

▶ London Councils' Response

▶ Transport Select Committee: Urban Congestion Inquiry

London Councils represents London's 32 borough councils and the City of London. It is a cross-party organisation that works on behalf of all of its member authorities regardless of political persuasion.

1. Integrated strategies for: managing competing demands for urban road space; shifting people from private vehicles to public and active transport modes in urban areas; and reducing urban road traffic congestion, including consideration of:

Bus priority measures (including bus lanes)

There are a number of measures that can be introduced to prioritise bus travel in urban areas. Segregated bus lanes is the obvious example, but there are also other options to consider, such as signal priority (where the lights change as a bus approaches) and filtered permeability (where buses have exclusive access through control points). Another important aspect to prioritising buses is ensuring better design of junctions, to minimise congestion and increase traffic flow (which could improve congestion for all modes).

Ensuring regular reviews of bus networks is essential. This ensures the most efficient use of resources to ensure buses aren't operated at too high/low a frequency, and also means they are able to adapt to the changing nature of demand in urban areas as they grow over time. Whilst meeting new demand is important, bus network reviews are also key to ensuring that missing provision to existing areas is also addressed.

Offering faster express buses acting as feeder services to railway stations could be another way to reduce the demand for car travel, making using public transport more convenient.

Local road pricing, including lessons from the London congestion charge and low emissions zones

Regarding the London congestion charge, according to official figures and data, there has been a 53 per cent reduction in car use in the congestion charge zone since its inception in 2003. This can also be attributed to improved public transport provision. Levels of road traffic in central London have fallen for much of the last decade, but have increased for the last two years, and this is thought to reflect the increasing population and economic growth post-recession. There have also been large increases in truck (LGV) traffic in central London, which could be attributed to the rise in e-commerce, and huge increases in the amount of roadworks in this area (362 per cent)¹. This would suggest that there needs to be a new focus on ensuring that this trend isn't long-term. Consolidation centres, and greater use of rail freight to reduce the demand for HGVs and LGVs should be considered where possible. Boroughs suggest that the Congestion Charge's effectiveness has declined over time. Its benefits have been eroded because traffic is changing away from private cars, which were the focus of the Congestion Charge, to commercial vehicles and vehicles for hire, which have increased substantially.

¹ London First (2016) London Congestion Trends

Technologies are also changing with PHVs introducing the concept of a variable cost model based on predicted times of higher congestion and this should be monitored. TfL should also investigate the impact of removing the Congestion Charge exemption for PHVs.

Road user charging could be an effective way to tackle traffic congestion and fund road maintenance in certain contexts. A lot of research from organisations such as the OECD, Friends of the Earth, and Deloitte, shows that road pricing can help to reduce congestion when planned correctly. The Department for Transport need to explore the potential technologies that could assist with more intelligent road pricing systems. While there is some fairness in charging more according to distance travelled, and this might help with public acceptability of road user charging, there is an incongruity with charging more for a long journey on uncongested roads than for a shorter journey in heavy congestion. A system that is aware of these issues would need to be developed.

The Low Emission Zone was designed to improve air quality in London, not reduce congestion. It was successful in reducing particulate matter, and to a lesser extent Nitrous Oxide air pollution. The LEZ does not impact private vehicles however. The Transport for London's air quality consultation document on the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) states that it is expected to reduce congestion when it is introduced in 2019 or 2020. While congestion and air quality measures that include restricting access for vehicles are often similar in scope, it is essential that approaches to reducing both are planned together, making the implementation more efficient and cost effective.

Parking schemes, including workplace parking levies

Workplace Parking Levies are increasingly being investigated as options for congestion reduction. London Councils notes that Nottingham City Council has introduced a workplace parking levy which is ring-fenced for extensions to the tram system, the redevelopment of the city railway station and the running of an accessible bus service for residents. The same powers are already available to many local authorities. Understandably there could be concern from business about the introduction of such a scheme, and we would encourage learning from the Nottingham scheme, for example issues with the 'cliff-edge' nature of a boundary based charge, with a gradually reducing zonal charge suggested. A number of boroughs voiced their concern with this policy, believing it could have negative impacts on businesses, and therefore employment opportunities.

A form of Parkway stations with express buses linked to residential areas located on the London boundary could reduce demand for rail-heading to get cheaper fares with the consequent additional car trips.

Cycling and walking infrastructure

While no data is available to assess the effect of recent cycling and pedestrian infrastructure improvements on congestion, TfL's most recent monitoring report on the effectiveness of the Congestion Charge (dated July 2008) states that some of the benefits realised from the Congestion Charge was offset by reduced road space following improvements to pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, such as the remodelling of Trafalgar Square². In the medium to long term, improved cycling infrastructure can help to relieve congestion, if modal shift is achieved, as this would see more people move from private vehicles to cycling. But there must be an acknowledgement that physical changes to road space on the scale of the Cycle Superhighways seen in London, need to be well designed and accompanied by significant wider measures to reduce the level of general traffic demand, otherwise they might not prove as effective.

London Councils supports the improved and increased provision of cycle infrastructure, as we believe it is key to encouraging a greater shift to cycling across London and the UK, which will have positive impacts on air quality and congestion in the long term. We feel many cities across the UK could learn from London's progress in this area. We support Cycle Superhighways – and related segregated cycle schemes nationally, where planned appropriately and believe they can benefit from further development to ensure they maximise their potential to deliver safety. Cycling infrastructure needs to be well designed and of high quality if it is to encourage modal shift, and needs to for part of holistic urban design plans which prioritise sustainable transport modes (including walking and public transport). It is essential that the public are provided supporting infrastructure (for example bicycle

² Transport for London, 2008, Congestion Charge impacts monitoring – sixth annual report, released July 2008

parking spaces and showers at work) to encourage cycling, as well as information that encourages active travel modes. This could include providing more information at bus/tube/tram/metro stops on walking times between various locations, as well as more signage to the nearest available bike hire site. Improving streetscapes and urban environments to make places more attractive, and therefore encouraging walking is important (for example, by providing more green infrastructure and pedestrianised areas) as well as improve air pollution. The new Mayor's focus on a holistic approach to street design (inclusive, safe and accessible) is welcomed. London Councils supports the objective of encouraging modal shift to more active transport, as well as public transport.

London Councils have been involved with a number of projects on modal shift, for instance the PTP Cycle which is a project co-funded by the Intelligent Energy-Europe Programme granted by the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME). PTP aims to influence people's decision making by providing information directly to the individual on sustainable mobility options through a one to one discussion with a PTP Adviser. The resulting information pack is then hand-delivered, leading to a greater likelihood of behaviour change than a one-size-fits-all-approach. A report on the project notes that over two phases 7,193 PTPs were delivered to residents in the London borough of Haringey. In phase 2 the follow-up survey revealed that 16.7% of residents in the project area changed their travel behaviour to a more sustainable mode of travel as a result. This dissemination of information on sustainable alternative modes of transport could be encouraged more.

It is important to bear in mind that this issue isn't just relevant to city and urban centres, but can also apply to situations like the 'school run' in suburban and also rural areas, which is a key cause of congestion at peak times. The STARS (Sustainable Travel Accreditation and Recognition for Schools) will develop a pan-EU accreditation scheme and a peer-to-peer engagement programme to get more children cycling to school in 9 EU cities, including the London Borough of Hackney. The project aims to attain a 5% modal shift from car to bike for journeys to school, and engage over 270 primary and secondary schools across Europe. In the interim review of the projects' first year, it showed that car journeys to primary schools fell by 10.8 per cent with cycling increasing by 12 per cent. In the secondary schools taking part, the modal shift to 'active modes' (walking and cycling) grew by 6.9 per cent³.

Street-running tram and trolley-bus systems

The evidence available around the impact of trams on congestion is broadly positive; in the cities that do operate light rail in the UK, the results suggest a significant increase in patronage over time — with total journeys on this mode more than doubling between 1997/98 and 2009/10⁴. Extending tram networks is a good option for improving the speed and reliability of orbital journeys in suburban areas, where bus and rail links are poor and cars are the only real option. Trams also have advantage of having a clearly defined and readily understandable network, given their visibility, which buses lack, which could be a deterrent to use. The main barriers to implementation of light rail in the UK are financial cost and lack of physical space. In many UK contexts, relatively low residential density results in corridor patronage demands that do not justify the costs of light rail. Physical space is also a barrier, particularly in historic urban centres where narrow streets would prevent operation of modern trams without significant re-development and thus costs. There is also some evidence that the implementing tram systems in the UK is more expensive than in Europe, mainly due to the requirement to relocate utilities from below the tracks, more intensive measures to separate trams from other road users, an absence of common standards and the lack of a steady investment pipeline⁵. The UK needs to learn from the experiences in Europe, for example in Spain, to make the tram schemes more affordable and enable effective on-street running. There are also a number of developments in the area of innovative new technologies for trams, such as the new battery-powered trams to be implemented in Birmingham, which don't require overhead lines to be installed.

Technological innovations such as intelligent transport systems and telematics (in use in the insurance industry).

The use of Smart Traffic Management (STM) systems are where centrally-controlled traffic signals and sensors regulate the flow of traffic through the city in response to demand. Having a wide-reaching network of STM can

³ STARS (2015) Interim Review (Monitoring and Evaluation Report for 2013-14)

⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/252807/rail-trends-factsheet-2012-13.pdf

⁵ <http://www.raeng.org.uk/RAE/media/Publications/Reports/The-Transport-Congestion-Challenge.pdf>

reduce congestion due to improved traffic flows, give priority to buses approaching junctions, phasing lights to give traffic flowing with buses a 'green wave', and enable a much more effective response to traffic incidents.

There could be an opportunity to provide more detailed traffic alerts in urban centres through telematics, and use of smart motorway technology – providing useful, up-to-date, information on traffic to drivers, enabling them to make better decisions. The technologies used on smart motorways are a mixture of message signs and signals, CCTV, vehicle detection and variable mandatory speed limit enforcement. Some of these could be used in the UK's major cities where appropriate, to help provide up-to-date information to drivers, helping them make better decisions when planning, or during, a journey. We support the trialling of the use of technologies to improve journey experiences across city roads. Open sourcing this information will enable the private sector to develop standalone solutions or integrate this information with their own transport planning activity.

Demand Management measures, such as integrated urban mobility (use of multi-modal, public and private transport solutions), will be an important component in reducing the number of non-essential car journeys made on UK city roads in a way that is attractive to the public. Such measures should take into account public transport accessibility, urban landscapes and social exclusion to ensure they are as effective for as wide an audience as possible. Local authorities need to understand how they can influence the Mobility as a Service (MaaS) solutions that are being developed.

While these sorts of interventions have a role to play in the intelligent management of traffic in urban areas, it should be noted that systems such as SCOOT are already being used across the UK. Schemes such as this can help smooth traffic flow and prioritise buses, but will not provide a step-change in traffic congestion unless used alongside other measures.

2. Wider considerations

Managing disruption to local communities and businesses during construction and operation

London's lane rental scheme has been highlighted as a successful means of reducing roadworks, and creating income. At the moment, lane rental is only in operation on a small proportion of roads, the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN). The lane rental scheme was introduced on the TLRN in 2012 and currently applies to 56% of the TfL road network. London Councils believes that this has been effective in managing road-space and ensuring that necessary works are undertaken in a timely manner whilst reducing highway occupation and minimising congestion. Not only does this reduce congestion, it also provided revenue which can be used to improve the road network. London Councils urges DfT to allow the extension of Lane Rental to further traffic-sensitive locations at the most traffic-sensitive times of day across the whole of Greater London i.e. allow schemes to be developed for the most important borough roads too. The legislative powers for local authorities to do this already exist but authorities require DfT approval to operate a Lane Rental scheme. DfT have only approved two pilot schemes so far, TfL and Kent County Council. They have committed to review the results of both schemes as well as the impact on utility companies before approving further schemes. Any DfT response or debate from Ministers whether they will consider further schemes should be carefully considered. More benefit could also be delivered if the rules around spending Lane Rental income were relaxed a little. Authorities should also be able to challenge the duration of works at any time.

There is a need to ensure all key stakeholders engage with each other to improve works coordination. For example, local authorities, transport service providers, utilities and developers could work together more transparently to provide more effective information sharing to ensure roadworks cause as little impact as possible. As mentioned above, lane rental has been deemed a success and it would be interesting to learn whether an extension of this across the UK would be welcomed by local authorities themselves.

Additional Information

Alternative working models

Places of employment, private or public sector, should look into the possibility for alternative working models to be adopted at their organisations. Organisations that implement innovative alternative working policies should be supported by their local authorities and the national government. Encouraging flexi-working could also be a potential contributor to reducing congestion, allowing staff flexible working hours outside of the usual working weekday. Another example is the need for employers to have access to improved 'superfast' broadband

connections and the associated infrastructure, so that workplaces can provide 'virtual meeting' technologies confidently. These types of facilities could encourage organisations to allow their staff to work from home more often, knowing they have the necessary ability to work with no reduced productivity.

Learning from other cities

There is no one city-wide strategy that can be adopted to reduce congestion and its impacts and there are few cities that compare to London in terms of its size, streets, complexity and society. Despite this, lessons can still be learnt from London's similarities to other global cities, and applied to different contexts. We encourage the Mayor and TfL to learn from the experiences of other international and UK cities, in the way that they restrict traffic movement, promote walking and cycling, and have integrated public transport; for example cities like Oxford. Further abroad, there are a series of cities looking to restrict car usage, by creating routes and places where walking and cycling is the method of transport opted for. For example, Oslo in Norway is planning to permanently ban all cars from the centre, and replace 35 miles of roads with bike lanes, while Madrid are looking for a modal shift from driving to walking by again banning cars from certain areas. These are just a few examples from a number of innovative projects from around the world⁶. There are also many examples of innovative policies to restrict car use in cities such as Copenhagen, Helsinki, Milan and Nottingham.

Inefficient use of space

There needs to be a clear acknowledgement that the private car, particularly when transporting a single occupant, is a poor use of road capacity. Therefore more needs to be done to encourage efficient uses of road space which will need to include both clear regulations and incentives.

Alongside this there should be a recognition that in many areas the space available for the storage of vehicles is exceeded by demand. In addition the storage of vehicles is an inefficient use of land in London, which is struggling to provide housing to support its growing population. With this in mind it would be positive if national planning policy recognised that, in urban environments where there are sustainable travel options, using land for excessive car parking provision may be unnecessary and strict maximum limits should be set with all parking needs accommodated onsite. Related to this consideration could be given to whether CPZs or similar area based approaches could be used to discourage excessive vehicle ownership.

⁶ UK Business Insider