

Blocking the roads

Each time I use my car to get to work or to visit places in my constituency to keep in touch I encounter some new obstacle to getting around. Each journey poses its own mixture of traffic jams, temporary lights, closed roads, restricted carriageways, narrowed lanes, reduced lanes and new speed restrictions.

Some of the disruption is the result of the UK madness of putting most cables, pipes and wires under tarmac roads then digging them up every time you need access for repair and improvement. The utilities and Ministers I have talked to over the years about why not place new or replacement cables and pipes in accessible conduits, preferably under pavements to avoid digging up main roads have always agreed but failed to implement. Management of road closures to allow access to existing pipes and cables is often poor with much wasted time with the road closed but no work underway.

Some of it is Councils wanting to force people out of their cars and vans. Councils who claim to have no cash to pay for decent social services or to maintain a good refuse service have bundles of banknotes to change kerbs, pavements, install more traffic lights, paint roads and festoon them with new signs and surveillance cameras. Many Councils take a sadistic delight in making the lives of the motorist, the van driver and goods delivery driver almost impossible.

Some of it is pressure of traffic on the diminishing number of roads that survive. We invite in hundreds of thousands additional people each year but fail to put in extra roadspace for their cars. In fast growing areas like Wokingham the Conservative Council did put in some important new roads and by-passes, but the Lib Dem led Council is now busy narrowing or closing roads to make life difficult.

This is a major impediment to productivity and business success. Those running businesses to help us at home book fewer appointments to allow for the delays on the roads. They need to add to the charges the costs of Congestion and low emissions zones, car parking charges and the extra fuel used in traffic jams. The London Mayor's widened ULEZ zone is very unpopular, seeking to stop people with older vehicles and lower incomes from using their cars.