

Getting about – our motorways and trunk roads

The Wokingham constituency has reasonable access to the M4, and is within modest driving distances of the M3, the M40 and the M25 which are all an important part of our road network. To the west lies the A34 trunk road, and to the north east the short A 404 trunk link to the M40. All the other roads are local roads, including the A4 which was detrunked some years ago, and the A329M. Using the major routes travellers from Wokingham have access to London, to the west country, to Birmingham and to the north.

The distinction between trunk and local roads matters as they are managed in different ways. All local roads come under the control of the principal Council's Highways Department – in Wokingham's case Wokingham Borough to the east and West Berkshire to the west. The Councils have a budget to maintain and improve these routes, and they lead any policy for changing their capacity or their traffic controls. The motorways and trunk roads are a strategic network of major routes, affording on a good day faster journey times for longer distance travel for both cars and goods vehicles. They are especially suited for large and heavy vehicles, which can make good use of them at night when traffic volumes are lighter. This network takes one third of the traffic on just 2.4% of the roads. These roads are also relatively safe, accounting for 9% of the casualties. It is paid for and maintained by the national government.

In a General Election it therefore makes more sense to debate the trunk network, as this is the one which will be controlled by the government Ministers we indirectly elect. Of course road users want a whole system that works for them, and are not so fussed about who runs what, but it still makes sense to recognise the different budgets and controls which apply, as it affects who to blame and lobby for improvement.

There is insufficient capacity on our local motorway and trunk network. The government has recognised this, and is nearing completion of a 33% increase in carriageway capacity on the M3 from Junction 4 to the M25 by converting the hard shoulder and upgrading to smart motorway. There are plans ready for similar expansion of the M4 from Reading to the M25, which will be the next major expansion. The M25 western section has been upgraded substantially once in its life, and a study is underway on what more needs to be done to provide capacity in that all too busy corner of the world. There are ideas to increase capacity on local roads to reduce local use of the motorway for shorter local journeys. There will need to be more capacity on the A 34 Southampton to Oxford which acts as a haul road for Southampton port traffic.

As MP in the last two Parliaments I argued the case for more capacity, allied to better sound reduction measures when the works are done on the M4. There will be more need of extra capacity and anti noise measures in the years ahead.

US returns Chinese fugitive, a suspected rapist



Police officers escort a fugitive who fled to the United States in April last year. The man, who is suspected of committing rape in China, was repatriated at Beijing Capital International Airport on Thursday. [Photo/China Daily]

A fugitive on China's most-wanted list who is suspected of rape was repatriated to China from the United States on Thursday afternoon, according to the Ministry of Public Security.

A United Airlines flight carrying the suspect – surnamed Zhu – and two U.S. law enforcement officers arrived at Beijing Capital International Airport, where the officers handed him over to Chinese police.

The successful repatriation was considered “the latest achievement of law enforcement and network security cooperation between the two countries”, said a senior official at the ministry's criminal investigation department, who asked that his name not be used.

According to the ministry, both countries have tried to put aside political and legal differences to enhance communication and mutual trust in the fight

against transnational crimes.

Moreover, they will improve law enforcement and security dialogues, while strengthening intelligence sharing and conducting joint investigations in some cases.

In recent years, a number of Chinese suspects, including some suspected of major crimes, have fled China to the U.S. Lack of a bilateral extradition treaty, as well as legal obstacles, have helped them avoid prosecution.

In April 2016, the Fuyang police in Anhui Province received a report accusing Zhu of rape, and the suspect fled to the U.S.

The Ministry of Public Security attached great importance to the case and set up a special investigation team to go to the U.S. to hunt down the suspect. It asked Interpol to issue a red notice, which is close to an international arrest warrant.

In January, Zhu was captured by U.S. authorities for illegally overstaying his visa, and the U.S. immediately informed the ministry. Chinese officials then shared evidence of the rape with their U.S. counterparts and requested that Zhu be sent back to China.

In May, Zhu was convicted in a U.S. court of illegal immigration and was expelled from the country.

Huang Feng, a law professor from Beijing Normal University, said Chinese fugitives will pose a serious risk to local public security, and if U.S. law enforcement officers are aware of their crimes, they won't allow foreign suspects to stay in the country.

"They will offer judicial assistance to their Chinese counterparts according to the laws in the U.S.," he said.

[Guideline helps county cut costs of weddings, funerals](#)



A mausoleum is under construction in Huichang county's Bingqiu village in Jiangxi province. [Photo/China Daily]

Huichang county in Jiangxi Province is taking measures to curb the soaring costs of betrothal gifts and extravagant wedding and funeral ceremonies, which have plagued its villages for years.

With the average cost of betrothal gifts in the county skyrocketing to 300,000 yuan (\$44,000) this year, the old tradition of giving money to a bride's parents has become a huge burden for a groom's family. "Getting married is now one of the two major causes of poverty in the county – the other being illness," said Xu Yongchun, a county official.

As part of a plan to reduce poverty and transform outdated tradition, the county government has issued a guideline, limiting dowries at 60,000 yuan and calling on villagers to scale down their wedding banquets to no more than 10 tables, according to Zeng Pengfei, director of the Huichang civil affairs department. He said the government is setting up village-level wedding and funeral councils to ensure implementation of the measures.

The measures were introduced in Wenwuba township's Gufang village in March. "Our village has nine communities based on family names. The nine council members we elected, one from each community, are all highly respected and enlightened elders," said Zou Zhulin, head of Gufang's wedding and funeral council.

"The task of council members is to raise awareness of the guideline, which involves helping organize and supervise wedding ceremonies, making sure they don't leave families penniless. But it's not easy to change a deep-rooted tradition," Zou said.

However, Huichang has made significant progress in simplifying funeral services and promoting green burials. Xijiang township's Bingqiu village is a pioneer in terms of mausoleums.

Villagers discovered the benefits of mausoleums after the government built one for them. In fact, the 271 residents voluntarily raised funds to build a second one, according to Wang Tianfa, vice-chairman of the village's wedding and funeral council. They each contributed 2,500 yuan for the project, which is also the price of one niche in the mausoleum.

The two-story building, which is under construction, is situated on top of a hill.

"The mausoleum covers just 190 square meters, but will house more than 350 urns. It requires much less land than a cemetery," Wang said. "It also eases the burden on younger generations. Traditional funeral services cost up to 50,000 yuan, while cremating a deceased person and storing their ashes in a mausoleum costs only a few thousand yuan."

Bingqiu's new practice has attracted the attention of neighboring townships and villages. "Since the beginning of this year, we have received more than 20 groups of visitors to our mausoleum," Wang said.

The county government said it plans to expand the practice in all of its villages.

[Nutritional program benefits over 36 million rural students](#)

More than 36 million Chinese rural students have benefited from a national nutritional improvement program launched in 2011, a foundation said Thursday.

The central government has allocated 159.1 billion yuan (23.4 billion U.S. dollars) for improving the nutrition of rural students since the end of 2011, according to a report released by China Development Research Foundation on International Children's Day.

The report showed that the physical health of students in poor regions has improved remarkably in recent years.

The central government will expand the program, which is part of the country's poverty relief campaign, and continue its reward and subsidy policies, said Liu Xin'an, an official with the Ministry of Finance.

In November 2011, the nutritional improvement plan for elementary and middle school students in rural areas was launched. It offered schools a subsidy of four yuan per student per day to build canteens or outsource breakfast and lunch from catering companies.

The program also provided free nutritional packages for infants aged six to

24 months and provided information on healthy nutrition for their caregivers.

A total of 1,590 counties in 29 provinces, autonomous regions or municipalities have taken part in the program, covering 134,000 schools, the report said.

A separate nutritional program was implemented in Beijing and Tianjin, and Shandong Province.

At the end of 2016, China had more than 43 million rural residents living below the poverty line. Malnutrition is a concern amongst those in the remote countryside.

The central government has vowed to lift the rural population out of poverty by 2020 to build a moderately prosperous society.

Since the country began the reform and opening-up drive more than 30 years ago, over 700 million Chinese have been helped out of poverty, accounting for over 70 percent of the global poverty reduction during that period.

[Top court to boost child protection](#)



Supreme People's Court holds a press conference on June 1. [Photo/cnr.cn]

A system to connect courts and other authorities to better protect children from serious harm is expected to be expanded across the country, China's top court said on Thursday.

The system improves communication between courts and governmental departments such as civil affairs bureaus and public security authorities. Its aim is "to speed up the process of handling cases involving children age 17 or under and to increase protection when juveniles are attacked", said Ran Rong, a judge at the No. 1 Criminal Tribunal of the Supreme People's Court.

Ran said a test program has been conducted in more than 10 intermediate or district people's courts in the country, including in Shandong and Sichuan provinces.

"We've got lots of experience in solving domestic violence and sexual abuse under the joint force," she said. "We've decided to expand the system to all courts nationwide as quickly as we can."

Under the system, for example, schools and hospitals in Qingdao, Shandong, have been ordered to report evidence or information to public security departments when it appears children have been sexually assaulted, according to a statement from the top court.

"Police officers must file and investigate a case in line with the evidence without hesitation. This is to ensure it becomes a part of judicial procedures and keeps the children involved from being attacked again," Ran said.

A similar system to protect children at risk is also undergoing improvements in Beijing. In May, the capital's top procuratorate signed a framework agreement with several departments and agencies, such as schools and social security organs, to create a network to identify minors in danger.

The top court is also trying to establish databases in Sichuan Province of left-behind children and people with criminal records involving sexual abuse of children, "hoping to give juveniles more effective and targeted protection," Ran said.

Between 2013 and 2016, the nation's courts heard 10,782 cases involving adults accused of sexually assaulting children, according to the top court.

"We've also given stricter punishment to offenders who sexually abused girls under the age of 12 in line with the revised Criminal Law," said Guan Yingshi, the top tribunal's deputy chief judge.

Li Yi, a repeat offender in Hunan Province, was recently executed after the court sentenced him to death for raping and sexually abusing 14 girls of 6 or 7 years old, some of them multiple times.

"Li Yi lured the girls to an apartment of his father's, to stairwells or hilly areas in the countryside and committed the crime 26 times from 2009 to 2011," Guan said.