

WHY NAAT OPPOSE “CONGESTION CHARGING” IN LONDON & ELSEWHERE

1. **British drivers are already overtaxed.** It is unfair to expect them to pay more.

The ratio of taxes to spending on building and maintaining all roads is about seven to one. The spending is somewhere between five and nine billion pounds. The taxes are fifty billion pounds or more depending on whether the more indirect taxes are included.

2. **Tolls are a “regressive” tax.** That is to say the amount charged is not related to the ability to pay. The toll is the same for rich or poor. It is also the same for the driver of say a Porsche or a small economy car.

3. **A Congestion charge is very expensive to set up and run.** The original London scheme cost over ninety million pounds to set up. The western extension cost at least an additional seventy million pounds. The annual running costs are also very high. In the first 12 months operation of the original zone, the expenditure was equal to the income. It has improved since then but even so about half of the income is wasted on the cost of collecting and enforcing the charge. (In 2007/08 financial year the income net of bad debts was about 286 million pounds and the running costs were about 142 million pounds).

4. **The congestion charge has hurt retail businesses (shops and restaurants) in London.** TfL deny that there is evidence for this, but that is what the businesses believe as indicated in reports from the London Chamber of Commerce and others. There is more detail of the adverse effects in a 2005 report that we obtained from the London Chamber of Commerce - <http://notolls.org.uk/lccretrep3.pdf> .

That report was written before the western extension, but retail businesses there are also blaming the charge for a fall in trade starting from February 2007.

(Big business interests mainly support the charge. This may be because they do not rely on “footfall”, and because London’s elite tend to travel by taxis and think that they are better off if poorer drivers are forced off the road and out of their way.)

5. **Congestion charging has little effect on congestion.** In general the effect of a toll is that a driver will try and avoid it. The London charge has had that effect and there are a lot less vehicles entering the charge zone than before the charge came into effect in February 2003. For a time there was also an increase in traffic speeds, **but** by 2007 all of the improvement was gone. This is according to the official TfL figures, but TfL say that the congestion is because of either increased road works or negative changes that they have made to the road system, and they claim that if it were not for the charge then there would be gridlock (traffic would come to a complete standstill).

In fact there were a high number of road works in the year (before the charge) that is used by TfL for comparison. The negative road changes have been going on for many years and possibly for that reason there was a long term trend for traffic in Central London to fall, even before the charge was introduced. The idea of permanent or frequent gridlock is a fantasy, as drivers will change their habits as congestion gets worse – they will drive at different times, use different routes, move job, move home.

The interesting question is what are the real reasons that there is no reduction in congestion if there are less vehicles entering the zone?

In our view the main reason is that the drivers who are most likely to be deterred by the charge are those that would have spent the least time in the zone. Drivers who would have been spending

more time will be less deterred and may move around more within the zone in order to get “value” for the charge that they are paying. There is also the paradox that the less the congestion then the more drivers will be tempted to drive until the congestion reaches an equilibrium.

In the case of London there are also many vehicles that pay no charge such as buses, taxis, bicycles and motor bikes. There are many drivers who illegally avoid the charge in various ways and residents of the zone only pay a small charge. Even for those who pay the full charge of 8 pounds it is relatively small compared with the incomes of many people who work in the City and compared with Central London parking charges which according to a recent survey average 35 pounds a day.

6. Drivers don't like tolls. The opposition to tolls was demonstrated by the biggest ever petition in Britain when 1.8 million people signed an petition against “road pricing” which was addressed to the Prime Minister. In the only two public votes on the issue there was an overwhelming “No” (75% in Edinburgh in February 2005 and 79% in the Manchester area in December 2008). The official consultations in London showed that the majority opposed both the original congestion charge zone and the later expansion. The then Mayor (Ken Livingstone) ignored the results. Ken was defeated in the May 2008 elections, there were various reasons for this, but opposition to the congestion charge would have been one.

The new Mayor (Boris Johnson) had promised before the election that there would be consultation on the removal of the western extension. The consultation showed that the majority wanted the extension removed and the Mayor announced at the end of November 2008 that he would do so, though he has not said when.

The main reason that drivers don't like tolls is that it costs them money. But with the London Congestion Charge, there are two other reasons – Fines and Surveillance.

Fines - If you do not realise that you have entered the zone or forget to pay then you are fined. The fine is 120 pounds. This is a big penalty for a slip that is easily made.

Surveillance – Congestion charge schemes usually need cameras, as even if there is another system such as radio tags, you need cameras as a back up. This means that the police and others can officially or unofficially see someone's movements. Some people do not mind this, but others see it as an invasion of their privacy.

7. There are better methods for raising income and better methods for dealing with congestion.

Better methods for raising income. The most efficient tax i.e. the one that is the cheapest and easiest for both the Government to collect and for the individual to pay is fuel duty. Almost all of the income is available for spending. Fuel taxes also encourage drivers to use less fuel, through driving less, using smaller more efficient vehicles, driving less fast (lower speeds use less fuel), and driving in places and at times which are less congested (the higher the congestion then the more fuel is needed to cover the distance). Using less fuel is good for conservation and reduces pollution.

Better methods for dealing with congestion. Using fuel tax would in itself reduce congestion as drivers will drive less and avoid congested times if they can. There are many other things that can be done, which are detailed on our website – <http://notolls.org.uk/roadpricing.htm#alternatives> . These include –

a) Reversing some of the road engineering that has been carried out in Britain over the last 30 years or so and which have had a negative effect, such as reducing space for vehicles in order to create bus lanes or cycle lanes, and long phasing of traffic lights.

b) Providing positive measures such as filter lanes at junctions, bypasses round towns and villages, multi level junctions where space permits, tunnels in urban areas, extra lanes on motorways, and more off road parking.

c) Soft measures that will increase road capacity such as - use of the hard shoulder during peak periods, minimising the time that road works take and expeditious handling of accidents so that roads are reopened as quickly as possible.

d) Greater promotion and encouragement of walking, car sharing, park and ride, flexible working hours and tele-working.

e) Improved public transport and in particular measures such as making bus services free for children and the retired.

f) Reducing the distances and time taken for people to travel to work by moving jobs, particularly Government jobs, from crowded areas such as London.

8. The real problem is not traffic and vehicles but population growth. The world population has increased from about 2.5 billion in 1950 to 6.7 billion now. The population of Britain has also increased over the same period from 50 million to 61 million. Increased population means increased demand for land for all purposes not just travel by car. It means more pollution and more crowding. It also puts pressures on things such as availability of food, fishing stocks, petroleum and rare metals. Ultimately it is one cause of wars.

Aiming to say reduce use of carbon fuels is laughable if population growth is not somehow stopped. A person living in Britain uses about twice as much fuel as the average person in the world. But even if Britain were to somehow disappear and use no carbon fuel, the effect would be wiped out in about 19 months due to population growth in the rest of the world.

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National Alliance Against Tolls - <http://notolls.org.uk/index.htm>