

Reproduced below is a letter to LTT in response to Tim Pharoah's letter which questioned the wisdom of encouraging cycling in Central London. I feel that Chris does not answer my points, but at the Transport Planning Society debate on cycling in London (on 25th January 2012 - see presentation pdf), Chris and I had to agree to differ.



Criticisms of Boris Bikes were off the mark

I was amazed to read Tim Pharoah's diatribe against 'Boris bikes' (Letters LTT 18 Nov).

The Tube in Central London is running at or above capacity. If some people transfer from the Underground to the bike, leaving more room and comfort for other passengers, isn't that good? Certainly bike hire is a lot cheaper and quicker to implement than building new Tube lines.

It's a similar story with buses. While buses in London have improved in recent years, you can still wait a long time for a bus and journeys can be very slow, particularly if there are roadworks around, which there usually are.

I do occasionally use the hire bikes, and, yes, it's on journeys that I'd have otherwise made on foot or by bus, or sometimes by Tube. The bike is much faster than the first two and often faster, and always more pleasant, than the last. I can get to more places in the time I have available, increasing my productivity, if you want to get cost-benefitty about it.

Perhaps the best aspect of the hire bikes is that they

show that cycling is something 'ordinary' people do – you don't have to have lycra, tights, shorts, helmets, high-viz, or a £1,000 plus machine. And it's very hard to run a red light on one of these bikes – they're too clunky.

Bus and taxi drivers do seem to give Boris bike riders room and respect and I doubt if it takes them any longer to get to their destinations as a result.

The bikes may even act as a form of traffic calming – something of which Tim was a pioneer back in the day. The hire bike scheme is proving very popular and there's a large demand for it to be extended into inner London.

Of course it's arguable whether central London should be the first priority for cycling investment, but to say, as Tim does, that we shouldn't encourage cycling in central London because cyclists get in the way of other road users is very dangerous. People in outer London, or anywhere else, who don't like cyclists could use the same arguments.

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