



Public Affairs

The Voice of UK Motorists

Road pricing, road charging, pay per mile – what we need to know.

A report published for HM Treasury in December - the Eddington Transport Study – has again raised the issue of road pricing – or “pay for use” roads.

Reaching a firm opinion on this concept is hard. Very little is known about how the concept will work and because of this it is easy to reject it out of hand.

What do we know?

- The roads are congested, particularly at peak times. There are strong objections to new roads, and strong suggestions that any new roads soon fill up as the removal of congestion makes more people travel.
- Currently the average driver pays about 7p a mile in fuel tax, and about £170 a year in road tax, which is equivalent to about another 2p a mile.
- The road pricing suggestion (in 2005) was that rates would vary between 2p and £1.34 per mile. The actual rate would depend on the type of road and the time of day that the journey took place.
- Some way of monitoring road use would have to exist for such a scheme to be possible
- Down the years, governments of all political persuasions have shown that they cannot be trusted not to raise motoring tax whilst at the same time reducing spending on roads and transport.

What don't we know?

- It has always been assumed that road pricing would replace most, if not all, road and fuel tax. However, recent government announcements have called this into question. If road pricing replaced fuel and road tax, many drivers may save. If it was additional, none would.

- Would the money raised be spent on improving the road network, or on providing alternatives? Or would we just end up paying more to sit in the same old queues?
- What pricing bands would exist for charging for road use? Would everyone pay £1.34 a mile to drive to work? Or just the users of the most trafficked roads at the busiest times? Who would pay 2p?
- Would big, polluting cars pay more per mile than smaller, more eco friendly ones?
- How much lead time will drivers get on the new arrangement? Many people may find it easier to move house, or change jobs, than pay the new charges. If the government wants people to travel less the people should have time to change their lives.
- How will other pricing schemes (e.g. the London Congestion Charge or Dartford Crossing) fit into the overall picture?
- Will drivers who pay high charges be treated as customers? Or just as victims who had chosen to travel by road?
- Is public transport a serious alternative to the car for a few or many journeys?

The AA needs answers to these questions before we can say whether road pricing is a good idea or a bad one. So do you.

Until we get the answers we have to be suspicious. But we are not yet in a position to oppose the proposal out of hand.

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