

## Chair's Report

For many years, IAM RoadSmart groups have been able to follow well-trodden paths in the way that they operate, within a society where, by and large, little altered when it came to the Advanced Driving world. However, the past year has seen NELE affected by societal changes for which the COVID epidemic, concerns over air pollution and road safety have been, at least, major catalysts.

- Lockdown encouraged many employers and their staff to adopt flexible and home-working practices. This was facilitated in no small part by recent technological changes such as near-universal rollout of home internet access amongst the working population. In turn, this enabled services such as Zoom and Teams to deliver virtual meetings between people without the need for them to travel. These developments have impacted the way that NELE can and does run social and committee meetings.

Changes to social meetings have perhaps been the most notable feature of the past year. Some of the changes can be viewed as negative – loss of personal interaction and social atmosphere at a common meeting point is not the least of these. Face-to-face meetings encourage personal networking to a level that virtual events never seem to achieve. On the other hand, virtual meetings allow people who are distant from the meeting location to participate without spending twice as much time travelling as participating. Virtual meetings also enable us to invite speakers from further afield, for whom travelling into London is unattractive.

NELE has adapted by adopting a range of strategies for our social meetings. Our monthly meetings at the Toby Carvery here in Chadwell Heath will continue to be held ~~in the~~ in-person ~~fresh~~ and, wherever possible, will be live-streamed on Zoom for those unable to attend in person. Most presenters will also be live, but some will deliver their talk remotely. Where possible, presentations will be simultaneously Zoomed and later made available on the NELE website. Understandably, this will not be possible without the presenter's permission, which cannot always be given.

Events are currently co-ordinated single-handedly by Jennifer Maclellan; we appreciate all her efforts whilst recognizing that she also carries out several other important NELE roles including Roadworthy Editor and Press & PRO. For the past two years, the committee (including Jennifer herself) have been asking that someone else from the Group would volunteer to help Jennifer with her work, or even take over one of those roles. This request is now becoming more pressing as Jennifer will be winding down her Group involvement over the coming year, and will have completely stepped away from those roles by next year's AGM. Without volunteers to take over, NELE will have no monthly social meetings, copies of *Roadworthy* and no publicity campaigns.

- Concerns over air pollution have seen the planned extension of the ULEZ zone, which has resulted in changes in car ownership and use. Some existing members, especially Associates and Observers, have had to curtail driving activities as a consequence; the geographical spread of our Observer corps also makes it unattractive for some potential Associates who will face long journeys (in time if not distance) to meet an Observer. In the coming year, NELE will be increasing its efforts to recruit new Observers across our area to address this issue. If you are a full member who would like to give something back to the Group for your training, please consider becoming an Observer. Our Observer training programme will support you in the process, and helps you find even more enjoyment in your driving, since being an Observer is one of the best ways of improving your own driving skills.

- Road safety initiatives such as 20mph zones, low-traffic neighbourhoods and wider adoption of cycle-friendly zones have made central London an inappropriate environment for post-Test driver training. At the same time, public transport developments such as the Elizabeth Line and improvements to the Overground have reduced reliance on private transport. Indeed, the trend amongst inner city youngsters is to delay preparation for their DSA driving test until their early 20s, or even to rely entirely on public transport, friends and cabs. This would increasingly impact the pool of potential NELE recruits if only we had reached saturation point amongst existing North-East London drivers – but we've got a long way to go before that happens!

Looking forward, NELE will be undergoing “under the bonnet” changes over the coming year which should help us deliver a better service to our Associates and provide better support to members and, in particular our Observers.

- Refined processes are being put in place for the membership “journey” to ensure that new Associates are more quickly and effectively added to the membership system and allocated to an Observer.
- Our subscriptions renewal process will allow renewals, subs reminders, personal details changes and, ultimately, membership cessations to be dealt with more effectively.
- A more rounded process will be put in place for providing Observers with information about new Associates; there will also be a simplified system for Observers then to regularly notify the Chief Observer (and thence the Committee) of how Associates are progressing. This will help us be more efficient in the way that we allocated new Associates.

All of this would not be possible without the committee. I've already mentioned Jennifer Maclellan; now is also the time to thank in particular

- Mike Noel, Group Secretary
- Paul Heasmer, standing down from the Treasurer's post, but remaining on the committee in a role that doesn't involve venturing inside the dreaded expanded ULEZ.
- Graham Fennel, taking over as Treasurer from Paul.
- Peter Rowles, standing down as Chief Observer.
- Derek Leggetter, great source of the type of wisdom needed by any committee
- Clint Childs, membership secretary.
- Pete Minvalla, IT supremo.
- Charlie McGlinchey – retiring from the committee after many years as the voice of experience.

We also need to recognize the time and expertise put in by our team of Observers to help make better drivers in North-East London and (bits of) Essex. It's not only the hours that they invest on the road with Associates, but sometimes also time on the phone when Associates' life events have interrupted their training programme and reminders are needed to become active again.

A final word of appreciation must also go to our volunteers' families for coping with the absences necessary for Observed Runs and events to take place, for telephone calls received at sometimes inconvenient times, and time taken up finding solutions to unexpected problems.

Rising to challenges is what seems to spur on our team. We have lived through a few recent years of changes, with more to come in the future. We truly live in interesting times!