

**London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 18 November 2015****Transcript of Agenda Item 4 – Oral Update on the Report of the Mayor**

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** I have a few things to update you on.

First of all, Dick [Richard Tracey AM] has asked for an update on the fares announcement. Members will know that we have put a real-terms freeze on Transport for London's (TfL) services and we are extending free travel for children on National Rail services in the capital. TfL fares are set to rise by about 1% in line with the July retail price index (RPI). Single bus fares and all but two of the pay-as-you-go single Tube fares are going to be frozen. Travelcards and season tickets will increase by slightly less than 1%. This is the third year in a row that we have been able to provide a real-terms fares freeze whilst balancing the need to keep investing in and modernising our network. The gist of the change for kids under 11 is that they now will be able to use their Zip photocards when they are travelling on all National Rail services in London, which is something that people will appreciate. It does not seem to be getting a deafening round of applause but, anyway, there you go. It is progress, folks.

There are various other things. Stratford, West Ham and Canning Town are coming into the Zone 2/3 boundary rather than Zone 3, which is very important. We have done a huge amount to regenerate that area. This is a big step forward. This is in tune and in line with what we are doing with the enormous post-Olympic regeneration that is going on.

You will have seen, obviously, that, we are doing a lot to help young people get into the tech world. We have put some more money into training for 14-to-24-year-olds. It is all very well having one of the most dynamic tech sectors anywhere in the world - and there are about half a million people in London now employed in tech and it is going to grow massively by 30% - but I want to see young Londoners getting those skills. We have launched a tech nurturing and digital talent programme that I hope will be successful.

We have launched a new police research institute at University College London (UCL) in order to have a better understanding of efficient, modern policing and how to help bring crime down ever further. There are many other things, but I sense that we should probably move on to questions.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair):** Thank you very much. Assembly Member McCartney?

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Mr Mayor, I want, if I can, to return to issues of policing, counterterrorism and security.

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** Sure.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** The events in Paris bring home the importance of having an effective police and security service response. Over the last couple of years, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has talked about the step-change in counterterrorism as a result of events in Syria in particular. You have talked about perhaps the police needing to review and enhance tactics as a result of Paris, particularly with regards to the range of weaponry used and also the number of venues that were involved.

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** That is exactly right.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** That is quite right: a reassessment of what is needed and our capacity to respond is going to be vital.

The Commissioner [of Police of the Metropolis, Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe QPM] said again yesterday that having resilience of at least 32,000 police officers was vital and he also talked about the need to increase the number of firearms officers in the city. You talked about that as well yesterday. However, of course, in order to do that, we need to have the resources to do it. We have traded ripostes in this Chamber about whether we have adequate police funding or not, but I think we are united in this: that the Government needs to rethink its planned cuts to the MPS's police service.

In the last few days, have you had renewed talks with the Home Secretary [The Rt Hon Theresa May MP] and the Lord Chancellor [The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP]? Are you confident that they will be reviewing and, hopefully, reassessing their plans on expected cuts?

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** First of all, Joanne, I will just say how much I agree with your analysis of what is going on and the changes that are necessary.

What Bernard has said is very sensible about looking at the number of armed officers we have that we can deploy at any one moment. As you know, there are only about 2,000 police in London who have firearms training and, of those, only 1,500 are deployable at any one time. Contrast France, where they have many more police officers than us full stop, but virtually every single one of them carries a weapon and is fully trained to use it.

We want policing by consent in this country. We do not want to be moving towards a situation in which every bobby on the beat is armed in the way that they are in France. I do not want that in London and I am sure that most Members of the Assembly do not want that, either. However, it is right to look at ways of making sure that when you have multiple attacks in multiple locations, the police can really respond in strength and in numbers.

On the funding, Members of the Assembly will have seen what has happened on the whole [police funding] formula review and --

**Joanne McCartney AM:** It was a shambles.

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** Those are your words. I am not going to say I could put it better myself, but that is certainly ... we have moved on a bit there. That is good.

However, we need to make sure that we see in London the numbers kept high, not just because that is what Londoners want. They want the reassurance of seeing police out there in boroughs and need to see police officers in their neighbourhoods, in town centres, in their wards; people want to have the reassurance of police on the beat. I absolutely believe in it and I believe in it passionately. It is one of the reasons we have been successful in fighting crime in a city that has huge challenges. However, also, it is because the police are the eyes and ears of the counterterrorism operation. They are there in the front line. They know what is going on in some of these areas where people may be at risk of radicalisation. We need proper funding for the police to keep that operation going.

Assistant Commissioner Mark Rowley [QPM, Specialist Operations, MPS] and his team are doing an outstanding job. As Len [Len Duvall AM] said earlier on, we are very, very lucky in the way that our police and our counterterrorism people have handled a great many threats and challenges to our safety. We are lucky and

we cannot necessarily always expect to be lucky. It is vital to ensure that we have the protection that Londoners need.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Can I ask you again? Have you had conversations and --

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** On the conversations specifically, yes, of course I have. I am seldom not engaged in conversations with the Government of one kind or another, particularly in this season coming up to the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) next week. As you can imagine, the conversations have been going on the whole time.

All I can say to the Assembly is that I really do think that at the highest level of Government - the Prime Minister [The Rt Hon David Cameron MP] in Number 10, the Chancellor [The Rt Hon George Osborne MP] in Number 11 - they really understand the importance of funding London police.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Good. I hope we do have some better news than we were initially expecting next week.

However, you have hit on one of the major issues as well, Mr Mayor. What we do not want to see necessarily - although it would be welcome - is extra money in this counterterrorism funding pot, but we need to see extra money in that normal policing funding grant because, as you have rightly said, the public's trust and the community's ability to be able to trust the police with information is going to be vital if we are going to actually stop terrorism.

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** Absolutely. I think --

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Can I just finish?

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** Sorry.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** If I could quote Peter Clarke, the former head of the counterterrorism unit, he said:

*"Neighbourhood police hold one end of the golden thread that can take us from Britain's streets to wherever in the world terrorists are being trained."*

We have had discussions before about the importance of keeping Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and neighbourhood policing in our communities. It is vital that when you make those representations, we do want extra funding in the counterterrorism pot but we also need that funding in local policing as well.

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** Yes, that is absolutely understood. I would just say that I do not particularly care from which pot the money comes --

**Joanne McCartney AM:** It is important because counterterrorism money cannot be used for local policing.

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** -- provided it goes into policing in London.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Yes.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair):** Thank you. Assembly Member Tracey?

**Richard Tracey AM:** Mr Mayor, I applaud the various elements of the announcement you have made about future TfL fares across London. Interestingly enough, on about the same day that you made your announcement, the Labour candidate for the mayoralty, Sadiq Khan --

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** Who?

**Richard Tracey AM:** -- talked about freezing all fares for four years. You have obviously gone through the figures. How could he possibly make such a promise?

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** How could anybody make it? I will tell you how: by hopeless political opportunism. They have tried it before and it never works and people always see through it.

The reality is that if you had a four-year freeze on Tube, rail and buses, it would reduce TfL's income by £1.8 billion over the course of TfL's business plan to 2020, which would take a huge chunk out of our ability to modernise and upgrade our services, to provide basic bus services and to keep London running in the way Londoners need and want. That is an argument that I have had with the Labour Party continuously over the last four years - eight years, actually - and I am proud to say that we have always won the case for investment in our transport system. Look at the results of what is happening on London transport, the vast improvements that have been made and the vast increases in customer satisfaction and the speed of journey times. I think most people would say that we took the right decisions.

That would be retrograde step. It would take a huge chunk of money out of TfL. It is not the way forward for London.

**Richard Tracey AM:** TfL in any case, surely, is going to be up against it for the next four years because we have seen rumours that there may be £700 million a year lost. This is in advance, obviously, of the CSR, but there is that rumour. Of course, TfL in any case is now proposing and has announced this morning that it is building a large number of houses on some of its land in London.

Given what it is having to do in order to meet the costs, is it totally unrealistic for any candidate for the mayoralty to be making a suggestion like this?

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** It is just claptrap because it is literally designed to catch the attention of the public in the run-up to the election. We saw it with the previous Mayor. He used to do this. He used to promise great fare-cuts and then reversed them as soon as he was elected and whacked fares up colossally in order to plug the gap. It is not the right way forward for the city.

Yes, what you say is completely right, Dick, in the sense that it comes at a moment when we have made huge savings already. We have cut large numbers of people from the back office and large numbers of officials of one kind or another. We have sold loads of buildings across London. We are now in a massive development programme. TfL is now one of the biggest developers in London. We are finding every possible way of maximising our income.

However, if you cut spending in that way and if you cut our ability to invest in that way, you will be doing material damage to things like the further improvements to the Jubilee line, the Piccadilly line upgrades, further work at Bank Station and all sorts of projects that are absolutely critical for decongesting this city and keeping it moving. The great thing about these promises is that Londoners do not believe them, alas. Even if they were acted upon, they would be extremely counterproductive.

**Richard Tracey AM:** Mr Khan mentioned that 'efficiency savings' would be his means. Have you missed any efficiency savings? Has TfL management missed any --

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** They say that every time. In reality, we took over an organisation that certainly was in need of trimming down. We took out about 25% of the senior bureaucrats of one kind or another. We sold about 40 buildings. You have seen what has happened at ticket offices where we have pushed through long-overdue changes that, yes, did mean substantial reductions in the numbers of people in those offices but actually made it possible for us to have staff doing other things. That is the way forward. You have to take tough decisions that involve cutting jobs that are no longer necessary. That is what we have done.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Mr Mayor, given the atrocities in Paris, if necessary, will you review your council tax plans and look to freeze or even increase council tax to keep at least 30,000 police and our PCSOs on our streets, as requested by the Commissioner?

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** I keep all options under review, Caroline, but there is obviously a very considerable council tax precept that goes to the police and that is quite right. You would have to increase council tax by quite a lot to be able to make a substantial dent or a substantial improvement on police spending. I am not convinced that that is the way to do it. We need to look at other means. The arguments with the Government are more important than reaching for that particular tool at the moment.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** It is an option if you need it that you would consider?

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** Yes. I am not inclined to do it. It is obviously something that I would not rule out, but we have been able to keep council tax very low. We have cut council tax by about 20% in real terms. It went up massively under the previous administration. It is not my preferred route.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Thank you.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair):** Assembly Member Dismore?

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Following on from the points that Joanne [McCartney AM] was making, at times like this it is really important to make sure that we protect places of worship, which may become focuses and targets, particularly mosques and synagogues, and to make sure that those who use those places of worship are reassured as to their personal safety. It is also important that we confront islamophobia and antisemitism, which can be sometimes provoked by these things. Indeed, on Monday, a swastika was daubed very close to the synagogue in Highgate on one of the walls there.

Can you tell us what you are doing to try to make sure that there are reassurance patrols and security patrols stepped up around places of worship like mosques and synagogues and what we are doing to redouble our efforts to confront islamophobia and antisemitism?

**Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London):** You are absolutely right, Andrew. We must make sure of that. Len [Len Duvall AM] spoke very well at the beginning of this session when he talked about the absolutely vital need for us all in London to distinguish between this nihilistic and pernicious ideology of the jihadists and the Muslims in London who reject it, who despise it and who have nothing to do with it.

You are completely right to be concerned about a rise in islamophobia and indeed, symmetrically, in antisemitism as well. These are things that in the case of antisemitic attacks - and you talked about a swastika daubed near a synagogue in Highgate - we work very closely on with the Community Security Trust (CST), as

you know. We support its activities in all kinds of ways. I have not yet had any evidence since the attacks on Friday of any increase in such attacks or any increase in reporting of either antisemitism or islamophobia, but it is something that we have to be very, very vigilant about.

We are one city. We are one city and we will not be divided by people who aim to set us apart.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair):** Thank you for that oral update, Mayor, and thanks for the associated questions for the Mayor.