

Outer London Commission – Consultation Response

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We have set out our comments under the three main headings of economic, quality of life and transport although there is a great deal of overlap between the two. Many of our points do not fit easily into the questions raised as we have major doubts about the concentration on super-hubs to the potential detriment of the vast majority of other centres and we have therefore not followed the exact ordering of the consultation paper.

Economic

Outer London employment principally relates to the provision of local services (eg retail, health, education etc) which in turn are driven by the absolute level and changes in the level and composition of population. Central London employment is driven by the growth in regional, national and internationally focused businesses and services. Capacity constraints (property and to a lesser extent transport) has led some of this employment to spill out into parts of inner London. Employment growth in inner and central London is driven by the general growth in the economy. Agglomeration economics shows that this is the optimal way for economic growth to be supported within a city context.

If employment growth beyond that related to population growth is to be encouraged in outer London then it needs to build upon particular comparative advantages such as Heathrow Airport or around developments such as a strong university campus that will provide a long term anchor to sustain and grow employment in the future. Forcing employment out of inner London through planning policies or trying to create competing employment hubs in outer London will in the long run be detrimental to London's economy. The failure of previous attempts to build up outer London office centres highlights this point.

Another area where employment growth can be sustained is through the major retail hubs in outer London which also offer a leisure product. Retail is becoming concentrated in a few major centres that can offer consumers the range of offer they want. Comparison shopping is now a leisure activity and the ability of a few key centres to offer a full day out experience will give them a comparative advantage.

Quality of life

There needs to be a radical improvement in the quality of major centres in outer London. This relates to the quality of the public realm and improving the leisure and retail offers within the majority of centres.

Across most centres there is a need for greater emphasis to be given to the person rather than to traffic. Wholesale pedestrianisation or at least the removal of the vast majority of traffic during shopping hours needs to be implemented. In the longer term if road user charging is introduced the money could be used to build underpasses avoiding key high streets thereby transforming the nature of our outer London centres.

High density housing need not be high rise housing or the ubiquitous block of one to two bed apartments. The use of terrace housing with private rear gardens is an ideal high density family friendly housing solution combined with mansion style housing. The outer boroughs need to be aspiring to the quality of housing and public realm as is achieved in parts of Notting Hill and Kensington & Chelsea which have some of the highest population densities in London.

Quality of education, the availability of green and community spaces, high levels of security and the sense of community are key elements to achieving quality of place and life. Again there is a

need to put people first in developments and to use public assets much more effectively to the benefit of the wider community – eg schools and places of worship which spend most of their time closed.

Transport

A radical change in approach is needed to transport in outer London. It is apparent from the failure to implement any major tram schemes over the last ten years that transport provision in outer London will be limited to improving existing transport infrastructure rather than providing new, opening up the market and providing safer alternatives to car use.

The take over by TfL of the North London line demonstrates what can be achieved on the existing rail network – passenger and revenue growth has been in double figures due in part to better revenue protection (gating), security (all day staffing) and environment (deep clean of stations).

We would propose that local rail services in outer London are taken over by TfL with all stations gated and staffed during the operating day. This could be revenue neutral – most uplift in patronage is off-peak as people are encouraged to use the system at quiet times because it is now perceived as safer, crime is greatly reduced on a gated system reducing the cost of vandalism and revenue protection pays for the additional staffing.

Orbital rail trips in south London are possible (eg Bromley to Wimbledon) but little used as they are perceived as complex and involve changing at “quiet” stations out side the peak. Better advertising of connections and staffing of interchanges will help to improve connectivity between key outer London centres without the need for new costly infrastructure.

Improved interconnectivity can also be achieved by a network of express bus services linking key outer London centres along the lines of the X26 – these can be market tested by the private sector as a way of moving to some deregulation of bus services in outer London.

Rather than developing cycle routes between outer London centres where demand is always likely to be limited resources should be concentrated on ensuring that 15 minute isochrones around key town centres are permeable for people and cyclists. This is where there is the greatest opportunity for walking and cycling. Better provision of cycle parking (in terms of quantum and security) is needed and the central London cycle hire scheme needs to be rolled out in key outer London centres.

Now mini-cabs and drivers are fully licensed and regulated the discrimination between taxis and mini-cabs in terms of use of bus lanes should be abolished. Mini-cabs are widely used in outer London by those who do not own cars while taxis are generally rarely seen.

Real safe cycle and walking routes need to be established to and from schools. What we propose is a radical change from the present system. We propose a pilot based on a large outer London secondary school where within the walking and cycling catchment area of the school, children receive absolute priority on the network in the period before and after school operates (although this is complicated by the extended school day). In practice this would mean

- dedicated cycle lanes on main roads (the width of a full lane) where alternative safe routes on non-main roads cannot be achieved.
- a camera enforced 20mph speed limit on all routes used by children on the way to and from school – using average speed and absolute speed cameras.
- signalised pedestrian crossing turning green for pedestrians within 10s of the pedestrian button being pressed.

Traffic management also needs to be far more radical in terms of:

- widespread introduction of average speed cameras and 20mph limits in residential areas

- withdrawal of free on street parking in most locations – cruising for free parking causes considerable congestion – replaced with resident and businesses permitted parking
- parking charges to reflect the true cost of parking provision – many outer boroughs make a loss on their car parking accounts and if the full cost of capital and depreciation was taken into account these losses would be substantial
- introduction of a workplace parking levy – even in outer London this is a substantial tax free benefit – reduction in workplace parking frees up more space for development, green spaces, public realm and helps to reduce traffic congestion
- London wide road user charging needs to be introduced to reduce congestion and smooth out traffic flows across the day – albeit at a much lower level than the central London charge
- consideration given to the establishment of home delivery centres – ie local shops/post offices/garages where home deliveries can be made and picked up by the recipient at a time suitable to them rather than the present high level of failed deliveries direct to homes and often requiring 2nd or 3rd deliveries
- removal of traffic lights at lightly used junctions where they are not needed for safety reasons
- the turning off of traffic lights at times of low traffic volumes while maintaining safe pedestrian crossing facilities where needed