

**Our Ref: Congestion charging**  
**Your Ref:**

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Business Reply Licence No. RRYL-HCTU-ASGG  
Congestion Charging Western Extension Consultation  
Chiswick Gate  
598 – 608 Chiswick High Road  
London

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.

The Western Extension to the central London congestion charging scheme has undoubtedly reduced the number of vehicles entering the western zone, without any discernable impact on the original zone. The recent increase in congestion, despite the reduction in vehicles is disappointing and the reasons unclear, but we accept TfL's analysis that this is in large part due to three factors: (a) major developments reducing vehicular capacity at important road junction, (b) an increase in street works, most noticeably those by Thames Water, and (c) deliberate reductions in road vehicle capacity, for example by raising the time given to pedestrians at signalised crossings.

London TravelWatch recognises the role of congestion charging in managing road space in central London and has been generally supportive of both the original 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.

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 payment system.

The proposal to develop an account-based payment system will be welcome to drivers, particularly to those whose charges are not paid from their own income. But it would mean £30 million less income being generated for spending on transport. Reducing the 'hassle factor' in this way may in itself lead to an increase in vehicles entering the zone.

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. The proposed introduction of a charge free period would mean both reduced income to be spent on transport (£20 million) and some additional congestion in the zone, though not during the peak hours.

The proposal for a 100% residents' discount would be popular with resident drivers, but would mean a £10 million reduction in income to be spent on transport. It may also lead to an increase in the number of vehicles being kept by residents and to additional trips within the zone.

All of these options for changing the operation of congestion charging will be attractive to some residents and private vehicle drivers. But they will all individually or in combination increase the number of vehicles circulating in the zone and thus reduce the congestion reduction impact of the scheme. This would be detrimental to the overwhelming majority of travellers within the zone, and impact negatively on the wider bus and road networks.

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 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 objects to any increase in the residents' discount, as this may lead to an increased number of vehicles being kept in the zone and disincentivise residents to reduce their reliance on private vehicles.

London TravelWatch requests that the additional and enhanced bus services introduced as part of the introduction of the Western Extension are 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

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