

Roads – are they the worst nationalised industry?

Road provision in the UK has all the hallmarks of a nationalised industry. It is a monopoly, provided free at the point of use. There are various specialist taxes just paid by motorists which mean users of the roads pay several times over the cost of provision. The state sees motorists as a great source of income, keeps us short of capacity, provides a very poor service, and goes out of its way to be use regulation not just to aid safety which is an excellent thing, but to produce a further source of income for the state from fines and parking fees from needless or complex rules. Some traffic management schemes seem designed to impede vehicles as much as possible.

The state takes particular delight in traffic mismanagement schemes which seem designed to try to collect more fine revenue. There are the frequent and sometimes inexplicable changes of speed limits within the same urban corridor. There are the bus lanes that allow you in them at certain times of day, only to switch to excluding cars at all times of day along the same stretch of road. There are the box junctions that you can be caught in by error if the vehicle ahead of you stops in a way you were not predicting.

There are state owned car parks with unclear rules – do they allow free parking on a Sunday? What is the position on a bank holiday?

There are then the many bad junctions which impede traffic and are often unsafe. Sometimes the purpose of the different lanes is not clear unless you know the road well, leaving some vehicles stranded in the wrong lane when they come to cross or turn at the junction. The system is chronically short of capacity in most of our towns and cities. Quite often the issue is a lack of bridging points to get over rivers and railway lines.

The authorities compound the inadequacy of the capacity they provide by allowing or encouraging the main utility companies to put all their pipes and wires under main roads. This means whenever they need to repair, maintain or replace they need to dig up the road and close it in whole or part. No-one would think of putting utilities down the side of railway lines and diverting trains everytime you need to access the wires and pipes.

Government authorities themselves are constantly fiddling with the road layouts, kerbs and lanes so they too directly create long delays from roadworks.

We have discussed before the agreed wish to keep the provision free at the point of use. This leaves us with how then we persuade local and national government to provide more road capacity and to manage the capacity they have more effectively. An authority like Wokingham is putting in substantial new road space to catch up with past demand and to deal with the current rate of new housebuilding, but it also needs extra capacity on the national trunk and motorway network. More of the money taken from motorists and commercial

vehicle owners should be spent on providing better roads.

Only the motorways segregate motor vehicles from cycles and pedestrians. They are as a result our safest and our fastest roads. All train tracks are segregated from pedestrians and cyclists despite having great straight shortest distance routes into our urban centres to assist rail safety. Where we have to run a mixed road, used by pedestrians and cyclists as well as motor vehicles we need to make decent provision for all and recognise the need to keep pedestrians and cyclists away from moving traffic where possible as mixed used junctions are particularly dangerous.