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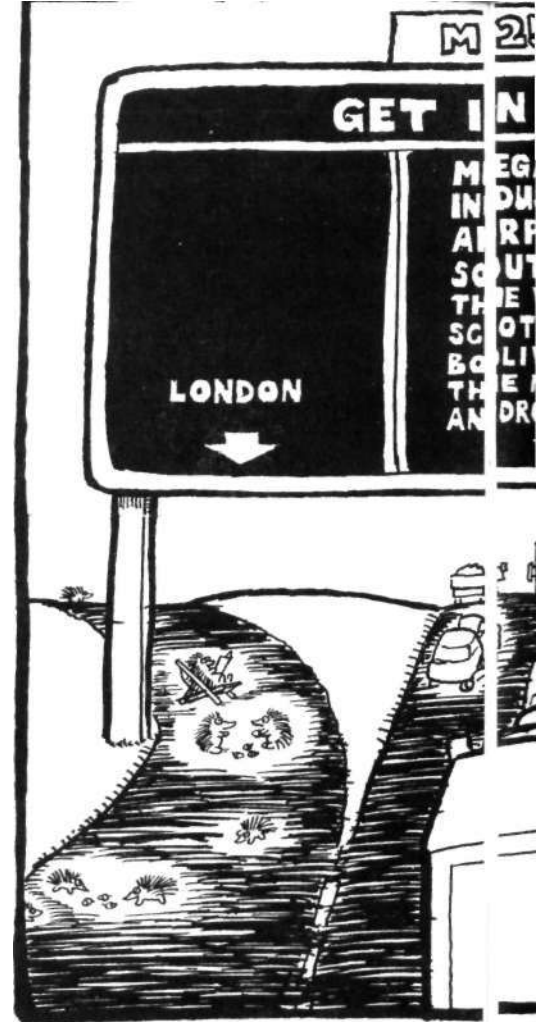
M25 itself, relating both to the traffic coming on and off the motorway and to the new development which is likely to be attracted.

This second set of impacts, on development and environment, could produce a most extraordinary political alliance. The M25 will increase the drain of jobs from central London. Warehouses and factories needing access to the national road transport system, office employers which will draw on workers commuting round the city on the new road, hypermarkets and superstores at intersections with massive catchment areas, and high-tech industry seeking rural retreats, but with access to London and the airports, all are likely to be attracted to the M25 rather than inner London. It is difficult to see how the road can do other than hasten London's employment decline.

At the same time, it will intensify the development pressures in the areas around the interchanges of the M25. This process is already underway. Developers have been getting excited about the prospects of good pickings for years now, and land prices have already risen dramatically.

At the inner end of this process, there are the Labour GLC and inner London boroughs, at the outer end Tory shire and local councils. And none of them want it to happen. In inner London the collapse of jobs is one of the main preoccupations of every local authority, and employment policies are now on the agenda in these areas in a way they have never been before. The concerns in the area of the M25 itself are in complete contrast. Just about every bit of the motorway has been fought, and almost every planning authority is now determined to resist major developments. The demands of property investors are increasingly coming into head-on conflict with planning authorities anxious to preserve the Green Belt. Environment ministers' tentative suggestions that development restrictions in the Green Belt might be relaxed were greeted with outrage, and the minister backed off. Present central government statements are ambiguous - definite commitments to the maintenance of the Green Belt are followed by statements urging local authorities to respond 'positively' to pressures for development.

There are undoubtedly those in these areas who need jobs and who are less concerned about the preservation of their environment and their (residential) capital assets, but on balance the M25 seems set massively to reinforce a process which is viewed with dismay by the local people and local authorities affected. There could be some odd gangings-up. The GLC already



strongly supports the Green Belt, and in a paper to the Town and Country Planning Association on the impact of the M25 in Surrey, a chief planning officer was quite clear: 'We are also very concerned to make decisions which support the aims of the GLC in the rehabilitation of their areas!' In any case, there are some major planning battles still to be fought over the degree of impact the new road will be allowed to have.

And it is not just the shift from inner London to beyond the metropolitan area which the M25 will reinforce. It also looks set in the longer term to exacerbate the growth of the West and the decline of the East of the capital. The only planning authorities *not* resisting development pressures as a result of the motorway are those along the Thames East of London. Here there is little Green Belt and lots of unemployment. But it is precisely here, of course, that employers are least likely to want to locate. The big pressures will be in the south, the north west and, of course, in the so-called 'golden triangle' from Heathrow down the M4 corridor.

All this leads us into wider issues. For it is precisely this area which is already leading the country in terms of jobs and prosperity and, while there has certainly been substantial expenditure on road building elsewhere, the M25 can only serve to reinforce this leading position. There is a growing awareness of the way in which public spending

• RUNNING RINGS AROUND LONDON

The final links in the M25 motorway which encircles London some 20 miles from its centre are due to be completed in 1986. But already some of its effects are becoming clear - as is the enormity of the planning battles which loom ahead.

There is no doubt that the road will bring some real improvements in travel times and traffic congestion. It will be quicker to get from the Midlands and North to the South coast. It will be quicker to get from Heathrow to Gatwick, and from Staines to Brentwood, for instance. And there will certainly be benefits in some parts of London as through traffic is now diverted round the capital. On the negative side, however, there are those - like the British Road Federation - who argue that the road will, as has happened so often before, generate so much new road traffic (for instance, by taking it away from British Rail) that it will soon be a traffic jam all of its own. Essex and Kent have already given notice that they will refuse to co-operate in building the extra Dartford Tunnel which will be needed in only a few years.

Moreover, there will, of course, be increased traffic in the area surrounding the

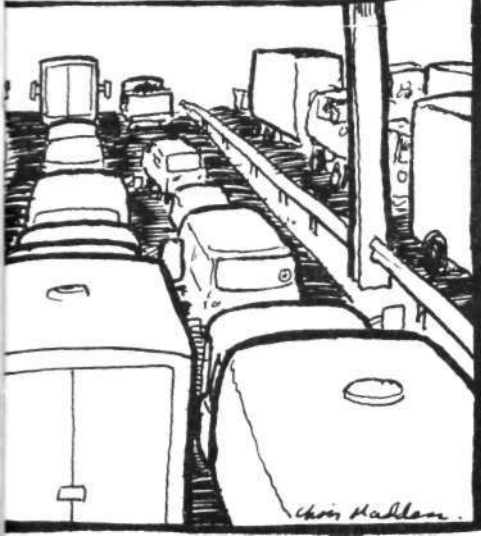


Illustration: Chris Madden

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that London fares are to go up. Integral to this policy is an erosion of local democratic control. The reformed Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment has no local authority representation while the abolition of the GLC would deliver up to central government control over key roads in its strategy.

So, who gains? The road lobby and road builders, property developers, and land and property investors, the consultants who provide the endless studies, and private sector industry in general, as its every changing locational whim is pandered to with new infrastructure, while the public purse picks up the bill for both providing for greenfield growth and mopping up the social dereliction which is left behind.

Doreen Massey and Richard Meegan

programmes not viewed as part of regional policy can have implications for regional development which far outweigh the effects of regional policy itself. And the 'golden triangle' has benefitted from massive public expenditure on infrastructure and defence.

Indeed, the whole public-private issue is central to the debate over roads. London itself has comparatively few motorway-standard roads. That in itself was a result of local political victories. But it could be argued that building the M25 alone is the worst of all worlds in terms of decentralisation for it leaves the city congested while allowing freer movement on the periphery. This argument begs a few questions. Which of the major conurbations with highly developed motorway systems have managed to avoid decentralisation? And is building roads anyway the best way of reducing congestion?

Lying behind all this is the wider argument between roads and private transport, on the one hand, and public transport on the other. Public expenditure is being shifted from buses, tubes and rail and towards private cars and lorries. The recent commitment by transport minister Nicholas Ridley to explore ways of reducing congestion in inner London is hard to take seriously. The almost universal assumption is that the outcome will be more roads. The one proven method is reducing public transport fares, but at the same time we have been served with an announcement