

Our Ref: Congestion charging
Your Ref:

29 July 2010

Congestion Charging Consultation
Chiswick Gate
598 – 608 Chiswick High Road
London W4 5RT

Dear Sirs

Congestion Charging Western Extension Consultation

London TravelWatch is the statutory watchdog representing transport users in London. We are grateful for the opportunity to comment. Our views set out below are similar to those we submitted in the 2008 consultation and as part of the recent Mayor's Transport Strategy consultation.

However, the present financial circumstances of the country means there is now a greater need to consider the issue of income from congestion and road user charging. Given the likely cuts in Government grant that are suggested, London TravelWatch believes that the case for the retention of the Western Extension Zone is now even stronger than it was in 2008.

London TravelWatch recognises the role of congestion charging in managing road space in central London and has been generally supportive of both the central area scheme and the Western Extension. It offers the four benefits of discouraging unnecessary private vehicular travel while improving journey times for essential trips, raising revenue to support transport investment, and improving the reliability of buses.

In central London, congestion charging has resulted in a modal switch away from private cars, facilitated new or enhanced bus services, and encouraged a large rise in bicycling. Bus services performance (both reliability and frequency) has improved, and use of buses has increased.

Congestion on central London's streets remains a significant problem. Any abandonment of congestion charging in central London would mean a fundamental shift in policy, requiring other mechanisms to be found both to limit congestion and to help fund transport improvements. The analysis undertaken as part of the Mayor's Transport Strategy confirms that road user pricing needs to be part of the mix of measures to tackle congestion in London. The Mayor's Transport Strategy, though generally welcome, does not do enough to tackle the issue of road traffic congestion in London.

That said, London's scheme is crude – a single price over the entire day for all chargeable vehicles. To develop, congestion charging in London cannot simply be an extension of the central area scheme because eventually this would be self defeating as all drivers gained residents' discount status. London TravelWatch would welcome a more sophisticated system.

It is generally assumed differential pricing by time of day would be part of a more sophisticated system based on automatic electronic charging – i.e. the next technological generation of road user charging.

In conclusion London TravelWatch supports the continuing operation of the Western Extension, and expresses its concern that its cessation without any substantive replacement would increase congestion in this area of London with damaging consequences for a majority of road users, and particularly for the operation and funding of buses.

London TravelWatch supports the principle of varying charges by time of day, but believes that to be fully effective this would require the development of a more sophisticated automatic payment system to replace the current arrangements.

London TravelWatch understands that the additional and enhanced bus services complementary to the Western Extension will be kept under review. However TfL should note that many of the changes introduced met longstanding requests for additional links that pre-dated the introduction of Congestion Charging in the Western Extension area, and/or were necessary to meet the needs of developments both in and adjacent to the area concerned. Any changes to the network should be fully consulted upon, before final decisions are made to either reduce or withdraw services.

Yours sincerely

Vincent Stops
Streets and Surface Transport Policy Officer