

The truth Boris Johnson tries to hide

£46m

The amount of taxpayer money Boris spent on the Thames Cable Car crossing from North Greenwich to the Royal Docks.

4

The number of passengers found to use the Thames Cable Car on a regular basis.

The amount Boris Johnson wasted drawing up detailed plans for a Thames Estuary Airport all the experts said was unworkable.

£5.2m

The number of planes which will ever take off from Boris' pie in the sky Estuary Airport.

0

40%

The amount Boris has put up travel fares since he came to power in 2008.

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THE COST OF BORIS

A Legacy of Vanity:
**The Battle for Boris'
Biggest Boondoggle**

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The Garden Bridge: Boris' biggest boondoggle

Boondoggle: a folly of epic proportions and an aptly poetic, yet accurate, description of Boris' latest vanity project.

For something which was initially only meant to cost taxpayers £4m, Boris Johnson's Garden Bridge is certainly breaking records – though for all the wrong reasons. Already the public cost has rocketed to over £60m with another £3.5m of taxpayer money being set aside to underwrite the substantial running costs every year of its operation. All of this before a single brick, or the bridge equivalent, has even been laid.

There's no doubt the bridge is an architectural oddity which captures the imagination. As far as tourist attractions go it's a winner. As a transport project, it's totally useless.

The idea of a Garden Bridge is nothing new and in theory it sounds great. It's when we get into the details that things get a bit murkier. Not only will the bridge cost taxpayers tens of millions to build, it will be closed at night, won't have space for bicycles and could even require tolling to stop overcrowding.

'Robin Hood economics'

Against this backdrop, it is hard to understand why we would be spending so much public transport money on the project. If it's a worthy tourist attraction then we should treat it as such and explore other, more appropriate, funding streams. Investing taxpayers' money, which is there to keep their tubes and buses moving, is a poor decision on Boris' part, a sort of reverse Robin Hood economics—taking from the poor to prop up extravagant vanity projects.

When you look at Boris' record as Mayor he has form, dipping into public coffers for no end of pet projects, and telling porkies about how they would be funded. In the competition for Boris' biggest boondoggle, there are many contenders.

'More public subsidies'

Take the cycle hire scheme, the brainchild of the previous Mayor and inherited by Boris. A great piece of modern infrastructure to be sure, but one which Boris pledged would operate at zero cost to the taxpayer. In reality, thanks to the Mayor's failure to get good value from the original sponsorship contract with Barclays, it became the most heavily subsidised form of public transport in London. That's not to say we shouldn't support the cycle hire scheme, just that it could have been done more effectively and provided better value.

The public cost of the Garden Bridge has rocketed to over £60m with another £3.5m a year of taxpayers money to keep it

The Cable Car crossing linking North Greenwich to the Royal Docks is another contender for the title. Originally promised to be cost-neutral for taxpayers, it eventually meant the public purse stumping up £46m for construction costs. Now it has only four regular passengers and is in the main used by, you guessed it, tourists.

We won't even go into the multi-million pound bounceway (a bizarre giant trampoline road once planned for the Southbank) – one even Boris Johnson was forced to accept was a step, or bounce, too far.

It was a similar story with Boris' aborted Estuary Airport, a widely discredited project the Mayor spent over £5m on before it was finally put out to pasture.

'Idle Mayor'

The similarities in each of Boris' pet projects are staggering; grand visions, promises of zero public investment and plentiful private sector sponsorship; all giving way to spiralling costs, public bail outs and serious questions about the benefits to real Londoners. The consistent theme across all of these projects is the Mayor's idleness, announcing them to much fanfare then failing on the detail and fading into the background as they slowly unravel at taxpayer expense. He is, without a doubt, the rightful successor to Macavity, T.S. Eliot's famous cat, who whenever something went wrong, wasn't there.

But the Garden Bridge must ultimately scoop the prize for Boris' biggest boondoggle, a folly of epic proportions.

Construction alone will cost £60m of public money, £30m of which will come from TfL and £30m from the Treasury. Having pledged 'the maintenance cost will not be borne by the public sector' it was revealed earlier this year that the Mayor has secretly agreed to underwrite the bridge's £3.5m maintenance costs after Westminster Council threw doubt on the Garden Bridge Trust's ability to raise the money.

'Politics is about prioritising'

People have rightly asked whether we could better spend the £60m public contribution on something else – the police, housing, bringing fares down – all the things Londoners consistently call for, all things Boris has cut – or in the case of fares put up 40% since becoming Mayor.

Whilst there may be a place for a floral footbridge, the case for the Garden Bridge as a transport project is lost. By consistently trying to misdirect and muddle his way through Boris risks making the bridge his biggest boondoggle to date, even against all the other competition.

RECEIPT

Cost of Boris

**Garden Bridge - £60m
then £3.5m a year**

Cable Car - £46m

Estuary Airport - £5.2m

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