

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 18 May 2011

Transcript: Question and Answer Session with the Mayor

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Before we go into questions I would just like to congratulate the Chair and Members of this Assembly's Transport Committee for their excellent piece of scrutiny this week. If members of the public want to follow that then of course that is available on the website as well.

Let us then move on to the first question to the Mayor, and that is question 1244/2011 and it is urgent action on air pollution.

Question No: 1244 / 2011 - Urgent action on air pollution

Darren Johnson

Given your failure to meet the annual limit of 35 bad air days for PM10 pollutants, will you now implement the idea of a very low emissions zone for central London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Darren. This is, I think, a wrongly posed question because according to the advice I have we have not failed to reach the annual limit of 35 bad air days. Ever since we succeeded in getting the extension from Brussels the criteria have been slightly different. I am told, and obviously this awaits final confirmation, that the exceedances are only 12 this year. That is the first point. The second point is that the overwhelming majority of the PM10 problem, 80% of it is caused by fumes of one kind or another coming from continental Europe or from outside London. Therefore, I think the Commission is being incredibly commonsensical and wise in giving us the extension that they have, and allowing us to get on with the various measures that we are putting in place.

Darren Johnson (AM): Let's try and unpick that. Firstly, the Department for Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) at Marylebone Road shows that it has now reached 38 bad air days, where it has exceeded the European legal limit, so it has gone beyond the 35 limit. Secondly, the European Commission is not accepting your argument that pollution from Europe blowing into central London, missing outer London, is to blame, and the European Commission says you are wrong on that. Thirdly, in terms of the extension, a provisional extension was granted but says,

"Provided that the plan is adjusted to include short-term measures, effective for controlling and, where necessary, suspending activities."

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Indeed we have loads of short-term measures, which is why discussion with Brussels has been good. I am not aware, by the way, of their rejection of that argument about the 80% of the particulate matter coming from outside London, but I will certainly look at it.

Darren Johnson (AM): It is strange isn't it, that it manages to get to central London where we have real air pollution problems and misses outer London?!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you want me to finish off the point? The things that we are doing include, as you know, dust suppressants on Marylebone Road, Euston Road, fitting diesel particulate filters on 25 Euro 4 busses on the 344 bus route, which is on Upper Thames Street, a particularly vulnerable area, 25 buses on Park Lane, 26 on the Marylebone Road. We have eco marshals trying to stop taxis idling in an unnecessary way at Kings Cross, St Pancras, Euston and other stations, and a series of other measures which are designed to deal with this hotspot problem. I think that the Commission is showing notable wisdom. Just about every city in Europe has problems of one kind or another. London is tackling them in a very, very vigorous way now after years of apathy on this subject.

Darren Johnson (AM): Instead of just concentrating on these small-scale measures at the edges, have you given serious consideration to the proposal for a very low emission zone in the congestion charging area? You say you are looking at it in your air quality strategy. When are we likely to see some progress from that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are looking at that, as I have said. I can see flaws in the idea, but I will be seeing something fairly shortly on that.

Darren Johnson (AM): Why have we had so much delay on this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): These things take time to analyse. I am not immediately attracted to the idea of setting up another charging zone, or low emission zone within London. We have a low emission zone for the whole of Greater London. We are just about to institute stage three of the low emission zone. I think that the measures we are putting in are very effective. You can tell that the Commission is impressed by that because they have given us this extension.

Darren Johnson (AM): Does it not make sense to have stronger measures where the problem is most acute in central London? Does that not make common sense? That was the view that the Environment Commitment reached cross-party; Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Greens, all signed up to that approach. Rather than trying to all move at the one speed for the whole of London why not look at additional measures in the centre of London where the problem really is?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is exactly what we are doing, we are looking at additional measures in the centre of London that are extremely ambitious that go way beyond anything you encouraged in any previous administration and they go way beyond anything that was done before. We have all sorts of measures to clean up our vehicles and to improve air quality in London. I think it is a testimony to the courage and ambition of what we are doing that the Commission has relented and given us the extension. Londoners are not facing a £300 million fine thanks to the efforts that we are making.

Darren Johnson (AM): I called on the previous Mayor to introduce a low emission zone in the congestion charging zone back in 2001, so I have not just jumped on the bandwagon on this one, Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As far as I can remember you supported the previous incumbent religiously throughout and what kind of low emission zone did you get?

Darren Johnson (AM): I think if you look at some of the Mayor's Question Time exchanges with the previous Mayor you will find that is not quite true, certainly when it comes to slowing down on air quality measures.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In that case I apologise.

Darren Johnson (AM): We note your dither and delay on this, as you have on all other air quality measures for the whole time of your mayoralty.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): With respect, what you should note is thanks to the dynamism and action that we have taken we have actually persuaded the European Commission to lift the threat of a £300 million fine. I think that is a very considerable achievement. I am amazed that you do not have the grace, that you are not big enough to stand up and say, "Yes, these guys produced a plan. They came up with a whole series of initiatives, they went to Brussels, they sold it and they are doing a good job to improve air quality for the sake of all of us".

Darren Johnson (AM): I want to see you solve the problem of air pollution in this capital, and you have given us no indication so far that you are serious about that as well.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think if you go to Brussels, you talk to the officials of the European Union (EU) they will tell you a very different story.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): There are two members who want to come in on this area of questioning, but I would like the Mayor to give the answer to question 1635/2011, Mr Cleverly's question, so that we can deal with the similar subject, and that is on EU extension on air quality.

Question No: 1635 / 2011 - EU Extension on Air Quality

James Cleverly

Do you agree with me that the EU's willingness to grant the UK a time extension for improving its air quality is, in part, down to its belief that the Mayor has an effective plan to tackle the problem?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The answer is yes I certainly do agree. I should also congratulate you, James, on your elevation to the post you now hold.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): We have finished with congratulations; just give the answer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Why shouldn't I congratulate him? You have just congratulated some committee for doing something or other.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): You are here to answer questions. Never mind congratulating - just give him the answer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I don't care. I am congratulating James for his achievement. The answer to your question is yes, James, I do think that it is a sign that we have an effective plan to tackle the problem.

James Cleverly (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. Darren Johnson mentioned short-term measures which were highlighted in the EU report on London air quality. To your knowledge were the hot spot measures that you had already initiated included in the Defra submission to the EU on air quality?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. Our subsequent measures are going to impress them even more. Just on the point about the 80% of PM10s that have come from outside London, this analysis is not by us, this is not some Greater London Authority (GLA) sticking our finger in the air analysis. This is from Kings College London in April which showed that 80% of background pollution was blown from easterly winds outside London, including from continental Europe.

James Cleverly (AM): The other area of concern is that there seems to be a little bit of historic revisionism with the Conservative position on air quality. Our position was that we would certainly consider reducing the geographical area of a low emission zone away from outer London. That somehow seems to morph into an implication that we would support an additional level in charging in the inner London zone. Is that something that you might consider, or would you share our position that that would be yet another inappropriate and unnecessary burden on London small businesses?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know that these guys are basically addicted to charging motorists, if they possibly can, for anything. They will do it if they possibly can. I do not like that approach. I think people are already over taxed in this country. I do not want to see new taxes brought in, in that way. That is one of the reasons, to get back to my answer to Darren's question, why I am not minded to go down this tack.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): There is not time for teaching on air quality, but can I make a couple of points to see if you agree with them. The issue here is not about complying with EU regulations. The issue here is about the health of the air that London breathes. The background pollution that you keep stressing is not the unhealthy bit, it is the places where it is concentrated and prolonged that is the problem, which is why the correct approach is to target measures in central London and to take the restrictions off, if we can, in outer London where the problem is not acute. That is what we should be doing, that is what your air strategy says you are doing and I hope that when you come back you will come back with an open mind instead of ruling out what you have put in your air strategy for something that is worth looking at. The question I want you to focus on, however, is the suggestion that for a temporary period next summer, during the Olympics and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, there should be put in place restrictions to get the level of pollution down. That is good for Londoners, good for the Olympics and may well save us the possibility of financial penalties through breaching the promises that you have given to the Olympic authorities. Will you consider a temporary, short-term, limited zone for central London for next summer?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course. I said already that I will consider any solution. I am delighted that James has drawn my attention to the fact that the new measures we are bringing in are actually thanks to the extra funding we secured from the Government, the extra £5 million we secured to bring in the new measures; the bus retrofit, the anti-idle strategy, other measures, the dust suppressants, those are all on top of the strategy that we were already pursuing with the low carbon vehicles, with a new bus for London that will be 15% less emitting than the current hybrid busses. What I am saying was the Commission is already impressed by what we were doing. We are now doing even more. Your idea that you raised several times with us is one we will certainly look at, but at the

moment I am very pleased that we are moving in the right direction and at last this body is taking action on air quality.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Mayor, the Member did not get an answer to his specific question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): He did, which was that I am certainly looking at it.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): He is looking at it.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): All right, thank you.

Murad Qureshi (AM): I should first make a point before I actually ask my question. I think the source of the more recent air pollution is probably nearer to home than mainland Europe. It's probably linked to the demise of the west London congestion zone, and it is not too far away to float from there to the Marylebone Road monitoring road, if you walk along the Marylebone Road. But I am not here to make that point.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): So you would restore the congestion zone in west London would you?

Murad Qureshi (AM): All I am saying is the environmental impact is that. Let me ask you questions and not you ask me questions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well don't make a statement then.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Can I just highlight that your own health study illustrated that 4,500 Londoners die prematurely each year as a result of poor air quality. I am just wondering if you are aware of how many Londoners have died prematurely since the implementation of the delayed and ineffectual air quality strategy.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Clearly, I am familiar with the statistics you have just given and, clearly, they are unacceptable. Yes, you are right in what you basically say, which is that it is the medical impact of poor air quality that is the number one problem, never mind what the Commission finds. But that is why we are taking the measures that we are taking and these are tough measures. Be in no doubt that to go through with the third stage of the Low Emission Zone (LEZ) is a difficult thing to ask people to do. People have to retrofit their vans or they have to get new vans. That is a tough thing to ask. That is why we postponed it for a couple of years. I think the impacts of the removal of the Western Extension Zone are absolutely negligible but I am interested that it is Labour policy, plainly, to put that back.

Murad Qureshi (AM): I would just like to end by suggesting that I think that is what should be uppermost in your mind.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, it is, and I agree with it.

Murad Qureshi (AM): It is the best way to judge the success or failure of your air quality strategy.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do agree with that.

Kit Malthouse (AM): As you give consideration to the various demands – draconian or otherwise – of the parties, what weight will you give to the voice of those people who live in the areas affected

about their ability to go about their daily lives and have their businesses serviced and not be inconvenienced by these measures?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Clearly, in deciding to postpone the imposition of LEZ Phase 3, it was very important to take into account the economic situation we were in and the need to protect business as far as we possibly could from the impact, to cushion the blow by delaying and to work with manufacturers of vans to make sure that businesses do have available to them a wide variety of options and discounts should they need to buy a new van. Obviously I stress again to everybody who is affected by this that you do not have to buy a new van. You simply have to buy a van that is compliant and that is less than ten years old.

Kit Malthouse (AM): But you accept that the imposition of draconian controls on traffic and indeed on residential cars can have a detrimental impact? When the Western Extension Zone came in, you accept that the small high streets within that area, indeed the Congestion Charging Zone and the small owner-managed businesses were decimated. Many closed and will never reappear. Lots of businesses became marginal, not least restaurants and theatres. There were some amendments made to the zone to try and compensate but it never fully did so and we might fall into the same trap. Actually, the solution perhaps - and I would invite you to comment - is in technological change --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course it is.

Kit Malthouse (AM): -- giving owners of cars and vans a carrot rather than hitting them over the head relentlessly with a green stick.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely right and I think that the last administration conducted a war on motorists in inner and outer London and traffic lights exploded across the City. There was a general fetish about taxing motorists and punishing them in one way or another. I think we have adopted a more balanced and pragmatic approach and our approach is to encourage green technology, to encourage walking and cycling. We have seen a massive increase in cycling. In the last year alone cycling has gone up 15%, the biggest-ever increase in cycling this City has had for decades, I would guess. There was a 15% increase in cycling in the last year alone and we are doing that in outer London as well as in inner London. But we are not waging war on the motorist and punishing them in the way that was done by the last administration.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Specifically in relation to the Marylebone Road, I should declare a vague interest. I live 300 yards from the Marylebone Road. What correlation is there between the breaches of air quality or high levels of pollutants and the incidence of stationary traffic on the Marylebone Road? If as I suspect there is a strong correlation between the two, what measures might you take to ease flow along the Marylebone Road, actually moving traffic along, making it easier for motorists to pass on that key east-west route, which would also then reduce pollutants?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The approach of the last London Mayoralty before we came in was basically to try and paralyse traffic in order to get people out of cars and to have more blockages of the road of one kind or another, whether it was road humps, traffic lights or whatever. Traffic speeds greatly declined and at last they are now becoming more reasonable again. I think there has been an average of a 3.1% increase across London and the average traffic speed is now up to the admittedly not quite supersonic level of 9.4 miles an hour. Delays have been reduced. Frustration is going down. At the same time, you are seeing huge increases also in the number of people using mass transit and using our public transport system, so it is not as though we are forcing people out of public transport and into their cars. On the contrary, people are using more buses and they are using the Underground system more. So I think a balanced approach that accepts that there are going to be places particularly in outer London where people depend on the car is reasonable.

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, will you accept there is some concern in the voluntary sector across London, particularly from youth organisations and others that run minibuses and so on, and will you ask officers of Transport for London (TfL) to do a piece of work on engaging with the voluntary sector and explaining what the LEZ means? Will you if necessary look at exemptions? Particularly I am thinking of uniformed youth organisations who are deeply concerned that they may have to replace their minibuses at a time when their funds are limited.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course and we have had lots of conversations already between TfL and such groups. The point we stress again and again is you do not have to buy a new minivan. You can buy a second-hand van. It can be up to ten years. Provided it is not more than nine or ten years old, it will comply. There are also opportunities to retrofit and we have tried to make sure that the retrofitting is as cheap as it possibly can be. But there is a huge effort of engagement with people who are affected by this and to advise them and to reassure them as much as we possibly can.

Brian Coleman (AM): That is all very helpful, Mr Mayor, but that still leaves financial pressures on voluntary groups.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It does and I accept that, Brian, and there will always be hard cases and I cannot now in front of you give a kind of blanket exemption for everybody who has a van and is using it for voluntary purposes, but we are always willing to look at particularly all the cases if a credible exemption can be made.

John Biggs (AM): This is a very unbalanced perspective from the other side, Chair. You inherited from the previous mayor an air quality strategy based on reducing emissions among other things but particularly based on reducing emissions to improve air quality in central London. One of your first steps as Mayor was to cancel the next phase of that. As a result of that, it is without a doubt the case that a number of frail and sick Londoners have died prematurely, a greater number than would have happened if you had not cancelled that scheme. How do you feel at night, recognising that your actions have caused that distress to Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I am very pleased with the work that we are doing --

John Biggs (AM): No, there is a question. Stop congratulating yourself. Answer to Londoners what you have done to improve their air quality.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, we have taken a huge number of steps, none of which were taken when you were supporting the previous administration, to improve air quality. I think they have been very significant and very substantial and the ambition and courage of those steps is recognised by the way the European Commission has responded. Actually, what we have had to deal with --

John Biggs (AM): That is a pretty frail --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have had to clear up the mess left behind by eight years of complete apathy and indifference on this. As I say, I slightly resent the tone and language and style of your attack there, John, because I really think it is unfair and does not do justice to the very considerable efforts of the team.

John Biggs (AM): That is a travesty of the truth. You should have the guts to sit in a debate with someone from our side and discuss what you have done over the last three years in this area because you are the one who has neglected Londoners' health.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, that flies in the face of the facts. I am disappointed but not surprised that you should adopt this kind of tactic, but that is not the case. We have done a fantastic amount to improve air quality in London and I am very proud of what we are doing.

Question No. 1392/2011 - Visit London pensioners

Len Duvall

Do you owe any duty to these unfortunate people, or have you simply asset stripped and closed down their employer and ignored their plight?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I really do want to say is that I think there is an argument to be heard and I am aware of the background now to the case and I have been listening very carefully to what the [Assembly's] Economy, Culture and Sport Committee will be saying about this matter in the course of the next week.

Len Duvall (AM): So are the Visit London former employees having to pay for a reduced pension pot from your failure to secure the appropriate funding for London & Partners from Government?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. We secured a very considerable sum for the funding of this fantastic new body. That is completely irrelevant. There is an issue around the pension funds and how we deal with that but I do not particularly, if you will forgive me, want to go into the details of how we address the position because I am going to listen to what comes out of the Economy, Culture and Sport Committee's analysis of this in the next week or so.

Len Duvall (AM): So, even if we had got extra money out of Government, we would have still gone down the same path?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, this is a live topic. I have taken advice on this and the view is that we may need to look again at this. I do not want to pre-empt how we do it or what the outcome will be because discussions are still ongoing.

Len Duvall (AM): In December 2008, your Economic Recovery Action Plan stated quite rightly that small and medium-sized enterprises are the lifeblood of the economy. Given this view, are you not concerned about the way that you, your decisions and London & Partners have acted - and your personally appointed chair - have triggered the collapse of Visit London, which has led to a number of small business creditors of Visit London remaining unpaid --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is a separate question. This is not to do with the pension.

Len Duvall (AM): This is following on from the same issue. It is all about your decisions. Are you intending to listen carefully or do something for those small businesses that you say you support and that remain unpaid? You have created a great deal of anxiety for their businesses. Will you be doing something for them as well because of the direct result of your decision as --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are bringing up a separate point. I will certainly look at what has happened to small businesses that are affected by the end of Visit London. If there is any comfort that we can give you and indeed more particularly them on that matter, then of course I will do so. But that is, I am afraid, not something that relates, as far as I understand it, to the topic of the Visit London pensions.

Len Duvall (AM): Mr Mayor, you took a number of decisions that had a number of consequences. Were you aware of the consequences either to pensioners or to other issues relating to this decision? Were you briefed on it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Clearly, the impact of the closure of Visit London has had an impact on pensioners that, as I said just now and I say it to you freely, I am willing to think about and I am willing to listen to what the Economy, Culture and Sport Committee comes up with when they have hearings on this next week.

Len Duvall (AM): Sorry, Mr Mayor, I am still unclear. Were you not briefed on the consequences of the decisions between Visit London and London & Partners? Were you aware of the consequences, yes or no?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Len Duvall (AM): Thank you.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): Thank you. I, too, do not want to pre-empt the discussions and the investigations that Economy, Culture and Sport Committee will have next week but I just wanted to follow on from what Len has said. Could you just confirm if you took professional advice when you were made aware of the consequences of London & Partners not taking on the pension liabilities for Visit London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): My memory of this is I was advised by Sir Simon Milton [former Deputy Mayor and Chief of Staff] that this would be going ahead and I think to the best of my recollection he said that this was the right way forward. I now understand that it poses various issues and, as I have said very freely and frankly to Len, this is something that I am taking advice on and we are going to have another look at it.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): But you did not take professional outside advice at the time?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I listened to Sir Simon Milton.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): OK, fine. Thank you.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Chair. I think the pensioners will welcome your open mind on this, Mr Mayor, and will welcome the fact that you are willing to wait until you see the deliberations of the Economy, Culture and Sport Committee which will be looking into this. All that I do ask at this stage - because of course we do not have all the information in front of us at the moment - is that you do take into consideration when you finally reach a decision on this and the moral duty that there is on this authority to be a good employer. Visit London, whilst organised as a separate entity, effectively was a department of the GLA and it is difficult to argue that it was not. Therefore, I think if you will give me an assurance that you will take that moral duty into account when you make that decision.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course I will. That is the point that I was making and that we were talking about yesterday. I think that this decision is clearly something that has proved very controversial. I will, as I have said, keep an open mind on it and try to reach as equitable conclusion as we can.

Len Duvall (AM): Can I thank you for the way you answered the question. There is one other matter that does not really take up much time for consideration. Will you apologise to those pensioners that have been forced into fear and some great anxiety by decisions emanating from your office? Can you apologise to them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course, Len, I am always sorry for anybody who suffers anxiety or disquiet because of anything that has gone wrong with a decision taken by this office. As I have said to you just now, we are more than happy to look at the circumstances again and to try to reach a solution that is fair.

Len Duvall (AM): So is that an apology?

Question No. 1341/2011 - London Housing Company

Mike Tuffrey

When will the London Housing Company, proposed in 2009, be operational?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Mike, and the question is a good one. The issue really is that the success in getting the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and the London Development Agency (LDA) together and in bundling the assets of the HCA and the LDA together with the housing functions of the HCA here in one body may make the London Housing Company unnecessary, if you see what I mean. We may be *de facto* creating such an entity and that is really what we are in the process of reviewing. But, clearly, it does make sense to put public land that we have to make it available for development in the way that was envisaged in the original idea of the London Housing Company.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Thank you. That is a new one; that integrating it somehow slows things down. This idea of creating a vehicle to take the public land with private money, to get the boroughs involved and to make things happen on housing and that prize that is there has been sitting out there for several years now. It is exactly two years ago that I first asked you about this and you said, "Yes, we are working on it and the LDA came up with a detailed plan to have this thing live last summer. Here we are two years on and now you are telling us that you are going back to the drawing board to look at what is the right vehicle.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, because we have done what was needed to be done and we have co-located and have created a unity between the LDA and the HCA, giving us the ability effectively to have a London Housing Company within this body in which we now sit.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): But here we are now in your fourth and final year. Can I remind you of your manifesto. You talked about the LDA having land for 30,000 units. When I last quizzed you on this, you wrote to me in February saying not that 30,000 houses had been built on LDA land under your watch but since you were elected just 1,400 starts had been made. Are you not missing a huge opportunity? Have you not been missing a huge opportunity to sort out London's housing crisis?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As you know, we have done fantastically well with building affordable homes in London. Yes, we could go further. Indeed, I would like to see public land generally made available in London. I would like to see a bringing together of public land held by all sorts of public bodies to create this London Housing Company. It has not been easy to achieve that. You find that the accounting officers in the various departments are extremely jealous of their fiduciary duty to maximise value. That is the difficulty that we face and you will understand the problem. But there is real scope for progress. Do not, by the way, run away with the idea that 1,500 or whatever it is on the LDA --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): It is 1,432.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, 1,432 is all that we are going to achieve on LDA land. There are fantastic projects for development, particularly in the Royals where we have secured an enterprise zone. Already I am seeing amazing projects for development there.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): That is the point.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Actually, rather than moaning about the comparatively abstruse point of the London Housing Company, you should be hailing and celebrating what we have achieved on building affordable housing in London and you should be recognising that by getting --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): But my point, Mr Mayor, is that there are these fantastic projects but they are still sitting on the drawing board three or four years in.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But we have built more affordable homes --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): The London Housing Company was the model that you put out there and you have been talking about relentlessly for the past two years and here we are with still no sign of a mechanism to unlock the public land - and, yes, with the national land as well as the HCA land and the LDA land - and it is not happening. Can I ask you, when is your much-vaunted taskforce going to report? We were told it was going to report on 16 February and then you said the end of April. Now we are in the middle of May. When is the Sir Peter Rogers taskforce going to actually report?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sir Peter Rogers has arrived in City Hall. What is happening --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): No, the taskforce that he is chairing that was promised for February. We are now in May. Is this going to be another one that takes years before it comes up with an answer?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What you are talking about is what we have effectively achieved by getting the Government to give us simultaneous control and co-location of the HCA assets and land and the LDA land.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): We know all of that. We are now set up.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have now achieved your nirvana but we have brought it here in City Hall.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): We know all of that. My question, Mr Mayor, was not about that. My question was about the housing investment taskforce that started work under Sir Peter's chairmanship last November and was promised for 16 February. I have it here in black and white. Then you promised the end of April. Now we are in the middle of May. Where is the report from the taskforce? When is it going to be published?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Can we have a quick answer to that question, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): When we have finalised the arrangements for integrating the HCA and the LDA into this current body, I am sure we will be producing a report for your benefit on how we are proposing to maximise the value of the land. I think in the meantime what we should do -

Mike Tuffrey (AM): What we are waiting for is the big, glitzy announcement to cover up three years of lack of action. Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On the contrary, what you have is a quite extraordinary level of delivery in affordable housing.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Going back to the debate around the London Housing Company, I am on record as having supported the concept around a housing company based on my experience from the Croydon model, the asset-backed vehicle. So whilst I do understand what perhaps Mr Tuffrey does not understand, that markets and situations and circumstances do move on, and whilst speaking I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate you on the fact that you are on course to build the number of affordable homes that you promised at the beginning of your term, I would urge you to continue to look at the options around the asset-backed vehicle, which the London Housing Company is based on, to continue to consider it through your excellent adviser, Richard Blakeway [Mayoral Advisor, Housing]. The fact of the matter is that in Croydon we have proven that by using municipal assets we can indeed build very good civic and public amenities at absolutely nil cost to the taxpayer. So whilst I agree that events have moved on and I agree again to congratulate you on the progress you have made, it would be right to continue to have the possibility in your kit bag of looking at an asset-backed vehicle.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would just remind you that we have brought forward significant public land for development over the last three years. There is the St Andrew's site, an LDA-owned site. We have brought forward the Bounds Green site, which is TfL land, and Adelaide Wharf, which is HCA land.

Question No. 1631/2011 - Tube strike ballots - minimum support

Richard Tracey

Has the time now come for the Government to introduce a bill before Parliament requiring unions, for example those that cover the London Underground (LU), to obtain the support of over 50% of their membership in a strike ballot before industrial action can be called?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Dick, and I think there is a good case for what you are suggesting. I think that when strikes are called by a small minority of union members it is not reasonable to expect everybody else to go through the loss of pay and aggravation and all the rest of it that is entailed by a strike.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, you sounded rather conciliatory earlier on this morning towards some of the threats of the transport unions but --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am always conciliatory.

Richard Tracey (AM): Of course, absolutely. But you heard that there was a meeting of the Assembly's Transport Committee yesterday and apart from hearing from Mr Bob Crow (General Secretary, National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT)) and a representative of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) union, we also heard from London First and their strategic director who told us that every day there is one of these transport strikes in London it costs London £48 million. The London Chamber of Commerce has also commented that it costs £50 million. Today you may have noticed in the Financial Times the very sensible but distinguished president of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Helen Alexander, has said that the Government needs to toughen up legislation to deal with this sort of strike. In fact, last October or November, at the end of last year, there were nine different Tube strikes which caused a lot of damage to London. So who are you talking to in the Government and what success are you having in urging some legislation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I talk to members of the Government at all levels about this and there is a great deal of interest, receptivity, whatever word you want to use, to these ideas,

although currently, as I have indicated perhaps in slightly forceful language, they do not seem inclined immediately to go down the legislative route. I think that is a mistake. I think that one way or the other citizens of a great capital and visitors deserve protection from strikes that are unreasonable and are called by only a small minority of the union workforce. I would like to see some more action on that and I have not been shy in saying so.

Richard Tracey (AM): Philip Hammond MP, the Secretary of State for Transport, seems to be taking the same line as you: that there is legislation required. The pollsters YouGov have found out that somewhat over 50% of the public believes that there should be a minimum threshold before a strike can be called. Indeed, you may have seen on the television yesterday that the public were pretty strong in their views about any possibility of paying off the unions to avoid any action during the Olympics. Is there a way in this electronic age that we can gauge accurately now what the public seriously think about this? I do believe the public are becoming pretty tired of any delays in dealing with this clear problem.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, there are I think a number of legislative routes that the Government could take and indeed should take and I am repeatedly making that case.

Roger Evans (AM): Mr Mayor, I was present at that Transport Committee yesterday and it was quite a feisty session, actually. One of the comments that Bob Crow made in response to the point my colleague has made about strikes costing London £50 million a day was that, if it was costing London business that much, that meant that that was what his members were worth and that was the sort of pay award they should be looking at. Do you feel they are on the same planet as the rest of us?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you are tempting me to engage in a sort of polemical conversation by proxy with the leader of the RMT and I am not disposed to do that.

Roger Evans (AM): In response to Mr Tracey's suggestion that perhaps we introduce a New York-style law where a driver would be fined two days' pay in return for going on strike for one day, Mr Crow suggested this would be akin to introducing lethal injection because they do that in America. Do you think he is being realistic?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Actually, they do not have the death penalty in New York, as far as I can remember.

Roger Evans (AM): Indeed.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But clearly, just to get back to the point, you are both right. I do think that there needs to be more urgent consideration given to a means of stopping public transport workers in a great capital city from holding the public to ransom on the strength of a small minority of the balloted union members and indeed an even smaller minority of the overall drivers. With the recent threat of strikes, it was only 11% of the actual drivers of LU who voted for this. As you can tell from my generally irenic manner, I do not want to raise the temperature and I do not want to cause more plaster to come off the ceiling with Government but I do think they need to get a move on.

Roger Evans (AM): It was quite an innovative committee, actually, and I should share with you another suggestion that a member came up with. Our colleague Jenny Jones suggested to Bob Crow that perhaps his members might like to go to work but not collect any money from passengers who were paying for their tickets as an alternative to strike action. Do you think that is a slightly irresponsible thing for a Member of this Assembly to suggest?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think Jenny is now the Green candidate for the mayoralty --

Roger Evans (AM): Maybe this is one of their policies.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What is the policy?

Roger Evans (AM): The idea was that a different form of strike would involve just leaving all the barriers open and letting people travel for free on the Tube.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): How would that inconvenience Londoners? What sort of strike is that? It is an interesting idea. Like all Jenny's ideas, I am willing to look at it.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Ms Jones, you have a point of personal explanation?

Jenny Jones (AM): Just to clarify, I just said that that was actually done in other countries and had they considered it. I did not suggest that they should do it.

Question No. 1386/2011 - Outer London Commission's Recommendations

John Biggs

What progress was made on the Outer London Commission's recommendations between its publication and the appointment of the outer London adviser?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, John, and a great deal of work and thought has been done by the Outer London Commission. I am very grateful to them and to William McKee (Chair, Outer London Commission) for everything he has done. I think the critical thing that they brought to us and the thing that we want to push forward is the idea of outer London as not just a dormitory place, not just suburbs that you ignore, but as places that need to be helped from an economic point of view and potential motors of the London economy. That is why a lot of our focus now is on outer London town centres and trying to help them in their competition particularly not just with inner London but with superstores and with big shopping centres that deplete high streets, and doing sensible things like looking at parking restrictions, urban realm schemes and all sorts of things you can do to promote economic activity in outer London. Those are some of the ideas that the Outer London Commission came up with and I am very grateful to them.

John Biggs (AM): What, then, in your opinion, is the most important outer London town centre to which you are addressing Londoners' resources?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It would be invidious of me to choose. It is like asking a tigress to choose between her cubs.

John Biggs (AM): But you are meant to be a leader, so you are meant to be leading.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not going to single out any particular outer London town centre. What kind of a leader do you take me for? They are all wonderful. They are all special. They are diverse. They must not be treated in some blanket way. But I think the whole concept of patronisingly endlessly referring to them as all belonging to outer London as though they were all homogenous parts of outer London with no individuality, I think that is a classic patronising line of argument that you might hear from a party that spent so long ignoring outer London that its previous mayor went more times to Havana than he did to Havering. That is the kind of approach.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is true --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No, Mr Mayor, please. That is enough.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is absolutely true.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Do you have a follow-up question, Mr Biggs?

John Biggs (AM): I think this is a waste of the time that is allocated to our party.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Ask a better question. Ask a sensible question.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Mr Biggs, do you have a follow-up question?

John Biggs (AM): I do. I certainly do.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Can we hear it?

John Biggs (AM): But for the record, Chair, seasoned Boris-watchers will know that that is a classic Boris Johnson bluster when he does not know the answer to a question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Ask me another question. Come up with a reasonable question.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Let us have the question.

John Biggs (AM): In your manifesto, you said that you would develop an outer London development strategy. In your answer to this question, you then praised the Outer London Commission but it took two years from your election before it published a draft report and it took you another nine months after that before you appointed an adviser to do anything about it, so the reality is you were elected on a bit of rhetoric and you have done very little.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I do not think that is true.

John Biggs (AM): Your answer about priorities shows that you have actually given very little thought to what you might do for the suburbs.

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

John Biggs (AM): Can you just clarify your vision, then, for the suburbs of London? Can you harness their votes or what?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, again, I really think it is patronising and ridiculous for an administration that you supported that spent eight years completely ignoring outer London now to portray yourselves as the champions of outer London and to ignore what we are doing. I think 50% of jobs are in outer London. There is enormous potential for economic growth but you have to do it sensitively. What we want to do is to work to put the village back into the City. People love London because it is unlike other European cities. It is a huge, sprawling, 656-square mile evolution. It has engulfed a huge number - 152 - villages in the last century or so. Our job is to keep the things that people love about outer London, the village atmosphere, but allow those places to develop economically. If you can do things to boost outer London high streets and town centres and keep people shopping there, that will be a great thing for that community. That is why I think our outer London town centre fund, the £50 million that we have found, is a good thing. In the course of the next few months we will be making announcements about which town centres have succeeded in getting funding from that money.

John Biggs (AM): You inherited an ambitious programme from the previous Mayor, a massive expansion of bus services, an extension to the Croydon tram, the Docklands Light Railway extension and bridges. Let us not talk about bridges. Can you name a single village that you have put back into London as a result of your actions?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would say that one of the best things that we have done is - and this was something that everybody wanted - we not only Oysterised the overground rail network, which everybody in outer London wanted, but we made transport much safer. If you want a village atmosphere, you have to have a sense of trust and a sense of community that goes with the feeling that when you get on your bus you are not going to be excessively hassled, you are not going to be victimised, you are not going to be terrified. That is why we have put so many Safer Transport Teams. Let me give you --

John Biggs (AM): Did you inherit the Safer Transport Teams from the previous mayor? Did you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In the last three years, we have greatly expanded them.

John Biggs (AM): You did.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We greatly expanded them and the result is that bus crime is down by 30% and that robbery on buses is down by almost a half, 46%, and I think for the loads of people who need to use buses in outer London that is an important thing. Let me just give you the figures for outer London increases in police officers, since you asked. Enfield: another 33 police officers, 20 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and 89 special constables in the last three years. Haringey --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Mr Mayor, no. Can I just ask you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I read all this out? I am going to read it all out.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Let us stay within the parameters of the Outer London Commission's recommendation. We are going to have a Plenary session with the police and we can deal with policing numbers then. Mr Biggs, do you have any follow-up questions?

John Biggs (AM): I would not say I am content, Chair, but that is the end of my questions.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you.

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, as you will have noted, Monday, 16 May was Middlesex Day, marked by the flying of the flag of the ancient county of Middlesex outside Eland House at Whitehall. Of course, many of the villages and towns that make up outer London that you have just referred to lie in the traditional county of Middlesex and are represented by Members sitting around this table. Will you ensure that the traditional county of Middlesex, beloved of many Londoners and many of our constituents, will not disappear from the folk and civic memory of this great city?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I thank you and I congratulate you. I seem to recollect that it was Alfred the Great in around about 890AD or so. As I recall, Middlesex was the product of the fusion between the Danegeld and the Saxon area and they decided they were going to create Middlesex. Is that not right? Am I wrong on that?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): This does not relate to the Outer London Commission's recommendations.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): To the contrary, people want to know. People are very fond of Middlesex.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Mr Coleman, do you have a follow-up question?

Brian Coleman (AM): I think the Mayor has just made the point that the ancient county of Middlesex was as diverse as the modern City of London.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, the Outer London Commission made a number of recommendations and some of them were economic. May I suggest to you that perhaps the fact that you have held the precept at zero increase for the last three years is rather more helpful than the 153% added on by the previous Mayor in his eight years in office?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I think that is a very good point and I think, when you look at any future financing plans that any other candidate may have, you can only shudder for the future of that precept because it is perfectly obvious that it would go up again.

Richard Tracey (AM): The Outer London Commission also made suggestions about making outer London even greener than it already is. Can I thank you from the London Borough of Merton for the trees that you have planted there. I think the cost of those trees came from what you saved in cancelling a propaganda sheet called The Londoner.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We did and quite right too. I think it was absolutely wrong that Londoners should be paying in their council tax for this sort of Commie propaganda. We are very proud to have planted the trees with the savings made.

Richard Tracey (AM): Can I finally say that I think you have improved the transport conditions of people in outer London by finally successfully concluding the detail with the train operating companies about Oyster being used on mainline trains, something which your predecessor singularly failed to do.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am obliged to you, Dick. I think that is right. It was an important success and I would like to thank you for all the work that you have done to encourage that.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Mr Mayor, you do share my astonishment at this newfound interest in Mr Livingstone [Ken Livingstone, former Mayor of London] and his outriders, Mr Biggs and Ms Shawcross, in outer London, an area that they showed absolutely no interest in during the previous administration. Do you not agree that it is rather patronising that they would think that my residents in Sutton and Croydon would be duped by this new-found interest? But for the record, Mr Mayor, my residents are very pleased that crime is down and public transport is safer. We have seen, as Mr Tracey said, a zero precept and extra protections for our back gardens. I would also thank you for your tram investment and your commitment to extend to Crystal Palace. Mr Mayor, would you share, as I say, my complete astonishment at the brand-new interest in outer London that has been exhibited by Members on the other side?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do think it is interesting. It is, in a way, hilarious. I am not disposed to discourage it as a political strategy because I think the more that the previous incumbent is seen in outer London boroughs campaigning, the more vividly those people may be reminded of his previous administration.

Steve O'Connell (AM): I would welcome the visits to Croydon and Sutton as much as possible for that sole reason.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you. Ms Shawcross has the floor for a point of personal explanation because I am sure she will want to tell us she is not an outsider.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): A brief point of personal explanation: my colleague does indeed have a short memory because I was the leader of Croydon Council for three years and I represented the furthest-most ward in London, New Addington, which is the furthest south ward in the whole of London, so I think he is very ill-advised to say that we have no interest in outer London. That is absolutely not true.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you. Mr Evans, your question.

Roger Evans (AM): During the recommendations from the Outer London Commission, they did suggest liberalising parking and making transport easier for people visiting shopping centres in outer London. We were recently very pleased to welcome you to Romford and I just wondered if you had detected any enthusiasm amongst the citizens of Romford for perhaps a reintroducing congestion charge or any of the other proposals which Labour members used to come up with.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I did not hear any enthusiasm for reintroducing congestion charges. I know from listening to Members here that that is their default solution to any problem: whack a congestion charge on it. I do not think that is the right way to go. Yes, I think there is scope for flexibility around parking where that will help businesses in outer London town centres. That is why we are looking at that addition to the London Plan.

Roger Evans (AM): Can I also say we were very pleased in Redbridge to receive the trees which were planted in Fairlop Waters, not to mention some artificial boulders which you unveiled as well and which are saving the limited population of natural boulders around the world from being moved to Redbridge.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We believe in conserving London's boulder stock and I am delighted to have erected these artificial boulders.

Roger Evans (AM): Can we have, Mr Mayor, another Trees for London vote in the coming year? That really engaged people in my community and I know we would love to be able to get engaged like that again. My residents want to make their opinion felt. Havering had a higher vote against the Alternative Voting system than any other borough in London and we would like to be involved in policymaking in future.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. Of course, I am confident, if trees could vote, then they would vote Conservative because we have planted a large number and it is our ambition to increase London's tree cover very greatly by 2025. The benefits are being felt particularly in some of the grimmer neighbourhoods and some of the tougher neighbourhoods as well as in leafy outer London.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Just a quick question, Mr Mayor. Can you tell me which boroughs your outer London adviser has visited in the last three months?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I can get back to you on that, Val.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Will you write to me, Mr Mayor, and tell me which boroughs she has visited?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will write you as long and as detailed a letter as I can on that subject.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Some straightforward facts would be helpful, for a change, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You get nothing but facts. What I would like from you guys is some straightforward and interesting questions.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): I have finished my question, Chair.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you very much. Can I personally thank Mr Coleman for bringing his next question here because I was with my constituents and they are very concerned about this. Of course, we share boundaries on this matter.

Question No. 1628/2011 - Thieves targeting Jewish artefacts

Brian Coleman

Is the Mayor concerned by the recent series of targeted burglaries of synagogues, Jewish schools and other Jewish premises in Barnet? Is the Mayor satisfied in the robustness of the Metropolitan Police Service's response, and will he ensure that the Metropolitan Police Service continues to put anti-Semitic crime high on its agenda in Barnet and other boroughs with significant Jewish communities?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The answer is, yes, absolutely. I am deeply concerned by this and I share your views. We have asked the Metropolitan Police Service about these cases and they have promised a thorough review of the investigations into these burglaries. What the motivation is behind these burglaries is as yet unclear and whether it is for material gain or even more sinister motives is, I am afraid, unclear. But what I have said is that I want the Metropolitan Police Service to use all the powers they have at their disposal to stamp this out.

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, I am grateful for that. I am aware in my constituency that four synagogues, a Jewish school and the home of a rabbi have been targeted. As you rightly say, we do not know whether these are anti-Semitic crimes or just general burglaries, but of course I think the definition of a hate crime is that the victim has to think it is a hate crime and then it is, so they are something. Another of the drivers behind this, of course, is the rise in the value of precious metals and I know members of the Asian community are being targeted because they often have gold jewellery at home, particularly for family occasions and high days and holidays and so on. I even hear stories of burglars these days going equipped to burgle not so much with a crowbar and a pickaxe but with bags pre-addressed to "cash for gold" companies and they literally drop them in a pillar-box on the way back from a burglary and the cheque arrives in the post. I just wonder, whilst keeping the pressure on the police over burglary and anti-Semitic crime in particular, whether we ought to consider some regulation or some oversight of this "cash for gold" industry which has cropped up in the last year or two.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that is worth considering. What you have obviously is a phenomenon caused by very high prices. Again, there may be anti-Semitism and there may be much more sinister motives behind the particular attacks, burglaries and desecrations that you have described. But generally what we are seeing in London is a wave of thefts arising from the very high value of scrap metal. You are seeing some quite extraordinary things happening. I think I am right in saying that there has been 13 or 14 bus shelters nicked for the purposes of scrap metal. You are no longer seeing a phenomenon where abandoned cars are simply left on the streets. They are going. Clearly, there is an issue around gold in particular. If there is work to be done with the companies that do the "cash for gold" operation to try to stop thieves taking advantage of their service, then I suggest that we do take that up. Actually, I think that might be something that the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) might want to look at.

Brian Coleman (AM): OK. One particular issue around anti-Semitic attacks and the reason why some in the Jewish community are particularly concerned about these issues is it does seem to be part of a rising trend of anti-Semitic attacks. You will know that in 2005 there were record levels of anti-Semitism. There was another anti-Semitic crime-wave in 2008/2009, possibly, and then we had the issues around the Gaza incident in 2009 which provoked further incidents. There does seem to be a trend which is disturbing in many areas of our capital city. However, I must congratulate the Metropolitan Police Service - and I am sure you will join me in that, Mr Mayor - on their approach to the Jewish community. Will you congratulate the Community Security Trust for their close work with the Metropolitan Police Service under the excellent chairmanship of Gerald Ronson and the liaison that takes place there?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will.

Brian Coleman (AM): But will you ensure that the Metropolitan Police Service do not take their eye off the ball? While in my borough of Barnet the borough commander and the police are very focused on this, it is sometimes not an issue which features in other boroughs that do not have the experience of a Jewish community.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do think it is very disturbing. That is the right word. I thank you, Brian, for the way that you have continued to keep up the pressure on this. It is very important that we do. Obviously this is something that I want the police to take with the utmost seriousness. Again, I would like to echo what you have just said about the work in the Community Security Trust and all those who support it, including Gerald Ronson.

1388/2011 - Outer London policing

Joanne McCartney

If safer neighbourhood sergeants are to be reduced in 'quieter wards' will this disproportionately affect outer London areas?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Joanne. The question is about what is going to happen to Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) in outer London.

Joanne McCartney (AM): To sergeants in particular.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All right. Just to reassure you and to reinforce what you and I have discussed many times here, we want to and we will keep a SNT in every ward and that is the intention. Where there is scope for a sergeant to have more control by managing more than one SNT, patently that is something that local borough commanders may want to do.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Thank you. At the last Mayor's Question Time, I put down a written question to you about where these sergeants come from and you said they would come from quieter wards. Are you aware that quieter wards are disproportionately in outer London? I have looked at the ward figures and 48 of the 50 wards for the lowest number of notifiable offences are in outer London. Of the 100 wards with the lowest number of offences 98 are in outer London and 133 of the 150 wards with the lowest number of offences are in outer London. Can you understand the concern there is in outer London --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do, but it is very important --

Joanne McCartney (AM): That they are disproportionately going to suffer the loss of some of those.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They are not because the critical thing is that we are going to keep a SNT in every ward. Actually, I know that this is not necessarily the Labour Party line, but the reality is that there has been a substantial increase in police numbers, warranted officers, PCSOs and specials in outer London just over the last three years and in spite of the budgetary difficulties that we face, very largely because of commonsense work done with the budgets by everybody at the MPA, yourself included, Joanne. Do you want me to read out the figures?

Joanne McCartney (AM): No, it is fine.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You stopped me last time but they are very, very good and people should know. There are 33 more in Enfield, 19 in Waltham Forest, 24 in Redbridge, 12 in Havering, 15 in Barking and Dagenham and 42 in Bexley. These are warranted officers to say nothing of specials and PCSOs.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Mr Mayor, Joanne's question was about sergeants. Can we have a follow-up question so that we can continue this?

Joanne McCartney (AM): Were you aware of those figures I have just given you to suggest that outer London was disproportionately affected by the loss of sergeants.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think that is correct.

Joanne McCartney (AM): They are from the Metropolitan Police Service's website and they are offences to March 2011, so they are very up-to-date figures.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. As I say, I think the proof of the pudding is in the eating and you have not only seen an increase in warranted officers throughout outer London, an increase in PCSOs and an increase in the numbers of specials, but you have also seen a substantial fall in crime and an increase in people's feeling of safety. That is what counts and I am very pleased with the progress we are making. If you look at what we are doing with sergeants and SNTs, I think it is sensible to give some scope for capable sergeants to manage more than one SNT. That is something we have discussed many times.

Joanne McCartney (AM): I am disappointed that it going to be outer London that suffers for this.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Outer London, as I say, is not going to suffer but I appreciate the tenor of the argument that you are trying to desperately to mount and I understand where you are coming from.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Mr Mayor, despite Joanne McCartney's attempt to manufacture a scare story this morning, would you agree with me that ward boundaries often disproportionately fall on town centres? There are large parts of London where a town centre may have three or four ward boundaries coming together and that causes significant operational problems for the police. In those situations and indeed the situation where there are small geographical wards, it is sensible and in fact may result in better crime fighting to combine the management of those wards and the prioritisation of those wards under one manager, i.e. a sergeant, for a better result all round.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do think that is right and I think that is a point actually that Joanne and other members of the MPA also accept, as far as I understand matters.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Do you also agree that in regard to outer London, where there are disproportionate numbers of the larger wards where there were one, two and six, it was a sensible step

to take through the budget to protect those numbers specifically because of the reassuring effect that they have in outer London boroughs?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are absolutely right and that is why it is critical to the whole argument that we remind people that every ward will have a SNT.

1637/2011 - Outer London regeneration fund

Tony Arbour

What progress has been made in setting up the fund? Which outer London regeneration schemes are being considered for funding?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The outer London fund is going to be up and running fairly shortly. I do not want to give the game away now by saying which particular schemes may attract funding, but clearly there are some wonderful things being done, urban realm schemes, all sorts of ways of improving outer London town centres and high streets and they will all be looked at very closely. You will have the first round of projects being announced this summer.

Tony Arbour (AM): It is very important to my constituency that we have some idea of how these things are going to be distributed because they are clearly going to be a catalyst for regeneration and we want to be making our plans now. You will be interested to know in the light of your discussion on the history of Middlesex that my constituency contains the county town of Middlesex, Brentford, which is in sore need of this money, as also is Kingston-upon-Thames, which of course is the old county town of Surrey and indeed the capital town of Wessex where seven kings were crowned. Indeed, I recall you paying homage at the Coronation Stone there, which is more than your predecessor ever did. Both of those places would very much like a piece of the action, as indeed would Twickenham and Whitton in the other part of my constituency. I know it is one of these ghastly things that happen where constituency members like to say that their part of London is more deserving than in other parts but in this case, given our illustrious history, I think you will agree that we really are in need of this money.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure that the people of Brentford, Twickenham, Kingston and all the other places you mentioned will be deeply grateful for your intercession on this matter and I am sure you will be helping to steer some outer London fund money in their direction.

John Biggs (AM): I just wanted to clarify one or two bits of this. You announced recently a £50 million outer London fund for the renewal of town centres. Is that correct?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

John Biggs (AM): What you did not announce is that that is £50 million over three years, so it is actually only £17 million in three even chunks in the current year. Is that correct?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you going to look a gift horse in the mouth? What we are trying to do is regenerate outer London town centres. You can go a long way with £17 million and I am surprised at the sort of endless droning and navel --

John Biggs (AM): OK. I think people in the gallery are getting used to this now. When you do not have an answer, you just sort of waffle. So roughly £17 million a year for three years, which of course is well worth receiving.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Good.

John Biggs (AM): As we have noticed, Tony Arbour could spend all of it in his constituency three or four times over at any time. There is a man in this room who used the term “chicken feed” and I think, relatively speaking, compared to the needs of outer London, this is a minor sum. But would you also acknowledge that 80% of it, so £40 million of it, is going to be achieved through borrowing and that this is the same Mayor who says that we have been borrowing far too much? Can you justify the strategic borrowing for London town centres when borrowing is a bad thing in general?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): So you do not think it is enough --

John Biggs (AM): No, you justify it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You do not think it is enough and you think that I am doing the wrong thing by borrowing it. Do you think I should be borrowing more?

John Biggs (AM): You asked the question. My thesis is as follows. We are now in the 37th month of your Mayoralty. In your manifesto you said you were going to do wonderful things with the suburbs. You woke up in February this year and realised you had not done anything much. You appointed an adviser and we have not worked out what she has done yet. You have found £50 million over three years, which is only £17 million, less than one-thousandth of the budget of the GLA.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I really think this is a very, very miserable --

John Biggs (AM): I think it is a record of media fluff but profound neglect. Would you agree with that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You had about 124 months of complete apathy or however long it was that you sat here --

John Biggs (AM): It was 96. I think we have already demonstrated that maths is not your strongest point.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and you did absolutely nothing for outer London and nor did your administration.

John Biggs (AM): Come on, now. I think we have already established that we spent a fortune in the suburbs.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you look at what we have done, I think it is very, very considerable. We have not only done great things in reducing crime, we now have a plan to help outer London town centres. I think that is what people want in outer London. If you are seriously arguing that we should completely let rip on public spending and spend money for the sake of it rather than targeting money wisely on good schemes, I think that is exactly what is wrong with your approach to government.

John Biggs (AM): I think the problem is that there are four words --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You judge everything by how much you spend rather than what you achieve.

John Biggs (AM): I think the problem is there are four words missing from what he said and those four words are ‘diddly squat’ and ‘I’m sorry’. I will count “I’m” as one word.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Clearly, it is welcome to have a focus on outer London and my colleagues from Sutton and North Cheam are quick off the mark and have already, as it were, put in for some money even though you have not actually told people what the criteria is. But I, too, am concerned about your funding mechanism. It is one thing to take the money off taxpayers and to grant it to outer London boroughs. It is another to borrow because you have to pay the interest on the borrowing and you have to pay the money back. I am a great Keynesian. I believe in borrowing where it is invested. Yes, I do have a question later in the session. I think it is probably the last question there. Can you assure us that the criteria that you apply to this will be suitable for borrowing, in other words, it will be money that will be invested for a payback? Can you tell us whether you are actually going to ask the boroughs to pay the money back?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Mayor, can you go to question 1342/2011 to see what you have prepared in answer to Mr Tuffrey's question on outer London funds?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Sorry, I thought it was helpful to bring it in now.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): It is the same fund.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand exactly. Mike is just taking the opportunity to go ahead to his question.

1342/ 2011 – Outer London Fund

Mike Tuffrey

In March you announced a £50m Outer London Fund. Is it prudent for this to be funded from £40m of increased borrowing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. Yes, all the information I have is that this is an extremely sensible part of prudential borrowing and it is going to be, as John says, over the three financial years 2011/12 to 2013/14. The costs of the borrowing are expected to be up to £4.2 million, which is well within the contingency set aside by the Authority and it covers both principal and repayment costs.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): The fact is there is an additional cost if you borrow because you have to pay interest and you have to pay it back.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Will the boroughs be asked to pay it back and will the criteria you set for the use of this money be ones that actually are sensible for borrowing, in other words an investment for an economic return rather than just, as it were, giving it away, which would be the normal way if you were cutting taxes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is an investment. The objective of this investment is to help regenerate outer London town centres, to drive economic growth and activity in those areas and to recoup money for the London economy.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): So the boroughs will be asked to pay it back?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is eminently sensible that we should be doing so. It is the kind of thing that you need a strategic authority in London to do. One of the points, by the way, in the course of the --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Are you saying it is a loan fund to the boroughs and they have to pay it back?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. That is not how it is going to work. But it is the kind of thing that we ought to be doing and indeed, when you look at how the business rates are going to be divided up, one of the cases that we are now making to Government is of course that we in the GLA should have a share in the uplift for the purposes of strategic investment of this kind in London. It is our job to promote this kind of thing. Obviously, it is disappointing to hear that John neither supports our borrowing nor approves of the scheme at all, but I think it is the right way to go.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. I understand the issues but I need to establish whether you are getting the boroughs to pay it back.

Question No. 1190/2011 - Sir Paul Stephenson

Richard Barnbrook

After Sir Paul Stephenson's recent comments to the Evening Standard on Tuesday, 19 April, do you not think that it is time to ask Sir Paul to step down and bring in someone more proactive to replace him?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. The question relates to some comments in the *Evening Standard* by Sir Paul. I think the answer is absolutely not. I think Sir Paul is doing an extremely good job and he was talking about the difficult and intractable problem of dealing with youth violence. I am delighted to say that youth violence is well down over the last three years, I think down 16% since May 2008, and it is a great credit to the Metropolitan Police Service that last year's murder rate - and you cannot fiddle with the murder rate - was the lowest since 1978. That is a very considerable achievement by London policing and I think we should pay tribute to everybody involved.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): I have to disagree but I am not going to start going around number-crunching. The numbers I have here are somewhat different; the lowest rate in the last two years. Anyway, my concern with Sir Paul, whom I have no personal grudge against *per se*, is that I think he made two comments which I think are really quite appalling and these in themselves are really about my call for him stepping down. The first one is that the whole of society needs to tackle the complex cause of gun crime. I think it is really quite crude to suggest that the whole of the community should actually assist in this when it is only when you look at the statistics that 70% of the crime is done by a very small part of our community. The second statement is that it is not a problem that can be solved in the short term. How long is he going to wait until we get back to zero? This sort of crime is something that is escalating out of control with regards to statistics of young people. When you find a five-year-old girl in her parents' shop being shot, with kids or teenagers having guns inside the shop, hiding or waiting for people to come in. Another element is knife crime as well. That is increasing 80% this year. When you are getting teenagers killing a 15-year-old black boy and the response from this killer was, "Did him", what sort of community are we living in? When the Chief of the Metropolitan Police Service cannot handle this crime and is actually trying to say, "The community needs to help me out", what sort of response can that give to the community?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I think the Commissioner was saying quite rightly was that there has been a great deal of success in suppressing those types of crime and dealing with the symptoms. We have taken under Operation Blunt Two 10,000 knives off the street. Youth violence is well down. Deaths by knives are well down.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Sorry, but I think five murders by knives this year is one per month.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): One is too many but the figures are moving downwards. It is very difficult and it is painstaking but it is going in the right direction. What I think the Commissioner was saying, which is correct, is that this is not a problem that can be tackled just by policing alone. In the version of his article that I saw, I think that he paid tribute to the Time for Action programme, to the interventions with the youth groups that we are doing, to all the support that we are giving to project dealers, for instance, at the Feltham Young Offenders Institute and to the many other initiatives that we are taking. These things take time and the things that we are doing now, dealing with very young kids, helping them with pre-school and all sorts of things, will not bear fruit for ten years. It will take a long, long time to eradicate this problem, but that does not mean it is not being done.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): I want to come back again. My concern here, Mr Mayor, is you seem to be saying this problem cannot be solved in the short term. Let me put something else to you. Would you agree with me that, as a teacher, if I say to the parents and to the children that want to learn in my class, "I am terribly sorry; I cannot function. I cannot teach you. I cannot resolve my lessons", it would be understandable for that school to say, "All right. You are suspended for a further hearing", and if I am unable to continue with that class, I would be sacked? All I am simply saying here is I am not getting very good comments from Sir Paul to give me a good feeling - and the community as well - that he is doing the job and is capable of doing it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I think the Commissioner is doing an excellent job and I think what he is saying is there are two sides to dealing with this problem. We are making substantial progress on both fronts. We are suppressing the symptoms. We have taken a huge number of knives off the street. We are reducing knife crime. We are reducing youth violence. We are dealing with the causes. We have a programme of mentor remits, very ambitious, and it is expanding the whole time; 1,500 people have now expressed an interest in becoming mentors under the scheme being promoted by Ray Lewis and Richard Taylor.

Question No: 1615 / 2011 – HGV Operators

Andrew Boff

What progress has there been in raising awareness amongst HGV operators on the vulnerability of cyclists?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. I am grateful to you, Andrew, for all that you do in this. There are loads of things that we do to try to raise awareness amongst HGV drivers of cyclists, the risks that they pose to cyclists. You have seen some of the big posters of lorries, warning them of who is in there, warning them and, of course, cyclists of where not to be to avoid collisions. There is a memorandum of understanding we have signed with the Freight Transport Association to develop cycle safety. We have got a new certificate of professional competence for safer driver training, which has been developed, and 695 drivers have got that qualification for driving in London. There are 640 companies now with 76,000 vehicles which are members of TfL's London freight operator recognition scheme, and there is a lot of work that goes on to get those drivers to understand the risks of colliding with cyclists, the danger spots, where the blind spots are and how to avoid them.

The key thing that I would try to get across is that there has been a massive increase in cycling. Everybody understands that. It has grown by 15% this year on last year; that is the biggest increase for a very long time. But we are not seeing a proportionate increase in fatalities on the roads, thank

heavens. That is very good news but it does not mean that we should not be extremely vigilant because we are, and we are doing a great deal to inform lorry drivers about the threat that they may pose.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. This morning, members of all the parties on the Assembly received a petition from the 10,000 members of the public raised by the London Cycling Campaign (LCC) requesting that all local councils, including the GLA, ensure that lorry drivers working for those public authorities receive cycle-awareness training. If I were allowed props, I would actually show you this [folder containing the petition] but I am not so, regrettably, I cannot! What is even more of a regret, Mr Mayor, and this I do want a response from you on, it is a regret bearing in mind that the move is going in the right direction with regard to trying to get cycle-awareness training for HGV drivers. It is with regret, therefore, that the on-bike-training part of such cycle training, which has been trialled by places like Hammersmith and Fulham, Lambeth and Hackney, has not been approved by the organisation that approves training programmes despite TfL and your own freight operator recognition scheme recommending it. Therefore, would you add your weight as Mayor in writing to the Department of Transport to insist that cycle-awareness training does become part of HGV courses in the future?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Which is this body that has not recognised the courses?

Andrew Boff (AM): Joint Approvals Unit for Periodic Training (JAUPT), it is called, which you really do not want to know about --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The JAUPT needs to recognise --

Andrew Boff (AM): It is the body that approves the training schemes for HGV drivers. It has, unfortunately, rejected that part of training schemes that insists on cycle awareness and the use of cycles. Therefore, the LCC and all members would be really grateful if you could add your weight to insisting that this is part of the training programme. I know this is complex. It is important that we do it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, no. We will get onto it and I will make sure that TfL takes this up with the body once we have established the name of the relevant body.

Andrew Boff (AM): Unfortunately, it is a five-letter acronym --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK. Good. Just while I have got you, can I just tell you, just so that people know, that the numbers of cycling fatalities, killed or seriously injured, are declining in spite of the huge increase in the numbers of cyclists. I think they are down 23% on 2009.

Question No: 1384 / 2011 – Transport Legacy

Valerie Shawcross

What do you believe the transport legacy of your Mayoralty will be in outer London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think one way or another we have touched on quite a lot of this but I am grateful to you for giving me the opportunity to remind you that outer London is not a homogenous blob hitherto uninvestigated by certain politicians but it is a very, very diverse area, and we have done lots of different things across the territory, and Crossrail clearly brings huge benefits on the left and on the right, on the east and on the west, and it was important to secure that funding. I think it is seven stations in Rebridge and Havering alone that are going to be Crossrail stations from memory. We have done a lot, as you will appreciate. We have got ten new trams going in in Croydon and a huge range of things across outer London, which I am happy to read to you but I think that will exhaust your patience if I took Henlys Corner --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Mr Mayor, I would appreciate it --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): How much do you want? The Oysterisation of the railways?

Valerie Shawcross (AM): I would really appreciate it if, rather than --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Safer buses? What do you want to hear about?

Valerie Shawcross (AM): -- rather than another filibustering exchange --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you are going to ask a pointless open-ended question --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Let us have a proper conversation. You have said that outer London is not an undifferentiated place. So, let us talk about your outer London transport legacy for somewhere, say, like Ickenham in Hillingdon. On a Saturday, if you are in Ickenham and you want to come into central London, it will be the case that your ticket office is only open for one hour on Saturday alongside a whole swath of zones 5 and 6 ticket offices. That would be one of very many that is --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is on Saturday, Val? Which day of the week is this?

Valerie Shawcross (AM): This is a Saturday, one hour on a Saturday. We have seen ticket office hours during the week slashed to over half of what they were before. But, in Ickenham, if you want to buy your ticket over the counter, it is not just that you have only got one hour to buy it in over the counter. In fact, even though you have got an Oyster product in your hand - which is great, Oyster has been a fantastic success - you will actually have to buy a zone 1 to 6 Travelcard even though you live in zone 5 because you have abolished a number of very important ticket products, the zone 2 to 6 Travelcard, the zone 1 to 5 Travelcard.

Can I put it to you that your legacy for outer London transport in practical terms, ticket office closures and ticketing costs, changes in structures of ticketing, actually on a day-to-day basis make life a lot harder for people living in outer London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously, you can put it to me but I also think you are reposing slightly too much in your argument on one issue around the difficulty of getting exactly the right ticket at Ickenham on a Saturday. I will certainly make sure that I look into the problem.

As far as I am aware of the issue around the abolition of certain types of one-day Travelcards and that kind of thing, we were really looking at a few thousand people who made use of those types of ticket, and in every case it was always true that you were better off using Oyster. You just said yourself that Oyster has been a great success. We have now got it on the Overground as well as the Underground. That was a great breakthrough. You now have the beginnings of an integrated Metro-style rail network Underground and Overground throughout outer London, and that is a fantastic thing to have achieved.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): If it is only a few people affected, Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I said a few thousand.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): -- why would it be so difficult to reinstate them? Because, in fact, if you have a Travelcard, the benefit is that you can make other journeys when you arrive at your destination. If you are from Purley and you want to go to zone 2, you can make some other journeys around there when you arrive --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The reason is that you are always better off using Oyster. It is the simplest way of doing it. We have Oysterised the Overground railway as well as the Underground, and that is a massive benefit to people in outer London.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): You see you are wrong there, Mr Mayor, because in cost terms, if you use Pay-As-You-Go, it is capped at the cheapest available Travelcard for the journeys you have taken. So, if there is not a Travelcard for zone 1 to 5, your cap will be a zone 1 to 6 Travelcard. There are ways in which outer London travellers are actually paying much more than they used to and need to because of these changes to ticketing structure.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is not what I am told. I will look at these cases but overall there has been a fantastic improvement in convenience for outer London travellers.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Can I just talk to you for a minute about actual transport service changes. You did promise outer London orbital buses. None of those has actually happened. You did scrap a number of very crucial outer London transport projects such as the Crystal Palace extension to the tram, which is a great shame. I think one of the things --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I have said, that is in the Mayoral Transport Strategy --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): But it is not in your business plan. You have not allocated any resources to it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and we are actively looking at how to fund it. We have delivered ten more trams for Croydon.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Looking at the total lack of outer London transport infrastructure development under your leadership because --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is nonsense. I have just told you --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Crossrail had begun under your predecessor, and we think it is fantastic that it is continuing --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What is fantastic?

Valerie Shawcross (AM): We are also looking at a situation now where the Piccadilly line upgrade has, basically, fallen off the programme completely. So, can I put it to you that your legacy for outer London transport users is going to be one of deep disappointment? We have got nothing to show --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Again, you can put it --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): -- for your period of time in office.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am afraid, again, you can put it to me, Val, and I reject it because I think you are completely wrong and you are unfair to what has been achieved. I think, if you look at what we have got on Crossrail where we secured funding for that package, which will be fantastic for both east and west London, and when you look at what we are going to do in Croydon, when you look at the improvements in safety on buses, the 24-hour freedom pass that we secured and the fall in crime --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): You are struggling, Mr Mayor. There is nothing in here that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- I think you have --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): -- makes a substantial strategic difference to any outer London area.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- I think you have a very considerable record. What we have moved away from is an epoch of persecution of the motorist, a crazed obsession with traffic lights and inventions of all kinds, and a crazed obsession with new taxes on motorists such as congestion charges. I think we have got a very balanced --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Such as having to take an extra zone on their Travelcard.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and successful policy.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Ms Shawcross, the Mayor has got the floor.

James Cleverly (AM): Mr Mayor, which of the following transport legacies do you think my constituents in Bexley and Bromley will be most thankful for? Do you think it is the removal of the threat of the Thames Gateway Bridge bringing thousands of heavy goods vehicles through a small semi-rural area of suburban London or do you think it is the users of the buses in Bexley and Bromley who have seen a massive reduction of crime over the last few years? Do you think it is the residents of Crystal Palace who have seen a Hub Team or the residents in and around Bromley town centre who

have seen a Hub Team or indeed the people who travel to Victoria from Bromley South who have seen their off-peak fare reduced by 40% because of the Oysterisation or indeed the drivers around suburban London who have seen the increased free flow of traffic because of the removal of unnecessary traffic signalling and the conformity to your policy of removing road impediments like unnecessary islands? Which one of those do you think should they be most grateful for?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I just congratulate you. In a hotly contested field, that was one of the best questions I have ever heard!

James Cleverly (AM): But I demand an answer!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Even better than some of the ones I have heard from John [Biggs]. Yes, I do agree with you. I am not going to single out any particular --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No, that was not the question. He asked you to choose one.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think the best thing is to have a safe and reliable service on the buses.

James Cleverly (AM): Indeed, the feedback I receive indicates that is also --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Is this a follow-up question?

James Cleverly (AM): It is, and there will be a question mark at the end of this one! Despite the plethora of other benefits that my constituents have received, actually feeling safe, feeling safe as they go about their business in outer London invariably comes out as the top --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You should not underestimate --

James Cleverly (AM): I have not finished my question, Mr Mayor. Are you as pleased with that being your legacy as my residents seem to be?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am pleased with that although, of course, it is by no means the only legacy that we have. There are a wide variety of projects not least the orbital rail links that we have established around London, which are of great benefit to people in outer London because they no longer have to go into the centre and come out again. They can now make use of orbital connections, and I think that the TfL should be congratulated on pursuing that vision of an orbital rail link, which we have accomplished with great vigour.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, you have mentioned several times in your statements in the last few minutes the Croydon tram link but can I ask you to remember that my constituents in Merton, will thank you for the extra trains that you have put on that tram link, because the tram link actually ends at Wimbledon?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Hear that, Val? That's the stuff to give the troops!

Richard Tracey (AM): Can I also ask you to confirm just how many more cyclists there have appeared from Merton on the Cycle Superhighway 7? Do you happen to know?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I can tell you. It is 70% more, I think. I have used it several times myself and it is a wonderful thing. When you cycle on it, as I am sure you do, Val, you hardly have to pedal. You are conveyed effortlessly on this blue carpet. Oh, you do not like it? Is there anything they actually like? It is unbelievable. The gloom, the negativity they radiate; the steaming gloom comes off you!

Richard Tracey (AM): I thank you for that confirmation, Mr Mayor. The last thing I want to ask you. Talking about traffic lights, do you remember about three, four or so years ago, when there were a lot of red lights around London, many, many motorists carried around a sticker on their cars that said, "Red light, Red Ken"? Do you not think you have changed things?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is a problem with traffic lights, and, certainly, I think the last administration had an obsession with them. What we have done is greatly reduce the growth in traffic lights. Many of them, of course, are on borough roads where the boroughs ask for them, and it is very difficult sometimes to prevent them from installing lights which local people have mounted campaigns to install. But, on TfL roads, I think that we have had a small reduction in traffic lights, and what we have achieved, after a vertiginous increase in the number of traffic lights, is a rephrasing of more than 1,000 lights. I can get you the exact figures. Whilst respecting the rights of pedestrians, whilst making sure that these crossings are as safe as possible, we have been able to allow traffic to flow more smoothly. We are about making traffic flow more smoothly, and that has been achieved in quite a few places. It is not always easy because you do have huge political pressure sometimes to bung in lights, bung in obstacles, stop the traffic moving, and cumulatively that gums up London.

Roger Evans (AM): I really hope that we can look forward to another Labour Group outer London-themed question time soon because it does give us an opportunity to compare and contrast the current administration with the last two.

Mr Mayor, we in Havering and Redbridge are of course grateful for Crossrail, and we are grateful for Oyster Pay-As-You-Go, which enables us to use those seven stations you mentioned earlier. We are grateful for the changes at the Gants Hill roundabout, which frankly have been better than I expected they would be and have bedded in very well. There remains one more legacy. I understand that Ilford will be the site of the end of the very last bendy bus service in London, the number 25. I was wondering if you could tell us when we will see the rather large back of this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You will see by the end of the year they are all departing to the happy hunting grounds in some Scandinavian airport or wherever it is. They are going off. I cannot remember exactly when the 25 is going but it is by the end of the year.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, your Jubilee line legacy, with respect, is not much to be pleased about certainly as far as the commuters are concerned. To bring an end to the dreaded weekend closures, never-ending weekend closures and see the disruptions even during weekdays, what precisely is the latest commitment for the Jubilee line upgrades?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Navin. The first I want to say is I appreciate the concerns that you raise on behalf of many Londoners who have experienced difficulties on the Jubilee line as we have been getting the new transmission-based train control system in, and there have been teething problems. We had to take over the whole Tube lines fiasco if you remember --

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I just answer. You will find the last closure, the last weekend closures, will be end of June, beginning of July; I think 26 June is the last weekend closure that is anticipated.

We must be absolutely clear. There will be a period in July when we move to the final phases of installing the new signalling, the new software comes in, when I must be absolutely realistic and say that there will be a period when we can expect teething problems. That will not go on for too long but by the end of the year, by the autumn, you will see substantial improvements in capacity on the Jubilee line, and we will be up to 27 trains per hour, which is a considerable improvement on the current position. It is up from 24 to 27 trains per hour; it is another 5,000 people per hour travelling on the Jubilee line. We have the prospect next year of getting up to 30 trains per hour. That is as many as run on the Central line, which is the most frequent service at the moment. So, the Jubilee line is set fair to repay hugely the investment that we have made in it.

Obviously, there have been teething problems. But it will be much better. By the way, it already is. If you look at the last couple of weeks, it has been running pretty much 100% in the last couple of weeks on the Jubilee line. It has been going much, much better now.

The software is incredibly complex because what you have got to do is, we have been importing software and then making it fit to the very, very unpredictable conditions of a massive transport network. That has led to delays and difficulties but they are going to be ironed out and you will see big improvements this year and next year.

Navin Shah (AM): I have listened to you very, very carefully. I hear what you say. Of course it is a complex piece of upgrade but last November you said that you had successful testing of signalling, etc, and you promised to deliver Jubilee upgrade by spring. Come April, there was an announcement saying that the Jubilee line deadline was extended and that it would be completed by June. Immediately, within a matter of a few days, there is a further press report saying that June deadline is again going to slip and is going to be some time in July.

I am very worried now from what I have heard because this is far from teething trouble. We have had months on end, nearly a year, of this sort of slippage announcement after announcement. There is absolutely no sign --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you are not being --

Navin Shah (AM): If I may complete, please.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, go on.

Navin Shah (AM): There has been absolutely no sign of a clear completion date. Today now you are telling me, yes, perhaps on 20 July but there still will be problems. Can I, can Londoners, can my constituents have a clear definitive answer as to when will you put us out of our misery in terms of the dreaded closures and the frequent closures that we are facing day in day out?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Navin, I am grateful to you for repeating the question. I will repeat the answer if you want, which is that, yes, I can give you a date for the last weekend closure, and that is the end of June, as I understand things, there will be no more weekend closures. What will then happen is that the new software will come into action, come into effect. As I say, there may be more teething issues but I hope we will keep those to a minimum. I hope Londoners will bear with us while we do it. I would stress that, at the moment, the Jubilee line is working extremely well --

Navin Shah (AM): Thank you. I have got my answer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- has been working extremely well for the last couple of weeks. But, just to complete, because you asked me for as much detail as possible, we will go up to 27 trains per hour. That is another --

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, I thank you. I can see myself coming back and asking the same question in June.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- 5,000 passengers per hour by the end of the year. Then, next year, the plan is to go up to 30 trains per hour.

Navin Shah (AM): Madam Chair, I have got my answer.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you. Let us move on.

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, would you accept that my constituents at the moment cannot move for falling over TfL investment in outer London; the investment in Henlys Corner coinciding with the Bounds Green investment on the North Circular? But would you also accept that my constituents should in fact be giving thanks in the streets, not just for that investment, but for the vastly improved service on the Northern line, for the decision to remove traffic lights at Stirling Corner, for TfL's complete change of policy on traffic lights, for the hugely increased night bus service, and for the many other improvements?

Mr Mayor, will you recall that under the last administration Nicky Gavron [Assembly Member], who sadly is not with us this morning, was appointed the Mayor's ambassador for the North Circular road? When she found it in her A to Z, not only did the previous administration fail to deliver the Henlys Corner improvement projects going ahead but, in fact, Ms Gavron was even late and missed a photo call announcing her appointment as --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Ms Gavron is not here to reply to you.

Brian Coleman (AM): She was even late and missed a photo call at Henlys Corner that the Labour Party had arranged. So, would you accept that my constituents should, in fact, be giving thanks in the streets of Barnet for TfL's investment?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you so much. I do agree with that and, of course, I commend that line of thinking to Navin. I think it is one of the many economies that we have made in City Hall since the last administration. We have not thought it necessary to continue with the diplomatic service of ambassadors to outer London that the previous administration had.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you. I am sure if Ms Gavron was here, she would have loved a lift in your taxi, Mr Coleman.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you.

Question No. 1619/2011 - Successful policing at Royal Wedding

Victoria Borwick

I would like to congratulate the Mayor and the Met police on the successful policing of the royal wedding and ask what lessons, if any, can be taken for policing the Olympics?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Victoria. You are completely right. I think that the lesson that can be taken from what happened on the day of the Royal Wedding is the one I mentioned earlier, which is that I think people want to get together and do the best that they possibly can for their city, and to show it off to the world in the way that they did. London looked fantastic and it worked fantastically well. I had people ringing up this office - literally - in the days and weeks afterwards volunteering investment support for programmes of one kind or another in London, just because they saw those images; two billion people around the world saw those images and thought how fantastic London looked, and so, yes, we did write to everybody in the MPS and indeed in TfL to congratulate them on what they did.

Victoria Borwick (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. This question is obviously topical, as I read in the press that this Government want to kick the police.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They want to do what to them?

Victoria Borwick (AM): Kick the police. No, no, the press are saying that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You all sit there on your Blackberrys reading the newspaper. I have not got that; what is it?

Victoria Borwick (AM): That is right. But do you think there is any evidence of that regime in London where, obviously, as you say, we have had a fantastic Royal Wedding, we have maintained these numbers, we have started to recruit again, and I am sure there are other good news stories you might want to tell us?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, and I think we have covered quite a few of them, Victoria. I do think that what the police did on the day of the Royal Wedding was very good, and I thought it was a wonderful moment when they allowed the whole crowd to walk up towards the palace. I thought that was subtle and intelligent policing, and I pay tribute to them, and I have no desire to kick them.

Victoria Borwick (AM): Mr Mayor, do you say it bodes well for the Olympics?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do think it is a good omen for how the City can perform fantastically well and show the world what we can do.

Victoria Borwick (AM): Thank you very much, Mr Mayor.

Question No. 1389/2011 - Benefit Changes

Joanne McCartney

Can you update us as to the current and predicted impact the Government's benefit changes will have on outer London boroughs?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you so much, and I am grateful to you for the question. We have been around this several times now. Clearly, the benefit reforms in the case of Housing Benefit are something that is necessary and I think supported by the Labour Party, if I recall, before the last election, very strongly. You need to do something to reform the growth in Housing Benefit. You need to do something to crack down on landlords who are exploiting the system, but you have got to make sure that you minimise the impact on hard-pressed London families. What we have been able to secure is a package that will protect vulnerable households by making sure that, number one, we have bought time. Remember, this was going to come in very soon, and I have said no, that is too precipitous for London, and we have got until 2013 now to get ready for the impact of these changes.

We have been able to secure the ability to pay the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to the landlord directly as a price for bargaining that rent down. That is the problem: these people are fleecing the system. These people are milking the Housing Benefit system. It is a racket in many cases, and you have got to be able to deal with them and I think to pay the LHA direct to them will help.

Thirdly, there will be a fund to help hard cases, and there will be exemptions made, particularly when it is a case of somebody who has to live in a particular area because that is where their kids are at school or they have some absolute reason that they must stay in that neighbourhood.

But I cannot pretend to you that there will not be some impact from these changes. On the other hand, when you look at Housing Benefit and the large sums of money that people were receiving to stay in homes that other people could not conceivably afford, I think most people think it was right and fair to make some reforms, and indeed it was the policy of the Labour Party to tackle what I think was widely seen to be an injustice.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Mr Mayor, when these Government changes were first announced, you likened them to Kosovo-style cleansing and said you would do something about it. The year's delay is welcome, but the effect is still going to be the same. There is still going to be --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I am not certain of that.

Joanne McCartney (AM): We are still going to have the migration of families and people from inner London to outer London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think that is true. We will see.

Joanne McCartney (AM): I have got no doubt that outer London boroughs are already telling you, as they're telling us, that they are already seeing the early signs of that. For example, my borough of Haringey has already had to employ two extra child protection workers because of the influx of cases, and London councils are concerned in particular about school places, that they will negatively --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Hang on, there is a separate issue.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Can I finish my question?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Joanne McCartney (AM): They are already suffering a shortage of school places, and this Government's policy to cut the Building Schools for the Future funding meant that 14 outer London boroughs, including Enfield and Haringey, my own boroughs, suffered 10% of the national cuts to funding.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, now, the --

Joanne McCartney (AM): That was to deliver increased capacity, and so in the future there is going to be a drastic shortfall and what have you done about it, to give --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you are slightly conflating two separate things, because the impact of the Housing Benefit reforms has got nothing to do with the explosion in the school numbers, and --

Joanne McCartney (AM): It will impact on it further.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will see. It may or may not, but insofar as it does, clearly London is being grossly underfunded, in the sense that the Department for Education needs to recognise the very serious increase in provision necessary in London schools. Everybody in London councils understands that, and this is a case that I am working with London councils to make to Government about the need to fund London schools properly, just as we intervened in the matter of Housing Benefit. It is unreasonable to under-represent, with the sheer explosion in the number of kids in London schools. There has been a large increase of kids in London schools, there is a very great need for more provision of schools, and that is, of course, the point that I am making to Government.

Question No. 1645/ 2011 - Direct Train Services from Sutton

Steve O'Connell

Will the Mayor do all he can to ensure that direct train services from Sutton to Kings Cross St Pancras and Luton Airport are not terminated in 2016, as currently planned?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Steve, I hear what you say. I think this is something, obviously, for Network Rail and the DfT, because Thameslink is not, strictly speaking - although it should be - it is not strictly speaking our baby. What I will do is work with you to see if we can perpetuate those services.

I would point out, I think I am right in saying that there will be more trains from Sutton to Blackfriars and from Sutton to London Bridge, but the through service, which is what you are talking about, that may well be varied and indeed reduced. So, that is an issue that I am more than happy to take up on your behalf and see what progress we can make.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you. This will be a continued theme. We talked about infrastructure in outer London boroughs, and we had a long debate about that. But my residents in Sutton, when I do speak to them, particularly feel vexed about the Network Rail service into the centre of London. It comes up time and time again, and I know that is not directly under your --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, what we need is to take it over.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Indeed, Sir. So we need to have more influence on it, which is a theme that I will pursue with you, with your agreement, but in between time I will be coming back to you for your support and lobbying to improve certainly the Network Rail/British Rail services for colleagues in

Sutton, because at the moment they are not well served and clearly they do not have the benefit, at the moment, of the tram service and it is something that I will be pursuing and hopefully have your support in the months to come.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Certainly, and you shall have it, though I think what it reinforces is the need to have more democratic oversight and participation by us in the GLA over Overground services and Network Rail services.

Steve O'Connell (AM): I will be urging that, Mr Mayor. Thank you, Chair.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, can I add to what my colleague, Steve O'Connell has said, because it is not simply Sutton that is affected by this. There is in fact an all party campaign about this situation.

This particular measure that has been talked about by Network Rail affects my constituents in the Mitcham and Morden part of Merton. It also affects people in Lambeth too, and it is not simply length of trains and so on; the real point that our constituents are making is that they do need the through service, not only to get to Luton Airport, but also get to St Pancras and Eurostar.

Sometimes people are taking very heavy bags and actually to have to get off one train and onto another one at Blackfriars would be very inconvenient. So, could I ask you to see if you can get some sense and reason into a myth that actually realignment of the tracks is going on - I think at Elephant and Castle at the moment - which would prevent the through trains from the loop going to St Pancras and Luton. It does require your office and the transport experts in your office to talk to Network Rail. So, could I ask you to do that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will get onto it. Can I say, I am very grateful to both of you for bringing this up and for drawing it to my attention. Let us get onto it; let us see what we can do to sort this out. Unfortunately, I do not run Network Rail service, we do not run Thameslink in the way that we need to, but let us see what we can do to sort it out.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you.

Question No. 1283/ 2011 - Cable Car

Caroline Pidgeon

When will the new cable car for London be open to passengers?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. The answer is that the cable car will be delivered when it is good and ready and when it is ready to convey passengers, including you and hopefully me, across the Thames.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): That is a terrible answer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What?

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): That is quite an extraordinary answer, and obviously I would look forward to a cable car ride with you across the river, but you seemed, last year, really confident that the cable car would be up and running before the 2012 and in fact in TfL board papers in February this year, a new Chair at TfL had said, "The cable car is anticipated to open ahead of the 2012 Games". What has happened to delay this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is no delay. It may very well be ready by the 2012 Games. The point I want to get across to people is that it is not integral to the Games. This is a thing that is valuable in its own right. It is a regeneration and a transport project that has a very good business case and will deliver a serious number of people across the river between two of the biggest landmarks in London. It will help, very much, with what we are trying to do at the Royal Docks, where we have an enterprise zone. I am not ruling out that it will be ready for the Games --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): So when, roughly, are you looking at it? Have you got a two or three month period when you are thinking it will open? When do you think the cable car will open for Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I believe in being prudent and cautious in these matters and I think there is every chance that things will go swimmingly with the cable car, but I am not going to commit. I would not want Londoners to get a false idea of what this is all about. This is not a project that is integral to the Olympic Games.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): You have said that already once, Mr Mayor, but surely you must know that you are hoping it will be finished between, I do not know, June to September, or --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand what you are trying to do. You are trying to get me to set some sort of deadline so that we do not meet it.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): You said it would be a 14-month period, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you not? You are trying to set an elementary track, and I am not going to --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): In all the paperwork, it clearly states it will be a 14-month build. Therefore, when is it going to finish? Have they started on site, 14-months on? When do you anticipate it will open? You cannot say, "When it is good and ready". You are Mayor of London; this is one of your key projects. When will it open?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, respectfully, I think we are doing all sorts of things which are considerably more important than the cable car, but the cable car will be ready, I very much hope, by the fullness of time. It will be ready in the fullness of time. It will ready by the summer of next year, I very much hope, but I am not going to set a deadline. You have got very, very complicated work to be done, doing the piling in the Thames, and I think if I was to get into a game with you now where we commit to a deadline that then proves impossible, you would rightly convict me of failing to keep my promises, and I am not going to pledge when the cable car will be because it is a technically very difficult thing to do. It is worth doing and we will get it done next year.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Mr Mayor, you are in charge of TfL. You are in charge of this key flagship project of yours. You are spending £57 million over two years to deliver this project. Surely you must have some idea whether it might open before the Olympics or which month or two next year it will open. It seems that you are not in charge of this at all. You are just letting contractors go away with this £57 million and they could open it, like the Jubilee Line, at some point in the distant future.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I am sure you are aware, the contractors are incentivised to get it done by next summer, but I am not going to sit here and promise to you that it is going to be done by a certain date, because I think that would be a mistake. You are talking about an extremely technically demanding project that involves piling in the River Thames. We have never had an urban cable car in this country before.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): OK, I would like a follow-up question, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think, I can see why, you want to try to trap me asserting some deadline, but I am not going to.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): I am sorry, you are out of time, Caroline. It was absolutely an inappropriate use of that group's time, Mr Mayor, and maybe we should just look at how you are going to answer the questions from the smaller groups, in fairness.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What do you mean? Can you just explain in what way I was unfair?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): It was clear that you had given an answer saying that you were looking forward to this opening in summer of next year. I think that was absolutely all that you said, and you took about three minutes to say that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I thought it was worth explaining the context, because Caroline was expressing confected disappointment and indignation that I could not give her a firmer date.

Question No. 1636/ 2011 - Cycle Super Highway 2

Roger Evans

How much money has been lost to Redbridge residents, ratepayers and cyclists as a result of Newham Council's decision to block CS2?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The Cycle Super Highway 2 is going to be a wonderful thing. There are difficulties with some of the works that are already going on in Newham. I talked last night to Sir Robin Wales [Mayor of the London Borough of Newham] about it, and he is obviously keen to pursue lots of cycling initiatives in the borough and to get Newham as cycle-friendly as possible by the Olympics, and what we have agreed to do, pursuant to your question, is to look again at this matter and look again to see what we can do to create cycle connectivity through Newham to Redbridge.

Roger Evans (AM): It is a very great disappointment, Mr Mayor, that my constituents, who want to be involved in your cycling revolution and who have access to the cycle training centre in Redbridge, cannot actually take their bikes further afield because of this Labour borough obstructing the progress of your Cycle Superhighway further east. Can you give us an assurance of when this will actually become available?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All I can say is that we are going to have a meeting with Newham, and I am going to ask Kulveer [Kulveer Ranger, Mayoral Director of Environment] to see what we can do to progress cycling through Newham, in Newham, in the run-up to the Olympics. Because clearly you are right to say that it is disappointing that they have not been able to complete this section of the Cycle Superhighway through Newham.

Roger Evans (AM): Thank you.

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, would you accept, that as you are somebody who ran on a platform of rights for the boroughs and as those of us who believe in the rights of boroughs, it is perfectly legitimate for individual boroughs to take a strong view and a strong stance on what they should or should not have in their boroughs? These are right and proper matters for local councils to determine, whether they are Labour, Liberal Democrat or Conservative. It is not up to Members of

this Assembly - or London-wide - to dictate to individual boroughs what they should and should not do with their roads. That is always a point of view you have proposed.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I accept that general line of argument, though as far as I understand the position in Newham, they are in fact enthusiastic for the Cycle Superhighway but that there are just difficulties in getting it in.

Brian Coleman (AM): Then it is a matter for Newham Council and its elected politicians, who have a mandate to decide on these matters.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I understand what you are saying. It is also a matter for us to encourage them to do what I think that they want to do, which is to have a wonderful new cycle superhighway. We are going to keep doing that.

Question No. 1214/ 2011 - Blackfriars Bridge

Jenny Jones

Are you content to give motorised traffic priority over cyclists on bridges over the River Thames?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cycle over this the whole time in Blackfriars Bridge Junction, and we are about to, I think, unveil a wonderful solution to the problem, which will, I hope, do the job. The details are going to be published shortly.

Jenny Jones (AM): Have you got the right question, because you are not answering the question that I have put? This is question number 1214.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, sorry, the question is, "Am I giving --"

Jenny Jones (AM): I do not want your random thoughts about Blackfriars Bridge, Mr Mayor; I want your answer on, "Are you content to give motorised traffic priority over cyclists on bridges over the River Thames, in particular Blackfriars?"

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It depends where, and it depends what you mean by priority and it depends what the context is, and really, if you are going to ask a general, open-ended question, you have got to expect --

Jenny Jones (AM): OK, all right, fine. Let me ask a more specific question: the plans for Blackfriars Bridge actually take out a cycle lane going southwards. Are you still taking out that cycle lane?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, we are about to make an announcement about this and as far as I am aware, the latest plan involves the reinstatement of the southbound cycle lane.

Jenny Jones (AM): I am really pleased to hear that; I think that is a very, very good decision. Thank you very much. And it also means that I can avoid lying down in the road, which I had promised to do if that cycle lane came out, although I am sure that Brian would have been delighted to run over me.

That is not the only problem, because Blackfriars Bridge at the moment actually has more cyclists going over it than it does cars and taxis, in the morning rush hour, and that is using old modelling, old statistics from TfL. If that is happening on Blackfriars, it is probably going to start happening on other bridges, so my concern is that you do not understand that the biggest amount of traffic is actually cyclists, now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I hesitate to disagree with you, but I wish the biggest amount of traffic was cyclists, but that is not, I am afraid --

Jenny Jones (AM): I am sorry, I cannot hear.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What do you mean, "The biggest amount of traffic is cyclists"? Where?

Jenny Jones (AM): That cyclists going over Blackfriars Bridge in the morning at peak hour are actually more numerous than cars and taxis combined.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I see. Yes, well, as I say, I --

Jenny Jones (AM): This is using old statistics, old modelling, from TfL, and actually if they used new modelling, it would probably be a vast increase.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, my memory of Blackfriars Bridge and the problems there was that there was, before I became Mayor, a terrible, crazy cycle lane in the middle of the road, as far as I can remember.

Jenny Jones (AM): Yes, that went the time before last.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It was absolutely demented. Yes, perhaps you were involved in putting that in. We got rid of that, I think quite sensibly, and as I've just told you, what is now happening is that the southbound cycle lane has been, or will be, reinstated.

Jenny Jones (AM): The point about having more cyclists than other traffic is that if you put in, for example, 20mph on that bridge, and every other bridge, it would actually make things safer for cyclists. We talked about this earlier; you want things safer for cyclists, because there are more and more cyclists. So, will you think about, for example, putting in 20mph over bridges, in particular Blackfriars?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I have pointed out repeatedly this morning, we have had a huge increase in cycling in London, and we simultaneously had a fall in the number of cycling casualties. I think that is a great achievement, I hope that is reported today. There has been a 23% fall in death from cycling, in spite of a 15% increase in cycling.

Jenny Jones (AM): Mr Mayor, I can see you are getting tired, and I quite understand that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Whether that gets into the paper or not, I do not know. It would be wonderful if it did.

Jenny Jones (AM): We want to make it completely safe for cyclists, but why do you want any casualties on the road. We do not want any, so it is not just a matter of bringing them down by half --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, listen, Jenny, I understand completely where you are coming from. In an ideal world, you would abolish the motor car and indeed we would all live on alfalfa and --

Jenny Jones (AM): Mr Mayor, you know that is not true. Why do you say things like that, which are patently untrue? Do you not think you are being a bit childish for a Mayor of London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that you want to make the best the enemy of the good and I think we are making great progress on increasing cycling and reducing the number of casualties. I am not disposed at the moment to consider 20mph limits over the bridge.

Jenny Jones (AM): Are you going to answer my question about 20mph?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have just answered it. Why do you not listen instead of gossiping?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): OK. Thank you. Ms Jones, you are out of time.

Jenny Jones (AM): Could you not be so rude? You are showing contempt for us, which I think is unbearable.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am very sorry you got that impression.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): You have a question from Mr Malthouse.

Kit Malthouse (AM): In relation to Blackfriars Bridge, for those of us who are fans and big users of your bicycle scheme, immediately to the west of Blackfriars Bridge there is a bay down on the riverside, although it is on the eastbound carriageway, and it is just into the slipway to turn left to go up as if onto the bridge. Once you get to the top of the slipway, there is no right turn for cyclists. You have to basically, effectively, break the law to turn right, because you are also unable to use the route that cars do to turn right, which is go down under the bridge, come back around and then over, so it is impossible.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you talking about Blackfriars Bridge?

Kit Malthouse (AM): The north side of Blackfriars Bridge, and I wondered whether you could incorporate in your plans a right turn at the top for cycles across the bridge, because it is impossible otherwise for them to turn right going east either way if they want to use the bikes from that bay.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you look at the plans that we are about to produce, you will see that there is a way now to turn right onto Blackfriars Bridge and go south over it.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Having come up the slipway?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Having come up the slipway.

Kit Malthouse (AM): That would be great, thank you.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr Mayor for your answers.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you so much.