... and for?

Peter Gibb listens to Richard Giles and sets out a few of his own thoughts on congestion charges

To my mind the issue of congestion charges is a useful one for us to think on: if doing so does not lead to decongested roads, at least it will lead us closer to decongested minds.

It seems to me that roads can be considered as, or occupy and function as open-acces 'commons' for the free use of all, only to the point at which their aggregate use has reached an intensity at which their *de facto* users at any time come to prevent their free use by all others at that time. That saturation point may be triggered perhaps by physical congestion, environmental pollution, road safety considerations, onerous development or maintenance requirements, or some other determinant upon which the community democratically agrees. It is at that point of saturation that a resource of space becomes something which the community must charge for, in order that those excluded from its use are compensated - by those who enjoy the advantages which its use bestows. Prior to that point of saturation, the resource functions quite happily as an *open-access* system: afterwords as a managed common.

The socio-economic management of our common resources is a matter which is dynamic and not static. As humanity's use of any natural resource increases, and as competiton for access to any particular advantage provided by the resource of community intensifies, so new and more active management of that resource is called for.

(On the subject of 'land ownership'; I think that concept obfuscates much which needs clarity: we should speak rather of the allocation of overlapping rights over land, some private, some public.)

Prior to the development of settled communities, there was no need for anything in practice like land value taxation. The compensating, by the monopoliser of any location, of the rest of us so excluded from that location, becomes necessary only with the development of intense, sophisticated and urban-centred land-use. And this is clearly so with buildings and other static uses.

But it is just so with roads: while and to the extent that the unhindered use of paths and roads worn by the feet, hooves and wheels of previous generations is free to all, then they can be considered as 'open-access' systems. At the point that they become community assets the use of which is not available to advantage us all equally, then roads become 'commons' the use of which has to be managed: thus city road pricing and congestion charging. Congestion charging is a rent collecting public revenue mechanism.

The principle does not extend to every instance of charging which cash-strapped public authorities may seek to impose. The Skye Bridge toll, for instance, is an iniquitous entry fee to Skye, which disadvantages its community's economic development and social mobility.

I suspect that much of the difference in the two positions being argued here is simply the result of differences in the respective experiences and notions of what the reality of a road is. **L&L**

Remembering September 11

Remembrance of September 11 should not be an excuse for the advancement of certain American and European causes, says **Jon Mendel**

The International Relations scholar Maja Zehfuss has observed that one thing both George W Bush and Osama Bin Laden hold in common is that they wish to ensure we remember the events of September the 11th 2001. As Zehfuss argues, this demand for remembrance has been misused to justify extremely damaging US policies. Attempts to understand why certain US policies might be unpopular in most of the world are often dismissed as attempts to justify or surrender to Al Qaeda's appalling terrorism. This mode of remembering 9/11 has debilitating consequences for those of us seeking to challenge the current norms of international politics - it is a block to political change.

Whilst terrorist acts should be abhorred, 'commemoration' of 9/11 is being used as a moral justification for an American 'way of life' - aped to a substantial extent in Britain and Western Europe - that is both unjust and unsustainable. While Bush may be correct to suggest that Al Qaeda is trying to destroy the American 'way of life', to claim that changing this lifestyle would therefore be insulting to the victims of 9/11 is a fallacious argument.

> **"Whilst terrorist acts should be abhorred, 'commemoration' of 9/11 is being used as a moral justification for an American 'way of life'"**

America, along with the other 'advanced' capitalist societies, must move towards a more equitable and sustainable distribution of natural resources. The taproot of the terror problem and its solution will be found this way. In any case maintaining the rate of consumption needed to maintain the US 'way of life' will soon lead to the Earth's atmosphere being overloaded with greenhouse gasses. The natural disasters which American 'ways' invite may make the human response of Al Qaeda's terrorism look relatively benign.

The best memorial for those lost on 9/11 would be to abandon the American 'way of life'. No way of life can endure which requires others' forfeit of their birthright. While the victims of 9/11 should be remembered - and events this tragic clearly deserve commemoration - the cost cannot be that we forget or abandon our political struggles. Zehfuss argues that, if the political consequences of remembering September 11 become too negative, we should 'forget September 11'.

We must come to commemorate 9/11 in more positive ways, and render unnecessary such forgetting. **L&L**

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