Transport and Sustainable Cities

By Steven Norris

When I told my team that I was going to Oxford for the weekend they thought I was completely insane, although several of the campaign team thought it might actually give the campaign a new boost. I did too, to be honest with you. I actually thought the campaign was going rather well, as when Emma and I went to the Electric up in Notting Hill to see one of those French movies in subtitles, when we went in the entire audience stood up and clapped, which was terrific because it has been quite a tough campaign. I was enormously impressed and when the film finished I saw the Manager on the way out, and said that this is what gives you heart and drives you forward on these occasions. He said "I wouldn't get too excited they had just been told that if they didn't get two more in I wasn't going to show the movie!".

What I wanted to talk about today was a subject that is entirely dear to my heart because it is dealing with precisely the kind of issues that London is consumed by, certainly in relation to Transport. The title that we agreed was "Transport and Sustainable Cities", and I thought I would just make a point which many of you here will appreciate. People like Chris and Mike, obviously, who taught me far more than I know, will appreciate this. I thought I would start by making the point that "sustainable" is a much more meaningful and worthwhile goal than "integrated", a word which in my view is massively over–utilised. Integrated transport I believe reflects the Deputy Prime Minister's big idea. John believes that the past 19 years prior to the advent of this Government were characterised by enormously muddled thinking—the legislators simply did not understand the issues as far as integrating services were concerned, the private sector was consumed by self–interest and was by definition short sighted, and therefore incapable of strategic thinking, and that ultimately Nanny knows best. So his version of integration is the idea that you draw lines on maps. Classic examples of this would be the new version of C.T.R.L. although I am personally only going to be interested in that project when we actually see some solid financing for Stage 2, because as far as Stage 1 goes, frankly, that is the easy bit, and if ever there was a deal done by mirrors it was the financing of Stage 1 of C.T.R.L.

As those of you know the project know, it is only when you start grappling with the difficult bit, which is coming round north of the River Thames and into London from the East, and grappling with the issues of access to St. Pancras or whichever other London Terminus is chosen, that you start actually dealing with the real problems. At the same time, the idea that we should use heavy rail trains to use London underground track is one which looks attractive when you simply look at lines on paper, but which on closer examination is proven not to work. I also find it mildly amusing that it should be necessary for a politician to contemplate the idea that it is necessary to legislate for buses to meet trains. As an operator of several thousand buses and indeed several hundred trains I can assure you that a fundamental objective of any operator is to make sure that if the train is late the bus waits. There is little merit in a system which relies on income in order to ensure returns to shareholders in actually sticking to a timetable which is clearly impractical in relation to reality. So, some of the earlier definitions of integration I personally find extremely unsatisfactory. What integration can mean and where it seems to me it has greater value is in the need to improve existing interchanges. It is often the case that no one transport player necessarily has a sufficient commercial interest, nor indeed perhaps is even commercially large enough, to actually initiate a project to plan improved interchanges, and interchanges are clearly a key, because seamlessness in terms of a journey is precisely a component which any decent public transport system has to incorporate if it has any chance whatever of competing with the car. So improved interchanges sponsored by the public sector and with the opportunity

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therein for each of the private sector participants to play a role I think is an important part of integration. I also think that integration ought to make much more rapid progress in terms of multi-operator, multi-modal ticketing. In London Transport's case it is little short of disgraceful that six years on from the launch of their first trials of contact smart cards we are still not in a position where you can buy for example a stored value ticket for those millions of London Transport consumers who do not necessarily do sufficient journeys in the week in order to justify their purchase of a travel card. They have no alternative at present other than to use infernally complex ticketing machines in order to buy a daily ticket or a single journey ticket that is not only inconvenient but time consuming and wasteful of resources. It is also of course failing to capture a very large cash advance which is available to the operator who can, actually install something as simple as the phone card you have probably kept within your wallet for the last 15 years. And, multi-operator multi-modal ticketing, it seems to me, is something that the train operators ought to be pushed towards much more forcefully than they are currently being so because whilst the train operator model of train operations has I think benefited train operations substantially, any sense in which we desegregate the benefits of being able to travel on a single system would be thoroughly unwelcome. There incidentally I add a third virtue of integration. I really do think that integrating ticketing and much greater interchangeability between operators should be a mandatory goal for transport operators in every sector. It simply isn't acceptable for operators to be able in the same geographic area to require passengers to purchase a variety of tickets in order to make seamless journeys, there is a role for Governmental intervention; there is also a role for technology, because technology in ticketing these days can ensure absolutely 100 per cent accurate revenue apportionment—being able to allocate the correct portion of a total journey cost between the various operators who subscribe to that journey—which means that there is no reason whatever why we shouldn't have much greater degrees of interchangeability and integration in relation to ticketing. But, as I have said, if integration is perhaps the wrong word to be pursuing, sustainability is in my view a much more important definition. The Government's white paper on sustainability earlier this year touched on a variety of issues which are perhaps not necessary for today, but which related to the importance of social exclusion in relation to the level of sustainability that sustainable communities require to exist coherently at every political level. It touched on the importance of housing and of improving social housing to the degree that again contributed towards the reduction of social exclusion. But on transport the White Paper made some important propositions—it outlined the basic goal of sustainability as being the protection of the environment and of managing the demand for travel. As far as protecting the environment goes there are of course a number of aspects of this some of which we seem to be grappling with well and others of which we are still way behind. As far as airborne pollution is concerned, as you probably know, something like 70 per cent of airborne pollution in cities is attributable to vehicle use. The advent of the catalytic convertor and cleaner fuels, coupled with the technique for capturing diesel particulate emissions, on a similar basis to the catalyst, actually means that in the short term we will see improving air quality as far as these pollutants are concerned, probably through until something like 2005. Thereafter unless we do something else to manage the demand for travel and start to arrest the growth in travel we sadly see those gains, *i.e.* the technical gains off-set simply by greater traffic volumes.

And, there is a second issue you know in relation to emissions which continues to trouble me. I heard Ian McCallister the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Ford Motor Company talk the other day about how his company had conquered the emissions problem. By that he meant knocks, socks, PM10s, PM1.5s and so on. What he remains silent on was the issue of carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is of course a component which occurs naturally in the environment, but the extent to which we are destabilising the proportion of carbon dioxide in the environment and giving rise to the reasonable

presumption that global warming and abhorrent weather patterns, the style of which we are seeing all too frequently these days, are related to that carbon dioxide inversion seems to me to be an extremely worrying issue that the industry has still not tackled. So, there remains a major goal in terms of conquering the environmental pollution issues which Government must apply even more pressure to. I used to take the view that it was always best to use the market in order to enforce change both in the wider field and particularly in relation to pollution, for example the assumption that one used the price mechanism in order to stretch the elasticities of fuel consumption and thereby actually force manufacturers to build less polluting vehicles. Sadly all the evidence suggests that the elasticities of fuel consumption are almost infinite, rather like cigarette consumption, and there is virtually no end to the degree to which some, or indeed the majority, of consumers will go simply to accommodate higher fuel costs however much they may object to them. At the same time one can look at the Californian model which simply mandated a proportion of vehicles to be pollution-free by a given date. It is a proposition that caused a great deal of difficulty in California but it has nonetheless led to the capacity to produce this year something like 350,000 non-polluting vehicles which clearly have to be the way forward in the future and clearly has to represent the kind of technical innovation that we need to see more widely here. A more difficult proposition of course, and the one that we ought to spend slightly more time on, is not simply to conquer the problems of airborne pollution but to look at managing the demand for travel, and that is where of course the earlier July 1998 White Paper entitled "A New Deal for Transport—Better For Everyone" comes in. 'My goodness some politicians will get away with anything won't they?' is an attitude which is absolutely right, because it marks above all a fundamental shift in policy—one that I am sure that the vast majority of people here are well aware of—the death of the concept of predict and provide, and the birth of the concept of managing demand for travel. Predicting a very simple proposition that one half of the department actually predicts likely increases in demand for travel and relating, for example to economic growth, and to increases in the volume of car ownership, whilst the other half of the Department sets about building the necessary infrastructure to handle that increased growth in traffic. The problem with that of course is that it is a self-fulfilling nightmare. I remember my own conversion began with a proposition that having already widened the M25 between the M3 and the M40 from six lanes to eight we should now build a further six lanes called collector distributors but essentially simply another six lanes for capacity to expand to fourteen lanes. In the paper which proposed this idea was an admission that in reality that would buy about a decade of additional capacity because fourteen lanes were themselves full and a fairly obvious question seemed to me whether or not it was possible to stop before one got to the Bristol Channel. I recognise that as long as that is an equally important proposition, and it is actually perfectly demonstrable in London, when the people of London themselves were invited to replicate the expansion of the North Circular Road into a three-lane dual-carriageway on the South Circular, they simply declined to take advantage of this technical innovation. In short they were not prepared any more to see substantial disruption to local communities induced simply by a pandering to infinite demand for greater road space. So whilst I have no difficulty whatever with the idea that in any integrated transport programme there needs to be a healthy component of road improvement and renewal I nonetheless subscribe totally to the idea that the major objective of transport policy, and particularly in cities, has to be managing the demand for travel in four basic components. They are: reducing car dependency, encouraging model shift, encouraging virtual travel and planning out the need to travel in the first place. Reducing care dependency is simply the process of eliminating those journeys which needn't in fact be done by car. 30 per cent of all current car journeys are for distances of under one half mile and in Britain 2.5 per cent of journeys are done by cycle. In Holland more than 20 per cent of journeys are done by cycle. "Ah well that is easy" you say because Holland is flat and that is why people cycle there. Well, in Switzerland the proportion is 17 per cent and you can say what you like about Switzerland but it ain't flat! Actually you

can see here in Oxford and in York and in Cambridge how interposing three components into the road space environment can actually massively improve the propensity for cycling. But the following points must be addressed:

(A) You need to eliminate the danger which is currently associated with cycling. People don't cycle because they frankly don't want to mix it with heavy commercial vehicles or indeed with other traffic. Incidentally neither do pedestrians wish to share pavement space with cyclists. Anybody who has ever attended a meeting of the Pedestrians Association will know that that is the one subject which is guaranteed to light the blue touch paper.

(B) We need adequate cycle parking provision, something that is almost wholly absent from the British Urban Scene and yet is a common place feature of a similar urban scene in most European Countries; you have got to be able to put your cycle somewhere where it is going to be safe. Interestingly enough when Cambridge introduced free cycles which could be picked up and taken on demand they were disappointed to find that all that happened were that all the cycles were stolen. When I put this to a Dutch transport expert he said "Well that is very simple. You simply buy more cycles!" The proposition of course is that it really doesn't matter who owns them, the important thing is that people use them as an alternative to a more invasive mode.

(C) You need to ensure that employers at every level actually provide facilities for those who do chose to forgo their car in order to cycle to work to be able to change and be able to therefore accommodate variations in the weather which are a necessary part of cycling. I was proud to have established the National Cycling Strategy; it seemed to me that it was an infinitely underrated component of any sensible urban transport scene and I do hope that we don't see that lack of progress, which I personally have been rather disappointed in over the last two years, continue for much longer. It said that in relation to walking that the Government is diffident about publishing further proposals on the grounds that the capacity for unintended puns somewhere around the 'ministry for silly walks notion' will somehow hold the Government up to derision. I hope not. Improving walking does sound, I suppose, a rather futile concept but the minute that you begin to examine the urban scene you realise, for example, that the threat posed to elderly pedestrians by cyclists, the existence of a great deal of unnecessary and rather heinous barriers, and the lack of sensibly planned pedestrian crossing facilities actually does impede peoples' ability to walk very short journeys in major cities in the United Kingdom, again to a degree which is simply not found elsewhere in Europe.

Encouraging modal shift is of course a more difficult proposition. It is not anti-car; if there is any elephant trap awaiting any Politician in relation to encouraging modal shift it is the idea of being perceived as being anti-car. I do not believe that this Government is anti-car for a moment, indeed the idea that any Government that requires to be elected democratically would be anti-car is vaguely ludicrous. Car ownership in any event is not the issue; car ownership in the UK is rather low by comparison even with continental standards, something like 450 per thousand inhabitants in the UK, 470 in France, 490 in Germany and 550 in the United States. We have a long way to go in terms of allowing some of the three in every ten of the population who don't currently own a car actually to do so, for when you ask them why they do not own a car the answer is not that they choose not to do so, but that they are simply unable currently to do, and I see no moral or economic proposition which would prevent me from allowing those people to use the car in those circumstances where it is clearly

the optimal mode. The key is not car ownership, the key is in appropriate car use. If you could define it in simple terms it is a quarter of vehicles in cities trying to accommodate a point of road space, or to put it perhaps even more straightforwardly, when nine people occupy one of my double-decker buses, already those nine alone are occupying less road space and emitting less pollution per passenger mile than if they were in their own private cars. Average carryings in London are something like 20, so you can see immediately that modal shift is not in any sense a moral statement, it is not in any sense intended to be anti-car, it is simply concentrating on the environmental and economic efficiency which implicit in a public transport mode. In order for public transport alternatives to be more attractive to car use we need to insert some new requirements into the public transport equation. Remember for example that the public transport journey actually starts when you leave home and have you noticed how extraordinarily the car manages to wait for you if you are late. It is that sort of comparison which is important simply to bear in mind. A journey does not begin as you get on your bus, a journey begins as you leave your door and walk to a bus stop where you are then windswept and rain-lashed for ten minutes while the bus which ought to have turned up doesn't, and you remember all those good reasons why you will never vote for Mr Prescott again.

Any public transport alternative needs to be frequent, reliable, safe, clean, preferably cheap although ironically all the evidence we have is that price is by no means the most important consideration, and for those preconditions to be met we require money and we require imagination. In the context of modal shift, buses in fact represent the only mode which has substantial peak hour capacity available to it. Any attempt currently to transfer substantial additional passenger volumes to the current rail infrastructure, particularly in London, will simply produce a situation in which the existing intolerable peak hour conditions are further exacerbated. But buses do have an almost infinite capacity to expand provided that we get bus priority and bus enforcement right. We have got to ensure that if we do have proper enforcement of a properly prioritised bus system, a great reliability which in turn leads to faster turnaround which in turn leads to better asset utilisation which in turn means being able to deliver more bus capacity from the same fleet will occur. At the same time we need to look at the poor image of the bus. I heard somebody say the other day that if you see a white middle-aged male standing by a bus stop in London he has obviously lost his driving licence. There is a need for quality partnerships to ensure that buses are seen as a viable a mode of transport as trains or even trams, which for some reason are able to place themselves quite differently in the spectrum of public appreciation. It is a real failing of the 1986 Deregulation Act that it failed to impose any quality threshold on bus operators outside London, and that has emerged in my view as a real problem in metropolitan areas where quite simply bus quality is insufficient to attract any new serious ridership. We need to see a tripartite combination between local government and operators where the traffic commissioner will actually only register those services which both of the original parties have agreed meet the quality standards required. So, if for example the operator is prepared to run . . . specification, low floor Euro 2 diesel engine vehicles then the only competition allowed on the route should be by vehicles which meet a similar specification. As far as virtual travel is concerned I am referring of course to the issue of E-Commerce, and there are two aspects of this which I think are worth just drawing attention to. One is the extent to which we are already beginning to eliminate the need for the post van. These days the vast majority of things that I write don't actually need to be transported—it is a rather primitive proposition in any event— nowadays they travel electronically. The first time that what I write is actually committed to paper is often when it is in the hands of the recipient rather than the author. That itself opens up a whole new vista in terms of the capacity for E-Commerce to eliminate unnecessary travel, and of course techniques such as video conferencing allow for journeys to be reduced. In one case a law firm I know which has premises in central London and also here in Oxford, is able to eliminate something like 20 per cent of their journeys through video conferencing simply by using technology which is widely available. The

key interestingly in terms of the growth of E-Commerce is that there might be another aspect to E-Commerce, which is that it might actually induce more travel as in a sense E-Commerce starts to close the world down, and bring more of the world within reach of every citizen. For example when you order something from Amazon.co.uk you are likely actually to be inducing more transport than if you bought it from your local bookshop.

As far as rail is concerned I will just make one final point here. There is of course a vast need for additional resources, and it has been something that has troubled governments for many, many years because central government has seen investment in transport as a fairly low priority. Chris and Mike may disagree, but in my view it is for a very simple reason; whereas it is relatively difficult politically to reduce expenditure in relation to staff-led budgets it is enormously easy to do so in relation to project-led projects. The vast majority of expenditure for example in the DSS, Department of Education or the Department of Health is actually staff-led; in transport expenditure largely consists of a variety of very large schemes and it is very simple simply to take those schemes and ship them six months to the right. So, we have pathetic levels of governmental investment in transport and have done for several decades. The current public/private partnerships however seem to me to be inadequate in terms of providing the kind of revenue streams that we need, and the example that we are currently offered of the public/private partnership proposals for London Underground I think make that point all too well. I am concerned about the politicisation and logistics of pricing models, certainly as far as motorway tolling is concerned. It seems to me to be fundamentally counter-intuitive to be setting in place a charge, the only effect of which must be to some degree to divert some traffic away from the very roads that you have constructed for their use and on to less suitable secondary roads which are precisely the ones that you wish to protect. At the same time there is something equally counter-intuitive about the idea of rewarding an operator by virtue of the number of vehicles that actually use his piece of infrastructure when the whole of the rest of transport policy is actually trying to manage down the demand for travel. Urban road pricing I can assure you, and I have the scars to prove it, in London is simply politically undeliverable at the moment and it is politically undeliverable at the moment because of a massive and widespread mistrust of government. That is why issues like hypothecation, transparency and additionality are so important in terms of restoring that public confidence. Work-place parking charging may look easy, and indeed it is in terms of being a revenue raiser, the problem is that even levels of something like £1,500 per car park space in central London have no apparent effect on traffic levels and therefore on congestion. It is simply again an over-elastic charge which those concerned are happy to pay. I have indeed suggested that there is an alternative way certainly of funding large infrastructure and that in fact arrives from attaching the cost of such infrastructure for those who have hitherto taken the gain without any contribution themselves. When I looked at the Jubilee Line extension, a project which is just about now coming to fruition hopefully in time for the Millennium. What struck me about that, was that Canary Wharf (then in receivership of course) and British Gas were the only two property freeholders along the entire line of route who actually made a specific cash contribution to the scheme to reflect the massive enhancement in property value that they have actually derived from the scheme. If, for example, one is contemplating a scheme like Cross Rail, which it seems impossible to contemplate funding in the public sector, why not attach to that massive benefit to all effected freeholders of property a charge for example something like 50 per cent of the value of the additional gain made by those freeholders by the addition of that infrastructure. The charge would not be payable in cash, it would only be payable on sale or transfer of the property or 20 years thereafter, whichever came the soonest, so it avoids the problem of requiring not necessarily cash-rich businesses to make large contributions, it is a secure advisable revenue scheme, although it discounted heavily to net present value and it provides a very substantial base, for example in Cross Rail in the order of £4 or £5 to ensure that such infrastructure is actually capable of construction.

Investment, believe you me, is the key. You only have to look at European cities to see that this is where we have failed our own cities most. We really do need to prioritise the thinking within the Treasury and indeed within Government as a whole. To redefine cost benefit analysis so that it captures more of the societal advantage which derives from the elimination of pollution and congestion for each individual. If, combined with that we see some vision and leadership and creativity on our transport policy then we can indeed make our cities in the future more sustainable than at present.

Thank you.

Questions:

(Unable to hear actual questions!)

Response:
The important thing is that first of all, I actually entirely accept that proposition. It is important to remember that in terms of freight that the one thing you can't do is to suggest that somehow freight deliveries go away. They are actually an essential component of every day life, but in so far as that kind of routeing procedure applies to every vehicle, then what it does not do is to destabilise the freight market place in which each transport operator is competing against the other on the basis of better logistics, better pricing and so on. Ultimately George, what you are doing is to transfer any additional costs, marginal or otherwise, to the consumer, and it is the consumer who gets the benefit of less noise, less vibration, less danger and so on. So no I have no difficulty with that. I ought to say however that I also said at one point, and it is a large subject to cover so I did not expand on it, that any properly integrated transport policy will need to have a sensible component of upgrading and improving our road system. I appreciate that this is greatly unfashionable at the moment but the reality is that a sustained bypass programme would do more to actually alleviate the problems associated with heavy lorry movements where they are clearly wholly inappropriate in many of our towns and villages, and actually of course, at the same time improve the efficiency and reliability of transport. Anything you can do to achieve that purpose I think is wholly welcome. Incidentally in that context the industry is much less concerned about shift from road to rail than you might imagine. These days large transport operators are in the logistics business, they take goods from the factory floor to a customer's front counter. The actual mode they employ to do it is largely irrelevant. Old Eddie Stobart, he of the blessed vehicle fleet, actually has one million sq. ft at Daventry which is entirely devoted to the idea of road rail interchange. There is no resistance whatever either philosophically or even commercially to the idea of shifting that cargo which can be carried by rail onto rail. The difficulty arises in the type of journeys which rail actually best accommodates. Most of the economics suggest that under about 300km the disadvantages of triple handling in other words two truck journeys as well as the rail journey to the central components simply do not make that sort of journey viable. But, there is clearly a road for railfreight and where that again can also alleviate some of the externalities of freight road use we are keen to see it.