

# Congestion Charge

## The views from the people of London

### Context

**In order to improve pollution levels from cars and general traffic, the city of London has introduced a "pay to ride" area within central London.** The theory is that if drivers are required to pay to drive into London, it would reduce congestion and pollution levels. The charge is £20 per day, while access after 7pm is free. Drivers of "green" vehicles will get a 100% discount if they pay a £10 annual administration fee. Drivers living within the charging zone will qualify for a 90% discount.

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No one appears to have mentioned one particular sector of society who will be affected. The small business community. My husband and I run a successful office refurbishment company and at least two of our vehicles are in the capital every day often popping in and out of the proposed area - is that one charge or a multitude? Obviously we cannot run the business using public transport so we will have no choice but to give in and pay up. Ultimately the charges would have to be passed on and we would not be alone in doing this. The price of all goods and services will eventually rise. Whilst I applaud the Mayor for his ideals, I unfortunately have to live in the real world.

***Kate, UK***

I work in London and have two main points: 1. rush hour travel on trains or tubes is already a claustrophobic nightmare. If this is really meant to get cars off the road, where are the ex-drivers meant to go? I do use public transport and, if I didn't think this was a cynical ploy more to do with raking in cash than reducing congestion, I would be very worried about dangerous overcrowding. 2. My (non- lucrative public sector) job often involves very early, very late, night and weekend shifts. Public transport doesn't feel safe for a woman at those times - and isn't reliable outside ordinary working hours anyway. My boss isn't going to pay for me to drive in - but I don't have any other choice, so I (and all others who work unsocial hours) will be penalised. Thanks, Ken.

***JR, UK***

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Richard is mistaken if he thinks buses are clean. They are far worse than cars, have a high axle weight so cause far more damage to roads (about 5000 times more damage) and in the UK carry on average the same number of passengers as less than six cars.

***Keith, UK***

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Automatic Congestion Charging, like the increasing number of camera speed traps, is dependent on people having and displaying a car registration plate. Already among friends who are totally law abiding, I hear talk of obscured or false number plates and non-registered cars. Clearly relatively few false plates will enable the rest of us to claim we have been falsely charged. How can this be overcome? I think the continued misuse of number plates in this way will undermine their reliability when they are really needed - when there has been a theft, robbery or accident.

I can see a big investment in congestion charging technology going to waste as collecting the charges will be impossible without a very heavy, expensive and unacceptable intervention by the Police.

***Lawrence Spiller, UK***

Theoretically, city tolls are probably the best way to clear the cities of automobiles. Unfortunately, there are still far too many firms, particularly in London, that will pay the charges for their employees, in the same way as they currently provide free parking in their office car parks. It's time action was taken against the company car providers as well as the private motorist.

***Scott Whitehead, Germany***

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There are people who, no matter how good the public transport system, need to drive into the city. Imagine if you were a builder, you'd have a van full of tools you need to use for your job. It is impossible for you to carry all your tools plus Mrs Jones's new sink, Mr Smith's new front door and the new gas fire that you had to pick up from the merchants for the mother-in-law. Add to that the fact you may need to go into the city 3,4 or even 5 times a day. That's up to £25 a day times the 5, 6, or 7 days a week you work. It comes to a cost of up to £175 per week which equates to a staggering £9100 a year, where would that money come from, by charging the customer extra?

So to anybody who thinks this city toll would be a good idea just remember that when your builder is charging you an extra £5 a day for having to drive into the city to do your new extension, or replace that antiquated gas fire in your front lounge!

***Paul Eden, UK***

I've moved out of London, but I would be only too happy to pay £5 a go if I knew that the money was being ring-fenced for public transport improvements. But what would really solve the congestion problem (assuming current levels of travel demand) would be a segregated and CONTINUOUS bus lane network on ALL major roads across Greater London. This could probably be provided for a fraction of the cost of the Jubilee Line extension, and with greater passenger capacity. (An improved London cycle network would be very nice, too). But this must be done before introducing charges, so the Government should provide the money up front with a plan for repaying the extra from the revenues. Keep up the good work, Ken!

***Peter Barber, England***

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I think the mayor is right in wanting to cut pollution and traffic chaos, but this is half the issue. Provide a clean, reliable and efficient public transport system and 50% of cars will be off the road tomorrow. Apply a congestion toll and you are again infringing on the liberties of people to choose the means of transport that advance their interests. The reasons behind London gridlocks is the continued failure of governments, mayors and the lot to provide a well funded, conveniently priced public transport to serve Londoners and non-Londoners. In short the charge will exacerbate the problem of traffic and pollution.

***Mohamed Chebaro***

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Isn't it funny that socialists, who say they support the little man, the people on lower incomes, seem to think that the answer to all problems is to put a tax on them, thus hitting the very people they claim to support.

***David, Spain***

I live in a street in Tower Hamlets less than 200 metres from the boundary of the zone. The increased traffic passing my kids' primary school so as to avoid the charging zone is going to be really dangerous for my kids and the others at our school. The Highway is already one of London's most dangerous roads and traffic levels towards Tower Bridge are likely to soar. The zone should be extended to encompass most of Tower Hamlets at least as far as the Blackwall Tunnel otherwise our streets are going to become some of London's largest car parks.

***Danny, London***

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It's a good, but half-baked idea. Ken should have gone further by extending the boundary to all inner London boroughs or even further out. As it stands the perimeter will be gridlocked. The real problem is Home Counties commuters driving in where they have a real alternative - the train.

***P Williams, London***

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As a nurse I need to get to work late and early. There are no tubes or buses that are safe for a single women to travel on, nor does a journey that takes half an hour by road, but TWO hours by public transport offer a viable alternative. This tax will be paid by the large private firms and MPs whilst the low paid and public sector workers will be forced out of London worsening the crisis in these areas.

***Julie Bagshore, London***

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I'm not opposed to this idea in principle, but surely we need to get the public transport infrastructure right first. London's train and tube network is already dangerously overcrowded during the rush hour. It seems to make no sense whatsoever to force people off the roads and onto public transport without investing first to ensure that the system can cope with the added demand. Otherwise we run a real risk of a Hillsborough-style disaster in some overcrowded underground station.

***Andy Dawson, UK***

When the full costs are taken into account we would see that what we pay in fuel tax and other taxes would fall far short of the actual amount that it costs to provide our roads. Why should motorists be the one group of people who expect to have a valuable resource made available to them cheaply?

***Graham Nalty, UK***

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It's just another tax on motorists. If Ken Livingstone really wanted to keep cars out of the city, he would ban them. But as he knows that most drivers will find the money from somewhere, he rubs his hands with glee.

Secondly, if people give up their cars and use buses instead, air quality in London will get worse, not better, as buses are 100 times more polluting than the modern car. Sheer stupidity.

***Andrew Howlett, England***

