

LETTERS to the Editor

Retailers benefit the most from concessionary fares

Roger Sexton is completely wrong in claiming that free travel for seniors is a massive subsidy to the bus industry (Letters *LTT* 17 Jun).

Before I was 60, if I went to nearby Keighley I would buy a £3.30 K-Day ticket. Now I keep the money, which eventually ends up in the retail sector. The bus company now gets about £1.50 for the return trip in the form of reimbursement paid by the Integrated Transport Authority. If I spend the £3.30 at Marks & Spencer's the Government gets back 66p in VAT, and if I spend it in Wetherspoons the Government gets 75p in alcohol duty, or about £1.41 (VAT + duty) overall.

Free travel is allowing better-off pensioners to use their cars less, cutting congestion and air pollution. Less well-off pensioners are getting out more and having more of a social life, although some may be walking less, which is for bad for their health.

The money saved by car owners and bus users will mostly end up in retail spending and this supports jobs and businesses, and hence communities. Retail is the big winner from this scheme, while many bus companies are losing out, resulting in some formerly commercial rural services being withdrawn.

If the Integrated Transport Authorities are trying to be fairer to the bus companies then they deserve praise. If this leads to better services it is the bus users who are better-off as a result.

Ray Wilkes
Shipley BD18

Give cyclists more road space as motorised traffic declines

I refer to the recent letters and articles about how to improve provision for cyclists. In the early 1980s, I ensured that the Greater Manchester structure plan contained a policy requiring the development of cycling routes and facilities. One of the intentions was to require the district councils to include such policies, and hopefully networks, in their local plans, and hence hopefully develop such networks, both in new developments and also through the many rural areas – containing country parks – that permeate the conurbation.

At the same time, when reporting on a trip by a delegation around Holland and Germany to view light rail systems (when we were developing the Manchester Metrolink scheme), I also reported on the Dutch policy of providing cycle routes throughout their urban areas, which has led to a high rate of cycle use.

Subsequently working in Kent on the development of Ashford International station for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, I gained acceptance of not only pedestrian routes to the station but also cycle routes, hopefully to link into a possible wider cycle network in Ashford.

A recent report has shown that journeys to work by bicycle are increasing, in the UK up from 57 million in 2006, to 73 million in 2010. It has also been reported that peak hour journeys by bike into the City of London are approaching double those by car in the peak period. Similar increases are being seen in many cities, including Bristol and York.

This growth needs to be built on by developing more specific facilities in urban areas.

Whilst over the past two decades we have seen the development of regional and national cycle routes, these cater basically for recreational use. Our urban areas have seen little done. In London, an area where cycle use is increasing, not least into the central area, we should consider using lanes of main roads, where vehicle flows are static and even decreasing, for cycle routes. This could also apply to other larger cities.

Philip Sulley
Maidstone
Kent ME18

Segregated cycle lanes: not essential for boosting cycling

Researcher Dave Horton of Lancaster University is calling for "continuous segregated cycling infrastructure on our busiest urban roads" ('Physically segregate cyclists from main road traffic, say researchers' *LTT* 17 Jun). He reached this conclusion after examining attitudes to cycling in areas of the country with the lowest number of trips made by bike. He also expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of 'soft' (and cheaper) measures such as behaviour change programmes and cycle training.

Dave presented his findings at the recent Cycling Communities conference hosted by Leicester City Council where he dismissed the on-going increase in cycling in London as an aberration.

In fact, it is exactly the measures Dave is sceptical about that have contributed to London's success as a cycling city. Transport for London's behaviour change programme includes the congestion charge and a raft of adverts on billboards and TV promoting cycling using positive images of people riding in London, many without cycle helmets.

In addition to actively marketing cycling, TfL has been funding adult cycle training for years. This training has been taken up by thousands of Londoners. Just before the last General Election the previous Government informed the cycle training sector that it was about to fund mass adult [Level 3] Bikeability training across the UK, which would have helped many more people to take to two wheels. Unfortunately, however, the current Government is only funding Level 2 training in schools.

Whilst many people cite fear as one of the main barriers to riding and conclude that they would only ride if they were segregated from cars, many are happy to move from these segregated/quiet routes once they've actually experienced what it is like to cycle on roads. Both TfL and London cycling campaigners prefer the 'whatever works' approach, calming traffic where appropriate to integrate riders into the traffic stream, segregating when that works, or building permeable networks of roads. All these hard measures are supported by marketing and cycle/driver training.

To sum up, the way forward is a holistic approach based on assessing what works to encourage cycling while minimising risk from the danger at source.

David Dansky
Head of training & development
Cycle Training UK
London SE16

Edinburgh: let buses cure your tram headache!

One option being ignored in Edinburgh's great tram debate seems to be the use of the priority routes and dedicated tracks, constructed so far, for a proper Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme. I don't mean a silly half-baked use of conventional single door buses with old-style fare payment on boarding and all the slowing down features of the conventional bus, which was in effect the Edinburgh guided busway.

I mean the rapid services that cities such as Curitiba, Brazil and Bogota in Columbia have installed for around a tenth of the cost of a tram or metro. Go online and seek out the Street Films videos on bus rapid transit (www.streetfilms.org/category/transit/).

SEND letters to be considered for publication to:
Local Transport Today, Apollo House,
359 Kennington Lane, London SE11 5QY
Fax: 0845 270 7961 Email: ed.ltt@landor.co.uk
(Letters may be edited)



Learning from a fiasco

As councillors in Edinburgh met this week to find a way out of the city's tram debate, which were growing for a public inquiry into the project, Amid all the reporting of the day-to-day problems besetting the project, it's easy to forget the big picture. The tram plans originated ten years ago as the core investment of a £1.1bn multi-modal strategy for the city, of which a congestion charging scheme was another vital part. The charge was supposed to come on stream in 2006, and the first tram line was predicted to be in 2009. But the public hadn't had their say when in 2006 the package was put to a referendum, the vote was a resounding no. The congestion charge was scrapped but the council was able to keep a £375m Scottish Executive grant (adjusted to £500m for inflation) to help fund the first lines serving the north and west of the city. Then, however, the project costs have risen and the scope of what is affordable has narrowed. The two lines became one shorter hybrid line which has now become an even shorter line with a £735m price tag.

Delays and cost overruns are nothing new for big infrastructure projects and an inquiry should want to know what procedures Edinburgh should use to minimise the risks. How, for instance, should the council and its delivery body Transport for Edinburgh (tie) approach matters such as cost marking with comparator projects to control costs and timescales? Questions about the council's decision to hive off delivery to an untested arms-length body, tie, and the appointment of a well-equipped body to manage the bid for the contract? And why were new tram directors appointed in 2006, 2007 and 2008?

Audit Scotland's role should not be under scrutiny. In 2007 it gave the tram project a bill of health, telling the Parliament, in words that sound incredible today, that the tram project had a "clear corporate governance structure, defined project management and organisational sound financial management and reporting, risk management procedures, and a project strategy aimed at minimising risk and delivering successful project outcomes". Did things only go wrong after 2007, as Labour claim? Should Audit Scotland not do its job properly?

An inquiry could shed light on many questions so long as it does not descend into a blame game.