More money for Wokingham Borough in 2023-24

Settlement Funding Assessment £ million	14.8
Compensation for under-indexing the business rates multiplier £ million	2.5
Council Tax Requirement excluding parish precepts £ million	134.2
Improved Better Care Fund £ million	0.5
New Homes Bonus £ million	1.9
Social Care Grant[3] £ million	5.4
ASC Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund[4] £ million	0.9
ASC Discharge Fund £ million	0.1
Services Grant[5] £ million	0.6
Funding Guarantee £ million	1.1
Core Spending Power £ million	**161.9**

These additional figures summarise some of the various grants Wokingham Borough is getting this year. It does not include the large grant for schools or the funds for special purposes like transport and roads. It reminds us that there is a grant for social care, a grant for discharge from hospital, and a Better Care fund grant in response to lobbying for more money for social care beyond the general resources. It also sets out the funding guarantee top up and compensation for business rates as well as the main funding settlement spending capacity.

The nationalised railways fail passengers

All too often the largely nationalised railway lets us down. On frequent strike days there may be no trains. On other days there may be delays and cancellations. There are bad weather days when service is impeded or cancelled.

The railway has lost its big five day a week commuting business. It used to overcharge this captive audience whilst discounting much of the leisure and pleasure business it used to try fill the off peak trains. It is having difficulty adjusting to a two three days a week in the office model, and to the more flexible hours of many. It is reluctant to make more changes to handle events and leisure travel more enthusiastically.

Before lockdown the average fare was £6.27 and the average subsidy £3.73 per ticket. Since lockdown the average fare has fallen to £6.12 and the average subsidy gone up to £7.51. So subsidy has doubled whilst the value of the fare has gone down.Why do taxpayers have to pay for people often with more income and leisure time than them to get cheap tickets?

I was on the committee that reported on how to privatise the railway. I disagreed with the majority report which proposed the system they adopted. They recommended splitting track ownership from trains and wanted a monopoly track company for the whole country.So Railtrack was born. It was nationalised by Labour. As I expected the monopoly track company did not perform well, though it was a bit safer than BR. It was nationalised following a bad crash brought on by track failures. As a monopoly it was more interested in revenue from existing assets than in evolving and growing the network.

Today we need railway management who can analyse current trends in commuting, leisure passenger travel and above all freight. We need a new pattern of use geared to maximising use, increasing revenues and cutting subsidies.

I will discuss the model I urged based on track and train together in line or regional companies facing competitive challenge in a later piece.

Nationalisation is as bad as it ever was

With Labour wanting to complete the nationalisation of the railways and the Conservatives hesitating to privatise, it is time to revisit the general case against public ownership.

The UK’s nationalised industries have been bad for customers. Lacking competition they put up prices too much, deliver poor service and fail to innovate in a customer friendly way. They are bad employers, often shedding labour by redundancies as they lose customers. They milk taxpayers, sending all their losses to the Treasury to pay. They make ill considered, expensive and badly managed investments in new capital like HS 2.

The Post Office has behaved disgracefully towards its employees. It bungled a computerisation programme. It has plunged into losses.

HS 2 has been subject to huge cost overruns and then faced a series of cuts to its scope to try to contain costs to three or four times original budget.

The nationalised part of the railway, all the track, signals and stations, has inflicted misery on passengers with endless signal failures, unplanned track maintenance, leaves on the line and the wrong kind of snow. Many of the delays and cancellations stem from nationalised mismanagement.

Nat West/RBS in public ownership has lagged other banks and performed badly.

The Bank of England has proved to be the UK's worst asset manager racking up £170 bn of losses on so called safe bonds it paid too much for.

The nationalised roads offer too little capacity and are bedevilled by temporary closures, congestion, slow running and potholes.

Governments can promote electric vehicles but cant make people buy them

Hertz's decision to sell off 30% of its recently acquired EV rental fleet shows that it is hard work renting out an EV. Early buyers of Teslas to electrify their offering they will now pause their buying and help push second hand EV prices down. More owners of EV s will lose more money on their purchase.

Many renters worry about range. EV owners are finding repair and insurance costs are high, whilst losses on resale are big. Car manufacturers are throttling back output and wanting more subsidy to go into the battery business.

The UK government should pause its EV subsidies and let the market sort out an EV enough people want to buy or rent.

My Intervention on the UK Internal Market SI – 20% of goods

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

It has been said that maybe 80% of goods moving from GB to NI will be able to use the internal market lane. Why will 20% not be able to do so, and why would the UK Government, who I was told were in charge, not want to ensure that practically all goods use the internal market lane?

Mr Baker (The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office):

With great respect to my right hon. Friend, with whom I have gone a very long way in this cause, he might like to revisit the text. The point is that the 80% of goods going on that route are staying in Northern Ireland; they are UK goods. The other 20% are goods that are going on to the European Union. That is the point: 80% is UK internal market trade, and 20% is trade going on to the European Union.