



Tagged, tracked and taxed off the road

Sean Corker makes an impassioned case for not switching lanes to congestion charging

At the end of July the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) will submit a bid for Department of Transport (DfT) funding that will set the country irrevocably along the road to what will eventually become a national road pricing scheme.

Every one of us will be forced to have a satellite transmitter installed in our cars, at our own expense, resulting in our movements being tracked at all times. The authorities will then send us a monthly bill for the number of miles we have driven on the very roads we have already paid for over and over again. A headline rate of £1.34 per mile to drive on the most congested roads has never been denied by the Government.

This figure is equivalent to a litre of fuel costing an eye watering £13.60.

The centre-piece of the AGMA scheme is a £3 billion investment in public transport which will consist of £1.2 billion from the Government's Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) and a further £1.9 billion borrowed against future congestion charge revenues. Of the £1.2 billion Government funding,

£470 million will be spent on the capital costs of the congestion charge scheme resulting in just £700 million of new money from the Government to be invested in public transport. If we then add on the huge annual running costs of the congestion charge scheme then it becomes clear that the deal we are being offered makes no financial sense and will prove to be a millstone round the necks of

Any shortfall in charging revenue would have to be made good through Council Tax revenues or more likely an increase in fees charged and longer charging periods. As part of the July bid submission the AGMA have to submit a detailed and properly costed business plan to the DfT. At a stroke they could dispel any doubts about their scheme by publishing this plan, so far they have refused.

motorists. Roads that were essential in dissipating traffic have been closed off, parking spaces have been removed, bus stops have been built out into roads and the relentless encroachment of white lines continues at an inexorable pace.

We already have an example of congestion charging in place on our railways. Train operators charge a higher rate at peak

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MANCHESTER CIVIC SOCIETY TAKES A STAND AGAINST CONGESTION CHARGES



There is an attempt to push through proposals to impose a so-called 'congestion charge' in central Manchester and indeed for the Greater Manchester area for cars, commercial vehicles and motorbikes. Little time is being given to object to these proposals with a very short consultation period of six weeks ending in July before a submission is made to the Government.

The Manchester Civic Society's Executive Committee has

decided, on an urgent basis, to oppose these plans as being destructive to the development and improvement of the City. They form a dire threat to the prosperity of Manchester and its restaurants, bars, shops and businesses in general. In addition, the impact on individual Mancunian motorists could be severe.

We will be making a submission against these plans and will be supporting the campaigns against them. If you wish to support us in this campaign or would like to get involved by

joining the Civic Society then contact us via our email address info@mcrscs.co.uk or fill in the form in this copy of Forum.

We believe that the proper way to proceed is by a much longer consultation with the people of Manchester and a vote to be taken on the issue. This was done in Edinburgh and resulted in a resounding NO vote against the proposals.

There should be a far greater public debate on such an important issue with both sides of the argument being put. A contribution to this debate is being made in this Forum.

Train operators charge a higher rate at peak times than at off peak yet the trains are still packed to bursting point during the rush hour simply because we have to be at work for a certain time. If congestion has no effect on rail passengers why should it work on the roads?

Manchester's citizens for generations to come.

The London Congestion charge has been rated by the DfT as offering poor value for money; this is borne out by the fact that £950 million in charges and fines have been paid yet in four years the London scheme has made only £25 million. Considering that repaying the AGMA's £1.9 billion mortgage depends upon the £118 million per year from the Manchester charge, this is optimism bordering on recklessness.



In 1999 almost 36,000 cars entered Manchester city centre at the morning peak period, yet by 2006 this figure had fallen to just under 32,000, so why has congestion not improved? The Government's congestion charge campaign is entitled 'Doing nothing is not an option'. Ironically this is exactly what the Government has done for the last ten years. Investment in our transport infrastructure is at an all time low as a proportion of GDP and our roads are crumbling and pot holed through chronic neglect. The phrase is yet another sound bite designed to obfuscate the situation. The reality is that Councils have squandered road space on politically correct transport policies designed to marginalize and discriminate against the



Congestion charges are already in operation in Durham

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