
London Congestion Tax



Transport for London (TfL) have produced their Sixth Annual Monitoring Report for the London Congestion Charge (aka “tax” – don’t let the words used fool you that this is anything but a tax on travel).

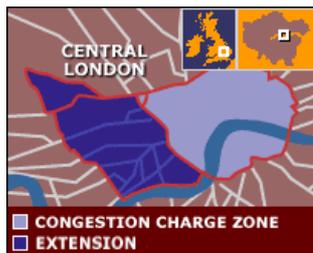
This latest report shows that this unnecessary and unreasonable tax has not resulted in any benefit in terms of congestion on the roads of London. Indeed although they claim traffic levels are down, they had to admit that “congestion rises back to pre-charging levels”.

They suggest that much of this can be accounted for by road works, and in particular in the Western Extension by a major redevelopment at the Scotch House Corner junction, but this is very doubtful. Road works are a continuing fact of life to road users in London and have been for many years – indeed there were complaints in the year before the Congestion Charge was introduced that the large number of road works at that time would distort analysis of any improvements in traffic flows in the following years.

In reality the Congestion Charge was never likely to have a major impact on traffic volumes, and all that has happened is that a few fast moving private vehicles have been replaced by slow moving buses and taxis, which obstruct other traffic. That is the main reason why Congestion Charging has not worked.

Mayor Boris Johnson has said the London Congestion Charge is “a blunt instrument”, which is surely why he should consider scrapping the whole system.

Western Extension



The western extension is even more obviously a failure

The report also says “Recent results have returned congestion values that are similar to pre-extension levels, indicating that the western extension is currently experiencing no material congestion relief”.

Instead of it taking 5 years to demonstrate how ineffective congestion pricing schemes are as with the central zone, this has been shown within one year in the western extension. Even bus speeds and reliability within the Western Extension have stayed the same or got worse, as is true for the central zone also.

Business owners and employers in the western extension reported weaker sales and profitability in 2007 compared to 2006 in a TfL telephone survey of local businesses. There were also negative comments from disabled people reported by TfL such as:

“I have friends from Bristol who come and visit me, but it has to be at the weekend now... I don’t see them as much as I used to.”, and: “People wouldn’t take me to places that they used to ... you don’t ask people to do things because you know it costs money.”

Campaign to Scrap the Western Extension

The ABD has launched a major campaign to advocate the total scrapping of the Western Extension during the consultation period recently announced by the Mayor. The Western Extension was not wanted by residents of the area and has had numerous detrimental impacts on business and community activities. We welcome the Mayor's commitment to consult the public again on this matter. Go to this page of the ABD London internet web site for more information: www.freedomfordrivers.org/WesternCon.htm

No Environmental Benefits

The TfL report also says “no clear scheme impacts from either the original central or western extension zones can therefore be discerned” in ambient outdoor air quality. It's a myth that congestion charge schemes generate any environmental benefits but car haters continue to promote this agenda.

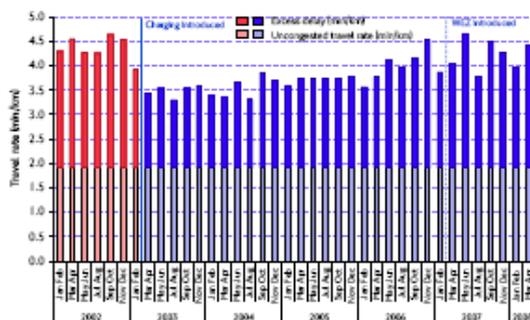
It is particularly odd that no discernable benefits can be seen as TfL admit that the “background change to the emissions performance of the vehicle fleet is significant” as newer, and more environmentally-friendly vehicles, replace older ones. The full TfL report can be seen at: www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/sixth-annual-impacts-monitoring-report-2008-07.pdf

Worse Congestion With Less Traffic

Although the Western Extension cut traffic entering the zone by 14% (but traffic circulating within the zone is down by only 10%) and the original congestion zone has reduced traffic by 21%, there is no corresponding reduction in perceived congestion.

Congestion is measured by driving sample routes in the middle of the night, and then during rush hours, and the additional time during the latter runs are used as a measure of congestion. The figure below taken from the TfL report shows the trend in the main zone.

Figure 4.1 Congestion in the original central London charging zone during charging hours. Moving car observer surveys.



As you can see, the trend has been consistently rising since the charge was introduced. Even more revealing is the fact that the base “night time” journey times have increased by about 21% within the zone and 22% across the whole of London between 2004 and 2007. This shows how much normal traffic speed has been reduced by additional traffic lights, revised traffic light timings, road narrowing, road closures and developments such as the pedestrianisation of Trafalgar Square.

Even TfL admit that “reduced network capacity” has been seen in recent years because of Livingstone’s policies but even removing these bottlenecks will not mean congestion charging would have any positive impact because it is the difference that is measured by the chart above.

The Economics

TfL claim the scheme generated a surplus of £137 million in 2007/2008. This has improved over previous years because of the western extension but also because penalty charges were increased substantially at the end of 2007. In fact £73m of the surplus comes from penalty charges even though only 73% of those issued are paid.

However, those figures seem to not take account of all the capital costs and the true picture of the economics of the scheme are very different. On a cash basis it seems unlikely that it has actually generated any surplus at all as yet. For more information on this see the analysis in the note on the previous TfL report at:

www.freedomfordrivers.org/London_Congestion_Charge_Report_July2007.pdf

The ABD will continue to campaign against all road pricing and congestion charging schemes, and we would like to see the London scheme totally abandoned. This was part of a strategy developed by the former Mayor which included reallocation of road space from one type of road user to another which treated private car users as second class citizens. His strategy to solve London’s transport problems has been totally discredited by the latest report.

Roger Lawson, Association of British Drivers
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