

## Not very smart cars

As someone who embraced the coming of the first mobile phones, adopted the iPad and welcomed the scope the web offered as with this blog I am in principle happy with the idea of a self driving car that would leave me free to do other things on a journey.

As a legislator I will need some persuading we have reached the development point with self drive cars that is acceptable and will fit on our roads alongside cars with human drivers.

So far I have found the addition of extra computing power to my current car far from smart. It is often annoying, slows down using the vehicle and can conflict with your safe judgements as a driver.

In the morning the computer display says Good Morning. There is no point in saying Good Morning back, and it delays being able to tell the sat nav where I am going which needs to be done before driving off . I drive to a local shop, leave the car for 5 minutes and then it wishes me Good Morning all over again with no sense of irony!

You are driving along on a sunny day -remember those?- and go briefly into shade. You can see perfectly well. The car puts the lights on. Why? I didn't tell it to.

You are in heavy London traffic on one of those junctions where your turn gets a few seconds on green. You follow the car ahead closely but safely at a slow speed to get round before red and the car screams at you.

You choose to stay in third gear because you foresee the likely need to stop at lights a few hundred yards ahead. The car tells you to change to a higher gear in blissful ignorance that you will need to slow down.

The sat nav tells you you will arrive in Westminster at a stated time. You estimate it will take a quarter an hour longer because the last three miles are always impossible thanks to the anti motorist street layouts, lights and road blocks. The sat nav is nearly always wrong and never learns from the repeat errors.

The other day the car told me I needed to download additional software. I complied when the car was parked overnight. In the morning it needed more time to complete. It had for no good reason hidden icons I needed to access easily, so I had to waste more time before setting off trying to rescue items that would be useful.

It has a fuel use/ environment programme. However you drive the vehicle the accelerator rating plunges from 5.0 to 1.0 as soon as you get the car moving. The brake and speed ratings make more sense and help give you better consumption figures for restrained driving.

Car producers need to keep in touch with what buyers want. Not all technology

is good. Touch screens in cars are difficult to read when the sun shines on them and when they get finger marked. They do not always respond to touch. It is dangerous to look at them when you need to be very alert watching everything going on on the road around you. It is very annoying when they do not respond to first touch. It is therefore important the touch screen does not contain controls you need when driving. Switches and knobs on older cars always work first time and do not require you to look away from the road ahead.

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## **Why are there no good official figures on the costs and benefits of net zero?**

The leading advocates for going faster down the road to net zero assure us it will be good for growth. They tell us about all the new jobs that will be created to make batteries, wind turbines, solar panels, electric cars and heat pumps. They stress how much investment must be put into energy transition.

All this is true, but we need to know how many of these jobs are likely to come to the UK and how many of these items will be imported. So far the West has let China build a huge lead in making batteries, securing the supplies of minerals for battery making, in wind turbines and electric cars. How will we get better at doing these things to create the well-paid jobs here?

We need to know how we will replace all the large tax revenues that come from taxing extraction of our own oil and gas, from using petrol and diesel in our vehicles, and taxes on domestic gas? What taxes need to be imposed on the electrical alternatives?

We need to know how much capital has to be written off prematurely as we close car factories, petrol stations, refineries and oil fields? We need to know how much public subsidy will be available to compete with the US and the EU in attracting green investment and getting many reluctant consumers to switch transport and heating systems.

A proper costed programme with options and assessment of cost benefits would make for better decisions and more popular buy in to the programme.

There would also need to be honest assessments of which measures did serve to lower world CO<sub>2</sub> rather than just diverting it abroad and making us import dependent.

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## Wokingham Borough finances

I and other Conservative MPs helped make the case for proper funding for social care and education which the government responded to this year. I see the Lib Dem Council wishes to claim an absence of government money to justify their cuts to important services so it is important to remind them of what happened in the 2023-4 local government settlement.

The government announced a 9.4% increase in core English Council spending power to a new high of £60 bn. Every Council was guaranteed at least a 3% increase. Wokingham had made clear to me in previous years that we received too little grant support for social care so I lobbied further for more increases. As a result Wokingham's social care grant rose from £3.1 m last year to £ 5.38m this year, a rise of 73%. Councillors did not send me the supportive figures I needed to make the case but nonetheless other work paid off to achieve a good result.

The Council also receives this year a £1.1 m Funding Guarantee grant to give it extra spending power. It is receiving £334,658 from the government Discharge fund, additional money for social care for some leaving hospital.

Independent research shows that real spending per person by Councils which did decline from 2015 to 2019 has been rising this decade. Unitaries are now above the start level of this period in real spend per head.

Any need to cut services we want in Wokingham is down to wasteful and ill directed spending by the Lib Dem Council. Better budgeting would deliver a much better result for all of us, without the misleading generalisations about government money in support.

Wokingham schools continue to be financed by government grants. I have set out before the increases to our schools under the national funding formula, taking spending to new higher levels in 2023-4. Education is around half the Council total spend, government grant financed. The Lib Dem Councillors usually omit this large grant from their speeches on local finance.

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## Which countries produce most CO<sub>2</sub>?

Those who campaign most strongly to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases always want to the UK to do more but are usually quiet about the countries that produce most and are increasing their output. The UK has halved its output per head of CO<sub>2</sub> since 1990 but is given no credit for this by its green critics, who will never be appeased.

Using the figures set out in the EU 2022 Report on each country, the world's

big five producers of CO<sub>2</sub> are China, the USA, the EU, India and Russia. Three of these led by China are still increasing their output. They account for almost two thirds of world emissions.

Total CO<sub>2</sub> output 2021

China 12,466 m tonnes

USA 4,752 m tonnes

EU 2,774 m tonnes

India 2,648 m tonnes

Russia 1,942 m tonnes.

World 37.8 bn

In the next grouping down there are Japan, Iran, South Korea and Saudi Arabia, all above 500 m tonnes.

If we look at per capita CO<sub>2</sub> output the UAE at 20 tonnes per person a year and Saudi at 16.6 are high, reflecting their output of oil. China, the Netherlands, Poland, Germany and Japan are all around 8 tonnes per head, the USA is at 14 and South Korea at 12. The UK is now down at 4.95.

Any analysis of these figures based on the wish to get the total down would mainly direct attention to the big five as they are so dominant. China in particular is a major part of the problem. China's growth in CO<sub>2</sub> each year typically exceeds the UK total output.! If you also wish to take into account fairness issues attention should turn to CO<sub>2</sub> per head, where taking the larger countries with high figures down to the UK level would enable the world to hit the green targets.

I appreciate some readers do not wish to see CO<sub>2</sub> reduction pursued as a main policy. I am accepting the fact that all the main world governments do wish to limit greenhouse gases and have baked this into their global and national policies. They should study the figures more to see which countries produce most, and they should question the advice more to avoid adopting products and policies which fail to cut world CO<sub>2</sub> in the way they hope. Only when China, India and Russia curb their output will the world have a chance to go to net zero. Why don't the campaigners concentrate more on that challenge?

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**[Letter from Transport Focus Regarding Proposed Railway Ticket Office](#)**

# Closures

I have received the letter below from Transport Focus regarding the extension of the deadline to register their comments about the proposed railway ticket office closures. The deadline is now 1 September and I would encourage those who share my concerns about these proposed closures to make their views known as directed in the letter. I have made representations against the closures as they will disadvantage those who are unable to use online ticket booking or who may have trouble with ticket machines. Passengers who may need physical assistance in accessing the train platforms will also be disadvantaged by these proposals.

Dear Colleague

The deadline for people to have their say about the rail companies' proposals the future of railway ticket offices has been extended until **1 September**. Information about how to send comments is [here](#).

## ***What is our role?***

Transport Focus (and London TravelWatch in and around the London) have a formal role in scrutinising the proposals and any mitigation in detail. Under the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement, train companies are required to consult us and provide passengers with an opportunity to have their say. We therefore receive and review the comments we receive. So far our two organisations have received more than 350,000 responses.

## ***How can we help your constituents?***

You can encourage your constituents to send their comments to us (or London TravelWatch). They may want to share what the changes will mean for them such as how the changes might affect their ability to buy a ticket at the station.

## ***What will we do with the proposals and comments received?***

We and London TravelWatch will scrutinise train company proposals and any mitigations in detail before responding to train operators. We will be considering factors such as whether the station will continue to be staffed, accessibility, the alternative options for buying tickets and whether passengers will continue to be able to access station facilities like lifts, waiting rooms and toilets.

We can formally object to the proposals but only on specific grounds. Even if we object, the proposals can still go ahead. The train company can refer its proposal to the Secretary of State for a final decision. Here is the Department for Transport's [guidance](#) setting out the approach the Secretary of State will take if this happens.

## ***Our response***

Our response to each train company's proposal, an overview of the number of

responses received and the main issues raised will be published on our website.