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**Secretariat memorandum**

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LTW 314

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**Smoothing the traffic**

**1 Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To brief the Board on the Mayor's policy of 'Smoothing Traffic Flow'

**2 Background**

- 2.1 One of the key transport pledges in Mayor Johnson's 2008 transport manifesto, Getting Londoners Moving, was to 'smooth traffic flow' using measures such as:

“re-phasing traffic lights, allowing motorcycles in bus lanes and cracking down on utility companies who dig up the roads”.

- 2.2 The Mayor was responding, in part, to public disquiet at the deliberate policy of Transport for London (TfL) of extending the pedestrian green man phase of traffic light signals and that more should be done to reduce the delays caused by the utilities road works.

- 2.3 Members should note that at the time when there was heightened publicity around extending the pedestrian green man phase of traffic light signals the Board investigated the matter. We heard from TfL that this was generally being done in a planned way to bring signal light timings up to standards set by the DfT. This process continues.

- 2.4 The Mayor also stated in his manifesto that:

“I will get traffic flowing smoothly. This will make commuters' lives easier, it will also help to reduce emissions and make buses more reliable – which will encourage long term modal shift.”

- 2.5 Since May 2008 TfL have set about implementing the Mayor's manifesto commitment in various ways: traffic lights have been re phased; there is to be greater use of intelligent traffic lights; the motorcycles in bus lane trial has commenced; further agreements have been made with the utility companies and the Government is being pressed to bring forward the regulations (part of the Transport Management Act 2004) enabling the permitting of utilities works.

- 2.6 Members should note that we too have written to ministers at the DfT pressing them to bring forward the required Traffic Management Act 2004 regulations to allow TfL to regulate road works by utilities through a system of permits..

2.7 In parallel with these initiatives TfL wrote to stakeholders, including London TravelWatch, in January 2009 asking for their views on 'smoothing traffic flow' and proposing workshops culminating in a conference in the summer to discuss the issues around this concept. This proposal appears to have been diluted to now be a website initiative aimed at stakeholders.

2.8 TfL has also been developing its ideas on 'smoothing traffic flow' and have four work streams:

2.8.1 Improve efficiency of the operation of network:

- Signal timing review
- Pedestrian Countdown
- Intelligent traffic light signals
- Enforcement
- Works permit scheme
- Incident management

2.8.2 Fit for purpose road network:

- State of good repair
- Road space allocation
- Integrated schemes
- Managing bottlenecks
- Junction improvements

2.8.3 Help users make informed choices:

- Variable message signs
- Real time information
- Satellite navigation systems and interfaces
- Journey Planner

2.8.4 Encourage shift to the most efficient modes:

- Bus services
- Marketing / info on advantages of bus, walk, cycle
- Cycle training / safety campaigns
- Road safety campaigns

### **3 Discussion**

3.1 Prior to the election of Mayor Johnson urban roads policy was clear, if difficult to deliver due to conflicting demands for road space. Transport planners suggested that the challenge of delivering better transport in congested urban areas would be met by a combination of improving public transport, cycling and walking and restraining the private car using parking controls and / or road pricing. This would be achieved by a whole raft of measures, but importantly reallocating road space to the more space efficient modes – bus, cycle and walk, parking control and congestion charging. Latterly, due to the political

difficulties of introducing road user pricing there has been increased emphasis on 'soft' measures to encourage modal shift.

- 3.2 The election of Mayor Johnson challenged this settled view with a much greater emphasis on facilitating the movement of all forms of transport. Thus it is now proposed that through a series of measures (notably the re-phasing of traffic light signals) more network capacity will allow more reliable journey times for all modes and there will also be additional environmental benefits – less pollution, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- 3.3 However, the difficulty with this proposition (outside of areas where road pricing applies) is the phenomena of 'induced' traffic – It is widely accepted that if there is an increase in network capacity this will just encourage more journeys and the network will, in time, become as congested as before the intervention.
- 3.4 Paragraph 2.8 above describes how TfL are widening the scope of smoothing traffic flow beyond just re-phasing traffic lights, allowing motorcycles in bus lanes and cracking down on utility companies who dig up the roads. This is to be welcomed, but there remains the concern that the balance of policies needed to tackle London's transport problems is now skewed towards those of increasing road network capacity rather than modal switch, reallocating road space to the space efficient modes and restraining the private car.

#### **4 Equalities and inclusion implications**

- 4.1 The concept of smoothing traffic flow will have an impact on all transport users and has no specific equalities and inclusion implications.

#### **5 Legal powers**

- 5.1 Section 248 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 places upon London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) a duty to consider - and where it appears to the Committee to be desirable, to make recommendations with respect to - any matter affecting the functions of the Greater London Authority or Transport for London which relate to transport (other than of freight).

#### **6 Financial implications**

- 6.1 This report has no specific financial consequences for London TravelWatch.

#### **7 Recommendations**

- 7.1 None – the report is intended for information only.