

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 23 October 2013
Transcript of Agenda item 3 – Mayor's Report

Darren Johnson (Chair): Then we move on to item 3, which is the Mayor's Report. The Mayor will now provide an oral update of up to five minutes in length on matters occurring since the publication of his report.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Darren. Since the publication of that report, obviously, there has been quite a lot of activity. We went on a big trade mission to China, which you will have seen, championing not just exports from the United Kingdom and from London but also having considerable conversations and indeed negotiations with Chinese partners about investment in London. You will be aware, Chair, and the Assembly will be aware that billions are already coming into our city and I expect there will be many more billions to come in the next few years. I do think that that trip will be seen to have been a good use of our time and of taxpayers' money.

Members of the Assembly will know that we have set up an Ethics Panel for the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and this is something that I think is important in view of the issue of police confidence, which is absolutely vital for Londoners. Confidence in the Metropolitan Police Service is actually now at a three-year high, I am proud to say, in London and that is very largely because I think the police are doing a fantastic job of bringing crime down across all types and the results are very clear. There has been a 7% or 8% fall in one year alone in crime in this city.

That is very encouraging, but Alex Carlile, Lord Carlile], will be chairing the Ethics Panel of the MOPAC to give a public face to that question and to make sure there is a point of reference for the city when these issues of ethics and the handling of sensitive questions by the police do come up. I think he will do a first-class job.

There is a terrific report out by the Greater London Authority (GLA) Economics unit that says that older people contribute far more to the London economy than they receive by way of payment, so I think that is a very important point to get across. I was stunned to see that they not only contribute £47 billion in paid work to the London economy, but only 0.2% of London burglars are over 60, I was delighted to see, which shows what a fantastic bunch of senior citizens we have, ladies and gentlemen.

The Assembly has asked briefly for updates on the Chinese visa issue which came up whilst we were in China. I think that is a good step forward. Obviously, we are looking at the detail. The question is could it be rolled out to other countries. Could you simplify it for other countries? That is, in my view, a very good question. What we want to do is to make sure that London and the United Kingdom gets its share of the massive Chinese tourist market. It is absurd at the moment that we are underperforming when you consider the large numbers of Chinese visitors who go to other European Union countries when they could be enjoying London, which is the

number one tourist destination for overseas visitors in the world. Chinese tourists should be coming in greater numbers.

Finally, the Assembly has asked for an update on the casualties and the fatalities on the Cycle Superhighways. I really do not want to go much beyond what I have been able to say in the last few days, except to say that obviously the sympathies of everybody, I am sure - of Transport for London (TfL), of me, of everybody involved in promoting cycling in London - will be with the victims and with their families after what has taken place. Just to repeat, we continue with a massive programme of investment in cycling and in cycle safety measures in the order now of £1 billion and we are determined to make all those routes as safe as we possibly can. If there is stuff that we can learn from the reports of the various coroners, then of course we will do so.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): I thank the Mayor for his update around this trip to China. Can I start by saying no one is going to be against a trip by a Mayor of London to China?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Good.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): Indeed, the Mayor's Office once held two offices in China, Beijing and Shanghai, and the first thing that you did, Mr Mayor, was to close them. I would say to you that I would like words of regret because, clearly, that means that we have to start again.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, on the contrary.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): Can I just finish? Maybe that was at the time a lack of wisdom. Now that you have the wisdom, just some words of regret would be useful.

Also, the thing is of course there is a difference between tourists and students. It is the students that I want to focus on. As we all know, students from overseas bring so many riches to this city including their fees that they bring. Where is the joined-up Government that you are a part of that introduces regulation that stops students from India, stops students from Nigeria, stops students from Turkey, stops students from the rest of the world; the United States and Canada? Then, because you are on a trip with your mate George [Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer], you decide we can have Chinese students. What is this policy that says some parts of the world are closed to London but others because I am visiting are opening? Can you just give us a little bit more detail?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): A couple of points there, Jennette. First, on the offices and the proliferation of offices that took place under the previous regime to no particular advantage to London, there remains of course a London and Partners office in China, as you would expect, and it has done a fantastic job. London is very well represented in China. The question was: did the Mayor need an office in China? I think that was superfluous and indeed an unnecessary cost to the London taxpayer.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): OK, that is the first part.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you should offer an expression of regret, Jennette, to the people of London for sitting idly by whilst millions and millions were squandered and council tax was put up to no particular purpose. Actually, our strategy has to do with --

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): It concerns me about the thousands that were squandered with you jetting around the world.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you will just let me finish my answer -- for much less expenditure by the taxpayer on airfares and in every other way, our strategy has delivered far more investment. That was what I pledged to deliver, a bigger bang for Londoners' buck, and that is what we are getting.

You asked about students. I think there is a slight confusion here because as I understand it the relaxation or the addition of a special United Kingdom category to the Schengen visa, which is I think what the Government is trying to do, applies to tour operators and is not so much for students. I think you are asking about two separate things. It is certainly true that we do want to encourage large numbers of Chinese students to come to city and I am proud to say that London is the single biggest recipient of Chinese overseas students anywhere in the world. We have more Chinese students of any other city in the world outside China, obviously, where they have large numbers of Chinese students in some cities. Indeed, I might go on and just for your benefit, we have increased --

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): Chair, the question was the Mayor --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you, Assembly Member Arnold. If the Mayor can just wrap up, then I will bring back Assembly Member Arnold. If Assembly Members can stop heckling, we will quickly let the Mayor complete his sentence and then we will bring in Assembly Member Arnold.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it will be to the advantage of the Assembly and Jennette to know that in the last five years, to pick a period entirely at random, the number of Chinese students in London has actually increased by 149% and it went up by 12% last year. We intend to get on with that programme and, to get to your question, we are in no way setting our faces by anything we do against student number from other countries, provided that they are legitimate students and they have legitimate applications. That is fantastic and we want to see more international students because, as you rightly say, they provide about £5 million to the higher education economy in this country, without which it would not be possible for our universities to function. They add immeasurably to our city and to the higher education economy of the United Kingdom.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): Chair, as ever, the Mayor is ill-briefed. Each university in London has lost about 2,000 students because of new regulations, but I will leave it there and I will write the Mayor a letter.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think the figures rather refute what you have just said.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We had a quick response from the Mayor to that.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Did you know that whilst you were swanning around doing your photo opportunities in Beijing with George Osborne, at home the UK Border Agency (UKBA) was harassing Chinese businesses in Chinatown? There have been 11 big raids since July. That is almost one a week and more often than not they do not find anyone illegal. It is not intelligence-led. These are fishing expeditions.

It has reached the stage that yesterday afternoon all the shops and businesses in Chinatown, 200 or more, closed for two hours in protest because they were very angry at the disruptive and discriminatory fishing raids by the Border Agency. They think they have become easy targets for the UKBA to attack. These raids are damaging the reputation of Chinatown and Chinese businesses and create and reinforce the negative stereotypes of Chinese people.

You, Mr Mayor, were born in the Year of the Dragon. Main characteristics: big ego, living the high life, grabbing headlines. Is this why you think you can get away with saying one thing in Beijing and doing something completely opposite in London? What are you going to do about these raids?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know which year you were born in. Presumably, the Year of the Slug.

Andrew Dismore (AM): I was born in the Year of the Horse: hardworking, dependable and reliable.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know what animal. What is it? The Year of the Hippo or the Year of the Slug or the Year of the Three-Toed Sloth, I expect.

Andrew Dismore (AM): What are you doing about these raids?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I would say is that obviously I --

Andrew Dismore (AM): Why are you saying one thing in China and another thing at home?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Come on. You want to hear the answer? You hear the answer. Obviously, I deprecate any activities by the UKBA that are discriminatory or unnecessarily hostile to any community in our city and I have made that clear time and time again. If they have been heavy-handed in this instance, then certainly we will get on to it and we will take the necessary actions.

However, it is absolutely vital in a great city that depends on talented people coming here to make their lives that we have a serious policy towards illegal immigration and we do something to make sure that illegal immigrants know where they stand and know that they have broken the law because what they are doing is undermining the hard work and all the effort that legal applicants have made to go through the system and do things properly. I think it is entirely fair and right that there should be a distinction drawn between those who come here legally and those who are not here in accordance with the law.

Yes, I am perfectly prepared to look at what the UKBA was up to. As you know perfectly well, Andrew, we do not control the UKBA here in London, unfortunately, but I will certainly look at what they have done. If it has been heavy-handed, I will certainly listen to what the Chinese community in Chinatown has to say about those actions.

However, I am not in any way going to resile from or dismiss the notion that you have to be tough on illegal immigration. Frankly, if I may say so, it was the active decision of the Labour Government whenever it was, whenever they were in power, to turn a complete blind eye that undermined immigration in the eyes of many people in this country. You should think about that because it did serious social damage.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. Just in reaction to what you said, are you aware that it is the porous borders and unenforced regulations concerning immigration that have made Britain a burgeoning destination for trafficked people, as I revealed recently in a report that I produced, *Shadow City*, which highlighted the problem of trafficked people in the United Kingdom?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I do, and I thank you and congratulate you on your work and on your report. I do think it is absolutely vital. I go back in a pedantic way to this distinction between legal and illegal immigration. It is vital that we do make that distinction. I am probably about the only politician I know of at the moment who is actually willing to stand up and say that he is pro-immigration. I do not hear anybody else saying it. You?

Jenny Jones (AM): Yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK, a few of you. I have the support of the Greens. Great. We can build on that. Labour is being very quiet, I notice. Anyway, I believe that when talented people have something to offer a society and a community, they should be given the benefit of the doubt. I speak as a descendant of immigrants and all the rest of it. However, you have to be very tough in dealing with people who break the law because, as I said just now to Jennette, they are undermining the credentials and the hard work of everybody else. I thank you for what you are doing to stop the traffic in human beings.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Moving on now.

John Biggs (AM): On Cycle Superhighway 2 (CS2), I think we all know that where the Cycle Superhighways are good they are actually very good and they create a sense of safety, but CS2 is not one of these. You will have been written to by the coroner in the case of two

unfortunate people who died riding bicycles on CS2 in Tower Hamlets. This is an issue I have been campaigning on for many years now, so I am speaking as a constituency Member. I was hoping you would be able to make some public undertakings about what you want to do on CS2. This is not meant to be a party point.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I understand, John.

John Biggs (AM): What I would like to see happen is for us to move towards a totally segregated Cycle Superhighway on the road in Tower Hamlets.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): At the Bow Roundabout area?

John Biggs (AM): On the Bow Roundabout down to Aldgate. I think that is what we want to see and there are two other particularly dangerous junctions both referred to in the coroner's report at the Bow Roundabout and at Aldgate. Public assurance requires you to give some sort of undertaking.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand that point completely and very sincerely. I will have to, I am afraid, just refer you to what I have already said on those particular routes and those particular junctions. As you know, at the Bow Roundabout there is a huge amount that has already now been invested and we have tried to change the configuration there.

This is always going to be an extremely difficult challenge for us on the streets of London and no solution will ever be perfect. We will do our best and we will invest what it takes, but I cannot guarantee to Londoners that we are going to be able to produce segregation everywhere that it is desired. I am afraid that is simply not a realistic objective, just because there is not the road space to do it. I know, John, that you have campaigned on this for a long time. We will certainly look at it.

I want to make a general point, if I can, about what is happening to cycling in London because I think there is a --

John Biggs (AM): I would prefer to spend time on this specific, actually, Chair, if that is all right. Maybe it will come up later in questions. If I could be helpful to you, I think in the case of CS2 there is --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Break the habit of a lifetime.

John Biggs (AM): I am always helpful to you. Sometimes you do not recognise it, but I am always helpful.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am grateful.

John Biggs (AM): On CS2, there is the space on the highway to provide for segregation and I think that that would make sense. I am particularly struck by the comment by the coroner which was uttered by others, including myself, separately that CS2 with its design creates a false

sense of safety or security for cyclists who see the blue markings as an indication that they have been thought about and that they have the right of way when, in some circumstances, they do not and the capacity on the highway itself just is not there to make it safe for them. I think that is a very serious matter and we need to urgently respond to it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I totally accept that. The way you have framed the dilemma is completely right. The dilemma is whether we could have a system in London where on lots of these roads - and CS2 is an example - you created a segregated cycle lane. Certainly, what I will undertake is that we will continue to look at what the coroner has said and what the police have said about this particular city.

The difficulty is that you take away a huge amount of road space and you perhaps do not even deliver the safety improvements that you desire because, speaking as a daily cyclist, one of the problems that I think many fulltime cyclists have with the segregated option is that actually they do not always use the segregated gullies. I am not convinced that it would be the knockout solution that some people suggest it would be.

John Biggs (AM): When they do, it should be safe.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do think there are further improvements that could be made across the streets of London and obviously we are investing huge sums of money in junctions and roundabouts and across the network.

If I can, I just want to try to give a broad picture, John, of where we are in terms of cycle safety and numbers of trips. Could I do that through you, Chair?

John Biggs (AM): Because of the way we manage question time, if the Chair is happy for you to do this for the sake of the meeting, I am happy, but our time allocation would make it rather difficult.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Are you happy to draw your questioning to a close now?

John Biggs (AM): My questioning has finished.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you.

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you. Mr Mayor, none of us wants to see deaths and injuries on the road and I have been a fan of Cycle Superhighways for many years and so I want to see them safe. I am glad to hear you say as you did in your opening remarks that you want to make them as safe as you possibly can, but there are some Cycle Superhighways that are coming on stream at the moment that are not as safe as they can be.

I would like to draw your attention to one. You might not know the detail, but I can just explain. It is an area that is quite near my house, so I know it quite well. It is the Peckham Road. It is 30 miles-an-hour, so it has a lot of lorries and vans and some quite stressed motorists who want to get to places quickly, so it is a fairly difficult road anyway. The

cycle lane along it, which is going to be Cycle Superhighway 5, actually has bits that are mandatory and then it becomes advisory and then, at a quite difficult junction, it becomes a wobbly white line and it is not anything in particular. This has not, I gather, been started yet.

I am just asking you now. Will you look at these? Will you at least, perhaps, cycle the route and see for yourself? I will happily come with you but I know you do not like cycling with me.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do like cycling with you, Jenny. That is such nonsense. The last time we all went cycling together, you took us on the wrong route. You claimed to know the way to Elephant and Castle and we got hopelessly lost and then it all turned out to be some complicated left-wing ambush.

Darren Johnson (Chair): We have debated you and Jenny's cycle ride so many times. I would actually like you to get on with the substantive question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is a serious point. I will thank you, Jenny, for your support of cycling in London. You have campaigned on it for many years and you are right about Cycle Superhighways. I do think they are a big net benefit to the system. They are there to stay. We are going to keep improving them. We are going to keep running them out. Yes, obviously, there are things we can learn. There are ways we can do things better.

I am conscious, by the way, of the particular controversy that you are raising this morning. I know this discussion. It is active. It is live now in TfL. I cannot give you any guarantees about any particular solution that we are going to adopt there, but we will do our level best to make it as safe as we possibly can. I just want to tell you that --

Jenny Jones (AM): No, do not please go into all these stats.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is important because I think Londoners reading the headlines --

Jenny Jones (AM): No, Mr Mayor, that is not fair on our time. We have limited time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think it is really fair to Londoners not to be told what is actually happening.

Jenny Jones (AM): I realise your time is incredibly in demand, but I would ask that you look at this for yourself and see for yourself. The problem is --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have cycled the route, obviously, but I will give you my personal undertaking, Jenny, that I will assess the whys and wherefores of this particular argument myself as a cyclist and see what I think myself.

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I hope, if you listen carefully to what I am saying, that it does not give any particular undertaking about the solution.

Jenny Jones (AM): No, that is fine.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Could you circulate the statistics that you were going to read out around the Members?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I just think it might be to the advantage of Londoners to know. I think people will start to feel that the statistics are being suppressed.

Jenny Jones (AM): Mr Mayor, this is my time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think they will get a feeling that I am being gagged. The simple fact is that cycling is getting safer. If you look at the last ten years, there has been a massive increase in cycling numbers, whereas the numbers of deaths and injuries per mile travelled have actually gone down. It is important to bear that in mind. For the numbers of deaths, one is too many, but they have remained broadly the same if not actually slightly declining over the last ten years --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will have those statistics circulated around the Members.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- whereas the number of cycle trips on our roads has multiplied many, many times over. I think it is very important --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Jones, have you any further questions?

Jenny Jones (AM): I do. Thank you. Thank you for that undertaking on Cycle Superhighway 5. There are two other places that I am particularly concerned about. One is the Cobden Junction, which is up near Mornington Crescent, and the other is Tottenham Hale, where there is the removal of the one-way system. These are both actually very busy places. A lot of cyclists use them and there are times in the morning traffic when there are more cyclists than almost any other form of transport.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Tottenham Hale at the gyratory?

Jenny Jones (AM): Yes, Tottenham Hale, but the cycle lane has been removed on the High Road. That is the problem there. If I send you a note on these, would you please look at them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I will certainly look at them. On the whole, I am in favour. As far as I can remember, we are taking out the gyratory at Tottenham Hale.

Jenny Jones (AM): Yes, but then the cycle lane is coming out as well, which I am very worried about.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Speaking as a cyclist, it will be a good thing, in my view.

Jenny Jones (AM): You are not a normal cyclist. You are not and you know you are not. You have a weird view about how these dangerous junctions are actually quite good for energy levels and adrenaline and that sort of thing. You love them. Most cyclists do not. They are frightened of these junctions. You have to look at it. You should go out with an eight-year-old child or with Val Shawcross [AM] on a bike - sorry, Val is not here - and see if they are happy at these junctions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand that point. Do not think I do not understand that point. I want everybody in London to feel happy and safe on a bike and I particularly want people who are not currently cycling or who did briefly take it up and then suddenly got alarmed to feel safe enough to do it. You are completely right about that.

I just want to give you the statistics in case you misunderstood me. There were 109 million cycle trips and --

Jenny Jones (AM): I am so sorry. My time has run out.

Darren Johnson (Chair): You are going to circulate those statistics to Members and I am sure you will have plenty of opportunities to publicise them.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): By 2011 the number of cycle trips had risen to 182 million - I just want to put that on the record - whereas the number of fatalities, as I say, has remained broadly static. In fact, although the numbers are small and it is hard to make comparisons, it looks as though they are coming down slightly.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Any other questions on the Mayor's update? No.