



**Speech by David Quarmby CBE, Chairman of RAC Foundation
at the Launch of
Keeping the Nation Moving: Time to face the facts
Royal Automobile Club, 21 November 2011**

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is David Quarmby and I am chairman of the RAC Foundation. We are an independent transport policy and research charity with historic links to the Royal Automobile Club and to RAC Motoring Services. These two great organisations join me and my fellow trustees in extending a very warm welcome to you all this evening.

Our roads are a national asset - all 245,000 miles of them. Almost everything we do beyond the boundaries of our homes involves their use. They are vital to the economic and social fabric of this country.

Collectively we should recognise that. Politically, our leaders should ensure that this essential utility – as vital as our power, water and telecoms networks – is adequately funded and properly managed for the long term.

Our contention is that there is neither adequate funding of the infrastructure nor effective management of the traffic that uses it – perhaps most importantly that there is no strategy for the future. Which leaves us with huge challenges in the face of the pervasive and growing problems of traffic and congestion

Tonight marks the publication of our report *Keeping the Nation Moving – Time to Face the Facts*. In it we note the Department for Transport’s own forecasts: of 25% more traffic over the next 15 years and of over 40% by 2035, figures which are driven as much by a sharply rising population as by economic growth.

The lack of plans to address the consequences of these big increases is simply not compatible with the sustained economic recovery we all desperately want.

Already Britain’s roads are the most heavily congested of any European country.

Every day millions of hours are lost by business and individuals, On our strategic networks the periods of stop-start traffic flow, unreliable journey times and more accidents are just getting longer and more frequent. Five years ago the Treasury-sponsored report by Sir Rod Eddington put a cash value of £7 billion on the cost of congestion – and that doesn't measure the stress and frustration experienced by millions of drivers every day.

Yet today the future is even bleaker than Sir Rod envisaged. Why? Because of increasing population estimates and the recession. Capital expenditure on roads has been cut sharply and almost one hundred road improvement schemes are gathering dust in Marsham Street despite offering spectacular economic returns for every pound spent.

Contrast that with the situation on the railways where capital expenditure has actually risen - and that is before we take into account High Speed Two!

The low priority given to roads ignores both the problems the road network faces and the dominant part it plays in nearly everyone's lives. Do not forget; 91% of passenger miles take place on the roads, just 8% on the railways.

At this point let me clear about one thing. The RAC Foundation is NOT arguing for a massive road building programme – everyone knows we cannot simply build our way out of trouble – no –one wants the consequences of that nor could we afford it. What we are calling for is two things. Help kick-start the economy by getting on with the road improvement schemes that are shovel-ready. This will immediately help employment, and the resulting improvements will help business in those areas.

Next, we desperately need a long term strategy – a package of measures which together address the traffic congestion and the inadequate infrastructure. First, we must squeeze extra capacity out of what we already have. The success of the Managed Motorways project demonstrates that - and there is much more that can be done. But let's not imagine that this solves the long-term problem: at best it buys a little time.

Second, for short journeys, modal shift will also help, and pilot schemes have shown some transfer from car to bus, walking and cycling is achievable. But the harsh reality is that there is no easy way of transferring the middle distance journeys – those between five and fifty miles that account for the vast bulk of travel mileage – to walking, cycling, bus and rail.

Let's beware of viewing these issues through a metropolitan prism. One of the world's best public transport systems, and a rail network radiating to all parts of the country, are not available to more than 50million people who don't live or work in

London. Their choices are very different. Their dependence on their cars is very different.

Third, some behaviour change can be brought about by a different charging mechanism for road use. Yes, we believe there is a role for Pay As You Go driving. Paying for the use of a good or service on the basis of the amount and time of consumption is second nature to us all. It happens in the gas and electricity markets; the mobile phone market; increasingly in water. Even in transport we understand and accept differential charging on trains, planes and coaches. It's about nudging people towards making travel choices which benefit them and benefit others. Used intelligently it can also encourage the take-up of low-carbon vehicles.

Let me be clear. This is not a pay-extra road pricing scheme of the kind that has proved so unpopular. We mean replacing a significant part of the fuel taxes and vehicle excise duties with Pay As You Go charging.

And finally, the package will include some further improvements to our road infrastructure, planned and prioritised to reflect the substantial benefits they can bring and the high value for money they offer.

And why do we call for a long-term strategy? Because delivering this takes time and requires a stability and consistency of policy – a consistency that through its rail planning government has shown it is quite capable of embracing.

Only in this way can we offer some relief, some promise, some hope to those among the country's 34 million drivers who in their personal or their working lives are as frustrated and stressed as Dave, Nigel and Natalie for example.

VIDEO

Ladies and gentlemen, the RAC Foundation is not alone in describing these problems or proposing solutions. Many organisations – all deeply committed to getting our economy growing again and sustaining the mobility we all depend on – are calling for a long term strategy and action to Keep the Nation Moving.

Whether you agree with all or only some of our arguments - and you will find them set out in our report - I hope you all recognise the need to Face the Facts. Thank you and please enjoy the rest of your evening.