

Ladies and gentlemen, and friends,

It's a great pleasure for me to be able to welcome you all to the Houses of Parliament this afternoon for what has become the Campaign for Better Transport's annual tea reception. It's a particularly special occasion this year as we are saying goodbye to Stephen Joseph and hallo to Darren Shirley. We shall have the pleasure of hearing from both of them shortly.

I hope you won't mind if I speak for slightly longer than I would normally do on this occasion. This is an opportunity for me to pay my own tribute to the great contribution that Stephen has made to the debate on transport policy, sustainable development, land use, and all those other environmental issues which we have tended to get wrong in this country over the last half century.

Along with a very small number of people in this room, I have been associated with Transport 2000 since 1977, and I am happy to own up to having been on the appointment panel which chose Stephen 30 years ago.

I was then working as an adviser to the British Railways Board, whose chairman Peter Parker had ignored the advice of officials in the Department of Transport and thrown his support behind T2000. Part of the deal was that in return for their financial support BR got to appoint a vice-chair, and to my great good fortune, that was me.

Parker recognised that it was overwhelmingly in the railway's interest for there to be a respected and reputable campaigning organisation able to refute the lies told by the road lobby and to make the case for rail, and which was representative of so many organisations which took a sane and rational view about transport policy and the environment.

A particular strength of T2000 was that thanks to the foresight of its founder, Sidney Weighell, general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen, it embraced a range of bodies which aren't on most people's list of usual trouble-makers. It's invidious to draw attention to one more than another, but I always attached particular importance to the involvement of the Women's Institutes. Forget about jam and Jerusalem, they are genuinely representative of middle England, and if roused, they strike the fear of God into pusillanimous civil servants and indeed former prime ministers, as Tony Blair can testify.

You need to remember that back in the '70s and '80s the motorway building programme was still well under way, the deregulation of lorry traffic had forced millions of tons of freight off the railways and on to the roads, car ownership was growing almost exponentially, and there were loads of people in government who believed that their job was to create conditions in which everyone was allowed to drive anywhere they wanted.

They also believed that we should have a significantly smaller railway, and in my view the greatest achievement of Transport 2000 and the Campaign for Better Transport was to argue successfully against repeated attempts to close

lines, and replace rail services with substitute buses. There's very little room for second thoughts, once you close a railway. Once you tear up the track, demolish the buildings and sell off the land, you can forget about reopening the line.

Another important reason why rail closures became unacceptable is that the environmental debate had moved on, and the unhealthy British love affair with the private car finally was turning sour. It's a huge compliment to CBT that no intelligent person now argues that the answer to traffic congestion is to build more and more roads, at the expense of public transport.

I am aware that one of the lessons on modern warfare is that you should not fight on too many fronts at one time, but I would urge you to regard the debate on airports, the plans for road building, the introduction of sensible road safety measures for pedestrians and cyclists – which involves facing down the hysterical tabloid campaigns on speed cameras, parking restrictions and all the other garbage in the cupboard of the motoring lobby – as well as the pursuit of a proper role for our railways - all these are vital elements in the battle for a sensible, sustainable and popular transport policy for our country.

The Campaign for Better Transport has achieved a huge amount in its first 40 years, and Stephen has been with us for 30 of them. So over to Darrell – you show us what you can do in the next 30 years.