

STATEMENT BY THE MAYOR CONCERNING HIS DECISION TO PUBLISH HIS REVISED TRANSPORT STRATEGY

1. I published my Transport Strategy in July 2001, and on my behalf TfL have now concluded an extensive consultation concerning revisions to certain aspects of the published Strategy relating to Congestion Charging. I am informed by TfL that the consultation was the most comprehensive they have carried out, leading to over 100,000 responses. The level of response satisfies me that public awareness of the proposed Strategy Revision and the consultation was high.
2. The principal proposal within the draft revision was that TfL would investigate the potential for an extended London congestion charging scheme, and that subject to this, and the availability of funding, TfL would make an Order for an extended scheme broadly covering the area to the west, bounded by Harrow Road, Scrubs Lane, West Cross Route, Earls Court One Way System and Chelsea Embankment.
3. It is clear that this proposal is controversial and that the majority of those responding to the consultation opposed the indicative scheme for a westward extension set out in the draft Strategy Revision. Consultations of this type, whilst extremely useful, inevitably tend to elicit responses primarily from those opposed to whatever is being consulted upon, particularly when, as here, there have been (as is perfectly proper) organised campaigns of opposition. Overall, some two thirds of respondents to the consultation opposed the proposal, with around a quarter supporting it. There are those who consider that any extension is misconceived, or at any rate premature, and others who consider that if there is to be a western extension other boundaries should be adopted than those proposed in the consultation draft.
4. In particular, the case against the proposed western extension has been set out exhaustively in the very many communications received from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and, assisted by the comments of TfL and my own transport advisers, I have taken into account the various arguments raised.
5. I do not accept there are other areas around central London that have more intense all-day traffic congestion which have been overlooked; that the consultation process has been inadequate or procedurally flawed; or that there must necessarily be a long period of delay whilst the impacts of the original Congestion Charging scheme are further examined, before I should contemplate revising my Transport Strategy.

6. On the other hand I accept that the draft proposals may have appeared to be too prescriptive. Whilst now is the time to provide a policy framework which will enable a western extension (subject to consultation in the event that an Extension Order is made), I agree with TfL that further investigation is needed of the potential for and impacts of an extended scheme, before deciding to make an Extension Order; therefore the reference in the draft to introducing a scheme as soon as possible was inappropriate. I continue to believe that a Western Extension is a logical next step for congestion charging in London, but its exact form and timing will depend upon further investigation (including further discussion with the most directly affected London Boroughs). It is even possible that TfL will decide that it is inappropriate to make an Extension Order. It would be wrong to have a policy which implies that an Extension Order will necessarily be made.
7. I never intended that the boundary contained in the consultation draft be other than indicative (as it was described in Figure 4G.4). More work needs to be done in relation to the proposed boundary, and the Transport Strategy now makes clear that decisions on the precise location of the boundary will only be taken after further discussion of the alternatives with directly affected boroughs (as well as being open to review, if an Extension Order is made, during the public consultation that will precede any confirmation of such an Order). Even if the eventual boundary were to remain as in the consultation draft, I agree that the residents' discount zone could be extended to certain areas outside the charging zone, but only where the particular circumstances justify it, and the Strategy Revision published today contains express reference to this. In any case I accept the recommendation of my officers that further investigation should be carried out regarding mitigating possible negative impacts on access and community severance near the proposed boundary of the extension area. This is not to be taken as an acceptance that the residents' discount zone will necessarily be extended, but, that, as with other matters, it will be given further consideration.
8. I am very aware of concerns from the business community that there may be impacts, particularly on small businesses, and from others in the entertainment world that, if there were to be a western extension, charging should cease earlier than 6.30pm as at present. I have included text in the revision to ensure that this possibility is further explored by TfL, and the whole question of business impacts is to remain the subject of ongoing monitoring. For my own part, I believe there is a strong case for bringing the end of charging hours forward to 6.00pm if a westward extension were to be progressed.

9. The consultation draft contains reference to a possible two-zone residents' discount system, and I have considered carefully the representations received which favour this alternative because it would maintain congestion benefits within the existing zone and provide a better financial return from the overall scheme. Nevertheless I have accepted TfL's recommendation that the Revised Strategy should propose a 'single-zone', which would be easier to understand, implement and operate, though this will be subject to review.
10. Finally I should mention that I have included a minor revision to Paragraph 4G.74 in the consultation draft to make it clear that it is not merely the amount of the charge itself, but also the whole question of discounts and exemptions, which will be kept under review to identify whether any adjustments were needed to maintain the objective of reducing traffic congestion or to respond to changes in circumstances. Furthermore, Proposal 4G.13 now states that monitoring results will help to inform decisions aimed not merely at preserving but also enhancing the benefits and effectiveness of the congestion charging scheme, and that, as was already implicit in the consultation draft, TfL will bring forward variations where needed.
11. I believe that the Transport Strategy Revision which I am now publishing has significantly benefited from the extensive consultation process. It now contains additional safeguards, designed to ensure that the concerns raised during the public consultation are addressed by further work, even though this is likely to delay the making of an Extension Order.
12. If TfL does make an Extension Order, the earliest date at which it could now be confirmed would be summer 2005, with the earliest an extended scheme could be operational being late 2006. I emphasise that these are not target dates, because there is still further work to be done on impacts, further discussions to be held, and further decisions to be made by TfL (and myself) in the light not only of those matters but also of the availability of funding.
13. I am grateful not merely to TfL for organising and reporting on the consultation, but also to all who responded. I am arranging for the TfL Report to be published, as well as the Mayoral Approval Form, both of which set out in far greater detail the nature and extent of the consultation that has taken place, the various policy and legal considerations which I have taken into account, and the reasoning behind the modifications made in response to public consultation.