

Report on the White City People's Assembly, 20th November 2021

SUMMARY

The Assembly, held at Our Lady of Fatima Church Hall in White City and involving about 30 residents, explored measures which might help reduce car miles driven in Hammersmith & Fulham, in the context of the climate and ecological emergency. Six speakers made short presentations and each one proposed a specific policy for discussion.

1. **Dr Ian Mudway** (MRC Centre for Environment & Health, Imperial College) spoke about the high levels of traffic-associated air pollution in London, and proposed **adapting planning regulations** to ensure new developments are not close to major roads and areas of high pollution.
2. **Celeste Hicks** (Mums for Lungs) described specific problems associated with 'the school run', and proposed the adoption of **School Streets**.
3. **Caroline Pidgeon** (London Assembly member, Chair of Transport Committee) spoke on the politics of travel in London and proposed a **workplace parking levy** on businesses and employers providing parking spaces for employees.
4. **Dr Caroline Mullen** (Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds) advocated promoting social inclusion by prioritising pedestrians and proposed a **safe, accessible, connected pedestrian network**, with pedestrian priority over other road users.
5. **Casey Abaraonye** (Hammersmith & Fulham Cyclists) spoke about the need for a range of initiatives to make cycling, especially for children, easier and safer, and proposed the adoption of **School Streets**.
6. **Leo Murray** (Director of Innovation at climate change action charity, Possible) made explicit the link between traffic reduction and tackling the climate crisis and proposed a two-prong policy **a) to stop** the allocation of new resident parking permits for the largest and most polluting vehicles, and **b) reduce** the total number of **resident parking permits** issued over time.

In the second half of the meeting, assembly participants split into three round table groups to discuss and prioritise the proposals. All five proposed policies were popular, but ultimately all three groups prioritised 1) **School Streets**; 2) **a safe, accessible, connected pedestrian network**; and 3) **restricting & reducing resident parking permits**. The Assembly organisers, Imagine2030 and H&F Extinction Rebellion, intend to work with the participants, and other local residents and civic and community organisations, to promote these policies locally.

INTRODUCTION

The White City People's Assembly took place in the Lady of Fatima Church Hall, in White City, W12, from 3.30pm to 6.30pm on Saturday 20th November. It was co-hosted by Imagine2030 and Extinction Rebellion Hammersmith & Fulham. The aim was to inform and engage local residents in one of the policy areas of the climate and ecological emergency.

The question explored by the assembly was:

How might we reduce car miles in Hammersmith & Fulham?

30 residents attended, mostly from the White City estate and the surrounding area. 6 expert speakers each delivered a 10-minute presentation, then proposed a single policy that would help reduce car miles in the borough. Each speaker took questions after their presentation. The speakers' presentations and policies are summarised below.

The speakers were followed by a deliberative process: the assembly split into 3 smaller groups and, under the supervision of trained facilitators ensuring that everyone had an equal chance to be heard, discussed the 5 proposed policies (not 6, because two of the speakers had the same policy of School Streets). Each group then voted on their preferred 3 policies. (The deliberations and votes are summarised below.)

SPEAKERS

- 1) Dr Ian Mudway (MRC Centre for Environment & Health, Imperial College)

Dr Mudway gave a rigorously scientific account of the current state of air pollution in London and why it matters.

Almost every street in London is exposed to a dangerous level of air pollution (breaching the latest World Health Organisation guidelines). The main source of pollution is traffic: petrol and diesel fumes, but also the particulates from vehicle brakes and tyres (produced by electric vehicles as well).

Despite London's air being cleaner than the 'bad old days' of the 1950s, many Londoners still die or suffer serious ill-health from air pollution. It is detrimental to the physical and mental development of children, and high levels of exposure to it are a reliable predictor of chronic illness in later life and premature death.

The number and size of cars and lorries, and the numbers of miles driven in London and the UK have all significantly increased in the last 40 years.

Air pollution affects people in cars as well as outside them, especially in cheaper cars, whose filtering system is less likely to be effective.

Dr Mudway mentioned several aspects of addressing air pollution identified by the diarist John Evelyn in 1661: cleaner fuels; separating the vulnerable from the sources of pollution; economic benefits; greener infrastructure; and the moral imperative (to protect people from harm). All of these remain pertinent, but Dr Mudway selected: separating the vulnerable from the sources of pollution.

POLICY 1: adapting planning regulations to ensure that new developments are not close to major roads and areas of high pollution.

2) Celeste Hicks (Mums For Lungs)

Celeste Hicks gave a powerful account of how she first became aware, as the mother of a baby, how toxic the air pollution was in the streets in her neighbourhood in Lambeth. As a result, she joined other mothers in the campaign group, Mums For Lungs.

Mums For Lungs have extensively researched the effects of air pollution on children's health (so the science in Dr Mudway's presentation was all-too-familiar).

Celeste pointed out the particular vulnerability of young children who are at the same level as vehicle exhaust pipes.

She described the perennial problem of the School Run: a major contributor to congestion and pollution. She noted the vicious circle of parents driving their children to school to protect them from the dangers of heavy traffic, thereby making the problem worse.

She also mentioned the social impact on children of the streets outside their school not being safe for stopping and socialising – because of the cars. When children are driven to school, their opportunities for socialising, being independent and engaging with the world are denied. It instils car culture from an early age, and so is likely to be perpetuated.

Mums for Lungs campaign for School Streets: streets immediately outside schools being temporarily closed (during school run times) to through-traffic and to parents dropping off/picking up their children. Celeste explained the difficulties with getting a School Street (despite their clear health and social benefits): any restrictions on drivers' freedom to drive where they want tend to be resisted so vociferously that headteachers and councils are (understandably) reluctant to implement them. As a result, a small minority of schools currently has School Streets. Yet they are popular with a majority of parents and voters – and once implemented, are rarely reversed.

POLICY 2: School Streets

3) Caroline Pidgeon (London Assembly member, Chair of the Transport Committee)

Caroline Pidgeon gave an authoritative overview of the politics of transport in London, including the roles of Transport for London (TfL), borough councils and the UK Government Department for Transport (DfT).

She affirmed TfL's aim (shared with the DfT and indeed LBHF) to effect a significant modal shift from private car journeys to active travel and public transport. Currently, one third of car journeys in London are under 2km; two thirds are under 5km.

She mentioned the secure bike parking hangars and bike training schemes as being helpful.

She explained the current financial difficulties of TfL, caused by its dependence on fares and advertising for its revenue: Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on these revenue streams and have left TfL needing to be bailed out by the government. (In view of the likelihood of future pandemics, this is not a sustainable arrangement.) Currently TfL's plans to expand the cycleway network are in jeopardy. Revenue needs to be found elsewhere, and the fairest way is to observe the 'polluter pays' principle.

To which end, Caroline made the case for the GLA/TfL to employ 'smart road pricing', whereby drivers would pay according to the distance driven, time of day, type of roads and vehicle. However, this is a policy beyond the remit of a local authority.

POLICY 3: A workplace parking levy – in which businesses providing parking spaces for their employees would be taxed on them.

4) Dr Caroline Mullen (Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds)

Dr Mullen's presentation was focused on the often-neglected rights of the pedestrian. As she is unfamiliar with the local conditions of H&F, she focused on general principles of urban transport design and policy.

She advocated car-free connectivity, social inclusion and addressing community severance (where large or busy roads can create 'traffic barriers' within a community).

She explained two connected policy aims: (i) making it viable for people to (affordably and safely) make the journeys they need without relying on a car; and (ii) prioritising safe, accessible, continuous walking routes for social and environmental sustainability - with the latter making the difference for some people between being able to get out of their homes or being stuck inside.

POLICY 4: Developing a safe, accessible, joined-up pedestrian network, where the pedestrian is given priority and improved conditions (wider pavements, priority at crossings etc.)

5) Casey Abaraonye (Hammersmith & Fulham Cyclists)

Casey gave an eloquent account of car-dominated streets, and the impact on children: pollution inside cars; missing out on socialisation and physical exercise.

He talked about tackling the (mis)perception that driving is safer for children than walking or cycling, and that driving a car is the quickest way for parents to transport their children to after-school clubs etc. in other parts of London.

He advocated protected cycle lanes and looked forward to the long-awaited completion of the Cycleway 9 stretch in King Street, from Chiswick to Hammersmith Broadway.

He welcomed a range of initiatives to make cycling, especially for children, easier and safer, from bike hangars to bike training in schools.

He also noted that some cities are now making public transport free: an excellent thing, but presumably beyond the scope of LBHF.

The policy that Casey believed would make the biggest and quickest difference was School Streets. Echoing Celeste Hicks, he described the significant impact of the school run on congestion and on children's health and safety. He noted the dramatic difference in traffic during the weeks when the private schools are on holiday but the state schools are not: in other words, there is a social justice issue here of poorer people being disproportionately affected by pollution caused by richer people.

The obstacles to School Streets are that they are expected to be requested by schools (when headteachers are busy and nervous of the backlash from parents determined to drop off at

the school gate); they should be implemented and managed by LBHF as a default policy. The vocal minority should not be allowed to prevail to the detriment of everyone else.

POLICY 5: School streets

6) Leo Murray (Director of Innovation at climate change action charity, Possible)

Leo made explicit the link between traffic reduction and tackling the climate crisis: carbon emissions from transport in the UK have flatlined since 1990, and it is now the sector with the highest emissions.

Data shows clearly that the main problem is too many cars, and (consequently) too many car miles. (E.g. in terms of emissions per km per passenger, a single passenger car is worse than an aeroplane.) Car/van/taxi miles have doubled in the last 50 years, while the other modes have flatlined.

While electric vehicles are part of the solution, even if they achieve far greater dominance than current policies and forecasts suggest, there still needs to be a significant reduction in car miles in the UK if the DfT is to hit its decarbonising target. UK car miles need to reduce by between 20% and 60%, depending on the uptake of electric vehicles.

Clearly, that reduction needs to happen mainly in cities where there is better public transport and the effects of congestion and air pollution are far worse than in the countryside. The London Mayoral Transport Strategy (MTS) aims to reduce car miles by 15-20% by 2041.

There is public support for the principle of traffic reduction – but it has proved difficult in practice. Myths are unhelpful, e.g. that any traffic-reducing measure is iniquitous: in fact, there is clear correlation between wealth and car miles.

In H&F, car miles have flatlined since 2012; the MTS requires a reduction of 15-20% by 2041. Despite relatively low levels of car ownership in H&F (in the last survey, only 38% of households had access to a car), the percentage of its available road space occupied by cars (16%) is second only to Wandsworth.

One reason why transport emissions have flatlined (despite more efficient engines and the growing market for electric cars) is the massive growth in SUVs, many too big for standard parking spaces. Of all UK boroughs, H&F has the second highest proportion of new car sales being large SUVs (30%): only RBKC has higher.

Of London boroughs, H&F has the 3rd highest revenue from parking fees (approx. £25m). Residents' parking permits, however, are heavily subsidised: at £119, they cost about a third of the cost of managing and maintaining that public space. The total annual subsidy for residents' parking permits in H&F is estimated at £3.5m.

Experts have long recommended that in order to deter car ownership, councils need to reduce available parking, including for residents. Anne Hidalgo, the recently re-elected Mayor of Paris, is removing 50% of the parking spaces in central Paris – and asking residents what they want to do with the newly-available public space. This is the kind of bold response to the climate and ecological emergency that we desperately need.

POLICY 6: A) Stop issuing permits to *new* residents for the largest and most polluting vehicles - any that cannot fit in a standard sized parking space, and/or have CO₂/km emissions in excess of 160g. B) Gradually reduce, over time, the number of parking permits

available. These measures would enable parking spaces to be used for a variety of more sustainable and communal purposes: parklets, bike hangars, rain gardens, trees etc.

DELIBERATION

POLICY 1 – Adapting planning regulations to ensure that new developments are not close to major roads and areas of high pollution

- Generally in favour, but with some concerns:
- Practicality and costs of implementing?
- What to do about the many vulnerable people already living near most polluted areas (e.g. new housing along A40)?
- Great idea but with the housing shortage is it realistic?
- More meaningful dialogue needed with residents around new developments: consultation for the Wormholt Park development seemed to be ignored by the developers/LBHF (?)
- Is this too late for the developments already granted planning permission?
- Social justice issue: poorer people (less likely to have cars) suffering impacts from richer people (more likely)

POLICY 2 – School Streets

- agreement that councils should push, not leave it to schools.
- School catchments in the borough are small and published, plus a minority own cars so shouldn't be so hard to implement.
- A clear, straightforward and impactful change
- Perhaps schools should enforce that all parents live within catchment throughout the period their kids are there
- Hugely needed: kids should be and feel safe in their own school streets
- Listen to parents on this
- Vulnerable people who need to drive can surely be accommodated?
- The phenomenon of the private school run is shocking
- Idling – including outside schools – is a major problem: why doesn't the council enforce the law and fine drivers?
- School Streets are great but where a school is on a main road, implementation may not be possible
- 100% in favour: children walking and cycling to school needs to be normalised again; more cycle training in schools would help
- Schools should not have to ask: should be council's policy to implement wherever possible

POLICY 3 - Workplace parking levy

- Smart road pricing – group generally supportive but presumably not practical to implement at a borough level.
- That said, road pricing is working in South Fulham with ANPR so perhaps could be used more within the borough

- Some key workers such as teachers can't afford to live near to their work
- It would help employers to discourage employees from driving
- Cautiously in favour but would like to know more: who would be affected by this? Is public transport adequate for all workplaces in the borough?
- London-wide yes; but would it make much difference in H&F? How many free workplace parking spaces are there? Isn't most traffic here through traffic?
- In favour: driving to work should not be cheaper/more convenient than other modes
- Is there an issue with business rates? Would they need to be adapted?

POLICY 4 – Safe, accessible, connected, prioritised pedestrian network

- There was much support for the idea and felt there wouldn't be much resistance given the importance for people with disabilities
- The group liked prioritizing pedestrians more at light crossings, perhaps some could default to green for pedestrians until cars approached?
- It's beneficial for disabled people too to be able to exercise
- General feeling that we are too conditioned to defer to cars in all settings: need to reset!
- Good to consult residents on this or a vocal minority (?) may claim it's unpopular
- Brilliant for disabled people: so important to give pedestrians priority on our streets
- LBHF should work closely with the people who most need this (those who rely on walking), e.g. by doing a walk-around with them
- Much-needed: some pavements and crossings are extremely dangerous
- Wholly in favour of a network prioritising pedestrians: the Great West Road, Shepherd's Bush Roundabout and Hammersmith Broadway are terrible
- Not keen on mixed use walking/cycling paths
- Walking and cycling should be treated separately: cycle paths should be in the roads (but protected)
- Pedestrians should be prioritised far more: review drop kerbs; concerned about e-scooters danger; speed limit for cycle lanes

POLICY 5 – Reducing parking permits

- The group was very much in favour
- Perhaps for each street where a permit is removed a bike hanger could be installed - thus retaining income for the council and giving residents secure cycle storage
- Residents could be incentivised to give up their permits, e.g. discounted cargo bikes/public transport
- The group felt the price of car permits should increase to discourage car-owning
- Good incentive not to get a car
- Yes, but consult residents on what to use the freed-up parking spaces for (though bike more hangars would be one obvious benefit)
- Be bolder: don't get embroiled in endless consultations – it's not right to give big, highly polluting vehicles a resident's permit, so just refuse to renew them
- Close the loophole which allows residents to get £119 permits for second and third cars (so long as they're registered under different names): there is effectively no penalty for multi-car households

- Electric cars may be better than petrol/diesel cars, but they still have a high environmental footprint: residents' permits for them shouldn't be free.
- Extend restricted times for parking
- Increase price of permits – and charge per household (not per registered driver)

OTHER SUGGESTED POLICIES

- Aim to install a bike hangar in every street (& spaces in it to be cheaper than £80/yr)
- Walking buses for school runs
- 20mph limit throughout borough
- More parklets

CONCLUSION

After their deliberations, the 3 groups voted for their 3 preferred policies:

Groups 1 & 2: 1st - School Streets;
 2nd - Reducing and restricting residents' permits;
 3rd - Pedestrian priority network

Group 3: 1st= Reducing and restricting residents' permits;
 Pedestrian priority network
 3rd - School Streets

In the words of LBHF Council Leader, Stephen Cowan: 'Our philosophy is to enhance civic life by empowering residents to change their own neighbourhoods for the better. That includes giving residents a leading role in developing policy in public, with the public.' We believe People's Assemblies are a brilliant way of doing exactly that: they enable residents to engage rigorously in complex policy areas and could help give LBHF a mandate to take bolder, more decisive action to address the climate and ecological emergency.

This People's Assembly was not a perfect exercise in participatory democracy. Clearly 30 people are not enough to be representative of a community, let alone a borough. That said, there was a diverse range of races, ages and perspectives represented. Perhaps most relevantly to this topic, there was a mixture of car-owners, non-car owners, regular cyclists, regular pedestrians and users of buses.

All 5 proposed policies were popular (albeit with some concerns around the practicality or relevance of policies 1 and 3 respectively). The consensus in choosing the top three policies is striking. Given that only a minority of households in H&F even have access to a car, we believe that the results of the voting reflect an appetite for bolder action from LBHF to reduce car miles in the borough. We shall therefore be campaigning for LBHF to 1) make School Streets the default option for schools; 2) create a much-improved network for pedestrians; and 3) restrict the availability and increase the price of residents' permits.

Many of the participants commented that they found the process highly informative and valuable. People felt heard and enjoyed the opportunity to air their views and have dialogue with both experts and other H&F residents. There was shared and real enthusiasm for the process and for doing it again.

For the organisers (Imagine2030 and XRHF), this was a huge learning experience. For any future People's Assemblies that we organise in LBHF, we will explore ways to increase the number and diversity of participants (e.g. by building relationships within communities) and to allow more time for the most important part of the process, namely the deliberations. We also hope to persuade LBHF councillors to attend future assemblies.