

Some interesting statistics!

The health secretary, Alan Johnson said that the public threat posed by obesity in the UK is a “potential crisis on the scale of climate change”¹. We do not agree, but suggest that the solutions to obesity would help mitigate climate change: Locally produced seasonal organic food and reducing consumption, especially meat; using the car less and walking and cycling more.

- 25 % of car journeys in the UK are less than 2 miles distance²
- 58 % of car journeys in the UK are less than 5 miles distance²
- Between 1996 and 2006 walking trips have fallen by 20%³
- Between 1992 and 2004 cycling reduced by 6%⁴
- Between 1997 and 2004 car journeys in the UK increased by 9%⁴
- Between 1992/94 and 2004 car travel accounted for 80% of total distance traveled in the UK⁵
- Between 1992/94 and 2004 the proportion of primary-aged children walking to school fell from 61 to 50%, with an increase from 30 to 41% being driven⁵
- Between 1992/94 and 2004 the proportion of secondary school pupils walking remained at 44% whilst those being driven rose from 16 to 22%⁵

The cost (this does not include to the environment) of travelling

Since 1975:⁶

- The cost of running a car has fallen by 11%
- Bus and coach fares have increased by 66%
- Train fares have increased by 70%

Since 1997:⁷

- The cost of running a car has fallen by 6%
- Bus and coach fares have risen in real terms by 16%
- Train fares have risen in real terms by 7%

The War on Motorists

According to 'Forecourt Fuels': *'Despite the fuel tax escalator being abandoned in 1999, fuel prices continued to rise rapidly with a 2 pence a litre rise after the budget, contributing to the fuel protests. These rises were however argued by the government to be as a result of increasing oil costs rather than tax increases. This argument does hold some truth with statistics showing that although the overall price of fuel had risen, the percentage of tax stayed relatively constant and even dropped slightly that year.'*⁸

In March of this year, Friends of The Earth estimated that had the fuel escalator remained as an environmental policy, the UK would have reduced its emissions by approximately 14 million tonnes of CO₂ in 2005⁹. Following Gordon Browns 2007 budget, a Treasury spokesperson was asked to comment about a 2p increase in tax on fuel, in line with inflation. He said the tax rise sent *'the right environmental signals in*

*our fight against climate change” and “After these changes, by 2010 main fuel duty rates will be 11% lower in real terms than they were in 1999’.*¹⁰

- Tax on fuel during the fuel protest was 81.5%¹¹
- Tax on fuel in 2007, when a litre reached the £1.00 threshold was 63%¹²

The proportion of households that do not have access to a car fell from 30% in 1995/97 to 25% in 2005, with car access increasing in all income groups, except the highest. The largest increase has been in the lowest income group, where access increased from 34% to 47%.¹³

Commuting (onwards and upwards)

When I didn’t work from home I was lucky enough to be able to walk to work. You see the day starting, shopkeepers opening up, people walking their dogs, people buying the paper and a loaf of bread. You get to make eye contact with people, you can smell the air, hear birds (above the sound of traffic) and if you want to replicate that isolated feeling of being in your own space (a car), you can listen to your personal stereo. *‘The average driver spends a minimum of 70 days a year sitting in their car whilst on company business’*¹⁴, which might explain why they have to be so big; they need to be comfortable.

- The average worker in the UK commutes 2,906 miles a year by car¹⁵
- UK workers spend on average 45 minutes a day commuting, which is the highest in Europe¹⁵, to go along side our long working hours
- In the last decade, commuting passenger miles increased by 6%¹⁵
- The average distance travelled increased by 17% to 8.5 miles¹⁵
- Between 1991 and 2001 the percentage of people commuting more than 50km increased by 30%¹⁶

All transport is predicted to increase

Between 2000 and 2010:¹⁷

- Road traffic is predicted to grow by 26%
- Rail passenger kilometers are projected to rise by 33%
- Bus patronage is projected to rise by 11%

Roading, roading, roading, keep those doggies roading, roadbuild

The UK Minister of Transport, said *‘the experience of my Department is that the construction of a new road tends to result in a great increase in traffic, not only on the new road but also on the old one which it was built to supersede.’*¹⁸ The minister in question said this in 1938. In the seven decades since this observation, nothing has changed except for the amount of traffic and the amount of roads. This year the transport sector managed to exceed 500 billion km¹⁹ on this densely populated island.

There are currently 200 road building schemes in the UK at a current cost to the tax payer of £13 billion²⁰. The most famous or infamous of these is the M1 widening proposal that will widen 115 miles of motorway. The project has increased in price from £3 billion last year to £5.1 billion²¹. So, by our calculations, each mile will cost £4.4 million. It is currently estimated that widening of the M25 will cost £1.8 billion²².

Paragraph 9.145 of the Inspector's Conclusions in the Thames Gateway Bridge (TGB) Inquiry found: *'The evidence is that if the scheme were built, then there would be more traffic than if it were not built. In fact the aim of the TGB is to enable people to travel further within a given journey time, whether by public transport or by car. The whole justification of the TGB is based not on reducing the need to travel, but on increasing it.'*²³

In November 2007, the French environment minister said: *'For 30 years we've built a lot of roads and a lot of highways...that's over. Our road capacity is not going to increase further'*. At the same summit President Sarkozy proclaimed: *'We are the first generation in the history of humanity whose mission is to rescue the generation to come.'*²⁴

As a postscript, the American author Cormac McCarthy's latest novel is called 'The Road' and is based upon what might happen if the planets biosphere collapsed...It does so not from global warming, but from a nuclear winter.

Freight

We've probably all seen those car chases in American movies where the protagonist eludes the pursuer by just making it over a rail crossing, in the nick of time, (usually in the desert) whilst the cops or bad guys have to wait as carriage after carriage after carriage trundles past them, whilst they punch the steering wheel and cuss. There is usually a train bell chiming. And the point of this visual scene – trains can be long:

- Transporting goods by train instead of by road emits 92% less CO₂²⁵
- In the UK only 12% of our freight travels by rail²⁶
- An aggregate train can remove 120 HGVs from our roads²⁷
- HGVs are up to 160,000 times more damaging to our roads than the average car²⁸
- The government is considering whether to allow trials of 60 tonne, 25 metre HGVs on our roads. 50% longer and 33% heavier than current HGVs²⁹

The Freight Transport Association have said: *'Fuel represents a third of the operating cost of many lorries and significant increases in fuel prices are bad news for transport and thus for customers'* and *'Road transport costs constitute an ingredient in the price of almost everything we eat, drink and use every day and it is essential that we contain those costs as far as we are able'*³⁰. 90% of all transportation is fuelled by oil³¹.

This would seem to bring us back to Alan Johnson's comment about obesity or at least the suggested solutions to it. The United Kingdom needs a modal shift in transport to a localized supply of food and goods. We need to massively reduce our reliance on personalized transport and to greatly reduce transport of all kinds in-line with a

personal carbon allowance based on the principles of fairness and equity of Contraction and Convergence.

Peak Oil

2008 has been a volatile year for oil prices, to say the least, with crude oil nearly doubling in price in a year, to reach an all time high of \$147 a barrel in July³². Thanks to the financial crisis, reduced demand, by November, has contributed to a rapid decrease to below \$50 a barrel. As a result of the credit crunch and high oil prices, new car registrations fell by 21% in September³³.

This June, New Scientist reported a survey of oil industry experts, which found that most of them believe global oil supplies will peak by 2010³⁴. This should be of major concern given the global instability and panic surrounding the current financial crisis and talk of recession and comparisons with the Great Depression of 1930s. Especially when you consider a report published by the US Department of Energy in 2005 argued that unless the world begins a crash programme of replacements 10 or 20 years before oil peaks, a crisis “unlike any yet faced by modern industrial society” is unavoidable³⁵. Has our government been preparing for the topping point, given that they predict growth in transport, which seems somewhat contradictory with dwindling supplies and climate change mitigation? Not according to George Monbiot, who asked four government departments about this rather important issue last year. ‘No report has ever been commissioned by the British government on the issue of whether or not there is enough oil to sustain its transport programme’³⁶. 95% of all goods in our shops involve the use of oil. 95% of all our food products require oil³⁷.

Lastly and by no means leastly – Greenhouse gas emissions³⁸

- Land transport in the UK accounts for 22% of our carbon emissions
- 91% of these are produced on our roads
- The government forecasts that carbon emissions from our roads to increase by 5-7% this decade.

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