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**Article (Accepted version)  
(Refereed)**

**Original citation:**

Gordon, Ian and Travers, Tony (2010) London: planning the ungovernable city. [City, culture and society](#), 1 (2). pp. 49-55. ISSN 1877-9166  
DOI: [10.1016/j.ccs.2010.08.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2010.08.005)

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This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/37032/>  
Available in LSE Research Online: September 2012

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## London – planning the ungovernable city

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### **Abstract**

This paper relates the processes of strategic planning in London during the first decade of an executive Mayoral system to Doug Yates' thesis about the ungovernability of major cities *and* London's long history of conflict around metropolitan governance issues. Yates' thesis only partially fits the London case because a separate lower tier of lower tier of borough authorities carries the main responsibilities for actual service provision. This London case, does, however, exemplify the proposition that without effective fiscal autonomy in planning for infrastructure provision, the need to manage diplomatic relations with higher levels of government (and other funders) can divert city strategies from those appropriate to the needs of the mass of their own constituents/businesses. In London as in other national capitals, this tension is intensified by a symbolic importance that inhibits central government from taking a detached stance in relation to priorities of the city administration.

Examination of the experience of Mayoral Plans for London suggest that sheer complexity of relations and interdependences across a much extended, diverse and dynamic metropolitan region is also a major restraint on governability as far as strategic planning is concerned. An inability to face up to this complexity, particularly in relation to cross-border relations has - as much as the (diplomatic) obsession with the 'global city' priorities –so far proved a major obstacle to using Mayoral strategic planning as an effective means of steering change in the region, and addressing central issues affecting economic efficiency and residents' quality of life.

## 1. Introduction: The Problem of Metropolitan Governance

London entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a brand new government structure, vesting most city-wide 'authority' in London's first democratically elected Mayor. This was a major step, particularly after a 14 year power vacuum in the city. Of itself, however, it could never have been expected to be 'the solution' to coherent and popular management of this city, which has clearly survived and evolved 'more by fortune than design' (Hebbert, 1998).

Indeed it was from the viewpoint of the Mayor's office in a city where such personal authority had been firmly established over a very long period that Doug Yates (1977) argued for the *ungovernability* of New York City, and (by extension) of all comparable metropolises.

The reasons for Yates' diagnosis, and those of other political realists, are important to appreciate – alongside London's particular history of governmental tensions and change – in order to understand how the new governance system has operated in practice, particularly in relation to the strategic planning functions on which we focus in this paper.

Yates' observation was not simply an emotional response to difficult times in a city where civil rights struggles were still flaring. Nor was it just a conventional judgement about the concentration of many of the most acute economic and social problems within the cores of big cities. Rather it reflects a structural analysis of peculiar tensions and processes associated with the role of metropolitan governments.

Perhaps the most obvious aspects of the structural difficulties they face is that such governments (including the present Greater London Authority – GLA) are called on to manage exceptionally *complex* systems. Complexity here is not just a synonym for difficulty, but relates to the combination of unusually high levels of *diversity* (of both people/cultures and business activities) and a very strong potential for *interaction* (among actors and issues), with knock-on effects making problems hard to disentangle, and greatly increasing the likelihood that policy has unintended consequences.

In London's case, elements in this complexity include a population coming from *many* different national and ethnic backgrounds, an extremely broadly-based service economy, and embeddedness within a functional urban region which is now some 150 miles across. The potential for interaction effects in such regions are maximised by high density and strong internal communications linkages. This has the dual effect of maximising *both* functional integration *and* spatial differentiation, producing a geography involving many

substantial communities with *very* different mixes of population, business and political preference.

On the positive side, this can provide the basis for locally differentiated provision of services and public goods for communities with quite distinct preferences. But, on the other hand, it allows for the institutionalisation of conflict over more strategic issues, and over the governance structure itself. One characteristic version of such conflicts is between an interventionist metropolitanism, concerned with efficiency, growth and/or equity issues, and a conservative localism intent on defending particular assets and stakes against all comers. Other versions are more purely inter-local, reflecting the different values and interests of (for example) inner against outer area residents.

A second dimension of ungovernability involves the 'street level' character of city governance. At a collective level big city governments share the characteristics of Lipsky's (1980) street level bureaucrats: operating in close proximity to clients for services, in a range of situations that neither formal rules nor resources are adequate for expectations to be met. In such situations, Yates argues, Mayors are forced to participate simultaneously in three problematic arenas: fire-fighting direct complaints from dissatisfied local constituents; overcoming the inflexibility and inertia of established service bureaucracies; and managing external relations in the hope of securing more adequate and predictable resource inputs.

## **2. The London Context**

The history of London's governance since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century exemplifies these tensions, remaining in play through eras characterised *first* by remarkable growth, *then* population loss and economic stagnation, before a *return* to further strong growth. This arc of economic change was accompanied by continuing spatial expansion of the city-region, and punctuated by a series of major governmental reorganisations (notably in 1888, 1965 and 2000), representing distinct attempts to deal with the issue of metropolitan governance, rather than particular responses to the current state of the city's economy.

A city-wide government was established, in the form of a London County Council (LCC), in 1888 to deal particularly with the various challenges of a rapidly expanding but socially polarised metropolis. By the following year, however, conflict between its 'progressive' administration and defenders of local interests led the Conservative central government to divide powers between the LCC and a lower tier of 'boroughs'. With numerical and spatial changes, as the city has expanded, this local tier of government has continued to play a very important role ever since, through several changes at the city-wide level.

The first of these, in 1965, saw a very considerable spatial extension of this tier, to cover the whole of the continuously urbanised area, up to the point where its further extension had been halted by a Green Belt drawn up at the end of the 1930s. This Green Belt has been sustained ever since, with the consequence that the (substantial) further enlargement of the functional metropolitan area has taken a discontinuous form, and has not been matched by any further territorial extension of the city's government.

The new Greater London Council (GLC) continued to share the service provision role with the boroughs. Across an inner area, corresponding to the remit of the old LCC, education was provided by a closely related Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), while in the (more middle class) outer London suburbs, where more conservative and localist values tended to prevail, it was in the hands of the boroughs. Continuing tensions between these interests and those pursuing active metropolitan integration – both for economic efficiency and social equity – emerged more directly in the fields of social housing and public transport. In the housing case, responsibility was effectively divided between *local* provision, management and planning control, and GLC efforts to pursue a strategic role, involving extension of social housing provision beyond the physically constrained ex-LCC territory. Conflicts with outer London boroughs (notably the London Borough of Bromley) that continued through the 1960s to the 1980s, led on more than one occasion to legal challenges. Public transport provision, however, was entirely in the hands of the city-wide London Transport. Efforts of a more leftist GLC in the 1980s to introduce explicit fare subsidies to assist commuting by poorer residents also generated conflicts and legal disputes with outer boroughs (again led by Bromley).

In this era, as in earlier ones, Conservative national governments naturally tended to side with their localist supporters. But more direct conflict between the GLC and central government ensued when a newly radicalised GLC (led by Ken Livingstone) in the early 1980s directly challenged the economic liberalism of Margaret Thatcher's government. During the economic recession of the early 1980s banners announcing London's unemployment totals were prominently displayed opposite parliament. The GLA developed an interventionist industrial strategy, and - in pursuit of a new 'rainbow coalition' base for the London Labour Party - subsidised an array of community groups and minority support activities. Central government responded to this challenge by abolishing the GLC – together with its counterparts in other English metropolises, though it was the political activism of the GLC that provoked their culling.

Abolition of the GLC came at what proved to be the end of an era of urban pessimism, across cities in advanced economies (notably the UK and US) which were witnessing de-industrialisation and population decline. In London's case it has been argued that much of

this change was better regarded as a matter of spatial and sectoral rebalancing than of failure (Buck et al., 2002). But it was in any case irrelevant to the actual demise of London-wide government, and the ensuing transfer of powers: in part to the boroughs; in part to Whitehall (i.e. central government); and in part to an evolving network, including inter-borough committees and wider partnerships (Hebbert and Travers, 1988).

Widespread criticism of the removal of a metropolitan level of government came even from outer London residents who belatedly recognised their involvement in the city (Travers, 2004). Despite pessimistic predictions there was actually no service breakdown - partly because the new collaborative institutions went a long way towards replicating the GLC's role. There were, however, significant gaps at least in relation to political accountability, economic development and transport planning. After the one-off boost to 'global city' activities in London provided in the mid-late 1980s by the government-led 'Big Bang' deregulation of City financial services, and its Docklands redevelopment initiative, there was a growing awareness of competition for these from other centres. This led to a series of studies of London's strategic position and how this might be enhanced, with growing central government interest in these (e.g. LPAC/CLD, 2001; LD, 2006). Such concerns reinforced a continuing lobby (particularly from within the Labour party) to re-create some form of city-wide government in London.

However, when 'New Labour' eventually came into office nationally in 1997, Tony Blair was no more disposed than his Conservative predecessors to recreate a powerful and potentially troublesome executive authority on the GLC model. Instead, what was produced as part of a package of devolutionary initiatives, and endorsed after debate and a referendum in London was an authority with almost exclusively 'strategic' functions. The Mayor of London, as its one-person executive was given a legal duty to generate a series of strategies, some relating to policy areas for which it (and its associated family, including the London Development Agency and Transport for London) had explicit powers and responsibilities, but others which were more purely 'strategic'. That is, the Mayor would have to encourage other institutions to become involved in the achievement of objectives laid out in many of the strategies. This new emphasis is surely ironic, given that it was the GLC's 'strategic' pretensions which had given most offence to central government. But the notion of the Mayor operating persuasively to get strategies implemented through a series of partner authorities also has echoes of the network mode of governance that developed during the 'interregnum' between GLC abolition and creation of the GLA (Travers, 2004; Buck et al., 2002).

Underlying this notion of the Mayor as 'facilitator' is the fact that the lower tier (borough) authorities retained almost all their powers. Their relative strength is signalled by a level of

collective spending which is twice that of the GLA, a balance which continues to differentiate London's system of governance even from that of those other big cities, such as Berlin and Tokyo, which also have two distinct levels of government. One consequence of the 'London model' is that (at least as far as residents are concerned) the London Mayor is largely protected from the need to respond to very immediate constituency demands, one of the three areas of pressure adding up to prevent 'governability' in Yates' New York-based analysis, but which in London falls largely to the boroughs to manage, in their own ways. But, on the other hand, this division of powers can make it much harder for a strategically-minded Mayor actually to get his vision implemented by boroughs representing different sets of more localised interests.

### **3. Strategic Planning of an Expanding Post-Industrial Economy**

At the point of its creation, the Greater London Authority was essentially a strategic authority in the sense of being primarily charged with responsibility for development of a series of 'strategies', relating specifically to the city's spatial development, economic development, transportation and a series of aspects of its physical environment and wellbeing. Over the course of time, the first Mayor, Ken Livingstone, managed both to elevate the first of these documents into an integrating document focused on his vision for the city (*The Mayor's London Plan*) and to progressively increase his formal and *de facto* powers beyond those originally allocated to him by a cautious national government. But the *London Plan* has remained primarily a spatial document, providing a framework for the exercise of statutory planning powers (principally by the London boroughs). It notably lacks any capital budgeting component, since the Mayor has neither overall responsibility for, nor effective control of, the major investment resources on which implementation of strategies for a growing city would clearly depend.

This lack of autonomy was highlighted when a major part of the Mayor's effort during his first two years in office was spent on a failed attempt to reverse the Treasury's imposition of a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) as the means of refurbishing the Underground. Funding for transport development was, however, actually made available by the Treasury on a scale which provided a clear physical indication of the governmental capacity of the new Mayoral system. This included establishment of Transport for London (TfL) on a debt-free basis, heavy investment in the PPP, and additional grants for both congestion charging and improved bus services. New funding mechanisms were also developed, notably arrangements for bond financing of further transport projects, though these had to be underwritten by additional income streams, in a situation where the GLA's tax-raising potential was very limited. The problem was thus not that the Mayor was starved of public-

funding, but that the terms and grounds of this funding were outwith his control or that of any sub-national authority.

Growth was absolutely central to the first Mayoral *London Plan* (GLA, 2004), reflecting a new and distinctive vision of the city's course and responsibilities. In part its optimism was simply born of the experience of (what now seems) a 'golden age' of expansion and investment in the period between the GLC's demise and establishment of the GLA. But, observers of the first two years of the GLA note that a draft *Plan*, grounded very largely in the work of the London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC) which operated on a consensual basis during this 'inter-regnum' period in London government, was then transformed into a much more positive, growth-oriented document, as the Mayor's own Office assumed the central role in its development (Thornley et al., 2005).

The Mayor's vision rested on the view that large scale population and job growth was *inevitable* for London (with forecast increases of 700,000 and 636,000 respectively over 15 years) *because of its global city role*, and that the *London Plan* should be geared to accommodating this. That would be achieved by a combination of higher densities (both in the office complexes of Central London and the Docklands to the east, and in residential areas across the city) and by a 'go east' strategy, reversing the established westerly bias of growth. This reversal was intended to take advantage of under-used land, particularly in the Gateway area around the Thames Estuary, the accessibility of which would be radically upgraded by means of major new rail investments (including the Crossrail project). In turn, it was supposed to contribute to a reduction in the city's disproportionate and growing share of economically disadvantaged residents (many of whom lived in the inner east) – though research evidence suggested it would actually make little difference to the position of these socially excluded groups (Buck et al., 2002).

The *London Plan's* strong emphasis on London's global city role and means of enhancing this was (naturally) subject to criticism. But it was also rather a surprise, given both the Mayor's previous leftist reputation ('Red Ken') and the fact that his (mid-1980s) interventionist economic plan for the GLC had explicitly rejected a global city strategy (GLC, 1985).

Hard economic data suggests that the Plan's judgement about the dominant contribution of 'global city' functions to job and population growth in London was substantially misplaced. It is true that business services (other than finance) contributed the bulk of the expansion in jobs. But, markets beyond Europe are estimated to have contributed just 13% in employment terms to the city's economic base, as compared with about 70% from UK markets outside South East England, while firms serving international markets showed no

sign of growing significantly faster than others in their sector (LD et al., 1997; Buck et al, 2002; Gordon et al., 2002).

The question why the *London Plan* should place such specific emphasis on the role and needs of 'global city' activities is thus one requiring some attention. Three types of answer deserve consideration. The first is simply one of misperception on the part of the planners, misled by the public prominence and high visibility of City financial functions, coupled with the common misuse of finance as an abbreviated label for a very much larger/broader 'financial and business service' sector. While true for much of the public and media, it is hard to believe that either the GLA's professional staff or a very experienced London Mayor can simply have made this mistake.

A second type of answer focuses on a direct exercise of power by Core Business District (CBD) interests, highlighting the privileged access to the Mayor and his senior policy advisor by a very small London Business Board including representatives of the London Chamber of Commerce, the Confederation of British Industry, and the (CBD-focused) London First, together with (in the early days of the GLA) a Mayoral Cabinet member drawn from the political leadership of the City of London (Thornley et al., 2005). There is undoubtedly some substance to this argument, but what it does not explain is the nature of the power that these interests could exercise over an independent-minded, socialist Mayor free of financial dependence.

A third, complementary line of argument (Gordon, 2004a), however, starts from recognition of the Mayor's weakness in relation to control over key investment resources required for delivery of any kind of development strategy, and suggests that the *London Plan* was fundamentally an investment prospectus designed to secure underwriting of infrastructure investment by a Chancellor (i.e. Finance Minister, Gordon Brown). This would reflect the emphasis in Yates' (1977) analysis on the strategic importance for Mayors without effective long run fiscal autonomy, of managing their external political relations, in ways which can impact substantially on how internal relations and policies are conducted. After a series of false dawns for the London Mayor, political success seems to have been achieved in relation to central government 'approval' of the (£16 billion) Crossrail project to strengthen east-west links to the CBD, after 20 years of lobbying and planning. The Crossrail funding gap has been very largely closed and work has started – though the post-recession public expenditure crisis (and prospective government change anticipated in May 2010) will still have to be weathered.

Election of a new (Conservative) Mayor in 2008, Boris Johnson, who enjoys the support particularly of suburban electors, has brought forward a draft 'replacement *London Plan*' with a rather different tenor to its predecessor (GLA, 2009). Visions of 'inevitable' growth

have been displaced (and job growth forecasts substantially moderated) in favour of an emphasis on quality of life, 'place-making', and the economy of outer boroughs, alongside promise of more autonomy for boroughs and less pressure for residential densification there. In substance, however, the differences are more modest. A clear gap remains between assessments of housing need – both overall and in the 'affordable' category, and what is likely to materialise, given past trends and the lack of new measures likely to accelerate these. Despite the Mayor's establishment of an Outer London Commission, to address the issue of its economic stagnation (OLC, 2009) the balance of likely job growth also remains heavily skewed toward the established CBD and its eastern annex in Canary Wharf.

#### **4. The Disintegration of Governance for the Wider London Region**

One of the continuing realities of urban government is that the spatial scale of (all but the least successful) cities has a constant tendency to grow, through some combination of increasing population and rising space standards, while their administrative bounds can only be extended every so often (with varying degrees of difficulty). The normal situation is thus for the territories of city and metropolitan authorities to be substantially under-bounded in relation to the relevant economic and housing market areas, and to exclude areas with the highest current growth potential, though constituents of neighbouring authorities (including these areas) may choose to resist at least the more extensive forms of growth within their territories.

In London there was a bold attempt in the late 1930s to halt the physical spread of the city, by imposing a Green Belt, with a very strong presumption against further development, at a point close to what became – broadly – the boundaries of Greater London (administered first by the GLC and then the GLA). In physical terms the bluntness of this instrument proved substantially successful, but its unintended consequence was an accelerated spread of the functional region, as population and business growth leap-frogged the restricted area, accelerating the growth of previously independent towns beyond it. And, as growth in the outer areas matured, they passed from being simply London's hinterland, providing an extended labour supply (via commuting into the city or local back offices), to becoming sophisticated elements in an extended capital city region (the Greater South East or GSE), and hosting many of the most productive and innovative activities within the UK economy (Hall, 1989; Buck et al., 2002; Hall and Pain, 2006).

Prior to the establishment of the GLA there was some provision for regional planning at a scale close to that of the GSE, via a *Strategic Plan for the South East* (SEJPT, 1970, 1976) and then - despite suspension of strategic planning under Thatcher's Conservative national government - continuing interaction via a Standing Conference on London and South East

Regional Planning (SERPLAN). A crude form of 'regionalisation' of some government functions in 1994 saw this territory being split between three separate units (each of bureaucratically manageable size, if not independence). Then with the election of Tony Blair's New Labour government in 1997, committed both to a network of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and a measure of devolution for London, the governmental fragmentation of the GSE was fully institutionalised, SERPLAN being abolished and three entirely separate RDAs being created for London and its two neighbours (the South East and East of England).

None of the versions of the *London Plan* produced by the first elected Mayor, nor the current (2009) replacement draft from his successor, actually pay any significant attention to likely developments in London's two GSE neighbours, or to the ways in which they can be expected to interact. For the implementation phase there is a promise that the GLA 'family' will:

'Work with regional, sub-regional and local authorities and agencies in the East and South East of England to secure the sustainable development and management of growth in the wider metropolitan area and the greater South East of England and coordinate approaches to other strategic issues of common concern' (GLA, 2009, p.31).

Boroughs are now also expected to work with their sub-regional neighbours across the London border. In relation to transport very tentative steps to expand 'London' government into the wider region have been taken, with a possibility of increasing TfL's powers in the area in which the electronic Oyster card TfL issue can be used by commuters. But there is no indication of significant collaboration in production of the draft spatial or transport strategies, or review of their forecasts – still less joint consideration of strategic issues in relation to the distribution and location of growth.

In principle, this blinkered view might be attributed to the fact that the Mayor is directly responsible to (and needs to be re-elected by) just London residents. That is not an adequate explanation, however, since the welfare of these residents can clearly be affected in important ways by the course of interactions with areas across the GLA boundary. A better case could be made that it is the sensitivity of residents (and their representatives) in the two neighbouring regions to potentially undesirable overflows of London development into their territories which accounts for the silences of the *London Plan* on these.

The position of all versions of the *London Plan* so far is that London has an absolute duty to accommodate all the growth that it generates (in population particularly) within its own borders. The reasons for this are not fully spelled out, but it is taken to be a requirement of

the 'compact city' emphasis of national planning policies (since the early 1990s), and an integral part of Mayoral aims to make London a 'model sustainable city'.

This obligation to provide for all the consequences of London's growth is clearly not an absolute one, however, since all that the *London Plan* has actually aspired to accommodate is a projected growth based on recent population trends. These reflect not only the impact of high rates of overseas immigration (into London) but also a scale of net outward migration to the rest of the GSE which reflects the constraints of the London housing market (where construction has not matched potential need).

The *London Plan's* feasibility has been tested arithmetically against calculations of potential 'housing capacity' but it has consistently avoided discussion of the choices that (potential) residents make as between housing options inside and outside the GLA area.

The issues of fragmentation - as a barrier to effective organisation of the dynamic extended region within which London is now embedded – go well beyond conventional spatial 'planning'. In the field of economic development they involve both a temptation toward wasteful forms of territorial competition, and discouragement of concerted activity across the borders between formally separate 'government office regions'. In transport policy planning, they involve shared difficulties in finding environmentally sustainable (and affordable) ways of dealing with congestion problems frustrating the growing demand for orbital travel in a region whose spatial extension was based on an essentially radial (public) transport network. It is in relation to physical planning, and particularly provision for housing development, that fragmentation is most obviously problematic, given the contrasting position of inner and outer areas, and the absence of positive incentives for areas to take responsibility for accommodating workers to service their common labour market (Gordon, 2004b).

A simple amalgamation into a Still Greater London Authority is not a viable solution to such problems, since it would neither possess adequate democratic legitimacy nor – given its dominant position within the English economy – be acceptable to central government. Rather a multi-faceted approach involving a set of complementary actions - including reshaping of incentives, encouragement of *ad hoc* sectoral and sub-regional collaborations, restoration of a shared technical and analytic infrastructure, and routine activities to promote understanding of regional interdependences, and national government leadership at the Greater South East scale – needs to be pursued over an extended period to build an effective capacity for governance across what is now the real London region (Gordon, 2006).

## 5. The new London planning – an assessment

The creation and implementation of the *London Plan* has been an important element in the evolution of the post-2000 system of city-wide government. The requirement of the Greater London Authority Act, 1999 that the Mayor of London should create a legally-binding 'spatial plan' provided the first Mayor, Ken Livingstone, with an opportunity to produce a document that allowed him to create a relatively detailed picture of his view of how London should develop.

Of course, the *London Plan* could only affect developments that were to take place after its completion. London's history, built form, transport systems, industries and people together embodied hundreds of years worth of historical evolution. In its creation and subsequent implementation, there were inevitably limits on the distance the new plan could take London from its starting point when the GLA came into existence in 2000.

A period of relatively strong economic and public spending growth in the period immediately after the completion of the *London Plan* in February 2004 came to an end in the autumn of 2007 when the banking crisis began to affect the UK economy. Moreover, in 2008 Boris Johnson set in train a revision of the *London Plan* when he took office, with a number of changed emphases from those of his predecessor. Thus, the period during which Ken Livingstone was able to use 'his' *Plan* to change the shape and direction of the capital was only 3½ years. Thereafter, development tapered off and the capacity to make radical changes to the city was much reduced.

Public infrastructure projects such as Crossrail and the East London line extension, a number of major new tall buildings and the Olympics project continued to be built throughout the period up to 2010. But, in the absence of much of the 'developer push' that had had so much influence on London over the period since the mid-1980s, it now seems likely there will be a much quieter period. Consequently, the potential for the *London Plan* to shape the city will be much reduced. The plan will only have a perceptible impact when there is substantial development of infrastructure, housing and other projects.

The *London Plan* was, without question, used by the first Mayor to describe his 'vision' for London, which was a 'global' city and 'command and control centre'. His plan was intended to 'predict and provide' for rapid population and employment growth, but in an environmentally sustainable way. Transport and other key infrastructure needed to be radically improved by the implementation of new railways, river crossings, more social and affordable housing, and economic development in the east of the city. Job growth was to be concentrated in the central area and in east London. Higher densities would avoid the need

to use green land. Minorities would be given greater access to the city's prosperity. Growth, equity and 'sustainable' development were the key elements of the plan.

It is probably fair to say this narrative became even stronger after the publication of the *London Plan*, as its impact was felt by the boroughs, developers and others. It is also important to note that the plan was a lobbying document, intended to be used as the starting-point for negotiations with central government about the need for more resources for transport, regeneration, housing and other assets. London would need major new projects to allow it to grow and thus to continue to pay the large tax 'surplus' that was used to fund public expenditure in other parts of the UK. The *London Plan* and the Mayor's *Transport Strategy* were together used to put the case for massive public investment in the capital's Underground, commuter railways and buses. Government spending on transport in London grew from £704 million in 2000-01 to £6298 million in 2008-09 – an increase of almost 800 per cent. The UK average increase over the same period was about 140 per cent<sup>1</sup>. Whilst it is not possible to attribute this increase to the power of the case made by the Mayor's *London Plan* and *Transport Strategy*, the scale of the rise in investment and subsidy suggests Whitehall was broadly convinced of the capital's need for investment as outlined in these documents.

The *London Plan* and other documents produced by the Mayor also fulfilled a 'branding' function. In the 14 years between the abolition of the GLC and the creation of the GLA, many 'good government' bodies published plans for London. With the arrival of the Mayor and Assembly, the GLA used the same technique to build its reputation. The creation of GLA Economics, in particular, led to a stream of studies about the capital's economy and issues relating to it. The strategies and plans fulfilled a similar function, allowing the Mayor to explain his views about policy and 'advertise' them to central government.

Finally, the *London Plan*, because it has statutory power, was used by Ken Livingstone (though much less by Boris Johnson) to impose 'metropolitan' policy on the boroughs. On issues such as residential densities, housing allocations, waste regulation and tall buildings, Livingstone had views that were often at variance with some or all of the boroughs. The *London Plan* gave the Mayor the power to over-ride borough planning policies. Indeed, in a revision to the GLA legislation which took place in 2007, the Mayor successfully gained the power to over-ride larger borough planning decisions and impose his will. Previously, he could only veto them. Conformity to the plan was a tool for the Mayor to dictate (some) policy outcomes to the boroughs.

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<sup>1</sup> Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2006, Cm 6811, TSO, London, Tables 7.5a and 7.5b compared with Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2009, Cm 7630, TSO, London, Table 9.8e

But despite this enhanced capacity for the Mayor to use the *London Plan* to push through particular projects and policies, the fragmentation of London's government made it hard for even a Mayor such as Ken Livingstone to make a material difference to much of the city. Only where a developer was proposing a major scheme could the Mayor have significant influence. The boroughs, though their own local development frameworks still have much of the planning capability within their boundaries. A change of Mayor in 2008 has led to a more emollient attitude from City Hall towards the boroughs, with less willingness to override borough decisions. Style as well as formal powers affects the outcome of the post-2000 planning system.

London's government has long involved a trade-off between metropolitan or city-wide interests and those of the boroughs. The post-2000 requirement for the Mayor to develop a *London Plan* creates an opportunity for the Mayor to influence local planning, but only where major proposals are coming forward. The *Plan* may still be used by the Mayor to 'brand' City Hall and to lobby for resources but this, too, depends on the Mayor's decision to use them in this way. The post-2000 planning arrangements can give the Mayor of London significant power over particular major planning proposals and decisions. But more generally, the boroughs still have significant freedom to act. It is important to remember, of course, that despite the creation of the GLA, major planning decisions can still be appealed to or 'called in' by the Secretary of State, allowing him or her to override decisions mad at either or both levels of London government.

## **6. Planning and the Governability of London**

Setting this review of the first decade of London planning within the framework of the new Mayoral system for London in the context of Yates' broader ungovernability thesis and London's particular history of conflict around metropolitan governance issues invites the conclusion that this metropolitan region is indeed 'ungovernable' at least in strategic planning terms.

Some key elements of Yates' diagnosis of the conflicting political demands made on any metropolitan leadership do seem to be borne out in the contemporary London case. The pressures of impatient consumers of public services, and of inert and fossilised service bureaucracies are both less severe in the case of the GLA, since (even more than in the past) it is the lower tier borough authorities who carry the main responsibilities for actual service provision – though the Mayor does face some of these problems through his (less direct) responsibilities for the Metropolitan Police and Transport for London. The London case, does, however, particularly exemplify the tension facing city authorities which lack effective fiscal autonomy in planning for infrastructure provision, in that the strategic requirements for management of diplomatic relations with higher levels of government (and

other funders) can interfere with those appropriate to the needs of the mass of their own populations/businesses. Indeed, there is some reason to think that these difficulties are more acute in the London case precisely because it is the national capital, with too much symbolic importance for central government to take a detached stance in relation to activities and choices of the city administration (Gordon, 2004a).

Sheer complexity of relations and interdependences across a much extended, diverse and dynamic metropolitan region is also a major restraint on governability as far as strategic planning is concerned. An inability to face up to this complexity, particularly in relation to cross-border relations has - as much as the (diplomatically motivated) obsession with the 'global city' aspect of the CBD and its needs – has so far proved a very substantial obstacle to using Mayoral strategic planning as an effective means of steering change in the region and addressing central issues affecting its efficiency and the quality of life available to its citizens.

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