

Strategic highways

I met Highways England yesterday to talk about the state of the national network.

A successful modern economy needs sufficient motorway capacity to allow easy transport of goods and people. Motorways are our safest and fastest roads. Like railways they segregate traffic moving in opposite directions to avoid head on crashes, and like railways they prevent pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable users from using them. Their junctions can flow freely, with easy access and exit when capacity allows. Motorway travel should allow greater levels of fuel efficiency and improved journey times.

Highways England controls most of our motorways and our major trunk roads. Most of the roads it looks after are dual carriageway or better. Many have grade separated interchanges. The problem is we do not have enough principal route capacity. We have invited in many more people who need roads for their own travel and for the supply of the goods they need. As our economy and the individuals in it enjoy rising real incomes so they can afford to spend more and need more goods supply. We need to be realistic about the amount of capacity we need.

In my local area Highways England has just increased capacity on the eastern part of the M3 by 33% and plans to do the same for the eastern section of the M4. We also lack north-south capacity. There the A 34 trunk experiences congestion as lorries struggle with inclines, whilst we do not have a good sized bridge over the Thames to the east of Reading.

Nationally there are various routes that lack sufficient capacity. We need a better south coast highway, better links to the east coast ports, a completed dual carriageway to the south west on the A 303 and similar extra capacity in the North and Midlands.

Highways England pointed out that there is now more money for road improvement, and the government does understand the need for more capacity. I would be interested to hear your priorities for improvement.

European Parliamentary Elections

The government has made clear no money should be spent on the next set of European elections by UK authorities by making the following statement:

In a recent answer to Parliament, they said:

“Following the EU Referendum and the European Union (Notification of

Withdrawal) Act 2017, the UK will cease to be a member of the European Union on 29th March 2019. At that point, we will no longer sit at the European Council table or in the Council of Ministers and we will no longer have Members of the European Parliament. We will therefore not be taking part in the European Parliamentary elections in 2019 which are currently scheduled to be held from 23rd to 26th May 2019.

Given this, the Government does not consider it is necessary or a prudent use of taxpayers' money for Returning Officers and electoral administrators to make the usual preparations for the conduct of a European Parliamentary poll in 2019. The Government does not intend to make an Order setting the date of the poll for the European Parliamentary elections in 2019.

We also do not intend to undertake the usual preparations for Information Exchange between the UK and the Member States in respect of EU citizens (including UK citizens) living in another Member State.

In due course, the intention is to repeal the underlying pieces of legislation providing for the holding of European Parliamentary elections in the UK under the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. Once that Bill has Royal Assent, all associated legislation will be repealed through Parliament by means of a Statutory Instrument made under powers in the Bill. We estimate that not holding European Parliamentary elections will save British taxpayers at least £109 million next year; this is in addition to the cost of the British contribution to the EU budget" (Hansard, 14 May 2018, PQ 143730, [link](#)).

The Government has already written to every local authority Returning Officer to inform them of the cancellation of these elections. It is the Government's position that it would go against our duties to taxpayers for any public body to spend money on such unnecessary administration.

The Electoral Commission is not accountable to the Government, but to Parliament, but I have written to the Electoral Commission to underline the Government's clear advice to election administrators."

[Time to take back control](#)

The Commons when it votes on the EU Withdrawal Bill has a simple decision to make. Will it take back control, as the majority wish, or will it seek to perpetuate the Puppet Parliament we have lived with for many years?

Will it side with the people, or with the peers? Does it understand the democratic mandate of the Referendum and the last general election, or does it think the EU and its most fanatic supporters are right to ignore such votes, to govern on with ears closed to the views of the voters?

The attitude of the Lords majority is sad to listen to. So many of them who allowed or encouraged the surrender of so much of our power of self government to Brussels have been fighting a rearguard action against reclaiming our right to democratic self government. These people do not even have the excuse that they sold our freedoms for a good price. They paid to give our freedoms away. They sought nothing of value for us in return. We sent the EU billions, all to enjoy a huge trade deficit with them which we can keep outside the EU for no price if we wish.

The endless debates in the Lords and the Commons over the past two years have repeated the depressingly negative campaign of Remain. They have not lined up to say the UK should enthusiastically plunge into full EU membership, joining the Euro which is the central part of the project, and welcoming full control of our borders and migration policy by the EU. They have not painted a picture of a more successful and more prosperous UK within the EU, and been unwilling to accept that the journey to political union would mean the UK being an important province in an EU empire.

Instead they have concentrated on the short term, generating a set of fears about immediate prospects for exports and imports, and claiming that their beloved EU will deliberately spike their own trade with us to prove a point. What kind of people do they think we are? Why do they think we would believe such nonsense? Why do they think we should be scared by the few wild threats the EU occasionally makes to fuel Remain dreams?

It is extraordinary that so many of the people given the great honour of sitting in the Lords and helping make our laws have such a low opinion of what we can do for ourselves, and such a high opinion of the governing capacity of the EU. The logic of their view should be their own abolition, as they clearly think most of our laws should come from Brussels, and think the EU is a better judge of policy, expenditure priorities and regulation than we can ever be. It is time for the Commons to tell them this is a great country with great future potential. It is high time we are self governing again. That is what the votes on June 12th will be about. The Lords do have an important role to play in a self governing UK, but not in a region of the EU.

Heathrow expansion

The government's announcement that in principle it backs the idea of a new runway at Heathrow is likely to lead to a Parliamentary debate and vote soon.

I would be interested to hear constituents' views on this topic.

I have always accepted the general need for more airport capacity in the greater London region, but have not concluded on how this could be best achieved. Some think Gatwick could be expanded rather than Heathrow, some have argued for an entirely new airport to the east of London, some for

incremental increases in capacity at a range of south eastern airports.

The government has concluded in favour of Heathrow expansion as the current hub airport with plenty of additional demand for slots and routes. The statement was brief and left many details to be sorted out a later date. Those seeking to expand the airport will need to demonstrate how they will hit demanding environmental targets. They will need full planning permission which will doubtless be a long and complex task to secure, with scope for people affected to seek changes or improvements to any individual proposal. The government and proposers of Heathrow expansion will need to strengthen and improve transport links into the airport, as these are already under pressure from present levels of air traffic.

I have lobbied extensively about the present level of aircraft noise, which increased following changes to routes made without consultation by NATs in 2014. The Statement did say that they wish to reduce aircraft noise, and propose to ban night flights for six and a half hours every night. The work I am doing on reducing aircraft noise does not require airport expansion to go ahead, as it relates to noise of aircraft, flying styles, rates of climb and descent and other matters. I will continue to press for less noise whatever the outcome of the vote about whether to build a new runway in several years time.

UK and EU growth

The most recent retail sales figures for the UK showed a welcome boost in April. The three month on three month was only up 0.1%, as March was a poor figure. In the Eurozone the latest three month on three month figure for retail sales shows no growth at all, after a disappointing April.

Retail remains very competitive, with a lot of pressure on older brands trading from too many High Street locations. On line shopping expanded by 17.3% in the UK over the last year, taking business away from more traditional outlets.

The UK's PMI figure for services came in at 54 this month. This is similar to the Composite PMI for the Eurozone of 54.1.

There has been a slowdown in both the Eurozone and UK economies so far this year, with retail growth subdued. In the UK this is the result of the tighter money policy the Bank has been pursuing. The EU figures were compiled before the latest worries in markets about the situation in Italy.