

THE LONDON CONGESTION CHARGE THE ROAD TO FAILURE

London has the world's most expensive and the least effective city wide congestion charging Scheme. How has this come about?

London also has the highest public transport fares of any world capital city.

Why has no other city copied London's charge system?

The basic approach is flawed. Vehicles entering the charge zone pay a single charge allowing multiple entry. Their use of road space within the zone is neither time nor distance based. On a tolled motorway vehicles pay for distance travelled.

However powered all vehicles add to congestion and should logically pay a charge, preferably related to size. In London all vehicles pay the same charge.

The Mayor/TfL have exempted some classes of vehicles from paying .This is the Achilles Heel of the Scheme. Now some 40% of vehicles do not pay and numbers are still rising.

When the Scheme started in Feb 2003 average traffic speed increased from 8.9 to 10.4mph. To keep this increase the road space for traffic in the zone needed to be maintained. TfL however in pursuing other Mayoral objectives have steadily removed the road space for general traffic by installing more bus and cycle lanes. More traffic lights installed have also slowed traffic. TfL plan to continue this policy.

On present trends, as revealed in TfL's 4th Annual Monitoring Report, traffic speed and congestion will be back to pre-charge levels before 2009.

The camera based ANPR system installed has been a failure. Too many number plates are misread and it is very expensive to run. Because of this within 18 months of start-up TfL decided to change, in 2009, to the more cost effective and flexible electronic 'tag and beacon' technology. This has been used very successfully in the world's first city wide road pricing scheme in Singapore since 1998. Some 30M tags are in use world wide.

Neither the Mayor nor TfL have explained why the well known more flexible and cost/effective 'tag and beacon' technology was not used from the start in London. TfL could have sent a team to Singapore and have adapted the Scheme for London. This would have saved some £500M in operating costs between 2003 and the 2009.

London's charge payment system is bureaucratic and hugely expensive. Of last years charge income of £212M some £92M went in operating costs. I.e. nearly 4 of every £8 charge payment.

Singapore 'tags' are essentially credit cards held inside the vehicle windscreen. As the vehicle passes the electronic 'beacon' a charge is automatically deducted. This simple pay as you enter system costs £5Mpa to run. Singapore deducts 235,000 payments per day, London 96,000. Singapore charges all vehicles, save emergency services, according to size.

TfL say that even when 'tag and beacon' is running they will continue to use the ANPR system in parallel thus negating some of the large operational cost savings to be made

The zone boundary is like a 'Berlin Wall' dividing communities and severing well established social and business links to the detriment of local people.

WESTERN EXTENSION OF THE CENTRAL CHARGING ZONE

The Extension, effective Feb 19th 2007, is purely a political decision taken by the Mayor as there are no traffic, financial, economic or environmental reasons for the Extension.

The Extension is in a residential area where 170,000 work against the 1.1M employed in the central zone.

Only some main roads, forming about 5% of the Extension's road length are congested from time to time. These could be much more cost effectively dealt with using a road pricing approach. Vehicles in the Extension will pay a charge to use uncongested roads.

176 studies by the local council show an average speed of 25mph in residential streets.

Using TfL figures the Western Extension will almost certainly lose money.

A study by the Centre for Business and Economic Research forecasts 6000 job losses and £236Mpa of lost business from the Extension as a result of the introduction of the charge.

TfL spokesman said the main reason for the introduction of the Western Extension was to 'speed the buses'. TfL in reply to a FOI request say that in the Extension average bus journey times will be cut by 30SECS and other vehicle journey times by 2MINS. Do these modest time savings justify an investment of £166M?

Many of the 60,000 residents owning cars in the Extension will use their 90% charge discount paying 80p to drive into central London thus adding to congestion

Two public consultations, ignored by the Mayor, showed overwhelming rejection of the Extension.

Many west Londoners living outside but working in the Extension will now face paying a charge tax of £1600pa, as due to inadequate Public Transport provision, they will have to continue to use their car.

THE WAY AHEAD

The charging zone concept for such a large area of London is wrong and has been stretched well beyond the point that it works. Aided by overt political interference the basic objectives of the charge have been compromised and congestion in the central zone is now going back to pre charge levels.

The way forward must be by using road pricing where vehicles pay for the use of congested roads only when they are congested and where charges can be varied during the day to maintain traffic speed.

This can be achieved using 'tag and beacon' technology. Using an active pay as you enter payment system, based on a modified Oyster card, operating costs can be substantially reduced and a more flexible charging hours regime introduced with say 2 hour charge free shopping window during the day.

Greater Manchester is planning to introduce road pricing on the main routes into the City. Sir Richard Leese Council Leader says 'It's clear that a London- style charging scheme – which imposes cost irrespective of time of day, length of journey, origin and destination – is not right for us. Any charging scheme must take account of the time of day, length of journey. Origin and destination as well as the impact on communities and key workers'. His statement highlights the inadequacies of London's present Scheme and shows the way ahead based on road pricing.

The use of a satellite based system so that every vehicle pays a charge for the use of every mile of road is unnecessary, expensive and has privacy implications.

London needs a new independent body, outside of TfL, with a team of high quality people with the necessary expertise, drive and vision to develop cost effective road pricing across London at the same time shrinking or eliminating the charge zone.

TfL data from published reports. Singapore data from visit to Singapore Feb 2006

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