

Technical and financial changes for personal travel

There are two possible revolutions for personal travel. The first is more people switching from owning to hiring a vehicle when they need one. The second is self driving cars removing the need for a driver.

The average UK private car travels less than 8000 miles a year. This means it is only in use on the road for 11 days a year. For the remaining 354 days it is parked.

If we went over to hiring in a car when we need one the numbers of cars could fall by 80% and still leave unused vehicle capacity to allow for non use overnight, for areas of low demand and for maintenance of vehicles. This would have major consequences for car makers, for tax revenue from vehicle ownership, and for the need for parking.

In practice it is easy to see more city dwellers opting to rent not own, but it is less likely to catch on in rural areas where people depend on cars and where it is more difficult guaranteeing hire car availability when needed.

The move to self driving vehicles will also take time. Legislators are not yet persuaded that the technology of the automated vehicle hits acceptable safety standards, and fitting automated cars onto roads with cars with drivers poses problems. We will move to a world where the car increasingly drives itself but a person is needed to remain in charge.

Parking is a big issue. We need to make more off road parking provision all the time we run on our current car ownership model. We have insufficient road capacity, so we need to work to get parked vehicles off the highway.

Views on road safety and capacity improvements for Wokingham Borough

The government has asked each local Highways authority to identify and improve a strategic network of main local routes. It is making money available for highways improvements to this network. Part of the rationale is to reduce use of the national strategic network for shorter trips through use of a motorway for just one or two junctions instead of using more direct local roads for these purposes.

The first task for Wokingham Borough is to define its strategic network.

I have put together some draft suggestions on how Wokingham might identify its local strategic network and would be interested in your thoughts.

The nature of the Boroughs main roads

Wokingham's routes are busier east west than north south. This reflects the need of many to travel into the County centre at Reading or to go to Bracknell, to the cluster of towns west of London and to London itself in the east. East-west travellers have a choice of A329 M, A 329, and A4 as well as having the M4 to the north and the M3 to the south. North south travel is badly impeded by the east west railways lines from Paddington to Reading and Waterloo to Reading, and by the west east flowing Thames to the north of the Borough. The network has only one two way bridge over the river at Henley, where capacity is badly impeded by traffic lights at the north end of the bridge, and a one way at a time river bridge in Sonning. In Wokingham there is only one underpass bridge to the train line to Crowthorne on the A321 and that is not wide enough to take two lorries at the same time. There are 3 level crossings which cause major congestion.

The main North-south A road, the A321 should be included in the network, as it connects the Borough to Oxfordshire by the only adjacent two way river bridge starting in the Borough at Henley. It goes down to the Blackwater towns, the A 30 and by extension the M3 to the south. .

The A329 M and its extension, the A3290 should also be included. It is the heaviest used local road with two lane capacity in each direction. It runs between east and west, connecting Bracknell to east Reading. It ends at the river where Berkshire has always wanted a river crossing, but Oxfordshire has not.

The A 327 runs from Fleet in Hampshire with a western tilt to Reading going through Arborfield and Shinfield, two expanding villages. It is currently subject to by pass upgrades and will be an important route for travel into and out of Reading. It warrants inclusion.

The A329 east west road links Bracknell to Reading via Wokingham Winnersh and Earley, all busy settlements. This is also being upgraded and warrants inclusion given the usage.

The A 4 is another east-west route that used to be a trunk road. Since adoption as a local road its capacity has been cut by traffic management measures and speeds slowed. As this is not in my constituency I do not express a view on whether this should be included.

The A33 Southampton to Reading road has been detrunked and runs to the west of the Borough into Reading. It has already attracted substantial investment upgrading to its Berkshire section to dual carriageway. It should also be part of the local strategic network.

Safer junctions and less road congestion

The Transport Secretary has rightly identified the need for more capacity on Council strategic road networks to complement the increase of capacity being achieved through the governments investment in more capacity on the national network. I am encouraging Wokingham and West Berkshire to come up with schemes and bid for cash to take advantage of this initiative.

Much of the congestion occurs at junctions. Mixed use junctions are also a place of maximum danger of accidents where cars, lorries, buses, cycles and pedestrians can get in each other's way. The more that can be done to provide safe separate routes for cyclists and pedestrians at main road junctions the better. The more that can be done to segregate turning traffic from traffic going straight on a main road, the safer the junction and the better the flow.

My local observations confirm my view that roundabouts usually increase capacity compared to light controlled cross roads. On the A329 Wokingham to Reading Road the busy junction with the Woosehill spine road normally flows well with a roundabout. In contrast the Winnersh crossroads, a little west of the Woosehill turning has a four way phased light set which causes traffic jams most of the day. The Earley peripheral road also flows well most of the time with a series of roundabouts. The jams occur at the main junction with the A 329 with light controls on the roundabout. This I accept is a busier junction anyway which poses additional design issues.

The best example of a roundabout scheme which has greatly improved flows and increased safety is the new junction with the A30 for the Eversley Road A 327. It should be an example for other schemes. Where roundabouts cannot be fitted light junctions need segregated right hand lanes, short phase right turn sequences, and priority phasing for the main route and flow at the junction. Where there is a main road with side roads the main road should always be green unless traffic sensors detect traffic wishing to join from the sides.

The BBC Today programme recycles the trade deal scare

I awoke to the one sided comment that prices will rise as we will lose access to the EU 's trade deals when we leave. Both the EU and the UK has to confirm with the other party to any given trade deal that we wish to continue as before after seperation. I do not know of any country wanting to end these

arrangements with either the rest of the EU or with the UK!

The UK government is discussing this with all the relevant countries to ensure continuity.

Once out of the EU we can unilaterally lower or remove the tariff on anything we like.

Travelling sense

Just before Christmas the government floated the idea of charging lorries for road use instead of some of the current forms of taxation they pay. There was a suggestion they are looking for a way of ensuring that foreign trucks pay a fair contribution for the use of our roads. At the moment a foreign lorry pays no VED and can avoid fuel duties by arriving with a nearly full tank and leaving nearly empty. In opposition I and others proposed a Brit disc to ensure foreign trucks paid a charge like VED to level the playing field.

Some think this reform idea is a way for the Treasury to get ahead of the rise of the electric vehicle which will eliminate a lot of fuel duty revenue. The government, however, has made clear it is not considering applying this reform to cars and light vans, so it is not the solution to the rise of the electric vehicle undermining the motoring tax base.

We have long experienced heavy taxation from a mixture of VED and fuel taxes on motoring which far exceeds the cost of monopoly provision and regulation of roadspace. No government is going to find an easy way of substituting revenue from sources other than motoring. Most governments positively favour taxing road travel as they see it as a problem rather than as a freedom and an economic solution for the supply of goods and services.

I am planning several blogs to explore how we can live with the car and van, enjoy the flexibility they offer, and find revenue streams as technology and regulatory requirements change the shape of personal travel. The change to electric if governments follow through with this demand poses one set of difficulties.

Larger issues would be posed if the market took us over time to many more relying on hired in or time share vehicles rather than each owning their own car. Widespread adoption of hire in would mean a large reduction in the size of the car fleet, with obvious consequences for VED and other per car levies.