

The Traffic Slayer Speaks

How a New Yorker is Remaking London's Streets

BOB KILEY IS THE COMMISSIONER of Transport for London. His long and distinguished career has included stints as deputy mayor of Boston and head of the New York City Metropolitan Transportation Authority, where he oversaw the revitalization of NYC Transit. More recently he has worked at the Fishbach Corporation, the New York City Partnership and Kohlberg and Company.

The following interview was excerpted from an upcoming Transportation Alternatives' produced documentary film.

Let's talk a little bit about the just the current situation for pedestrians, cyclist and transit riders. What does it look like now, and what did it look like, say, five years ago?

Well, for a long time the automobile has been the priority for almost every major urban center. It's starting to change—it's changing here—but only someone very naïve or foolish would say that the automobile is in second place. What's really important is that the Spartan and intelligent automobile user actually gets a break now. For example we introduced something called congestion charging here in London which was designed to reduce traffic flows into the center of the city as well as to reduce congestion. Congestion is down as a result of that—it's now two and a half years since it was introduced—by some 30%, and traffic flows are down 15%, which is a boon to those who must drive. Now those who must drive are paying a five pound charge [\$9 USD] to get into the city.

Cycling is on the increase here. The number of cyclists on the streets has more than doubled since I arrived here about four and a half years ago.

We're trying to encourage walking. Walking is by far the most popular mode in London. Now it's not always the friendliest city to pedestrians, but we're working on that. We will probably be changing the traffic signals in London, at some point—that's an expensive proposition—but we've begun the process of studying just exactly how that would be done. And we'd be very mindful of pedestrians as we go about that,

because there are lots of things you can do with new technology, that couldn't be done, say twenty years ago, with traffic signals.

How would that experience compare with somewhere on the street in New York?

Well if you think about New York as all five boroughs, and not make the mistake of focusing only on Manhattan, then you have a very diverse city when it comes to automobile use, the experience of the walker, cycling and so on. I find that New York and London actually have quite a lot in common. They've roughly the same populations, they're both enormous economic centers, huge financial services centers. I know that there are plenty of New Yorkers, people in the New York City government, who are here fairly frequently to see how we're doing things, and we do the same thing in London.

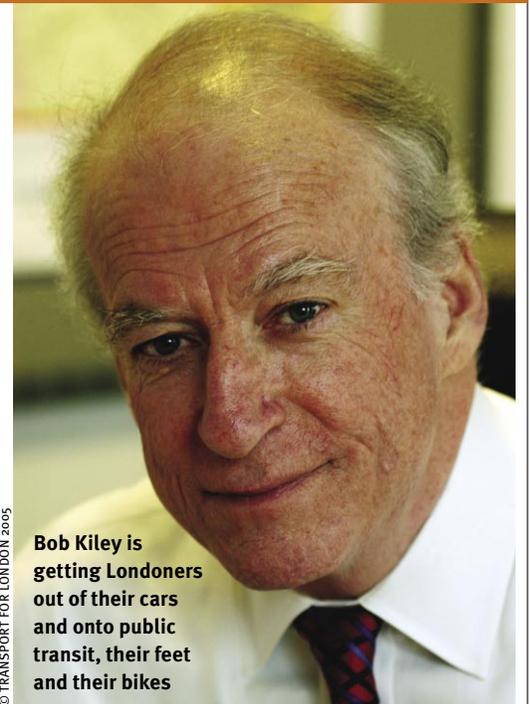
“We're all fed up with congestion, we know the time for doing something about it is here, and what I would like to do is to try the following ...”

If the mayor were to give you power to implement three things in New York to improve our streets, what would they be?

I would concentrate on serious traffic management using good technology and try to keep the automobile in proper perspective, meaning that you have to continue to invest in public transportation.

Secondly, I would really concentrate on making New York City a much more walkable city, that means widening sidewalks, that means pedestrian crossings that are clearly marked and easy for pedestrians to navigate and very, very, very strong enforcement of that so that the fines for jumping red lights, for crossing on amber lights by automobiles, or for that matter cyclists or motorcyclists, are very strong indeed.

I think [the City should go] into the



Bob Kiley is getting Londoners out of their cars and onto public transit, their feet and their bikes

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schools and [encourage] people to use cycles. We're doing it here, and it really works. The statistics in the early going suggest that 80% of the people who take that training actually end up cycling as a regular practice.

I think one thing I should emphasize for those faint of heart in New York is that just in the four years plus that I've been here, we've achieved a major change in that public transport use is now up 4% and automobile use is down 4%. And I think it's the only city in the world [that has accomplished this feat]. We hope that we can continue that shift [by making alternatives to private car use more desirable].

What institutional changes took place here and what might need to happen in New York if some of the policies were to be pushed through?

Well the one advantage that London had in going into a scheme like congestion charging was that there was one agency, namely Transport for London, that heavily influenced or controlled most of the levers that you needed to pull to make it happen. That's not exactly the case in New York City. So it was somewhat easier for us to implement something like congestion pricing. I think [London mayor] Ken Livingston showed that if you take a controversial idea, like congestion charging, and you put it in front of the voters and say to them, 'We're all fed up with congestion, we know the time for doing something about it is here, and what I would like to do is to try the following,' and then spell it out, you will get a tremendous [positive] response. People I think, are quite cynical about politicians, and when they find one who actually says 'This is a hard problem, you all know it, I know it, I'd like to do something about it, elect me,' that's a pretty good way to get into office. □