

VIEWPOINT

Citizen action is essential to blocking the Government's appetite for more road building

Road Block, an alliance against road building, was launched in early 2005 in response to the gradual build up of a roads programme (in local transport plans and the Highways Agency's targeted programme of improvements) of now over 200 schemes. This road building renaissance is beginning to rival the Tories' roads programme of the 1990s, and is starting to face similar resistance, from community groups and activists, but this time with the added urgency of climate change which should be at the centre of all transport planning. The u-turn on previous promises to end road building and tackle traffic growth needs to be resisted with the same strength and coordination as in the 1990s, and so the idea for Road Block was born.

The contradiction between the Government rhetoric on sustainability and climate change, and its actual policy of expansion of road building and airports, is wholly untenable, and more and more people are waking up to this. On the one hand we have a Government admitting 'we cannot build our way out of congestion', yet on the other it is blowing over £3bn on the M1 widening, simply for it to fill with more traffic.

Although many thousands of kilometres of roads have been detrunked, and many new schemes come through the LTP programme, the fact remains that it is central government that has given the approval and funds for every one of these roads. Although ministers have delegated the task of identifying and justifying road projects to local authorities, it is still the DfT that sets the policy framework, the appraisal criteria and the traffic forecasts, which allow it to approve and fund local politicians' pet road schemes.

Even with the new regional funding allocation procedures, the regional transport boards will only be giving advice to ministers, who will still be making the ultimate decisions on whether roads (trunk or local) get the cash. Thus regionalisation and the LTP process are two smokescreens that central government uses to hide its failure to deliver the integrated transport policy we were promised in 1998, and its inability to tackle transport emissions.

The majority of the blame for the resurrection of the roads programme therefore rests squarely with central government. This is ironic because it has actually created a tool for itself to fix past mistakes, and get local transport policy back on track. In April this year guidance was published that, for the first time, required reappraisal of old road schemes before final approval, and also tightened up the early option identification stage of appraisal.

In the past, road schemes with clearly dubious appraisal cases have won approval. This has lumbered the Government with a bloated LTP pro-

gramme, full of ancient road projects, representing poor value for money, especially given the subsequent cost escalations, averaging 42%! Some of the schemes, such as the controversial Brunel Link / Harnham Relief Road in Salisbury, have been approved for five years without even achieving planning permission. It is time for the Government to kick these dinosaurs out of the LTP programme, as pledged in this guidance. These old road schemes, given the go-ahead in a desperate attempt to ward off the 'motorists' backlash' after the 2000 fuel protests, are anachronisms. They belong to the same era as Gus MacDonald's ten-year transport plan, unceremoniously dropped three years later. The controversial Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western bypass in Buckinghamshire is a prime example of a scheme which should have been reappraised, had this guidance appeared just four months sooner.

In the latest round of LTPs, some local authorities have come up with predictable wish lists of roads, without considering demand management alternatives. It is time for the Government to firmly apply its guidance that "the testing of alternatives is not an add-on... but an integral part of the process of determining the preferred option".

Road Block is concerned that there is still no formal requirement for local people to be involved in the crucial 'option identification' stage. The process by which a road solution is chosen, remains opaque and a 'closed process'.

The cynicism of the consultation and

public inquiry process still remains, with the perception that decisions have already been made, especially after the recent M6 Expressway, Tyne Tunnel and M74 decisions. With Alistair Darling admitting the Government has now abandoned previous pledges to reduce traffic, and the *Future of Transport* White Paper based on assumptions for catering for massive increases in traffic, the absurdity of the Government's position cannot be maintained for much longer.

Road Block formed to unite and support all the numerous community campaigns that have sprung up, a strategy that worked devastatingly well in the 1990s. We are not a direct action organisation, and we do not organise protests, but we do support local groups who take direct action. We set up to assist local campaign groups to defeat road schemes before and during the planning procedures, hoping it never gets to the bulldozer stage. However, if the Government continues with more road building, more protests are inevitable, as anger builds up about the Government's hypocrisy on climate change.

Rebecca Lush Road Block



"Regionalisation and LTPs are smokescreens that central government uses to hide its failure to deliver the integrated transport policy promised in 1998"

Rebecca Lush is a campaigner for Road Block, and occasionally 'pies' those who stand in the way of climate action.

LETTERS TO THE

Past experience shapes our travel choices – and that's rational

Tony Duckenfield's piece on the use of 'brain science' in marketing leaves me a little uneasy (Viewpoint *LTT* 29 Sep). Could he be drawing a non-existent distinction between feeling and thinking? Surely they are part of a continuum?

When faced by a need to travel, going by public transport may be the politically correct choice as judged by transport professionals but that does not make it a 'rational' one for an ordinary person who has a car.

If the bus takes longer, involves a wait in a noisy street, standing in a crowded interior, occasional proximity to smelly people, being thrown about by a poor driver (I could go on), what is rational about choosing this rather than a car? It would be the triumph of dogma over experience. Surely the starting point, when any one of us makes a decision, is a review of relevant accumulated experience, including discussion of such experience with others and reflection on it 'in the bath'. It can be done with astonishing quickness. Women are often quicker than men.

But what is going on? Tony Duckenfield suggests that the driving force is 'feeling' or 'unconscious emotion'. And he seems to think that such a mental formulation is outside the realm of the rational and unconnected with thinking. But what has filled up the little reservoirs in the hippocampus where such 'feeling' is stored? What else, in the public transport case, but all that accumulated experience of the shortcomings of local travel by bus compared, for all its shortcomings, with local travel by car? Where is the lack of rationality in that? Surely it is the fruit of logical analytical thinking stored in such a way as to be ready for almost instant use?

So what should we do about public transport? How do we make people feel better about it? Operators know. Where they can, they go for driver training, new and better vehicles, priorities over other traffic, up-to-the-minute information and so on. They then do their utmost, like any business, to get people to experience the new service in the knowledge that they will start spreading the word. At that point for some drivers, some of the time, going by bus becomes rational – and they do it.

Marketing is a modern religion with its acolytes, its books and its magical words. It can be extremely effective but we should be sceptical about some of its mantras and some of its science.

Terence Bendixson

Secretary
Independent Transport Commission
University of Southampton
c/o London SW10

Attacking efforts to change travel behaviour will get us nowhere

I'll be as polite as I can in responding to Bernard Abrams (Letters *LTT* 29 Sep), but he should appreciate there is a distinction between making an argument and a greenhouse gas emission. While he may feel better at having released his message into the public arena, I fear he has not improved the atmosphere for conducting a reasoned debate on this issue. Not that I've anything against generating heat in the process, but to have a positive effect it has to be accompanied by light.

Ray Fisher

Independent consultant
Skelmanthorpe
Huddersfield HD8

EDITOR

Rail surpasses bus as part of a CO₂ reduction strategy

I was interested to read about the report by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research into carbon dioxide emissions from the aviation sector ("Aviation emissions 'could swallow UK's CO₂ allowance'" *LTT* 29 Sep).

By coincidence, I have recently studied the Tyndall Centre's 2004 report, *How can we reduce carbon dioxide emissions from transport?* which examines the situation with regard to terrestrial modes. One conclusion is that improvements to public transport could lead to an 8% reduction in driven kilometres between 2015 and 2050. Of this, rail contributes 7%, but bus only 1%. Pondering this, I assume it is because rail trips are on average five times longer than bus trips, so each car trip diverted to rail results in a much bigger cut in CO₂ emissions than one diverted to bus.

Trips of ten or 20 miles seem rather unlikely to be diverted from car to bus, given that the average bus journey in 2003 was 4.3 miles (Source: *Transport Statistics*, 2004). A transport strategy based on reducing CO₂ emissions may therefore involve a somewhat different package of measures than one aimed mainly at relieving congestion. For example, in the case of the Greater Bristol Strategic Transport Study, which you refer to as backing "roads and bus transit" ('Bristol study backs roads and bus transit' *LTT* 29 Sep), the measures would apparently result in a 20% increase in CO₂ emissions from transport by 2031. By contrast, the Tyndall Centre suggest that an actual reduction in emissions from the transport sector is needed by that date if the country is to achieve its overall target of a 60% cut by 2050.

Land use change also seems important. The Tyndall Centre suggest that this could result in a cut of 10% in driven kilometres by 2050, no doubt because non-car modes thereby become more convenient to use. Rail-based public transport co-ordinated with land use has, of course, been the basis of planning in many European cities. In England, PPG13 and Regional Planning Guidance represent major steps forward in terms of land use, but have not been matched by appropriate institutional frameworks or investment in the transport sector.

Overall, it seems more important to reduce the total distance that is driven, rather than the number of trips. Combining strategic road improvements with purely local public transport measures (necessary as the latter may be) somehow does not seem right. I also wonder how many rail schemes dismissed as 'non-viable' might actually be worthwhile once allowance is made for their contribution to cutting emissions of CO₂; plenty of people I know drive hundreds of miles because of the absence of a rail link for a relatively small part of their journey.

Philip Bisatt
Taunton
Somerset TA4

Send letters to be considered for publication to:

Local Transport Today, Quadrant House, 250 Kennington Lane, London SE11 5RD.
Fax: 020 7587 0497. E-mail: ed.ltt@landor.co.uk

Cheshire's decision to scrap cycling officer sends the wrong message

Your article 'Councils rethink ambitious cycle targets in LTP2' (*LTT* 29 Sep) raises some key issues. Are councils giving up on cycling or just being cautious? Chester Cycling Campaign believes that cycle usage is visibly increasing, but this does not seem to be reflected in county council figures, clearly highlighting the complex issues of recording trip levels.

What does however disturb the campaign is that Cheshire County Council, having had a reasonable record of cycle provision investment, has decided to scrap the position of a dedicated cycle officer.

What kind of message does this send? Are cyclists to be pushed into the gutter or does the council see them as a minority that can easily be forgotten?

David Robinson
Chester Cycling Campaign
Chester CH4

Road protesters are full justified to target local authority schemes

In his column about the Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western bypass, Garrett Emmerson questions "the effectiveness of using local road schemes to protest against Government policy" (*LTT* 29 Sep). I believe the Government has given no other option to people who are concerned about the level of road building proposed across the country. New Labour has cleverly devolved decision-making about many major road schemes down to local authorities claiming that this is the best place for these decisions to be made. That may or may not be the case. What is certainly true is that it off-loads any blame for unpopular roads onto local authorities and masks the true level of road building which is taking place.

At least the Conservative government in the 1990s was honest about its intentions. During the ten years I chaired ALARM UK – the coalition of community organisations opposed to the new roads – it was clear that we were fighting a national road building programme. We did make the national policy arguments against road building, but the essence of our campaigning was the supporting of, and linking together, the local community groups in their individual fights. The tactic was successful. Most of the 600 schemes proposed in the 1989 national roads programme were abandoned leaving only 150 by 1997.

Road Block, the successor body to ALARM UK, is pursuing the same tactics. A decade ago those tactics – linked to the spectacular protests of the 1990s – stopped the road lobby in its tracks, really for the first time in this country. It's a pity that New Labour failed to seize the opportunity it was offered to move away from a car-based transport policy. The problem is not Road Block's tactics, but the fact that it needs to exist at all.

John Stewart
Former chair of ALARM UK
London SW9

LOCAL FIRST FOR NEWS / FIRST FOR JOBS
TRANSPORT
TODAY

ISSUE428

13 October 2005

The local ideal

The success of the Wensleydale Railway in re-establishing regular passenger services along a rural freight line thanks to the vision, willpower, and general business acumen of local people makes heartening reading. At a time when the longer-term future of many railway branch lines is still in doubt, the approach in Wensleydale, which has succeeded despite little financial support from the public sector, offers a model for what communities can achieve when they are motivated.

The vision of a community-led revitalisation of local rail lines is currently being pursued nationally with the establishment of community rail partnerships for many branches – although this has probably been motivated as much by a Government keen to reduce the amount of subsidy they require as it is to encourage lines to meet their full potential.

Yet suggesting that transport services should be community-run is often talked about in negative terms, with a subtext hinting that a normal commercial approach has clearly failed and the community might as well be given a chance of instead of closure. Perhaps more should be done to reclaim the concept as a positive development. Providing greater support for organisations who do want to help set up an inclusive, locally-based transport operation, be it a railway, bus link, or community car club would be a start.

What the Wensleydale approach demonstrates is the significance of local ownership – in its case literally as well as metaphorically. A bottom-up approach ensures greater buy-in with people more acutely aware of what the proposals, if successful, will mean. They are more likely to undertake work voluntarily for the sense of personal reward that they get by contributing to the greater endeavour, or to offer help in kind. Intangible benefits such as greater trust and community spirit can also increase.

The Wensleydale Railway also reinforces the case against fragmentation and in favour of unified operations that can also include non-railway related endeavours. As well as being able to fully integrate infrastructure and services the railway also has a trading arm and owns property to help boost its core activities and ensure longer-term sustainability.

Having centrally-run, top-down transport services in Britain has often given many communities a raw deal. The time has come to encourage local communities to take matters into their own hands where necessary, and help bring about the sorts of services they would like to see and can help bring about.

Local Transport Today provides fortnightly coverage of the total urban and regional UK transport scene from the viewpoint of planners, policy makers, traffic engineers, analysts, investors and managers of resources involved.

Publisher/Editorial Director Peter Stonham

Editor Andrew Forster

Deputy Editor (features) Rik Thomas

Deputy Editor (news) Matthew Ledbury

Editorial Research Co-ordinator Terry Figg

Production Natalie Clarke, Sonia Sanassy, Justin Andrew, Nicky Phillips

Editorial Office 3rd floor, Quadrant House,

250 Kennington Lane, London SE11 5RD.

Tel: 0845 270 7875 Fax: 0845 270 7961

E-mail: ed.ltt@landor.co.uk

Managing Director Rod Fletcher

Commercial Manager Natalie Lancaster

Advertisement Sales Executives Matthew Gardiner

Advertising Office Tel: 0845 270 7968

Fax: 0845 270 7960 E-mail: ads.ltt@landor.co.uk

Publishing Executive Nomvelo Mthembu

Subscriptions David Alliston

Tel: 01536 763816 Fax: 01536 760306

E-mail: ltt@aasm.co.uk

Address for subscriptions

Local Transport Today, Unit 6

Pipewell Road Industrial Estate, Desborough Kettering,

Northamptonshire NN14 2SW

Accounts Irena Cocks, Petula Benjamin

Tel: 0845 270 7854 Fax: 0845 270 7960

2nd Floor, Quadrant House, 250 Kennington Lane
London SE11 5RD

LTT is available on subscription only. The annual UK subscription rate is £80 including dispatch by first class post and supply of special supplements. The overseas rate is £124 for Europe and £160 for the rest of the world.

Printed by Hastings Printing Company Ltd, Drury Lane, St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN38 9BJ ISSN 0962 6220 All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part without the written permission of the publisher. LTT is published by Local Transport Today Ltd.

© Local Transport Today 2005

Protesters and Bucks have both learnt from the Linslade bypass

The Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western bypass, which was provisionally approved in 1999, did not follow the New Approach to Appraisal guidance, and contravened the European Habitats Directive, the Environmental Impact Assessment regulations and PPG9, according to a former English Nature species legislation and licensing specialist. Furthermore it ignored much of the guidance on assessing induced traffic. Meanwhile, the planning inspector who supported the scheme dismissed "soft measures" to reduce car use as "ideas postulated by Friends of the Earth".

The bypass may indeed be popular in Buckinghamshire but in Bedfordshire it was not. In 2003 Linslade residents had in four months raised £8,500 to challenge the scheme at the public inquiry. At a public meeting in Linslade this February, 80% were against the road. Many houses in Linslade have lost between £40,000 and £20,000 of their value. For two months there were countless protests of about 40 to 60 people, the faces frequently changing as people juggled families and work. There was also a rota so that the tree houses were continually supported. The pro-bypass lobby of 100 protested for one morning only.

The negotiations with Bucks were enthusiastically supported by members of South Beds Friends of the Earth and many local residents. Although local people are still heart-broken to see their countryside destroyed, public transport and traffic management is so bad in this border area of Beds and Bucks that people were delighted at any chance of improvements.

I have huge respect for the way that Garrett Emmerson has seized the opportunity and worked so hard to create the joint transport strategy, using the expertise and experience of Bucks CC. However, local people will not be convinced until they see the results on the ground, and Bucks CC was very slow in informing us about the traffic management consultation in Wing. South Beds FoE are now distributing leaflets and posters in support of a big publicity drive from the council and have the dates for the Stoke Hammond consultation.

The whole process has been a learning process on both sides. There is a difference between following the requirements of consultation and proactively involving the community. Local people do not want to sit in endless meetings but passionately want to play a part in improving their local area. But so often all that they are offered is the odd questionnaire to fill in. The challenge for both councils and local groups is to harness this huge source of energy and enthusiasm that does exist on the ground and let it help deliver a much better quality of life that is sustainable.

Victoria Harvey

Co-ordinator, South Bedfordshire Friends of the Earth
Leighton Buzzard
Beds LU7

A protester's viewpoint of the Linslade bypass controversy

As a protester who gave up several weeks of my life fighting against construction of the Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western bypass, I read Garrett Emmerson's article with interest.

The project is not a road improvement, as he claims at the outset, it is a new 10km dual-carriageway. It has been discussed for over 20 years and the plans have not changed substantially in the last ten years in spite of growing concern about sustainability and environmental degradation. The road runs very close to a large housing estate (previously bordered by open country), cuts across environmentally-sensitive countryside and impedes passage by foot and bicycle between local villages and Leighton Buzzard. This road 'improvement' will deliver over 6,000 extra vehicles a day to the nearby village of Wing.

The protest started two days earlier than Garrett Emmerson claims – the arrests were on day three. Up to 60 protesters (all but one local) had gathered each morning from 6.30am to prevent the work on moving the pipeline. On the first two mornings contractors arrived, met the protesters and left – but on day three, after most protesters had left for work or school, contractors entered farmland with machinery and the arrests followed. Afterwards, the morning protests continued until supporters built a tree house – with a rota to ensure a continuous presence.

20 October 2005

GARRETT EMMERSON

Can councils learn from anti road protests?

What lessons can be learned from the anti road protests across the UK? A local authority's decision to proceed to discuss with protesters is a small step towards an overall strategic approach for the area.



What lessons can be learned from the anti road protests across the UK? A local authority's decision to proceed to discuss with protesters is a small step towards an overall strategic approach for the area.

A number of reasons

I think that the local authority should be able to do a better job of handling the public's concerns about the road. The council should be able to do a better job of handling the public's concerns about the road. The council should be able to do a better job of handling the public's concerns about the road.

21 October 2005



Local authority should be able to do a better job of handling the public's concerns about the road.

Documents for and against

Understanding the situation

Garrett Emmerson's article on the Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western bypass generated considerable interest among readers

The legal moves by the council involved an injunction preventing anybody from being on the (existing) road in connection with the protest and was a flagrant breach of the rights of free speech. Protesters succeeded in altering the injunction to allow their passage and presence on the public highway, subject to not impeding work etc. – in spite of which the council's security staff still carried me off the road verge, in the presence of my three-year old son, while we were watching tree-felling from a safe distance. On occasions, I was threatened with physical violence. At times small groups of female protesters felt sufficiently threatened by the behaviour of security staff that they had to call for male help (the police, by contrast, were professional and polite). The draconian injunction and the behaviour of security personnel were probably the main reasons tensions rose on the protesters' side.

It is untrue to claim that local protesters left after the single pro-bypass demonstration (orchestrated by council-delivered leaflets, and less than half the claimed 200-strong). We maintained a constant, though sometimes small, presence. It is also untrue to claim that we asked the protesters from Scotland to leave: we were surprised when they arrived unannounced, and one protester did ask them to leave in return for concessions from Bucks CC. However, within hours – following an assault by security guards, putting into question the council's good faith (later restored by a written apology) – they were being supplied with food and blankets, their phones were being charged in local homes and so on. When some days later we did suggest they leave – in the middle of the night, before the next morning's intended eviction – the Scottish protesters accepted our advice and assistance for a strategic withdrawal, to avoid unnecessary arrests.

The promised improvements were won because of the protests. At a public debate early on in the protests, a council officer had refused point-blank to make any such commitments, and said they were not possible. The failure to include improvements to public transport, to mitigate environmental damage and encourage sustainable alternative travel as part of the original plan was scandalous, and even now there is room for doubt about delivery: as I write a public consultation on measures to help Wing, promised as a result of the protests, is due to be held in the village in nine days time and there has been no publicity at all from the council.

Sean Kelly

Wing, Bucks

We need to reduce the environmental impact of existing roads

I read Garrett Emmerson's column concerning the Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western bypass (LTT 29 Sep) with particular interest because of its local impacts. It is good to know how close working with all local groups, both for and against a project, can produce a more balanced scheme that meets the requirements of most people.

Some 35 years ago and about 30 miles south of this bypass, the first sections of M40 were being constructed in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. There was some

concern about the Stokenchurch cutting, but generally the road was built with few objections and minimal regard for protection of the local environment. Since then the M40 has been developed into the main route between London and Birmingham, with much greater environmental protection on the newer sections. Some 25,000 people live close to the original section of the M40 and suffer serious environmental intrusion, especially noise pollution, from 100,000 vehicles per day.

Prompted by the draft M40 Route Management Strategy prepared by the Highways Agency early in 2004, the M40 Chilterns Environmental Group was set up to press for improvements to the M40 that would benefit all users, but especially for local residents. Noise pollution would be tackled in two ways, quiet Stone Mastic Asphalt (SMA) surfacing to reduce tyre noise from high-speed vehicles and acoustic barriers to protect residents close to the road from engine noise, etc. The group also suggested that a package of sustainable measures could regulate traffic flows more safely and enable some traffic to be transferred to rail, or other modes. A booklet was prepared titled *Making the M40 a better motorway through the Chilterns*, which has been widely circulated.

The Highways Agency has agreed that this section of the M40 does not meet modern environmental design standards, but apart from the eventual provision of SMA surfacing through maintenance, virtually no money appears to be available for environmental treatment to existing roads. The county and district councils show some interest in the matter, but their main attention is elsewhere. Buckinghamshire's draft LTP2 focuses on how the road system can handle the impact of growth in the Milton Keynes to Thames Valley corridor, which is clearly a justification for the Stoke Hammond bypass; the environment of existing roads is not discussed.

The M40 is a serious environmental blot on the Chilterns AONB and impacts on a large number of residents. Action is needed to reduce the pollution caused by existing roads.

Nigel King

High Wycombe
Bucks HP14

Engineers and environmentalists should work in partnership

Surely we must all raise our glasses to Rebecca Lush who splendidly put the point for sanity by throwing a pie in Jeremy Clarkson's face. Cheers Becca, it was worth all the submissions to the Thames Gateway Bridge public inquiry put together.

And, I at least would like to clink glasses with Jeremy Clarkson who acknowledged defeat with wit and grace, and, opening the dialogue, caused Rebecca to make the point that environment and engineering should be working together, not fighting each other.

There's a thought worth remembering.

Nina Tuckman

London N1