



Some final thoughts on the UK trip

Posted by [Heading Out](#) on June 6, 2006 - 1:23pm

Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

Tags: [global warming](#), [particle emission](#), [rail](#), [traffic control](#) [[list all tags](#)]

Well there are lots of comments that I have not had a chance to go through yet, but once I get a couple of minutes But first, with your indulgence a penultimate comment on the trip.

Coming back from the UK, there are a couple of impressions that I would like to put down before they get overcome by the ongoing changes in our world that seem to be already happening.

Over the past weekend since my last post I took the train from London up to Nottingham, and then, on the following day, out to visit with friends (whom I will call, hoping they don't mind) the Sociologist and the Voice. When they drove me to the airport yesterday I left in the middle of a London rush-hour (to work). I arrived here in the middle of a US rush hour (after work). The traffic in both cases was very heavy, multi-lane, yet in the UK was moving faster and with better control. The Sociologist commented that the authorities had installed cameras and had adjustable speed limit signs along the highway that they changed to cope with the traffic. She commented that it was a system that worked and that, for example, holding traffic to 40 mph kept it moving at around that (which it did for us) while keeping a fixed speed would otherwise have brought it down to 15-20 mph (which was the US experience).

I was musing on this in the 30-minute hold-up at the US end and thinking that perhaps trains were not the total answer. But lest Alan skewer me, let me explain quickly why. I rode trains as I mentioned for a couple of days. In both cases the trains were full. And this was off-peak travel. They were pleasant, and comfortable, and had sockets to charge my laptop, and a small drop-down table so that I could efficiently use it. (Whereas on the plane it was not that practical to use even the small machine that I have). But on both journeys the frequency of trains was already fairly high. There must therefore be a given capacity limit above which the current system will not be able to operate. And looking at the numbers of the cars on the highways in each country, I was left wondering just what proportion of the traffic would be absorbable into a rail solution, before it became saturated. My impression was that rail would not be able to take that much, without drastic changes that are not, I would suspect, being even contemplated, let alone planned for. Unfortunately rail is also a "hub-bound" system, and it can take longer than the "acceptable 5%" time to get from home to the office. In the Sociologist's case she would have taken 2 hours, because of the connections, to take a trip that takes around 40 minutes by car, and which would have cost almost the same as the wear and tear and parking. This is, admittedly, because she does not go to that office every day of the week.

The use of speed-monitoring cameras and displays was much more pervasive than from my last trip, and I found that I took more notice, as did the rest of the traffic, so that it was perceptibly slower than it used to be, in overall speed, even on the motorways.

Oh, and just to prove that I am still a little mischievous, even after all that travel time, let me pick

up just one comment from the last couple of days. There has been, apparently, a meeting held by Skeptics Magazine on [Climate Change](#). (With my mind still not here yet, I can't remember where I got the direction-sorry). I was intrigued by Dr Greg Benford's solution to [global warming](#), which is to do something that the power industry, particularly that based on coal, has been trying to eliminate for the past 30 years. And, because it relates to some previous thoughts, I grin and pass my thoughts on.

When there is a major volcanic eruption, such as [Kragatoa](#) the resulting clouds of dust injected into the air can affect the world temperature for some time. Krakatoa apparently, from the PR on the show, affected global temperatures for 3 years. The eruption of [Mt Pinatubo](#) had a similar effect

The resulting aerosol cloud depressed the mean global temperature by some 0.50C.

So what Greg Benford wants to do is to seed the upper atmosphere with small particles and thus counteract some of the effects of global warming. So this is where I grin and say, um! You know the mining and power industries have been cleaning up their act since the beginning of the 60's (when apparently this current cycle may have begun after the cooling that took place from 1930 to 1960 - as shown in the graph I [posted earlier](#)). As a result a lot of the particulate matter that used to go up the smokestacks has been removed. And from the suggestion, to put particles back, one might even conclude that this might have had some impact on global warming (with the side comment that it might explain the global cooling that simple carbon dioxide modeling doesn't). So the mining and power plant folk, and thus indirectly, the environmental activists, might have caused the current cycle of global warming by taking these particles out of the air? So now you might want to have us put them back, so that we can start the cooling process - is that what I am hearing?

Hmm! Maybe I should have another day off before returning to serious posting !



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