



For reasons known only to the Gods, we have in the family a number of Manchester United supporters. United were playing at home on Boxing Day, but for the second year running there were no buses or trains in Greater Manchester or Lancashire on Boxing Day.

Furthermore, the two main banner items on the BBC News channel were the Boxing Day sales, with retailers expecting to take in excess of £3bn in the day, and there was a 'busy day' for football fans. Sure was busy, particularly if you were trying to get to a game – or to town centre shops.

Mightily inconvenient, you may scoff; but there are multiple layers to the environmental impact of the absence of buses and trains on such important public holidays. Significantly, by driving 13 miles or so into Greater Manchester, there were trams available in the form of the Metrolink that could take the aforesaid family member to Old Trafford. That is run by Transport for Greater Manchester – formerly GMPTE – an operator owned by the 10 constituent local authorities of what used to be Greater Manchester county. They have seen the advantages for the local economy and the environment of having transport available on the biggest shopping and sports day of the year.

The buses and trains, however, are privately owned: nuff said.

The absence of such a service drives people into their cars to access those events – the very thing we as a society are supposed to be discouraging people from doing.

What is worse, having jumped into their cars, they will head for the out-of-town shopping

centres, rather than using the local town centre – again, something the Government is putting millions of pounds into encouraging.

The inescapable conclusion I have drawn is that the only way to encourage the saving of our town centres and greenfield sites from the scourge of the out-of-town retail park is to re-nationalise the transport system – or at least put it back into the hands of local authorities. But that is not the Tory way. While there is profit to be made you can sod the environmental consequences.

How much longer before the tub-thumping of 'The Boy' George and Eric Pickles is drowned out by the flapping and clucking of chickens coming home to roost?

- Still on the subject of transport – or lack of it – there is, it appears, a veritable crime wave of bicycle thefts. Following the success of Bradley Wiggins in Le Tour and a haul of medals in the Olympics and Paralympics cycling has become not only popular but up-market. Expensive bikes are becoming prized status symbols and as such are attracting a very green type of thief. Indeed, at the beginning of December Hampshire Police found over 100 top-of-the-range velos in a polytunnel in the New Forest.

I once had a bicycle stolen from outside the office at the theatre where I worked. It was particularly annoying as it had recently returned from a trip to Paris and Normandy, where it attracted little knots of admirers when it was parked up (it was a hand-built Dawes – virtually unseen in France at the time), but no attempts at theft. Plus ça change, eh?

Just leaves me to wish everyone a Happy New Year, seeing as how the world hasn't actually ended.

**Chris Stokes**