

# Boris gets serious – now he needs to get radical

The Conservative Mayoral candidate's transport plans show depth but he needs to go much further to solve London's problems



TONY TRAVERS

**B**ORIS Johnson's new transport manifesto is less a radical plan to improve London's transport than a heroic attempt at political positioning. Having been relentlessly portrayed as a lightweight and a buffoon, this document is written in such a way — and at such a length — as to suggest a big effort is now under way to show that, if elected, there would be substance to a Conservative mayoralty. This is an attempt to move on from "clown king" Boris to a credible "Mayor Johnson".

The Tory transport proposals include speeding up traffic by re-phasing traffic lights, abandoning the £25 congestion charge for 4x4s, a new Routemaster to replace bendy buses, orbital bus routes in the outer boroughs and more police at train stations. There would be fare enforcement on bendies and a requirement that under-18s who abuse their free travel concession would have to do community service to win back the perk.

A Johnson mayoralty would also consult the residents of the western extension of the congestion charge as to whether or not they wished to keep it. He would also reinstate "tidal flow" at the Blackwall Tunnel. There would be renewed efforts to air-condition the Tube and to run it later on Friday and Saturday nights. There would be a network of rental bicycles, as in Paris. The Freedom Pass for pensioners would be "untouchable". Ken Livingstone's commitment to extend the Freedom Pass concession to 24 hours a day is repeated by the Johnson plan. Finally, Tube ticket office closures would be halted.

Taken together, the Boris transport manifesto is mildly "Right wing" on law and order, in that there will be additional policing, live CCTV and new punishments. But apart from that, it is without political leanings. The contents are designed to convince voters that Johnson has joined the sensible party.

And that's it. The sole commitment on fares is to lobby commuter rail operators to reduce them. There is no detail about the future of Travelcards and Oyster fare levels. The traffic-light proposals might speed up vehicles — but even this measure would do little more than slow down the rate of increasing congestion. A more emphatic commitment might have promised to get rid of at least some traffic lights altogether.



Rebecca Reid

Don't mind the gap: either explicitly or by implication, Johnson would leave virtually all Labour's transport policies in place

There is no doubt that Livingstone has so far been the "serious" candidate in this year's election. We know where Ken stands on the congestion charge, bendy buses, cycling and the environment. Passenger numbers have surged during the Livingstone years at City Hall. The East London line and Crossrail have been given the go-ahead. Plans have been prepared for a major new bridge in east London. On the other hand, the incum-

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bent is probably weakest when it comes to providing evidence of value for money. The higher cost of improved bus services and the billions tipped into the failed Tube PPP have been vast in relation to the growth in passengers.

Either by explicit commitment or by implication, Johnson would leave virtually all of Livingstone's policies in place. Apart from the flow of traffic at Blackwall Tunnel, traffic-light re-phasing, new ways to pay the congestion charge, some orbital bus routes and a new system of real-time bus mapping, there is little in the Conservative manifesto that will not appear in Labour's. Continuity would be the most visible consequence of a change from Livingstone to Johnson.

Moreover, if there were a change of Mayor, there is little doubt most of Trans-

port for London's senior managers would stay in post. Equally, Johnson would be wise to keep key officials in position.

The Tories' transport manifesto is aimed squarely at showing Londoners they can vote for Boris without the sky falling in. The document is full of referenced sources, stressing its solidity. Voters are expected to read the plans and feel comforted that they could vote for him without threat to their Tubes, buses or fares. But given the gap in experience between Livingstone's decades at the top of London government and Johnson's newness, the Conservatives need to go further than this document.

Who will chair TfL? Who will be responsible for transport policy at City Hall? It surely won't be Boris himself. We should know this before the election — not just after our votes are cast.

Frankly, London needs radical action to improve its transport systems. The theoretical promise of Crossrail in 2017 is still a long way off. The outcome of the £30 billion Tube PPP remains almost invisible. Since 2003, £6 or £7 billion has glugged into the Underground's track, signals and stations, but there is no evidence of fewer power failures, train breakdowns and signal glitches.

We need a clear sense of how the PPP billions would be used in future. Shifting resources from elaborate station upgrades to improved track and signals would be an obvious step.

The trades unions remain untamed. Would Johnson be willing to risk a long stand-off if this proved necessary to impose order? Fares are world-leaders by any measure. It is probably not possible to envisage much lower ticket prices but what would Boris's fares policy be — continuing Livingstone's "inflation plus one per cent" model, or less?

Then there is the issue of congestion. Using new technology, it should soon be possible to introduce a genuine congestion charge across a wider area of the city. Would Mayor Boris take that bold a step? There certainly needs to be a radical approach to the worsening sclerosis affecting roads beyond the centre. Would he extend Ken's effort to take the whole of the commuter railway into TfL control, with Tube-like train frequencies in south London and vastly better station staffing? What about creating better orbital rail routes by linking together national rail and Tube lines, in the way the East London line will?

Last week, Livingstone promised a tram along Oxford Street. Boris Johnson has also signed up to it. Such a project would be good but the capital needs far more of this kind of innovation — with more suburban tram schemes, too. It also needs to know how the candidates would tackle the big issues such as delivering rapid improvements to the Tube PPP and how to sort out the RMT, ASLEF and co. There is, as yet, little evidence of anyone having grasped the enormity of the challenge posed by London's dilapidated, embarrassing, transport systems.

There is a political sting in the tail of these transport plans. Johnson says that the "same old solutions are coming from City Hall, dripping with fatigue". But unless there are convincing new solutions coming from the Conservatives, too, such a criticism could come back, like a boomerang, to hit them. Johnson needs convincing and eye-catching ideas to solve London's transport problems — so let's hear them.

■ Tony Travers is director of the Greater London Group at the London School of Economics.

## Give up this urge to make all mummies look yummy

FIONA NEILL  
... AND INCIDENTALLY



AS SOMEONE whose definition of pampering includes a bi-annual leg wax and eyebrow pluck, I haven't lost much sleep in the postpartum years over my failure to look and dress like Victoria Beckham. Ever since I heard on good authority that Madonna exercises for five hours a day, I have felt liberated from pressure to have the kind of body in my forties that I didn't have half a lifetime ago.

It is an impossible goal, requiring a combination of time, money and genes that I don't possess. I live with someone who is happy for me to dwell on the Nigella Lawson side of curvaceous. Besides it takes more than two plates of steamed vegetables to get me through the day and I can't kick the 2pm chocolate habit.

But according to a YouGov and Netmums survey published last week I am in a minority. It found that on top of the befuddling juggle of work and family life that defines modern motherhood, almost 70 per cent of women confessed to feeling an overwhelming burden to look perfect, too. Yummy Mummy, with her washboard stomach and perfect wardrobe, has entered our psyche.

In our rational moments, we know that behind these celebrity mums stands an army of personal trainers, nutritionists, nannies and stylists. And behind the Yummy Mummies in the school yard there lies a diluted combination of these same factors. It was heartening to see that the same group voted Victoria Beckham the most unrealistic role model for mothers, followed by Angelina Jolie and Madonna. This suggests that we realise that Victoria Beckham's appearance is unattainable and undesirable, but can't divorce ourselves from the fact it affects how we feel about our own bodies after childbirth.

A more puzzling question is why mothers have become like this. Is it because in the post-antibiotic era we have displaced worries about our children making it into adolescence with a fixation about our appearance? Or because of the current obsession with eternal youth? Does the advance of magazines with celebrities showing off their post-baby body have something to do with it? Is it because we live in an age where the status of motherhood is so low that we depend on how we look for our self-esteem?

I'm not immune to this trend, but nor am I consumed by it. I would like to be able to refer to my stomach in the singular but the invention of magic knickers has let me off the hook. And I think mothers have a responsibility to resist this pressure, not least for our daughters' sakes.

This kind of competitive pressure to look good is not so different from the burden of being a perfect housewife that consumed our 1950s counterparts. And in similar fashion, it is women, not men, setting these impossible standards. Just say no.

■ *The Secret Life of a Slummy Mummy* by Fiona Neill is out now in paperback (Arrow, £6.99).