

Artificial Intelligence

Whether we like it or not, Artificial Intelligence is going to make big advances and huge changes to business . I see many wins from it, enabling as it will a productivity advance and a quality advance in many clerical, administrative and analytical functions. It is a greatly enhanced Google Search facility and an improved Microsoft software package with more capacity to help. Like all such big families of invention it will costs us some old jobs but throw up many new ones.

Some worry that it will be used by the criminals and the tyrants for evil purposes. That is of course possible, just as they use current computers and communications systems to try to disrupt our lives, steal from us and threaten us. We will still need a police force in the age of AI, and that force will need to be AI savvy.

I would not leap into legislating to regulate the businesses and create new offences. It is too early to know if that might be needed and what shape it might take . In the meantime be reassured. Theft, fraud, sexual exploitation, terrorism and violence are all against the law. The police can still track and arrest even if they are using some AI as part of their crimes. Using AI will also offer a new way to detect them as use of computers leaves footprints back to the original criminal user.

The issue we should be discussing is why are the world's three dominant AI/Cloud computing companies all US? It is good news there is lively competition to control costs for the users and drive faster innovation from Microsoft, Alphabet Google and Amazon Web Services. It should alarm the EU and worry us that no large company from this side of the Atlantic is seriously in the game and gaining substantial market share.

The BBC and world media

The meeting of the 1922 Committee with the Director General of the BBC on Wednesday evening was a private meeting and covered a wide range of topics before we had to vote in divisions. It led me to some more thoughts on the BBC and our media future which I would like to share more widely.

The BBC has an annual turnover of just £ 5.7bn. Whilst it remains an important presence in UK media, with access to substantial tax revenue in the form of the licence charge for watching live tv, it is a small presence worldwide. The global non UK activities earned just £2bn last year by charging users.

Netflix started up in 1997. It now has a turnover of \$32 bn or 4.5 times

that of the BBC. Amazon Prime Videos business is comparatively recent but already has a turnover larger than the BBC. Disney with a worldwide total entertainment turnover of \$82 billion also has a tv turnover as large as the BBC without any preferential terms or tax in a particular country.

The BBC assures us it has a fine reputation abroad and it has ambitions to have a more influential world presence. To do so it needs to understand why the great US media corporations have been so successful at exploiting new technologies for dissemination of services and how they have captured the attention and the money of so many foreign viewers.

The BBC has a good back book of programmes and archival material from news to cultural events. It has plenty of expensive talent on its books. It commissions programmes from a range of independent producers. If it expanded its global business more rapidly this cost base could be defrayed over many more paying customers, and talent could be paid well out of the growing audience and revenue base.

Leaving aside the tax financed UK traditional business, the global/studios business could be expanded rapidly. To do so its ring fencing would need to be strong so no subsidy was paid across from UK taxpayers. It can have its own balance sheet with arrangements for accessing the back materials and the talent held by the UK BBC to the mutual benefit of the two arms of the Corporation. There could be talent sharing and revenue sharing arrangements where they were working jointly.

Some say the world BBC is held back by lack of money. With its own ring fenced balance sheet and revenue stream from overseas sales that should be easy to remedy. BBC Global could borrow against its talent, programmes and audience figures as it grows its own equity. It could bring in minority outside shareholders with equity contributions.

The UK has to earn its living. It should not sit and watch as Netflix, Amazon, Disney and the other US giants dominate the world media markets. With its reputation and established library the BBC should be able to help build one of the world giants of the new media age. Its immediate task should be to put another nought on the number for its non UK turnover. The UK has done well at building a bigger domestic film industry and has some competitive flowering in domestic tv and radio, but needs to add a media giant to the repertoire to make a difference to our balance of payments and living standards.

[Update from Great Western Regarding Proposed Railway Ticket Office](#)

Closures

I have received the update below from Great Western regarding the proposed changes to ticket offices. They have said that they have made a number of key changes to their proposals based on some of the responses they have seen from the consultation although the final results are not yet in.

Dear John

Just a quick note to remind you that Transport Focus and London TravelWatch will be reporting back on their consultation on how tickets are sold at stations next Tuesday (31 October).

We will send a further update then, but we thought it would be helpful to send a reminder and a quick update on the work we have been doing in the meantime.

We have been listening to stakeholders and colleagues and to Transport Focus and London TravelWatch who have been sharing key themes from the consultation, and as a result we have made a number of key changes to our proposals:

- **Digital First, Not Only:** We have changed our proposals so that retail trained staff will have handheld sales devices to support self-service ticket machines. This means customers will still find every type of ticket they can get today at a station in the future and staff will be available to help with ticket advice if needed. In addition, we will upgrade our ticket machines to sell a wider variety of tickets and more tickets will become digitally available. Staff will also be able to help switch to buying digitally via our app or other options like pay-as-you-go/CPAY
- **Staffing Hours:** We are extending our staffing commitment so that retail trained colleagues will be on hand for the same hours as today at all stations with a ticket office, ready to help customers when they need it
- **'Help at Hand' Points:** We have proposed the introduction of accessible, clearly marked Welcome Points with 'Help at Hand' buttons providing a direct link to a retail-trained staff member should they not be immediately available
- **Cash availability:** We are proposing to add cash payment options to our self-service Ticket Vending Machines

We have also looked at the timing of the changes. Before any change is made, we will first need to agree our revised plans with the Department for Transport, we will then discuss the changes with our colleagues and their Trade Unions, complete updated Equality Impact Assessments for each station and a Crime and Vulnerability Risk Assessment.

Once this is complete, we propose to reduce the number of windows available at stations with multiple windows, bringing those staff closer to customers on the station floor. They will help customers use self-service machines, or

digital purchase, while also helping with any queues for tickets with their handheld ticket devices. We will review progress before making further changes, including bringing staff from single window stations out from behind the glass, with handheld devices, and the pace of change will be driven by changes that customers make in how they buy their tickets.

Best Wishes

Great Western Railway

Agenda for roads

Now that government wants to help drivers get about there are ideas they can adopt to make the vision a reality.

Talking to Ministers, they say they do want highways authorities to review traffic light phasing and controls.

It would be good if all sets could be equipped with sensors so lights responded to different traffic conditions. At low use times lights should shift to green when any vehicle approaches a red light when there is no traffic using the green. At normal times green time should be proportionate to traffic flows.

If these systems cannot be used the phasings should be adjusted to reflect normal use patterns. For example, the lights at the junction of the Embankment with Vauxhall Bridge Road, a busy London junction, offer twice as long on green for traffic approaching from over Vauxhall Bridge. This produces unused green time in that direction and permanent queues on the other three. Why?

The government should allow traffic turning left at a light controlled junction to treat the red light as a Stop sign. Drivers should stop as now on red but if the turn was free of vehicles and pedestrians then they should be able to proceed.

Ministers approving schemes to alter road layouts and junctions should not approve or fund Council schemes which are designed to get vehicles off the road. Of course we need better routes for cycles and safe paths for pedestrians. Taking roadspace off vehicles on busy main roads is not the way to achieve this aim.

Roundabouts are usually better than light controlled junctions. They should usually be preferred.

Where right turning traffic can easily get stuck Councils should be encouraged to widen the carriageway to create a right turning lane to free

traffic going straight on or turning left.

Councils should exercise greater discipline over timings and duration of works that entail digging holes in roads. This should include their own Highways department.

Councils should move to getting utilities under verges and pavements in conduits with locked access to avoid the continuing need to dig up roads to repair pipes and wires.

Stopping the small boats

I am pleased to report one of the hotels being used for migrants in my constituency will be vacated by the Home Office soon. The Minister reported progress with stemming the flow. He argued that it was not fair that groups of young men sought to circumvent the legal ways of entry and to take more of the places available for asylum seekers by refusing to use the legal channels.

He was able to tell us that numbers crossing from the continent are down by a fifth this year compared to last. The French authorities have co-operated more in stopping boats from departing French shores. The new arrangements with Albania have stopped most of the flow from there and have enabled the return of many to that safe country. The government awaits the result of the appeal to the Supreme Court over sending people to Rwanda who seek illegal entry to the UK. The processing of claims has been improved.

They have intensified work to find, charge and prosecute the illegal gangs operating the boats. It is good there has been some progress but clearly more is needed by pursuing all these options, and processing claims more rapidly.