

# Municipal roads are letting us down

I have watched with concern as Council highways departments have spent much money and time making our roads worse. Motorists and business drivers have to pay huge sums in taxation. There is the taxation on a new vehicle, road fund duty to take a vehicle on the roads, there is the 55% of the fuel price that goes in taxes to the state as fuel duty and VAT, and the taxes on insuring and maintaining the vehicle. The original idea that motoring taxes pay for the roads has long since been supplanted by spending much of the traveller and transporter taxes on anything but roads.

Local authorities do not seem to see the roads as a necessary service to taxpayers where they should constantly consider the ease of safe use of the highways by the taxpayers. Most people need to use roads for good purposes. Van drivers need to get to their next client. Delivery drivers need to get food to the shops and medicines to the surgeries and hospitals. Parents need to drive young children to school in safety. Emergency vehicles need to get to accidents and disasters. Many workers need a car or van to get to their place of employment because of their hours and or the location of their work and home. Few people live in walking distance of a station with an employer in walking range of another station down the line. Few people can do the weekly shop from a bicycle or bus. Buses and cycles too need roadspace.

Years ago when I was a member of a County Council I found then there was a wish to restrict use of the roads by some officers rather than a wish to provide additional capacity and safer freer flowing junctions. Traffic lights were often preferred to roundabouts. More recently Council after Council has set about narrowing roads, removing lanes, creating artificial barriers and bollards to restrict flow, cutting traffic light green phases on busy roads, changing kerbs and painted lines, creating more special zones. They often take out parking spaces and raise the charges, leading to more vehicles circulating looking in vain for a parking place. Many streetscapes now are a slalom course festooned with many menacing signs. Large sums are spent on aggressive kerbs, with fancy blockwork for carriageways.

All this undermines business productivity, limiting the number of calls someone can fit in. It adds greatly to business costs and therefore to prices of services as the self employed and businesses need to recoup the increased cost of transport and parking. It adds to the stress on drivers and can make roads and junctions less safe, as with the country roads where now one way is occasionally blanked out by bollards forcing vehicles to use the wrong wide of the road to progress. It gives many Councils a bad name and leads the public to be more hostile to all the taxes they have to pay. A council only provides two services to every household, the roads and the refuse collection. If both are damaged and made worse people form a bad impression of the Council as a whole.

Today we see too many roads full of unrepaired potholes, and too many streets narrowed or under road works designed by the Council, against the driver. Too much money is spent on making roads less available and too little on better

roads away from pedestrians and homes to allow people and businesses to get about in a sensible way. Coming into work yesterday my optimistic sat nav once again underestimated the time it would take by 17 minutes, not allowing for the all the delays created by Councils through roadworks that many of the public do not want performed.