

LONDON TRANSPORT AWARDS DINNER SPEECH

27 FEBRUARY 2008

Thank you (David - for organising the Awards) (Jeremy - for hosting this evening).

Nice to be here – a great pleasure. It's a good time to speak. It's the season in the now-established London electoral four year cycle when two things happen.

- (a) Tim O'Toole, and I, wake up one morning to discover we have a comprehensive complete breakdown of Industrial Relations with the RMT, we didn't know about the previous evening when we went to bed, with, surprise, surprise, the threat of industrial action leading up to the election and, also
- (b) politicians, and aspiring Mayors and Assembly Members (not omitting present Mayors and AM's), start making statements and promises that sometimes strain the credibility of the sort of managers and professionals in this room tonight. One candidate said to me two weeks ago "please don't tell me too many facts-it might restraint my ability to make public statements". Hope will be regularly deployed over knowledge in the next several weeks, until 1st May.

Here's a thought – a politician who doesn't use buses talks about bunching – one who does hates long gaps. Watch for that in the next few weeks.

So it's a relief to me (if not you) to be able to take a view of transport across London from the professional, rather than a political, point of view.

Last night I was at 55 Broadway, home of London Underground, ancestral home of the old London Transport, at an Omnibus Society meeting (lots of duffel bags) addressed by James Freeman, CEO of Reading Transport, and an old friend. The meeting was held in the "District Room", which these days is a meeting room that holds 80, but which in my time was the Chairman's

Office – suitably grand, as befitted the first real public transport corporation in the world. On one wall is a very imposing portrait of Albert Stanley, Lord Ashfield, the father of London Transport who looks down severely at you, and in my case, at me, with what seems to me to be a particularly questioning look. I fell to thinking what he'd make of the state of transport in London in 2008 compared with the era of 1933-1947 in which he was in charge.

He would recognise a unified authority (though not covering as big an area as the old LPTB – Hitchin to Horsham). He'd recognise collaborative working with local authorities – more than 70 before the war, half that number now. He'd certainly recognise a degree of friction over who controlled the road network – LT never did, TfL only 5% now, and even in the thirties a continual argument over the road maintenance on tram roads. He'd see a neglected and under-invested National Rail network, and one where there was a common approach to fares pooling (wish we had that!), but not to fares or service levels.

He would recognise a common image, marketing, and systems that determined then as they do now how London develops, and what the opportunities and constraints in that development were. In his day it was Uxbridge and Barnet, in ours the Thames Gateway and Canary Wharf. And he'd recognise a five-year investment plan backed by borrowing – London Transport's first was 1935-1940, the next five year plan is TfL's 2005-2010 plan (and unlike his, interrupted by the war, we'll finish ours - unless George Bush goes mad very quickly!)

Ashfield was not a humble administrator (as I am!); he was a politician (he was in the Government in the 1st World War). It's no accident that what many historians refer to as the golden years of London's transport happened when he has a broad political control of London's transport authority – nor that his political acumen brought the ability for large scale borrowing for investment backed by government guarantee.

That parallel is, at least, striking. No one in this room can disagree that the remarkable change in the levels of investment and revenue funding in London's transport are as a result of having a strong political position of Mayor of London, with access to Government not available on a conventional public appointee/SofS relationship. And whatever you think of Ken's policies, he's taken the view that he should use transport as a primary tool for London's economic, social and environmental development, exploiting his powers to the full, pursuing bold policies, and utilising the funding streams sometimes more than completely.

The resultant achievements are exciting-and have brought world wide interest in London's successes. Wherever you look – 53% rise in bus patronage over 8 years, with the best reliability ever and a 20% increase in passengers per bus – the highest number of tube passengers ever (on a system which is full to bursting, with outdated trains and signals and still begging for more investment) – the early success of the London Overground – the twenty year success story of the DLR – the doubling over 8 years of the Borough transport grant from £82m in 99/00 to £161m in 2007/08, contributing to a 40% road casualty reduction, an 80% increase in cycling, a resurgence in interest and public valuation of public space – the 10m Oyster cards in circulation, the phenomenal and permanent success of the Congestion Charing zone - the resurgence of river transport to Canary Wharf and the O2, (I could go on).

Sure, it can be argued much of this is due to London's growth and role in the national economy – Eddington, more than a year ago, made an eloquent justification for Government to put transport investment where it would most help national economic growth (and, for the avoidance of doubt, that's here in London!). But the prominence and funding that has been the result of the new London governance system has propelled transport in London back to a second golden age, I'd say. Even Ashfield never got his hands on London's suburban railways – he certainly never aspired to nor promoted a new central London tube – and we have Crossrail – funded and finishing in Parliament shortly.

There are, of course, more challenges. The growth of congestion and the widespread use of motor vehicles in Greater London is very challenging, both in cost to business and environmental and climate change terms. We, and the boroughs, will continue to have to use existing policies and promote new ones to deal with both these issues and the proper and increasing demands for better public space. The Underground still needs comprehensive renovation and capacity improvements, and Crossrail is no substitute – you get nothing for the money at all until the day it opens. Crossrail's a massive job: the Olympics are on their way.

We still need to bring people into work and to schools in greater numbers – so we need big buses (I didn't say of what sort!), and we need to be realistic about, for example, topically, Oxford Street. (There may be only 7% of pedestrians use buses, but it'd be a challenge to get them all onto the Central Line). We need to give access to work, healthcare and education for those in social exclusion, and to educate both old and new generations to walk and cycle more. And we need to do all this within a bigger, longer term funding settlement (the biggest ever) to 2017 but still one which is finite and which will make us take some very difficult decisions on priorities, and the new Mayor some similar ones on fares.

So we should, I think, celebrate the first few years at least of a new golden age that I think Ashfield would also recognise. And the community in this room are the right people to enjoy this moment's reflection of success – operators, local authorities, staff and trade unions, community, consumers and pressure groups, business - none of this change has been done by the party alone – and the people here tonight represent the best of all those I've mentioned, and some of you will win an award for your efforts too. Ashfield gave the occasional gold watch to a bus driver or tube motorman – the prizes here are less valuable but rather more scientifically awarded!

I'd like to finish by going back to what James Freeman from Reading Transport was saying last night. He said that both the ruling party and their opponents on the Council had decided to keep the operation in public hands

because they were proud of what it did – and his job was to make sure it stayed that way. And I think we should all be similarly proud of what London's achieved so far in the new political era of the mayoralty. From saving people's lives through road safety, to resurfacing the northbound bore of the Blackwall Tunnel at no notice in 24 hours, from the heroism of the 7th July 2005, to the joy of the Grand Depart of the Tour de France, and particularity to the modal shift from car to bus of 5%, unique in a world city, we aren't perfect (and never will be) but we can be proud I think of what we've done so far. And, of course, the journey won't stop. The next two political months will culminate in a Mayor with a new mandate, and the one thing I hope is that whoever it is has bold policies to continue the transport progress of the World's greatest city. In the meantime, as I said, you're the best of the transport community in that city – so enjoy the evening and the awards!

Peter Hendy

27 February 2008