

Sustainable Development and Travel.

A Paper from Poole Agenda 21.

The Purpose of Government.

The purpose of government is not to maximise choice for its citizens and to leave the organisation of society to the choices of those citizens.

Rather it is to be wise on our behalf. It is to lead, mould and regulate our society so as to maintain the general health and well-being of that society.

What is "Sustainable Development".

"Sustainable development" is NOT simply development with a faint green wash applied. In the words of the classic definition it is:-

Development that meets the needs of the present
Without compromising the needs of future generations.

In that classic definition the important words are the meeting of "NEEDS" and "WITHOUT COMPROMISING". This classic definition emphasises above all else the requirement to achieve "sustainability".

All the scientific evidence points to the fact that the world is hugely threatened by the global warming crisis and that this will very heavily compromise the needs of future generations. This threat is not for some far off future generation but will bite on those already born today. The scientific advice is that we should do all we can to reduce the impact of global warming by reducing our emissions of greenhouse gases. So sustainable policies must be those which lead to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and to eschew actions which lead to an increase in those emissions.

Lip service is widely paid to these objectives. Yet all too often in engaging with those who are responsible for policy making we have heard the most specious arguments put forward to justify completely unsustainable policy decisions.

Our Most Unsustainable Activities - Flying and Car Travel.

Nowhere is this more true than in policies concerning transport and travel. Flying and travelling by car are about the two most unsustainable activities in which we take part. Furthermore they are activities for which there is the least justification.

Facts about Flying.

Flying produces global warming emissions at about the highest rate per hour of any activity in which we take part - the rate of production can be as high as about ½ a ton of CO₂ per person per hour. On a per mile basis flying produces emissions per passenger equivalent to driving alone in a car which does from about 13 to 19 mpg.

Note. These figures take account of the facts, established by research, that emissions produced at altitude have much greater effects than the same emissions produced at ground level. The order of magnitude of this effect is established as between 2 and 5 times the effect of the same amount of CO₂ produced at ground level. The figures quoted are based on a factor of 3. Naturally these figures are worse than those quoted by spokespersons for the aircraft industry. Who both ignore the factor simply quoting raw CO₂ figures, and also base their claims on the very latest aircraft ignoring the fact that

much flying is done in older aircraft - and given the cost of aircraft this will remain true.

Flying is a largely unjustifiable activity. Most flying is done not because it is a need but because we want to, and we do not take account of the consequences. Even so called "Love miles" where people travel to see their relatives resident abroad while more justifiable than mere tripping take no account of the damage done to other people as a result of those flights.

Similarly much business flying could be replaced by video conferencing or even by telephone and written communication - a large element of business flying is recreational.

Apart from its drastic contribution to global warming flying also makes a major contribution the pollution of the environment by noise - lots of people suffer from living near to airports or under flight paths. Aircraft construction uses large amounts of non-renewable resources, in particular rare metals, which are increasingly becoming scarce.

Facts about Car Use.

Naturally, because of the much lower speed car use, produces greenhouse gases at a much lower rate than flying. At the very worst (Jeremy Clarkson alone in his Ferrari driving at 120 mph!) the rate might get as high as ½ ton in 4-5 hours, the average car would only produce ½ tons emissions in a full 24 hours of continuous driving. However even this rate is still many times higher per hour than our other energy consuming activities - like heating and cooking.

However we spend much longer driving about than we do flying, so that car use makes a huge contribution to our global warming emissions.

A large proportion of our private car use is also unjustifiable, since there are potentially much less damaging ways to travel and many of the journeys that are made are in any case unnecessary. It is not necessary to live long distances from one's place of work. It is not necessary to fit so many things into our lives that they can only be done by rushing from one place to another by car. These things are not "needs" they are choices and ones which have very undesirable consequences for the well-being of both individuals and our society.

Further car use together with excessive transportation are the major causes of unpleasantness in urban environments - noise, congestion and pollution. Private car ownership and use are responsible for the excessive concreting of the free space in our localities for the parking of the ubiquitous car - our localities are largely designed for the car rather than for people.

Sustainable Policies for Travel and Transport.

Bearing all of the foregoing facts in mind:-

The ONLY sustainable development policies for travel and transport are those, which lead to reductions in Flying and in Road Traffic.

Note. Actually lead to reductions not reductions in rate of growth.

How Do Government Policies Rate for Sustainability.

We do not believe that it is possible to challenge the arguments we have presented above on any rational basis. Yet government policy for flying and for traffic management run directly counter to these considerations.

On flying the government has a policies of:-

“expanding airport capacity to cater for an increased number of passengers”

and “developing local airports.”

both of these can have no other effect than of increasing the numbers of people who fly. As such both policies run directly counter to the only sustainable objective of reducing the numbers of people who fly.

On road management the government policy is to:-

“improve the road system to cater for an increased number of vehicles”.

again a policy, that as research has shown time after time, has no other effect than to increase the amount of road traffic.

Sustainable Transport Policy - Rationing and Cheap/Free Public Transport.

It is widely recognised that in order to achieve an acceptable reduction in car use it is necessary to provide improved and cheap public transport.

Public transport suffers from a downward spiral of expensive fares and poor service - these lead to less utilisation and consequent increases in prices and reductions in services. The only way to break this downward spiral is to provide public subsidy to kick start the virtuous cycle of greater utilisation leading to better service and cheaper fares. This is the cycle that has been achieved in London but it is not a policy that the government has been following.

It is our belief that in order to fairly bring about reductions in flying and in the use of private cars both should be rationed.

Rationing of flying would lead to a reduction in flying - which we have to achieve - in this case people will just have to get used to the idea that they cannot have a divine right to fly - it is far too harmful to the environment.

However rationing of private car use will only be acceptable if the public transport alternative is made much more acceptable. Local transport (mostly buses) should be largely (or completely) paid for out of taxation making it very cheap (or even free). Hence the need for much more pro-active policies for public transport. In this area the governments introduction of free travel for older people is welcomed but the policy should be extended to make travel very cheap or free for all of the population.

It is also time that the government looked seriously at Mr Alan Storer's (and others) proposals for a motorway coach network. This network should operate from out of town coach stations served by local transport services and with fast comfortable frequent coaches running along priority lanes on motorways between these stations. It is nonsense that current coach services operate to the middle of towns adding hugely to the journey times as they fight through congestion. In transport terms such a network would be very cheap to implement.