

Roger Evans
Member for Havering and Redbridge



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The Lord Borrie
Chairman
Advertising Standards Authority
Mid City Place
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Date: 27/07/06

Dear Lord Borrie,

I am writing in regard to current advertising campaign, encompassing posters, television adverts and cinema adverts run by Transport for London (TfL), the statutory transport authority chaired by the Mayor of London. I enclose several examples of the adverts.

I am very concerned that these advertisements may have gone beyond the remit that a public authority should have, when using public money to promote their work. In particular, I am concerned about the poster adverts promoting the supposed benefits of the Congestion Charging scheme, introduced in 2003. As you will see from the examples attached, the posters have a series of positive statements, which are clearly misleading.

For example, the phrase "Less Congestion" is not strictly accurate, given that the most recent report by TfL¹ showed that the average speed in central London was just 10mph. This is an increase of just 0.5mph since the introduction of the charge. In addition, the report also showed that the observed excess delays have risen since 2003/2004 from 1.6 minutes per kilometre to 1.8 minutes per kilometre. Recent proposals by the Mayor to shift the focus away from tackling congestion to tackling emissions show that this point is accepted.

Similarly, the phrase, "Less road traffic emissions" is also misleading. According to the London Air Quality Network², the body tasked with monitoring air quality in London, the measured levels of the most harmful pollutants showed an overall average increase of 2.5% since the introduction of the charge. At some sites, the increase was as much as 67.9%. Again, the new focus on emissions testifies that the Congestion Charge has not been successful in reducing emissions. The Mayor recently admitted that London is on course to miss the European Union emissions targets.

¹ <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/cclondon/pdfs/FourthAnnualReportFinal.pdf>

² www.londonair.org.uk

In regard to the cinema and television adverts, these seem to be offering nothing more than promoting the brand of TfL and the Mayor of London, showing the transport system in London in an extremely positive light, and not promoting, for example, the benefits of the Oystercard which some Londoners may not know about.

I understand the need for effective communication between public authorities and the public at large, but I do believe that a clear balance must be struck between communicating in order to inform and communicating in order to electioneer. I believe that, in this case, the tone and content have deliberately over stepped the mark into electioneering. You do not, for example, see Treasury adverts with phrases such as, "Millions invested in health and education". Such phrases would, rightly, be deemed as electioneering and have indeed featured in Labour Party campaign posters in the past. There is nothing wrong with promoting your party and their policies during an election campaign, but using public money and the perceived independence of public bodies to promote the same party political messages is an abuse of resources.

I would ask therefore, that you undertake an investigation into this campaign in order to ascertain whether or not these adverts can be judged to be political adverts, promoting the Mayor for the purpose of his re-election in little under two years' time, or whether they truly do communicate essential information to the public.

Yours sincerely,

Roger Evans, AM

London Assembly Member for Havering & Redbridge

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