

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 26 February 2014
Transcript of Agenda Item 4 – Questions to the Mayor

2014/0632 - London's flood risk

Jenny Jones

Will you heed the warning from the Environment Agency chief that London must step up its flood protection or risk being swamped in future?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Clearly, there is a huge amount of activity going on at the moment because, although London was relatively unscathed in the sense that you did not see terrible images the whole time of huge tracts of London underwater, there is no doubt that there was a very serious problem and continues to be a very serious problem in some parts of the city and there remains a serious risk of fluvial flooding.

Of course, we are mitigating that in all sorts of ways. You will be familiar with the Drain London strategy that we are pursuing and the river restoration strategy we mentioned at the a previous meeting. We of course have written to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to make sure London gets a proportional share of the £130 million flood recovery funding, as well as an increased share of the national flood budget to reduce the number of properties at risk.

People looking at this conversation or looking at me now will say, "Why on earth is the Mayor of London going on about this when we have seen the devastation in the Somerset Levels and clearly London was relatively unscathed?" The answer is that the downside risk to London is much greater. We really were within an ace of a very serious problem in Kenley.

The final thing I want to say is that I really want to congratulate all the emergency services, the London Fire Brigade in particular, the South West Water people who did a fantastic job in dealing with that emergency, the police and of course the ambulance service and others. A very serious problem was averted by a huge, Napoleonic effort by the emergency services. We have to put in long-term plans to make sure that does not happen again.

Jenny Jones AM: Thank you. I am glad you have said that because obviously there are several aspects. As you say, we have talked about river restoration before, which is an important component. There is also the fact that the Thames Barrier has been closed 40 times already this year and it was always imagined it would only ever open 50 times a year, so it has already opened almost that many times. Have you met with the Environment Agency or anybody to discuss whether or not we need to bring forward plans for a review of whether we need a new Barrier, whether we have to work downstream on the Thames or whatever?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. The answer is yes, Jenny. I do want a review of the Thames Barrier. It is absolutely fascinating how it has functioned in the last few months and how it really has prevented huge potential damage in London in ways that I do not think its authors conceived of.

Jenny Jones AM: That is the whole point.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What it has done is it has stopped the aggravation of the problem by stopping the tidal waters coming in at the same time as the fluvial waters are coming down. It has turned the Thames in London, which is heavily embanked now, into a gigantic sump, which has prevented considerable damage.

Jenny Jones AM: That is my point, really, because it --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): My information is that the Barrier is good, Jenny, for another 75 years. However, clearly, as you rightly say, in view of the many times that it has been in operation and continues to be in operation over the last few weeks and months, it is only prudent to have a full review of its operations.

Jenny Jones AM: I am glad. That figure of 75 was obviously done on previous forecasts and those previous forecasts now look as if they might not be quite accurate.

Another aspect to avoiding flood risk here in London is the whole surface water issue and the fact that we have so many paved areas. Your own London Plan says there will be an increased risk of surface water flooding. I am wondering what you are going to do about that. Are you going to have some sort of Mayoral announcement that would encourage people not to pave over any more land and to put permeable surfaces in or find other ways to make themselves safe? People do not understand the risk they are putting themselves under when they start paving their gardens and so on. All developments, of course, ought to have permeable surfaces.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. You are absolutely right. Through the Drain London programme and working with the boroughs, we are encouraging people to understand the potential risk. If you go down to the A22 where there was considerable flooding, basically the Caterham Bourne burst its banks and came out of the culvert. You could see so clearly how the water was coursing on pavements, on tarmac and on bits that had been lost to natural drainage. Therefore, it is very important that we encourage people not to concrete over their front gardens if they possibly can, to think of drainage schemes and, yes, to plant more trees and to deculvert rivers in the way that we are.

Jenny Jones AM: Could you also push the boroughs to produce all of their surface water flood risk plans? There is a bit of a lag there. They have all undertaken to do them but they have not, actually.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They have a statutory obligation to do so and I will certainly take it up with Jules [Pipe, Chair, London Councils] and with London Councils to ensure that they are.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): I have agreed at this point that I will bring in Assembly Member O'Connell, who has a question later on the order paper on flooding in Croydon.

2014/0620 - Flooding in Croydon

[Steve O'Connell](#)

What contribution has been made by the GLA group in helping to deal with the recent flooding in Croydon?

Steve O'Connell AM: If I may, I will wrap my question around and add it to Jenny's remarks. Thank you again for the support you gave particularly to my residents in South Croydon and particularly thank you to the

GLA family itself. As I said last week, the fire brigade, the police and the other agencies pulled together and supported my residents. It is with thanks for that, for the record.

I would like to come in on a couple of Jenny's points. Now the operation in Kenley and Purley is, to a degree, being scaled down, which is good, there are still vulnerable households. The questions I get asked when I am down there are two particular questions. One is: when is the A22 Godstone Road opening and when can I go back to my home? That is a question you may wish to respond to. Secondly, a poignant question is: how on earth can we stop this happening again? These are the two questions that I am being asked and I know the authorities in Croydon and elsewhere are attending to them. They are two big questions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Thank you, Steve. First of all, I want to pay tribute to you for all the work that you have been doing over the last few weeks and months because you have been an absolute pillar of strength down there, constantly on the scene, constantly trying to help the council, help the police and do your bit, too, to sort out what has been a very difficult logistical problem.

As far as I know, there are plans to reopen the A22 as soon as possible, if not to two-way traffic then with traffic lights and so on with a contraflow.

Steve O'Connell AM: It is the second question I am more concerned about.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What can we do to stop it happening again? That is the big issue. If you look at what is happening in the Bourne, it only really appears once every seven years and people who know this area will know what I am talking about. This river only appears very infrequently and we have now to assume that it will be a regular customer. What we need to do is to look at the culverting, either to expand that or possibly to deculvert it or to come up with a long-term solution, perhaps an interceptor tunnel or something like that, to abate the very strong surge we saw that basically broke the Victorian brickwork and caused it to bubble up in that way right by the water treatment plant. That was the problem.

Steve O'Connell AM: Indeed, but what we should be turning our attention to is the agencies coming together post-event to work out perhaps a flood prevention taskforce. Perhaps you can lead and inspire people to sit down and see how we can access funding because there is Government funding available, we hear, to attend to the infrastructure.

Also, again I would ask perhaps for your support to assist with funding some additional technical research to support the taskforce I just mentioned, the multiagency taskforce, which could work towards understanding the additional risks that can be associated, not just with the underwater flooding we have talked about, but also the groundwater flooding Jenny has touched upon. Like Jenny, I have been concerned over many years about the overdevelopment and the concreting-over of tracts of London. You could argue that what we have been seeing in the last two or three weeks has partly been a contributory factor on the surface water aspect.

What I am saying, Mr Mayor, is that what I would like is an aspiration to set up a multiagency flood prevention taskforce, perhaps under your leadership or others', and also perhaps you would consider funding some technical research to support that taskforce.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. The obvious body under which this should sit is the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) and I am sure that James [Cleverly AM, Chair, LFEPA] and his team have already given a lot of thought to that. Inevitably when big pumping operations take place it is the

fire brigade that leads, although typically if it is a major emergency the police will be Gold [Command]. That is where I would look to locate that work.

Steve O'Connell AM: My last point is particularly poignant, as I said. When you talk to the businesses along Godstone Road there – and you would know because you have been down there twice now – there are 20 or 30 businesses, mainly small businesses, which have had closure signs up, in essence. They have been open, but in essence they have not been able to trade for two or three weeks.

The Government has announced some support schemes that I am sure are generous but by nature may not be the easiest things to access and we as a council will support them. For the record, we have given, *gratis*, £1,000 to each of the small businesses down there, no questions asked, with a three-month business rate relief. However, again, I would ask that when it comes to us knocking on the Government's door to get funding to support businesses, you could lend your weight behind that and assist us in opening that door.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. The heart really bleeds for those people because they had a very tough time. There was a wonderful florist there and I think she is going to lose her trade right over Valentine's Day and all the rest of it. I can see that it was a pretty wretched situation for them, so I am grateful to you and the council for stepping in to help them.

Steve O'Connell AM: She will not mind me saying this, but I went down there yesterday. She is being given a hard time by her insurers now, of all things --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry.

Steve O'Connell AM: -- because her basement flooded, so that is the next challenge. All these businesses are having challenges. I went down to see her yesterday and said, "Look, we are trying to help. We are going to give all of you £1,000 to assist you". She broke down in tears.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry to hear that.

Steve O'Connell AM: That is the sort of pressure these people are under, so I am grateful for all the support you can offer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. If it is a question of writing a letter to the insurers or whatever, then let us do that now.

Steve O'Connell AM: I will come back to you for that support. Thank you, Mayor.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): At this point, can I welcome now pupils from Highlands Primary School in Redbridge who have arrived, welcome.

Murad Qureshi AM: Thank you, Chair. Mr Mayor, according to Environment Agency figures, there are something like 14,000 homes with no flood cover in London. Are you prepared to take up the Prime Minister's offer of money being no problem for these homes to be protected?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, in the sense that we are seeking London's due share of the funding that is available and we will make sure that we get rapid provision for those homes that are vulnerable.

As I say, thankfully in London – thankfully – the problem has been localised. That is in no way to minimise the suffering of people in Croydon. We have had 300 homes flooded in London altogether, which is a very substantial number. Clearly, the risk is great.

Murad Qureshi AM: The important distinction I want to make, though, is that Prime Minister David Cameron is talking about relief and not protection. I am sure that when the time comes you can take up Ed Balls' [Shadow Chancellor] offer of a Labour Government making investments in flood defence after May 2015, which is what a lot of Londoners want.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In the vanishingly improbable event of Ed Balls having anything to do with supplying the cash, I will certainly consider it.

In the meantime, what we have is the national flood budget to protect properties at risk. Patently, as you rightly say, Murad, there are properties in London that are at risk and we are going to do our best to ensure they are adequately protected. One of the interesting things is that so far a lot of the homes that were allegedly built on floodplains and so on have not yet been affected, but there is absolutely no cause for complacency.

Steve O'Connell AM: Just one point because I have been living and breathing this stuff. The fact of the matter is that the Government has made available – just for correction – a new repair and renewal grant that will provide financial support to pay for work that improves a property's ability to withstand future flooding. That money, not necessarily Ed Balls' promise of money, is now being made available by the Government for properties that need support in the future for resistance and resilience against future flooding, just for the record.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you.

2014/0572 - Payday Loans and Credit Unions

[Stephen Knight](#)

What work are you undertaking to address problems caused by payday lending in the capital and to boost the membership of London's credit unions?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Stephen, I am, indeed, concerned about payday loan companies in London and to charge 17,000% annual percentage rate (APR) or whatever some of these people are doing is usurious and --

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): I am sorry. I am going to adjourn the meeting. If you can leave the public gallery, we will adjourn the meeting shortly and then we will reconvene. Thank you.

[The meeting was briefly adjourned.]

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): We will reconvene the meeting, and if I can ask everyone in the public gallery to remain quiet throughout the meeting.

If we can resume the meeting, this is the second question on the order paper today.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am, indeed, worried about payday loan companies in London. Since the crunch began and since I came in, we have been promoting debt advice services through the Know Your Rights campaign. We have helped to promote the London Mutual Credit Union to divert people away from these usurers. Through the Schools Excellence Fund, we are trying to develop much greater numeracy and sense of the risks these things pose.

I have to say that these people need to be tackled. They could do it in the Middle Ages. I do not see why we cannot do it now. The Chancellor has – rightly – instructed the Financial Conduct Authority to put a cap on the cost of credit in the Financial Services (Banking Reform) Act 2013. That should make some difference to some of these absolutely extortionate rates of usury that are being charged.

Stephen Knight AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. Recent research from the Liverpool John Moores University found that 61% of Londoners have no savings at all, which is double the national proportion, and three quarters of Londoners would find it difficult or impossible to raise just £200 if needed in an emergency without having to borrow, so it is perhaps unsurprising that we have seen this explosion of payday lending in the capital.

One of the key issues, Mr Mayor, is that there is very little co-ordinated thorough research and data being published on the use of payday lending in London. I would like to ask you whether you will work with the financial regulators to do some research and publish regular figures on the amount of payday lending taking place in the capital and, secondly, whether you would re-establish the London Debt Strategy Group, which I believe has not met since May 2011.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We set it up in 2009 and it was there particularly to address what was the most acute period of the recession. I am very happy for that body to work on the issue that you raise.

It is true. We do not have enough data. There is lots of anecdotal stuff. I was talking to people working with vulnerable people the other day and there is no question at all in my mind that the proliferation of food banks that we are seeing at the moment is partly caused by this incredible indebtedness that people get themselves into, this nightmarish cycle.

Stephen Knight AM: We have seen falling real wages and of course increasing costs of living in London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Indeed. That is one of the reasons why we should all make the London Living Wage so central to what we are trying to do. Yes, there has been a massive expansion of it, but it is going by no means far or fast enough. I am fed up to the back teeth of listening to corporate titans suddenly coming up with some sort of elaborate weasel explanation for why they cannot do it like they have difficult business models or some such malarkey.

Stephen Knight AM: I think we can all agree with you there, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is no reason why more firms in London should not be paying the London Living Wage.

Stephen Knight AM: Thank you very much for committing to re-establish the London Debt Strategy Group. That is a good first step.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It has never been disbanded.

Stephen Knight AM: Thank you for recalling it because I do not think it has been active since 2011.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It last met in February 2013, actually, just to correct you.

Stephen Knight AM: Perhaps it has not published anything since 2011.

Could I just move on to the next area of my question, which is around support for credit unions? Obviously, with personal debt being a key issue, one of the solutions is to promote credit unions. Devolved governments in Scotland and Wales have been putting a lot of effort into promoting credit unions. Indeed, the UK Government is now putting money into credit unions.

Can you commit, Mr Mayor, to investing in the promotion of credit unions in London yourself? I do not know whether you have read the recent reports I have published on proposals to increase and promote the use of credit unions, but I wondered whether you would consider the proposals in that report, which I believe we sent to your office, including giving every secondary school pupil a credit union account and promoting increased credit union membership and awareness across the capital.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Since 2010 we have helped to promote the London Mutual Credit Union alongside lots of other credit unions and they are all listed on www.londonmoney.org.uk, if anybody wants to get hold of it. It is worth saying that actually in London, by comparison with the rest of the country, there are more credit unions in operation than elsewhere. There are more credit unions in London than in the whole of Wales.

Stephen Knight AM: There is a much lower rate of credit union membership in London than there is elsewhere in the UK and much lower than elsewhere in the developed world, so, Mr Mayor, we are a long way behind the rest of the country in terms of credit union membership. What we really need is a big campaign in London to get people signed up and joining credit units.

Mr Mayor, I recently visited your local credit union in Islington, the London Capital Credit Union. It has a membership form waiting for you. Would you be willing to join?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All the credit unions in London are my local credit union. We make no distinction.

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, it is the local one to where you live. Would you commit to joining a credit union?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have no objection whatever to joining whatever. I do not mind. I must be impartial in this matter. If I have to join one, I have to join all of them. I cannot have favouritism here.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): A very quick final question from Assembly Member Knight.

Stephen Knight AM: Many of us around this table have already joined a credit union, Mr Mayor, and believe in promoting the credit union sector, so I hope you will commit to joining this movement yourself.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Even more usefully, possibly, than that, what we can do is promote credit unions as we are doing through the website that we support campaigning for credit unions. By the way, I fully support what the Archbishop [of Canterbury] has said about that and I look forward to the Church driving Wonga out of business, as it said it was going to do. I have yet, by the way, to see it happening, but I look forward to seeing some action there.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): The Liberal Democrat group is now out of time. We then move down the order paper. The question on right to buy in the name of Assembly Member Copley has been withdrawn and replaced.

2014/1038 - Tackling the Cold Homes Crisis

[Murad Qureshi](#)

Have you taken any measures to reduce utility bills for Londoners this winter and, if so, what?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are asking about what we have done to reduce utility bills in London. I told you. I met you in the lift the other day and said I was going to give you some amazing news about retrofitting. Do you remember?

Murad Qureshi AM: I do not.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you mean you were not interested in what I was going to tell you about retrofitting? Do you mean to say you glazed over, Murad, and did not care? I will tell you anyway. We have retrofitted more than 100,000 homes through the RE:NEW programme and that helped overall to reduce Londoners' energy bills - to get to your point exactly - by £2.3 million this winter and over, obviously, many more winters to come. The figure I thought you would be interested in is that, in total, we have retrofitted since 2008 more than 400,000 homes now, which is double our target. How about that? It is pretty good.

Murad Qureshi AM: Mr Mayor, we have covered this ground before and I did not really want to get into the retrofitting.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Why not?

Murad Qureshi AM: What I wanted to get into was actually the utility bills. If you read the question correctly, that is what I was focusing on. I just wanted to tell you about a cost-of-living survey that I have undertaken. There were over 2,000 respondents to the survey and we found that 85% of them identified utility bills like gas and electricity as their main concern about the cost of living.

I just want, for the record, to know what you did when Thames Water attempted to hike their water bills by £29 for 2014/15. That is seven times your proposed cut in the council tax.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are asking now about water bills rather than cold homes and water does not affect the temperature of your home much, but since you want to ask --

Murad Qureshi AM: It is a utility bill.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Your question says, "Tackling the Cold Homes Crisis".

Murad Qureshi AM: No, that is the header. Look at the question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK, it is about water now. I will happily answer questions about water bills.

Murad Qureshi AM: It is about utility bills.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The answer is that you are right to be concerned about water bills and one of the things that we need to be very careful of is that the Thames Tideway Tunnel, which is on the whole a very good scheme, does not become a massive excuse for the payers of water bills in London to be paying huge amounts for a piece of infrastructure built by Thames Water that will greatly increase their regulated asset base and is therefore in their financial interests. We need to be very vigilant about what is going on with water bills.

On the wider point of what is happening with energy consumption, which was the one that you highlighted as being the thing of greatest concern to Londoners, it is a fascinating thing. If you look at international comparisons, including taxes, the costs of energy in this country and certainly in London are relatively low by comparison with other capitals. The problem is that we have very high consumption of that electricity and that gas and we are using much more to heat our homes. Therefore, the solution is to do the obvious thing and to retrofit and insulate and reduce consumption. That is why I hoped you would be more excited, Murad, about what I had to say about retrofitting homes.

Murad Qureshi AM: I had been asking questions about that before Christmas and I just changed my emphasis. Just for the record, it should be noted that you actually did not respond to the Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat) consultation on that £29 hike, although I do agree we have to be very careful about what the proposed bill for the Thames Tideway Tunnel is.

I now move to another conclusion that we found from our survey, which demonstrated that 65-year-olds were hit particularly by spiralling energy costs and 63% of them were saying they have cut back on heating in order to pay their bills. In particular, one person in response to the survey from Hounslow said, "I am worried sick about heating costs. Life at our age is becoming frightening". Does it really concern you in the city of which you are Mayor that your people, Londoners, are terrified about what the next bill is going to mean for them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are right to make this point and I thank you for the work you are doing on this. The Know Your Rights campaign is there. We are trying to be as proactive as possible, working with councils to make sure elderly people do know the allowances they are entitled to for helping to heat their homes.

As I say, if you look at the consumption figures in London and the relative costs, one of the problems is we are spending so much more on heating our homes than we need to, partly because of lack of good insulation. Many of those homes can be tackled with retrofitting. In London, 40% of the housing stock has solid walls. It is much more difficult in London to put in some of the basic insulation things that make a difference, but 400,000 so far is not a bad achievement and obviously we have very ambitious programmes over the next few years.

Murad Qureshi AM: I am sorry you did not support our amendment in the budget for the Home Energy Advice Team, which the Citizens Advice Bureau also support.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The only reason I did not support your amendment, which I am sure was excellent in many respects, Murad, was because I believe that we can achieve what you want through other ways. I am determined that we should.

2014/0630 - Homeless Veterans

[Gareth Bacon](#)

Following the scheme that was announced at last year's budget, what progress has been made in helping homeless veterans in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Gareth, and you are asking a question which is dear to your heart. You have lobbied on this many times before and we have made some good progress.

Veterans have traditionally made up quite a large proportion of the homeless. These days, actually, it is not so clear that they do make up a very significant proportion, but they are nonetheless a group that is particularly tragic. They have fallen on very hard times. They have served their country. Often for very complex reasons, they have ended up on the streets. We have considerable sums of funding to help veterans off the streets with £300,000 for 2013/14 for homeless UK veterans. The projects include the No Second Night Out project and No Living on the Street projects because the key thing is to stop people getting habituated to a life on the street. In 75% of the cases, we are able to help people off the streets after just one night.

Gareth Bacon AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. The budget for this scheme was secured when you responded to a GLA Conservatives group amendment to last year's budget. The reason for the amendment that we tabled at that time was of course that, as you correctly say, the number of homeless veterans on the streets is declining but there are still some there. The reasons are many are varied. Often, it is associated with trauma from service overseas and this country owes these people something, so we are grateful that you have managed to find the money for it.

The progress report from your Housing and Land Directorate suggesting that, working with Veterans Aid, 447 homeless veterans in the last year contacted them. Of those, more than 200 have been helped by the funds that were put aside. What plans do you have to build on this for the forthcoming year to help more of those 447 veterans find secure housing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Clearly, we are going to maintain the programme and my information is that we have helped 50 homeless veterans so far. You obviously have more encouraging figures than I have. Eight out of ten of those have not been seen subsequently sleeping rough. We are setting up and we already have a Social Impact Bond for rough sleepers. In other words, the savings that you make from helping people off the street help to cover the cost of the outreach.

It is a very complex problem. You have to support all sorts of agencies that are involved in helping rough sleepers and that is why Richard Blakeway [Deputy Mayor for Housing, Land and Property] ages ago now set up the London Delivery Board and scored £33 million, off the top of my head, to help crack this problem. It is

not going away. We have to be honest about it. There are large numbers of people coming onto the streets of London. The majority of them are non-UK nationals, but that in no way mitigates the severity of the problem.

What you have to do is stop them getting entrenched and stop them becoming, as I say, habituated to a life on the streets. That means supporting St Mungo's and all the people who are out there looking after them and in particular the No Second Night Out scheme. If you can stop people getting into the habit, you can help to change their lives.

[Following a further disturbance from the public gallery, the meeting was briefly adjourned.]

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you. We will resume the meeting. Can I remind any members of the public that if they wish to put questions to the Mayor or Assembly Members, we have something called People's Question Time. It meets twice a year and the next one is on 26 March 2014 in Kingston where people will be welcome to come along and put their own questions.

This session, however, is simply for Members to put questions to the Mayor. At this stage, I also welcome pupils from Whitchurch Junior School in Harrow. Welcome.

We then move down the order paper to the question on TfL and the Living Wage in the name of Assembly Member Shawcross. She has asked for a written answer, so we will skip that and move down to the question on TfL fare rises in the name of Assembly Member Biggs.

2014/1040 - TfL fare rises

[John Biggs](#)

Has the Government compensated TfL for the confusion over how much the fares rise would be this year?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): For the benefit of people who do not know what John is referring to here, before Christmas there was - as there normally is - a discussion between us and the Government about how we were going to organise the fares package for 2014/15 and it would be fair to say that - as Stephen [Knight], who is not in his place, brilliantly pointed out - the lead showed by City Hall stamped the Government into holding fares down to the retail price index (RPI), which was the right policy for the country. There is a nominal question of whether they should reimburse us for the foregone revenue from the TfL side of things. As it happens that has already been more than amply made up by Government contributions. I might single out the £200 million funding that we just secured for buying the Crossrail trains, which many times over makes up that gap.

John Biggs AM: Remind me. Are you the same Mayor who essentially said hell would freeze over before you could not increase fares by greater than inflation in previous years?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I am the same Mayor who said I would bear down on fares, which is what I have done. I have borne down.

John Biggs AM: Are you the same Mayor who when challenged on this said the £30 million costs - which you then multiplied by ten to make it sound bigger, so therefore a £300 million cost - over ten years was ruinous and would prevent us from investing in London's transport?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you saying I was wrong? Are you saying I was wrong to hold down fares?

John Biggs AM: If you are the same Mayor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am he.

John Biggs AM: -- you are now nonchalantly waving away £21 million you have lost as a result of the Government messing up their analysis.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have not. We have not lost a penny.

John Biggs AM: Then you are being hypocritical because --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, no, come on. Let us be clear. Are you the same Biggs who campaigned less than two years ago on a manifesto to cut fares by 7%? Does anybody remember that? Yes, 7%, which was going to cost billions in revenue. It was completely the wrong policy for London. Is that policy still operative?

John Biggs AM: Interestingly, philosophically, I am not actually the same Biggs now but the --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you not? Which Biggs are you?

John Biggs AM: What I do want is for Londoners to get the £21 million they have lost and for you to feel as feverishly angry about this as you are when it suits you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, we have already plentifully recouped whatever emotional downside there may have been. Actually, if you were the Treasury you might say that we had cost them more than £80 million because, if you remember, they had to hold fares down at RPI.

John Biggs AM: I am pretty clear that the record shows that you are nonchalant about this from your --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not nonchalant. I am not nonchalant at all. It was right. Look, there is a balance to be struck.

John Biggs AM: Which is?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you cut fares too hard then what happens --

John Biggs AM: It is a very specific question. I am asking why you are not banging on the Chancellor's door saying, "Give us our money. You have cost us serious cash".

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are in constant negotiation with Government about all sorts of sums. We just happened to have obtained a further £200 million which is essential for buying the Crossrail trains. In the grand scheme of things, they could very well point out that our decision to go for holding fares down at RPI, which bounced them into holding fares down to RPI, cost the Treasury £80 million and money well spent, by the way, money well spent. In tough times it was right to hold fares down at RPI, a point I made

to the Chancellor and which he then accepted once we had done it. As Stephen Knight rightly said, "Rail passengers from Cornwall to Corby had Boris Johnson to thank".

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): A point of personal explanation from Assembly Member Knight.

Stephen Knight AM: I should point out it was a question. I did not say it was true that they had you to thank. I questioned whether you thought your head was so big as to think that the --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You were right. Your question contained a kernel of truth and you were wholly right.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you for that clarification.

2014/0618 - Heathrow Night Flights

[Richard Tracey](#)

Does the Aviation Commission's decision to hide their recommendation for increasing night flights at Heathrow in an appendix underline how much the Commission still has to learn before it publishes its final report?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are really asking about the Davies Commission and a bit of a stinger buried in the text. There in the footnotes they have some absolutely awful thing about early morning smoothing, as they call it, at Heathrow, which is just another word for allowing planes to land between the hours of 5.00am and 5.59am when most human beings are asleep. I think I am right in saying that something like 70% of the human race is still asleep at 6.00am. Is that right? Maybe it is even more than that. Hands up, anybody. Most Londoners are still asleep at 6.00am and an awful lot of them are still asleep at 7.00am. It is quite amazing. Yes, they are. A lot of them are still asleep at 7.00am. Some of us get up very early or barely sleep at all, but those are the habits of most people in our city. To expect them to have to wake up every morning at 5.00am because some plane is coming over is absolutely inhumane and it is completely wrong and duplicitous to bung this in the footnotes of some interim report. I congratulate you on disinterring it and exposing it.

Richard Tracey AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. In fact it was some really astute people in Putney that picked this up, but it is the real killer these night flights because, although the bar has always been to stop planes coming in before 6.00am, in fact quite a number do start coming in at 4.00am in the morning, so for two hours people are being disturbed.

This point in the appendix of the Commission's interim report talks about extra flights, a doubling of the flights between 5.00am and 6.00am in the morning. It seems to me absolutely iniquitous that this sort of ploy has been taken by the Commission when what we are relying on the whole Commission to do is to be absolutely open with a discussion of what we should do with our airport for London and where it should be and not play around with tricks like this.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. This is one of those things that would have very material impact on the quality of people's lives in London. It is buried away as a kind of footnote and afterthought. It needs proper investigation and it needs to be resisted.

Richard Tracey AM: Would there be any problem with night flights, may I ask you, if the London airport were to be sited on the east side of London as proposed by the Foster Partnership?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, there would be virtually no noise impacts at all.

Richard Tracey AM: Thank you.

Tony Arbour AM: Do you not find it odd, Mr Mayor, that leading members of the Government who devised the terms of reference for the Davies Commission – Nick Clegg [Deputy Prime Minister], Vince Cable [Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills] and Ed Davey [Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change] – failed to have removed from the options, which the Davies Commission set up, the possible expansion of Heathrow? Do you not find that odd?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do. Are you saying that the Liberal Democrats speak with fork tongues, Tony? Are you saying that it is your experience with Liberal Democrat politicians that they say one thing whilst they have no power and do another once they get it?

Tony Arbour AM: I do not want to diss the Liberal Democrats, as they stand on the edge of electoral extinction, but it is an extraordinary thing that these three leading members of the Government spend a great deal of time opposing Heathrow expansion when it was in their gift to rule Heathrow expansion completely out. Would it surprise you to know that there are many of us who have to suffer under the yoke of these ?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is very sinister. I agree with you, Tony. The more I think about this I think you are right. If Clegg really cared about this, why did he not rule it out?

James Cleverly AM: What about the tree?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): He did. There is a Clegg tree, is there not? We should all go and have a little druidical ceremony around Clegg's tree in Sipson and summon up his spirit or whatever you do. It is absolutely outrageous that he is continuing to pretend to be Deputy Prime Minister of this country and coadjutant of the fortunes of Britain when he cannot actually strike out Heathrow from the scope of the Airport Commission.

Tony Arbour AM: It is even more sinister than that but I do not suppose they actually thought of it themselves. It is probably chance because it is something really rather clever that at the same time as they are opposing Heathrow expansion when it was in their gift to stop it in any event, they refuse to countenance any growth elsewhere. They are refusing to countenance the Estuary Airport.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Liberal Democrat policy seems to be to encourage expansion at Heathrow, which is the single worst place where you could have a hard airport. Is that really what their policy is? I am looking now at the Liberal Democrat "coalitionaires" here. What is their policy? What is it actually? I have no idea.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is a jolly good question. Once again it has illuminated the complete vacuity of the Liberal Democrats. Actually, the sinister hypocrisy of the Liberal Democrats. They are in favour of a third runway.

2014/1041 - Unemployment

Jennette Arnold

As the cost of living increases at a faster rate than income, as data suggests, members of minority groups in society and those protected under the Equality Act 2010 are suffering disproportionately. What have you done, as Mayor, to rectify this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You ask a very good question, Jennette, about what is happening to unemployment in this city. Obviously it has been a very tough time. Things are starting to turn around, as Members will have seen. We have one of the highest employment rates now and the highest rates for numbers of women in employment, which is very, very encouraging. There are certain groups that we need to do more for, in particular youth unemployment. That can particularly affect some minority communities, as I am sure, Jennette, you are aware. That is why we are trying to tackle youth unemployment by creating 250,000 apprenticeships by 2015. That programme is going well, although it is not easy. We have done a lot of the low hanging fruit and we are now really ratcheting it up and I am confident we will get to 250,000.

There are plenty of other things you have to do to help people through these tough times. I mentioned the Living Wage, which has greatly increased the travel concessions we have for young people for those in search of work.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Mr Mayor, thank you for that. Of course I welcome the improvement on the unemployment figures regarding women, but the purpose of my question was to raise specifically with you the issue about black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, particularly young black men. Let me just read you some statistics that came out of the Department for Work and Pensions' report published in 2014. It was called *Labour Market Status of Ethnic Groups*. It showed, in that report, that the rate of unemployment in white people - if you like - as the base, aged 16 to 24 was 19%. When you looked at the unemployment rate for Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people it was 46%. When you looked at the unemployment rate for young black people - particularly men - it was 45%. That is about a 20% difference between young white males and young black males.

What I am asking you to do is to consider a programme of specific employment programmes to support young people from BAME communities, particularly black males. Can I just finish by saying to you, Mr Mayor? In your 2020 Vision, where you set that vision of 250,000 apprentices by the academic year of 2016, I welcomed that as did everybody else. Your words said that you wanted to make a significant dent in youth unemployment. You will agree with me that the pace is not quick enough and if we are not careful that what will happen is that young Londoners, particularly young black Londoners, will be left out of your vision of London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. The statistics that you give are broadly right and certainly accord with what I have been given. The gap is actually narrowing now between unemployment rates amongst the various communities. They are not by very much and so I would have to accept that there remains a problem. The best way to tackle this, I still think, Jennette, is to recognise that all Londoners, from all communities, face young people who are not in education, employment or training. There is educational failure across all communities and we need to tackle that. That means looking at literacy, at numeracy in primary schools in driving up standards where we can, and obviously we are doing everything we can to do that. The Schools Excellence Fund you know about, the Gold Club that we also have to encourage excellence in schools.

I would like to see in London not just an expansion of the apprenticeship scheme, which I think is central to trying to solve the problem that you are identifying, but also a much greater expansion of the university technical colleges (UTCs). In many cases people with great natural gifts for science and for engineering are missing the opportunity to pursue those disciplines because of the type of education that they are getting. The UTCs I have seen in Greenwich and the one that is being set up at City & Guilds is a fantastic new approach to education.

If I can just finish this, it is very important we do this. This is basically what they did in Germany, if you remember, after the Second World War. That was the right way forward. We need many more of these university technical schools. That is the best way forward for us. There are obviously many other interventions you could pursue.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Mr Mayor, I would accept that and I would ask you to visit Hackney University Technical School. There is excellent work going on there. I am just saying, given these figures, we need a more specific programme. Why are you so resistant to actually just considering calling your advisers together and saying, "What can we do for this particular --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, there is --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: They cannot be left behind.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course not. I have already had several meetings and, by the way, the problem is not confined just to BAME young people.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: That is where it is critical.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Particularly as you will know, Jennette, when the recession started to bite. There was an acute problem amongst the female workforce from BAME groups in the middle years and you will know exactly what I am talking about. There was an acute problem caused by the sudden laying-off of people in the public sector.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Specific action was taken.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We did take action there. We did take action and we are continuing --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Specific.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are taking specific action. Believe me, these actions, our apprenticeship scheme and our interventions are of course aimed directly at young Londoners growing up in the centre of our city and around our city who are being asked to compete toe-to-toe with kids or young people coming in from the European Union accession countries who very often will get the jobs that I would like to see going to Londoners.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Mr Mayor, it is something we will return to but I would ask you to consider specific action.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): To be honest with you, Jennette, I do not think there is much difference between us on this. I really do not.

James Cleverly AM: Mr Mayor, whilst having regard to the statistics that Assembly Member Arnold put forward about the unemployment rate amongst the black communities in London, I would urge you to look at the experience of the London Development Agency (LDA) in its unsuccessful attempts to target, specifically, certain ethnic groups at a certain age in their development and I would urge you to concentrate on doing everything that you are able to do to improve the academic success rates of people within that particular group.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely right.

James Cleverly AM: My experience on the Board of the LDA for a number of years was there was a huge difficulty in spending money, effectively turning around what was basically and under attainment at the educational level.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I absolutely agree with that, James, but the under-attainment in education is again very complex. It is not just a question of the failure of the schools. I do not blame bad teaching necessarily. When you look at the backgrounds of these kids and the difficulties they face in their lives, there are a huge range of things. That is why we set up all the things that we did. That is why we have the Mayor's Fund for London there to support early years, to intervene to support reading groups for young kids, to try to get them off to the best possible start. If you look at what is happening in London, even in the groups that are most vulnerable, even in the groups that have traditionally been falling behind - as Jennette describes - actually you are seeing amazing levels of success. We should sometimes talk about that more than the failures.

If you look at what is happening in some of these communities, in some of these schools in inner London they are knocking spots off schools in the rest of the country. That is a big change from how London was when I was living here as a kid in the 1970s when basically London schools were thought to be worse on average than the rest of the country. London schools are now thought on average to be better. That is a great thing and we need to be building on the achievements of those schools and of those teachers.

2014/0593 - Congestion Charge

[Andrew Boff](#)

Mr Mayor, will you guarantee me that you will scrap the congestion charge when the new ultra low emissions zone is introduced?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, thank you very much, Andrew. The answer I am afraid is I think going slightly to disappoint you, in the sense that I cannot guarantee to axe the congestion charge when the new ultra low emissions zone (ULEZ) is introduced, partly because this will happen in 2020 and, well, I do not know. I might be around in 2020. You never know. I cannot guarantee that I will be here. You asked me whether I can guarantee that I will scrap it. I cannot guarantee you that I will be here. I cannot guarantee that I will not but I cannot guarantee that I will.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, you could say however, much as you cannot guarantee that you are going to be here, that it could be part of the plans. Otherwise you will be effectively taxing Londoners twice for driving on a piece of their own road.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is a very serious question. You are right. We will have to put the plans into effect and it will be something that we will have to elaborate on in the course of the next couple of years. The answer is, no, we will not be getting rid of the congestion charge but we will be doing our best to see that people are not hit too hard or are not double taxed. The actual modalities of how the whole thing is going to work are being thrashed out now. You are going to see a lot more about how it will work within the next year or so.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you for using that term 'double taxed', Mr Mayor, because that is an admission of course that the congestion charge is a tax, which it always has been.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, it is not. It is a charge.

Andrew Boff AM: You did not say 'double charge', Mr Mayor. You said 'double taxed'.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): For heaven's sake. Did I say 'double tax'?

Andrew Boff AM: I note that clarification.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is a toll and it is extremely important, by the way. We do not concede for one second that it is a tax. It is not a tax. It is a toll for the use of the road and it is the blooming diplomats - like the Americans and the Germans - who continue to insist under the Vienna Convention that it is a tax, but it is not a tax, is it?

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, thank you. Freudian slips reveal a lot, Mr Mayor. I am overwhelmed by your enthusiasm for people to realise their tax liabilities or their charge liabilities.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, it is not something that was universal amongst the Labour Party, actually.

Andrew Boff AM: Could I therefore ask, Mr Mayor, that you write to the British diplomatic staff in Stockholm who refuse to pay their congestion charge on the basis that it is a tax?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are joking. You cannot be serious. Is that true?

Andrew Boff AM: I would suggest you write to them, Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly shall.

Andrew Boff AM: -- and say let us be consistent.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Hang on, that is an amazing story. Are you saying that UK diplomats in Stockholm refuse to pay the congestion charge?

Andrew Boff AM: They do not pay the congestion charge in Stockholm because it is a tax.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If I were the Mayor of Stockholm I would bang them up.

Andrew Boff AM: To be fair, Mr Mayor, the people in Sweden believe it is a tax as well and they accept that it is a tax.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What?

Andrew Boff AM: The Swedish Government accepts that it is a tax.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look, you cannot have it both ways. Under the Vienna Convention diplomats should not pay a tax. There is no question of that. This is not a tax. As you rightly say, Andrew, this is a toll or a charge for the use of road space. It is perfectly blooming obvious.

Andrew Boff AM: Yes. Mr Mayor, it is a charge --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): By the way, there are many diplomatic communities in London, approximately 100 of them, who do pay the congestion charge, who are honourable citizens who make a contribution to the life of London and enable us to invest more in roads.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, it is ever so simple. It is a charge if you get some benefit from it and then, until the day when I pay the congestion charge and they either clean my windscreen or provide me with a parking space, it is a tax.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are getting the benefit of being able --

Andrew Boff AM: It is a tax and it should be repealed.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I did not know that you drove a car, but you are getting --

Andrew Boff AM: I do.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you drive a car in central London it is a priceless and wonderful thing to be able to do. You are using road space which is massively contested between all sorts of other potential road users. It is the most popular city on earth. Everybody wants to come here. It seems perfectly reasonable to me that the value of that road space should be reflected in a charge, which is what the congestion charge does. It helps to alleviate congestion and has other benefits as well.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. Without prolonging this, I would like you to go back on that last contribution you have had because you have just described a tax. Thank you very much indeed.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Do you want to come back on that, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I think most people will see that what I am describing if you go over a toll bridge then you pay a charge. You pay a toll. That is what the congestion charge is. It is perfectly obvious what function it serves and all diplomatic communities should pay it.

Roger Evans AM (Deputy Chairman): I am a big fan of the ULEZ because it actually targets the area of London where the problem is, and will help to reduce the pollution around those areas which are worse affected.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, the boroughs want to be in it.

Roger Evans AM (Deputy Chairman): Having said that, when you introduce it will you consider repealing the wider low emissions zone, which affects outer London and punishes a lot of people where the pollution is not high and there is no reason for you to be charging them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): An interesting point, Roger. If there is any air quality benefit to be done from that measure I would be certainly willing to consider it. In the meantime I think we have to look at the very large numbers of people in London, 4,000 or more who die prematurely as a result of poor air quality, and actually to the best of my knowledge there are still some pretty nasty poor air quality hotspots in places outside central London, so I would be reluctant to do that.

Roger Evans AM (Deputy Chairman): I was not suggesting there would be an air quality benefit in repealing that outer section of the charge, because there has not been much of an air quality benefit in introducing it in the first place.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is not true.

Roger Evans AM (Deputy Chairman): It is actually the cost to people's pockets that has suffered in outer London **Roger Evans AM (Deputy Chairman):** for very little benefit and that is why I suggest that you move the boundaries to where it is actually going to be helpful.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am obliged to you, Roger. I must disagree with you because if you look at the air quality in London, over just the last few years with nitrous oxide, we have infringement proceedings against us, in fact proceedings against us now by the EU Commission over nitrous oxide, but it has come down by something like 20% since 2008. I would have to check the figures and small particulate matter by about 15%. That is a very considerable improvement in air quality and that is something to be welcomed.

Roger Evans AM (Deputy Chairman): Have those improvements been achieved in outer London areas or in the centre of London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would be happy to give you more detail on where the improvements have been registered, but I think most people will accept that there are parts, even of outer London, where on busy days traffic congestion can cause serious pollution and I will reduce that.

Steve O'Connell AM: Unsurprisingly I speak to support Roger's comments in that I would support, very much, removal of the existing limits around outer London. I am not sure - and remain to be persuaded - of the benefits to those areas in outer London, but in view of the fact that you are not able to remove that outer London surrounding barrier that you consider reviewing the boundaries because there are certain areas where it really does not make a great deal of sense.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Steve O'Connell AM: I have written to you particularly about a charitable riding centre, the Diamond Riding Centre, that is strangely like 300 yards within the boundary and 90% of their trade is the horse trade, which is coming in from Surrey. Those people out there in Surrey are not adapting their vehicles. I know the horse box comment argument has been well rehearsed but these are an example where they are there to support disabled young people through riding, through Riding for the Disabled centres all around London, and their ability to raise funds is severely limited.

That is just one example of the fact that when the original boundary was placed, I am not sure that there was a lot of thought around it. I would certainly be supporting Roger that where we have a central congestion area that makes loads of sense, and we should be at least reviewing the existing boundary now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On the horse box problem and the current operation of the Low Emission Zone, actually by 2020 most of the vehicles that are coming into London will be naturally compliant anyway as a result of the improvements in technology. As we have said, if you have a vehicle that is currently non-compliant with the Low Emission Zone -- we went to huge efforts to show how you did not have to buy an entirely new machine, you could go for a second-hand vehicle of such and such a vintage and you would be all right. I have been very struck how most people have got it. Most people actually have not had that much difficulty in conforming to it. Most Londoners would see that when a vehicle comes into London it circulates freely and if it going to cause an aggravation of pollution in the city, most people would want to see standards to protect us against it.

Steve O'Connell AM: I am just seeking a balance, Mr Mayor, where we should be considering some examples of where people are affected. The argument is lost on many of the horsey fraternity out in Surrey and Sussex who have no mind to adjust any of their vehicles because they are not coming into London other than perhaps to support a disabled charitable event. I will leave it there but I would really continue with Roger to press you on this.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. If you are asking for a total abolition of the Low Emission Zone because there are some very hard cases, which obviously there will be in the periphery, that will be the wrong way forward.

Jenny Jones AM: I am with you on this, Boris.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Jenny.

Steve O'Connell AM: For the record, Mr Mayor, what I am asking for is to consider exceptions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You want the ULEZ to take over from the Low Emission Zone and I understand the logic of that and what I said to Roger is I will look at it.

2014/0608 - Flexible Ticketing Plans

[Roger Evans](#)

The news that my report, Home Works, has persuaded you to support flexible ticketing is very welcome. Could you tell me what you expect to see modelled, and later put to trial?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, this is one of those examples of the heroic work of GLA Conservatives who have badgered and browbeaten their way to victory here by securing my attention on this problem and getting - as I announced two or three months ago now - the prospect of flexible ticketing for part-time workers. I think what you want to know is when you are going to see the exact modelling, and all that kind of thing.

The product itself will be in use from early next year. I think I have already said January next year. You can expect to see a lot more detail towards the end of this year.

Roger Evans AM (Deputy Chairman): The reason that I am asking this question is that flexible ticketing gives TfL a wonderful opportunity not just to help the part-time workers, who you talked about, but also to encourage people who work from home for a couple of days during the week and, therefore, actually reduce some of the loading on our transport system and maybe provide alternatives to continuing to build greater capacity into it. As you know with transport systems whenever you add extra capacity it encourages more people to use them.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. That is no reason not to add extra capacity by the way.

Roger Evans AM (Deputy Chairman): The anti-road campaigners would argue differently. I am merely saying what applies to roads applies to other --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you an anti-road campaigner?

Roger Evans AM (Deputy Chairman): No, I am not. What applies to roads applies to other forms of transport.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Roger Evans AM (Deputy Chairman): Do you also recognise that flexible ticketing would encourage people to maybe come into work by cycling on Sundays and would help their health.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): One of the many benefits of the scheme you have heroically helped to secure, Roger, is that it will help cyclists.

Roger Evans AM (Deputy Chairman): Thank you.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): We will then move on down the order paper.

2014/1042 - Food Poverty

[Fiona Twycross](#)

Are you concerned by increasing number of people in London who are facing food poverty?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Fiona, yes, you ask about whether I am concerned about the number of people in London who are facing food poverty, and indeed we are. That is why Rosie Boycott, Chair of the London Food Board, has been absolutely militant about this for years now. She successfully got a pretty good

budget from us to continue her work. What she wants to do is to bring social supermarkets to London to improve the distribution of surplus food in that way. As you know, I am a supporter of the whole free school meals idea in getting more healthy food on the table for kids in our schools.

Fiona Twycross AM: I also welcome the work that Rosie Boycott and the Food Board have done, but I would question a good budget being one that is cut. At the point at which the charitable trusts are reporting that there has been a 400% increase in the number of people using food banks in London over the past two years, it is really not the point at which to make any cut to what - by any standards - is a relatively small part of your overall budget.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand that. I did continually say to Rosie, "Is this enough?" In the end you have got to be guided by that. The principle has got to be not how much you spend but the results you deliver.

Fiona Twycross AM: No, I agree but with a 400% increase in the number of people using food banks I would question whether the resources for the people, who are having to resort to food banks, are quite meeting the need at the moment. I think when we see some of the impact of things like the social supermarkets, which I agree are a good move I think that we need to look at what more can be done for the, for example, 63,000 people including 24,500 children relying on food banks in the first eight months of this year. I am sure you would agree with me that is an embarrassment in the sixth wealthiest city in the world. Are you embarrassed about this and what more are you personally going to do?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am very concerned about what is happening with food banks and with levels of poverty generally in London. There is no question at all that in the last six years or so since the crunch real incomes have declined. You have seen increases in prices of heating, as we have discussed, of food and things on which people absolutely depend. The answer - there are many things you have got to do - the single best solution is to get people into work and to get the economy really humming. That is the thing that in the end defeats poverty. We are having great success in getting employment up again, in getting people into work, but they have to be paid decently and that is why I come back to the London Living Wage.

Fiona Twycross AM: If you want to come back on to your record on the London Living Wage we can do, but for the moment I would like to talk instead about a different commitment you have made. You previously said you would monitor the impact of welfare changes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Fiona Twycross AM: A report published after much delay by the Government last week on emergency food aid in the UK said that emergency food aid is a last resort, and I think we need to be clear that they are a sticking plaster and not a solution. Last week as well faith leaders and charities attributed much of the problem to benefit delays and changes, and surveys of people using food boards make it very clear that it is about benefit delays. You have already mentioned your focus on Know Your Rights but actually it is not so much about people knowing their rights. It is about actually getting what they are entitled to, so I want to know what you are doing about monitoring the impact of the welfare changes and the benefit delays, and what you are doing to lobby Government on those aspects that are driving Londoners to food banks.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are obviously continually monitoring the impact of benefit changes. One of the most --

Fiona Twycross AM: What form does that take? What form does that take because we are not hearing about it yet?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): One of the most important changes has obviously been the reform to Housing Benefit. If you will remember a few years ago now there were predictions of huge convoys of people fleeing the places they were living and being driven into other accommodation elsewhere in huge numbers, and --

Fiona Twycross AM: That is happening. We know that that is happening.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Fiona, it is not clear that it is happening or certainly not on anything like the scale that some people had predicted, and we are indeed monitoring those numbers. I would be very happy to share any details that we have with you about what is happening. If you remember, one of the pledges I made at the time was to try to mitigate the impact for London, to try to dampen it, because clearly in London there will be lots of very hard cases, people who have, for one reason or another, to live in what is a very expensive property but reform of welfare is essential and, indeed, in the election in 2010 I seem to remember that all parties were committed to reforming Housing Benefit.

Fiona Twycross AM: This is not about reform of welfare. It is about people not getting what they are entitled to, that this Government with the welfare changes says they are entitled to. It is about making sure that people get what they are entitled to. I have seen in the lift you have got a little sign saying you want everybody to get what they are entitled to. What are you doing in terms of raising this with Government?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The Know Your Rights campaign is there to ensure that people are aware of the benefits that they get.

Fiona Twycross AM: There is no point in them knowing their rights if they are not getting what they are entitled to, so I think I would like to see you doing more to do this because that is one way that you can help prevent the increased rise of food banks in London. I will leave it at that. Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously, Fiona is right that it is part of our general job to make sure people do claim what they deserve and that they get it and we do that through the Know Your Rights" campaign and supporting boroughs in that work.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you very much.

2014/1043 - Childcare

[Fiona Twycross](#)

Do you think the childcare situation in London is unique to that of the rest of the country?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks very much, Fiona. You ask whether the London childcare situation is different or is uniquely difficult. I think that is absolutely correct. The cost of childcare for children under two is 25% more expensive than in the rest of the country, and the Department for Education (DfE) has launched a London childcare fund in recognition of those particular difficulties. I ought particularly to thank

Liz Truss [Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Education and Childcare], the Minister concerned, who has really taken this up in a big way and totally gets it about childcare.

As you know, funds are now coming in specifically for London childcare. I am not going to pretend to you that it is magic and I am not going to pretend to you that we can solve the problem overnight, but we are well aware of the scale of the problem and we are working very hard to try to tackle it.

Fiona Twycross AM: I am glad to hear you are working very hard to tackle it. The Daycare Trust described the situation two years ago as “mission impossible for London’s families”. It does not actually feel like it is getting much easier very quickly for them. The Daycare Trust surveyed over 400 childcare providers, and four of the top five policy proposals they backed in tackling the London childcare crisis required you to take action as Mayor of London.

Among other things they called on you to lobby for reversal of the tax credit cut, promote family friendly practice and childcare vouchers, include early years in your Education Inquiry and promote a Know Your Rights campaign on childcare. Obviously we have already discussed the Know Your Rights campaign quite a lot today already. Which of these actions have you specifically taken up?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): From what you said at least three of them.

Fiona Twycross AM: You could not say which ones, though?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The reversal of the benefit reforms because, as I say, I do not believe that is the right way forward for the country and, indeed, nor when it comes to the election does the Labour Party. You have to change the way benefits work in order to encourage people to get into jobs.

Fiona Twycross AM: They cannot get into jobs if they cannot afford the childcare to allow them to, and that is one of the reasons that we just need you to back.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course, and I cannot tell you how often I had this conversation with people and mothers who want to get back into work. I accept that this is a major problem.

Fiona Twycross AM: Yes, actually I would like to know how often you have that conversation.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is one of the reasons why we did secure funding from the DfE for schools to be open from 8.00am to 6.00pm, so that somebody - and these are very often the best places to do this - can look after the kids. As I say, I am not going to pretend to you that we in the GLA are able to deliver a one-size-fits-all magic solution to this. We are not the delivery authority concerned. Unfortunately, I have very limited statutory powers over education let alone childcare.

Fiona Twycross AM: No, I agree, and actually one of the suggestions you did not take up from Labour in our budget earlier in the month was to launch an investigation into childcare, which would have cost a very small amount to do. If you took a lead on this and worked with third sector parties, childcare professionals and civic organisations to assess new models for childcare provision, and the potential for devolving powers and finance in relation to childcare from Government to yourself, this could actually make a massive difference. Therefore, would you look into this further?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look, again, as ever, I am grateful to you for the concealed vote of confidence there in the Mayoralty.

Fiona Twycross AM: Actually not. We are looking to the future, you see. We have given up on you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are right in your analysis; it would be a good thing if we were able to take a more strategic lead on this. Obviously, this is something that I think is absolutely crucial to solve.

Fiona Twycross AM: Will you look into this further?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What is happening at the moment is that Munira Mirza [Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture] has convened and the local authorities concerned brought Liz Truss in to try to work out a way forward for London. I am more than happy to alert Munira to your request for a further investigation into childcare in London.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I see absolutely no reason why that should not be produced. By the way, it seems quite a good subject for an Assembly report.

Fiona Twycross AM: Yes. We did do a report. In the past there have been a number of reports, so it would be good if all of those could be taken on board as well. Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Good. It might be time for another one.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you.

2014/0625 - Step-free access at Harrow on the Hill Station

[Victoria Borwick](#)

How will the new feasibility study on step-free access at Harrow on the Hill station be taken forward, and what has been the contribution of Harrow Council towards making progress on this important issue?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Victoria, this is really a chance for us all to pay tribute to the work of Councillor Susan Hall of Harrow who has done a blinding job in getting this project, much delayed, off the ground. There was £3.1 million from the London Borough of Harrow, jointly funded by Harrow, GLA and TfL into solving that problem of step-free access at Harrow on the Hill. It is very difficult. I cannot tell you exactly when the new lifts will be put in or the new facilities will be put in, but if you had to pick three of the most difficult stations on the whole of the tube network where you need step-free access, Harrow on the Hill would certainly be one.

Victoria Borwick AM: Thank you very much. I visited this area again this week and I know this is an area you have also visited on several occasions. As you are quite rightly saying, this is a long-standing issue and I am delighted that you recognise the work done by Councillor Susan Hall, and the rest of the administration there, in working closely with your team to make the Harrow and Wealdstone area a new opportunity area to attract new funding in order to include step-free access and I think a redesign because, if you think about it, with the college on one side at the moment it artificially divides that community. One of the lessons that we learned

after the Olympics that we did show ourselves to be an accessible city, and obviously I continue to urge you to go on seeing what we can do to make London more accessible. It is something that is a real passion of mine. From buggies to wheelchairs, let us continue to make London a step-free access and to make it easier for people and to make us a friendlier city. Thank you for your support of this scheme, on behalf of the constituents in Harrow who I am sure will benefit. Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much and obviously it has taken time and the reason for that is these are expensive schemes. This will be an expensive project. You cannot just snap your fingers and put in all these things at once. Some of these lifts, as the Assembly will know, can cost about £100 million to put in.

Navin Shah AM: Yes, Mr Mayor, I can see here and I can understand the fan brigade for Councillor Hall from yourselves as well as your colleagues.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Including you, I have no doubt.

Navin Shah AM: To be honest, Mr Mayor, should we not be applauding the residents and campaigners for Harrow who have been lobbying you very hard since you took the office?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You mean should I be applauding you, Navin?

Navin Shah AM: Absolutely, why not? Yes, yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you think I should applaud Navin or should I applaud Sue [Hall]? Navin, well done.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, let me continue about the result that has been mentioned. I welcome your late conversion to this great and good cause. Right from the start people have been lobbying you and what you did, the first thing you did was to scrap £25 million funding that was negotiated and agreed with TfL - when you took office - by the previous administration. That is the reality. This is nothing but election in the air. There is the propaganda from your side.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, of course not.

Navin Shah AM: A lot of work has been going on for the last eight or nine years, with successive administrations in the Harrow Council - vastly Labour administrations if I may add that - and also TfL.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The facts speak for themselves and that is it is under the leadership of Councillor Hall that Harrow Council has finally put together a package that enables us to get on with the step-free access.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, the funding potential from the Harrow Council and the feasibility aspects were being discussed long before Councillor Hall took control of the council.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is one thing to discuss things and another thing to get them done.

Navin Shah AM: Can we come to the point now? The people of Harrow have waited long enough. When will they have a fully accessible station? Will you put time to it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, the work currently underway is expected to take around three months to complete and we will then move ahead as fast as possible.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, let me put to you what the funding programme looks like. There will be £100,000 in 2014/15 from Harrow Council for feasibility, which does not surprise me. This is something that is not party political. It would have come along and has come along, which I welcome. In 2015/16 there will be £2 million from TfL. In 2016/17 £12 million from TfL, 2017/18 £3 million from TfL, which means that the people of Harrow are not looking at having anything on the ground in terms of step-free access at least until 2017/18. The £3 million which has been allocated on paper by the Harrow Council will actually be delivered not now but much later, and TfL's funding. The question is why are the people of Harrow being treated like second class citizens?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is a question you might well have asked during the eight years of the Ken Livingstone [former Mayor of London] administration, when absolutely nothing was done for Harrow on the Hill for step-free access there.

Navin Shah AM: No, no, £25 million was --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I was not aware of anybody doing anything let alone yourself.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, £25 million was allocated --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is a fortunate coincidence. The happy alignment of the stars that brings together a forward thinking and dynamic leader in the form of Susan Hall and a proactive administration, a proactive Conservative administration at City Hall that is finally solving a problem that Labour collectively neglected for well over ten years.

Navin Shah AM: The fact is all you are doing is playing politics, preparing a groundswell, election propaganda. This is not new money. This is not a new initiative.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Therefore you do not want us to do it? Labour says "No". Labour says, "No to step-free access". Labour blocks step-free access. Is that what you are saying?

Navin Shah AM: You lose the ground here because you have not supported the people of Harrow for step-free access. Thank you very much, Mr Mayor. Thank you, Chair.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The people of Harrow will recognise that a thoroughly productive programme is now in place that will deliver a full feasibility study into step-free access within the next three months, and I hope very much it will then go forward to solving the problem Harrow on the Hill has particularly vertiginous steps, as everybody knows. It is high time it was fixed.

Navin Shah AM: In all of six years that is what she did.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I congratulate Councillor Susan Hall in putting together the requisite funding package.

Kit Malthouse AM: Mr Mayor, it would be chary of me to lose the chance to raise the issue of South Kensington step-free access with you again under this particular issue. I am sure you will be aware that Harrow on the Hill gets about just under 9 million entries and exits a year, whereas South Kensington gets just over 30 million – approximately the same number of passengers passing through its doors as Gatwick Airport – and yet remains not step-free despite the proximity to a number of tourist attractions, which are currently inaccessible to those in wheelchairs or those who are struggling with pushchairs. I wonder whether, given that we have an approaching budget and the Government is very keen on investing in infrastructure, whether you would be willing to --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The answer is --

Kit Malthouse AM: It is a national asset. It is not a local station; it is a national station with a similar level of entries as Gatwick Airport.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As you know, I have every hope that we are going to do the same for South Kensington, but as you know it would be totally mad to do the scheme *in vacuo* without looking at what is happening with the development above what used to be called Dino's – I cannot remember what it is called now – and the opportunity there is there to create something wonderful for the neighbourhood that would yield section 106 revenue and would enable us to fund it. That is the obvious thing to do. At the moment, there are some objections to that kind of vision. Those objections are misplaced and that is what we want to achieve.

Kit Malthouse AM: Part of the issue is – and we have been talking about this now for six years – we have been trapped in this kind of intractable position where no progress seems to have been made in any direction, either saying, “We are not going to do it” or “We are going to do it”. Yet during those five or six years nearly 200 million people have been passing through the doors of South Kensington, where nothing happens. The point I am trying to make is that these are national assets that are inaccessible to huge numbers of mothers and indeed people from around the country. I wonder whether there is a case to be made to national Government for investment into this national asset, because this is a station of national importance, rather than us trying to hope that some developer will come forward who will put money into it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think what needs to happen is we need to accept that there is going to be a fantastic development there and not block it.

Kit Malthouse AM: Can I ask you then to put your personal weight behind trying to reach some kind of resolution in the next 24 months to the South Kensington step-free case?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course. My personal weight is uniformly distributed in support of virtually every project around London. I do have a considerable amount of it to go around.

Kit Malthouse AM: This is a particularly important and critical one for both the cultural and accessibility --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is. I understand that. It is a source of frustration to me and to you that we have not been able to crack this as fast as we have cracked many other things. That is because of a

basic disagreement between us and residents in that part of London about what kind of development they will tolerate above what used to be called Dino's.

Kit Malthouse AM: As always, Mr Mayor, you are absolutely correct. Having said that, obviously South Kensington seems to be treated in a different way from other stations that have been made step-free and step-free access being given to South Kensington seems to be conditional upon there being a development, whereas at Harrow or Green Park or many of the others the money has just been made available without there being an ancillary development.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, but in the case of neither Green Park nor Harrow is it possible to envisage any such development that would yield the corresponding section 106 funds. Therefore, it is right for us to pursue this in the case of South Kensington and we will.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, do you welcome the chaos of the previous Labour council in Harrow? It resulted in them spending so much time fighting each other that they omitted to fight for the residents of Harrow and it is now only that Councillor Hall has taken over with the Conservative administration that they do not have that distraction anymore and are spending all their time fighting for what the residents of Harrow want.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): We are on the issue of step-free access.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, he is correct. Assembly Member Boff is completely right because the Labour Party did not want step-free access at Harrow-on-the-Hill. They wanted to use it as a stick to beat the Mayor. That is what they wanted. As I say, it is the happy coincidence of these stars that enables to box on and do this. We will do it, Kit, in South Kensington as well.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): We are not going to re-enact scenes from Harrow Town Hall in the Chamber today. We will then move on down the order paper to the question on High Speed 2 (HS2) in the name of Assembly Member Dismore.

2014/1044 – HS2 (1)

[Andrew Dismore AM](#)

On 23 January at a public meeting to protest against HS2 a local resident, one Stanley Johnson, said HS2 was creating a kind of wartime collective spirit in Camden and it was time to "rise up". He added, "We are all talking to each other in the street. No one ever used to talk to each other. Now we are; we are talking about HS2. We need people of Camden to man the barricades. The hundreds of thousands who live here need to rise up and say: "Camden will fight. If we don't fight for Camden who else will?" He added, "Anybody here know the Mayor of London?" Do you know this militant individual who does not seem to know you and what do you think of his view on HS2?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, thank you so much. Andrew has asked a question about High Speed 2 (HS2), which is about the intervention of my father. I am obliged to you, as ever, Andrew, for reducing the debate to this level, but my view on HS2 is basically what you are asking for. As you know, I broadly support the scheme, but I have huge reservations about some of the ways it is being done. There could be a better HS2. You have to have a proper HS2/HS1 link. You have to look at better mitigations in the

west of the city. I am very concerned about some of the impacts in the Camden area. The criticisms that have been made of the Labour Party by my relative are entirely right and I congratulate him on his trenchant views.

Andrew Dismore AM: I take it from your answer that you will not be donning your Phrygian cap and joining them on the barricades bare-breasted, Marianne-style, à la Eugène Delacroix [artist, *Liberty Leading the People*], but what is more important is whether you will be joining the Camden Working Group on alternative options for the use of the station that was announced yesterday where they want to look at other alternatives? Obviously, their position is against HS2, but the fall-back position is to see what can be salvaged.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you against HS2?

Andrew Dismore AM: They are looking at the baseline plan and double-deck down. Will you be joining that working party and will you also be prepared, if necessary, to put some finance behind the research work they are doing to look at the technical aspects of those other schemes?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We already have. I am sure you know this. We already have set up a group that is working with Camden Council, with HS2, with Network Rail and with all the relevant parties to try to minimise the impacts. I am absolutely determined that we should do that.

Whether double-deck down is the answer is a moot point at the moment. I am certainly interested in it. It is basically the idea like in Grand Central Station that you have one deck and then another deck. I am certainly interested in that. However, there are various technical objections that are being raised at the moment. We will have to get to the bottom of that.

Andrew Dismore AM: The question is whether you will work with Camden in looking at those technical issues.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I had Sarah Hayward [Leader, Camden Council] in the other day and I understand her position completely. It is slightly different from mine, but it is a perfectly respectable position. She has to stick up for her immediate electorate. What is slightly less clear is the position of the Labour Party, I must say, as a whole. You are in favour of HS2, are you?

Andrew Dismore AM: No, I am not in favour of HS2, unlike your Government, which is.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Unlike your party, which is?

Andrew Dismore AM: Your Government and your coalition.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What about your party? What is your party position on HS2?

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): It is up to Andrew to put the question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Is he going to maintain a Delphic silence on this? Yes or no? Is Labour in favour of HS2?

Andrew Dismore AM: Your Government is in favour of HS2. I am not.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What is the position of Labour?

Kit Malthouse AM: Mr Mayor, if you had £50 million, £60 million or £70 million - we are not quite sure what the bill on HS2 is going to be yet to the national purse - but if you had that money spare, would you rather spend it on connecting London to Birmingham, connecting London to the rest of the world or connecting southwest London to northeast London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): A very well put question. The business case for the three projects is, in reverse order, HS2, Crossrail 2 and a new airport. The most valuable for long-term economic competitiveness would be the better global connections. Crossrail 2 is a several times better scheme than HS2. That does not mean that HS2 is actually a totally useless idea. It is just not as good as the other two ideas.

Kit Malthouse AM: Given that HS2 is - how can we put it politely - possibly faltering as a scheme in terms of both political support but also practicalities when the bill seems to be going up and up, what representations are you making or have you made to the Government to possibly divert that spending to these two other much more productive projects for the capital?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am very glad that the Chancellor gave us £2 million to begin, which is a drop in the bucket, but it is the beginning of work on Crossrail 2. That is now steaming on. That will be a reality by the end of the next decade and I think everybody around this Chamber supports it. That is going to be a fantastic thing for London. It will hook up the whole of those southwest commuter belts through bypassing Waterloo into the City, a massive economic benefit for London through to the northeast to Hackney. Jennette [Arnold OBE], Crossrail 2 is going to be superb for your constituents and, Andrew [Boff], it is the scheme we should really be getting behind now. My view is probably that it will be a fight because at the moment there is loads of anti-London nonsense going around and lots of people, including, I may say, Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament and London MPs who claim to have some rank or role in the Government and who get up and say that London is a drain on the UK economy. That is what he [Vince Cable, MP for Twickenham] said. Unbelievable. A huge suction pump. How on earth are we going to get investment in London going when we have our coalition partners taking this kind of Luddite and cretinous approach to investment? We need to fight that. We need to get the Crossrail 2 build going. We need to find a parliamentary sponsor. We need to move it all through. Believe me. Work is well in hand.

Kit Malthouse AM: Would you also confirm that the proposed regeneration at Old Oak Common is not dependant necessarily on HS2?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Kit Malthouse AM: Even if HS2 does fail, it would still go ahead?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are quite right, Kit. Old Oak Common is one of the great opportunity areas in London. It is going to be fantastic. It is all there in the 2020 Vision. It does not depend on HS2. Actually, it would benefit greatly from HS2. I am not against HS2. You can make a case for the benefits for London from HS2. As it happens, I think the benefits for London from HS2 will be greater than the benefits of some of these northern cities, unfortunately, because it will allow greater commuter flexibility in coming to the place that is really the motor of the UK economy. It will bring benefits to the northern cities as well, but it will be those people who will be --

Kit Malthouse AM: I can certainly see that more people will jump on a train from Birmingham to shop in the West End and vice versa.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): A final response to that because the Conservative group is out of time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, there is that, though David Higgins [Chief Executive, Network Rail] well makes the point that the benefit from London's point of view will be obviously that you get those people coming in, but you are also able to conveniently set up back-office functions in other parts of the country such as Birmingham which will therefore benefit from that.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): We then move back on the order paper.

2014/0653 – Ticket Offices - Pilots

[Jenny Jones AM](#)

Have you given consideration to piloting your proposed staffing changes to Tube ticket offices and stations and carrying out a full assessment of the impact rather than simply introducing such dramatic changes across the entire network?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You ask whether we are going to trial stations without ticket offices. Of course the answer is that we already have several, including Cannon Street, which was rebuilt without ticket offices, as I am sure you will have observed. Regent's Park, Roding Valley, Wood Lane. Since they have been made over they do not have them. That does not mean that as we go forward with the programme of the changes that we will not be obviously working very closely to consult and explain what we are doing.

Jenny Jones AM: I suppose I am worried that there are still 200,000 people every day who use ticket offices and some of those will be disabled people, older people, people like me who are not information technology (IT) proficient. I am just concerned that those voices get heard, if you can reassure me that you are listening?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is incredibly important. You are asking absolutely the right question. If I were to reproach myself for anything in this whole debate, it is not getting over to people clearly enough what benefits there will be from the new arrangements.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): If you can draw your answer to a close, the Green Group are running out of time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Very briefly, in virtually every case there will be more people on the platforms able to help you, help disabled people, help the elderly, help the IT illiterate or incompetent or whatever with mobile devices to sort out your ticketing problems and to act basically as personal ticket officers who help you rather than sitting behind plate-glass in a way that is inefficient.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you. We then move on down the order paper to the question on Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in the name of Assembly Member McCartney. The Labour group has requested a written answer to that.

2014/1046 – London Plan alterations and affordable housing need

Nicky Gavron

You are consulting on your further alterations to the London Plan. How do you know what is the need for affordable housing in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The way we calculate the need for affordable homes is obviously to an extent difficult to base on population projections and so on which can go up and down. Interestingly, I see the birth rates have suddenly started going down again, having massively increased in the last couple of years. I saw in this morning's paper that we have had a record low birth rate. Fascinating. It is a symptom of the economic recovery, apparently. The analysis is set out in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), which was published on the website alongside the Further Alterations to the London Plan (FALP), and that identifies an overall need of 49,000 across the life of the plan. I suppose that is to 2018. Of those, 25,600 should be affordable.

Nicky Gavron AM: Thank you for that introduction. It means I do not have to say so much. That is good. Can we just establish something? Just a yes or no. You do agree that policy should be based on evidence, yes?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I do. Yes.

Nicky Gavron AM: All right. Your evidence base, which we colloquially call the 'SHMA' and which you just referred to, published with the FALP last month, identifies how many homes we need at an affordable rent. I want to concentrate on affordable rent, if that is all right with you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Nicky Gavron AM: What it does not do is to break that number down into how many homes are needed at different levels because affordable rent is up to 80%. It does not say different levels of rent, for instance, for families --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It would be an average. It would be an average of 65%, as you know.

Nicky Gavron AM: It does not break it down. It does not in fact give the evidence. Why did you not get the evidence? It gives you the overall numbers, but it does not give you the evidence.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On the Affordable Rent Programme, the plan is that there should be an average across London of 65%. Clearly that will allow some to be at 40% and some to be higher. That is very clear. For the evidence for what is necessary, to a certain extent, you have to go on population growth. That is what we think is going to be what London will need. The city is going to be 9 million by the end of this decade and possibly 10 million by the end of the next decade. That is how we have reached the figures for demand for housing.

Nicky Gavron AM: Yes, I am very clear about all that. Really, what we are talking about is a difference between evidence and policy. You have a policy which does have your 65% and does break down into targets your affordable rent. It actually says, if you have to be very precise, 10.7% of homes - that is 10 out of 100 -

should be at a social rent level. You have no evidence in your SHMA for that, none at all. You have not broken it down. You have all your boroughs coming in and telling you at your examination in public how much their need is and telling you that, but you have not gathered the evidence. How can you have that policy that it should only be 10% when you do not have the evidence?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What we have is a projection for the number of affordable homes that we need to have over the lifetime of the plan and how much per year. It is a massive increase. No administration has ever delivered anything like this number of affordable homes, even though, as I say, we have already done a record number. We are going up to 25,600 and across the board there will be an average of 65%. There will be a considerable number obviously at much lower than that.

Nicky Gavron AM: What you cannot measure you cannot manage. You do not have the evidence.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are doing as well as we possibly can with the data that we have. As everybody knows, demographic projections are very much a “mug’s game”. If you look at what is happening to the population figures this year as opposed to last year, last year we seemed to have an incredible post-Olympic baby-boom and this year it seems to be less clear. What is going to happen to London’s population in the next 10 or 20 years is to an certain extent guesswork. This is what we think we need.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you.

2014/1048 – Leader of Jobbik

[Andrew Dismore](#)

As London’s elected Police and Crime Commissioner do you consider the Home Secretary was correct in not excluding Gábor Vona, leader of Jobbik, from the UK, when he came to London to address a rally of his supporters recently?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Andrew. You are asking about a fellow called Gábor Vona, leader of something called Jobbik, who came to address people in the UK recently. Your question is whether the Home Secretary should have excluded him. I have to tell you I had to look up who you were talking about because he did not make much impact when he came here, as far as I can make out, although he may have spoken to a gathering, which was – from what I can gather – pretty sparsely attended. The best thing we can do is not give repulsive figures like Mr Vona any further publicity. What this guy craves is the oxygen of publicity, Andrew. It is a mistake to give him any further such oxygen.

Andrew Dismore AM: That is a very worrying question, Mr Mayor, because one of the reasons for exclusion is public security. Unfortunately the police did not even know he was coming until I found out and told them. There was the possibility of a very serious near riot at Holborn Tube Station when Vona turned up with his Jobbik fascist crew. It was only because a Labour member of Camden Council found the room which they booked under false pretences and managed to get the room closed down and even took the key away that it prevented the police having to force a way through the demonstration for Jobbik’s crew to go and have their meeting. That was a potential very serious flashpoint indeed. It was lucky in the end that that did not happen.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): A quick response to this because the Labour group are nearly out of time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, my impression of the visit of this character is that it was – despicable though his views are, loathsome though he is and what he may stand for – he had very little actual impact. The worst thing we can do is babble on about him because that is what he wants.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you very much. Before the Mayor leaves, I have agreed that Assembly Member Jones can make a brief personal statement. Assembly Member Jones?

Jenny Jones AM: I want to make an abject apology to the Mayor for suggesting that he lied to Parliament. I have done two minutes' intensive research that I found under the Mayor's own Wikipedia entry. It says that under Michael Howard [former Leader of the Conservative Party] you briefly served on the Conservative front bench when you were sacked after allegedly lying to Howard when denying you had an affair with Petronella Wyatt. I am really sorry for suggesting that you lied to Parliament. That is obviously not the case.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am obliged to you, Jenny, for that stylish apology and I am grateful. I am grateful to you for your clarification.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): OK, thank you. We note that for the record. Can we thank the Mayor for his attendance today?