

PRIORITISING PEOPLE

How to deliver healthy streets



A briefing by Caroline Russell
Green Party Member of the London Assembly
November 2016



Prioritising People

Since being elected to the London Assembly I have met with and been contacted by hundreds of Londoners with stories to tell about their journeys around London on foot, by bike, by public transport and by car.

Many are enjoying cycling on the new superhighways. Some have told me they can now hear birdsong when they open their front door since through traffic has been removed from their street. But the majority of Londoners face congested and polluted roads for their journeys to work, to school, to college and the shops.

I've heard from office workers put off their daily commute by bike following a frightening close pass by a lorry or speeding vehicle. From older people who tell me they are wary of popping to the shops on foot because of heavy traffic, lack of crossings and uneven pavements.

And from parents frustrated at having to bundle their kids across a pedestrian crossing with barely seconds of green time. That's if they're lucky enough to have a crossing. Meanwhile car drivers express exasperation at lengthy journeys and huge tailbacks.

For these Londoners and so many others, our city's streets are just not working.

Since widening roads is not a sustainable option, we need to use the street space we have more efficiently. Some world-class sections of cycle routes have been built in central London by the previous Mayor and pedestrians' needs are now being considered when some big junctions are redesigned. But much of the capital remains hostile for people who want to walk or cycle.

London's new Mayor, Sadiq Khan, is drawing up his transport plans right now. The decisions he takes will determine whether the city embarks on a more liveable path or whether Londoners will face a business-as-usual blend of traffic jams, pollution and missed opportunities to get people moving around differently.

The Mayor has said that he wants Transport for London (TfL) to think more about Londoners' health when making decisions about how they design the capital's streets. My five point plan explains what he needs to do to deliver healthy streets – it means prioritising people.

Caroline Russell
Green Party Member of the
London Assembly





01

Build a sense of common purpose

There is a growing consensus among Londoners that breathing clean air is a priority - 79% of respondents to the Mayor's clean air consultation supported proposal to bring the Ultra Low Emission Zone forward to 2019.

One way to clean the air is to change our street layouts to prioritise the safety and convenience of people on foot and bike, enabling more people to switch from using cars.

The previous Mayor badged his three Mini Holland schemes as cycling projects. This prompted opposition from people who felt excluded from the schemes' benefits.

The new Mayor says he wants to learn the lessons from previous initiatives and he should make story telling his starting point.

Whether you happen to use a wheelchair and struggle with narrow pavements or are an eight year old who can't cycle to school because of heavy traffic, the Mayor must make a strong link between the plans on the table and how Londoners' lives will get better as a result.

That will mean promoting the next round of schemes as neighbourhood improvement projects with something to offer everyone.

Over the last couple of years ambitious bike lane proposals have generated a lot of discussion and campaigning both for and against. This has led to individual London boroughs delaying and watering down the cycle superhighway schemes.

The new Mayor's business plan should take forward a strategic network of fast, direct bike routes from the suburbs to the city centre.

This type of high-volume cycling infrastructure is what London needs to bring about continental levels of cycling.

The Mayor must throw his energy into bringing Londoners and the boroughs along with him on this journey.

He should also be prepared to enact provisions in the GLA Act 1999 that could make TfL the designated highways authority for the roads where cycle superhighways are to be built, should councils' objections threaten crucial schemes.

Test it for real

Something amazing has happened in Waltham Forest

Traffic levels on twelve busy roads in Walthamstow Village have fallen by over half. 10,000 fewer vehicles per day traverse the area. Collisions have fallen.

In 2014, previous Mayor Boris Johnson gave Waltham Forest £27m to make its streets safer and easier for people to navigate on foot or by bike. Three years later and the evidence shows [2] London's first Mini Holland has been a huge success.

It all started with a two week trial. People saw the huge potential for a healthier, more pleasant neighbourhood.

Consultation and construction followed. The story hasn't been the same across London, however.

Earlier this year, the London Borough of Hackney planned to filter thirteen roads in London Fields to limit through traffic on a trial basis. TfL approved the plans in November 2015. [3]

The council and TfL hoped to demonstrate the benefits of reduced rat-running to support their ambition to deliver Quietway 2.

But even though the closures would have been temporary and reversible, the trial was cancelled.

After much delay, road narrowing rather than traffic filtering will be taken forward instead, leaving a less ambitious scheme with traffic still cutting through the area.

Where the evidence suggests that traffic can be successfully filtered with tactically placed bollards or planters.

Cheap and cheerful live trials should be the default approach to consultation.

Residents are then able to participate in weighing up the overall benefits of less traffic passing through their area against any inconvenience from reduced vehicle access.

Live trials are temporary and give people a chance to experience any real positives and negatives without getting bogged down in fears about what might happen, which can be the case with a solely paper based consultation.

Trials should be an appropriate length to ensure any short-term increases in congestion are not a factor and mitigation measures should be adopted on main roads.





Success in Walthamstow

56%

Reduction in number of vehicles on key roads

10,000

Fewer vehicles every day across the area

Traffic on 12 key roads fell by more than half, compared to the 22% reduction seen during trial.

ZERO
road collisions since the scheme began

FIFTEEN
in the three years before the scheme began

Overall traffic across village fell 16%.

Traffic on two roads outside village went up 3% and 11%.

03

Commit more money and resources

The new sections of central London cycle superhighway are hugely popular and are great value [4] for money.

More cycling brings other benefits such as fewer employee sick days, less pollution and more pleasant streets. But London spends less than half the amount per person on cycling than Copenhagen.

I raised TfL's proposed cuts to the cycling budget [5] with Mayor Khan in September. Although he pledged to increase the proportion of TfL funding spent on cycling this could end up being a real terms cut as, due to various factors, the overall TfL pot is shrinking.

In his first term, the Mayor should commit to invest £1.55 billion in cycling and walking, equivalent to 15 per cent of the total expected investment in capital transport projects during that time.

The Mayor should cancel roadbuilding projects, introduce a workplace parking levy with the boroughs and bring in a better Ultra Low Emission Zone and a

road pricing scheme to raise the necessary extra funds.

There have been encouraging [6] signs that the Mayor will get London boroughs to show how they will improve residents' health before he allocates them money for local transport schemes.

But along with that money the Mayor should make more TfL staff expertise available to borough officers to help them make the switch to a less car focussed use of street space.

It's great that it's getting easier to go car-free in Kingston [7], Waltham Forest and Enfield [8] where the mini Holland schemes have been implemented.

The Mayor's next TfL business plan should give every London borough Mini Holland levels of funding for projects to enable walking and cycling.

This would cost £725 million over four years, paid for by the £1.1 billion boost to the TfL business plan that the measures above would bring.



Abandon 'computer says no' thinking

The Mayor should not underestimate the extent to which TfL's decision-making processes will need to be overhauled if he is to make London's streets much better for walking and cycling.

The former Mayor promised to 'smooth traffic flow' and made 'journey time reliability' for vehicles a priority in his 2010 transport strategy.

New safe junction design schemes are rejected by TfL transport planners time and again because of a 'computer says no' way of thinking.

If the new Mayor wants to prioritise people on London's streets then he has to remove journey time reliability as an objective in his forthcoming transport strategy. He should adopt a volume of people measure instead, which will favour journeys on foot and by bike as more efficient movers of people.

TfL's 'pedestrian SCOOT' technology recognises when a big crowd of pedestrians has built up on the pavement and can reduce the wait for an opportunity to cross the road.

But Londoners tell me that they are waiting too long for a green light and crossing times are often too short even when lots of people are waiting.

This could [9] be due to the way TfL is programming junctions to benefit motorised traffic.

If the Mayor is to make our streets better for walking, Londoners will expect to see more frequent pedestrian green lights and crossing times extended. TfL's data should show increases in time allowed.

"TfL's assessment of road network performance for the Mayor's Transport Strategy is primarily based on the concept of journey time reliability, which is one manifestation of smoother traffic.

TfL's journey time reliability metric considers the relationship of actual measured journeys (using ANPR cameras) to a nominal average journey time that is representative of motor vehicle journeys by road in London."

– TfL's Travel in London 8 report (2015)



Be smarter with data

CASE STUDY Tower Bridge

Tower Bridge is undergoing repairs for the first time since 1975 and is closed to vehicles for three months.

Before works started, I asked the Mayor if he would ask TfL to gather data on how Londoners adapt to the closure. He did not agree.

TfL have missed a once-in-a-generation chance to learn whether people, faced with a closed bridge, jump on a bike, walk, find a more convenient crossing or decide not to cross the river.

When a road is closed, people change the way they travel to avoid the blockage. Some permanently change their route or mode of transport, having tried a new way to get to their destination and found it more convenient or enjoyable.

The Mayor told me recently [10] that Transport for London does not collect data on the impact of temporary closures on its roads.

If he started using these temporary closures as opportunities to gather data and learn about travel behaviour, then any traffic reduction changes could be 'locked in' once the road is reopened. This must become normal practice at TfL.

In 2014, TfL got teams of researchers to find out whether the capital's streets work for Londoners.

Thousands of hours were spent and hundreds of people of all kinds were asked for their thoughts. But to date the results of the surveys have been left to gather dust

TfL should publish this information without delay and act on any findings.

The Mayor has confirmed [11] to me that a new healthy streets check tool (below) will be applied to all new roads schemes, so hopefully we will start to see more designs that prioritise people over vehicles.



Source: Lucy Saunders

The Mayor should set a minimum overall score that schemes must pass in order to proceed and should also ask planners to go back to the drawing board if any critical failures are picked up.

**"I hear birdsong
outside my home
for the first time
now that the
traffic rat-run
has gone"**

Resident in Waltham Forest's Mini Holland Scheme



If you are a Londoner who wants to check the health of your street then look out for my 'street check' tool that I'll be launching soon.

If you have any thoughts on this report or on solving any of London's transport problems, please get in touch.

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