

Comments on the Mayor's Transport Strategy revision

1.Introduction

The London Sustainable Development Commission was set by the Mayor in 2002 to advise him on sustainability issues in London. Further details on the Commission can be found on the GLA website:

http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/sustainable-development/sustainable_development_commission.jsp

2.Methodology

In keeping with other English regions the Commission has developed a London Sustainable Development Framework. This was endorsed and launched by the Mayor in June 2003 (attached as appendix 1).

The Commission has used this Framework as a means of commenting on the Transport strategy revision - see Section 4, below. Section 3 sets out a summary of the Commission's main comments drawn from the Framework appraisal.

3.Summary of Commission comments

3.1.Introduction

The proposed westward extension of the congestion charging scheme has been appraised on the basis of impacts associated with the existing scheme (both together are referred to as 'the schemes' in the following assessment).

Welcome the reference to sustainable development in paragraph 4G.80. It is important that the GLA and TfL use sustainable development as an overriding context within which major policy is set, thus producing more integrated economic, social and environmental benefits.

Congestion charging is consistent with a sustainable development approach. It scores positively on some of the key sustainability indicators, such as neighbourhood satisfaction, travel patterns, air quality, health, greenhouse gas emissions, economic efficiency and employment.

The schemes are considered to deliver integrated economic, social and environmental benefits for those living, working or visiting the zones. London can be said to be employing exemplary measures to tackle traffic congestion – providing world leadership in urban traffic management.

Further monitoring of the impacts of the original scheme are awaited. There are still concerns about the impact of the schemes on some London businesses and some groups of Londoners.

4. Assessment of Transport Strategy revision using the London Sustainable Development Framework

Overall objective

We will achieve environmental, social and economic development simultaneously; the improvement of one will not be to the detriment of another. Where trade offs between competing objectives are unavoidable, these will be transparent and minimised.

Note that a report on the social, economic and environmental effects of congestion charging will be available in Spring 2004.

The schemes are likely to result in integrated economic, social and environmental benefits for those living, working or visiting the zones, and elsewhere in parts of London. These include:

Economic:

- Reduced congestion means better business efficiency and therefore decreased cost to business and beneficial impacts on employment.
- Assist in enabling better long-term decisions making use of revenue generation for a minimum of 10 years and overcoming investment barriers.
- Technological advance, including support for green technology sector.
- Makes London better place to live work and visit.

Social:

- Reduced congestion means people make better use of their time.
- More efficient and reliable journey times.
- Less rat-running through residential areas.
- Better bus services.
- Improved conditions for cycling and walking (and secondary health benefits)
- Improved public transport and investment in future infrastructure.
- More reasonable taxis and private hire vehicles rates.
- Fewer emissions contributes to improved health.
- Less noise, disruption and severance for by local communities.
- Contributes to falling road accidents.
- Makes London better place to live work and visit.
- Exemptions for various groups including disabled and emergency/key workers.

Environmental:

- Less rat-running through environmentally sensitive areas.
- Reduces vehicle emissions (improves air quality and reduces greenhouse gas emissions)
- Should reduce noise.
- Promotes cleaner fuelled vehicles and technological advancement.
- Improves public enjoyment of green spaces and parks.

- Makes people more aware of their impacts – paying the true cost of motoring.

Taking responsibility

1. As citizens of a world city, we will be aware of the impact of our actions on the rest of the UK and beyond, and will take a responsible world leadership role which contributes to the planet's sustainability.

The congestion charging scheme and the proposed extension represent a brave initiative to tackle a worldwide problem – traffic congestion in cities. London is setting an example in this respect and the initial results seem to be encouraging from a sustainability viewpoint – produced integrated economic, social and environmental benefits.

The schemes are designed to make people think carefully about using their vehicles in the charging zone during charging hours. This is likely to reduce the number of trips as well as increase the number of trips by 'more sustainable' modes.

The area of the proposed extension includes many areas of national or international significance (Royal Albert Hall, Hyde Park, Natural History, V&A Museum etc) as well as diplomatic missions. The scheme would therefore have a significant impact in terms of influencing visitors.

2. All of us - individuals, households, businesses, local and regional government, voluntary groups — will have the information, knowledge, motivation and support to help us to take both short and longer-term decisions that will make us and our city more sustainable.

How we choose to travel around London is crucial to making the city more sustainable. The congestion charge and proposed extension provide Londoners with both the motivation and support to make more sustainable travel choices, away from private vehicle use and towards public transport, cycling and walking. In addition, the scheme also promotes cleaner fuelled vehicles. The revenue generated will assist in making long-term decisions in terms of public transport infrastructure.

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The monitoring programme and public information programme will assist Londoners in making better travel decisions.

3. We will seek new and creative ways to overcome the constraints of time and money that prevent us from taking effective decisions. We will ensure that these decisions are informed by a long-term perspective.

The congestion charging scheme represents a creative way of tackling the problem of traffic congestion (a major time constraint) – generating money to enable more effective decisions to be taken over long-term plans for public transport schemes and infrastructure. The knowledge of reliable journey times will be a major advantage for people making daily decisions.

4. We will build and sustain a powerful sense of ownership and responsibility for our city, with civic participation as the norm.

The congestion charging scheme and proposed extension are subject to public consultation. In addition, the Mayor has made it clear that if re-elected, he will implement the extension. The original scheme formed part of his Manifesto for the 2000 Election.

GLA data states that more than 50% of all London residents support or tend to support the scheme: around 30% oppose, or tend to oppose it. About 70% of London residents consider that the scheme has been 'very effective' or 'fairly effective' in reducing congestion in central London.

Developing respect

5. Our city will have a culture of tolerance, fairness and respect, for people and the environment, recognising London's diversity as its key strength. The right of all London's citizens and communities to pursue fulfilment will be assured, so long as this does not infringe the rights of others.

Improvements to public transport, walking and cycling will benefit many people. Car users are likely to suffer to some extent – car ownership is low for low income groups and many inner London residents. On balance, there will be benefits to the majority of people living, working or visiting central London.

Various categories of people are exempt or benefit from discounts, including disabled people and some emergency or key workers. There are likely to be significant benefits for many excluded groups.

To some degree, more reliable journey times, increased accessibility to public transport and increasing late night public transport should have social inclusion benefits and benefit more flexible working.

Spending priorities for the funds generated by the charges include increased accessibility to public transport, which will benefit socially excluded groups.

Further studies will look at impact of current congestion charge on different road users.

The charges impact on economic diversity is less clear. There will be benefits to business from reduced congestion, but impacts on retailers and SMEs are not yet clear. The charges could make these zones less attractive locations for SMEs and those businesses operating at the margins of profitability, who could relocate elsewhere or cease trading. This could have social impacts in terms of diversity of employment opportunities available locally for people living in the zones.

The impact of the scheme on retailers within the zone has been questioned, but the 6 month report concludes that the current charge has had little effect. Around 85-90% of people travelling into central London use public transport. TfL's updated assessment is that 4000 people are no longer travelling to the charging zone as a result of the charge. The general economic slowdown, the fall-off in overseas tourists (from the Iraq war etc) and the temporary closure of the Central Line were thought to have had a much more

significant influence on retail activity in central London than the congestion charge. There are also benefits to businesses as a result of the scheme.

Similarly, the impact of the scheme on those living in adjoining areas has also been questioned. TfL considers that there has been no material traffic displacement to local roads in areas surrounding the charging zone – but this will be reviewed in Autumn traffic surveys.

In terms of respect for the environment, the schemes have improved the overall amenity of central London, as well as marginally improving various environmental conditions (air quality, noise, greenhouse gas emissions). This may be likely to increase people's respect for the environment within the zones and have benefits in terms of crime and security.

6. Our city will be a place where everyone feels at ease and is able to enjoy life. All who work, live and play in the city will be able to pursue their objectives in peace, free from the threat of crime, violence or intrusion.

The schemes are likely to significantly contribute to this objective – creating a more enjoyable central area for most people, on a more human scale (walking, cycling etc). In terms of road accidents, the 6 months report on the existing scheme found that 'a reduction in road accidents within the charging zone has been recorded although this seems to reflect a longer-term trend of declining accidents'. However, limited data is available.

A more human streetscape, with improved respect for the local environment is likely to have benefits in terms of crime reduction and increased security.

7. Our communities will be dynamic, stable, adaptable, innovative, progressive – creating a city in which conflicts will be resolved as part of a transparent and participatory process.

Congestion charging is an innovative response to a significant problem – unsustainable levels of traffic congestion in central London. One of the benefits of the schemes is likely to be improved communities – as congestion is reduced. Residents within the zone benefit from a 90% discount.

Public information and awareness is an important aspect of the scheme – this needs constant attention and should strive for improvement in public understanding and conflict resolution.

The scheme also promotes the use of alternatively fuelled and cleaner fuelled vehicles – which could have an impact on boosting the local green technology sector.

Managing resources

8. We will protect and improve the city's natural ecosystems, its biodiversity, its open spaces and its built environment. We will help to protect the wider regional, national and international environments with which London has links.

There are likely to be only marginal synergies with this objective. The schemes will aid the public enjoyment of parks, open spaces and buildings within the zones – as general amenity improves.

9. We will limit and deal with our pollution, and use energy and material resources prudently, efficiently and effectively, including re-using and recycling our residual waste.

There are likely to be small improvements in air quality, reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and noise improvements associated with the schemes. Less traffic means a reduction in fuel consumption.

The scheme also promotes the use of alternatively fuelled and cleaner fuelled vehicles – which could have an impact on boosting the local green technology sector.

Getting results

10. We will make consistent economic progress – not necessarily always growth – to enable wider economic, social and environmental objectives to be pursued both in London and beyond. Business transactions in London will be conducted to high ethical standards.

The schemes will improve business efficiency in London. Businesses within the zones are expected to experience more reliable deliveries, improved travel (especially for staff) and new transport infrastructure. These benefits are expected to also extend to businesses outside the zones.

Some businesses may lose from a potential transfer of demand from within the zones to outside, though the overall impact of such effects from the existing scheme is considered to be small.

TfL state that they will continue to adhere to the standards set down by the Mayor's Green Procurement Code in all their contracts with suppliers for congestion charging.

11. All the different parts of our economy will consistently invest in new technologies, new solutions, new plans and new ideas that contribute to achieving social, economic and environmental objectives simultaneously.

The schemes involve considerable application of new technology, which may have wider beneficial applications (e.g. in tackling crime). The revenue generated from the schemes will assist in the delivery of new technology and infrastructure.

The scheme also promotes the use of alternatively fuelled and cleaner fuelled vehicles – which could have an impact on boosting the local green technology sector.

12. All forms of work will be recognised and valued. Paid employment will be plentiful.

The schemes will improve employment conditions in terms of accessibility and reliable journey times. Reducing congestion will improve the cohesion of communities, benefiting various forms of employment.

There may be some deleterious impact on some companies currently within the zone who may have to relocate. Unfavourable Impacts on retail companies are thought to be minimal.

13. We will be healthy and fulfilled – through living in good housing, with wide opportunities to develop as individuals and communities, through access to services, good quality food, green space and cultural, sporting and leisure activities.

The schemes are likely to be beneficial to the health of those living, working or visiting the zones, through fewer accidents, improved amenity, marginally better air quality and less stress/noise. The amenity of housing within the zones will also improve.

There should be much better access to services (including green space, leisure, sporting and cultural facilities) within the zones, with improved public transport and conditions for cycling and walking.

The area of the proposed extension includes many national and international visitor attractions which would benefit from improved accessibility and a better local environment.

Annex 1. A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR LONDON.

Vision for London¹

London has retained its position as one of the World's great cities over many centuries because of the quantity, quality and diversity of its people, businesses, infrastructure and natural resources. However, the downside of this pre-eminence has been the associated social division, pollution and increasingly wasteful use of resources.

Our vision for the 'World Class' London of the future is a place where all Londoners and visitors feel the greatest possible sense of physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual well-being. Our thinking and decision-making will be long-term, meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This means ensuring that the ways in which we live, work and play will not interfere with nature's inherent ability to sustain life.

We will achieve this by taking responsibility for the regional and global impacts of city life. With our commitment to inclusion and cooperation, we will build upon and celebrate London's diversity, in all its forms. Resources will be used efficiently and fairly and the natural and built environment protected. Our reward will be a prosperous, vibrant and healthy city, one in which we all make the most of opportunities for fulfillment.

All of us have a part to play in achieving this vision. Each step will be supported by clear objectives and targets and will be sustained by learning from success.

Objectives

Overall objective

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Taking responsibility

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2. All of us - individuals, households, businesses, local and regional government, voluntary groups — will have the information, knowledge, motivation and support to help us to take both short and longer-term decisions that will make us and our city more sustainable.
3. We will seek new and creative ways to overcome the constraints of time and money that prevent us from taking effective decisions. We will ensure that these decisions are informed by a long-term perspective.

¹ This Vision and set of objectives is intended for all Londoners as well as those working or visiting London (i.e., the collective 'we' refers to those living or working in, or visiting the capital).

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LSDC, c/o 4th Floor, GLA, City Hall, The Queen's Walk, London SE1 2AA
Email niall.machin@london.gov.uk