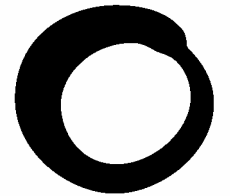


Briefing Note



**Friends of
the Earth**

10 myths about the London congestion charge

“There’s no point in being Mayor unless you do this.”

Ken Livingstone on congestion charging, BBC Eve magazine

“For a decade or more it has been obvious that London needs some kind of traffic restraint if the party is not eventually to reach a state of permanent gridlock.”

London Evening Standard editorial, 18th June 1997

Myth 1: Congestion charging is unnecessary

London has the worst traffic congestion in Britain. There is just too much traffic on our roads - and not just in central London. Without firm action forecasts are for 300,000 more cars on London’s roads by 2016 and our road traffic crisis is set to continue. Polls routinely show that Londoners, visitor and businesses say there is too much road traffic and that traffic levels affect people’s quality of life and damage London’s image.

Most people (over 70 per cent) entering central London for work or leisure use public transport so the percentage of people coming in by car is quite small. But those that do still cause enormous and unnecessary problems, congestion being just one of these, for everyone else. Because most trips in London are for relatively short distances about 1 in 5 car journeys terminating in the charging area could transfer to public transport, and many others to walking and cycling. Congestion charging will help people change their travel habits and extend real transport choice. People with a car will be able to leave it at home for many of their trips. The large number of Londoners in households without a car (37 per cent) will be able to travel without feeling like second class citizens.

Myth 2: it’s anti-car

It is too easy to condemn as ‘anti-car’ any measure, however small, that seeks to control the way cars have come to dictate our lives. Congestion charging won’t stop all cars coming in - it will ease congestion for those that need to. People with a disabled ‘blue badge’, taxis and licensed mini cabs, and drivers of dual fuel gas or zero pollution vehicles, will be zero-rated and can drive in the congestion charge zone for free.

Myth 3: other measures could be used instead

Congestion charging alone will not solve London’s traffic and transport problems but it is a start. People need other measures such as Company Travel Plans, Safe Routes to School (to deal with the ‘school-run’ - 18 per cent of the morning rush hour), coordination of road works, and far better cycle facilities and bus, train and tube services. These measures are needed *as well as* congestion charging, which can have an immediate effect.

Myth 4: it’s a regressive tax hitting the poor, not the rich

Not true. Few low-paid workers drive into central London. The poor are less likely to drive in London than elsewhere. A UK Family Expenditure Survey shows that car ownership among the poorest 10% of Londoners is just 18%, compared to 25% nationally. Most of the money raised (about £130 million a year) will go to improve the public transport system, helping all Londoners but especially the poorest who most rely on public transport and who tend not to have a car. A 2002 report by the

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Institute of Public Policy Research found links between levels of poverty and increased road deaths, especially children; reducing road traffic levels is even more urgently needed for poorer Londoners.

Myth 5: it won't work (too complex/too cheap/zone too small/too many illegal cars/possibility of civil disobedience)

Let's try it and see. The technology has been used elsewhere (e.g. bus lane enforcement cameras) although not as one package on such a large scale. The inevitable teething problems must be ironed out not be used as an excuse to junk the scheme. The police are cracking down on the hazard of illegal cars which are a real cost to law-abiding drivers, and the congestion charge cameras will catch more. The system is designed to catch non-payers.

Myth 6: public transport won't be ready

Improvements have been made to public transport - especially the buses - and more is in the pipeline. Of course more improvements are needed but London cannot wait for every aspect of public transport to be perfected we adopt congestion charging as part of dealing with too much traffic. Revenue from the charge will help fund improvements.

Myth 7: businesses will be damaged by the charge

Congestion costs businesses at least £2billion a year in lost staff time and delayed deliveries; there could be large economic savings in terms of more reliable journeys and reduced fuel consumption and energy waste with traffic sitting in jams with their engines running. This will help businesses large and small.

Myth 8: why should nurses/fire-fighters pay the charge?

They won't, if working. When on duty in marked vehicles they won't pay the charge and should be able to move around London faster. Most come to work, even at difficult times of the day or night, by public transport or bike. The solution for the minority who do not is not an exemption but better public transport and better pay.

Myth 9: recent traffic light changes are for congestion charging

Not true. The re-phasing of traffic lights began in 1992 to bring London's signals in line with national standards for pedestrian crossings. It is unreasonable to expect all Londoners to cross roads faster than someone in Leicester.

Myth 10: it won't even help air quality

The congestion charge is not primarily about improving air quality. A successful congestion charge scheme may reduce some air pollution from road traffic in central London, but not enough to meet the targets for clean air to protect people's health. For that, the charge is needed across a wider area along with the creation of Low Emission Zones across Greater London, preventing highly polluting vehicles from travelling within the M25.

Congestion is killing London. The Mayor must ensure a fair, workable scheme.

But if you still oppose the charge what is your solution to London's road traffic crisis? Let us know at: www.foe.co.uk/congestion/

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