The road investment strategy is a victory for ‘predict and provide’ over transport planning

I am still struggling to work out whether the Road Investment Strategy represents evidence-based policy or policy-based evidence.

In Passing

Teases the season to be jolly, except, it seems, at the DfT. A Freedom of Information request has been made to find out how much the Department has spent on Christmas decorations, cards and parties in the last three years. Remarkably little is the answer. The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency is the most profligate part of the department, spending £100 on a real tree in 2013, and budgeting to spend £90 on an artificial tree and £30 for a real tree this Christmas. The Highways Agency spent £15 on a real tree in 2012 but hasn’t bought a bauble since. And what about DfT HO? “The central department and other executive agencies have not incurred any expenditure on Christmas decorations,” we’re told. “Additionally, the Department as a whole has not incurred any expenditure on Christmas cards or parties.”

As Sir Howard Davies pondered the thorny question of which airport to expand, Heathrow or Gatwick, he can only look enviously to China where residents of the village of Xin Jia An, near Beijing, are apparently celebrating the news that their village is to be flattened to make way for a new £8bn seven-runway airport. “Homes that have stood through a century and a half will vanish overnight. And the villagers could not be more delighted,” reports The Times. One resident told the paper: “I am happy. It means that I can move into an apartment.”

Congratulations to the 143 organisations who performed heroics by finding time to respond to the DfT’s 11-day consultation in November on how £6bn of road maintenance funding should be allocated to councils over the next six years. The rushed process seems to have tripped up the DfT because its conclusions on the consultation and its announcement of the way forward say different things, even though they were released on the same day! In its conclusions to the consultation the Department says that, because of adverse reaction to the plan to award some of the cash via a challenge fund, “the overall challenge fund will be reduced [from £600m] to £500m over the six-year period.” Yet the challenge fund guidance says the fund will be worth £575m. Meanwhile, the Department says in its conclusions on the consultation that it will “consider further” whether to include the major maintenance or renewal of footways or cycleways within any challenge fund. The deliberating can’t have taken long because the challenge fund guidance says eligible projects will indeed include “major maintenance or renewal of footways or cycleways.”

With the General Election now less than five months away all of the major political parties have started to prepare their assaults on the enemy. But the Tories’ first salvo has, it would appear, misfired rather badly. Because, according to The Daily Mail, a paper that is not generally known for ridiculing the Conservative Party, the first election poster produced by the Tories features the wrong road. “Let’s stay on the road to a stronger economy,” the caption beneath a picture of, well, a road, says. But the road in question just so happens to be in Germany. Oops.