

## Better roads

The government is currently consulting on a network of A roads that have strategic importance, to supplement the national network of motorways and trunk roads. These strategic A roads will continue to be local roads under the control of the local Highways Authority – a County or Unitary Council. They will be able to bid for substantial funds for major improvement schemes for these roads. I have been a keen advocate of such an approach. The Transport Secretary has secured extra money for later in this Parliament to provide assistance with these works.

The government has set out in its Consultation document a suggested map of routes that could be included. These tend to be large A roads where there has already been some substantial upgrades and improvements, dual carriageways and recently de trunked routes. The main aim is to choose roads with substantial current road usage, that link substantial settlements. They also need to consider the role of busy routes where they act to take some local journey pressure off an adjacent national highway. I would also trust they will consider roads that may not currently have very high usage, but given likely growth in development will be hitting those levels within the planning period of this initiative.

You might like to look at what is being proposed for your local area and to make some observations to your Council. Councils also need to consider what improvements they would wish to propose once some local roads are designated. Some will need extra capacity by dualling, some better junctions to improve safety and flows, some will need bypasses round settlements and bottlenecks.

On Friday I spent time with Wokingham Borough Council, one of the two local Highways Authorities in my constituency, discussing their response to the Consultation. They too welcome the general approach. The government has set out an indicative map of routes, but is open to persuasion to add or delete roads from the draft. In my area they have proposed designating the A 329M/A3290 Bracknell to Reading route, the A 33 Reading to Basingstoke road, and the A4 into Reading from the east, a relatively recently de trunked road. I have suggested adding the A 327 and the A 329 to these routes, where some major improvement works are already underway with the Winnersh, Arborfield and Shinfield by passes. Wokingham Borough is considering the case for a B road, the Earley peripheral, as well. Anyone with thoughts on this locally should write in to the Council and copy me in to the submission at Parliament.

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# Taxing travel

I saw in the press the case made for private sector run roads. The IEA pointed to the shortage of capacity of the current road system, the high pay backs that new road investment would achieve compared to new railway lines, and urged a more radical approach. The present government has ruled this out, and is only considering road user charging for lorries, not for private cars. Without a system of comprehensive user charging private run roads with private new investment are impossible. This article is not an attempt to re open this issue, which the government regards as settled.

In the run up to the 2010 election the Conservative party looked at a scheme to repay debt from franchise fees for roads whilst abolishing Vehicle Excise Duty, but decided against it. The Conservatives were keen to find ways of cutting state debt. I am not recommending this scheme now, and the numbers no longer work with lower interest rates on government borrowing. I thought it might be of interest to see what has been explored and rejected in the past in the light of some people's wish to re open road pricing as an issue.

The aims set were

- 1 Abolition of Vehicle Excise Duty, introduction of road charges. Road users overall to pay no more in tax and no less as a result of the change
2. Tax road use rather than vehicle ownership
- 3 Raise a large sum of money from the private sector to pay off some national debt.
4. Government to retain the freehold of the road network so we were not selling long term national assets
- 5 Motorists to display and register their insurance so there remained accessible records of vehicles in use
- 6 Private managers of the highways network incentivised to increase capacity, safety and availability of road space
- 7 Price controls to stop monopoly exploitation of popular roads at popular times of day.
8. Winners from the scheme to be people on lower incomes, low mileage drivers and users of roads at off peak periods

The scheme entailed introducing road charges to replace the lost VED revenue. The government was to offer franchises to the private sector to manage and improve the main roads and to collect the charges to pay for the maintenance, management and franchise premium paid to the state. The franchises were to be auctioned for a specified price, with bidders bidding for length of contract. There would be absolute price controls to stop monopoly exploitation, allowing franchise holders to charge less off peak as they saw

fit. The numbers worked to deliver £ 100 bn of capital to the government to repay debt, with later reversion of the franchises to do it again.

Private management of the highways was likely to result in improvements to flows and use, with less time with intrusive roadworks and closures. Franchise holders could add to the network, with incentives to spend capital on road improvement and protection for sunk capital if they lost the public sector road franchise.

The leadership considered it carefully but rejected it because it had a big political drawback . The public were so distrustful of government that they did not believe any government would honour the promise not to charge more.

The scheme did of course offer a useful tax cut to those using the main roads less than the average. It was particularly helpful to low income and elderly households who drive fewer miles. The user charges only applied to the national trunk and motorway network.

Today interest rates are lower so the public finances would lose out from the loss of state revenue, so it is a non runner. The scheme worked financially only because the state saved in interest costs from debt repayment what it had lost in VED revenue forgone. Today some people are proposing a switch from VED to road charges but all collected by the state. This cuts out revenue loss but fails to deliver service improvements in highway provision. With user charges the motorist would likely get even more critical of the poor service and availability of roadspace in the UK with a public monopoly.

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## Sharing data and security information

I find it strange that three Heads of Security Agencies had to speak out for fear that Brexit would damage exchanges of information between France, Germany and the UK after Brexit. Why should it? They would have to want to change their current procedures, or their governments would have to stop instructing them to make sensible exchange.

It is already the case that if the UK gets intelligence about a threat to lives in France it will tell the French authorities and vice versa. There are data sharing agreements, based on what we can usually share with due consideration of how each Intelligence service protects its own sources. The UK belongs to the Five Eyes grouping of the USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada where trust is even stronger and the sharing has gone further, and that will clearly continue after Brexit.

This seems to me to be another non problem, unless the EU side wants to make it a problem. As we have high quality and extensive intelligence it is unlikely they will want to reduce the flow of information, so they can just agree to carry on. The information share is usually bilateral anyway. Issues in the UK should be adjudicated by our court, and issues on the continent by

their court.

An Extradition Agreement might be a better route for bringing suspects to trial in another country rather than trying to continue with the Arrest Warrant, where ECJ jurisdiction would be a problem.

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## [Wikipedia](#)

Last week I was asked some questions at a meeting based on wildly inaccurate information about myself and my views. I was told the basis for the questions came from Wikipedia so I looked up my entry.

I understand it is not the done thing to correct your own entry, so instead for greater accuracy I will record here where the entry is factually inaccurate, and also where it is particularly misleading.

### Factual errors

I am not currently the co chairman of the Conservative Party Policy Review on Competitiveness. That job ended in 2010.

I do not act as the Leave means Leave pressure group spokesman

I am not Corporate Affairs Adviser at Concentric PLC

I have not been non executive chairman of Mabey Securities this decade

I completed and received a D Phil – not a PHD – at All Souls College, Oxford, not at St Anthony's

I was elected to a fellowship by examination at All Souls in 1972 which led on later to a Distinguished fellowship.

I did not write an investment column "recommending investors pull their money out of the UK"

### Misleading impressions

I have never spoken or written against civil partnerships and gay marriage and am not proposing any change to current laws. I regard the debate about capital punishment as being over and do not support its reintroduction. I never spoke or wrote in its favour.

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## [The benefits of Brexit](#)

Next Tuesday I have been invited to give a lecture in the Speaker's House at Westminster on the opportunities Brexit affords the UK. I have plenty of ideas of what can be better, and believe the UK can both be freer and more

prosperous once we are out of the EU. That was why I campaigned and voted for just such an outcome. I will share more of the details with you on this site next week.

My vision will include discussing how to spend all the money we save from our contributions, which will boost both our growth rate and our balance of payments. It will look at opportunities to remove taxes we do not agree with but have to impose as part of our membership. It will examine the scope for a fishing and farming policy which is better for our farmers and fishermen, and will cut our dependence on imports. It will consider what a new migration and borders policy ought to look like, and set out how we can pursue a free trade agenda that will be good for jobs in the UK. There is a longer list than this, but these are some of the highlights.

I would be interested to hear from readers what they think we can do after Brexit that will improve our lives and government, given the freedoms we will gain to vary our laws and spend our own money. We have had months and months of being told by a small group of contributors here – and another small group of contributors to the national media – what they think the downsides will be. Most of these will prove as incorrect as the forecast of a recession immediately after the referendum vote.