ANDREW MARR:
In a couple of months time people in several major cities in England will have the chance to elect their own mayors. The role is already well established of course in London where the current Mayor is Boris Johnson who’s seeking re-election for a second term. He’s brought in Boris bikes and new buses, and if he had his way London would have a new airport as well. But on that and a few other issues, he hasn’t always seen eye to eye with the leadership of the Conservative Party. He’s a staunch defender of the financial sector too, which is not universally popular these days. And he joins me now. Good morning.

BORIS JOHNSON:
Good morning, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:
Good morning. Can I start by asking - of course most of the people watching are not from London - but how seriously some of the sort of tax changes that we’ve been talking about earlier in the programme would affect London, and we were talking about things like possibly a so-called mansion tax?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Yeah, I saw that, I saw. Look, from my point of view obviously I don’t want anything that does damage to the London economy in any way, and I will be arguing for a budget really that promotes growth. And the things that I want to see particularly are investment in infrastructure in London because that is the … investment in building new homes for Londoners who can’t afford to get on the housing ladder and of course improving our creaking transport infrastructure. That is where I think the money should be going and that’s a point I’ve made repeatedly and I think quite successfully to government. I also think at a time of rising youth unemployment, I would like to see more done to help people, get young people into their place of work. So if there could be national insurance holidays for businesses to encourage them to take young people on, that would be a great, great thing.

ANDREW MARR:
Rather than obliging them to work for nothing?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Well I have to say on that argument, I’m very much on the side of those who think that some sort of work experience is better than nothing. And really if you talk to people who are involved in getting young people into work, they really think it is far better for them to be in a place of work getting the skills, getting the raw cunning you need to survive in a place than being on benefits.

ANDREW MARR:
So I mean there is clearly a big and potentially successful Liberal Democrat campaign inside the coalition for a mansion tax. How do you react to that? What’s your view?

BORIS JOHNSON:
We’ll have to see how that comes off. As I said, I’m not keen on anything that disadvantages the city. But I will say … the City of London. What I will say …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Just on that …

BORIS JOHNSON:
… is that if there is something that could … You know if you want to save a billion
pounds and you want to do something on housing and we’ve done all sorts of things, as I say, to build new homes in London, but what you should do is crack down on this stamp duty thing. There’s a billion pounds being lost …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) People are evading stamp duty by companies abroad.

BORIS JOHNSON:
It’s a scandal, it’s an absolute scandal, and more and more people are mentioning it to me. People have wised up to the fact that they can set up rich people setting up a company to buy the property that they want and then not paying stamp duty. I would crack down on tax avoiders of all kinds.

ANDREW MARR:
But this straightforward proposal for a mansion tax is not something that worries you?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Well we’d have to see what it is. As far as …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Houses over two million …

BORIS JOHNSON:
… as far as I understand it, there’s no agreement in the coalition. Obviously in a city like London you’re going to find, in places like London you’re going to find many more people who might be hit by such a tax. I’d much … Listen, I’d much rather that we stop focusing so much on bashing people and started thinking what we can do to help people into work. And that’s what I mean by supporting things like national insurance holidays, supporting investment in infrastructure.

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.
BORIS JOHNSON:
Those are the things that are actually going to drive jobs and growth over the next ten years.

ANDREW MARR:
What about getting rid of the 50p rate?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Well again you know we’ll have to … we’ve been round … this is a sort of super masticated subject now. We’ve been round it about fifty … I think you and I have probably argued about this quite a lot. I don’t think it’s a good thing for London, for the UK over the long term to have rates of tax that are conspicuously higher than our global competitors.

ANDREW MARR:
Well the French are about to put 75p on if … 75 per cent tax on the rich if Francois Hollande gets his way, of course.

BORIS JOHNSON:
If he gets his way. But that’s something obviously that the Chancellor is looking at. I don’t think that’s the priority for me. The priority … There are three things I want: I want massive investment in infrastructure; I want to help young people into work; and I want to crack down on tax dodgers and tax avoiders of all kinds.

ANDREW MARR:
There’s a big push again from the pro-Heathrow Third Runway lobby. Presumably you would be worried to see that argument reopened?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Look, I don’t think it’s right to build a third runway at Heathrow, and if you look at the other measures that are being proposed, the extra capacity they’re trying to load that into that airport, they’re trying to cram a quart into a pint pot. I’m not in favour of it.
ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

BORIS JOHNSON:
I think it’s a mistake. It adds … You know it’s not just the noise pollution from the aircraft. It’s the congestion in that part of London, the vehicular pollution. It’s not a good idea.

ANDREW MARR:
What about the whole growth agenda which you talked about because you know there are a lot of people who say at all costs we must expand airport capacity in this country, particularly in the South East. There’s an argument whether it should be Boris Island or whether it should be Heathrow … but we just have to get ahead and build more airports.

BORIS JOHNSON:
Yeah. I think that the growth agenda certainly revolves around transport infrastructure. And if you look at the history of London and the growth of this city, it was built on people who had the imagination to send electric rail… to electrify the railways and send them out into suburbs that were still undreamt of and to create places for people to live. And what I want to do is if you look at the tube network that we have at the moment, it’s about to be 150 years old. There is a massive opportunity to modernise and automate that tube system and take it forward, so that it is better than the best of the Asian economies. We could do that in London, but we can’t do it if we cut investment in transport infrastructure.

ANDREW MARR:
What about the condition of your Conservative Party friends? Steve Hilton going off to California. That’s no doubt because his wife wants to be there for a bit and all the rest of it. But there is a worry that you know the edge is being lost from Conservatism, that the process of coalition is kind of smoothing and grinding away the edges.

BORIS JOHNSON:
All I can say is …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Is it radical enough this government?

**BORIS JOHNSON:**
What the government needs to do - and I think what they’re doing very well - is stop the nonsense. I mean Harriet was talking just now about the Labour approach without I think really owning up to the fact that it was Labour’s fiscal approach that got us into this mess. You’ve got to do something about that approach to spending, and I think it’s important to cut waste and it’s important to focus on the things that matter. What I want the government to do is to help us in London to power through the recession.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Well one of the arguments that was going on, and I think Steve Hilton was involved in this, is the extent to which a government can start to tear up a lot of the regulations that have arrived over the years from Brussels and from Europe without sort of actually leaving the EU. Now do you think more should be done for instance there?

**BORIS JOHNSON:**
It’s certainly true that Britain is punctilious in obeying EU regulations in a way that other European nations aren’t, and I certainly think that we gold plate it, we over-egg it, we put so much spin on the ball that we make it very difficult sometimes for our businesses to comply in a reasonable way.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Are you in a real fight, do you think, in London?

**BORIS JOHNSON:**
Of course it’s a real fight.

**ANDREW MARR:**
(over) I mean it’s a legal match?

BORIS JOHNSON:
This is the greatest job I think … You’ve advertised the other mayoral positions that are coming up, but I think this is the most wonderful, wonderful job and anybody would expect this to be a knockdown, drag out contest because it’s a fantastic job to be able to do and I intend to do my best to retain the reins of power.

ANDREW MARR:
Has doing this job changed you?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Yes, it has in a sense.

ANDREW MARR:
In what way?

BORIS JOHNSON:
Well I suppose I did not have, let’s be totally clear, I was not thought of as a municipal politician. I think probably in the last three and a half, four years, we’ve become much better at what we’re doing. And there’s an awful lot …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Are you saying you’ve become more serious?

BORIS JOHNSON:
(over) … there’s an awful lot that we want to do. I think …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I’m not sure we want a more serious Boris Johnson, but …

BORIS JOHNSON:
… I think it’s probably true that to do a job like run London, be Mayor of London,
you have to focus very hard on the things that really matter to people. This is a city that’s going through tough times economically, and I think that the way forward now is for us to do a series of things that may not be … you know people may not see the immediate advantage of investing in transport infrastructure …

ANDREW MARR:

Sure.

BORIS JOHNSON:

… but if we don’t, we will be …

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Then that’s a very serious thing.

BORIS JOHNSON:

… we will be in real trouble in five, eight, ten years time.

ANDREW MARR:

One of your biographers said yesterday in the paper, “The thing about Boris Johnson is he could give so much more than he has”. Whatever happens in London, are we going to see you back on the national stage?

BORIS JOHNSON:

Well I do my best to give absolutely everything that I can and I can tell you this, Andrew. This job is absorbing mentally, emotionally 100 per cent. It’s something that I love doing and I want to continue to do. Whether I will be lucky enough to do anything else in politics, I very much doubt.

ANDREW MARR:

(laughs) Okay, alright Boris Johnson …

BORIS JOHNSON:

(over) Thank you.
ANDREW MARR:

… thank you very much indeed.

INTERVIEW ENDS