

THE ROAD AHEAD

CUTTING LONDON'S
CONGESTION WITHOUT
PENALISING DRIVERS



TONY DEVENISH
GLA CONSERVATIVES
GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
The trouble with road pricing	1
Traffic lights and street furniture	2
Home working	3
A crackdown on road works	4
Lessons from abroad - more tunnelling	5
Conclusion & recommendations	6
Feedback	8

INTRODUCTION

With the publication of the Mayor's Transport Strategy, there is renewed focus on the need to reduce London's congestion. However the strategy gives every indication of viewing motorists as a cash cow, and the potential introduction of 'Pay as you go' (PAYG) road user charging as a panacea that can fill any financial hole. There is an urgent need to offer an alternative approach that accepts congestion is a problem, but which does not attempt to punish those who need to drive.

London's population is fast approaching 9 million people. It is predicted to reach 10 million by 2030 and 11 million by 2048. On the principle by which you can't fit "a quart into a pint pot", doing nothing and hoping that London's congestion won't get worse is not a viable option.

While technology may provide a part solution to London's congestion crisis, we should not rely on it. Driverless cars might revolutionise London's transport, overturning many of the assumptions with which any transport planner must wrestle. We could see a future where car ownership declines as driverless cars or taxis can be quickly and cheaply summoned at the touch of a smart phone. The reduction in parking spaces would then free up road space and enable some change, but not until the late 2020s or 2030s.

THE TROUBLE WITH ROAD PRICING

Even if the driverless vehicle revolution does come to pass, London cannot put off reform until driverless cars are a reality. The Mayor needs to find solutions today. An option beloved of the anti-choice left and some on the extreme free market right is road pricing. The end point of that approach is that ordinary Londoners are priced off our roads, even though those roads are paid for out of general taxation. There are those for whom road pricing could be the tipping point that makes living in London unaffordable or is the difference between small businesses remaining viable or failing.

The Draft Mayor's Transport Strategy¹ (MTS) contains plenty of assertions on the importance of road pricing and the need to crack down on motorists:

"A new approach to funding and delivering the transport network is therefore required. This must include addressing the fundamentally inadequate and unfair way in which road use is paid for in London, with motorists paying too little, and in effect being subsidised by public transport fare payers."

The Mayor has stated that he would not introduce road pricing in his first term². This is welcome but, given the enthusiasm displayed in the MTS for road pricing, some more clarity regarding the conditions under which the Mayor believes road pricing should be introduced would be welcome. Given the scarcity of detail contained in the report on funding London's transport infrastructure, the fear remains that road pricing will be seen as a way of filling the gap.

1. https://consultations.tfl.gov.uk/policy/mayors-transport-strategy/user_uploads/pub16_001_mts_online-2.pdf

2. <https://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/b15861/Minutes%20-%20Appendix%20%20Thursday%2013-Jul-2017%2010.00%20London%20Assembly%20Mayors%20Question%20Time.pdf?T=9>

The London Assembly Transport Committee produced a report on congestion entitled 'London Stalling' in January 2017³. The report has some useful suggestions for reducing congestion, particularly in terms of increasing both the number and the usage of consolidation centres so that the numbers of delivery vehicles required to bring freight into Central London can be reduced. The report also calls for the Mayor to "begin developing proposals for a wider road pricing scheme for London." In so much as showing Londoners precisely what a road pricing scheme would look like, this could be useful as it is far easier to be in favour of road pricing in theory than when confronted with the reality of what it would mean.

A recent report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) entitled "How to Abolish Traffic Jams"⁴ looked at road pricing in some depth. The road pricing scheme it proposes would see users pay 8p per mile. Assuming the average of 6,488 miles travelled per year is maintained, then this scheme would cost Londoners £1,349,504,000. In comparison to the Congestion Charge this would equate to an additional cost to Londoners of more than £1.2 billion. As suggested above, these sorts of numbers emphasise why the Mayor might be very tempted to try and introduce road pricing in London.

This underlines the great danger of introducing road pricing. The cost to ordinary Londoners would almost certainly be significant. Consequently, the impact would be to force many low-income Londoners out of their cars. Even if you take the view that this would have some benefits, the disbenefits to the quality of life of many Londoners who need to drive would be enormous.

The Mayor currently lacks the power to introduce road pricing in a fair way so it is best put to one side. This report will focus on options that are within the Mayor's current powers. This report will focus on options where the Mayor would not have to wait for more powers or ask permission from Government. All my recommendations will be ones which the Mayor could enact – or at least make a start on – immediately.

TRAFFIC LIGHTS AND STREET FURNITURE

In 2014, Richard Tracey AM wrote the 'Green Light' report:

"When the Congestion Charge was introduced to London it was a very controversial decision. However, the stated reason behind it was to reduce congestion in London at peak-times because this was seen as a drain on London's economy. Consequently there was no suggestion that the charge should apply for 24 hours a day. This should not be surprising since congestion is not a constant problem and the costs of congestion to London's economy vary at different times of the day. A solution that might be effective during peak hours might be completely unnecessary – or even counterproductive – at off-peak times".

This point deserves expansion. There are many traffic lights in place for the purpose of traffic management, not safety. This means that at some point they were assessed as having sufficient traffic volume at some point of the day to necessitate traffic lights. This might only be true for an hour a day and yet the traffic lights will operate for 24 hours

3. https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_stalling_-_reducing_traffic_congestion_in_london.pdf

4. <https://cebr.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Abolishing-traffic-jams-v3.0.docx>

a day, 7 days a week. A ratchet effect is in operation so it is far more likely that traffic lights will be introduced than removed. This might mean that traffic lights that once met the criteria for installation would no longer meet it, but will not be removed due to pure inertia.

In 2009 a huge power cut saw vast swathes of Bexley without electricity for 36 hours. A consequence was that traffic lights in the affected area were out of action. The result was no increase in accidents and less congestion as traffic flowed more smoothly. That is not to suggest that all traffic lights should simply be removed or that these consequences would automatically continue if the change was made permanent. A review of all London's traffic lights from first principles could conclude whether each light should:

- Remain in place and be operative on a permanent basis.
- Remain in place but only be in operation at specific times.
- Be removed completely.
- Be replaced by an alternative such as a pedestrian crossing.

It is worth noting that many of the traffic lights in London are not on TfL-run red routes and so they are the responsibility of London's boroughs. Whilst it would make sense to run a single London-wide review, it is entirely possible that some boroughs will not be at all interested in following the review's recommendations. The Mayor should work with London Councils and directly with the boroughs to gain buy-in. He should guarantee to finance the capital cost of changes. It is worth noting that there is a significant financial and environmental cost to running a set of traffic lights full-time for a year. This cost is met by the relevant borough so it's entirely possible that the opportunity to reduce costs and congestion and improve traffic flow may persuade boroughs to accept potential changes.

This report recognises that there are limits to what the Mayor and TfL could achieve in this sphere if confronted with uncooperative boroughs. Rather than seeking to coerce boroughs, a better approach would be one of persuasion. Making changes to up to 6000 traffic lights in London would take time so it would be sensible to start by focusing on cooperative boroughs.

HOME WORKING

What has 'home working' got to do with reducing congestion? The short answer is that an increase in home working takes Londoners off London's roads, trains, Tube, bikes and buses. It has the potential to free-up road space and free up capacity on London's public transport. Home working is on a significant upward trend with an increase from 1.3 million home workers in 1998 to 4.2 million people "who usually spend at least half their work time using their home in 2014."⁵ By 2015, nearly 640,000 Londoners – or 14.6% of all London workers – were working from home. ⁶

Rather than trying to meet the current demand for travel and anticipated future demand, the Mayor and TfL must seek to reduce that demand. The easiest way for the Mayor to reduce demand for road space is the worst way. The Mayor could seek to increase the cost of using London's roads. However, as explained above, this simply prices the poorest

5. <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/o/3/Homeworking-a-guide-for-employers-and-employees.pdf>

6. <https://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-issues/work-life-balance/four-million-people-are-now-homeworkers>

Londoners off the road with no consideration for need. It would be all stick and no carrot.

A far better approach is to focus on the carrot of easier, more accessible home working. By doing everything possible to help Londoners to take fewer journeys, the Mayor could reduce congestion, boost productivity and improve air quality. Those who have a real need to drive could still do so, but real efforts could be made to reduce the number of people who do need to make a journey by car.

In the reports 'Home Works'⁷ and 'Commuter Payback'⁸, Roger Evans AM outlined the benefits of home working and suggested ways that the Mayor could make it an easier option for Londoners. Amongst these was a focus on flexible ticketing. When people buy Travelcards, these are a sunk cost so there is no financial incentive to reduce travel once you've paid for your ticket. By ensuring that Londoners can save money every day they avoid travelling, there is a real incentive to work from home.

This approach has been successful with the percentage of Londoners working from home continuing to rise, but there are still people who would prefer to work from home but for who currently face too many obstacles. For example broadband is too often slow and inconsistent. There are still too many "Not Spots" – areas where internet connection is virtually non-existent. Anyone who regularly uses or just travels through Clapham Junction Station, which on some measures is the busiest station in Europe, will have noticed their internet cutting out as they approach. By eradicating these "Not Spots" and boosting broadband speeds across the capital, the Mayor could provide a real boost to home working.

In the recent report 'Digital Connectivity in London'⁹, the London Assembly's Regeneration Committee highlighted ways in which the Mayor could significantly improve the status quo. Ideas such as utilising the London Plan to seek to simplify planning procedures across London in terms of expanding the broadband network, learning from the City of London and Westminster Council to expand high-speed broadband and utilising existing duct networks to roll out fibre. The report notes that "The Government last year placed an obligation on all duct owners to make their infrastructure available to operators and Ofcom published guidance." London via TfL has a huge opportunity to benefit from this approach.

The Home Works report called on the Mayor and TfL to "give a specific person responsibility for increasing home working in London." This should now happen.

A CRACKDOWN ON ROADWORKS

Roadworks continue to be a significant cause of congestion and frustration in London. The previous Mayor's road permit scheme did have an immediate impact. There was "a 32 per cent reduction in the level of serious and severe disruption due to roadworks occurring on the Transport for London network across London in 2010/11 compared to 2009/10, and [the permit scheme] managed to save more than 1,300 days of disruption by better coordination of roadworks on the capital's busiest roads." ¹⁰ London First's "Road Sense" report noted that "road works account for 38 per cent of the most serious and severe

7. <http://glaconservatives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Home-Works.pdf>

8. <http://glaconservatives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Commuter-Payback.pdf>

9. https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/digital_connectivity_report_final.pdf

10. <http://www.wandsworthsw18.com/shared/eroadworks001.htm>

traffic disruptions across London at a total cost of £752 million.”¹¹

In 2011 the then Mayor of London, said, “Roadworks are a massive headache for Londoners, also levying a heavy toll on our economy. I have already taken action to introduce the UK’s first permit scheme which will impose fines on those companies digging up the road that fall short of the high standards this city deserves.

“But like any great battle you have to plan for the next big push. We are now putting in place better ways to empower Londoners to name and shame those who blight our city with disruptive or badly managed roadworks. These reports will followed-up with swift action by the relevant authority to help unclog roads suffering from unnecessary delays.”

Delays have crept back up and there is a need to revisit this work. Some fingers have been pointed at the reduction in road space for motorised vehicles caused by Cycle Superhighways. Transport for London has argued that the installation of Cycle Superhighways has had an impact on delays and congestion, but that this should abate with their completion. As yet there is little evidence.

There is still a strong case to be made for continuing to find ways to crackdown on roadworks. The Government’s most recent proposals for the reduction of roadworks on A-roads were twofold: to ensure “that works on local ‘A’ roads are not left unattended over weekends.” Instead, their proposal was that “the work site should either be cleared or returned to traffic use, or the works should continue throughout the weekend.” The Government also proposed the “prompt removal of temporary traffic lights once works are complete.” Both suggestions are sensible. The Mayor should implement them, whilst seeking to learn from best practice in reducing roadworks from around the world. There is unlikely to be a big bang approach that solves the issue of roadworks, but an iterative approach that consistently seeks to make small gains can have a strongly positive cumulative impact.

LESSONS FROM ABROAD – MORE TUNNELLING

In 2016, the previous Mayor unveiled his plan to build two huge road tunnels across London. The first would have connected Park Royal and Hackney Wick, whilst the second would have connected Chiswick to Beckton. His proposal was that these should be financed using tolling, reducing congestion by 20%, with a network of smaller tunnels and flyunders throughout London.

There was some scepticism from those who are sceptical about any new road scheme. Given the proximity of the release of the plan to the end of Boris Johnson’s mayoral term it was swept under the carpet. Ignoring the opportunities of expanding road tunnelling would be a mistake. Certainly, if tunnels could be financed using tolling then it is difficult to make a reasonable case against building them. Those who favour road pricing should consider that tolling-funded road tunnels offer a genuine way forward. There are two key problems with road pricing. The first is that motorists already pay a large amount for the privilege of driving, paying far more on collective motoring taxes than is spent on the roads. Seeking to charge car-users even more to drive on the roads for which they have already paid is far from reasonable. The second is that road pricing fails to offer a viable

11. <http://www.wandsworthsw18.com/shared/eroadworks001.htm>

alternative to many drivers so poorer drivers can be forced off the road.

Building new road tunnels, which would only happen via tolling, neatly deals with both issues. By offering a new service that is not being funded out of road tax or fuel duty the Mayor would avoid the problem of asking for more money from those who are already subsidising other transport users to a considerable degree. Simultaneously, as tunnels are a new option, funded entirely by those who use them, the Mayor would not be forcing poorer Londoners off of roads. By giving those who will pay for a premium service the option of driving through tunnels, those driving at surface level would see a reduction in congestion.

Ideally the Mayor and TfL would seek to test the market on allowing private companies to bid to dig and then run these tunnels. In return for paying for a tunnel to be built, a company would have the right to toll that tunnel until their outlay plus a reasonable rate of return had been achieved. The advantage of this approach is that it would genuinely shift the risk of the project onto the private sector. The potential value of the tunnels in terms of time saved would increase the more that congestion rose throughout the capital.

If the Mayor and TfL are unwilling to take this approach, it would be worth looking once again at building the Hammersmith Flyunder. As well as tolling, the ability to remove the Hammersmith Flyover once the Flyunder was complete and develop the land that was freed up would cover the cost of the work. A smaller scale project such as this would clearly not have the same potential benefits of cross-London road tunnels, but it would offer a useful proof of concept.

Once again there is a great opportunity for the Mayor to significantly expand the use of tunnelling. He should work with TfL to bring forward proposals for how to take this forward by the end of 2018.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS – “EVOLUTION NOT REVOLUTION”

It is understandable that reports looking at congestion often call for a “big bang” approach. Proposals like ‘car-free days’ or ‘expanded congestion charge zones’ or ‘road pricing’ appear to have a tempting simplicity. They are all variants of the same solution: reduce congestion by forcing cars off the road. Like many ‘simple’ solutions, this kind of approach is misguided. If motorists are priced off the road, it will be the poorest drivers who will no longer be able to afford to drive.

Whilst the temptation to introduce a scheme that could raise approximately £1.4 billion per year is understandable, to do so would be a mistake. Very often Londoners need to drive either because they do not find that public transport suits their needs or because the journey they wish to take is ill-served by public transport. This is particularly true in many parts of Outer London.

It is worth considering that such schemes are liable to be expensive, slow to implement and difficult to change if unsuccessful. Instead, it is worth looking at the status quo and

considering evolution rather than revolution.

We must make it easier for people to avoid some of their travel.

There are traffic lights and other street furniture that could be removed or used more effectively.

The Mayor should ensure he is doing everything possible to maximise the effectiveness of traffic management.

We must further reduce roadworks.

Finally, if we are to introduce more revolutionary changes, can we learn from other cities that have done them already?

This is not an exhaustive list of interventions that might help London's transport flow better, but in all of these areas there are measures that should reduce congestion. Many could be implemented relatively cheaply and quickly. If technological progress will transform the status quo in the coming decades then that is all the more reason to stick to iterative, cost-efficient changes now. The Mayor should follow these recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION #1 - The Mayor should offer a guarantee that he will not introduce road pricing so long as he is Mayor.

RECOMMENDATION #2 - The Mayor should work with London's boroughs and launch a review of all 6000 traffic lights in London that will consider which might be removed, turned off at specific times or replaced with a more appropriate alternative.

RECOMMENDATION #3 - The Mayor should focus on eliminating 'not-spots' and increasing broadband speeds across London, by following the recommendations of the Digital Connectivity in London report.

RECOMMENDATION #4 - The Mayor should task a specific TfL officer with encouraging the expansion of home working.

RECOMMENDATION #5 - The Mayor should amend the Mayor's Transport Strategy to incorporate the need to expand home working and assess what changes should be made to the London Plan to ensure that new developments are conducive to home working.

RECOMMENDATION #6 - The Mayor should launch a renewed focus on road work reduction, by adopting a "marginal gains" approach that fully accepts the Government's approach by, for example, guaranteeing that no roadworks are left incomplete over the weekend.

RECOMMENDATION #7 - Flyunders can transform an area, freeing up space for development and greenery. The Mayor should make the Hammersmith Flyunder a reality and bring forward concrete proposals for more ambitious cross-London road tunnels.

APPENDIX 1

ROAD PRICING STATS		
cebr road pricing scheme		
Price per mile ¹²	£0.08	
Avg miles travelled per year ¹³	6,488	
Avg cost per year per driver	£519.04	
Total numbers of cars in London ¹⁴	2,600,000	
Total cost of scheme to London	£1,349,504,000	
Congestion Charge		
Average valid charges (for each charging day) ¹⁵	57,547	£563,589
Average Standard charges	10,880	£125,120
Average Standard Auto Pay charges	20,735	£217,718
Average Resident charges	2,411	£2,773
Average Resident Auto Pay charges	3,069	£3,222
Average Fleet charges	20,453	£214,757
Yearly CC gross revenue		£146,533,166
	Daily charge	Yearly charge
Standard charge	£11.50	£2,990.00
Standard auto pay charge	£10.50	£2,730.00
Resident charge	£1.15	£299.00
Resident auto pay charge	£1.05	£273.00
Fleet autopay	£10.50	£2,730.00
Daily per person cost difference between resident auto-pay CC and road pricing		£246.04
Total yearly cost difference between CC and road pricing		£1,202,970,834

12. <https://cebr.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Abolishing-traffic-jams.pdf>

13. <https://www.licencebureau.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/road-use-statistics.pdf>

14. <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/technical-note-12-how-many-cars-are-there-in-london.pdf>

15. <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/cclez-online-factsheet-jan17.pdf>



FEEDBACK

Connect with us online and tell us what you thought about this paper.

Twitter: [@assembly_tories](https://twitter.com/assembly_tories)

Facebook: facebook.com/glaconservatives

Email: assembly.tories@gmail.com



TONY DEVENISH
LONDON ASSEMBLY
Greater London Authority
City Hall, The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA