Perceptions of Congestion

Analysis report of borough-wide focus group activity
Final

23 June 2008
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Executive Summary

The aims of this research were to investigate findings from the residents’ survey and the Air Quality survey which both reveal increasing levels of concern about both traffic and congestion and the need to prioritise this. This would therefore provide an initial insight into areas that may require further work or discussion.

Having used focus groups across the borough as the main source of information for the purposes of this research, data was collected and themed into categories using a ‘constant comparative method’ (Grounded Theory).

Findings showed several consistent themes across all focus groups. These were: concerns about planning and regeneration activities; access and affordability of public transport and other transport alternatives; the impact of HGV’s (heavy goods vehicles) and LGV’s (larger goods vehicles) and finally general concerns about the future in regards to worsening health and expense.

A set of recommendations were developed which included: More involved communications and engagement strategies for planners; more co-ordinated or ‘joined up’ thinking with key agencies; better promotion of cycling and car clubs; further impact research into the affects of HGV’s and LGV’s; further member-led scrutiny insight and an examination of equalities impacts.
1. Introduction

The Resident’s Survey Temperature Check and Survey in 2007 showed a marked increase in percentage of those who saw congestion as a concern and an issue for improvement. In March 2008, a series of focus groups were commissioned from the research and consultation team focusing on what has contributed to the perception of congestion, how residents think congestion may change over the next 10 years and what should be done to tackle congestion.

Whilst some of the findings presented were common sense perceptions of the cause and effect of congestion, there were some unique insights into the issue and how it has affected residents in their day-to-day lives. The almost unanimous perception that congestion has got worse in the borough is balanced with some sound suggestions from residents on how to tackle congestion.

Although we cannot generalise for every resident in the borough, the richness of the data adds a welcome dimension to the interpretation of quantitative results from surveys such as Residents Survey and the Air Quality Survey.

At this point, the author would like to thank all members from the Residents’ Panel members who kindly contributed their time and thoughts to the focus groups. Their views were insightful and invaluable to the research process.
2. Background

2.1 Residents’ Survey

The 2007 Residents’ survey contained many pertinent findings, the most alerting being that congestion is now one of the top three concerns for residents in the borough (35%, an increase of five percentage points since the previous survey). This finding clearly fuels the need for further exploratory research to better understand this perception and the issues that drive it.

Other pertinent findings from the Residents’ Survey in relation to congestion include the following:

- There are considerable geographical differences between wards in the borough in relation to how much of a concern residents perceive traffic congestion to be. For example, over half thought congestion should be a top concern Northfield (55%) but in Perivale, this figure diminishes to under a quarter (22%, see Fig. 1).

Fig 1.

Percentage (%) of residents by ward who were personally most concerned about congestion in Ealing
• In terms of concerns raised by residents and those issues that require improvement, there are strong correlations between traffic congestion, poor public transport and pollution and the environment. This indicates a real need to explore the nature of these relationships and find out why certain concerns become issues for improvement.

• In relation to use of public transport, there are some similarities and differences between different ages groups. For example, 42% of 18-24 year olds and 44% of 65-74 year old residents selected buses as their main mode of transport. On the other hand, a quarter (25%) of 35-44 year olds chose buses as their main mode of transport, compared to over half (52%) of the 75+ group.

• There are considerable differences between wards when considering what residents’ preferred mode of transport is. For example, Ealing Broadway has just over a fifth of its residents (21%) who cite a car/van as their main mode of transport compared to nearly two thirds (63%) of residents in Lady Margaret ward.

2.2 Air Quality Consultation

The air quality consultation carried out between 13th February 2008 and 11th April 2008 looked at various statutory and non-statutory stakeholders’ perceptions of air quality within the borough. Though in draft format whilst writing this report, there are pertinent findings that aid the interpretation of some of the responses from this report:

• 45% of respondents for this survey perceived ‘traffic and roads’ as being the main contributor to air pollution in the borough.

• An open text response question asking participants to identify the roads which they felt contributed most to air pollution identified The A40 Western Avenue as the main contributor followed by the Uxbridge Road and then Hanger Lane.

• 70% of respondents felt that an improvement of cycling networks and facilities would aid congestion, this was closely followed by improvements of the public transport system (68%, joint with the take up of cleaner fuels) and then by improvements to pedestrian routes and public transport interchanges (67%).
3. Aims and Methodology

As an exploratory approach to understanding these findings, a series of focus groups were commissioned to establish:

- What are the main impacts on participants as a result of congestion and;
- What residents believed to be the way forward in tackling the issue of congestion.

3.1 Sampling

Focus group attendees consisted almost entirely of residents’ panel members. Other focus group attendees were friends of current panel members. Attendees were invited via a mail out to all current panel members in early April 2008. Panel members were asked which focus group they wished to attend. Because of the overwhelming response for the focus groups in Ealing, two additional focus groups were arranged. Times were flexible and participation to each focus group was not restricted to residents who lived in the area in which it was being held. There were nine focus groups held in total ranging from four attendees to twelve.

3.2 Focus Groups

Before the focus groups, participants were asked to complete a simple questionnaire, asking participants to comment on their main modes of transport and any comments in regards to congestion.

At the focus groups, participants were also asked to show their main routes on a map of the borough and the main method of transport they used. The purpose of this exercise was to illustrate the diversity of travel within the borough and as a warm-up exercise to encourage people to talk about their travelling experiences.

The main body of the focus groups can be found in the appendix (i). It consisted of a series of open-ended questions with prompts, where necessary. Results were analysed using qualitative technique known as ‘Grounded Theory’ in which themes are reduced and collapsed into other over-arching themes using a method of ‘constant comparison’. The responses given to the questions asked in focus groups is summated in main body of the findings below.
4. Results and Findings

Below are the findings from the focus groups and the various activities around them.

4.1 Questionnaires

Participants were asked what types of transport they used and what was their main method of transport. Because of the numbers of participants used for these questions, it is unfeasible to generalise these to any part of the borough or the borough as a whole. However, as a point of interest, it is worth noting the pertinent differences between some of the groups. The base number (i.e. the total number of respondents, not responses) was 51. Some respondents could not attend the focus groups, but submitted the questionnaire by paper, these replies were added to the results below. A breakdown of frequencies can be found in appendix (ii). The findings and a brief commentary are presented below:

Fig 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Group Participation by Mode(s) of Transport Regularly Used (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dominion Centre, Southall</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priory Centre, Acton</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenford Hall, Greenford</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicars Green Primary School, Perivale</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islip Manor, Northolt</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ealing Town Hall</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceval House Evening</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceval House, Afternoon-2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceval House Afternoon-1</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Commentary

In terms of cars, participants in Southall proportionally used their cars the most (50%) compared to other parts of the borough. There was interestingly no take-up of bus services from participants in Southall (Fig. 2).

Participants in Ealing had the greatest take-up as bicycles in the borough (between 20-33%, see Fig. 3).

Under ‘other’ forms of transport, motorcycles, commercial vehicles and dial-a-ride were cited under both questions.

In terms of the main method of transport, the results above are not broadly consistent with the results from the Resident’s Survey, however, they do show similar percentages to certain wards. For example: participants in Southall had the highest percentage of car users with over three quarters (75%) using it as their main method of transport compared to 63% in Lady Margaret ward and 26% in Southall Broadway (Resident’s Survey Results). The author
would therefore like to reiterate that these results are not generalisable, but certainly illustrates that there are nuances from ward to ward and area to area within the borough.

4.3 Geographical area ‘hot spots’

Below is a summary of the most frequently mentioned problems areas. These are reported by focus group area. However, many of the problem areas mentioned were reported in more than one focus group across the borough and are therefore not exclusive to the area of which the focus group itself was held in:

4.3 (i) Acton:

- Participants mentioned rat-running and speeds of upto 50mph on the Uxbridge road.

- The journey from Avenue Road to Gunnersbury Lane was cited as a source of time delays, with respondents quoting times of between 5-10 minutes to turn into one of the roads off these roads (such as Latimer Road).

- Turning off Acacia Road off Horn Lane was also cited as a congestion magnet. Speeding was a concern on the area between Hillcroft Road and Wilcott Road.

- Finally, continuing building work (on the South Acton Estate) and the waterworks in the area were also a source of frustration to participants.

4.3 (ii) Greenford:

- HGV vehicles were deemed to be too close to the residential properties on Wadsworth Road.

- Rat-running was seen as a particular problem near Northern Avenue and the CPZ’s on the road were seen to be contributing to congestion at peak times.

- Western Avenue was seen as an area of dense traffic, which caused many drivers to avoid it all together or alter their travelling time.
• The redevelopments in Greenford town centre were seen to both cause and exasperate traffic conditions. HGVs delivering building aggregate and other materials were cited as the main reason for this.

• Buses travelling through Windmill Road were also seen to add to the congestion within the borough.

• Participants also mentioned the Target roundabout and its reduction from three lanes in the north to one further down as being a problem area.

4.3 (iii) Southall:

• Traffic lights between Western Road/Montague/Featherstone Road were seen as an unnecessary traffic management instrument, which were perceived as increasing traffic at peak times

• The industrial estates engulfing Marlborough Road on Southall were also perceived as a major source of congestion at peak times.

• The several places of worship around Montague Way, Havelock Road, Norwood Road and Western Road caused problems for worshippers wishing to park because of the perceived constant search for a parking area.

• Participants saw certain roads in Southall as showing no signs of relenting in terms of the bottlenecking of traffic. Their primary concern was that (apart from the obvious lateness and associated frustrations) eventually, emergency vehicles would not be able to get through. These areas included: South Road, Southall Broadway, Merrick Road and The Green.

4.3 (iv) Northolt:

• Northolt tube station and the area around it were seen to be a bottleneck for congestion as a result of people picking up and dropping people off as well as traffic management systems, such as speed bumps.
• Target roundabout was seen as the major source of congestion, with heavy traffic both on the roundabout at peak times and on roads leading off the roundabout (such as Mandeville and Church Road). Accidents on the road increased frustration for those travelling in and around it both in cars and on public transport.

• Residents were also concerned about the air quality in the area around the Target roundabout and it’s affects on respiratory problems.

• The Ruislip Road, though in close proximity to other borough borders, was perceived as frequently congested at both peak and off-peak times.

• Concerns with the redevelopment of the Swimarama and increased traffic as a result of redevelopment were a big concern to those living/travelling to Northolt. The redevelopment was see as a major contributor to already burgeoning area of concern.

4.3 (v) Perivale:

• Western Avenue was seen as problem area. The width restrictions were seen as problematic by participants.

• The many industrial estates in the area, between the Western Avenue and Bilton Road were perceived as magnets for HGVs. Participants were concerned for the increased road and pavement damage to the nearby residential areas due to rat running. The associated noise and air pollution were also viewed as problem areas.

• The lights at Haven Green were perceived as inefficient, you stop start all the time and this causes congestion

4.3 (vi) Ealing:

• Areas around the hospital and Thames Valley University sites appear to be problematic at peak periods and the shuttle buses to these sites appear to cause congestion rather than ease it.
• Hanger Lane (and close to Uxbridge Road) was viewed as a bottleneck at peak periods, with cars and buses suffering as a result of congestion from HGVs. However, participants also perceived buses as contributing to traffic and congestion especially when they congregated in two’s or three’s.

• General bottlenecks were perceived by railway bridges and tube stations in central Ealing.

• Participants also mentioned other areas of the borough such as the North Circular, and the general area around Greenford Broadway and Ruislip Road west as being particularly congested.

4.4 Is congestion getting better or worse?

Panel members believed overwhelmingly that conditions had got worse in the borough and where they lived. Many of the explanations given by residents for these worsening conditions formed the basis of the predominant themes throughout the focus groups. Below are the main themes from the answers given by participants.

Changing driving habits and conditions

There was a perception that the density and nature of traffic has increased considerably over the last 3-5 years. The increase in density was perceived to be due from an increase in car ownership per household and what kind of journeys people are making. Panel members spoke of how commuters (both from inside and outside the borough) and parents completing school runs were the main contributors to this.

Additionally, many noted how bad driving habits such as rat running and speeding were commonplace as mechanisms to escape the dense traffic at peak times. As a result, traffic enforcement/calming felt redundant (such as speed bumps, one way streets and speed zones) as rule breaking is prevalent:

"Congestion…generates significant extra traffic and perceived 'rabbit runs' along residential streets”

Participant, Priory Centre, Action

“People parking/waiting in cars (and dropping off) forcing other drivers into one lane”

Participant, Islip Manor Community Centre, Northolt
Regeneration and improvement works

A major theme for both this question and throughout the focus groups was the impact of regeneration and improvement works. Put succinctly by one focus group attendee:

“More flats equals more people equals more cars...big redevelopments contribute to this also”  
Participant, Greenford Hall, Greenford

Panel members felt that regeneration and planning did not test feasibility of certain projects or consult at an adequate level (such as the Northolt Swimarama and the Ealing 'Leaf').

Improvement works in the borough, whether they are conducted by the council, utilities companies or Transport for London (TFL) are considered as a major contributor to congestion in the borough. More specifically, the disruption caused by such works (regardless of how long they were) featured heavily as a cause of frustration and dissatisfaction throughout the borough.

Traffic enforcement and calming

As mentioned above, traffic enforcement and calming measures are not being adhered to. Further, many panel members reflected that such schemes were often responsible for an increase in traffic density:

“Traffic lights causing congestion rather than preventing it...Misplaced zebra crossings...Mini roundabouts-drivers are unsure how to proceed”  
Participant, Perceval House (Evening)

“I feel road claming measures/traffic lights are excessive”  
Participant, Perceval House, (Evening)

Additionally, people looking for parking facilities were also seen as contributors to traffic. In certain areas of the borough, the extension of the congestion charge further west was seen to increase traffic flow in main roads inside of the borough.

In relation to alternative forms of transport, there was interestingly no mention of concerns with overland and tube services (though it was mentioned at other points during the focus groups).
Heavy good vehicles (HGVs) and other commercial vehicles

HGVs coming into and travelling through the borough at various points was another major theme throughout the focus group. Panel members saw HGVs as not only contributing to congestion, but also being culpable for associated issues with congestion such as low air quality, noise pollution and structural damage.

Illegal parking or unnecessary rat running of commercial vehicles and HGVs in the borough were also noted, especially in regards to redevelopment and regeneration:

“Illegal parking by commercial vehicles on residential roads…”  
*Participant, Perceval House (Afternoon)*

“…Roads are always congested with cement lorries and lorries waiting to be unloaded”  
*Participant, Vicars’ Green Primary School, Perivale*

Problems with alternative forms of transport

Panel members leaned more towards cycling as an alternative form of transport rather than other options.

However, those who used cycles or would consider cycling also pitched a number of issues. These centred predominantly on the size and access to cycling lanes in the borough, which was seen to lead to poor cycling discipline (for example using pavements to cycle on and going through red lights):

“…Roads [are] too dangerous to cycle and cycle routes [are] inadequate”  
*Participant, Priory Community Centre, Acton*

There was also a perceived lack of encouragement of cycling in the borough from organisations and businesses.

In terms of buses and walking, panel members believed that access for buses was getting increasingly worse and often found themselves waiting for lengthy periods for buses to
arrive. Walking in areas of high density traffic had also become increasingly difficult because of safety issues.

**Traffic from Council and Police vehicles**

Recycling and refuse collections by the council were seen to be a cause of congestion because of their slow moving nature. Similarly, vehicles operated by police or even blockades by police (causing traffic diversions) were seen to add to this problem.

**4.5 What are the functional impacts of congestion?**

This question covered the practical, everyday effects of congestion. It covers impacts on time and other day-to-day perceptions panel members have of congestion and traffic in their area. When going through the impacts, it is worth noting that there is some overlap between functional and other impacts. That is, that participants often did not draw a distinction between functional and other impacts. The most frequent example of this is that of when people cited environmental impacts both under functional and other impacts. This shows how the members see factors such as the environment increasingly affecting their day-to-day lives.

**Health, safety and environmental impacts**

Some participants noted the environmental impacts from congestion. Of particular concern was the quality of air in the borough. Fumes from HGVs and cars were seen as the main cause for this:

“Poor air quality as a result of heavy traffic, especially when it is slow moving”  
*Participant, Islip Manor Community Centre, Northolt*

Respondents also mentioned the effect of air pollution on those sat in stationary traffic. They suggested that those who had daily exposure to congestion could be more at risk than those simply walking or living in that area.

Noise pollution and vibrations from HGV’s was also mentioned frequently. Panel members spoke of the impact of both noise and vibrations on their properties, in some cases contributing to damaged foundations. The noise pollution was also cited as a cause for distress and disruption the home (such as small children being woken).
Other participants spoke of their worries over emergency vehicles not being able to get through due to gridlocked traffic:

“It’s only a matter of time before someone dies because an ambulance can’t get thorough”

Participant, Dominion Arts Centre, Southall

General health and safety of drivers also concerned participants. Many reported feeling ‘stressed’ or ‘frustrated’ whilst in traffic jams, whilst others mentioned they or other drivers seemed prone to dangerous driving when they were in congestion.

Impacts of time delays

Respondents spoke of the frustration they felt whenever they were delayed because of congestion. They referred to the waste of time and resources through lateness. Many had developed coping strategies such as allowing for more time, avoiding traffic hot-spots or even rat-running (discussed in more detail later).

Many felt forced into using bikes, motorbikes or walking because their cars had become an inefficient form of transport for them.

Impact on traffic flow

Traffic flow inside the borough was perceived to be a product of traffic flow outside of the borough, on major roads:

“When you’re travelling in London, it slows you down, as soon as you’re outside of London it speeds up again”

Participant, Vicar’s Green Primary School, Perivale

The heavy traffic flow was seen to contribute to increased law and rule breaking. Many saw the Highway Code being disregarded in areas that were frequently congested (such as Gunnersbury Road and The Green in Southall):

“…The area outside the club on The Green is always congested...People park illegally, causing heavy traffic and pedestrians cannot get cross at lights either....”

Participant, Dominion Arts Centre, Southall
Others noted rat-running as a persistent issue on more residential streets in peak-time traffic. Panel members noted how speed limits and humps had little affect at these times.

**Traffic calming and associated impacts**

Many participants felt that traffic calming measures and parking has and will contribute to congestion and heavy traffic flow in the borough. There were many examples given by participants in their relative areas of where traffic calming and parking (particularly in those roads where there were parking bays on both sides of the road or near CPZ areas) exasperated problems:

"I feel that road calming measures/traffic lights are excessive"
*Participant, Perceval House, Evening*

"...illegal parking by commercial vehicles on residential roads...causing problems"
*Participant, Perceval House, Afternoon*

**Fear of Worsening Conditions**

Participants feared for the future of the borough roads and felt that conditions could only get worse. Many felt that they unable to reverse the situation that now faced the borough:

"The system is working against us"
*Participant, Vicar's Green Primary School*

Participants believed that congestion would bring increased and unwarranted criminalisation of drivers, similar to what was perceived when the congestion charge was bought into operation in central London.

**4.6 What are the other impacts of congestion?**

Participants were asked to comment on those issues outside of the day-to-day effects of congestion and what affects their quality of life. Interestingly, the responses given were largely reiteration to the replies given under the ‘functional impacts’ question above. Other
issues repeated by residents referred to impacts on time delays, impacts on traffic flow, rat running and dangerous driving and the impact of co-ordination of planning resource. To avoid repetition, only the additional points mentioned under this question will be reported here.

Effects on individual health

Panel members saw their own health as being at considerable risk following the rise of congestion over the last two to five years. As well as referring to the problems of noise and general pollution, one participant mentioned the effect of traffic in terms of the levels of lead in blood flow in those residents who had high exposure to congestion.

People also spoke of the respiratory problems associated with heavy traffic. In particular, they talked of how these had got worse during the summer months, especially for children and those sat in gridlocked traffic.

“Congestion [is] bad for the environment hence it is bad for human welfare. More polluted air can’t be good for asthma sufferers”  
Participant, Greenford Hall, Greenford

The issue of stress was elaborated on under this question, with an association with frustration with journey time and other drivers stress & ‘road rage’ affecting them.

Financial Costs

The rising costs of fuel caused respondents to abandon vehicles. Equally though, respondents found the rising cost of public transport a deterrent.

“…More consumption of oil and petrol, more inflation indirectly more cost to every family”  
Participant, Greenford Hall, Greenford
Problems with public transport

Public transport was seen as both the cause and effect of congestion. Whilst some respondents felt that buses were being slowed down by car related traffic, others believed buses were causing unnecessary traffic themselves:

“Buses are having great difficulty getting to destinations on time as the roads are always congested”  
**Participant, Vicar’s Green Primary School, Perivale**

“Main reasons [for congestion] I see is due to roadworks…and to a degree the bus lanes”  
**Participant, Perceval House (Evening)**

Other environmental issues

Pavement edges, roads and other street furniture were cited as being at risk from congestion from HGVs. Many noted cracks, dents and uneven edges in the pavement and the road. The main concerns with this (alongside the unsightliness) centred around noise (from HGVs moving over damaged roads) and the subsequent traffic flow from roadworks:

“Traffic flow is beginning to break pavements and the subsequent repairs…causes congestion”  
**Participant, Acton Priory Community Centre, Acton**

4.7 How do participants cope with congestion?

Many tactics were used to avoid congestion at peak times in order to cope with congestion and manage time spent in heavy traffic. Below is a summary of the key mechanisms used by participants to ease their experiences of congestion.

Restricting car usage

Many participants avoided using their cars as a means of eliminating their negative experiences of congestion. This meant driving only when necessary to avoid stressful situations. Self-imposed restrictions of car use to certain days/times were cited such as using
alternative days or avoiding using the car on weekends. Participants predicted that car restrictions would become more common due the increasing price of petrol.

**Alternative forms of transport**

Alternative forms of transport were considered by panel members. Some used alternatives out of choice, whilst others chose to use them because they felt that cars were no longer reliable or journeys were not predictable:

“…number two [of a list of concerns] journey unpredictability, number three traveller stress”

*Participant, Priory Centre, Acton*

People had taken up bikes as it meant that that they were rarely stationary in traffic compared to vehicular traffic. Participants also valued the health benefits from regular cycling activity. Cycling was also thought of as a more ‘European’ or continental activity.

“I try and avoid this problem [of congestion caused by accidents/roadworks] by cycling. This is a good opportunity for exercise and to help the environment”

*Participant, Perceval House, (Afternoon)*

Travelling on the buses or walking were seen as less attractive alternatives compared to cycling primarily because participants felt less safe whilst on buses/walking compared to cycling:

“the junction at….has no setting to enable pedestrians to cross safely”

*Participant, Vicar’s Green Primary School, Perivale*

People also talked about the rising costs of public transport and felt that either free or subsidised community transport would be of great help and more reliable than buses which were perceived as being unreliable:

“Buses are having great difficulty getting to destinations on time”

*Participant, Vicar’s Green Primary School, Perivale*

It was often the case that participants combined public transport with walking (walking considerable distances to the stops and from them). Some walked whole journeys as they
enjoyed the exercise and felt it quicker than taking the bus or car for short journeys in heavily congested areas.

**Time Allowance**

Respondents often found themselves changing personal routines to cope with the threat of congestion. This meant allowing for extra time whilst commuting as well as leaving work early to avoid ‘rush hour’. Where possible, some individuals avoided travelling peak hours for some activities (such as shopping) altogether because they felt journeys were more pleasant.

**Avoidance**

Panel members frequently felt the need to plan further in advance to avoid congested journeys. This often meant incorporating different routes to avoid those areas where redevelopment or roadworks were taking place or notorious traffic black spots. This frequently included rat running or using physically longer routes which were less congested.

**Apathy**

Some residents felt a degree of apathy towards the situation because there was a perception that the situation would only get worse.

**Health**

Some found alternative methods of transport as a way of coping with the health implications of congestion. Some used public transport, and biking and walking were seen as a healthier way of coping with congestion. Many cyclists also used face masks to protect themselves from air pollution in congested areas. Encouraging school-aged children to walk was also seen as a healthy way of avoiding congestion:

> “Try and encourage people to walk their children to school”  
> **Participant Islip Manor Community Centre, Northolt**

**4.8 What could be done to ease congestion in the borough?**

This question was probably the most widely explored by participants throughout the focus groups. Participants were very vocal about both what needed to be done throughout the
I fear that this latest consultation exercise will be another talking shop, where very little is actually implemented

Participant, Dominion Centre, Southall

Below is a summary of the solutions put forward by participants.

Greater engagement with residents

Participants felt that there was not enough engagement with residents on developments and regeneration throughout the borough. Moreover, they felt that when consultation was delivered, it was usually perceived as inadequate, piecemeal or not transparent. Panel members felt the lack of transparency in both decision-making processes and consultations lead to a feeling of mistrust of the Council.

“I fear that this latest consultation exercise will be another talking shop, where very little is actually implemented”

Participant, Dominion Centre, Southall

Many were unhappy about the co-ordination of transport and planning consultations and suggested solutions:

What we really need is a council ‘tsar’: someone who pulls things together…someone who co-ordinates all relevant points of view

Participant, Vicar’s Green Primary School, Perivale

“There was a consultation…Can anyone in charge [traffic and parking] let the residents know?”

Participant, Dominion Arts Centre, Southall

Improvements to the public transport system

Many participants wanted to see public transport systems that were more frequent, cheap and above all safe. The perceived lack of decent transport seemed to be the main reason why participants were reluctant to give up their cars. Additionally, many felt that some of the 24 hour bus routes should be abandoned (or evaluated in the least) as many were perceived as unnecessary.

Community transport was also a popular choice amongst participants citing other city’s ‘park and ride’ schemes as successful alternatives.
Incentivising and rewarding reduced car usage

Some participants perceived reducing car usage and schemes that aimed to encourage a reduction in car usage positively.

Others felt that more had to be done to reduce traffic flow from public transport, heavy goods vehicles and traffic from outside the borough before they considered reducing the use of their own cars.

Panel members talked of how the Council should work more closely with local business to promote things like car sharing, flexible working and ‘no car’ days to incentivise/encourage people to use their cars less:

“…promote car sharing and car clubs”  Participant, Town Hall, Ealing

Alongside the Council and other organisations, participants felt that residents should also take responsibility for reduced car usage and ownership. Participants suggested that residents should consider not going into central London if it could be avoided as well limiting the amount of short journeys made and using cars which had less of a carbon output.

Another participant suggested that parents dropping off their children in the mornings or picking them up in the afternoon should be targeted for traffic reduction. A school bus style service was seen as a popular alternative to this; as were the promotion of walk to school schemes:

“Try and encourage people to walk their children to school”  Participant, Islip Manor \Community Centre, Northolt

Though some participants felt that those whose vehicles caused congestion should be penalised:

“Reduce the number of cars per household on residents’ permits (e.g. charge higher rates for 2nd and subsequent cars”  Participant, Town Hall, Ealing
Generally though, participants felt that the Council should not penalise individuals for using cars, rather they should consider incentivising less car use.

**Addressing HGV-related problems**

Participants were keen to see time and weight/height restrictions for HGV and LGVs in the borough. Time restrictions were popular in those areas near main roads (where rat running occurred) and those areas close to industrial estates. A staggering of operating times was perceived to reduce traffic caused by both the size of the vehicles and by vehicles loading/unloading goods or people. Weight/height restrictions on certain roads were seen to reduce damage to roads and rat running by large vehicles on minor roads:

> “I would like a width restriction put at the junction...to limit the big lorries”
> **Participant, Vicar's Green School, Perivale**

Similarly, the staggering of food deliveries and other goods to retail premises was perceived as a means of reducing the impact of HGVs.

**Charging**

Although almost unanimously participants felt that a congestion or ('c' charge) similar to the one that is in place in Central London was unnecessary for residents and detrimental to local businesses; some recommended charging non residents and businesses for the use of the borough roads at peak time. One participant recommended the introduction of a charge for those parents dropping children off/picking up outside schools. Another felt that the introduction of a congestion charge for those using major roads around the borough should be introduced (such as the M25).

Support for increased parking and related increases was mixed: Some supported increased charges in those areas which were most congested:

> “…Also not enough enforcement of parking violations by non-taxed vehicles”
> **Participant, Greenford Hall, Greenford**
Whilst others wanted to see increased parking areas outside of schools for people to drop their children off safely and to stop obstructing traffic.

Greater encouragement of cycling

Some participants felt that cycling was not accessible for residents at the present in the borough. They wished to see dedicated cycle routes that were not shared with bus routes. Many spoke of the need for safety for cyclists to be improved and incentivised:

“Not enough is being done to encourage people not to drive for short journeys, and to walk, bus or cycle instead…provide more cycle lanes/routes away from main roads”
Participant, Town Hall, Ealing

“[Cycling] is an opportunity for exercise and to help the environment”
Participant, Perceval House, (Afternoon)

Better Pedestrian Access

Some participants felt that certain areas of the borough were troublesome to negotiate because of high volumes of traffic and what was perceived as poor traffic management. In particular, participants wanted to see a greater pedestrianisation in town centres (especially Ealing) and crossings with quicker light changes.

“Cyclists and pedestrians are not adequately prioritised. They cause least congestion, but are often left waiting whilst streams of cars pass through (at pedestrian crossings)”
Participant, Perceval House, (Afternoon)

“Keep the [the town centre] traffic free”
Participant, Islip Manor Community Centre, Northolt

Other public body/Agency work

Other public bodies and agencies than the Council were perceived as having a shared responsibility for traffic management and congestion problems within the borough. Many mentioned working closer with TFL to co-ordinate transport planning solutions. Others mentioned working closely with housing associations to look at residential parking solutions.
The link between local and national government was also discussed. In particular they wanted to see a closer link between central and local government helping to meet local residential solutions as opposed to large-scale schemes lead by central government. They also wanted to increased bidding for capital funds to tackle congestion.

**Look to European and international models**

Some participants cited examples of European and international transport schemes. Typical examples included: bike schemes similar to those in Paris and Amsterdam; school buses as seen in America and India as well as congestion free zones similar to that in Athens. ‘Smart’ technology that timed or sensed periods of heavy traffic (similar to places such as Japan) were seen to be a more cost-effective solution to traffic management than some of the present solutions.

**5. Discussion**

The aim of this piece of research to gain insight into resident’s perceptions of congestion and what could be done to tackle it as a response to Residents’ Survey findings. A series of exploratory questions were asked to gain insight into the issue and the findings were presented above, question by question.

Across all questions were some strong consistent themes that were mentioned throughout the borough:

- **Planning and regeneration activities:** There was a perceived dearth of impact assessments, feasibility studies and general engagement in areas where large regeneration and traffic management had /would be taking place. Participants wanted a more ‘hands on’ and co-ordinated approach.

- **Better public transport/alternatives:** Participants wanted to see viable options for alternatives to their cars. This meant cheaper, reliable, flexible and above all safe public transport. Increased promotion and safety for cyclists and pedestrians alike was also seen as key; especially for school aged children as an alternative to the school run.
• **Impact of HGV/LGVs**: The affect of these vehicles on people’s day to day activities appears to be significant: They were cited as causes of congestion, environmental damage and generally seen as poor followers of traffic regulations in the borough.

• **Concerns about the future**: Respondents felt that their health and general well being would continue to suffer as a result of increased congestion, both as those in transit and those who lived in highly congested areas.

The themes above were not mutually exclusive; more often than not one was mentioned in relation to another: Frequently HGVs were mentioned in relation to regeneration; better public transport was mentioned in relation to planning and in relation to concerns about the future.

It is important at this stage to point out the distinctiveness of each of the focus groups both in terms of what was deemed a priority for each of the questions asked. The shift in what was perceived as the causes and effects of congestion were notable from group to group. Similarly, during the mapping exercise, the journeys made by participants from different groups varied. This simply illustrates that the diversity of transport behaviours throughout the borough and therefore the very different transport requirements throughout the borough. For example, although better public transport is an issue across the borough, Perivale and some Ealing participants wished to see better community transport for the elderly whilst those in Greenford wished to see public transport with a minimum number of children that were of school age at peak times because they felt intimidated by them and because it left little room for commuters.

Very few participants mentioned their own stake in contributing to the reduction of traffic and often cited other drivers as being responsible for, and having an impact on, congestion.

**6. Recommendations**

The notion of congestion in the borough is a complex issue and these focus groups have started to develop our understanding into how congestion affects residents. Participants gave several insights as to how they would like to see congestion reduced. Below is a set of potential recommendations based on research findings so far:
• **Communications and Engagement:** When planning regeneration and redevelopments, better engagement and communication is required before the stage in planning whereby it becomes too late to reverse. Consultations should be transparent and local with the results of consultations being readily available. The Air Quality survey found that 70% of respondents would, for example, look for air quality information through the Council website, whilst 54% would look in Around Ealing.

• **Agency Co-ordination:** Enhanced co-ordination of key agencies (such as TFL) that affect transport planning should be considered in all transport/planning consultations. Similarly, internal communications could be enhanced between those in transport planning and regeneration planning and the research & consultation team.

• **Promotions:** Increased promotion of existing schemes such as subsidised bike training and free lockers on estates may be beneficial. Car sharing could also be further promoted by the Council in conjunction with large local employers.

• **HGVs and LGVs:** In response to participant’s concerns around these vehicles, further work needs to be done to ascertain how these vehicles are contributing to congestion and how they affect air quality problems as well as road surface damage.

• **Scrutiny insight:** A member-led interest of matters concerning congestion would give some scope for practical change.

• **Equalities Impact:** Results from both the Resident’s Survey and this research illustrate the need to address diversity concerns throughout the borough. The most obvious observation of this is the reliance of cars in some Southall wards compared to the rest of the borough. Additionally, the impact of the current and worsening travel conditions on an aging population or those with disabilities may be considered.