

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 21 May 2015

Transcript of Agenda Item 3 – Report of the Mayor

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Jennette, and I want to congratulate you on your re-ascension to power in the Assembly as Chair of the Assembly. I want to thank Roger [Roger Evans AM, Chairman of the London Assembly 2014-15] very much for his tenure, which he discharged very well indeed, and also to thank him for assuming the job of statutory Deputy Mayor.

Members of the Assembly, since we last met, there has been a general election and I want particularly to congratulate Victoria [Victoria Borwick AM MP] and James [James Cleverly AM MP] and Kit [Kit Malthouse AM MP] for securing their seats and commiserations to Andrew [Andrew Dismore AM]. Anybody who has fought an election knows how tough it is to be on the losing side and I am sure you will come back one day and serve well in this place nonetheless.

Can I just say a little bit about London going forward over the next year or so. We have a huge amount to do, as I am sure everybody knows. I want to single out some of the things we are going to do in the next year. We are going to start a programme for 400,000 new homes on the 38 opportunity areas. We are securing and delivering three new river crossings, as you all know, as well as a Garden Bridge. We are creating and delivering more pocket parks to reach the 100 that was promised in the original manifesto. We aim to increase massively the number of Londoners who are paid the London Living Wage. We are going to regenerate parts of London that have not yet benefited from the current boom, including Old Oak Common and Park Royal and many, many other areas.

We are getting on with extending the Bakerloo line to southeast London. We are launching a Night Tube service for the first time in the history of this city in September this year. Transport for London (TfL) is taking over the West Anglia line. We will continue with the very popular cycling revolution and investing in cycling across the city. We will shortly complete the final batch of 100,000 affordable homes. Just in the next 100 days, we will complete Crossrail, we will finish the Thameslink project, we will improve a third of the junctions on the M25 and we will bring forward plans - as I say - for the Bakerloo line extension. We will start construction of the Northern line extension to Battersea, complete the business case for Crossrail 2, draw up a bill to recruit 250,000 new apprentices by the end of this Parliament and many, many other ventures; not least maximising the legacy of the 2012 Olympic Games by establishing an Olympicopolis on the site in east London and rezoning the three Stratford stations to Zones 2 to 3 from 2016. We will keep crime coming down and we will keep police numbers high, at or around - as I have always said - 32,000 people. We will ensure that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) continues to look like the city it serves.

Over the last five years, there has been huge progress in London. I would just remind you of the key issues on which this election was fought. It was about the success of this city and delivering another 530,000 jobs, getting unemployment down by 47% and youth unemployment down by 59%, 215,000 more businesses, 200,000 more apprenticeships and an income tax for 3.6 million people saving £825 a year, typically.

However, everybody understands that that economic success has to be harnessed and yoked for the good of the entire community and must deliver improvements in the quality of life for absolutely everybody in London. I am very pleased that one of the first things the new Government will do in the Queen's Speech is to ensure that no-one working 30 hours on the minimum wage pays any income tax at all. That will be the start of tax

cuts that will benefit 3.8 million people across our city and people on low and moderate incomes. That is the way forward for our city. It is about harnessing the locomotive – if you can harness a locomotive – and linking the wagons of the economy to the great locomotive of London and taking this country forward.

I have received one particular question from Jenny [Jenny Jones AM] about the tragic accident involving a lorry driver. I want to offer my deep condolences to the family and friends of Alan Neve, who died. Jenny, the difficulty is I cannot comment on why the MPS or the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) have made the individual decisions that they have in that case, although I understand people's deep feelings of anxiety and outrage. What I can propose and what I will offer is that the MPS contacts you directly for a briefing about that, although clearly the intention and our ambition is to make cycling ever safer. That is the purpose of our current investments.

That concludes my update, except to say that also in the course of the next few days in Parliament we will be seeking further powers over the private hire trade in London and over unsafe pedicabs, which may be of some interest to people in the audience. Members of the Assembly will know that there are currently about 8,600 buses in London. There are about 26,000 black taxis. The number of minicabs is growing by around 1,000 a month. It has gone up about 18% just in the last 18 months. There are currently now 78,690 minicab drivers in London. They are posing a serious congestion risk and indeed causing congestion in many locations in the city. TfL needs to have the power to restrict licences by quantity and we will be going forward with that. That concludes my report.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Just before I look to Members, Mayor, you just talked about that piece of action being taken in Parliament and you talked about 'we'. Is that a TfL-sponsored bill that you are talking about?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We will be seeking support in Parliament as TfL. You will remember there was a transport --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): It was just that clarification that I wanted on record. It is TfL that will be --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There was a Transport Bill that was talked out of the last Parliament by various loonies like George Galloway [former MP for Bradford West]. What we are trying to do is to revive that and there are some devolutionary objectives that we want to achieve in that Bill and they will be put forward.

Jenny Jones AM: Thank you for the offer of the briefing from the MPS about the cyclist's death and I will say yes to that, but I want a bit more than that. This is the second time recently that the MPS has backed off from prosecuting a driver who has actually killed somebody. This particular driver should never have been employed in the first place. The judge actually said, "Heavens know why the lorry owners let you drive that vehicle without checking you had a valid --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sorry, I could not hear that, Jenny.

Jenny Jones AM: Basically, the judge in the case said that the licensed operators were at fault. Could you please ask the MPS Commissioner next time you see him for a personal explanation of why they will not pursue that licensed operator?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I shall, but you will understand the difficulty I have in relaying now any details that I may have to you about the thinking. It is better if they brief you directly.

Jenny Jones AM: Thank you. It is just that cyclists are starting to feel that the MPS is not really on their side. Many of us around the table cycle, including you, and it is important that the roads are safe.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Slightly more than you. Yes, absolutely. I do not think I can agree that the MPS does not care about cyclists. If you look at --

Jenny Jones AM: I am talking about perceptions.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- Operation Safeway, which we have been running, actually, a huge number of cyclists obviously have been stopped from jumping lights and have been fined for mounting the pavement and all the rest of it --

Jenny Jones AM: Yes, but that is cyclists. I am talking about drivers who kill cyclists.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- and drivers have been fined for various infringements as well. In fact, drivers have been fined slightly more than cyclists. The result has been, whenever we have run Operation Safeway, there has been a reduction in people killed or seriously injured. If you look at the figures, we are driving those down in spite of a massive increase in cycling. The police deserve credit for the work they do to make cycling safer.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member Duvall?

Len Duvall AM: Chair, I wish to make a point of order and ask you a question directly. It is something the Mayor has raised in his report but it is a question to you and I believe under protocols I should stand if it is a point of order. The Mayor will know that in April the courts gave permission for a judicial review of the Garden Bridge. In his judgment, Mr Justice Ouseley criticised the Mayor for making a statement at our last Mayor's Question Time session that he said - this is Mr Justice Ouseley - could be understood "neither in terms of English, nor of what Mr Johnson intended".

This is a view this Chamber will recognise in the way that the Mayor sometimes answers questions or sometimes does not answer questions. As we enter the final year of this Assembly and mayoralty, Chair, could you ensure - like your predecessors have sought to do - that we get some intelligible answers from the Mayor when questions are put to him? Thank you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): All I --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No. The point was not made to you for you to answer and it is noted. I am glad we have a judge on our side. That is all I have to say. OK. Assembly Member Malthouse?

Kit Malthouse AM MP: Thanks, yes. Mr Mayor, just two subjects from me. On bicycles, I know you have been quite keen to lobby on modifications to motorcars in terms of emissions and the type of car and all the rest of it. There is quite a lot of technology available now for cars for sensors around the car: blind-spot sensors and object sensors. Airbags are now becoming more mandatory in cars, as are seatbelts.

I wonder whether it would be sensible for us to lobby the Government on whether near-side sensors on cars could be specified, particularly in the light of the development, for instance, of the new taxis that are coming and whether that would be a good thing for TfL to require to be fitted to vehicles that are used in central London.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Kit, thank you very much. It is a very foresightful and imaginative point, as usual. Most of the really grim accidents in London are caused by lorries and that is the first type of vehicle that we are looking at. When the safer lorry zone comes in in September, there will be some important restrictions on the type of vehicle people can drive. They will have to have proper skirts that stop people from being dragged underneath. They will have to have better mirrors and better viewing for the driver.

In some cases, I have to say that the position of the heavy goods vehicle (HGV) driver in London is very difficult because they are right up in a cab and they cannot see around them very easily. You have to have some sympathy sometimes with drivers who are driving very big machines in very crowded traffic.

What we need, I am afraid, is a wholesale revision of the design of HGV cabs in London. The position of drivers and the views of drivers have to be radically improved to make windscreens more bus-like, as it were, and to lower the drivers so they are more immediately familiar with the surrounding traffic. That is one of the things that we are now working on. You will see shortly some of the designs we are bringing forward. Safer cabs for lorries; I really think that is crucial. So many of these terrible accidents are caused by lorries turning left and not seeing a cyclist who is trying to go across them or trying to turn left as well. That is the thing we want to tackle first.

Kit Malthouse AM MP: The second question I had was about pedicabs. Could you just expand a little on what powers you are seeking over pedicabs and then what your intention would be if you acquire those powers?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): In my view, you can salute pedicabs as an example of glorious free-market economy and people's hard work and thrift and self-reliance and so on. On the other hand, they are very often charging inebriated passengers huge sums of money; they do not represent good value; they clutter up very congested sections of the city; they are, in my view, a bit of a menace, and I speak as a cyclist as much as a motorist.

What we need to do is to regulate unsafe pedicabs. We are not at this stage calling for the extermination of the pedicab; we want to regulate them.

Kit Malthouse AM MP: Do you think the nature, size and speed at which these cabs move presents a danger to other users of the road and pedestrians?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do. Typically, what happens is that in the areas where they congregate like beetles, they move rather slowly and they force people either to dawdle behind them or else to lurch out into the traffic and pose a risk. We need to think hard about whether they are really adding much value to the streets of London in what is already a congested city.

Kit Malthouse AM MP: Your intention once you get the powers that you want may be to reduce the numbers, improve safety or even possibly try to remove them entirely?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Let us see how we go. It seems to me a peculiarity in the law that a type of taxi that plies for hire on the streets of London is in no way regulated by TfL. That is the first thing we need to look at. The second thing is to see what we can do to make them safer. If that drives away some unsafe and rash pedicab drivers, then I am not going to weep hot tears about it.