



Sian Berry AM
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
LONDON SE1 2AA

Transport for London
(by email)
ccyourview@tfl.gov.uk

6 October 2021

Dear TfL,

New Congestion Charge proposals 2021 – consultation response
<https://haveyoursay.tfl.gov.uk/congestion-charge-changes>

I write in response to the proposed changes to the central London congestion charge. The congestion charge has been one of the great achievements of devolved local government in London, but it needs careful consideration both about its short-term goals and the best methods to achieve its long-term aims.

During 2020, Transport for London (TfL) was instructed by the Mayor to increase the basic congestion charge to £15, and to increase the hours of operation from 07:00 to 18:00 Monday to Friday to 07:00 to 22:00 Monday to Sunday, including bank holidays and the Christmas period. This was a prudent response to the challenges of the pandemic, when there was a risk that the reduced capacity on public transport due to social distancing might lead to a sudden shift to greater use of private cars.

The changes in 2020 were right to counter a potential spike in the use of motor vehicles, and in 2021 we now need to make sure London does not return to the traffic levels we saw before the pandemic, or even higher. The need to cut overall traffic levels in the face of the climate emergency is clear: emissions must reduce today so that we can reach the budgets and targets necessary to achieve our net-zero goal for emissions in London by 2030.

On this basis, you should be retaining the fully comprehensive nature of the congestion charge from 2020 – charging should continue in the evening as well as the daytime, and it should also cover weekends and bank holidays.



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At a time when the night tube service hasn't returned, and night bus services are under threat, there should be no move to increase the attractiveness of driving into London at off-peak times. The suspension of the charge at Christmas has always conveyed a poor message, with Londoners seeing headlines encouraging them to drive for shopping trips at a time when cold conditions can exacerbate pollution, as seen all the way back to the Great Smog in 1952.

Private car ownership in central London should not be encouraged – there was a case for a 90 per cent residents discount when the congestion charge originally came in, as a transitional measure to help give residents time to change their principal mode of travel. There should now be a transition away from resident discounts towards concessions only for those who really need them. This will give a clear signal to Londoners living inside and near the congestion charge zone to avoid private car ownership where they can – renting or hiring a car when they need one, but also using the variety of public transport options London has.

More generally, the value of the congestion charge has always been as a deterrent that reminds people of the external costs of driving, and encourages them to consider alternatives. That deterrent factor should be backed up by removing discount schemes such as Auto Pay and Fleet Auto Pay.

Finally, all of the questions about fairness and fine-tuning the congestion charge highlight again the blunt nature of an area-based scheme.

As I have been proposing for many years, the best solution to congestion in London isn't the congestion charge, it is something much fairer – smart, fair, privacy-friendly road charging.

To counter the short-term bluntness of both the congestion charge and the potential new boundary charge, it would be hugely beneficial for a conversation with Londoners to be conducted by TfL and the Mayor about developing something smarter as the next step for charging for vehicle use.

In my view, it is now long overdue for detailed proposals for options for smarter road charging to be developed, with per-km, per vehicle charges that vary based on time of day, emissions and levels of congestion. This policy could not only help people to choose cleaner alternatives including active travel and public transport, but also help pay for these alternatives.

The congestion charge is now nearing twenty years old – we must urgently begin work on its replacement to bring it up to date.



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In summary, here are my responses to your consultation questions and my additional comments are above:

1. How important is it to you that we take steps to reduce traffic and congestion in central London?

Very important

2. How important is it to you that we take steps to increase the number of people walking, cycling and using public transport in central London?

Very important

3. How effective do you consider the following proposed changes to the Congestion Charge scheme would be in achieving our aims set out above?

Set the level of the Congestion Charge at £15.00 (Since June 2020, the charge level has been set at £15.00 as part of the temporary measures introduced in response to the transport challenges arising from the pandemic).	Major effect – the charge must remain at this level
Operate the Congestion Charge from 07:00-18:00 on weekdays (Monday to Friday). (This is the same as before the pandemic. Since June 2020, charging hours have been 07:00 to 22:00 on weekdays as part of the temporary measures introduced in response to the transport challenges arising from the pandemic).	Major effect – temporary extended timings must be maintained
Operate the Congestion Charge on Saturday and Sunday and on bank holidays between 12:00 and 18:00 (but not in the period between 25 December and the New Year's Day bank holiday). (Since June 2020, charging hours have been 07:00 to 22:00 on Saturdays, Sundays and bank holidays (except Christmas Day), as part of the temporary measures introduced in response to the transport challenges arising from the pandemic).	Major effect – restoring these exemptions could be harmful
Reopen applications for the residents' discount of 90 per cent of the Congestion Charge. (Since August 2020 the residents' discount has been closed to new applications as part of the temporary measures introduced in response to the transport challenges arising from the pandemic).	Major effect – this would remove valuable incentives for residents to change their mode of travel
Increase the "pay next day" charge to £17.50 and extend the deadline for making payment to three days. (Since June 2020, the charge has been set at £17.50 with three days for delayed payment as part of the temporary measures introduced in response to the transport challenges arising from the pandemic).	Major effect – the charge must remain at this level



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No discount for payments made by Auto Pay or Fleet Auto Pay. (Since June 2020, no discount has been given for payments made by Auto Pay or Fleet Auto Pay as part of the temporary measures introduced in response to the transport challenges arising from the pandemic).

Major effect – these discounts do not help achieve the goals of the congestion

4 How important is it to you that we have reimbursement arrangements for NHS staff and patients, care home workers, certain local authority workers, domiciliary care workers and charities during pandemics or epidemics in Greater London (existing reimbursement arrangements in other circumstances are proposed to continue)?

Very important – we fully supported these measures during the coronavirus pandemic.

Yours sincerely,



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Green Party Member of the London Assembly



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