

Public Inquiry - *The New Tyne Crossing*
Proof of Evidence submitted by
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1. Introduction

1.1 My name is Wendy Love and I live in North Tyneside. I am giving evidence today on behalf of the membership of *Living Streets* and also as a member of the umbrella group the *Tyne Crossings Alliance*.

2. The Organisation Living Streets

2.1 What is *Living Streets* and what do we represent? *Living Streets* is one of a growing number of organisations concerned about road safety, traffic speed, the air we breathe, & the quality of life for city residents; we are also concerned specifically about the safety, convenience and aesthetics of the street environment for those not in cars and buses, and our ability as city dwelling individuals to connect to each other in vibrant, safe and attractive communities.

2.2 *Living Streets*, a major initiative of the *Pedestrians Association*, is an organisation of **1900** people, and I represent today all those people who would like to see the many uses of our streets properly recognised. For too long, our streets have been considered only as traffic corridors and other functions have been denigrated and, quite literally, pushed to the side. But streets are also for meeting people, for walking to the post box, for shopping, for watching the world go by, for admiring the neighbourhood gardens, for getting exercise, for relaxing. We want all these activities seen as equal to, if not more important than, getting from A to B as quickly as possible on four wheels.

2.3 *The Pedestrians Association* has been in existence since the 1920s and was instrumental in getting speed limits on city streets and in the introduction of driving licenses.

3. Our Street Infrastructure – legacy of 40 years

3.1 Over the last 30-40 years, we have seen many aspects of our communal public spaces and of our street environment deteriorate. Our parks are no longer as well cared for. Our bus stations and train platforms no longer have staff regularly assigned to them. Our pavements are not well swept, our litter bins are often overflowing, dirty and smelly and the street furniture –street lighting, benches, paving materials, pedestrian bridges and pedestrian fences are often of poor design, poor quality and aesthetically displeasing. Add to this the ever-increasing traffic, the congestion, the fumes and the danger from motorised transport, and it is no wonder that fewer and fewer people want to be on the streets and more people, if they can, choose to be inside a car.

4. Local authority management of streets

4.1 The resources of the local authorities with regard to streets, are primarily used for *traffic* management and carriageway maintenance. Our streets are even classified by the amount of motorised traffic they carry, instead of their other uses. For example, a street might be labelled as a 'principal highway' or a 'feeder road' instead of being labelled as a street with *shops*, a street with *children* and *residences*, a street with *schools* and *churches* on. All other functions of the street other than as traffic corridors seem to have been forgotten. In the Tyne and Wear local transport plan, 50% of revenue income is allocated for road maintenance (and this is taken to mean 'carriageway'). When was the last time we saw a new footway put in, or street lighting improved? We see carriageways resurfaced and repainted, schemes for traffic calming, for traffic re-routing. We still see the installation of roundabouts (an attempt to keep traffic moving in all directions while making life inconvenient and dangerous to the pedestrian): multiple schemes designed to make the life of the motorist more convenient, and to avoid the motorist suffering delays. The New Tyne Crossing is, of course, such a scheme.

5. Welcome Changes

- 5.1 There are exceptions to this general rule, most specifically in urban centres. Let's think of Northumberland Street, the main 'high street' in Newcastle's city centre, or the East Quayside area on the north bank of the river Tyne. These areas have been redesigned to minimise and exclude traffic and to enhance the experience of those on foot or on a bicycle. They are well-designed, safe and attractive areas, and, most importantly, there are facilities in close proximity that people want to reach – shops, market stalls, banks and post offices to meet everyday needs, tranquil areas of beauty by the riverside to escape to, pubs and restaurants to relax and enjoy ourselves and to meet people in.
- 5.2 It is heartening to see how people crowd to these areas on foot. Even on a cold, rainy day, Northumberland Street is crowded with shoppers (not being able to park your car on Northumberland Street outside your favourite clothing store has not led to a decrease in retail profits), and the new attractions of the glorious Gateshead Millennium Bridge and Baltic Art Factory attract thousands to the Quayside during the week and at weekends. These areas are functional, beautiful and thriving.
- 5.3 It is my strongly held belief that we encourage social interaction, less reliance on private transport, better health and more thriving communities when we invest in this manner to beautify our cities.

6. Social Exclusion

6.1 The obverse is also true: when we invest in the infrastructure to create fast roads, with access routes intended to avoid traffic coming to a halt, when our mindset is always to think of 'road improvements' that are improvements only for those in a car, when

we make infrastructure on a scale that is inhospitable to those not in cars, then we encourage people to use their cars more and we make people more and more dependent on cars.

- 6.2 We only need to look at what has happened since the advent of the large supermarkets built not on the local high street in synchrony with the independent shops, but on a large tract of open land and surrounded by areas 4 times their size to allow people to park their cars. These shops are much more difficult to get to on foot, by bicycle or on public transport. It becomes almost necessary to get to them in cars. So what then happens to the 40% of households in Tyne and Wearⁱ who do not have access to a car? The superstores have meanwhile taken business away from the high street shops which have closed in droves since the 1970s. There is no longer the fishmonger or the butcher or the newsagent that a local community can walk to. For the community without access to a car, this equals social exclusion.
- 6.3 How difficult is it these days to find a high street shop that sells paintbrushes, lightbulbs, garden plants or bamboo canes – now that the out-of-town DIY shops have cornered that market? What does this mean for the teenager, the person without a car, the elderly or simply the person who doesn't believe we should have to rely on our cars for everyday needs. It means social exclusion.
- 6.4 What does the car culture mean for the poorer segments of our society? According to a recent study by the Institute for Public Policy Research and Imperial College – *Streets Ahead: Safe and Livable Streets for Children*ⁱⁱ these groups suffer the most danger from our car culture and from fast travelling cars. The report clearly shows the links between deprivation and pedestrian injuries, and recommends that 20mph becomes the norm in residential areas. The aim of the New Tyne Crossing is for ever-faster car travel. Accustomed to driving at 50mph or above on roads near and through cities, it seems that motorists find great difficulty in keeping to a 30 mph speed limit on other roads – 70% of motorists routinely exceed the 30 mph speed limit.

7. The New Tyne Crossing

- 7.1 Is the New Tyne Crossing aimed at making crossing the River Tyne easier or making car travel easier? If it were aimed at improving public transport, the new tunnel would be for buses only. It would need far less land space at its portals and a dedicated bus tunnel would not need the land-grabbing access roads that the current plans include. If the New Tyne Tunnel were designed for safety, it would not be designed to allow fast travel. If the New Tyne Crossing were designed for 'necessary' car travel only, why do the proposers show a sharper increase in predicted traffic volumes with the New Tunnel than without it?
- 7.2 The lack of clear thinking and confusion of aims that seems to be endemic within transport planning is apparent in a recent job opportunity announcement in '*The Evening Chronicle*' to create 'Green Transport Plans' for customers and employees

of the Metrocentre. The advertisement begins by announcing that planning permission has been granted for a 1200-space multi-storey car park at the Metrocentre, but goes on to state that the green transport plans officer would aim to discourage car travel to Metrocentre! I firmly believe that we cannot plan for one thing while putting in the infrastructure for the opposite. This is what is so misguided about the New Tyne Crossing. Government guidanceⁱⁱⁱ is for local authorities to *decrease* traffic on our streets; we cannot at the same time continue to create the infrastructure to accept *increased* traffic. We must find alternatives. It is surely the brief of the Tyne and Wear **Passenger Transport Authority** to explore ways of improving *public* transport infrastructure and *public* transport ridership instead of making private transport more convenient.

8. The local community of Jarrow

- 8.1 During the public inquiry, you will undoubtedly, Mr Nixon, have had reason to explore the locality of Jarrow. You will have wanted to see for yourself the very adverse impact that the New Tyne Crossing would have on many of the residents of Jarrow – most notably the residents of the Epinay Estate. I imagine you will have walked between the Jarrow Community Centre and the Epinay Estate – less than 400 metres away. I hope that you noticed how difficult it is for a pedestrian (let alone a disabled person or a parent pushing a stroller) to get from the Epinay Estate to the Community Centre – even from the Epinay Estate to the supermarket *Morrison's*. The street layout encourages car dependency: there is no direct pedestrian route (especially at night once the Viking Shopping Centre is locked), there are intimidating streets with windowless buildings on either side - the traditional street pattern with buildings on each side facing the street has been abandoned here. The layout of the streets and car parks has been with the convenience of the motorist in mind. A pedestrian has no choice but to a) go considerable distances out of his/her way, b) use roads with no pavements, c) be forced to cross the road in two parts, d) cross roads onto petrol station forecourts or onto flower-beds, and e) negotiate high kerb stones. The layout of *Morrison's*, presumably constructed in the 1980's, (I'VE SINCE FOUND OUT THAT MORRISON'S OPENED ONLY A YEAR OR TWO AGO) caters only for the motorist. A resident of the Epinay Estate would not find it easy to nip out for a pint of milk on foot, as one might find it easy were the street plan of a traditional layout.
- 8.2 May I suggest that the mindset that allowed this land use planning to be proposed and approved is alive and well in Tyne and Wear – that same mindset of pro-motorist and anti-pedestrian has allowed the detrimental proposal for the New Tyne Crossing to be approved by the TWPTA and North and South Tyneside Councils.
- 8.3 Anyone who has to negotiate this area of Jar row (and any number of other areas in Tyne and Wear) on foot will immediately recognise that the infrastructure of the street environment cannot simultaneously cater for the convenience and speed of the motorist and the convenience and safety of the pedest rian. Surely Government Guidance, from the late 1980's on, and certainly since the publication of the

Transport White Paper in July 1998^{iv} has recognised that the infrastructure in our towns and cities can no longer favour the motorist, but must recognise that people are more important than cars, and that safety, social inclusion and local facilities are paramount. Mr John Prescott, announcing in the House of Commons on 5th February 2003, his plans for new housing, said that “we must build real, sustainable communities, not soulless tracts of new housing”. We must keep the heart in communities. One of the most important ways of keeping the heart in a community is to make sure that the infrastructure and the facilities are suitable and pleasant for walking and walking to. The New Tyne Crossing would, I believe, rip the heart out of this community.

Summary

This proof of evidence argues that, through the design of our streets and through the mindset of many in transport planning, we still cater primarily for the motorist within our cities. This catering for the motorist serves to socially exclude those 40% of Tyne and Wear households that have no access to a car as well as those car owners who aim to use their cars as little as possible rather than as much as possible. This evidence argues that the New Tyne Crossing is contrary to Government guidance that aims to make cities more livable places and to decrease car dependency.

ⁱ Census 2001: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/>

ⁱⁱ *Streets Ahead: Safe and Liveable Streets for Children*, Institute for Public Policy Research at <http://www.ippr.org.uk/research/index>

ⁱⁱⁱ PPG 13

^{iv} DTLR (1998) *A New Deal for Transport, Better for Everyone*. The Government’s White Paper on the Future of Transport. London HMSO

Rebuttal of Rebuttals

Mr John Miller:

States in Para 2.3 that “the TWPTA has a responsibility for the...tunnels and to address the issues associated with the tunnels.....However, this will not be feasible unless additional capacity is provided”.

Response:

I don’t understand this logic. One can look after anything, whatever its state or condition. I don’t accept that the TWPTA has to increase the capacity of the tunnel in order to carry

out its duty of operating and managing the tunnels. One has to ‘manage’ when one has finite resources. It’s not a matter of not being able to manage the Tyne tunnel because it is congested: it is a matter of choosing to increase its capacity versus choosing to discourage as many people driving through it.

States in Para 2.5 that “ 7.6 million is to be spent on the Four Lane Ends interchange”. I happen to have checked out the plans for this interchange – since walking to that Metro station has been the bane of my life for the last 8 years. The plans include all sorts of improvements for motorists driving to that interchange, but, as far as I can see, nothing to improve access on foot – not even removing the dangerous roundabout between the main residential area, the local shops and the Metro/bus station.

States in Para 3.1 that “the TWPTA is promoting the New Tyne Crossing in order to address the problems of congestion at the tunnel entrances and approaches”. I’m concerned about congestion too. Maybe not the same kind of congestion. I’m much more concerned about the congestion that happens opposite the Civic Centre in central Newcastle when 4 lanes of traffic are given priority over the hordes of students and shoppers who want to cross the road. People on foot have to wait so long they need to jostle for space and make the crossing unsafe when they judge that there is time to cross before the next car swings around. I’m concerned about the congestion outside schools when parents with small children and strollers gather on the pavement waiting an excessively long time to cross the road safely. I would much rather this kind of congestion were addressed than congestion caused by cars.