

Response to Proposals for Emissions Related Congestion Charging

INTRODUCTION

London Living Streets is part of Living Streets, a national charity established in 1929 as the Pedestrians' Association. London Living Streets campaigns for better streets and public spaces in the capital, and for a higher priority for pedestrians.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on these proposals.

SUMMARY

- The Congestion Charge has been a success in reducing motor vehicle trips and creating conditions which favour pedestrian amenity
- Creating a city that embraces walking over car use can tackle climate change whilst also contributing to wider Mayoral policies
- In order to support these emission related proposals, London Living Streets requests that they are altered to ensure that an overall decrease in motor traffic is delivered so that pedestrian amenity and a culture of walking and civility can be further embraced.

MAIN RESPONSE

The congestion charge - a successful policy for people on foot

The Congestion Charge has undoubtedly been a success in reducing the number of vehicles entering and driving around the zone. Consequently it must be deemed a success for people on foot. Fewer vehicles has improved pedestrian amenity.

Air quality improved. Traffic noise reduced. Introducing engineering measures that encouraged walking (and cycling (and other sustainable modes)) became possible as capacity on the streets was freed up.

With the Congestion Charge, walking became a more pleasant choice. It started to feel as if our streets were being returned to people, with the city moving towards its *raison d'être* – civil encounter, where people discover their destiny through others. Through looking, feeling, touching, exchanging glances, conversation, smiles.

The Congestion Charge is an excellent foundation from which to increase civil encounter and to achieve the Mayor's vision of making London one of the most walkable cities in the world by 2015 (The Walking Plan for London, 2004). By creating a walking friendly culture it is possible to contribute to a wide range of Mayoral Plans, including tackling climate change by reducing CO₂ emissions.

The impact of the emission based proposals

Given the success of the Congestion Charge we are gravely concerned that these proposals may result in an increase in traffic (4.1.7). Any alterations to the Congestion Charge, no matter how well intentioned, must seek to ensure an overall reduction in the amount of motor traffic within the zone. Ideally the reduction should be in the same region as that delivered when the Congestion Charge was initially introduced – that is around 15%.

Further reductions in motor traffic will make the implementation of schemes that promote pedestrian amenity easier. For example, it would become easier to provide pedestrian facilities at signalised junctions where green men are currently missing.

Any changes to the structure of the Congestion Charge must create a culture that promotes and encourages walking over private car use, sending out a clear signal that the era of the car in London is coming to an end, not just the end of cars that emit a lot of CO₂.

Compared to the delivery of modal shift to walking (and other sustainable modes) smaller, cleaner cars still:

- emit high levels of NO_x and PM₁₀ (indeed the impact of these emission based proposals on air quality is null (4.1.18))
- take up valuable street space that is at a premium
- emit large quantities of CO₂ compared to walking (or cycling)
- cause death and serious injury
- contribute to increasingly inactive lifestyles
- erode civil encounter.

Our position

In order to support these proposals, London Living Streets requests that they are altered to ensure that there is a significant overall decrease in the level of motor traffic circulating within the zone so that pedestrian amenity and a culture of walking and civility can be further embraced.

Whether needed (or not) to achieve the overall decrease in traffic that is requested above, we request that the 100% low CO₂ discount is dropped. Reversing a policy, and permitting some vehicles that currently pay the charge to drive freely through London once more, no matter how small the number, would be a significant step backwards. We suggest that the minimum charge should remain at £8.

The Commissioner's Policy Unit is currently conducting a Review to ascertain how levels of walking can be increased to meet the targets set within Transport 2025. We are eagerly anticipating the recommendations. We very much doubt that any credence will be given to policies that potentially increase levels of traffic anywhere in London. Indeed such a policy would contradict the Mayor's objective to reduce traffic growth in London, as stated in the Transport Strategy.

Cont.

We request that serious reconsideration is given to these proposals. Whilst their intention is good are they really the best plans to develop the successful existing scheme in order to tackle climate change and contribute to wider Mayoral policies? Alternatively could they be tweaked to deliver greater benefits, both for future generations and in the shorter term, right now?

*London Living Streets
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