

Greater London Authority
People's Question Time
3 March 2010

Introduction

Navin Shah

Assembly Member for Brent and Harrow

Good evening. Welcome to the People's Question Time. I extend my warm welcome to Harrow and to the Mayor of London, Mr Boris Johnson. Equally I extend my welcome to the Chair of London Assembly, Darren Johnson, and my London Assembly colleagues.

Both Harrow and Brent are richly diverse boroughs with very strong community cohesion. As a Harrow resident, I am proud to belong to this area, which I call my home, my patch! I would also like to welcome all of you here tonight, it is really great to see such a good turn-out to these sumptuous, historic surroundings we have for us, for the People's Question Time.

In the main, the Mayor and London Assembly work together to improve the quality of Londoners' lives and see how best, what best, we can do for the great city that we live in and belong to. This is your show tonight; it is your opportunity to voice your concerns, raise issues that matter to you, to the Londoners, so please let us have those questions in due course.

On your seats, you all have the programme for tonight. That includes information about the London Assembly Members. It also tells you what responsibilities we individually have, and there is also a feedback form. By the way, there is a special incentive for you tonight: for those who return feedback forms, there are 250 mugs available on a first-come, first-serve basis, so get your mugs tonight when you give in your feedback forms.

To help the flow of discussion this evening the debate has been broken up, as it says in the booklet, into different topics. That is the order I will be taking questions on. As you can appreciate there is plenty to get through tonight, so please keep your questions short, concise, and to the point. Please do not go into big narratives, comments or speeches, otherwise we will be here forever, which is not going to happen. The same applies not only to the audience, but to the Mayor and my colleagues in the Assembly; be precise and to the point.

Incidentally, like the national question time, we do not have any prior information about any of the questions; neither the Mayor, nor the Assembly Members. I will generally direct my questions to the Mayor and then I may ask for the Assembly Members to respond as well, depending on the topic and the issue.

With so many people here tonight, you will also appreciate that we will not have time enough to take all the questions, but I will assure you that there will be written answers provided within six weeks. Please make sure you give your name and address if you leave questions behind, and you can add further questions when you leave, if you like.

In terms of the publicity of this PQT, highlights of this evening will be broadcast tomorrow evening at 18.30 on LBC news, 97.3 FM, and in full at 19.00 tomorrow on LBC news 1152 on digital radio. We also have a Podcast this evening on the LBC website, so you can go back and watch if you wish. We must finish tonight at 21.00.

Opening Address

Boris Johnson

Mayor of London

Thank you so much for coming along tonight. I want to begin by congratulating each and every one of you on taking the public-spirited decision to come to this People's Question Time in Harrow, when you could have been stuck at home, glued to the television, watching the football and discovering the answer to the number one question that is on the lips of the nation: will John Terry score and who with?

So thank you for coming. It is an act of self-sacrifice, and you have done the right thing. It is very important that we should put our policies and our agenda before your scrutiny, and the number one question you may ask is, 'Why are we in these incredibly opulent, fantastic surroundings, in this distinguished, fee-paying public school?', which I did not attend, I hasten to add. Well, the answer is simply that this venue is not only bigger, I think Navin, than most of the comparable venues in the area, but also, we did a deal that saved us £1,200 on the average cost of People's Question Time. That is the name of the game today in City Hall.

We are here to deliver value for money and that is why we have done all sorts of, what I hope you will agree are sensible economies, such as getting rid of *The Londoner* newspaper, now, a dim, distant memory, a weird, sort of Pyongyang-style free-sheet that used to get posted through your letterbox. Now that's gone, millions of pounds have been saved there. We have axed all sorts of jobs in publicity and PR and back-room functions of one kind or another. For the second year running, we now have universal support across the parties, is that right? We have frozen the Council tax, frozen our share of the Council tax for the second year running and diverted the savings. Did someone say 'Boo'? I am glad to hear a dissenting voice; your policy is not supported by anyone else on this platform, but what we are doing, in spite of your objections, is diverting the resources that we have saved into things we think really matter to London.

In particular I would cite the fight against crime, and I congratulate Chief Superintendent Dal Babu, who is here tonight, with some of his officers. If you look at what is happening in Harrow, it is a very, very good record at the moment. Bus crime is considerably down across London and we have been to look at the Safer Transport Teams, the Transport Hub in Harrow-on-the-Hill. It is working extremely well: bus crime is down 18%, down a further 10%; knife crime, youth crime are all down and crime overall in the last 21 months is down 9%. I think that is a very important thing for us to be delivering and by making these economies it allows us to put money into things that I think do matter and I wonder whether you approve, you who 'boo', I wonder whether you approve of the 24-hour Freedom Pass that we brought in. I did not hear any 'boos' for that one! That has been a good thing. I wonder whether you object to the 12,000 affordable homes that we have built in the last year, more than any previous year in any time that this office of the Mayoralty has existed. I think it is a good thing to have done. Our 400 street trees in Harrow alone, I do not

know whether you are opposed to that, and continuing the investment in things that really matter to our city over the long-term.

I just have ridden up in the tube; I left my bike at King's Cross. I came in what will be one of the last Metropolitan Line trains not to be the fantastic new S-Stock trains with air-conditioning. I think they are going to be a wonderful addition. I know there has been a lot of angst about the upgrade of the Jubilee Line. It will be ready by October and when it is ready there will be an increase in capacity of 30% on that line and it is absolutely vital that whoever we get in government in Westminster in the next few months, we get those upgrades of the tube. It is vital that we get Crossrail as well, and that we harness the Olympics to deliver the fantastic changes and improvements, not just in East London, but across the whole of the city. I am thinking of the cycle hire scheme coming in this year, the cycle superhighways; we already have more electric cars in London than any other city in Europe; the fantastic new bus, the hop-on, hop-off, Routemaster-style -

The Chair

Mr Mayor, please could you wind up? I do not want you to break rules.

Boris Johnson

I will wind up by saying that if we take all these things together, I have absolutely no doubt that we will be able to lengthen London's lead as the best big city on earth. In spite of some of the gloom, in spite of some of the negativity you will hear tonight, there is no doubt everyone on this platform will be working together to that end and to deliver a fantastic future for our city. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

The Chair

In terms of timekeeping, that is one precedent I would not like other members of audience to follow, please, thank you. May I now invite Darren Johnson, Chair of the Assembly, to address the Question Time please?

Darren Johnson

Thank you very much, Navin. I am Darren Johnson, as Navin said, Chair of the London Assembly. You do not need to be called 'Johnson' to have one of the top jobs at City Hall but it seems to help! So, welcome to People's Question Time. Obviously this is your chance to find out what is going on at City Hall, to raise the issues that really concern you and for us to find out what we can actually go away and do about those concerns.

This is our twentieth event now, twentieth People's Question Time in 10 years. Although, I do not think we have ever had one in such a salubrious venue before, in the appropriately named 'Speech Room', but unlike the Mayor I am not going to make a very long speech –

Boris Johnson

I was pretty short!

Darren Johnson

I will keep the speech short, so we do have time for your questions and obviously you have got a range of key concerns, maybe on the impact of the recession and what is being done about that at City Hall; about the public transport improvement and concerns about line closures and so on; about safety on our streets and questions about how the police are performing in this part of London and other parts of London; and when you get home tonight, issues about what sort of home you are actually going to and whether the housing in London is meeting your needs.

It is our job all of the time to put questions to the Mayor as the elected scrutiny body, to speak up for Londoners and to find the answers to questions on your behalf, so we are here tonight. We really want to hear your views, hear about the important issues that are facing you as Londoners, that are facing the capital, and our ears do not stop listening after tonight. We are the democratic check and balance on the Mayor of London, and the various bodies in London, so we are here to hear your concerns.

If you do not manage to get a question in tonight, you can contact any of the Assembly Members here and they can put questions directly to the Mayor. Or you can click on the GLA website and again put questions to the Mayor through one of the Assembly Members that way, because we are your voice at City Hall, and we do not just keep an eye on what the Mayor is doing; we have a wider role in terms of representing and speaking up for London, and investigating issues of concern to Londoners.

So, at the moment, these issues include: we are looking at the tube overcrowding and the impact of the closures of various lines; we are looking at tube and bus fares; we are looking at the impact of the recession on small shops and high streets; we are looking at the impact of Heathrow in terms of climate change and air quality, and so on; we are looking at Olympic ticketing and what that will mean for Londoners, how much they have to pay, how many will be able to get in and so on. All of these are subject to current or recent Assembly investigations. So it is our job to keep watch on the Mayor all of the time, day in, day out, but we are delighted tonight to be able to share that task with you as Londoners so I hope you have a good and productive evening. Thank you.

People's Question Time

Navin Shah

Chair

Thank you for that, and in observing your time frame. We have four topic-related slots of 20 minutes each:

- Policing and safety
- Transport
- The environment, which will include planning and housing
- Olympic Games London 2012

and then any other issues which are not covered in the main four topical slots. For each topic I will be starting off with a lead question which I have been advised prior to this evening to get the ball rolling.

I. Policing and Safety

The Chair

I have a question from R. Kundi: How many officers patrol the streets in Harrow and in London? There does not seem enough police officers and can the number be increased?

Boris Johnson

I am delighted that we have Dal Babu and a lot of his team here today. In London there are now a record number of warranted police officers; there are now 36,000 police officers serving in the Metropolitan Police force and it is my intention that there should be more warranted officers, more police officers, by the end of my Mayoral term in 2012 than there were when I came in. One thing – and I appreciate that the questioner feels there are not enough out on the street – actually, if he had been with us today I do not think you have ever seen so many people in fluorescent yellow jackets in Harrow-on-the-Hill! It was absolutely amazing, and I suppose it is not surprising, but one of the things that has been very beneficial has been the decision of the Commissioner, Sir Paul Stephenson, to say that officers can now patrol singly rather than in pairs. The advantage of that, an elementary piece of arithmetic, which Harrovians will be able to do, you can double the number of patrols, can you not? Yes! That adds to the flexibility of the police service, and in their ability to get people out in the street where people want to see them. The detail of the answer is 405 police officers in Harrow, with a Metropolitan Police Service total of 35,969 officers.

Dee Doocey

I do not think that is the whole story, because when the Mayor is talking about warranted officers he is including Special Constables, who do a fantastic job but they are part-time and it is not the same as having full time police officers. I think the straight answer to the question is, if the Mayor had accepted the Liberal Democrat amendments to his budget, there would have been more officers on the beat, because we put through a series of suggestions to cut waste, including press officers and chauffeur-driven limousines for senior Met officers, all sorts of perks, and to spend more money on front-line policing. We believe it is absolutely essential there are more police on the beat, and that there is less waste and money spent on waste and bureaucracy.

John Biggs

I am deputy leader of the Labour members, so I would tend not to agree with Boris. Dee Doocey has made the point that 36,000 officers includes 3,000 volunteers and they are very welcome and very important but the headline is that year-on-year under Ken Livingstone – no one likes to pay more tax. We paid more tax but we got a lot more police officers. Under Boris, when he loses office in two years' time, we will have fewer police officers than when he was elected, if you count full-time officers. Yes, we should rely on volunteerism of people but we should not rely on it to replace the safer teams of fully employed, fully trained and fully equipped police officers that London depends on. There is a price you pay for the value for money, he calls it; real value for

money for us would be keeping the same amount of officers but making them work more efficiently. Under him value for money means cutting them.

The Chair

Does anybody else want to come in on this before I move on to the next question?

Boris Johnson

Can I just say –

The Chair

Not yet, I have not asked you. I am not going to allow you to speak thank you.

[Audience: Boo]

Andrew Boff

A lot of the public get very confused over the number of police officers and what that means to the effectiveness of the police force. What actually matters, at the end of the day, is the number of police who are actually on the streets doing the job. As a result of reform of the Metropolitan Police Authority, the number of police officers sitting in an office filling out forms is going to be drastically cut to the effect that up to 550 more officers will be on the streets of London at any one time.

Through natural wastage over the next few years, which is the line that Dee Doocey and John Biggs may take, there will be a reduction of 455, but that still means there will be an extra 55 over the top of that. I would hope that nobody underestimates the contribution that Specials do make to the policing of London and I do not think we should do down their very important role in keeping our streets safe. So actually -

The Chair

Andrew, can you please wind up now...?

Andrew Boff

Over the period of the next few years we will see an increase in the number of fully qualified police officers actually doing the job of being police officers.

[Applause]

Darren Johnson

I do not doubt that efficiency savings can be made in terms of how the police is run at the central level. Until recently, I had assumed there had been an absolute solid political consensus on the retention of the 3, 2, 1 model for safer neighbourhoods, with each ward in London having an absolute guarantee of three PCSOs, two constables and a sergeant. I am concerned that this

Mayor, Boris Johnson, has failed to give an absolute guarantee that the 3, 2, 1 model will be retained for every single ward in London. I would like to invite him tonight to give that absolute guarantee that the 3, 2, 1 model for safer neighbourhoods will be retained for every single ward in London.

Boris Johnson

I am delighted –

The Chair

I would like to now invite questions from the audience. Can I please have...?

[Audience: Boo!]

The Chair

We have only got 13 minutes left. There are lots of indications here, so I would like to take some questions.

Participant

Mr Chairman this is People's Question Time, and the Mayor answers. If you do not let the Mayor answer then what is point?

[Applause]

The Chair

Can you please stand up asking the question so that everyone can see? Thank you.

Participant

Great. A month ago a group of teenage boys threw glass bottles at my head while I got off the tube and six weeks ago, someone was mugged, at 12.30 in the afternoon in Rayners Lane. I want to know what the Assembly is doing to address the issues of rising youth violence and make me feel safe?

[Applause]

The Chair

Who wants to take this question? Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson

I am very, very sorry you experienced the appalling attack that you did. I know that the Chief Superintendent will have noted down what you said both about your experience on the tube and the mugging in Rayners Lane.

But really, I want to repeat: we are putting a lot of hope and confidence at the moment in the Safer Transport Teams, the Transport Hub teams. They should be bringing down crime on public transport; indeed the figures tell us they are bringing down crime on public transport but patently you have had personal experience of that not working. All I can say is that I apologise to you and we will try harder and I am sure your point is amply received and understood by the members of the police here.

Kit Malthouse

I have been Boris' Vice Chair of the Police Authority for the last 18 months, and I am also very sorry for your experience but for exactly that reason, over the last year we have had every single London borough, all 32, into the Police Authority. We have sat them down: local authority, the borough command, local youth service and everybody involved to look specifically at youth violence, where it is happening, why it is happening, what the problems are and what needs to be done. We have made some real progress and as the Mayor said, overall, the numbers are very much significantly down, not least the very alarming numbers of teen homicides: fewer than half. It is still too many though, half the number of teenagers being killed on the streets with a long way to go.

It is not just about the police this time. We are completely committed to doing some of the longer-term work that is needed to turn some of the younger people who are going to be teenagers in the next five or ten years away from a life of crime and violence. The Mayor's plan, Time for Action - please look at the GLA website if you want to know the detail - is doing very valuable work towards that, so in ten years' time hopefully, we will not be facing the same problem. At the same time we are doing immediate enforcement and much more enforcement to deal with exactly your problem but I am sorry nevertheless.

Participant

I would like to know what the authority are going to do to make sure that the police are in the right place, because Boris did say that the amount of police at Harrow-on-the-Hill was amazing, but really, should not they be in Harrow town centre or at Harrow bus station? We need loads of police up on Harrow-on-the-Hill.

Boris Johnson

[Inaudible: off-mic]

The Chair

Boris can you wait your turn please? Mr Mayor if you wait your turn, I will ask you. I am taking two questions at a time.

Participant

Good afternoon everyone. I would just like to put it to the good people down there about the increase in stabbings in London at the moment. I heard you say it was down by 6%.

Kit Malthouse

60%; the numbers of murders is down by 60%.

Participant

On the telly, in terms of what we see at the moment, the actual stabbings, and not even just the stabbings, but the stabbings that are not even brought to the actual telly, are increasingly higher. If you actually make a comment like that, I think you are out of touch, to be honest with you.

The Chair

Thank you. We have got two questions. Mr Mayor, do you want to pick up the first question about locations of police in right places?

Boris Johnson

I took the opportunity to answer that question, but I will repeat it. You are absolutely right. Of course, the police should be in the town centre and at Transport Hubs. They were actually mob-handed at the bus station and the town centre. I congratulate the borough council, for what they are doing to pay for the town centre team as well. I am told, certainly the figures seem to show, they are making a bigger difference there too.

I want to say to you, sir, who think that we must not be complacent about knife crime. Of course you are right; this is a major, major problem. Nobody in their right mind could be complacent about this. Be in no doubt about the seriousness of the measures we put in place to deal with it. Through stop and the search we have taken 6-7,000 knives off the streets of London. There are many, many more thousands of people who have been arrested and, despite what you say about the media hyping this up, that has unquestionably, hugely depressed the volume of knife crime and that is a fantastic thing. That is the right thing to do.

Stop and search and all of the rest of it is controversial and it is difficult, and it has to be done sensitively and in accordance with the law. If you can take a knife off the streets and you can stop that knife being used in a fatal incident, I think that is the right thing to do. I defend the police's policy over the last two years. I think it has been successful. As Kit was saying just now, you have to deal with the root causes as well. That is what you are saying; you are saying there are kids out there who are still being dragged into this kind of thing, still being dragged into gangs and still being tempted into life choices which are completely catastrophic. I accept that. But we are trying to work to divert them and get them to get their lives on track that is why we have Time for Action and all the programmes we are working on in City Hall.

Kit Malthouse

Very quickly on both those questions. The town centres are exactly where the Specials are valuable and that is the reason we want to recruit so many more. They will be, largely, patrolling on a Friday and Saturday night in town centres. There is a programme across the whole Met to put more uniforms in the town centres across the whole of the city, as well as Boris's policy to put 32 Transport Hubs across the city and paying for 50 extra British Transport Police to patrol the Overland network so we have seen a significant increase. On your numbers, I understand there is a huge amount of cynicism about crime statistics but there is one statistic which no one can run

away from that is the number of dead bodies that we experience, sadly, every year. Although it is still a terrible number, this time last year the number of teenagers who lay dead was 22. At the moment it stands at only 10. Although that 10 is 10 too many, there has been a significant decrease, because of the measures the Mayor has outlined.

Boris Johnson

Can I make just one short point?

The Chair

I want to take questions, please.

Participant

Thank you for coming to Harrow; I think you are shaping up to be the best local government politician since Horace Cutler [Leader of the Greater London Council 1977-81]. Instead of PCSOs is it not time we had more PCs on the beat and less police in the stations doing paperwork? Get more police officers, less Blunkett's bobbies.

Participant

We may like police officers but what we do not like are cameras. In using the cameras to try to combat terrorism and crime are not we intruding on the very liberties that you are trying to defend?

[Applause]

Boris Johnson

I want to add to Kit's point. It is absolutely true what he said about homicide. New York is currently safer than it has been for a very long time but you are still three or four times more likely to be murdered in New York than in London. We are considerably safer than Amsterdam and Paris. Do not let people deceive you into thinking that this is an unsafe city by comparison, internationally.

On PCSOs, of course you are right to want to maximise warranted officers and that is why we are doing Project Herald and getting as many frontline officers as we can, many of whom are working in things like HR or computing, out on to the frontline. As Andrew Boff completely correctly said just now: that is going to increase the number of frontline operatives.

As for the gentleman who objects to cameras, well what can I say, of course you are right not to want a surveillance society. I would like to have a society in which everybody acted as the eyes and ears of the community, and everybody looked after each other. I think it was a Harrovian, it was Peel who probably sat in this very place and said the public are the police and the police are the public. Right? It would be a wonderful thing if people felt safe enough to police on their own and to step in but they do not. People feel apprehensive. I want to create a climate of security in London where people feel that they can, that they do not have to pass by on the other side and that they can step in if they see something going on; they can remonstrate with kids who are being rowdy. At the moment people are nervous and that is why there is huge pressure to put cameras up. When I used to run up Holloway Road every morning for a very slow jog, I was filmed

I discovered by no fewer than 33 cameras in 100 yards of running. What kind of movie it was, I do not know! It is out of control. One promise we will make is, subject to consultation, the cameras of the Western Extension Zone of the congestion charge will cease to be operative from the end of this year.

II. Transport

The Chair

I would like to move on to the questions on transport. I would like to take three questions at a time. The lead-off question for transport is from L. Fisher. It says: 'Why are the residents of Brent and Harrow subjected to weekly disruption in travel at weekends by the constant closure of the Jubilee and the Metropolitan Lines and also the Bakerloo Line? Why are they continually closed at the same time?'

Boris Johnson

I blame the government! I do! I blame Gordon Brown! I blame the government ministers – there is one sitting there, the ex-government minister [Tony McNulty MP]. I blame them, here in the place of his second home. I blame them for the ludicrous PPP structure that they set up. You talk about the closures, quite rightly, in your question and I apologise. Speaking as the Chairman of Transport for London, of course I apologise for any inconvenience that people suffer, but we have a system at the moment where the people who are responsible for repairing and improving the Jubilee Line can go and close the system as much they want, owing to the contracts that were devised way back in 2003.

It is completely mad and we need to go forward with a system that delivers value for London, but also enables us, in London Underground and in Transport for London, to understand what their requirements really are. You complain about both lines being closed at once. There have, frankly, been times when, as far as we can tell, they have asked for closures and we are contractually obliged to deliver the closures. We have asked for closures when actually they are not able to get on with sending their people down the line to put in the new signalling because the programme work and the software work still has not been done in Canada. I think the whole system has been crackers. It is time we move forward with a new system that gives transparency and clarity to London Underground but also gives taxpayers value and stops what, in my view, is a complete rip-off by the contractors: a licence to steal, to put it no higher than that.

[Applause]

Caroline Pidgeon

I think it is quite outrageous that we have seen so many people, I know, up this end of the Jubilee Line and the other end, stranded at weekends not able to travel due to the overrun of the closure programme to upgrade the lines. I think there is some real issues here, people on the Jubilee Line suffered; we have seen it until October before the line fully works. We are seeing it on the Northern Line and bits of the Bakerloo Line. Quite honestly, it is unacceptable and both Tube Lines and London Underground have got to get together, stop the squabbling and work at a programme which will mean passengers are less disrupted.

We have been proposing, as a committee and as Liberal Democrats, the idea of having blockades where you could, for 2-4 weeks at a time do intensive work on a certain bit of the line and then it is open again. This is something the contractors, Tube Lines, are very open to but London Underground does not want to do that. Passengers I have spoken to have said they would rather have a month with a bit of pain and then use the line again. That does need to be looked at. As a committee we have also recommended ideas around improving the signalling in a different way where you overlay one system and can test the new one as trains are running. That is what they do in Madrid. We need to look at what is happening around the world and learn from best practice.

We have years and years of misery to come unless Tube Lines and London Underground really get together to work together on this and I think the Mayor does have a role there. I know he is championing this and we can all moan about the PPP and that it is the government's fault but actually, we need to ensure that whatever happens we get a service that works for passengers because it is everyone here that is suffering.

Valerie Shawcross

I am Deputy Chair of the Transport Committee this year and I support what Caroline says there. It is very rare that there is a serious row that is not six of one and at least half a dozen of the other, so we do want to see more serious negotiation.

Ken Livingstone was not very happy with the PPP, and that is a fact, and many Londoners were not but it is important to remember that for decades before this particular flawed contract, there was actually very little going on with investment in the underground. I think we inherited a tube system, which was becoming increasingly dilapidated; there was not any long-term maintenance and investment going in, so we needed something. I think we all agree we could do with something better now, and having had the first 10-year period, though we have seen significant improvements in some sections of the underground.

As the Mayor says, when this work is done we will see a very rapid increase in the amount of trains coming in and out of stations, and people will be able to move around. I think it is actually one of the failures of TfL that they are, perhaps, sometimes so big that they do not think about how sometimes, something small could be done to help. One of the things I think they could have done to help here is to have actually made arrangements to allow the Metropolitan Line trains to stop at Neasden Station when the Jubilee Line was not running. So I think there is a bigger problem here but I think TfL could probably have done more, both to negotiate a better closure programme but also to try and do some local improvements like that.

Participant

The reason I came this evening is because your committee never seems to reply to anything that I send on transport so I am going to leave the questions here anyway. It is mainly to do with your accessible transport. You have three systems running: you have Capital Call, black taxis' Taxicab and Dial-a-Ride. You only need one to combine the lot. Unfortunately, TfL could not run a bath, let alone run a transport system! The buses they have bought, I have only found one driver in 51 weeks that likes it -

Boris Johnson

The ones we have just bought?

Participant

The ones you have just bought, the red Dial-a-Ride buses.

Boris Johnson

You do not like them? I was very proud of them!

Participant

They do not go through width restrictions.

The Chair

Will you please have the courtesy of listening to the question?

Participant

So I am going to give you three pages of why the bus and the services are diabolical and why the drivers at Dial-a-Ride - which are fantastic, the Unite and all the others, do not bother to do anything. So if you could take this piece of paper and get your Transport Committee to actually write back on it, because the buses are a disgrace.

There is only one thing I would like to say, nothing on that, I am glad you saved £1,200 pounds but none of the ramps in here comply with the EU regulations!

[Applause]

Participant

My question is that if a driver has a problem with a customer on a bus, he can summon the police and he can get the police to come and take the passenger off the bus. My problem is, and a colleague of mine had the same problem, a passenger had a problem on the bus with the driver. There was not the same redress. They were just told to get in touch with the local bus company, which did not immediately solve the problem when the driver confiscated the pass of the passenger and they could do nothing about it at that time. They did not know what redress or who to go to. Everyone they phoned said 'Get in touch with this'. Eventually the person got in touch with Transport for London, who put it back to the bus company and the person is still waiting for an answer. So I feel that if the driver can take the passenger, the passenger should have the same sort of rights.

Participant

Over 50 years ago, I wrote a letter to *The Times* regretting the demise of the London Trolley Bus. These were very comfortable, very silent, had swift acceleration, regenerative braking and with a six-wheel configuration, they had a bigger capacity than a London bus. I wonder if any consideration has been given to reintroducing these, particularly bearing in mind that by 2025 there is supposed to be a 60% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions in London?

Boris Johnson

First of all, the gentleman who asked about Dial-a-Ride and transport for the disabled: we are incredibly conscious of the difficulties that Dial-a-Ride has had over the last few years, and when you mentioned the new buses I was hopeful, obviously, that you would say something nice about them, but we have the new buses and clearly there are still issues. We will put those issues to the relevant department at TfL and make sure your dossier gets a full answer from the relevant people. As for the inadequate ramps in this place, I apologise for that, I am delighted that you are able to join us anyway.

I want to go to the question about the bus pass. Was this a child whose bus pass was confiscated or an adult? I do not know the circumstances of the dispute but I do know we have a very active policy in TfL of dealing with such confiscations and making sure people are satisfied on both sides. The best thing is to take full details from you, if that is acceptable, and we will make sure the case is taken up pronto.

As to the gentleman who nostalgically thinks about the trolley buses, and who wrote to *The Times* 50 years ago to call for the restitution of the trolley bus, your hour is at hand, my friend. We are not going to bring back the trolley bus, because if you remember, that was succeeded by the Routemaster. The Routemaster was this fantastic variant that you did not need overhead gantries, or whatever the phrase is, in order to go round corners, the Routemaster was a fantastically more versatile vehicle. So we are going to be reintroducing to the streets of London a lighter, cleaner, greener vehicle that will have all the low carbon advantages of the trolley bus. Indeed, I think, this year we are already introducing six hydrogen buses, but from 2012, every new bus in London will be either a hybrid bus or a low carbon bus of one kind or another. It is our intention, thereby, to reduce hugely the emissions from the London bus fleet and to bring back the clean air that you associate with the trolley bus, if not the electric doo-dahs that used to run overhead. I think nowadays they are superfluous to our technological requirements.

Caroline Pidgeon.

Just briefly, I wanted to pick up the Dial-a-Ride point, because yesterday the Transport Committee had a session with passengers and users of Dial-a-Ride and the other services across London, with Transport for London and others, to try to look at what has happened with Dial-a-Ride over the last year. We did a big piece of work last year and we did hear about some improvements but there are still issues in terms of bookings, getting through on the phone service, the distance travelled and stuff. We are also looking, with London Councils, at how we can move forward with services and whether we can co-ordinate the services such as Taxicard and so on. We had a really good discussion and had a lot of users who fed in some valuable case studies. We also had Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson with us, who sits on the TfL Board, who found it very useful to hear the real experiences. I would like to look at the information you have as well because it would be really helpful feeding into our work on that particular subject.

Roger Evans

As a person who was Chairman of the Transport Committee a couple of years ago, we looked at a number of issues and it is always interesting to see the same things come back and in a way disappointing that they have not been resolved yet.

On the subject of the behaviour of bus drivers, which you referred to, obviously you would not want the police to come along and take the driver off the bus. That might upset the other people on

the bus! But what we need is much better training for the drivers. The bus drivers in London move on to better jobs; it is a sort of job that a lot of people do not stay in for very long, so we need to constantly be training people in customer care, and in safe driving, to be honest, because we went through a period when there were a lot of injuries on the buses because of the speed at which the drivers were cornering and accelerating and stopping. Hopefully that is something we have dealt with now.

On the subject of the trolley buses, our Transport Committee a couple of years ago did quite an extensive review of trolley buses and trams. Basically the problem with the trolley bus is the same as the problem with the tram; that you need to put the overhead line infrastructure in to run the service, and then if it is not used, you have spent a lot of money creating a service which is not viable. If you put buses in first, and see how many people use those, that is the way to go, at least initially, and then possibly you might look at trolley buses in the future, although actually, if you have enough people to use a trolley bus, then a tram is often a better option to use instead of that.

We did look at a very intriguing system, a trolley bus in Oslo, which follows a white line painted on the road, rather than rails and the professor who designed it came to speak to us and we asked him what happened when it snowed, of course, because of the eye following the white line. He was very honest and told the Committee it did not work! So that is one option we turned down for London!

Participant

Mr Mayor, given that it is almost impossible to get into Harrow-on-the-Hill station if you have a disability, a pushchair, a heavy case or just stiff knees, why did you make the decision to postpone for up to 10 years making the station accessible?

[Applause]

Participant

I am a Harrow cyclist. I commend the Mayor on his vision and relating to the cycle superhighways. However, the implementation appears to be just painting bits of road blue. Would the Mayor admit he is not meeting his vision in any stretch with the implementation as it stands?

Participant

As somebody who can speak on the transport system, the person to blame is Gordon Brown who pushed the PPP through. We now have to plan 26 weeks ahead for closures.

The Chair

Can you ask a question please?

Participant

The question I am asking is, that lady who said that we must blame London Underground...

The Chair

What is your question?

Participant

My question is what are we going to do now with Tube Lines and the PPP? What are we going to do now to hasten this?

Boris Johnson

On Harrow-on-the-Hill station, the lady who asked about disabled access and lifts generally at stations across London. Unfortunately, London Underground is the oldest system in the world. Out of 570 stations we already have 58 which have disabled access and we have a programme to keep going. As you know, it was an Olympic deliverable and it is important we do that but in tough economic circumstances, with a £900 million fall in revenue caused by the fall in ridership, owing to the recession, the cost of PPP which TfL has had to pick up, we have had a real squeeze on budgets. I am surprised no one has mentioned the fare rises which I did not want to do, but it is very, very difficult to proceed with absolutely every lift access that we would like to deliver. I give you one example, in Green Park alone, for one lift, it is costing £96 million to put in and it is exactly the same cost at Shepherd's Bush! I know how frustrating it is for you, and these things have not been cancelled, they have been postponed until we can deliver them.

As for the gentleman who complains about the vision – where is the cycle superhighway opponent – they are going to be wonderful! I am delighted to find a cyclist who has got all the way up this hill. It is a fearsome obstacle in my view. Did you cycle up here? You are a fit man, well done! That is what we want to encourage; that kind of fitness and attitude across London and cycling is going up on average 10% a year at the moment, and there are more and more journeys by bike. In July, the cycle hire scheme is coming in and we want, in parallel, to put in these superhighways that we think will make cycling in London much more attractive and I pick up your slight feeling that they will not be complete cycle motorways, and we cannot deliver that in the middle of this city because there are a lot of motorists around as well –

The Chair

Mr Mayor, we have run out of time on this issue.

Boris Johnson

I agree with the gentleman over there, who blamed Gordon Brown.

[Applause]

To say that what we need is a system that delivers transparency for London Underground and taxpayer value, and it is at the moment a complete rip off.

The Chair

Mr Mayor, we are here to listen to what you are going to do, not the government. If you can try and keep...

[Mixed audience response]

Boris Johnson

I will tell you –

The Chair

If we can try and not go into electioneering it would be best. We are out of time.

Boris Johnson

My dear friend, I am trying to elucidate what we are doing in London!

The Chair

Mr Mayor, I am chairing the meeting, I will take control and not you, thank you.

[Mixed audience response]

First of all, apologies to those members who are not able to take questions, because we are not going to get through the whole lot anyway and if answers are far too long, we are not going to be able to take many more questions, so please observe the discipline.

III. The Environment, including Housing and Planning

The Chair

Before we go into the question, there is a lead question on this topic as well: What does the Mayor think about the unsightly high-rise apartment blocks that are being built over the London areas. How many storeys are considered to be an acceptable height? The question is from F. Fraser.

Boris Johnson

Thank you very much F. Fraser. You want me to answer the question now Navin, or do you want to say something else?

[Laughter]

The Chair

No let us answer the question first.

Boris Johnson

Let me say that I think that this is one of the most difficult areas of planning and I am basically opposed to too many unsightly tall buildings across London. I think we have had huge numbers of them in the last few years. When I look at something now in our Planning Committee I want to have a very, very good reason why it has to go above eight storeys. That seems to me to be pretty

high; I have to know why it has to go above eight or ten storeys. We have too many 23, 27 storey buildings pepper-potted around London in a way that I think is extremely ugly and does great damage to the skyline.

I would love Mr Fraser, or Miss Fraser – whoever F. Fraser is – I would love you to come and spectate at our planning meetings, because the only circumstances in which I will accept the construction of a tall building is if the local people, if the local councillors, really want it and if there is a strong local case to get to Columbus Tower, if it is already in a zone of existing very, very tall buildings. There was one building in Canary Wharf that I thought could go ahead and did, but otherwise I fully share your hostility.

Participant

I live in Brent, near Brent Cross. As Mayor you have made commitments to cut traffic, maintain green spaces, preserve our skyline and implement proper housing standards. The proposed Brent Cross regeneration fails every single objective and will make matters worse. It proposes potentially explosive technology for waste incineration in a residential area, close to schools, thousands of homes and major arteries and road routes. Given your strong position on these issues, will you confirm your intention to reject the plans as they stand currently, including the 28 storey tower blocks, and to support the tens of thousands of us ordinary Londoners who oppose the blinkered, discredited, bulldozer approach by the developers and Barnet Council? Will you send a clear message to all of us who voted for you, some of us, that you are a Mayor for the people and not a puppet for a Conservative council and dubious city interests?

[Applause]

Participant

What urgent steps does the Mayor intend to take on the TfL-managed A40 trunk road in Acton, West London to reduce the exposure of residents to nitrogen dioxide pollution that is currently 30-50% above the annual air quality objective for nitrogen dioxide. What area-specific measures will he include in his new air quality strategy to reduce emissions from vehicles using this road in order to deal with the breaches of the EU limit value for nitrogen dioxide in this area?

Participant

I would like to know City Hall's opinion on the expansion of Heathrow please? Is it absolutely guaranteed that you are against a third runway?

Boris Johnson

Brent Cross, brilliant question and all I can say is I hear your very, very strong, passionate plea for me to intervene in this matter. Unfortunately, legally, if I wanted to intervene, the worst thing I could do was say anything now because it would fetter my discretion on any future planning procedure. The very cunning and well-paid interests that you mentioned would be able to take me to court and frustrate any pledge I might be able to make. That is the first point.

On the A40 and pollution, generally you are absolutely right. That is why we are going ahead with the third phase of the low emission zone. That will come in. As I said earlier on, we are being absolutely militant in our championing of zero carbon and low carbon vehicles of all kinds. You

may not believe this, London has an incredible reputation. People were very impressed at the Copenhagen Summit at what we are doing with electric cars. I believe that low carbon vehicles and electric cars are the way forward. In the GLA fleet, we are introducing 1,000 electric cars immediately. By 2020 I would like to see all the taxis in London - 32,000 of them emitting prodigious quantities of fumes in our city, gravely affecting air quality in key areas of London - going to zero carbon, either by electric or some other means. The most important way in which we have reduced emissions on the A40, of course, around Acton is by the massive investment that we have made in that colossal bridge which means there are no longer huge traffic jams pumping out exhaust.

As for the question about Heathrow: yes, you have my absolutely categorical assurance that we will oppose – indeed I believe that we have given some small help to the campaign against the third runway. We believe that is completely the wrong policy for London; I do not believe there is any Mayor of this city, putting aside party politics, who could conceivably defend the increase by hundreds of thousands of flights over London, gravely eroding the quality of life not just for people in West London but people all over the city. I will oppose the third runway as long as I have breath in my body. If you want to stop a third runway at Heathrow, it goes without saying you have only one thing to do at the General Election, which I am not allowed to say!

[Applause]

Sorry, the Liberals oppose it too. And the Greens! It is only the Labour party that supports the third runway at Heathrow.

Mike Tuffrey

Thank you Boris, for acknowledging our implacable opposition to the third runway at Heathrow. So, there is no doubt about that. On air quality, you said that you were praising the third phase of the low emission zone. The trouble is, you delayed that so that Londoners are breathing unhealthy air for longer than they need to as a direct result of your action. The plans you have in place will not deal with the nitrogen dioxide problem that the questioner referred to, and we need – hang on Boris let me have my time, thank you – we need action from central government and from yourself to get healthy; to get the air we breathe healthy and that means taking the old polluting vehicles off the road and your plan at present is not doing that. You need to step up to the plate.

At Brent Cross, thank you for that question; I know local MP Sarah Teather has been very much part of the campaign to help this. The trouble, Boris, is you got elected on a ticket saying “I am going to leave it to the boroughs”. That was your whole thing: leave it up to the boroughs; stop interfering like Ken Livingstone, you said. The trouble is when the boroughs get it wrong you have no basis then to intervene. You said to this questioner ‘come along to my Planning Committee.’ The trouble is your Planning Committee is held in private. You will not even let us as elected members in, never mind the public. My challenge to Boris is to open up his planning decisions so that Londoners can see what he is up to!

[Applause]

Murad Qureshi

I speak firstly, as the Chair of the Environment Committee and both the two issues just raised, air pollution and aviation, have been tackled in the programme of the Committee's work. On the aviation front, you will be glad to hear our report on the environmental regulations of Heathrow

expansion clearly came out saying that they do not cut the mustard; the proposals the government had put up to deal with local environmental issues like noise, air pollution and climate change do not add substantially to making expansion at all feasible. That was supported by all the parties including the Labour group at City Hall. It is a slur to suggest that Labour members of the London Assembly are supporting the expansion of Heathrow Airport.

When Boris does talk about expansion, though, he is being disingenuous with his treatment of East Londoners. It was only last week that the Assembly did pass a motion about City Airport expanding, and rightly so, we came out against it. But, Boris has written in support of that expansion whilst actually being in public meetings like this before, supporting the challenge of that decision. You cannot have it both ways, Boris: you either fall one way or other on aviation. Why is it that you are happy to support the aviation expansion in East London and not in West London? Be consistent.

As for air pollution, quite clearly the problem is much bigger than we realised under the previous Mayor. The previous assumption was about 1,000 premature deaths a year as a result of air quality in London, PM10s and nitrogen dioxide. The reality is that it is three or four times worse. When we are talking about premature deaths, we are talking about cutting into people's life expectancy. That is what we are talking about here. I do not think the Mayor has acknowledged the extent of the problems and the proposals he has put up haven't really been costed in the way they needed to. Finally I think he has kicked it into the long grass after 2012. Whoever is Mayor after 2012 will be dealing with the legacy of not much happening in the present term.

Darren Johnson

I was actually looking at a press release I put out 10 years ago, when I was warning the previous Mayor, Ken Livingstone, that if we did not get to grips with air pollution in the capital we would face mega, multi-million pound fines, which is what we are facing now because of the very, very serious problem of air pollution.

Although the Mayor has outlined some of his measures to tackle that, we have actually taken a number of steps backwards. Cancelling the Western Extension will actually exacerbate the air pollution problems in London and Transport for London have admitted that; their own figures show that; they have admitted that. The Mayor has delayed the implementation of the next phase of the low emission zone for vans, losing vital time which could have helped save lives and reduce the risk of this fine being imposed.

We need more action from the Mayor on this. We need to follow cities like Berlin which have produced special zones in specific air pollution hot spots to really tackle the problems there and we need to take a look at what they are doing in Stockholm in Sweden, where they are now running all their buses on clean, green fuel direct from the city's vegetable kitchen waste. Those are the sort of solutions that we can do. Finally on the issue of airport expansion, obviously as a Green Party member, being consistent in opposing Heathrow but not only Heathrow; City Airport expansion and Gatwick Airport expansion: any expansion is not the way we need to be going with the problems we face in terms of climate change, the biggest threat facing the world today, we cannot be flying more and more and more. We actually need to be reducing the number of flights, not increasing them.

Participant

I am speaking on behalf of the Campaign for a Better Harrow Environment. You say you leave it to boroughs to decide locally, but we would like a stronger lead and better provision within the London plan to strengthen the hands. Could you tell us what you are going to do about that to enable boroughs to decide? One major problem is that the developers have got too much power. Funds for infrastructure are coming from the developers as part of their planning permission, the S106 obligations. This means that the boroughs are very much in hock. If we paid a decent council tax to pay for our infrastructure, we might be better supplied – sorry that is my view, I should not have brought that in. So, really, what are you going to do to decrease the power of property developers in building large buildings with very small, inadequately small flats, how will you address that?

Participant

I live in rented accommodation, as I am sure a lot of people across London do. I would like to know why there are not any requirements for private landlords to make flats and houses more energy efficient, both as a money-saving tool for the tenants, but also as an effort to help to reduce carbon emissions?

[Applause]

Participant

London needs to build 30,000 homes a year; that is the plan. Some of the new-build has been very interesting and very good, like the Greenwich Peninsula, where we have got new communities in an old wasteland. Each of these new communities needs space, needs space to play, space to shop, space to get about, and some of our high streets are also being re-spaced. They are having their façades made different. Can I ask an apolitical question that all parties in the GLA look to ensure that these new spaces, the shared spaces, are accessible to blind people, to people in wheelchairs, to mothers with pushchairs, to elderly people and that nobody feels intimidated by these new spaces?

[Applause]

Boris Johnson

Perhaps I could take the first and the third questions together and say that, to answer your question about spaces together, and say that there is actually a huge amount that in the revised London plan that is currently under consultation that I think you will really like and approve of. For the first time, we are putting in really serious protection of back garden space, to make sure that the developers do not just move in and build high-rise rabbit hutch dwellings there.

Second, for the first time since the 1960s, we going back to the 'Parker Morris' standards, but they are 'Parker Morris plus 10'. You will be familiar with what I am talking about: I am talking room sizes for accommodation in London and it is an absolute scandal that although the human race, although Londoners have not been getting noticeably thinner - have we, speaking for myself - rooms are getting smaller. We now have new-build rooms in our city and have been under the previous Mayoralty, smaller than any other city in Europe. That is why we are going for 'Parker Morris plus 10', bringing back decent room sizes and we are also insisting that 42% of affordable homes should be family-sized dwellings, three bedrooms or more. To get back to the environmental

point, we are putting in special, electric vehicle plugs and for cyclists in the London plan. All those requirements are being built into the London plan and developers understand that and know they are going to have to make the environmental concessions.

As for private landlords, what can we do to encourage private landlords to become more environmentally conscious? There is a huge amount that they need to do but what we need to do is build up a system whereby we help Londoners with the upfront costs of retro-fitting your home, making them far less polluting, getting rid of all the emissions that come from boilers and that means, in my view, we need to get the banks to step up to the plate and finance the upfront investment in this retro-fitting, cladding, insulation; all these kinds of things because there will be a long-term saving for the consumer and the financial incentive for us to get it done. That is something that we are working on very, very hard right now in City Hall.

IV. The London Olympic and Paralympic Games 2012

The Chair

If we can move on to the next topic, which is London 2012 Games. The question I have here: Why are Londoners not given preferential treatment in the allocation of Olympic tickets as we have already helped to pay for the Games? And this is a question from M. Griffiths. Do you want to take the question?

Boris Johnson

Well, I am afraid I cannot give the details away now of what our ticketing will be but – who said it was illegal! He has been following the news...

[Audience contribution]

The Chair

Can you wait your turn please?

Boris Johnson

He is prompting me on my answer, which is fantastic! As it happens, you are completely right about one aspect of it. Owing to EU Competition Law, we cannot show favouritism for ticket distribution.

[Audience contribution]

Withdraw from the EU! That is not a matter for the Mayor of London, though I do not see why Londoners should not have a referendum on Lisbon, why not!

[Applause]

But what we can do, what we are going to do, and I do not want to pre-empt LOCOG, the London Organising Committee of the Games, which is going to come forward with a lot of measures to make sure that, for instance, we get London schools into the venues so that we do not have the embarrassing thing that they had in Beijing of loads of stadiums being empty and loads of empty

seats. Secondly, there are going to be places in London where you can buy tickets at short notice, they will be comparatively cheap tickets by comparison with some other events, and that facility will not be available around the country. But there will be other measures we will be bringing forward and LOCOG will be bringing forward within the constraints of that EU law that you talk about.

Dee Doocey

It is absolutely correct that European law does not allow the organisers to discriminate in favour of the host nation

[Audience interruption]

However, it is entirely possible to make a case in mitigation and to say that, for example, those people who have been living in the roads surrounding the Olympic site, who have been subject to noise and living, basically on a building site, should have preferential treatment and I do not think anyone would disagree that they really should be at the top of the list. I think it is also really important that we make sure that the stadia are filled with enthusiastic fans, and with school children who are going to be inspired by this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and that they are not filled with corporate sponsors who are paying an absolute fortune.

[Applause]

I will make one other point, Chair. Basically what is going to happen is that three-quarters of the tickets are going to be allocated for ordinary Londoners and Europeans so everyone in Europe has the exact same opportunity to bid for them through a public ballot, and one quarter is going to be reserved for the Olympic family, the IOC, the government and athletes and that is the way that is going to happen and the ballot will be in April next year.

Participant

Mr Mayor, big fan, this is a quick question though. Do you not think that it is too much money for one-time things such as the Olympics? If you look at Beijing, they spent so much money on the Birds Nest stadium, yet post Olympic times, tourism never increased. Then, you are looking at ticket prices, the South Africa World Cup, how many people are going to buy tickets, and we have been over-budget so many times I have lost count. So, we are going to spend £3 billion – that is a lot of money! – we are going to spend all this on the Olympic stadium and then when the Olympics is over, what, give it to West Ham?

[Applause]

Participant

I am concerned about the legacy for East London that the Olympic event will bring. I think a lot of us are very happy that this is now going ahead, and hope that everything will work well. My concern as a transport lobbyist is about the transport legacy and the failure to actually invest in some of the local railway networks. At the moment, Boris, you as the Chairman of Transport for London run London's worst and most dangerously overcrowded train on the infamous Gospel Oak to Barking line, something where there is an argument over the electrification.

Getting a scheme like that done is absolutely crucial for not only the Olympic period when the festival is happening, but also as part of the legacy. Several members have asked that you meet local representatives about this problem to get it sorted out, to make sure that there is an investment strategy which serves not only the Games but the legacy afterwards; several of your colleagues who have helped us are on the panel there tonight. Will you undertake to meet local representatives with members to sort out the problem of the remaining items of investment in the Overground in north-east London, so that we are not left with an appalling legacy of inadequate rail services?

Participant

I would like to ask to what extent will renewable energy sources be used to power the Games?

Participant

I represent young people in Brent, and I remember coming to a Parliamentary outreach session last month and I think I met James Cleverly there. Regarding the Olympics, how are we going to involve young people? Are you not just going to knock them out, because they need an opportunity, they need the inspiration that they can get involved and actually participate in London and what London is going to do about the Olympic Games. It is going to be affecting them directly so you need to work with them, get their ideas and views. So what are you going to do about that?

[Applause]

Andrew Boff

It is undoubted that the Olympic Games will be a marvellous event; they will be on time and for that period all the eyes of the world will be on London. It will be a great time for the capital.

With regard to the youth involvement, sorry to shift responsibility, but the secret of youth involvement that we found from our scrutiny on the Economic Development, Culture, Sport and Tourism Committee of the Commonwealth Games was that the boroughs themselves get involved in the Olympics and involving young people. The boroughs themselves must not just sit there and wait for the ODA or LOCOG to provide them with the opportunities; the boroughs have got to come up with programmes to involve young people in the undoubted waves of enthusiasm that there will be as the games approach.

The most interesting question was from the gentleman who spoke first – he should be on the London Assembly, he is asking all the right questions – that is about the legacy of what is left behind after the Olympics. The worry I have, and it is something we will pursue later on the London Assembly, with regard to the stadium itself, is that we have left ourselves in a situation where if we insist that it will only be an athletics venue, then we actually block out other uses for it. And the prospect might be that like all other Olympic stadia before it in Olympic history, it becomes a white elephant.

I actually think that the Olympics, Seb Coe, should abandon his insistence that that be used for athletics because for as long as he does that people like West Ham will be less interested in taking it over and we could end up with a very, very empty stadium as they have now in Beijing and in Sydney, which is only used four times a year, and yet they still have to pay the maintenance of it. Those are the questions we will ask in the future.

The awful thing about the Olympics was when we were sold the Olympics, in the original document, every single paragraph had the word 'legacy' in it. When I joined the London Assembly I said right, give me a list of the legacies; there was none. The crying shame of the planning of the Olympics was that the legacy was the last thing they actually thought about.

[Applause]

John Biggs

I represent people in the East End of London and most of the Olympics is in my area and it is an area which has seen massive job losses in the last 40 or 50 years; the docks have gone, industry has gone. If you travel around the world you will find it is full of cities which are hungry for inward investment and jobs for the future and higher skills and the reason we bid for the Olympics under the previous Mayor, and the current Mayor supports it as well, is because we need London to look forward and get those jobs and investment and get skills up for the people of East London and the whole of London. If you think £9.3 billion is a lot of money, I think not spending £9.3 billion on something like the Olympics, and taking London forward, would be a far more expensive risk for our city. It is about having a vision. It is important the Mayor tells us about what his vision is for being hungry as a city and get the jobs in the future so we can send our kids to wonderful schools like Harrow School.

Boris Johnson

On the point about legacy and transport, and John is absolutely right; he is a militant campaigner for his area and quite right too. We are going to transform that part of London, and Stratford station alone, as you know, will be one of the best-connected stations in the whole of the UK, with 10 lines going into it. We are expanding the Docklands Light Railway by 50%. You mention the Gospel Oak to Barking – and think you and I have conversed on this matter before? We have, I thought so, you are the Gospel Oak to Barking, we call it 'GOB'! – you are absolutely right to be militant about it. What I would say to you is the electrification of that route is very important; most of it is currently freight and as anyone who studies Transport for London's objectives will know, we do not move freight, we move people. There is someone who should fund Gospel Oak to Barking electrification, and that name is 'Adonis'. I want to see him coming forward with the funding which we –

The Chair

Mr Mayor, can you conclude now?

Boris Johnson

- I want to make sure your point is taken.

On renewable energy, we are putting the combined heat and power plant, but I will make sure we give you the exact figures for what proportion of Olympic energy will be actually renewable. Young people and volunteering; you are absolutely right. The whole name of the game is to inspire young people; it is not just sport, I would like to see the Cultural Olympiad turned into a proper X Factor style competition. That would be a great thing, so that we have Poetry Olympics! Why not? Or darts or something if you don't like poetry!

Murad Qureshi

I would like to make a general point about legacy. Let us scotch this idea that the IOC were ever interested in this. If they were serious about a permanent legacy of the Olympics, they would have a permanent site for the Olympics every four years, rather than have all the cities round the world dance around the maypole as we did and the Brazilians have and in the future they will do. But saying that, we have done more on the legacy front than other cities like Athens or Beijing, because we have set up the legacy mechanisms, or are beginning to, and they have done it afterwards. The bit of legacy I am looking forward to as a Londoner generally, is a brand new park with waterways and what have you, and I think the key issue is not just how the stadium is managed for sporting fans to use, but also who manages that park and the waterways in the way that Londoners can appreciate it for generations to come?

Participant

In August 2008, you were quoted saying that you were absolutely determined that the budget for the Olympic Games would stay at £9.3 billion, yet in November 2009 there is evidence that there is a hidden £3 billion which means the budget is £12 billion pounds. Would you agree that you contribute to widescale distrust to all politicians, given that fact?

Boris Johnson

No, it will stay at £9.3 billion. We are sticking at £9.3 billion; it is a lot of money; if you cannot get an Olympics for £9.3 billion.

Participant

What is the Mayor and the London Assembly doing to promote access to the Olympic Games for disabled people?

Participant

I am one of the councillors for Harrow. The Olympics: being on the west of London, in Harrow, what will Olympics bring to the residents of Harrow apart from an annual bill?

[Applause]

Boris Johnson

The answer is £9.3 billion is what it is going to cost and over my dead body are we spending any more. I do not want to mess around and talk about urban realm schemes and things that you are going to enjoy as a result of the Olympics. There will be things; we are spending £220 million on improvements of outer London Boroughs, there will be things that Harrow will see directly as a result of Olympics but that is not the main point. The main point is that this city, particularly the East End of London which John Biggs rightly says was neglected for generations, will receive a fantastic shot in the arm. It will be a wonderful thing for this city. Our job is to work for the whole of London, and our job is to work to produce not just a fantastic Games but we get a fantastic legacy as well. I have absolutely no doubt that we are going to succeed in doing that and get the maximum possible value for every penny of that £9.3 billion, which I know is a lot of money.

Richard Barnes

There are a number of direct benefits Harrow will get, because I understand the Bangladesh Olympic team will be based here, there is a memorandum of understanding for it. The Council has also developed its own Championing Harrow Task Force so all the business opportunities are possible and the attractions of tourism can be developed here as well, and getting the young people involved in the Olympics.

As far as the disabled access to the Olympics and the Paralympics, I personally would have liked the Paralympics to be before the ordinary Olympics simply to give it that really high profile that it totally deserves. But we are ensuring that there is total access to the Olympic stadia, and I am ensuring that there will be proper viewing areas for the free to view sports, those that are happening on the streets in London. We are working on websites to show how you can travel easily down to the Olympic Games and from here you are only about an hour at most away from the site itself. Accessible London, hotels; the whole lot is being looked at and it will be up on the web, it will be printed in hard copy and we are doing everything to ensure that all Londoners can take part in the Olympic Games and the Paralympics.

The Chair

I am afraid that we have come to the end of that particular topic.

V. Other Issues not Already Discussed**The Chair**

I would like to move on to the last topic for the evening, which is on the other remaining issues. I would like to give opportunity to the members who have not participated in any responses.

Participant

Is it about time that the Metropolitan Black Police Officers Association distanced themselves from the criminal Ali Dizaei and recognise that our country's diversity agenda is pushing certain individuals who should not be there up the ranks of various institutions?

Participant

As a mother of two British born Pakistani children I would like to ask the Mayor of your plans to assimilate them with their peers, as I feel when there is sharing of literature and culture at a grassroots level, only then would they feel understood and part of Britain and will not have to look elsewhere for guidance, identity acceptance and support. I have been working with schools showing them what Pakistani children are about and sharing Eid and everything with the children it really works very well at grassroots level. I have a plan I can give it to you.

Participant

Currently a sixth former as a state school: I have seen many teachers now afraid to tackle behaviour in lower school classes. How is the Assembly going to help teachers to feel safer when teaching?

[Applause]

Boris Johnson

Just on the question about the Metropolitan Police Authority?

Participant

Black Police Association.

Boris Johnson

I think the most eloquent commentary I can make is that Ali Dizaei has plainly been convicted of very serious offences he is now in prison and will serve a substantial prison sentence. I think everybody around London can see the very powerful signal that sends, that no matter how powerful you are in our police service you are not above the law.

Your question about how to integrate children of Pakistani origin. I am endlessly proud about this but my own children are a quarter, geographically, from Pakistan, how about that? Yes they are funnily enough and I do my best to integrate them but you know it is a struggle.

[Laughter]

But, more seriously, I feel profoundly about this, is that the way to bring understanding between communities, particularly between Muslim communities and the rest of society, is just get people to know the shared history. Get people to understand what we have in common.

Participant

Why particularly Muslim? We live in a country where there is different cultures all over the place.

Boris Johnson

I absolutely agree and what we need to do is bring about maximum possible understanding between all communities so people know about other people's backgrounds and their origins. The more understanding you have and the more historical knowledge you have, the less prejudice there is going to be. The way to break down prejudice is to build up understanding and if have you got a plan for that, I can see you have got a brown paper envelope - I will be happy to receive your envelope, provided it contains no cash [laughter] and we will put it to what good use we can.

On making teachers feel safe it is the number one, absolutely. I think one of the real problems in our education system at the moment is that teachers do not feel they have the authority to impose discipline on their classes, do they? I think it is time we moved away from a culture that endlessly blames the teacher and terrifies the teacher, should he or she choose to exercise adult authority and control over a classroom. I have seen far too many cases of teachers in my view being prosecuted, being terrified when what they want to do is get on and discharge their functions of giving instruction.

James Cleverly

As well as being on the London Assembly, I also sit on the board of the London Development Agency and one of the responsibilities that we have is the training and skills agenda for young people above the age of 16 and one of the things that is becoming increasingly evident is that we are slipping behind the world when it comes to the quality of our education. We are, arguably, in one of the best schools of the world I am sure I will have a discussion about the Mayor later on about that! The simple truth of the matter is that the school system in London for a lot of young Londoners is not good enough and the ability for the teaching staff to actually teach has been recognised. My colleague Kit Malthouse has already mentioned the Time for Action plan. I would recommend that you look at that, because within that is a stream of work about making sure young people turn up to school and making sure they are taught when they turn up to school. We recognise the importance not just for the education here and now but in terms of maintaining our position as one of the commercial centres of the world. If we do not recognise the importance of quality education we will be left behind. So I think that is an area that we do not have all that much control over at the London Assembly but we are, through the Academies Programme that the Mayor is sponsoring, we are making sure that that is pushed up the agenda.

Richard Barnes

As Deputy Mayor of London I lead on the social policy and community cohesion and it is important that we do celebrate all the communities in London. You will probably be aware of Diwali, Vaisakhi/ Baisakhi, Eid, Chinese New Year, Russian Spring Festival, which we celebrate in the centre of London, but we also celebrate Saint George's Day and we have a Christian festival in Southwark Cathedral to celebrate Christianity.

[Applause]

For the first time ever, on Good Friday there will be a Passion Play performed on Trafalgar Square. But the greatest way to integrate is to learn to speak the language.

[Applause]

We spend £155 million in London teaching English to speakers of other languages. It is not just the children that need to integrate; it is their parents as well.

[Applause]

You cannot have children leading schizophrenic lives; if we do that, then the opportunities, the training, the jobs that are open to them and they will be Londoners first, and wherever they came from and the culture and languages they speak second. We want one city, not salami sliced.

Participant

How can you as Mayor increase the participation of young people aged 14-18 in the capital's politics especially considering that in two years' time, they will form your electorate and a greater proportion if the voting age is lowered to 16?

Participant

You talk about value for money, but I just wanted to know if you think it is acceptable to ride around in taxis at the taxpayers' expense?

Participant

I have an invitation as much a question for the Mayor and the panel. I am afraid I look a bit older than the students that Navin pointed to, but it was actually my question. It concerns a piece of Harrovian history, a mansion not three miles from here on the high ground opposite this building. It was built by a previous pupil of this school, but more importantly during the summer of 1940, it was the RAF Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain. Since the RAF disposed of the site two years ago, its future has been very uncertain. When another pupil of this school, a gentleman whose portrait hangs over to my left here, said that 'Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few' –

The Chair

Will you come to the question?

Participant

The question is, would the Mayor please take the trouble to come and visit Bentley Priory one day and look at it and see if he can help secure its future. It would be very nice if an Old Etonian could rescue a piece of Harrovian history.

Boris Johnson

Bentley Priory, I will make sure that your campaign is taken very, very seriously. Whether I am going to come there immediately, I do not know, but it is patently something that excites strong local passions and I will make sure that we address them and we deal with that.

On the ridiculous question about – the implication seems to be that I was riding around in taxis. Was that what you were driving at? Absolutely ludicrous. Insofar as anybody rides around in taxis nowadays in City Hall, the bill has been hugely reduced on the shameless profligacy of the previous regime. I do not think I need to remind you I go almost everywhere by bicycle, which I would encourage you to do, by the way. Furthermore let me say the real savings to be made for this shameful Labour Government to get rid of its addiction to chauffeur-driven cars. Only the other day I was in the House of Commons, on my bicycle and Keith Vaz – do you know who I mean by him –

The Chair

Mr Mayor, the question is about your taxi rides.

Boris Johnson

He was going in a chauffer driven limo from Westminster to Lancaster Gate. Why, what an incredible waste of taxpayers money. Get rid of that! Get rid of the Labour Government!

[Applause]

I am not going to give you the answer you want to this question, because I do not believe in lowering the voting age. I do not think enough people vote enough as it is. I want to encourage people to vote; it is vitally important that people take an interest in politics but you do not encourage people to value the franchise more in my view, by extending it. You should encourage younger people to come to City Hall and see what we are doing at Mayor's Question Time, which you will find almost electrifyingly exciting and also get involved in London's Youth Parliament as well.

[Applause]

Participant

I would like to know in your opinion what is more important? Economic growth and our whole economic situation, or environment sustainability or global warming? What is more important to you?

Participant

I thought this event was rather successful today because it encourages people to politically participate and we were just talking about the voter turnout not being so good nowadays and Mr Johnson said there has only been 20 events in 10 years. I wanted to know if there was going to be any more?

Participant

Thank you very much for coming to the suburbs; it is nice for you to be able to see there is a vibrant life beyond Zone One. The Outer London Commission, which you appointed, recommended dropping the super-hubs as a method of development in London generally and promoted enhancing a constellation of local town centres. My question is, will the Mayor reject the proposals for the super-hubs generally and put the time, effort and money into enhancing local town centres, through the London plan which you have now got in draft consultation stage, so still have the opportunity to work with local authorities to enhance them, so they provide local, human scale centres, that recognise the character and individuality of each area? There is no British standard suburb. We are all different and we would like that to be recognised through the rules and regulations and not made to fit some inner city design standards, densities and all the problems.

[Applause]

Nicky Gavron

I lead on Planning and Housing for Labour and I am Deputy Chair of the Planning and Housing Committee. Just on the economic growth and on sustainability: economic growth is not incompatible with sustainability. It was a very good question and we really need now to look at the way that we can bring the environment together with the economy and in fact there is a massive opportunity now to actually green the economy, not just have a green environmental sector but actually look at every single way of greening the economy. In the future it will not be the best way forward to become prosperous, it will be the only way forward because it is the only way we can fight climate change.

On super-hubs: we did not really understand why the super-hubs were put in, because Croydon is a growth area, there are other growth areas which are already in the plan and we did not understand why one should need more growth areas. But anyway, we are very pleased that in fact, town centres have been embraced as where we should be actually investing. They are the lifeblood of outer London, in fact the lifeblood of all of London. They are where the investment needs to stay. We need to be careful about promoting a super-hub, because it sucks the investment out of the centres round it and we cannot have that situation. We need thriving town centres. I also wanted to mention the London plan has made Harrow an area of intensification. Now, you need to be very careful about that because intensification means more densification and that can be all right, but watch out for the high-rise, because you do not want, necessarily, intensification and higher density to mean high-rise.

Also, make sure you get infrastructure to go with it. Are you going to have the bus services, and the improvements to your stations to go with being intensified? I will just leave it at that. It is very important you watch that. Also watch out for your affordable housing because the London Plan is quite *laissez-faire* in terms of giving to the boroughs responsibility for affordable housing, and there is a lowering of targets and a diversion away from those most in need: social rented.

Victoria Borwick

I have lived in London all my life and I absolutely agree. London is a network of communities, villages, town centres. That is what makes London so special and that is why we are in this wonderful mixed community tonight. The wonderful thing is, yes, with this localism agenda you can make decisions locally. Boris has gone all out to say that he is going to make sure that local councils feel empowered to make the decisions that matter to them locally. The closer to the ground you make the decision the more likely it is that you as residents will make the right decisions about your local area. Let us preach localism and let us make local decisions locally; that is what matters. We are unique in London and we want to dictate what happens to our own local area.

The Chair

I am afraid that brings to an end People's Question Time. I am sorry I have not been able to take a lot of questions but as I said, right at the beginning.

[Heckles]

I am sorry, can we stop heckling. There is no extension whatsoever. There are rules that need to be followed, which is what I am going to do. No one absolutely no one is going to get any sort of extension.

Participant

You haven't stopped talking since you got here!

[Applause]

The Chair

I would like to thank all of you for attending the People's Question Time. Information on all questions will be available on the GLA website which is www.london.gov.uk. Written answers will be provided within six weeks to all questions sent in advance or handed in tonight if you hand in your contact details. Highlights of this evening will be broadcast tomorrow. Thank you for coming. Safe journey.

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