



# An interview with Steven Norris

In each edition of The Review, we feature an interview with a key transport figure. For this issue, Marion Gourlay spent time with Steven Norris, the former Conservative Transport Minister and newly appointed Transport for London Board Member.



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**These are unprecedented times. With the present global economic crisis deepening by the day, the pundits are predicting that life as we know it will never be the same. Steven Norris, the respected former Conservative Transport Minister – and recently appointed Transport for London (TfL) Board Member – shares some of his thoughts about life, politics and the shape of our industry given the instability of the financial markets.**

From his home in South London, Norris conveniently takes the no.333 bus to his office in Piccadilly. It's a mode which, he believes, is becoming more attractive as a direct effect of high oil prices. "In the most basic terms, public transport is filling a gap – just like Aldi and Lidl are filling a gap for prudent consumers".

But unlike food retailing, Norris believes that government intervention is necessary to create viable transport choices, which in turn will lead to permanent modal shift. He does agree though – as do most – that planning decisions in the UK take far too long and can't wait for the new Independent Planning Commission to speed up the decision-making process.

"Whilst we debated Heathrow's T5 for 10 years, Hong Kong planned and built its hugely ambitious Chek Lap Kok international airport, complete with fast rail links and two suspension bridges".

So what will happen to major transport projects given the current financial climate? Private finance is embedded in our ethos – over the past 25 years we've privatised the bus, aviation and rail sectors to raise money and crucially raise capital for up-front infrastructure investment. "Gordon Brown has, for 10 years, taken large infrastructure projects off the Government books through PFI and PPP", these funding mechanisms are here to stay. Norris states that "there will be an inevitable phasing of large scale infrastructure projects" like London's Crossrail and that governments must be bold and "project manage within a fixed budget" – which, he feels, is well within our ability.

"We've proven we can do it – with the CTRL and T5, both delivered on time and within budget". He sees transport projects as still a "safe bet" for investors given that we get the scoping and planning stages perfected.

No one can dispute that Norris has a healthy appetite for transport. He has his fingers in lots of pies including Executive Chairman of Jarvis and Director of Speed Check Services (which operates the average speed cameras used to tame driver behaviour on UK motorways). He is also Vice President for the Institute of Advanced Motorists and at the opposite end of the spectrum is a Patron of the Campaign for Better Transport and a keen advocate of cycling.

When pressed, Norris said he will only re-enter politics if he is given a 'doing' job – that is, a Cabinet position. His 'doing' talents have been swiftly acquired by the London Mayor who appointed him as a Board Member of TfL and the London Development Agency. On a national level Norris has contributed to Conservative leader David Cameron's Quality of Life Commission which advises on the party's future transport policy.

Just as Peter Mandelson was made a Lord to re-enter British Politics it may only be a matter of time before Steven Norris is given the same privilege. Whether he has a seat at the table in a future Tory Government or advises from the sidelines, Steven Norris knows how to play the politics game.