

# PARKING POLICY AND TRAFFIC RESTRAINT IN CENTRAL LONDON

A paper for the Berlin Senate of Building and Housing

Tim Pharoah  
School of Land Management & Urban Policy,  
South Bank University, London

October 1992

## INTRODUCTION

This paper has been prepared at the invitation of the Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik (DIFU), and the Berlin Senate for Building and Housing. It covers the development of parking policy in London, and its relation to traffic restraint policy. The paper is mainly concerned with Central London, but reference is also made to the rest of Greater London. Important points are highlighted in the text. Some basic facts about London are given in the "fact sheet" attached, together with Berlin equivalents where these are known.

## CENTRAL LONDON

It was recognised long ago that the centre of London could not (and should not) attempt to accommodate movement to and from by private motorised transport. London's competitive position as a leading world metropolis has depended on providing high volume passenger access to its large central core (Figures 1 and 2). This core provides a wide diversity of activities, which are characterised by their highly specialised function (e.g. international finance, insurance, theatre). Being specialised functions, they must draw on a large catchment population. Thus the Central Area of London attracts each day 1.2 million office and other employees, who travel from throughout a region whose total population is in excess of 15 million people. About half of these commuters live outside Greater London.

This remarkable daily flow of people is possible only because most of them (75% in fact) travel by railway (Figure 3). If they all travelled instead by car (1.2 people per car), there would need to be 40 motorways each of 8 lanes simply to bring them in and out. The one million parking spaces required for these cars, plus the local access roads to link them with the motorways would occupy the entire land surface of what is central London. And this calculation does not include travel for purposes other than work!

The conclusion is therefore clear: if London's commercial core is to grow and prosper, travel by private car has to be limited, and travel by rail and bus has to be maintained. Although London is currently going through a bad patch (both in terms of its economy and its transport), it still presents a remarkable example of minimal dependence on the car, and successful restraint of road traffic to its centre. Apart from the fairly restricted supply of roads, the main instrument of traffic restraint in London is the deliberate parking policies adopted over the past thirty years.

## DEVELOPMENT OF PARKING POLICY IN CENTRAL LONDON

With the growth of car traffic after the Second World War, London's streets became increasingly congested, and clogged with parked vehicles. In Central London (the 27 square kilometres commercial heart of the city), sites left vacant from bomb damage were often used for car parking, and new building developments included car parking provision, usually underground. On the street, parking became increasingly problematic.

Over the past thirty years, policies have been introduced to improve the flow of traffic, to reduce the use of cars for the journey to work (called "car commuting"), and to allocate available parking space for essential vehicle users.

### On-street control

In 1958 the first parking meters were introduced to control and reduce the amount of on-street parking. This was combined with "yellow line" parking restrictions at the kerbside. The intention from 1966 onwards was to cover a large part of central and inner London with such controls, though the spread was fairly slow because of the resources needed for enforcement. In the late 1960s, special residents' parking spaces were introduced.

Now the entire area of Central London has comprehensive on-street parking control and, with a few exceptions, there is no longer any on-street space that is free of charge or control during weekdays. Controls are mostly from 8.30 to 18.30 hours, but in the West End (with high concentrations of theatres, restaurants etc.), controls continue to 22.00 hours. Enforcement is by traffic wardens (now local authority employees) backed up by police teams who use wheel-clamps and tow-away trucks.

The aims of on-street control are to:

- keep streets clear for moving traffic
- keep some kerbside space for deliveries
- reserve spaces for residents (an increasing %)
- favour short-term parking
- prevent all-day parking by car commuters

### Public off-street parking

During the 1960s and 1970s in particular, attempts were made to provide public parking in off-street garages, whilst limiting provision in private developments. These public car parks were paid for partly by the local authority, and partly by "commuted payments" from private building developers. Some were multi-storey garages, and some were built underneath open spaces, such as Hyde Park and Cavendish Square.

By 1980, the system of commuted payments was no longer used, and the building of public car parks had virtually ceased. Indeed, sites used for temporary public car parking (mainly bomb sites) were progressively closed as development took place. A notable example is the National Gallery extension site in Trafalgar Square.

A further aspect of policy has been the regulation of charges at public car parks, which have been progressively designed to favour the short-term rather than the all-day parker. Although all public car parks in Central London are operated by private companies, the local authorities have powers (since 1970) to dictate the level and structure of charges. About 57% of public spaces are controlled by local authorities in this way.

#### Private non-residential car parks

In 1969 the former policy requiring a minimum number of car parking spaces to be provided in new developments was replaced with maximum standards. These maximum standards were included in the Greater London Development Plan which received full Government approval.

The present (1992) standard was adopted in 1971:

Central London Shop and Office developments: maximum of 1 space per 1,115 m<sup>2</sup> of floor space.

Existing private car parks have sometimes been converted for public use, an example being that attached to the Hilton Hotel, Hyde Park. Since about 1982, the local authorities have encouraged building owners to voluntarily convert car parking space to other uses. (Powers were sought by the GLC, unsuccessfully, to compel owners to reduce parking.) As buildings dating from the era of minimum parking standards come due for redevelopment, the application of the maximum standard often results in a net reduction of spaces. An example is the Paternoster Square development next to St Paul's Cathedral, which when redeveloped will have less private parking than now, and will also lose the present 340 space public car park.

The reason for the maximum standard is to restrain the amount of peak hour traffic by limiting the number of people commuting to Central London by car. The 1969 standard has remained unchanged and is still strongly applied. In the City of London (the financial quarter or CBD), developers are not required to provide any car parking in new buildings. Apart from the restraint objective, the City of London is also concerned about minimising turnings and footway "crossovers" - given the high pedestrian flows - and conserving townscape qualities. A slightly different approach is currently taken by Westminster City Council, for whom the standard of one space per 1,115 square metres is both a maximum and a minimum. Both cities, however, are concerned that servicing space (loading etc.) should be provided off-street.

#### Residential parking

In new residential developments there is a normal requirement of one space for each dwelling, but this is not always rigidly applied.

#### THE OUTCOME OF PARKING RESTRAINT POLICY

How successful are the parking policies we have described? It would be wrong to ascribe any outcome to parking policy alone. Parking is one element in a strategy which continues to apply, even in the absence (since 1986) of a strategic planning authority. Important amongst the other elements are: continuing (though declining)

subsidies for public transport, restricted roadbuilding, a ban on heavy goods vehicles, pedestrian priority areas, the building of new and improved railway facilities, and bus priority schemes.

#### Traffic and environment

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that parking policy has been the main instrument of restraint in Central London. Traffic speeds have remained relatively stable for many years, while traffic growth has been contained to no more than about half a percent per year, and most of that increase has been outside the peak hours (Figure 4). Through traffic has tended to increase, and this is a major limitation of parking restraint, but the small capacity of Central London roads itself is a feature which limits through traffic. The public transport share of the (peak) commuter market has been around 85% for many years. In addition, environmental quality has improved with the reduction of street and footway parking. Better enforcement coupled with the reduction of parking places and the conversion of carriageway to footway in many places has brought improvements for pedestrians. Local journeys in Central London are generally catered for on foot and by public transport, including taxis, which account for a high proportion of daytime traffic flow. Only 10% of trips generated by Central London offices are made by car (Figure 5).

#### Parking supply

Parking supply has increased only slowly overall, but there has been a considerable change in its composition (Figure 6). On street parking has been reduced, and a higher proportion of the remainder is reserved for residents' use. The reduction of on-street parking has been more than counterbalanced by increases in off-street parking, most of which has been for private use. The result has been a declining proportion of the total parking stock subject to local authority management. This remains an issue to be dealt with.

#### The economy

The economy of Central London clearly has not been prejudiced by the restrictive parking policies. During the 1980s, the financial sector was the only major growth sector in London, and the majority of this growth took place in Central London. Office floorspace continued to grow throughout the 1980s, and many existing offices were rebuilt to bring buildings up to modern requirements. Office rents generally are amongst the highest in Europe. Moreover, developers of new offices neither expect nor want to exceed the maximum parking provision standard. They recognise that space can be put to better and more profitable use. In the City of London, some office developments have been built with zero parking provision, and the authority does not require any provision.

It may therefore be concluded that parking provision in Central London for office employees is largely irrelevant to the area's economic well-being and competitiveness. In addition, restrictive parking policies have enabled traffic and environmental conditions to remain fairly stable over many years, despite the rapid rise in car ownership and use in suburban parts of the city.

## ISSUES IN PARKING POLICY

### Integrated parking policy

Restrictive maximum parking standards in new developments came **after** the introduction of comprehensive on-street parking controls in Central London. Restricted off-street provision without on-street control would have led to the chaotic street congestion that London saw in the early post-war years. The lesson learnt is the need for a comprehensive parking strategy that covers all parking: on- and off-street, public and private. In terms of supply, this has been relatively successful in Central London. However, there is still a large quantity of private off-street parking which is uncontrolled, and which is made available for employees free of charge. This in effect is a major subsidy" to car commuting, contrary to the general policy of restraint.

### Reducing private car parking

In an attempt to reduce private non-residential parking, owners of buildings have been encouraged, on a voluntary basis, to reduce the number of spaces. This has been done, for example, by granting planning permission for conversion of car parking to other uses, or alternatively bringing private parking into public use. There is a limit to what can be achieved on a voluntary basis, however, and debate continues on how to take firmer action. Free employee parking space is regarded by many as an "untaxed perk", and as such results in a loss of tax revenue to the Government. In Central London, the value of this untaxed benefit is put at about £2,000 (6,000 DM) per space per year.

### Commuted payments

Commuted payments from developers to local authorities instead of providing parking on-site have not been used in Central London since about 1982. Indeed, such arrangements require some form of minimum parking standard, and this would be inconsistent with the adopted maximum standard. Although the City of Westminster is attempting to establish the maximum standard also as a minimum, there is no intention that this will lead to a reintroduction of commuted payments. The reason is that any parking agreed with developers is seen as "operational" (i.e. essential) parking, and there is no intention to provide parking for employees' journey to work, whether on-site or elsewhere. Commuted payments for parking have no logic in this traffic restraint policy.

### A transport tax?

The question now arises whether developers should contribute to the provision of other transport improvements. This is done in San Francisco, for example, where one-off payments are made for public transport investment (and for other purposes). In Paris, employers make a permanent contribution to public transport via an employee tax as a percentage of the wage bill. This is used mainly to subsidise the "Carte Orange". These possibilities have been discussed in London, but no action has been taken. It remains, however, a serious issue because office development has increased beyond the capacity of the transport system to cope with the

generated passenger traffic. Development interests have been detached from the wider public interest in this respect, and some form of direct transport tax would establish this link, and help provide a direct source of finance for much needed public transport improvements. A transport tax would be more useful than commuted parking payments.

#### Parking and competitiveness?

People no longer expect to drive to Central London, especially for work. The provision of parking in order to maintain the area's competitive position is not an issue, though the provision of adequate public transport certainly is. There are increasing fears that London's poor quality public transport will harm its ability to compete on the European stage.

#### Through traffic

There is evidence that through traffic in Central London has increased over the years, taking roadspace formerly occupied by terminating traffic. Government consultants are currently examining road pricing for London as a way of achieving more effective traffic restraint.

#### Company cars

Britain has a high proportion of cars which are funded in whole or in part by companies. For example, more than two thirds of all new cars sold are bought by companies. In general, taxes do not cover the full extent of the private benefits which these company cars provide to their users. This subsidy to private motoring is especially important (and damaging) in Central London where most cars are company-financed, and use high value parking space free of charge. These company cars are also likely to be a major problem for effective road pricing.

#### Monitoring of parking policy

Since the abolition of the Greater London Council in 1985, there has been no body with responsibility for monitoring parking policy, or for policing the application of parking standards. There is no system of monitoring parking provision even within the local authorities, and information on parking stock and is both out-of-date and incomplete. Differences in policy are also emerging between the local authorities (boroughs).

### PARKING POLICY IN INNER AND OUTER LONDON

Outside Central London the parking policy situation is very different, and can be only briefly dealt with here. However, it is in the inner and outer suburban areas - where the traffic restraint issue has not been fully addressed - that the main problems for the future lie. (See Figure 7 for the modal split by area.)

#### Standards for different areas

The Strategic Guidance provided by Central Government states that maximum

standards should apply throughout Greater London:

Central London - 1 space per 1,115 m<sup>2</sup>

Inner London - 1 space per 743 m<sup>2</sup>

Outer London:

Town Centres - 1 space per 465 m<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere - 1 space per 186 m<sup>2</sup>

**The application of these standards appears to have completely broken down, except in Central London.** A survey of London local authorities in 1990 showed that only 8 out of 15 inner/central boroughs had adopted the Government standards. In Outer London, only one borough (Croydon) had adopted the recommended maximum standard. The other 17 authorities applied **minimum** standards that were 3 - 10 times more generous than the recommended **maximum**.

Application of the standards in practice is even more in conflict with strategic policy. Information on a selection of recent developments showed that parking provided was 12 times higher than the maximum standard in Inner London, 15 times higher in Outer London town centres, and 5 times higher in other parts of outer London. Even in Central London it was 20% higher.

#### Competition for development

Parking practice in Inner and Outer London appears to be governed not by any intention to limit traffic, but by the desire of individual local authorities to attract development. Unlike in Central London, developers and the authorities believe that generous, free off-street parking is necessary. Conversely **it is believed that restricted parking allowances will simply persuade developers to go to other authorities where provision is not restricted.** There is clearly a need for strategic intervention, but there is currently no mechanism or political will for this.

A second principle which leads to large parking requirements is the desire of local authorities to avoid traffic congestion caused by on-street parking. Restricted parking off-street would lead to more on-street parking in most of Inner and Outer London, where kerbside parking is mostly uncontrolled. This reinforces the connection between on- and off-street policy already discussed.

#### Traffic generation

Generous parking provision in new developments outside the Central Area is (together with new roads) fuelling the trend of traffic growth. This is leading to rapidly-spreading congestion and falling traffic speeds, with attendant environmental and road safety problems. It appears to the author that these problems and trends are leading to a rapid deterioration in the quality of life in London's suburbs which will have potentially disastrous consequences for the long term future of the Capital city. These fears are shared by various advisory bodies and environmental groups, but not apparently by the Central and Local government bodies who have the power to alter the course of events.

## FACT SHEET

	LONDON	BERLIN
<b>POPULATION</b>		
Greater London/Berlin Land	6.71 m	3.4 m
Outer Met Area/Brandenburg Land	5.93 m	2.6 m
South East England	17.43 m	-
<b>AREA</b>		
Central Area	27 km <sup>2</sup>	?
Greater London/Berlin Land	1580 km <sup>2</sup>	883 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>DENSITY (Persons/km<sup>2</sup>)</b>		
Inner London (pop 2.5m)	7725	-
Outer London (pop 4.2m)	3362	-
AVERAGE Gtr London/Berlin Land	4250	3900
<b>EMPLOYMENT</b>		
Central Area	1.2 m	?
Greater London/Berlin	3.47 m	1.62 m
<b>RAILWAY NETWORK</b>		
Route length (kms)		
Underground (UBahn)	335	140
Network South East (SBahn)	3120	318(—73)
Light Rail/Tram	12	175
Stations (% with Park and Ride)		
Underground (UBahn)	280 (26%)	?
Network South East (SBahn)	893 (55%)	?
<b>BUS NETWORK</b>		
Route Length	2920	900 (ca)
<b>MODAL SPLIT</b>		
Greater London 1981/Berlin West 1986		
Public Transport	20%	30%
Car	40%	40%
Cycle	4%	6%
Foot	36%	24%
Central London (to and from ex. foot) 1989		
Public Transport	85%	
Car	14%	
Cycle	1%	
CARS (Greater London)	2 m (ca)	

### Sources:

\* London Research Centre "London. & Paris, a comparison of transport systems", L'IAURIF, Paris 1992.

\* "Lebensraum Strasse in Berlin und Paris", Ergebnisse einer Werkstatt vom 23. bis 30. September 1989.

\* Pharoah, T. "Transport, How Much Can London Take?" in London: A New Metropolitan Geography, Edward Arnold, 1991.

\* Ryser, J. "Germany in Transition: New Strategies of Urban Development; Berlin-London", Goethe Institut, 1991.