

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) - 21 January 2015

Transcript of Agenda Item 4 – Oral Update on the Mayor's Report

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Mr Mayor, we have asked you to provide an oral update, including an update on the impact of last week's bus strike on other modes of public transport, including taxis. Also, very importantly, we requested an update on security issues in London post- the incidents in France and Belgium.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks so much, Roger. Just a few things to say. Since we last met, there are lots of things we have been doing, but I would single out the expansion of the Kicks programme [community cohesion project between Premier League and Metropolitan Police Service] that some of you may have seen. We are working with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and with the Premier League to increase the number of kids who take part. We had a huge success with 500 more than we thought and 30,000 hours of activity on Kicks.

We have put a lot of money, £10 million more, into renovating 400 empty homes and getting them back into use. As everybody knows, the number of empty, unused homes is now at a low that we have not seen since the 1970s.

On 8 January, we launched a plan to revamp London's Greenwich Power Station. Six brand-new gas engines will be there, ultimately running on renewable fuel. The waste heat generated will go into the neighbourhood. We should be very ambitious about this. It is a fantastic thing for London, generating clean power in the heart of the city, and heat as well.

You have asked for an update on the effect of the bus strike. I would point out that 90% of regular adult fare-paying passengers were still served in spite of the very considerable disruption that we saw to services. Only 30% of buses were running but the Tube coped well. There was a considerable increase in ridership on the Tube. The cycle hire scheme was up by about 25%. You have asked for the impact on taxis. I cannot really comment except to say that taxi marshals were deployed at the ranks to assist passengers and to encourage taxi-sharing.

You have asked also, very importantly, about the impact on London of the appalling crimes in Paris that we have just commemorated. Let us be clear that we are extremely vigilant about what is happening in our city and there are communities in London that need special care and special protection. Of course, as the Labour request for an update indicates, those specifically include the Jewish community in London. It is absolutely vital that the MPS continues the work it does with the Community Security Trust (CST) and that we support everyone in the Jewish community who is trying to spread a mood of confidence and security. It is vital that everybody in our city from all communities should understand that this is a very, very safe city, one of the safest big cities in the world.

We have seen in the last year an increase in both Islamophobic and anti-Semitic hate crime. They went up in the summer months. They have now been coming down, paradoxically in the light of what has happened in Paris, but we can never be complacent. As those who know about the police will know, we have 500 specialist hate crime investigators now in London. We take this crime incredibly seriously. I want London to be safe for all our communities. Clearly, we cannot at the moment identify any

particular extra threat to London as a result of the incidents, the crimes, the murders in Paris. There is no direct read-across that we can see. However, we are never complacent.

Finally, I want to say something about the difficulties at London Bridge [rail station] and the extreme disruption that passengers are experiencing. It is very, very important that we recognise that this is a problem and that it is caused by a very ambitious programme of work and improvement, Thameslink, with £6 billion or £7 billion to improve that station, Blackfriars and so on. It has the potential to be transformative of north-south travel. It should be the north-south equivalent of Crossrail. It is very important that we get that message across.

I must say I am concerned that people are not getting the message that this is about a future improvement to their services and it is time we heard very clearly that this disruption is the precursor to a massive improvement in services that will enable trains to run 24 hour. One of the problems we have with London Bridge is that there is a group of people - Network Rail, the Department for Transport (DfT), the train operators, Southeastern and Southern - all of whom who have a stake in this matter but nobody, it seems to me, is uniquely accountable. For my money - and I hope I have the Assembly's support in this and people look to us and to me for a view of what is happening at London Bridge - my view is that it should be, as I say, the essential precursor to fantastic improvement, but nobody at the moment is taking ownership of the problem in the way that I would like to see. I would like to see these organisations more directly accountable somehow to Londoners. The chaos at London Bridge should be a matter for accountable London institutions. That concludes my report.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Thank you, Mr Mayor. I should mention to Members and remind Members that we are having a lunchtime briefing with Network Rail today, which is very timely considering the problems at London Bridge and some of the problems that occurred over the Christmas break as well. We are on the case.

Andrew Dismore AM: In the wake of the terrible events in Paris, the police concern for the Jewish community in London is the security of Jewish schools. Not all of them benefit from the grant to the CST for school security; for example, private nurseries. This worry is not surprising because in France in the very recent past Jewish schools have been attacked and children murdered.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry. Could you repeat the name of the school? I did not catch it.

Andrew Dismore AM: I did not name a particular school.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry. I just cannot hear what you are saying, Andrew.

Andrew Dismore AM: I think it is the microphone pointing away to where I am looking.

The point I am making is that not all Jewish schools benefit from the CST grant for school security, particularly, for example, some of the private nursery schools. The Jewish community is very worried about school security, particularly after recent events in France where Jewish schools were attacked and children murdered.

What can you do to reassure the community about this and, in particular, what additional steps can you take to provide security for all Jewish schools?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As you know, we are taking steps and you will have heard what Assistant Commissioner (AC) Mark Rowley and indeed Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe [Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] have said just in the last few days about the importance of giving confidence particularly to the Jewish community in London. There is work going on now to ensure that all such areas are properly patrolled.

I will look, if I may, at exactly what arrangements we have for the private nursery schools that you describe, Andrew, and I will seek assurances from the MPS that they are receiving the kind of cover and the kind of protection that we would all want to see.

Andrew Dismore AM: That is very helpful. It is not just private nursery schools; private schools generally are not covered by the CST grant. There are obvious reasons for that, but still I have concerns about that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand that. If there is a lack of adequate coverage, then that will be speedily identified. It is important to stress that we are working very, very much now with the CST. Stephen Greenhalgh [Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime] has recently met them and we are obviously very impressed by the range of services that they supply. However, where there are gaps, it is obviously up to us as the guarantor of safety in this city to fill those gaps and we take our responsibilities very seriously.

Jenny Jones AM: Mr Mayor, you have said recently, "I am not particularly interested in this civil liberties stuff", but do you not think that MPS surveillance, which costs a lot of money, should be targeted at people who are a risk of serious criminal activity?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, of course, Jenny, and you have a question later on in the order paper about a particular case, but I have always been clear that there has to be a balance. I am not in principle against the MPS having access to the means by which people who might mean us very serious harm can communicate with each other. As you know, what has happened is that new technology allows people to communicate over the internet in a way that is not always easy, under the current law, for the police to monitor. All we are saying is that in certain circumstances with the right approvals and with the right oversight - and I would like ultimately there to be judicial oversight of that - the police should be able to have access to such data.

As I say, it is difficult to draw conclusions about what happened in Paris, but if you look at recent events, even the tragic death of Lee Rigby [British serviceman and murder victim], it is obvious that surveillance of these characters is extremely important. Most of them are on the radar. [Michael] Adebolajo and [Michael] Adebowale [murderers of Lee Rigby] were on the radar. The guys in Paris were well-known. It is important, in my view, that communication between them and the planning and the preparation of atrocities should be something that we are able to monitor.

Jenny Jones AM: What seems to be coming out of France is that actually they were under surveillance --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In Paris?

Jenny Jones AM: -- in Paris, but what was missing was dogged police work that was not anything to do with surveillance. It was about talking to local communities and other bits of police work. It is not all about surveillance --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Electronic surveillance, you mean?

Jenny Jones AM: -- and over the past few years I have been saying to you that the MPS is spending time on surveillance of people who have not committed crimes and who are not a threat of serious criminal activity, including me. When you say, "I am not particularly interested in this civil liberties stuff", can you not see that that is giving *carte blanche* to the police to carry on with what I would say is abusing their powers and tracking people who are no threat to us and wasting time and our money?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On the contrary, I think most Londoners will be thoroughly grateful and willing to accept that the police have a duty to keep under surveillance - and, yes, that must include electronic surveillance and monitoring of communications - those who could be preparing serious atrocities and who could mean our society real harm. That is entirely right.

Jenny Jones AM: Like me? Like me, Mr Mayor? They have a file on me.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The issue for me is the judicial oversight and the level of responsibility. Is this done on the say-so of a very junior officer? How often is it done? That is the issue. However, the principle of actually being able to access such data, it seems to me, is one that most sensible people would accept.

Jenny Jones AM: In 2013, the police made something like 93,000 requests under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) exactly as you describe: using a fairly junior officer to actually OK surveillance. Now you are saying that that is not what you think should happen. Are you going to stop the MPS doing that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There should be a proper and accountable system of authorisation --

Jenny Jones AM: But there is not.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- but I have to tell you, if you look at the success of the police over the last few years in bringing murderers to justice, very, very often it is because of mobile telephony data of one kind or another, whether it is --

Jenny Jones AM: You are getting off the point a bit, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, it is not. It is bang on the point.

Jenny Jones AM: No, it is off the point because --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is bang on the point. It is absolutely vital that --

Jenny Jones AM: -- what I am asking you about is the police abusing their powers and you are turning a blind eye.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- the police should continue to be able to use that kind of data.

Jenny Jones AM: You are choosing not to look at this problem.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know you have a question later on about this issue --

Jenny Jones AM: I will come back to it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- but I am content that the balance of the argument should be in favour of the police having access in principle to the communications data of people who might be planning atrocities in this city.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Assembly Member Malthouse?

Kit Malthouse AM: Mr Mayor, you referred to the very valuable work that is being done with the CST around security for the Jewish community, but you will also be aware that in France in particular there have been some horrific revenge attacks on the Muslim community with hand grenades thrown into mosques, shootings and all this kind of stuff.

I wondered whether similar work had been done in London. I know a number of mosques have received hate mail and death threats.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. That is why in my opening statement I was very clear that I want London to be safe for every community. We have seen a rise in Islamophobic attacks as well as in anti-Semitic offences. We take both equally seriously and we come down equally hard on all such offenders.

Kit Malthouse AM: OK. Thank you.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): We will now move on to deal with the bus strike and taxis issue. Assembly Member Pidgeon?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Mr Mayor, given the important role taxis played in keeping Londoners moving in the bus strike, can you confirm if you have read the [Assembly] Transport Committee's report, *Future Proof*, on taxis and private hire and when we can expect your response?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I can certainly tell you, Caroline, that I am familiar with the broad recommendations of the Transport Committee's excellent work. I certainly have a summary of what you have said and a lot of it seems very sensible.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: OK. When can we expect your full response when you have time to read it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have just responded.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: You are saying it is an excellent report?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): A lot of it looks very sensible. This is a mayoralty that has really tried to stick up for the taxi trade, which I believe in fervently and passionately. I know there is a --

[Interjections from the public gallery.]

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Can I just stop you for a moment, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, of course.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Can you stop my time?

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): I ask members of the audience not to heckle you whilst you are speaking because we need to hear what the Mayor has to say in response to these very important questions. If people continue to heckle, I will have them removed, regardless of the level of sympathy I might have for their point of view. Carry on, please, Mr Mayor.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: When can we expect a written response, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In the fullness and richness of time, I am sure you will get a full written response. However, as I say, there are many things in this report that seem like common sense.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you very much.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Assembly Member Tracey?

Richard Tracey AM: Mr Mayor, you mentioned the rather unfortunate confusion at London Bridge Station, which looks as though it is going to go on for a good many months or indeed over a year. Given that a good many people have previously used the Southeastern rail from Waterloo East to London Bridge, which is now not possible, can you talk seriously to Transport for London (TfL) about putting more bus services between Waterloo and this area - possibly some sort of shuttle bus, as we often see when stations are closed - and indeed also of course using river transport far more?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I know that [the use of] river transport was up considerably during the recent bus strike. It may be that TfL already has such plans. I will talk to them about what they are doing with buses, Dick.

However, on my general point about London Bridge, I have a lot of time for all of the organisations concerned - Network Rail, the train operating companies (TOCs) and the DfT - but in the end I feel that somebody needs to take ownership of this and explain to the public why they are paying such a high price and what they are paying such a high price for. People need to be reassured that this Thameslink investment will actually deliver the improvements that were promised.

Richard Tracey AM: Thank you.

Kit Malthouse AM: I wanted to ask specifically about Tooley Street. As a fellow cyclist, you will know that the road surface is appalling, the management of pedestrian crossings is terrible, there are buses, cars and lights everywhere and it is chaos.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know about that. I have used Tooley Street every day for the last seven years. It seems all right to me.

Kit Malthouse AM: It is not for anybody who is travelling between here and the Tube or indeed cycling or driving. Given that most of the access for the works to the station is on the far side, is there any chance you could press TfL to bring forward public realm improvements on Tooley Street so that at least passengers who are being inconvenienced through the station would have a pleasant experience as they exit on to Tooley Street?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The public realm improvements are going to be massive in Tooley Street. You will be familiar with the redesign that is going to happen. It is going to be an absolutely fantastic new design.

Kit Malthouse AM: Yes, but can it be brought forward? That is my question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The difficulty is that there is no early point in doing that in advance of the rebuild of the station itself.

Kit Malthouse AM: Why not?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure that it will all, inevitably, have to be torn up and done again and so let us do things in the right order. I have to say I do not fully accept your characterisation of Tooley Street. Actually, considering the incredible bottleneck it is and the amazing amount of traffic we force down Tooley Street, it functions about as well as you could conceivably expect.

Kit Malthouse AM: I think your view would be in the minority, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There you go. Perhaps I have a more robust approach to cycling than others, but I have to say I have used it every day, as I say, for six years. The only problem I have on Tooley Street is that little bit where sometimes buses back out and you are not expecting it as you come down around Hay's Galleria. Otherwise, it is fine.

Kit Malthouse AM: There are four sets of traffic lights within 200 yards.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I hope you obey them.

Kit Malthouse AM: I do --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is the spirit.

Kit Malthouse AM: -- unlike some of us who have been caught on camera!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I hope you obey the traffic lights. I obey them. I am punctilious. I stand frozen like a pillar of salt at the traffic lights.

Kit Malthouse AM: If it is so brilliant, why is TfL planning improvements once the station has been finished?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Hang on. You cannot simultaneously say you do not want improvements. You have to have --

Kit Malthouse AM: I just say: bring it forward. Anyway, enough on Tooley Street. There are other issues to deal with.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The improvements will be spectacular, but at the moment it is not as bad as all that.