

KICK NUCLEAR & NUCLEAR TRAINS



www.kicknuclear.com • www.nonucleartrains.org.uk
c/o Mordechai Vanunu House, 162 Holloway Road, London N7 8DQ
tel. 020-7607 2302; e-mail: david.lrcnd@cnduk.org

The monthly mailing of Kick Nuclear *and* the Nuclear Trains Action Group of London Region CND.

Editor: David Polden

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REGULAR FRIDAY SOLIDARITY VIGILS

Every Friday (since August 2012): leafletting outside the Japanese Embassy, 101-104 Piccadilly (Green Park tube) from 10am-12.30pm; and then outside Tokyo Electric Power Co. offices, 14-18 Holborn (Chancery Lane tube) from 1-1.30pm. Held in solidarity with the anti-nuclear movement in Japan. Organised by: *Kick Nuclear* and *Japanese Against Nuclear UK* (JAN UK)

NEXT JOINT KN/NTAG PLANNING MEETING

Monday July 31st, 7pm, At CND Office. Address in masthead.

FIRE DISASTER FOR KENSINGTON COULD'VE BEEN SO MUCH WORSE, BOROUGH ADMITTED 16 YEARS AGO

by Dr David Lowry, senior research fellow. Institute for Resource and Security Studies

In a meeting room at City Hall, the headquarters of London government, on 26th March 2001, a committee of London Assembly members heard explosive evidence on public safety from Guy Denington, a senior council official responsible for environmental safety at the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC)

He told the committee members, chaired by the Green Party's Darren Johnson

that given the amount of people who resided and worked in the centre of London, alternative rail routes to the West London Line that passes through west Kensington should be found through areas of much lower density population for the transportation of radioactive waste...

Some 200 transport of radioactive materials – mainly irradiated nuclear fuels rods from the nuclear plants at Sizewell in Suffolk, Bradwell in Essex, and Dungeness in Kent - then took place through London each year.

It was suggested by Mr Denington that a thorough examination of the issues of risks and routes associated with the transport of nuclear waste needed to be undertaken.

He was backed by David Norton, who led the Barnet Borough's pollution control team, including emergency planning, who advised that there was "a perceived need for the nuclear waste trains to pass through areas of lower population density as reasoned argument suggested that if smaller numbers of people were being potentially exposed to the risk of exposure to radioactive material the risk was smaller than if a large number of people were potentially being exposed."

LB Barnet had, he said, sought alternative routes (through dialogue with relevant bodies arising from the Cricklewood Inquiry in the late 1990s) although information about routes had not been particularly forthcoming and conclusive answers about potential alternative routes had not been received. He strongly argued that routes used in the transportation of radioactive waste should avoid bridges and tunnels wherever possible, particularly as it was understood that one of the types of flasks used in the transportation, if upside down and heated for approximately 2 hours, could allow venting of radioactive material through its safety valve. Such a scenario was not inconceivable and that, if this were to occur in a tunnel, the problems for the emergency services associated with trying to reach a flask in this situation and rectifying the situation would be very difficult

Mr Denington said that while the possibility of a major rail accident involving flasks containing radioactive material was very small for that Borough – the Borough's emergency planning officer had advised that there was a higher probability of chemical spillages (e.g. a gas spillage) which would potentially be much more difficult to contain than a very low-level spillage from a nuclear waste transport flask – "In terms of public perception, the RBKC emergency planning team had noted that, in the event of an incident involving the transport of radioactive waste, it may be that the public response would be the most serious aspect of the incident if information was not handled and presented carefully."

Fast forward to June 2017, and it has been apparent for all to see how inadequately prepared the RBKC's emergency incident plan has been to deal with

the major catastrophic fire at Grenfell Tower. How much it would have been had the fire been spewing out radioactive smoke across North Kensington, requiring the urgent mass evacuation of tens of thousands of residents.

David Norton had stressed to the London Assembly committee looking into the hazards of nuclear materials transports through London, that it was possible that the transported flasks represented a target for terrorist action. Under questioning, Guy Denington said the RBKC emergency planning officer had suggested that terrorists may well look for easier and more controllable methods of creating major disruption and damage, although he acknowledged that this was essentially speculation as there had been no formal study of this issue by RBKC. He supported a test run of the Government's emergency plan called RADSAFE, for incidents involving radioactivity.

He also advised the committee that RBKC was in favour of a detailed risk analysis being undertaken before it could reasonably comment on the adequacy of the liability arrangements.

<https://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/Data/Nuclear%20Waste%20Trains%20Investigative%20Committee/20010326/Minutes/Minutes%20RTF.rtf>

The final report of the committee's investigations was published on 15 October 2001, (https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_migrate_files_destination/archives/assembly-reports-environment-nuc_waste.pdf) barely a month after the world biggest ever terrorist attack, that destroyed the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, killing 3000 civilians.

FAILURE TO CARRY OUT RISK ASSESSMENT

As we saw above, in 2001 the GLA set up a "Nuclear Trains Investigative Committee" to enquire into the safety of running nuclear trains through London. This duly reported and among its recommendations was, "that a risk assessment be undertaken of the transport of spent nuclear fuel by rail through London, and that the Mayor initiate such discussions with relevant bodies to establish such a risk assessment." Initially the Mayor's response was to say he supported the recommendation, but that he believed "this would best be co-ordinated within a national level assessment to ensure consistency and the involvement of national government, though I will seek to ensure there is a strong London input..."

NTAG saw this as a cop-out – the Mayor was trying to pass the buck to central government, a central government moreover that evinced little desire to investigate such matters. We were adamant that a meaningful risk assessment for nuclear trains through London should be organised *in London* and by the authority responsible for London. After pressure from the NTAG and others, the Mayor at last, in 2005, agreed to organise such an enquiry in London. Remarkably, when

the Mayor proposed to the GLA that it should co-organise the enquiry together with his Office, the GLA transport committee turned down the idea, with only the Greens on the committee supporting the proposal.

Nevertheless, the Mayor decided that his Office should go ahead and organise the enquiry. A firm, SERCO, was appointed to carry out such an assessment. It might well be asked why the Mayor's Office chose SERCO, which, is one of the three companies that run Aldermaston, itself "seething with nuclear waste", to do the assessment.

SERCO's report was supposed to appear in Summer 2006. In the event no such report appeared. A year later NTAG member Ann Garrett managed to get an explanation from Ken Livingstone through her MP. Ken wrote, "The study has now been completed; albeit in the event SERCO were not able to address the key issue of terrorist or other deliberate actions leading to release of waste, and it was therefore not appropriate to produce a final report."

Subsequent probing resulted in NTAG getting hold of the [then] unpublished report which *inter alia* said that the "Study considered accidents not deliberate acts." Why not? The report gave as the reasons: "Methodology of study (statistical approach) not suitable to assess frequencies of deliberate act" and, "Security aspects also make consideration difficult."

Of course the statistical approach was not suitable, as there have, as yet, been no terrorist attacks on UK nuclear trains! And were they concerned they might find ways in which the trains *were* vulnerable to terrorist attack in certain ways which might well help a terrorist if these findings were published?

Since one of the main purposes of the risk assessment recommended by the Investigative Committee had been "consideration of the risk from sabotage or terrorist attack" it is no wonder the GLA decided not to publish the report.

As far as I am aware there has been no known effort to carry such a risk assessment. Trains carrying highly-radioactive nuclear fuel rods continue to run through West Kensington on a regular basis.

In the event no terrorist attack on nuclear trains or serious accident involving the flasks has occurred in the subsequent 10 years. That of course doesn't mean it *can't* occur, and it has been estimated by nuclear engineer Dr. John Large that an incident resulting in the breach of a flask containing spent fuel rods) could lead to the deaths of thousands of people downwind in a built-up area, a worse disaster than that involving Grenfell Tower. So clearly a risk assessment is required to determine whether further safety measures are required to reduce the risk further.

David Polden