

*Congestion* in London reverting back to pre-congestion tax 2003. [Please see seventh paragraph below (top of page two of this PDF) – highlighted for the benefit of our readers.]

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article2872752.ece>

From *The Times of London*

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## Cars out as London mayor clears way for Paris-style plage and cycle boulevards



Ben Webster, Transport Correspondent

Visitors to London may not find the streets paved with gold but they could certainly find that a lot more streets have been paved, under proposals for the tourist heart of the capital.

Cars will be banned from some of London's busiest streets as part of a bold plan to create continental-style boulevards devoted to pedestrians and cyclists.

Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, plans to replicate Paris Plage, the beach created on a highway alongside the Seine each August, on the four-lane Victoria Embankment beside the Thames.

He is also considering a ban on through traffic on a series of roads connecting London's parks and main shopping areas, including Portland Place, which runs between Regent's Park and Oxford Street.

Speaking at Mayor's Question Time at the London Assembly yesterday, Mr Livingstone said that he wanted to create attractive, tree-lined walkways in the style of Las Ramblas in Barcelona.

Traffic would be diverted on to alternative routes, but shops and restaurants would still be able to receive deliveries outside peak hours.

The first scheme will be the £18 million part-pedestrianisation of Parliament Square, which will involve removing traffic from the south side closest to Westminster Abbey from 2009. Mr Livingstone believes that the success of the Trafalgar Square scheme, where the road beside the National Gallery has been pedestrianised, will help to overcome objections by motoring groups and retailers.

The RAC Foundation said that Mr Livingstone's plan would force traffic on to less suitable routes and add to congestion, which is already almost back to the level before congestion charging began in 2003.

Edmund King, the foundation's director, said: "Mr Livingstone appears to be choosing streets which are absolutely essential for through traffic. Closing Victoria Embankment, even if only in August, would cause complete chaos as traffic diverts on to less appropriate, narrower streets.

"The mayor does not seem to realise that Paris virtually shuts down each August but London is a global city that is very busy throughout the year. Banning traffic from some streets might sound environmentally friendly but it could push up emissions by sending vehicles on longer, slower routes."

Mr Livingstone has been impressed by several ideas for tackling traffic introduced by Bertrand Delanoë, the Socialist Mayor of Paris. He is planning to copy the city's bicycle hire scheme and also believes that the Paris Plage concept would be an even greater success in London.

Each August since 2001, the Right Bank highway in Paris has been closed to traffic for the two miles between the Pont Neuf and Pont de Sully and covered by 2,000 tonnes of sand. The "beach" is dotted with palm trees and cafés and lined by a boardwalk. It attracts more than four million visitors a year, and some have been so eager to strip off that a €38 (£27) penalty was introduced last year for anyone going nude, topless or in a thong.

Mr Livingstone's plan is partly in response to demands by the Green Party, whose support he needs to win the London Assembly's approval for his budget. Jenny Jones, a Green assembly member, said: "Making it more enjoyable for people to go by foot will help to cut congestion and relieve pressure on some of London's busiest bus and Tube routes."