

## **London Councils' response to the proposed changes to the Congestion Charge**

1. London Councils Transport and Environment Committee (TEC) is a statutory joint committee representing all 32 London boroughs and the City of London. It is the main voice of the London boroughs and of their electorates on a wide range of issues relating to transport and the environment in London and related matters of concern to Londoners. It also carries out a number of statutory functions and works closely with the Local Government Association and with many private, voluntary and public sector bodies.
2. London Councils has reviewed the consultation leaflet on the proposed changes to the Congestion Charge. In brief, our comments are as follows:
  - We do not wish to comment on the removal of the Congestion Charge in the Western Extension Zone (WEZ).
  - We encourage TfL to ensure that it has consulted effectively with all those affected
  - We support the introduction of an Auto Pay facility for users of the scheme.
  - We support the proposal to include plug-in hybrid electric vehicles in the current Electric Vehicle Discount subject to certain conditions.
3. More detailed consideration of each of TfL's proposals can be found below.

### **Removal of the Western Extension**

4. London Councils does not wish to comment on the proposed removal of the Congestion Charge in the WEZ as we believe that it is for the London boroughs and those people directly affected by the extension to take a view on its future. However, we believe that it is essential that TfL consults effectively with boroughs and individuals both inside and outside the congestion charging zone in order to ensure that the views of all those affected are taken into account in the final decision.

### **Daily congestion charge increase**

5. London Councils supports the increase in the daily Congestion Charge to £9 per day for drivers who register for the new automated payment channel (called Congestion Charge Auto Pay) and to £10 for those who don't on the grounds that the increase is in line with inflation and that without an increase the introduction of Auto Pay could lead to further increases in traffic levels.

### **Congestion Charging Auto Pay**

6. London Councils supports the introduction of payment accounts (such as Auto Pay) as these should prevent drivers from being charged a penalty fare if they genuinely forget to pay or make a mistake such as registering the wrong vehicle.
7. At present, resources are being used to send Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) to users for not paying the charge, and then receiving and processing their payment. What is unclear is how many people are receiving PCNs because they genuinely forgot to pay the charge, as opposed to those who actively wish to avoid paying. An account facility, such as Auto Pay, would minimise the risk of receiving a PCN for those who forget to pay or make a mistake such as registering the wrong vehicle. It needs to be kept in mind that driving in Central London is not in contravention of any regulations, and therefore drivers should not be treated as if they have done something wrong.

### **Removal of the alternative fuel discount**

8. London Councils supports the removal of the Alternative Fuel Discount on the grounds that many of the vehicles that qualify are less environmentally friendly than newer vehicles which don't qualify. However we would like to see an amendment to the provisions in paragraph 7.57 of the [supplementary information](#)<sup>1</sup>. This currently sets out that although the alternative fuel discount will be closed to all new registrations at the end of the charging day on 24 December 2010, those vehicles which are already registered to receive the discount can continue to do so until 24 December 2012. We would like to see this amended so that the discount would remain in place until the vehicle changes hands.

### **Greener vehicle discount**

9. London Councils supports the introduction of the Greener Vehicle Discount (GVD). Although we have previously expressed reservations about the level of subsidy required to promote greener vehicles and the potential for increased congestion that an increased number of electric cars on the road may create, the GVD should lead to a reduction in emission levels across London. Nonetheless, London Councils believes that the GVD can be improved in a number of ways: firstly, we believe that the review of the GVD should take place in 2012 (rather than 2013) so that account can be taken of the increased efficiency of cars and emerging new technologies and also to ensure that as more vehicles qualify for the GVD, congestion does not increase and the level of subsidy required is kept at a reasonable level; and secondly, the GVD should also apply to biomethane and compressed gas fuelled vehicles. Finally, consideration should be given to introducing a sliding scale for greener vehicle discounts which varies according to the level of CO2 emissions.

### **Electric vehicle discount**

10. London Councils supports the proposal to widen the eligibility criteria for electric vehicles so that plug-in hybrid electric vehicles can qualify for a 100 per cent Congestion Charge discount. However, careful monitoring will need to take place to ensure that the use of private electric vehicles does not serve to shift travellers from more sustainable modes of travel such as public transport, walking and cycling, thus generating additional traffic.

### **Other changes**

11. London Councils does not have a view on the proposed alteration to the registration process for vehicles with nine or more seats nor the extension of the Congestion Charge exemption to any vehicles belonging to the Ministry of Defence.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/cc-consultation-supplementary-information.pdf>