

The Today programme condemns populism

I had hoped with Guest editors the Today programme would seek to reconnect for just a day or two with the taxpayers, motorists and Eurosceptics it regularly castigates the rest of the year. I should have known better. This morning they have just given an interview with an “expert” who told them that people voting for “populist” parties threatened the underpinnings of liberal democracy in Europe. So there we have it. People voting against the EU and Euro establishment in their countries are anti democratic forces. Why wasn't the expert asked why in the EU you are only allowed to vote for what the Establishment thinks is right? Why do voters have to vote again when they get the answer to referendums wrong according to the Establishment? What should voters do when traditional parties remain wedded to Euro austerity policies?

Euro papers withheld

There's a surprise! The release of government documents includes delays to the release of European Exchange Rate Mechanism papers and a block on the release of certain Euro papers relating to 1992 when we dropped out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. This was the biggest economic policy error of the last quarter of the twentieth century in the UK. The Establishment and main political parties united to visit this disaster on us. It led to falling house prices, a big rise in unemployment, closed factories, bankrupt businesses, all in the name of European integration. The irony is it delivered what Project Fear wrongly said our vote to leave the EU would deliver in the winter of 2016-17! No wonder the Remain establishment is shy about revealing more of what happened then.

Personal travel

I was surprised by the way several contributors misread yesterday's post. It was a piece about how technology and changing lifestyles might affect personal transport in the future. It was not an attack upon personal choice or on the motorist. Use of a car is essential for most people today to get them to work or their children to school or to go to the shops. It is only in large cities like London where public transport offers a frequent and flexible service that more people find it practical to do without owning a car.

The government does need to do more to improve road safety and reduce congestion. I have sought to show how these twin aims can be mutually reinforcing and need not be in conflict in the way some suggest.

Short term and relatively cheap options include permitting and encouraging more off road parking, optimising phasing on traffic lights, creating segregated right hand turning lanes, and creating more pavements and cycleways away from main vehicle carriageways.

Dearer options include bypasses, more bridges over railway lines and rivers which act as barriers cutting road capacity especially into towns and cities.

The highways authorities need to offer safer and better solutions for school set down and pick up instead of encouraging parking on busy roads close to schools at peak times of day. They need to use more roundabouts and fewer light sets. They should require replacement and new utility pipes and cables to be laid away from the main highway in accessible conduits to stop the need to dig up the road for maintenance and replacement.

The government is asking each Highways authority to identify and improve a local strategic road network. This is a good initiative with money for suitable improvement projects.

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 bypass 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.