

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.

[One cheer for the OBR](#)



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[Utilities and street works](#)

I met Thames Water today. They liked the idea that pipes and cables ought to be placed in a conduit adjacent to the highway but not under a main road, to avoid having to dig up the road and close it every time they need to maintain, mend or improve the system. They agreed that with new development it would be particularly easy to route utilities away from the main roads and to have them in a common carrier with controlled access, and that where replacements are being deployed there is also scope to reduce the amount going under main roads. I look forward to more progress.

Tariffs and trade

Tariffs can be damaging to trade. That is why I want us out of the EU customs union, because it imposes high tariffs on lower income countries wishing to sell us better value food. I want us to be able to negotiate a lower overall tariff package for ourselves than the EU wishes to do with the rest of the world. It is particularly foolish and unfriendly to levy high tariffs on food we cannot grow for ourselves because it comes from a non EU country.

I find it curious that the EU claims to be scandalised by Mr Trump threatening a 10% tariff on German cars which sell in large numbers into the US, when the EU itself imposes just such a 10% tariff on US cars into the EU. Germany runs a colossal trade surplus with both the UK, inside the EU tariff wall, and with the US, outside the tariff wall. Mr Trump identifies the asymmetric tariffs and some other barriers as one of the reasons the trade is so lop sided, and wishes to do something about it.

Meanwhile it is typical of the EU that they are telling the UK that we cannot exempt ourselves from the US steel tariffs, though we would probably be in a good position to do so on our own. It is reminder of why we need to get on with our exit so we do have control over these matters. I also read that the EU is still pursuing tax cases against us and argues that we owe them E2.7bn of underclaimed customs dues which the UK Treasury contests. We have lost a lot of revenue before from EU tax cases and now have to argue against making yet another additional payment to a body we are leaving. Clearly they think we should be levying higher tariffs on non EU imports than we think are owing because they wish to keep these products out, and to harm UK consumers.

This is not the wonderful free trade EU some think we must stay in at all costs.

How about some new subjects for media interviews about Brexit ?

The mainstream media seems to have got lost in repeats on their news and comment shows. Every day is Groundhog day. They do the Irish border story, the various alleged barriers to trade stories, and various sectors at possible risk stories. Most of it fans baseless fears or perpetuates misunderstandings of what the current position is and how WTO works. It usually assumes both that the EU will be out to damage their trade with us, and that they will have the power to do so even though we are no longer under their jurisdiction!

If they wish to do a Brexit story every day when there is precious little

news in these very slow moving negotiations. I have some thoughts on some new topics that many of us would be interested in. They could also provide a bit of balance.

Let's ask the various parties how they would like to spend the Brexit bonus, the £12bn we will save when we are finally out. And let's have some discussion on whether we should pay the EU additional money after 29 March 2019, and if so why and for how long.

Let's look at our options for designing a much better fishing policy for the UK once after March 2019 we have taken back control of our waters and fish stocks. How much more fish could we land in the UK and sell at home or for export, whilst doing a better job than the CFP has done on conserving stocks, owing to discards.

Let's get on with debating a modern UK farming policy, with an emphasis on how much more food we can grow for ourselves as we used to before entering the CAP.

Let's discuss which are the best prospects for new trade deals around the world, and will the government ensure we can sign these quickly once out of the EU?

The government is rarely asked about its leaving preparations, and the Opposition rarely asked about what it wants the country to do with its new freedoms once out.