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**CONGESTION  
CHARGING**

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DEBATING MATTERS  
**TOPIC  
GUIDES**

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**MOTION:**

**“THE LONDON  
CONGESTION  
CHARGE MODEL  
SHOULD BE  
ADOPTED BY ALL  
MAJOR CITIES”**

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# INTRODUCTION

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# NOTES

**1** On 17 February 2003 London's first directly elected Mayor, Ken Livingstone, launched the world's largest congestion charging scheme for motorists. Described at the time as the decision that would 'make or break' his mayoral career, the London scheme is the most ambitious of its type ever implemented and has been watched by city authorities throughout the world. A radical departure from traditional road charging, which was a way of directly funding the construction and maintenance of road routes, the London Congestion Charge was explicitly presented as a means of reducing the number of cars travelling into London.

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**5** Its introduction was controversial, and the practical issue of road congestion was only one part of a broader debate about climate change, city centre pollution, personal mobility and the freedom to travel. Whilst some suggest that the congestion charge has been successful in 'creat(ing) a truly sustainable transport system', others say it shows an 'utter lack of imagination' in dealing with the modern problems of transport. Should the congestion charge be rolled out to other cities across the UK, or stay parked up in London?

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## KEY TERMS

Road pricing

Toll road

Traffic congestion



## What is the London Congestion Charge?

The charge obliges road vehicles to pay a daily charge (currently £8) for entering the Congestion Charge Zone (CCZ) in central London at certain times, although some vehicles are exempt [Ref: [Transport for London](#)]. The perimeter of the zone, and key thoroughfares within it, are monitored by street cameras and roving camera vehicles operating automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) technology. The majority of vehicles are captured on camera and their number plates checked against payment records. Those that have not paid are fined.

## Why is traffic congestion a problem?

Supporters of the congestion charge argue that in a city as large as London measures have to be taken to reduce congestion and gridlock; congestion is said to represent a total loss of £20 billion a year to the UK economy [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. Public transport, such as buses and trains, carry large numbers of people into the city, whereas cars are often used by single drivers and therefore deemed inefficient in comparison. Some have also said that an incentive to help people change to public transport, or other alternatives such as cycling and walking, has a beneficial effect on the city's overall environment [Ref: [Friends of the Earth](#)]. But critics of the congestion charge suggest that we have misdiagnosed the problem. They say that we have forgotten how much freedom increased car travel has brought, and how profoundly modern transport has improved our lives [Ref: [spiked](#)]. Driving, they argue, is being unfairly cast as an act of complacent self-interestedness, rather than a benefit of modern society that should be applauded. Questioning whether the only solution to transport problems is making people travel less, critics have pointed to the fact that the

UK has built fewer roads than any other large developed country in the last twenty years. Rather than penalising the public for driving, they argue that the government should be looking for alternative solutions to congestion problems, including building more roads [Ref: [Times Online](#)] and changing traffic light flows [Ref: [spiked](#)].

## Was congestion charging the way forward for London?

Early critics of the congestion charge doubted if it would succeed in reducing the number of cars entering London [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. A Transport for London review indicates that car numbers have fallen by 70,000 a day, but while the congestion charge has reduced numbers, the report shows that congestion and travel times are no better than before, due to traffic calming measures, car lane restrictions and an increase in bus and cycle lanes [Ref: [Transport for London](#)]. Businesses also claim to have suffered financial losses since its implementation [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. There are other suggestions that the congestion charge has led to unequal access to roads. But supporters of the charge put their argument bluntly: the era of the car is over, and people need to cut back, congestion or not. With cities like London growing year on year and environmental considerations ever more important, the congestion charge is a necessary way of changing behaviour for the greater good [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. But critics suggest that there is little evidence to support the 'benefits' the charge is purported to bring. With a recent study finding that the congestion charge has had no impact on pollution levels in London, they suggest that this is a moral rather than an evidence-based crusade [Ref: [New Scientist](#)].



### What is the future of congestion charging?

Major cities across the UK and around the world have looked to London as a template on which to base their own versions of a congestion charge. But whilst some (Stockholm and Durham) have introduced the charge, others (New York, Cambridge and Edinburgh) have rejected it. Supporters of tax-based incentives to change travel habits argue that ultimately they work in shifting the focus of traffic policy from private car owners to pedestrians and other forms of transport [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. But critics argue that the London scheme resorts to the age old method of taxing people's behaviour and is an attack on individual freedom. The question remains: is congestion charging an effective way of dealing with modern transport problems?



## ESSENTIAL READING

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The Big Question: Has the congestion charge been effective in reducing London's traffic?

Nigel Morris *Independent* 13 February 2008

### For

In praise of...London's congestion charge

Editorial *Guardian* 7 August 2008

Decongestant drops: It's high time Manchester had a congestion charge

Ally Fogg *Guardian Unlimited* 10 June 2008

Admit it, we're travel addicted. Let the taxman put the brakes on

Simon Jenkins *The Times* 3 December 2006

The global transport challenge

John Whitelegg *openDemocracy* 26 April 2005

### Against

London: still stuck in a jam

Nico Macdonald *spiked* 19 March 2007

The car represents freedom and progress so lets build more roads

Mick Hume *The Times* 30 August 2004

Congestion? No problem

Hamish McRae *Independent* 27 July 2004

Capital Office

Stephen Bayley *Independent* 6 February 2003

### In Depth

In support of the congestion charge

Cameron Munroe *Washingtonpost.com* 6 August 2007

The road to nowhere

Mick Hume *spiked* 1 February 2007

Road pricing is necessary for UK

David Begg *FT.com* 15 May 2005

London Congestion Charge

Laura Blow, Andrew Leicester, Zoe Smith *The Institute for Fiscal Studies* - Briefing Note No.31 2003



## BACKGROUNDEERS

Friends of the Earth v Porsche

*Sky News 1 February 2008*

Motoring towards 2050 – Roads and reality executive summary

*RAC Foundation*

Congestion charging

*Guardian*

Charging schemes around the world

*Commission for Integrated Transport*

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## ORGANISATIONS

Association of British Drivers

Friends of the Earth

IAM Motoring Trust

London Cycling Campaign

Motorists Forum

Transport for London



## IN THE NEWS

Congestion Charge plan proves unpopular  
*Lancashire Evening Post* 8 August 2008

Transport: London still gridlocked despite congestion charge  
*Guardian* 7 August 2008

C-charge 'has had no effect'  
*BBC News* 6 August 2008

Is congestion charging a price worth paying for £3bn worth of public transport improvements?  
*Manchester Evening News* 1 July 2008

£2.8bn for Manchester transport as congestion charge plan confirmed?  
*Guardian* 10 June 2008

London congestion charge did not improve air quality  
*New Scientist* 30 April 2008

Congestion is good for business  
*Whatcar?* 30 April 2008

How the congestion charge lost its principles  
*Independent* 10 March 2008

British cities shun London's wasteful car tax  
*The Times* December 2007

Rush-hour is slower than before C-charge  
*Evening Standard* 6 November 2007

Road pricing is only one cog in the machine  
*Independent* 22 May 2007

New York to follow London's example with congestion charge  
*Guardian* 23 April 2007

Embassy road toll row continues  
*BBC News* 14 May 2006

Edinburgh rejects congestion charge  
*BBC News* 25 February 2005

Should congestion charging be extended?  
*BBC News* 20 June 2003

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NOTES



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**“TEENAGE CITIZENS  
THINKING DEEPLY  
ABOUT...SOCIAL  
ISSUES”**

**IAN GRANT, CEO, BRITANNICA**

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