House of Commons
Transport Committee

URBAN CHARGING SCHEMES

First Report of Session 2002–03

Volume I

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House of Commons
Transport Committee

URBAN CHARGING SCHEMES

First Report of Session 2002–03

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TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

The Transport Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Transport and its associated public bodies.

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Footnotes

In the footnotes of this Report, references to oral evidence are indicated by ‘Q’ followed by the question number. References to written evidence are indicated by the page number as in ‘UCS 12’.

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1 Chris Grayling MP (Conservative, Epsom and Ewell), was appointed on 23 July 2002 and discharged on 2 December 2002; Helen Jackson MP (Labour, Sheffield Hillsborough) was appointed on 23 July 2002 and discharged on 13 January 2003
2 Appointed on 13 January 2003
3 Appointed on 2 December 2002
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FIRST REPORT

The Transport Committee has agreed to the following Report:

URBAN CHARGING SCHEMES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On 17 February 2003 the London congestion charging scheme is expected to come into effect. From that date, motorists who wish to drive into, or within, the area of central London bounded by the Inner Ring Road between the hours of 7.00 am and 6.30 pm, Monday to Friday, will be charged £5. The central London congestion charging scheme is the responsibility of the Mayor of London, and is to be operated by Transport for London under the powers granted by the Greater London Authority Act 1999.

2. A road user charging scheme on a smaller scale, operated under powers granted to local authorities in the Transport Act 2000, was implemented in Durham city centre in October 2002. With certain exceptions, vehicles wishing to drive into the narrow street system serving the peninsula on the River Wear between 10.00 am and 4.00 pm, Monday to Saturday, are now subject to a charge of £2, payable at the single exit from the charging zone.

3. These two urban charging schemes, very different in scale, are the first fruits of the Government’s policy, initially set out in the Integrated Transport White Paper of July 1999\(^1\), of reducing road congestion and improving urban transport either by charging vehicle users for their use of urban road space, or by levying charges on employers based on the number of parking spaces they provide for their employees. The White Paper provided the first indication of the Government’s firm intention to give the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority powers to introduce road user charging and/or a workplace parking levy as part of an overall transport strategy.\(^2\) Breaking the Logjam, issued in December 1998 as a daughter document to the White Paper, set out the Government’s detailed proposals for the introduction of local road user charging schemes and workplace parking levies in England and Wales and sought to consult on them.\(^3\) The conclusions of the consultation exercise were published in February 2000.\(^4\) The broad conclusions the Government drew from the consultation were that the powers proposed could be valuable in assisting local authorities to meet their objectives in respect of local transport provision and environmental protection, provided they were used in an integrated framework.

4. The then Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee examined the White Paper in 1999 and concluded, in part, that the significant reductions in road traffic required in some urban areas to meet air quality standards, to alleviate road congestion or to address other environmental issues “will not be achieved without powerful disincentives to use cars such as road user charging.”\(^5\) The Government agreed that traffic management measures were needed to alleviate the effects of congestion, as air quality standards in

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\(^2\) It had previously only indicated that these issues were under Ministerial consideration, e.g. in the White Paper on London government A Mayor and Assembly for London: The Government’s proposals for modernising the governance of London, Cm 3897, March 1998, para 5.42. This developed policy options set out in the Green Paper New Leadership for London (DETR, July 1997).

\(^3\) Breaking the Logjam: the Government’s consultation paper on fighting traffic congestion and pollution and workplace parking charges, DETR, December 1998. A similar consultation paper was published by the Scottish Executive in July 1999: Tackling Congestion: the Scottish Executive’s consultation paper on fighting traffic congestion and pollution through road user and workplace parking charges, Scottish Executive Development Department, July 1999.

\(^4\) Breaking the Logjam: the Government’s response to the consultation, DETR, February 2000

congested areas could not be improved simply by the imposition of more stringent vehicle emission standards.⁶

5. The Government indicated that once legislation was put in place it would work with local authorities to develop pilot schemes for urban road user charging and workplace parking levies, which would need to be individually approved by the Secretary of State. The effects of the schemes would be monitored and on the basis of this monitoring detailed guidance would be developed for further schemes. The Government also undertook to ensure that "schemes are designed and implemented in ways which support the vitality of town and city centres and do not result in the dispersal of development. We will not permit their use as a general revenue raising device". It said there would be "a strong presumption against allowing both new charges to be levied in the same area at the same time."⁷

6. Our predecessor Committee last examined this aspect of the Government’s transport policy in its report on the 10 Year Plan for Transport in May 2002.⁸ It was concerned then that the Government had significantly downplayed the contribution which it expected local charging schemes to make to meeting the policy objectives to be carried forward by means of the 10 Year Plan. On the eve of the introduction of the largest of the charging schemes envisaged by the Government, this Committee thought it appropriate to examine its assumptions and the overall implementation of its policy in greater detail than was possible in the earlier report.

Scope and conduct of the inquiry

7. We invited submissions on four main issues arising from the implementation of the Government’s policy:

— the benefits urban charging schemes will bring and how those are measured;
— the process of introducing charging schemes;
— the level of charge and use of the revenue raised from such schemes; and
— the current and future technology requirements of the schemes.

Our findings and observations are set out below. Given the scale of the scheme to be introduced in London, and the particular powers of the Mayor in relation to the London scheme, we have examined this separately. We have also considered the development of the Government’s overall policy on urban charging schemes in the light of the progress report on the 10 Year Plan which the Secretary of State presented to the House on 17 December.⁹

8. The Committee received written evidence from the Department for Transport, Transport for London, the Transport Committee of the London Assembly, the major motoring organisations, several local authorities, representative business organisations and individual businesses likely to be affected by congestion charging, and members of the public. We took oral evidence from the Member for Vauxhall, Kate Hoey MP, from those local authorities actively considering implementing road user charging or workplace parking levy schemes, from the Mayor of London and Transport for London, and from the Commission for Integrated Transport, the RAC Foundation for Motoring and the Secretary of State for Transport. Transport for London Street Management also provided a demonstration of the numberplate recognition technology to be used in the London scheme,

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⁷ Cm 3950, para 4.111
and a briefing on its application. We are grateful to all those who submitted written evidence or gave oral evidence for their assistance.

9. The Government’s integrated transport policy applies to England and Wales. In London, ultimate responsibility for the congestion charging scheme rests with the Mayor of London, who is directly answerable to the London Assembly for his implementation of the scheme. We do not seek to overshadow or second-guess the detailed and ongoing technical scrutiny of the scheme which the Transport Committee of the Assembly (and its predecessor, the Transport Policy and Spatial Development Committee) has been undertaking since the Mayor’s initial proposals were announced in July 2000. We note the publication in December 2002 of the Assembly Committee’s most recent report on the implementation of the scheme. We believe it appropriate to examine the London congestion charging scheme, though we do not seek to duplicate the London Assembly’s work. The impact of the Mayor’s scheme is likely to stretch far beyond the capital. If it is not successful, other authorities will be deterred from introducing charging. This will reduce their ability to cut congestion and raise the revenue necessary to improve public transport. Lessons from the London scheme will be of vital importance for the future development of urban charging schemes and the Government’s overall policy to reduce urban congestion.

10. The Scottish Executive is developing its own transport policies, for which it is answerable to the Scottish Parliament and its Transport and Environment Committee. Similar powers for road user charging—but not workplace parking licensing—were given to Scottish local authorities by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001. Edinburgh City Council is presently consulting on the New Transport Initiative (NTI), its proposal for the introduction of a road user charging scheme in Edinburgh city centre from summer 2006. In its Regional Development Strategy for 2025, the Northern Ireland Executive has also indicated its intention to explore the possibility of using road user charging and workplace parking levy schemes as a means of raising finance for public services. While responsibility for transport policy in Scotland and Northern Ireland rests with their respective administrations, it is clearly desirable that policies on road user charging throughout the United Kingdom should be closely related, and that the charging technology should be interoperable. We urge the UK Government and the devolved administrations to co-operate closely on the development of charging schemes.

11. The European Transport White Paper, published in 2001, has proposed a framework directive on the principles of charging for transport infrastructure. The responsible Commissioner, Loyola de Palacio, has called for a definition of “common principles for fair charging for the different modes of transport. This new framework for charging should both promote the use of less polluting modes and less congested networks and prepare the way for new types of infrastructure financing.” The European Commission originally contemplated issuing a framework directive to establish the principles of infrastructure charging in 2002. Bristol City Council, which has worked closely with other European cities in developing its proposals for road user charging, indicates that the directive is now to be published in the spring of 2003. The implications of the directive are likely to reach

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10 For example, Scrutiny of the Mayor’s proposals for congestion charging: report of findings, Transport Committee, London Assembly, October 2002. See also UCS 41, para 1.3.
12 Transport (Scotland) Act 2001(2001 asp 2), Sections 49–67
13 Details of the Edinburgh proposals are available at www.edinburgh.gov.uk/traffic/NTI. The City of Edinburgh Council has agreed that the people of Edinburgh could be invited to decide on the Council’s preferred scheme in a referendum: City of Edinburgh Council Minutes, Year 2002/03, Meeting 6, 17 October 2002.
15 European transport policy for 2010: time to decide, European Commission, 2001, p 2
16 UCS 28, Ev 83
far beyond the Government’s policy on urban charging schemes. The Government, in its negotiations on any future European transport infrastructure directive, should ensure that it secures sufficient flexibility to enable the future implementation of local and national charging schemes without the imposition of unnecessary restrictions.

II. CHARGING SCHEMES AND URBAN CONGESTION

12. There is a growing perception that traffic congestion on roads in many major conurbations has now reached unacceptable levels. Mr Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, told us that

I have lived in [London] all my life and the traffic has got worse all my life and we were getting to a point where we had to tackle the problem... I did not want to be in a position that, two or three years down the road when we finally get permanent gridlock in London, people say to me “Why didn’t you do something about it?”

It has long been a journalistic cliché that the average speed of a motor vehicle crossing central London is the same as that of a horse-drawn vehicle crossing the capital a century ago. When our predecessors undertook an inquiry into urban road pricing in the 1994–95 Session, witnesses from the business community and the environmental lobby alike stressed the need for a substantial reduction in congestion, although motoring and road haulage concerns disputed whether traffic congestion in urban areas general, and in London in particular, had reached unacceptable levels outside peak hours. While there was some dispute over the extent at which vehicle use might increase, there was more general agreement that the capacity of the urban road network could not itself be increased to match projected demands, and that some form of traffic restraint would therefore be necessary to alleviate congestion.

13. The Government has estimated that 80 per cent of the 1.6 billion hours calculated to have been wasted by drivers and passengers on British roads in 1996 had been lost to congestion in urban areas. Department of Transport research in 1996–97 indicated that during the rush hour in outer London one fifth of a vehicle’s journey time was spent stationary, while in central London the proportion could be as much as one third. In 1998 the Government estimated that the delay caused to individual journeys by overall levels of congestion in urban areas could lengthen by 70 per cent by 2018. In his evidence to us Professor David Begg, Chair of the Commission for Integrated Transport (CfIT), broadly confirmed this assessment. He estimated that between 70 and 80 per cent of the total national level of congestion occurs in urban areas, and of that, 40 per cent occurs in Greater London. The relative importance of inter-urban and urban congestion will be further addressed when we report on the Government’s programme of multi-modal studies.

14. The Government’s initial projections of congestion over the period 2000–01 to 2010–11, calculated to inform the 10 Year Plan for Transport, published in July 2000, indicated that without corrective action the levels of congestion in London could worsen by 13 per cent, and in other urban areas by 15 per cent. The Secretary of State has since

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17 Q 64
18 Third Report from the Transport Committee, Session 1994–95, Urban Road Pricing, HC 104, paras 17–18
19 Ibid., para 19
20 Ibid., paras 20–26
21 Breaking the Logjam, para 2.2
22 Ibid.
23 Cm 3950, para 2.17
24 UCS 30 (“over 70 per cent”); Q 175 (“over 80 per cent”)
25 Transport 2010: the Background Analysis, figure 13. See below, para 86.
told the House that the problem of overall traffic congestion was worse than had been estimated in 2000, and that greater than expected economic growth would lead to increased traffic levels, and increased levels of congestion, over the period of the Plan.\(^{26}\)

15. Our predecessors have been sharply critical of the methods used by the Department to measure and express levels of traffic congestion. We set out the reasons for this at greater length below. Nevertheless, we accept that the problem of urban traffic congestion is significant, even if it cannot at present be accurately quantified. The undesirable consequences of urban congestion are therefore likely to increase substantially if the present problem is not adequately addressed. In the Commission for Integrated Transport's memorandum, Professor Begg stated that "congestion is seriously blighting the lives of an increasing number of people. It is important to realise that to do nothing is not an option."\(^ {27}\)

16. What the Government, the Mayor, Professor Begg and others among our witnesses have proposed as part of the solution is the introduction of charges for road use in urban areas. This concept was first considered seriously by the Government in the early 1960s, but not developed as a policy option until the mid-1990s.\(^ {28}\) It has, however, been tested elsewhere. The first large-scale urban charging scheme was introduced in Singapore in 1975, and charging schemes were introduced in the Norwegian cities of Trondheim and Oslo in the 1980s.

17. Professor Begg pointed out that roads were the only public utility or transport system which were free at the point of use. As long as there was sufficient road space to accommodate all road users comfortably, the issue of charging did not arise, but now demand on the urban road network had to be managed if gridlock was to be avoided: "the only realistic long-term policy [for reducing congestion] includes demand restraint in the form of congestion charging."\(^ {29}\) The RAC Foundation for Motoring has stated that it supports the principle of road user charging "as a means of managing demand on the busiest and most congested roads during times of peak demand."\(^ {30}\) The Freight Transport Association is similarly supportive of the principle, though it believes that freight vehicles should be exempt from charges.\(^ {31}\)

18. The arguments underlying the principle of road user charging are essentially economic. It is argued that motorists using scarce road space at busy times should be obliged to pay a charge representing the cost of the occupation of the road space. This charge is in effect a pricing mechanism, which is intended to increase the net cost of car use at particular times and reduce the relative attractiveness of the private car as a means of transport, and to encourage the use of more sustainable public transport alternatives which contribute less to congestion. Revenues generated through charging can be applied to the development of alternative transport modes which can reduce congestion and alleviate its ill effects.

19. Different charging schemes have different objectives. The two Norwegian charging schemes are of limited duration, and the revenue raised from them is intended to fund major transport infrastructure projects which will themselves reduce congestion. It is said that the initially high level of public resistance to the Norwegian schemes diminished as the benefits of reduced congestion were appreciated, and once the road users of Oslo and Trondheim were convinced that the revenue raised from the charge was being used to

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\(^{26}\) HC Deb, 17 December 2002, col 710

\(^{27}\) UCS 30, Ev 92


\(^{29}\) UCS 30, Ev 92–93

\(^{30}\) UCS 43, Ev 125

\(^{31}\) UCS 09, Ev 46
deliver tangible improvements in the road network. The Singapore scheme was introduced principally to manage demand for road space. The Automobile Association argued that public acceptance of road user charging in Singapore is high, as the charges imposed on the motorist have been balanced out through a reduction in motoring taxation.

20. The twin objectives of charging schemes in England and Wales, as proposed by the Government, are a reduction in the level of congestion in urban areas, and the generation of revenue to fund public transport improvements. These two objectives, often presented as a package, are not necessarily complementary. A highly successful charging scheme may reduce congestion by more than is envisaged: consequently, there may be less revenue available for the promised improvements which are intended to encourage car users onto public transport. Conversely, an inefficient scheme which does not reduce urban congestion may nevertheless generate substantial revenues in charges and penalties. The primary objective of an urban charging scheme must be to make significant reductions in traffic congestion.

21. There is no doubt about the environmental ill effects of congestion, and there is no doubt that its impacts on business and on individuals are significant. The difficulty lies in finding measures to deal with it which do not themselves adversely affect the quality of urban life and its attractiveness to business. There are of course other ways in which congestion may be reduced, without the imposition of a charging scheme, such as better road design, efficient traffic management measures or even more considerate driving and parking. The Secretary of State, in evidence to us, made clear that he regarded charging schemes as only one means of reducing congestion in urban areas. Some urban areas, by virtue of their topography, may be ill-suited to charging schemes; other areas may find that very substantial improvements to public transport are necessary before it can be considered as a plausible alternative to car use. The economic impact of a charging scheme on an urban area may be prohibitive, as motorists who were used to driving to city centres for shopping and business find it easier to drive to out-of-town shopping centres and business parks instead. Charging schemes have the potential to make significant reductions in congestion and to improve the capacity, speed and reliability of public transport, but it is important that such schemes are designed to enhance the urban environment. Schemes which merely displace traffic from a city centre to suburban or inter-urban road networks may cure urban congestion at the price of urban decline, and will lead to problems elsewhere on the road network.

Measuring congestion

22. Congestion cannot be effectively tackled until the root causes are identified and their effects measured. The impact of an urban charging scheme in reducing congestion and its effects cannot be properly assessed unless a reliable means of assessing, expressing and measuring levels of congestion is in place. Mr David Holmes, of the RAC Foundation’s Public Policy Committee, believed that “there does need to be a more acceptable definition of congestion in order to be able to monitor what the effects are.”

23. However, the Government has admitted that “an ideal measure [of congestion] has yet to be identified.” The Commission for Integrated Transport, in its advice to Government, had proposed a measure “based on the total amount of delay encountered, calculated across all traffic from the difference between the actual speed encountered and

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32 Q 50 (Councillor Helen Holland, Bristol City Council)
33 UCS 42
34 Q 240
35 Q 223
free flow speed” (free flow speed being defined, for each particular type of road, as “the speed at which vehicles typically travel when there is very little traffic on that road.”) The Government eschewed that measure in favour of one which divided the C4T “estimate of total delay by the volume of traffic to give the average amount of delay encountered by a vehicle travelling one kilometre.” It argued that this better reflected the way that changes in traffic levels contributed to the total loss of time to congestion over an average journey. But it recognised that both these measures were open to criticism on the grounds that they did not build in variations in time over a given journey, or the relative importance of delay to different types of journey.\textsuperscript{37}

24. Although the Government has repeatedly questioned the appropriateness of the congestion measure, and promised further work on its definition, this measure was the one which largely drove the assumptions behind the policy and investment conclusions of the 10 Year Plan for Transport, issued in July 2000.\textsuperscript{38} Our predecessor Committee took extensive evidence on the reliability of the congestion measure as an instrument for determining roads policy, and analysed it in its initial report on the Plan.\textsuperscript{39} It concluded that the only clear purpose served by the congestion measure was “to multiply almost insignificant journey time savings into comforting numbers that the traveller does not understand.” It called for a re-examination of the measure, and a more explicit and informative analysis of the real changes to journey times, and their day-to-day variability, which would result from the implementation of the Plan.\textsuperscript{40}

25. The Government acknowledged that the measure chosen was only one of several means of assessing congestion, but asserted that it was “realistic, measurable and forecastable.”\textsuperscript{41} Despite our concerns, and the misgivings about the measure expressed by Ministers and officials, this measure is still, for the time being, the one which is used to assess and determine Government policy towards congestion. Mr Derek Turner, Director of Street Management at Transport for London (TfL), confirmed that the measure used by TfL to assess congestion on London’s roads was the same as that used by the Department: for urban roads the measure reflected “the average amount of time spent stationary in traffic queues by vehicle occupants.”\textsuperscript{42} In October the Secretary of State did indicate to us that congestion measures were being re-examined:

\begin{quote}
We are looking and we will continue to look at a range of measures for looking at congestion and of evaluating the progress we are making, and I suspect in congestion, rather like measuring poverty, there is no one measure that captures everything that you want to look at. It makes sense therefore for us to look at a range of measures, and when we have come to a conclusion, of course we will tell Parliament.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

26. In its progress report on the 10 Year Plan, published in December 2002, the Government accepted that the congestion measure represented an average across the entire network, rather than an identification of particular congestion points or the specific causes of congestion at such points. It now concedes that the indicator does not reflect some aspects of a vehicle journey, such as journey reliability or time spent travelling below a certain speed, which motorists may find more meaningful.\textsuperscript{44} \textbf{The present indicator used to measure congestion, while arguably well-fitted to the abstract task of national}

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., paras 39–40
\textsuperscript{38} Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, July 2000
\textsuperscript{39} HC (2001–02) 558, paras 17–22
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., para 22
\textsuperscript{41} Government Response to the Eighth Report of the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Session 2001–02, on 10 Year Plan for Transport, Cm 5569, p 4
\textsuperscript{42} UCS 29b
\textsuperscript{43} Q 263
\textsuperscript{44} Delivering Better Transport: Progress Report, paras 7.8–7.9
policy modelling, is of no help at all in demonstrating the actual problems of congestion in urban areas. The public will want to know how urban charging schemes will improve their daily journeys. Simple and transparent indicators should be developed to reflect these important concerns.

27. The Government has also stated that it is examining how better to identify congestion ‘hotspots’ so that they can be tackled. In the context of urban congestion, this is an admission which we find puzzling. Any regular driver into or around an urban area—indeed, any regular listener to ‘drive-time’ local radio—is likely to be able to reel off a list of areas where acute road congestion regularly occurs. Areas of significant urban congestion ought to be well enough known to the transport departments of local authorities, if not to the Department for Transport. Resources which the Department may be earmarking for the identification of urban congestion hotspots would be better allocated to addressing the actual problems of congestion at those locations already identified.

III. LOCAL AUTHORITY CHARGING SCHEMES

28. Through the Transport Act 2000, the Government has given local authorities in England and Wales the power to introduce schemes which may charge the motorist for the use of road space, or may levy a charge on an employer in relation to the number of parking spaces provided for employees who travel by car. Local authorities’ use of these powers are subject to approval by the Secretary of State. Similar powers were granted to the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority in the Greater London Authority Act 1999, although the Mayor does not need the Secretary of State’s approval before exercising these powers.

The Charging Development Partnership

29. The Transport Act 2000 requires local authorities to prepare five-year Local TransportPlans (LTPs), setting out their integrated transport policies and the means by which they will be delivered. Local authorities submitted their first full LTPs for the period 2001–02 to 2005–06 to the Government during 2000. In drawing up these plans, they were directed to indicate whether they intended to use the new powers to introduce road user charging or workplace parking levy, and, if so, to submit details of the timetable for introducing the charging scheme, the estimated revenues and the objectives they expected to achieve through expenditure of the hypothecated revenue. 25 authorities had expressed interest at the draft LTP stage, and they were invited to take part in a Charging Development Partnership to be established by the Department. The Department describes the Partnership as “a forum for sharing and exchange of knowledge, ideas and experience about how to take forward the new powers.” It stressed that participation in the Partnership does not commit an authority to introducing an charging scheme.

30. Twenty-four of the 25 authorities invited participated in the Partnership’s inaugural meeting in February 2000, chaired by the then Minister for Transport, Lord Macdonald of Tradeston. By February 2001, a further 11 authorities had expressed interest in charging schemes, and these were also invited to join. The Department told us that in 2000 and early 2001 meetings of the Partnership were held “about every two months”, chaired either by officials or by the host local authority. Matters considered at the meetings included communications, regulatory requirements, financing, scheme design, operation and

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45 Ibid, para 7.9
46 Transport Act 2000, sections 108 and 109
47 UCS 37, para 11
48 Ibid, para 12
impacts, and approval, appraisal and monitoring. 49 In late 2001 and 2002 the frequency of meetings lessened, as the participating authorities began to make informed decisions on whether to proceed with their proposals. The Department believed that “a core of about 15 local authorities have attended most of the meetings”: participation by other authorities has fluctuated depending on local interest in congestion charging. The Department admitted that many local authorities “have adopted a cautious approach to congestion charging.” 50 It has now indicated that, outside London, it does not expect any major urban charging schemes to be implemented until the end of the 10 Year Plan period. 51

### Table 1

**Local authorities participating in the Charging Development Partnership**

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<td>Bath and North East Somerset Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birmingham City MBC (West Midlands)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bolton MBC (Greater Manchester)*</td>
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<td>Bristol City Council*</td>
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<td>Bury MBC (Greater Manchester)*</td>
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<td>Cheshire County Council*</td>
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<td>Cumbria County Council</td>
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<td>Derby City Council</td>
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<td>Dudley MBC (West Midlands)*</td>
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<td>Leicester City Council</td>
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<td>Manchester MBC (Greater Manchester)*</td>
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<td>Milton Keynes Borough Council*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warwickshire County Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wigan MBC (Greater Manchester)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wolverhampton MBC (West Midlands)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York City Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Department for Transport [UCS 37, Annex A]
*— initial members of the Partnership (February 2000)

NB: All 10 Greater Manchester metropolitan borough councils (MBCs) have expressed interest in urban charging schemes. Four out of seven West Midlands MBCs have expressed interest (Coventry, Solihull and Walsall are not participating)

31. The 24 initial members of the Partnership were allocated £17.7 million in funding and credit approvals in addition to their 2000–01 Local Transport Plan settlements, to assist them in the necessary local transport improvements prior to the introduction of congestion charging. The Department states that, in general, local authorities intended to spend the money on improving transport interchanges, developing integrated ticketing systems, enhancing pedestrian and cyclist access and introducing a range of improvements to bus-related services. Further funds (in the form of ring-fenced credit approvals) have been made available to Derbyshire, Durham and Nottingham for 2001-02, and to Nottingham for 2002-03, to assist with capital expenditure necessary to scheme development. 52 The Department expects authorities to report on the use of the funds in their LTP Annual Progress Reports.

32. Once a firm decision to proceed with an urban charging scheme has been taken and costed proposals have been submitted, an authority will also be able to apply to a ‘Charging Schemes Fund’ for assistance with the capital costs of implementing the scheme. Any grants from this fund would be additional to that authority’s LTP settlement. 53 Separate funds have also been provided to enable authorities to monitor the performance of charging schemes before and after implementation: Durham County Council has been granted

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49 UCS 37a, paras 5–8
50 Ibid., para 9
51 See below, para 92
52 UCS 37a, paras 12–15
53 Ibid., para 14
£15,300 to assist the monitoring of the Durham City scheme, while Derbyshire County Council has been awarded £25,200 to monitor the rural Derwent Lane charging scheme in the Peak District National Park.

33. Guidance setting out the essential elements of charging schemes, commissioned by the Department, has been made available to authorities participating in the Partnership. Transport and Travel Research Ltd (TTR), in association with Ian Catling Consultancy and Wilbur Smith Associates, issued a preliminary guide to the design principles of an urban road user charging scheme in March 2000, while the Oscar Faber consultancy issued an initial guidance document on workplace parking levy schemes in March 2001. However, the Department itself has not published any guidance to local authorities on the development of charging schemes. The Secretary of State told us that “there is something to be said for the Department producing guidelines for the benefit of local authorities”, but that there was little point in publishing them before the implementation of the London scheme.

Table 2

Charging Development Partnership funding to participating authorities
(additional to annual Local Transport Plan settlements)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supplementary funding allocation (£m)</th>
<th>2000–01</th>
<th>2001–02</th>
<th>2002–03</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bristol City Council</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridgeshire County Council</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire County Council</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derbyshire County Council</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durham County Council</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Manchester MBCs (10)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampshire County Council</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds City Council</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton Keynes Borough Council</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottingham City Council</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Borough Council</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands MBCs (4)</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>17.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.14</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.95</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.79</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department for Transport (UCS 37a, annex A)

34. We welcome the establishment of the Charging Development Partnership to promote the effective exchange of information between councils which are contemplating the introduction of charging schemes. We believe that there is scope for the Department to develop its role in the Partnership’s activities, particularly following the implementation of the London scheme.

54 *Ibid.*, para 8
55 Q 268
Case studies

35. Local authorities wishing to implement a charging scheme in their area, or authorities in partnership wishing to implement charging across contiguous areas, are obliged to submit a Scheme Order to the Secretary of State for confirmation before it can be brought into effect. Local authorities in Wales are also subject to planning frameworks set by the Welsh Assembly Government. The Government set out a number of criteria which a scheme should satisfy before it would receive Ministerial approval:

— the scheme should be well-founded;
— it should make a real impact on congestion in its own right;
— the plans for revenue investment in local transport should be robust;
— some improvements to local transport should be in place before implementation; and
— the necessary technology should be in place to enable the scheme to operate.  

36. We have examined three of the local authority schemes which are under development: a large-scale road user charging scheme in Bristol, a small-scale traffic management scheme in Durham and a workplace parking levy scheme in Nottingham. The Durham scheme was implemented in October 2002. Nottingham expects to introduce its levy in April 2005, while Bristol presently envisages bringing in its scheme in 2007.

Workplace parking levy: Nottingham

37. In its written and oral submissions, Nottingham City Council was candid about the purpose of the workplace parking levy as a means of raising revenue to fill two gaps in the funding of the city’s Local Transport Plan: first, a ‘pump priming’ subsidy to new bus and rail services which might not otherwise be viable, and secondly, a local contribution to funding future tramway development, which it believes the Government requires before further PFI deals can be made. 

38. The Council believed that the scheme represented a relatively low risk and required a low initial outlay. In May 2002 it had commissioned a feasibility study into the benefits of road user charging as opposed to workplace parking levy. The study found that a road user charging scheme would be feasible, would be more effective at reducing traffic congestion, and would raise more revenue, but its costs would be far greater (an estimated £70 million, compared to £8.6 million for the workplace parking levy). Ms Sue Flack, Planning and Transport Strategy Manager for Nottingham City Council, also told us that the city’s geography “does not particularly suit a road user charging scheme”. In September 2002 the Council decided to develop its workplace parking levy policy for the short to medium term, while monitoring the implementation of other road user charging schemes and waiting for the Government to introduce a national standard for road user charging.

A city-wide road user charging scheme: Bristol

39. Bristol City Council has committed itself to road user charging as part of the travel demand measures incorporated in its integrated transport strategy. The charging scheme recommended by the City Council’s transport consultants is based on an inner city cordon

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56 UCS 37, para 5
57 UCS 15, para 2
58 Ibid., para 3
59 Q 15
60 UCS 15, para 3; Q 33
which operates using an electronic tag and transponder system. The system is presently in
the final stages of design and appraisal.\textsuperscript{61}

40. The Council told us that the cordon had been drawn to include the main shopping
areas within Bristol, but did not include the major residential areas in the inner city. The
scheme would operate in morning peak hours. Its key objective was to reduce the level of
traffic passing through the city centre at the morning peak.\textsuperscript{62} Previous field trials were
undertaken in Bristol in 1998 and 2000. Results of the 1998 ELGAR trial suggested that
introducing a charge at the level of £5 would encourage a 15 per cent switch from private
car use to public transport. The INTERCEPT trial in 2000 indicated that a £3 charge would
reduce private car use by 10 per cent.

41. The scheme which the City Council now proposes would set the level of charge at
between £1 and £2, rising to between £4 and £5 in later years. Mr Richard Rawlinson, the
Council’s Director of Traffic and Transportation, told us that computer modelling based
on the £1 charge, forecast a 45 per cent reduction in peak period traffic travelling into the
central area. The City Council did not, however, give us an estimate of the reduction in
congestion which it anticipated would ensue from the reduction in traffic.

42. The Council is concerned that its overall objectives for the scheme, namely
protecting and enhancing the city centre, are not shared by the Department, which it argues
has given more weight to economic factors in its guidelines for the appraisal of charging
schemes.

\textit{City centre traffic management: Durham}

43. The road user charging scheme implemented by Durham County Council in October
2002 is on a very much smaller scale. It was designed with a limited aim, namely to
“significantly reduce the pedestrian and vehicular conflict” in the Peninsula area, and
Saddler Street in particular, “by the removal of a substantial proportion of the existing
traffic.”\textsuperscript{63} The Council had previously considered introducing a permit scheme to reduce
the number of non-essential car journeys into the Peninsula area (for example, to visit
banks or shops or to try to park as close as possible to the Cathedral), but could not find a
means of differentiating between essential and non-essential traffic. The powers made
available under the 2000 Act made such differentiation feasible by means of road user
charging.\textsuperscript{64} The scheme requires vehicles using the Market Place and Saddler Street (the
only vehicular access to the Peninsula) to pay £2 on exit. It operates between 10 am and
4 pm, Monday to Saturday: access outside these times is free of charge. Residents on the
streets affected, and those with existing parking facilities within the controlled zone, are
exempt from the charge, but the Council says it has kept other exemptions to a minimum.\textsuperscript{65}
Bus services into the Market Place area have been developed and enhanced.

44. The formal consultation exercise on the proposed scheme commenced in November
2000.\textsuperscript{66} Mr Roger Elphick, Head of Highway Management Services for the County
Council, stressed the amount of consultation that had taken place beforehand. “I would say
that we have been drip-feeding the idea for three or four years now.”\textsuperscript{67}

45. The scheme is to be measured against six criteria, including the reduction of traffic
impact on the local environment, reduction of accidents and the perception of accident risk.

\textsuperscript{61} UCS 28
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} UCS 22, para 1.5
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., paras 1.7–1.8
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., paras 3.2 and 3.7
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., para 3.2
\textsuperscript{67} Q 39
and the improvement of the economic viability of the Market Place and the Peninsula area. It is expected to raise £120,000 per annum, to subsidise a new bus service into the central area, to support Durham’s Shopmobility scheme and to cover administrative costs. However, no targets have been set for revenue generation: the Council was clear that “it will be a measure of success that motorists elect not to meet the charge and that less income is generated”. In the event of a shortfall, the Council envisages assigning revenue from on-street parking charges to the support of the services to be funded out of charging revenue.  

46. Early indications are that the scheme has been extremely successful, and that traffic volumes in the central Durham area have been reduced by up to 90 per cent, rather than the 50 per cent initially projected. It is of course too early to come to a judgment about the overall impact of the scheme, although the results in terms of demand management appear encouraging. This illustrates the point we have made above. The nature of charging schemes will vary according to circumstances. A successful charging scheme may not necessarily result in net revenue gain.

IV. CONGESTION CHARGING IN LONDON

47. Unlike schemes under the Transport Act 2000, a scheme in Greater London can be brought forward by the Greater London Authority and confirmed by the Mayor of London, without reference to the Secretary of State. The Mayor has chosen to introduce congestion charging and to improve public transport in Greater London. This course is by no means risk-free, and certainly not without its drawbacks. In evidence to us Mr Livingstone admitted that “there will be winners and losers . . . it is going to be painful for many people, but people recognise that you just cannot go on with this current situation.” Decisions by local authorities on the political and technical feasibility of introducing schemes in their areas will hang very heavily on the outcome of the London scheme. Accordingly, we examine below the background to the scheme’s development, its operation, the anticipated benefits of the scheme and the measures which will be put in place to monitor its operation and its effects, both positive and negative.

Investigating options: the ROCOL study

48. The first steps in the introduction of road user charging in London were taken by the Government. In August 1998, a month after the publication of the Integrated Transport White Paper which announced that the Government would give charging powers to a future Mayor of London, the Government Office for London established the Review of Charging Options for London (ROCOL) working group, to illustrate the options for and likely effects of these powers. The ROCOL report, published in March 2000, before the election of the Mayor and the establishment of the GLA in May 2000, drew on studies prepared by consultants under contract to the Government Office for London which had considered the various charging options and their feasibility, acceptability and transport impacts. It examined the possible introduction of a road user charging scheme to be introduced within the Mayor’s first term (i.e. by May 2004), and concluded that an “area licence” scheme enforced by digital cameras reading numberplates would be “feasible and enforceable”.

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68 UCS 22, para 4.4
69 Qq 35-36; UCS 22, paras 4.2 and 4.6. The Government has also cited this figure: Delivering Better Transport: Progress Report, para 4.52
70 Schedule 23 to the Greater London Authority Act 1999 gave the Greater London Authority (GLA) the power to introduce a road user charging scheme within the GLA area, while schedule 24 to the Act granted powers for the introduction of a workplace parking levy scheme.
71 Q 98
73 ROCOL, executive summary, para 63
This would oblige drivers who moved their vehicles into, or within, a defined area of the capital between certain times of the day to purchase an entitlement to do so. This entitlement would not have to be paper-based: ROCOL believed that it would be feasible to operate an area licensing scheme monitored by digital cameras which could record licence plates and compare them against a database of users who had registered for the charge.

49. The area licence scheme which was illustrated envisaged the application of a £5 daily charge for vehicle drivers in Central London—defined as the area within, but not including, the Inner Ring Road—between 7.00 am and 7.00 pm on weekdays. It was anticipated that this scheme would cost between £30 million and £50 million to set up, and that operating, administration and enforcement costs would be between £30 million and £50 million annually. The predicted effects of the charge were to reduce weekday traffic in Central London by 10 per cent at peak times and by 12 per cent over the period from 6.00 am to 8.00 pm. Penalty charges would be set at £40, and enforced by a network of 100 cameras, 15 vehicle patrols and 20 foot patrols. It was estimated that the scheme could raise between £260 million and £320 million annually.74

50. ROCOL departed from its technical brief to set the London scheme in a political context. It considered that any Mayoral candidate intending to implement an urban charging scheme as quickly as possible, once elected (i.e. within his or her first term of office) would need to make a clear commitment to the scheme in an election manifesto. It envisaged that the earliest a Central London area licensing scheme could come into operation was the autumn of 2003, and recognised that there were several significant risks to that timetable.

51. ROCOL reviewed the available technology for direct electronic monitoring of road usage by individual vehicles within an urban area. It believed that electronic road pricing systems could ease payment and enable more flexible charging arrangements. However, it considered that the Department would not be able to develop and finalise national technical and billing standards for electronic charging systems, and provide specifications for manufacturers to produce and distribute sufficient units, in time for the implementation of a road user charging scheme based on electronic technology by the end of a Mayor’s first term. It concluded that a scheme brought forward for early implementation would have to use less advanced technology and proven systems, with an eye to compatibility with eventual development into a more sophisticated electronic scheme.75

52. One of the key arguments in support of the proposition of an area licensing scheme, supported by digital camera enforcement, was the prospect of the licensing system being used as a ‘halfway house’, enabling a charging scheme to be introduced during the Mayor’s first term, without prejudice to the eventual introduction of a more sophisticated system based on electronic monitoring of road usage by individual vehicles. Mr Derek Turner, Director of Street Management, Transport for London, told us that the Mayor was keen to adopt an electronic road pricing system, based on smartcard technology, to build on the area licensing system.76 He believed that much of the infrastructure already installed would be compatible with electronic road pricing, but the development of a second-generation system could not be investigated further until the Government had issued its minimum specifications for electronic road pricing systems. We discuss the technological requirements of future schemes in greater detail below.

74 ROCOL, paras 7.2.9–7.2.14
75 Ibid., para 7.2.13
76 Q 167
The London congestion charging scheme

53. In July 2001 the Mayor fulfilled his statutory duty to publish a transport strategy for Greater London. One of the Mayor’s 10 key priorities was to reduce traffic congestion, and a charging scheme was identified as a “primary tool” towards this aim.\(^{77}\) Stakeholder consultation in July 2000 had revealed that “six times as many stakeholders supported the concept of introducing a congestion charging scheme in Central London as opposed it”, although TfL has not identified the stakeholders consulted.\(^{78}\) The Scheme Order, providing the legal basis for the introduction of the scheme, was made later in July 2001, and put out to consultation. Transport for London’s analysis of responses to this consultation—in support, opposed or non-committal—is indicated in table 3, broken down by respondent group. TfL then proposed modifications to the Order, which it reissued in its modified form for consultation in December 2001. A report on the consultation was submitted to the Mayor, who confirmed the Scheme Order with modifications in February 2002.\(^{79}\) An application brought by Westminster City Council and the Kennington Association for judicial review of the scheme in the High Court was dismissed in July 2002. Although the scheme was due to commence in December 2002, the Mayor delayed its implementation until February 2003, apparently to allow greater time for systems to be tested.\(^{80}\)

<p>| Representations received following publication of the Scheme Order, July 2001 |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Other organisations</th>
<th>Members of the public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representations</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support scheme</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose scheme</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


54. Kate Hoey MP, Member for Vauxhall, was openly critical of Transport for London’s operation of the consultation, which she called “a bit of a sham . . . in reality the consultation in Kennington was one large meeting in which people made it very clear they did not want the boundary [of the zone to run through Kennington] and they wanted a lot of changes. They did not get any changes to that.”\(^{81}\)

Alternatives to the scheme

55. The Mayor has consistently maintained his assertion that there is no credible alternative to the scheme he is committed to introducing.\(^{82}\) Although ROCOL found that a workplace parking levy could be implemented in central London, Mr Livingstone believed that a levy of that type would not affect traffic which presently only passed through the central zone, and would therefore have less impact on overall traffic levels.\(^{83}\) Mr Turner indicated that the imposition of a workplace parking levy across Greater London

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\(^{77}\) Ibid., para 5.1.5

\(^{78}\) Ibid., para 5.1.4

\(^{79}\) Ibid., paras 5.1.7 – 5.1.10

\(^{80}\) Congestion charging: the public concerns behind the politics, para 2.2

\(^{81}\) Q 6

\(^{82}\) Q 64

\(^{83}\) Q 63
would have a severe impact on the outer London economy, which he believed was more reliant upon car use than the central zone.\textsuperscript{84}

56. The Mayor has come to the judgment that, given the present state of charging technology and his desire to introduce a scheme in his first term, the area licence scheme first proposed by ROCOL offers the best opportunity of reducing congestion in central London and the surrounding boroughs.\textsuperscript{85} This is not to say that the scheme will continue in its present state. Developments in charging technology may allow refinements which will iron out several of the flaws already identified in the scheme. Mr Livingstone told us that if he considered the scheme a success, he would start discussing a westward extension of the zone to include the boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster, which had both expressed an interest in being included.\textsuperscript{86} Mr Turner indicated that the borough of Tower Hamlets was interested in an eastward extension of the zone.\textsuperscript{87}

57. Alternative schemes have been examined outside TfL. The Transport Committee of the London Assembly has published the proceedings of the seminar it convened in January 2002 to examine what alternatives were available.\textsuperscript{88} Mr Stephen Plowden, a transport consultant, has criticised the scheme’s reliance on a flat £5 entry charge, and has argued that a distance-based pricing mechanism would be more effective in discouraging long car journeys and would remove the difficulties which the imposition of the charging boundary has caused.\textsuperscript{89} Mr Bob Kiley, Commissioner of Transport for London, was careful not to eschew other means of addressing congestion in the capital: “I do not think that we should fall into the trap of believing that congestion charging is the single tool and the panacea that will solve all of central London’s congestion problems, never mind all of London’s congestion problems.”\textsuperscript{90} It is also open to the Mayor to consider a workplace parking levy scheme.

\textit{Operation of the scheme}

58. Between 7.00 am and 6.30 pm, Monday to Friday (but not on public holidays), vehicles travelling into or within the congestion charging zone will be subject to a daily charge of £5. Drivers may pay the charge in advance or up to midnight on the day (although, to deter late payment, the charge is doubled to £10 for payment between 10 pm and midnight on the day the charge is incurred). Payment may be made by credit card over the telephone or over the Internet, in cash at retail outlets or by post.\textsuperscript{91} Payment machines are available in certain central locations, including main car parks, and registered users will also be able to pay via text message. Daily, weekly, monthly and annual passes may be purchased in advance. An automated account scheme is available to businesses operating light vans and light and heavy goods vehicles. However, there is no provision for car drivers making occasional or unplanned journeys into the zone to make advance payments into an account which can then be debited every time their vehicle incurs the charge.

59. Certain categories are entitled to a discount on the charge, or a full exemption. Residents who keep vehicles within the zone are entitled to a 90 per cent discount on the charge, although the minimum period for which they can claim the discount is one charging week (i.e. five days). Exemptions are extended to registered disabled people; London-

\textsuperscript{84} Qq 127–133
\textsuperscript{85} UCS 28, para 5.1.3
\textsuperscript{86} Q 80
\textsuperscript{87} Q 165
\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Alternatives to Congestion Charging: proceedings of a seminar held by the Transport Policy Committee, Transport Policy and Spatial Development Policy Committee, London Assembly, March 2002}
\textsuperscript{89} UCS 13, para 6
\textsuperscript{90} Q 134
\textsuperscript{91} UCS 28, paras 4.3–4.5. Although TfL indicated to us that the designated retail outlets would include “selected newsagents, Post Offices and petrol stations”, the Mayor has since been unable to reach agreement with the Post Office over its participation in the scheme.
registered taxis and minicabs; motorcycles; coaches and minibuses with over nine seats licensed for use within London, and certain vehicles using alternative fuels. Emergency service vehicles, including breakdown service vehicles, are also exempt from the charge. Some public service employees (NHS staff and Fire Brigade and police officers) will be entitled to claim reimbursement on the charge they have paid.\textsuperscript{92}

60. The numberplates of vehicles for which the charge has been paid, or which are exempt, are to be entered on a database which is maintained under the authority of TfL. TfL has contracted the maintenance of this database out to Capita Group plc.\textsuperscript{93} Cameras mounted at the entry points to the zone, and at certain ‘screen lines’ within the zone, will use automatic numberplate recognition technology (ANPR) to capture and record the numberplates of vehicles entering and moving about within the zone at times when the charging scheme is active and register them in a separate database.

61. At midnight on each charging day, the two databases will be compared. The numberplate details of those vehicles which have entered the zone or moved within it, but have not paid the charge or registered for an exemption, will be passed to the DVLA, which will supply TfL with the details of the registered keeper of each vehicle which has moved within the charging zone and not paid the charge. TfL will issue penalty charges of £80 by post to the registered keepers of vehicles which have not paid the charge. The penalty is reduced to £40 for prompt payment, and increased to £120 for late payment. TfL’s enforcement powers extend to clamping or removing vehicles belonging to persistent evaders of penalty charges on any public road within the Greater London boundary.\textsuperscript{94} The Mayor suggested that the vehicles of particularly egregious offenders might be seized and, as a last resort, crushed.\textsuperscript{95} Transport for London also told us that there were mechanisms in place to recover penalty charges from evaders resident outside Greater London.\textsuperscript{96}

\textit{Benefits of the scheme}

62. TfL anticipates that the scheme will have two simultaneous benefits: the reduction of traffic congestion and the provision of revenue to fund other elements of the Mayor’s transport strategy. These are the main advantages. Other benefits which TfL has claimed for the scheme include improved business efficiency, brought about by quicker and more reliable journeys by cars, taxis and delivery vehicles within the zone, and an overall increase of the attractiveness of central London.

63. The eventual reduction in traffic in central London is projected to be between 10 to 15 per cent, which will reduce congestion (measured in terms of traffic flow) by 20 to 30 per cent.\textsuperscript{97} In February 2002 the median estimate of the number of vehicles within the zone each charging day was 266,000, of which 92,000 would benefit from a full exemption or a discount. However, recent traffic flow data indicates that the number of chargeable vehicles entering the zone has already been reduced by 16 per cent. TfL has indicated to the London Assembly Transport Committee that it now expects 150,000 drivers to pay the charge each charging day.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{92} Congestion charging: the public concerns behind the politics, p 24
\textsuperscript{93} Capita has submitted a memorandum (UCS 24) on the operation of the systems underpinning the scheme.
\textsuperscript{94} UCS 29, para 4.6
\textsuperscript{95} Q 110
\textsuperscript{96} UCS 29, para 4.6. Mr Livingstone also indicated (Q 109) that TfL had let a contract for the recovery of fines in Europe. This is to be managed by the Stockholm-based debt recovery company Intrum Justitia (\textit{The Guardian}, 27 January 2002).
\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Ibid.}, para 8.1.4: Mr Turner later indicated ‘a reduction in queuing time of around 25%’ (UCS 29b).
\textsuperscript{98} Congestion charging: the public concerns behind the politics, p 24, citing a February 2002 letter from the Mayor to the Assembly Budget Committee.
64. The scheme is projected to raise at least £130 million in annual net revenue, of which £30 million would be raised from enforcement (i.e. revenue from penalty charges, net of the costs of collecting charges and enforcing compliance). Mr Bob Kiley, Commissioner of Transport for London, told us that this figure was the estimate of annual revenue over each of the first four years of the scheme’s operation, net of the costs of setting up the scheme (which he said would be paid off over the first five years). Once the startup costs are paid off, the revenue available for public transport improvements is likely to increase. The Government estimates that the London scheme will generate £1 billion in net revenue over the life of the 10 Year Plan (i.e. to 2011).

65. TfL believes that, as a result of the charge, the shift from car use to public transport travelling into Central London will result in an increase in public transport usage (rail, Underground and bus) of about 2 per cent. TfL has stated that this increase will be catered for by bus service improvements introduced as part of the Mayor’s transport strategy, and that in addition rail and Tube users will be persuaded to switch to using improved bus services. Additional improvements to the reliability of bus services will result from reductions in congestion on roads within and leading to the zone. In fact, as the Mayor indicated to us, the extra capacity to be introduced on the bus network will have to bear the brunt of the anticipated shift from car to public transport, at least in the short and medium term. Any significant improvements to the capacity of the Tube network would not be delivered until after 2009, and he doubted whether there would be real improvements in London rail services.

66. Government ring-fencing of the revenue stream from congestion charging is at present only guaranteed for ten years from the scheme’s introduction, i.e. until January 2013. London First believed that the period of ring-fencing should be extended beyond ten years, as investment in London’s transport infrastructure would continue to be necessary. It also argued that TfL should be able to borrow against the revenue stream from charging in order to fund longer-term capital projects over 20 or 30 years, as lenders would want guarantees of repayments for the period of their loans. The Mayor told us that “there is no problem making sure we spend the money on transport schemes”, although the order in which major schemes such as Crossrail could proceed would depend on Government approval. He did guarantee that the hypothecated revenues from the scheme would not be spent on consultancy and other fees ancillary to the scheme itself. We discuss the hypothecation of revenue from charging schemes in general at paragraphs [96] to [105] below.

67. The TfL memorandum did not set out precisely how the Mayor intended to spend the revenue accruing from the scheme, although it indicated a number of possible short-term priorities, including improved bus services, better road and bridge maintenance, and more facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. Recent reports based on the draft TfL budget for 2003-04 indicate that £84 million of the anticipated revenue will be spent on bus improvements, £36 million on road safety measures, £4 million on closed circuit television on buses and £6 million on developing safer routes for children to take to school. The longer-term investment options TfL has suggested included expansion of Tube and rail capacity and new river crossings at the Thames Gateway. London First has pressed for the

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99 UCS 29, para 5.2.5; for enforcement charges, see Q 151 (Mr Turner).
100 Q 140
101 UCS 29, para 5.2.3
102 Ibid., paras 5.2.3-5.2.4
103 Q 88
104 UCS 16, paras 8-9
105 Q 89
106 Q 92
107 UCS 29, para 5.2.5
108 “Congestion charges to be spent on buses”, The Guardian, 15 January 2003
Mayor to apply congestion charge revenue to improving the capital’s road network. It is quite clear that in London the levels of investment needed for the longer-term capital investment projects may require revenue streams which are secured for considerably longer than 10 years.

**Monitoring benefits and impacts**

68. The Mayor has stated publicly—and confirmed in evidence to us—that if the scheme has failed within two months it will be scrapped. When pressed, he identified two possible occurrences which might lead him to conclude after such a short period of time that the scheme has failed: a level of resistance to the payment of the charge which means that the scheme is not sustainable, or an unanticipated occurrence which leads to a “catastrophic failure.” Transport for London gave examples of such occurrences, which it believed would be highly unlikely: an irrecoverable systems failure, or sufficient evidence that the scheme was “fundamentally flawed and could never lead to a reduction in congestion”. The Mayor might also withdraw the scheme if obliged to do so by force majeure. Conversely, Mr Livingstone believed that if, two months after the start of the scheme (i.e. by mid-April) there had not been a catastrophic failure of the scheme, that traffic flows into the charging zone had been reduced by at least 10 per cent and that congestion levels had fallen by 20 to 25 per cent, it could be considered a success.

69. Short of the “catastrophic failure” which may prompt the Mayor to cancel the scheme, we believe that two months is not long enough to establish whether it has **succeeded or failed**. The first point at which a meaningful and objective assessment of the scheme’s operation can be made will be in late August, when the data relating to the first six months of the scheme’s operation will be available. This will provide the first indication of the reliability or otherwise of the projections of traffic flow and revenue generation. The other effects of the scheme will also require careful monitoring. The roads immediately outside the boundary of the charging zone may well experience greater congestion resulting from rat-running, more legal and illegal parking and circulating traffic anticipating the relaxation of controls at 6.30 pm each charging day.

70. The Mayor has promised “immediate studies, a six month study and a five year study to get the long term impact” of the scheme. Transport for London detailed the surveys which it had established in autumn 2002 to monitor the social and economic aspects of the scheme, complementing the programmes it has put in place to monitor traffic flows. The Social Impacts Programme, based on household surveys, telephone interviews, ‘public space’ surveys conducted in and around the zone, and other ad hoc inquiries, has been designed to “discover the responses to and perceptions of the scheme by the public”, and to determine how the scheme has affected the use of the charging zone. The Economic and Business Programme aims to understand the impact the scheme has on the operations of businesses and institutions in and around the zone. A site on the charging boundary has also been selected for a comprehensive monitoring programme. TfL envisages repeating its monitoring activity at least once after the scheme comes into operation, in order, we assume, to provide a “before-and-after” picture. The monitoring programmes which will track long-term change are designed to run for at least three years.

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109 For example, in *Getting the Best from London’s Roads*, London First, December 2002.
110 Q 73
111 Q 74
112 UCS 29, para 8.2.5
113 Q 80, 76
114 Q 75
115 UCS 29, para 6.2
116 *ibid.*, para 6.3
117 *ibid.*, para 6.5
Independent scrutiny

71. It is difficult to overestimate how much is riding on the successful implementation of the scheme in London. The significance of the scheme for Londoners, and for the British transport system overall, is such that the data collected in advance of, and during, the scheme’s operation will be very closely scrutinised. We were therefore pleased to hear from the Mayor that he was willing to submit the scheme to independent scrutiny, and we encourage him to do so.\textsuperscript{118} We also welcome the commitment of the Transport Committee of the London Assembly, which has been conducting its own detailed scrutiny of the scheme and its implementation, to carrying out an ongoing monitoring programme based on the data published by Transport for London.\textsuperscript{119} If charging is to be regarded as a proven mechanism for reducing congestion, it is important that congestion charging in London should not only work, but should be seen to work. We believe that, in addition to the monitoring programmes established by Transport for London, a regular, authoritative, independent and impartial assessment of the effects of the London congestion charging scheme is essential to sustain public confidence in the scheme.

Concerns

72. We received substantial oral and written evidence on the difficulties which may stem from the scheme’s implementation. A number of the concerns raised with us are specific to the particular operation of the scheme in London. While we identify these below, we believe that it is more appropriate for the Assembly’s Transport Committee to consider and monitor them as part of its programme of scrutiny of the scheme. We have, however, examined those issues which in our view have particular relevance to the implementation of charging schemes elsewhere in England and Wales and in Scotland.

73. We are particularly concerned about the impact the charge may have on those who work unsocial hours for low wages and who presently rely on their cars for transport to and from their place of work. While public transport improvements have been made in advance of the introduction of the scheme, and will continue to be made in successive years, the present state of the transport system cannot provide for the needs of everyone who presently chooses to travel in by car. Those who have no option but to travel in by car, either because they are travelling at times when public transport is unavailable, from places where it is inaccessible, or with items which cannot be transported otherwise, will be obliged to pay the charge. This will of course have a disproportionate impact on those with low incomes.

74. Public service employers and public service unions have noted the potentially damaging impacts of the charge on recruitment and retention in key services in inner London. Ms Hoey confirmed, for example, that the charge was likely to affect recruitment at several Kennington schools which fall within the charging zone.\textsuperscript{120} The effects of the charge may also be felt disproportionately by voluntary organisations whose staff may decide they can no longer afford to travel in by car. We believe that the monitoring programmes which Transport for London have established should make particular provision for examining the effects of the charge on the low paid, on public service workers and on the voluntary sector.

75. The Mayor indicated to us that some measures would be in place to alleviate the effects of the charge in this area. He was working to develop schemes which would, for example, enable a Government subsidy for teachers’ travel in London. He also argued that

\textsuperscript{118} Q 82
\textsuperscript{119} Congestion charging: the public concern behind the politics, chapter 8
\textsuperscript{120} Q 1
improvements in public transport, and an increase in visible policing and closed circuit television on buses, would encourage many workers to travel in on the bus where they would previously only have considered taking the car. These are helpful palliatives, but they are unlikely to address the range of justified concerns which have been expressed. The anticipated improvements in bus services are of course welcome, but they will take some time to deliver, and it will take longer for public perceptions about the quality, reliability and safety of London's bus services to change.

76. We are concerned about the knock-on effects of the charge on public transport, particularly in those sectors of the capital's transport network which are already operating at capacity. More bus services have been put in place, and bus capacity has been increased. This is welcome. But it is unrealistic to expect a large number of car commuters to switch to the buses, particularly when they are travelling long distances. Commuters from the outer boroughs, or from outside the M25, are far more likely to switch to rail services. This will strain an already crowded network to bursting point, particularly in areas such as south London, which is not served by the Tube and at present poorly served by buses. Rail commuters, already accustomed to standing on trains, may have to accustom themselves to standing on platforms while trains packed with new commuters from outside the M25 pass by.

77. The Freight Transport Association argued for an exemption from the scheme for freight traffic, as freight operators were not able to alter their delivery patterns to avoid the hours of the charge. In fact, the present operation of the London night-time lorry ban leaves freight operators very little room for manoeuvre, effectively obliging the vast majority to pay the charge. The Mayor indicated to us that he was sympathetic to the difficulties the freight industry had with the charge. The unit charge for freight vehicles was initially set at £15 per day, but subsequently reduced to £5. Mr Livingstone was not prepared to lower it any further, or to exempt freight and small businesses from the charge, in case other motorists used this exemption as a means to circumvent the charge. We recognise that the charge is going to cause difficulties for freight operators and for other vehicle-based businesses within central London, which cannot use public transport alternatives. Large concerns may be able to absorb the charge within their operating costs. Small businesses may not, and will either have to pass the charges they incur on to their customers, or develop working patterns which are more efficient and take the charge into account.

78. One of the modifications made to the original scheme was to provide an exemption from charging to certain alternative-fuel vehicles, which would pollute less than conventional petrol or diesel-fuelled vehicles. The alteration to the scheme was welcomed by, among others, Marks and Spencer plc. Press reports indicate, however, that the level of interest in conversions to alternative fuel vehicles has been greater than expected, and there have been some suggestions that the Mayor may amend the Scheme Order to restrict the exemption or to cancel it. These reports remain unsubstantiated, as indeed does the indication that the level of conversion is greater than Transport for London had anticipated. TfL has stressed that the objective of the London scheme is to reduce congestion and not to improve air quality, and has indicated that the Mayor may, following consultation, consider reviewing the level or structure of the alternative fuel discount if it appears to threaten the congestion reduction benefits of the scheme. We believe that the switch to greener fuels encouraged by the exemption of alternative fuel vehicles from congestion charging is welcome. It may well contribute to overall reductions in the level of pollution. Consequently, it represents an undoubted benefit of the scheme.

121 Q 108
122 UCS 11, para 4.1
123 e.g. Guardian, 13 January 2002
124 UCS 29c
Significant changes to the exemptions for different vehicle types should be avoided. If not, investment in new technology will have been wasted and the overall credibility of the scheme will be damaged.

**Will the scheme work?**

79. The level of interest surrounding the scheme’s introduction is already high. We expect that it will reach frenzied levels in the coming weeks, as the scheme is finally implemented. Those with fundamental objections to the scheme will no doubt seize upon evidence of its shortcomings to demand that the Mayor scrap it. Those who support the scheme will of course seize upon evidence to the contrary. This may not be the best or most constructive way to advance the mature debate on paying for road use which the country desperately needs.

80. There are clearly dangers in implementing a scheme on this scale without any experience of smaller projects. The automatic numberplate recognition system may not build up a sufficiently robust database, and this database may not be properly maintained by the contractor concerned. Comparison of the two databases may be mishandled, so that drivers are either wrongly pursued or able to evade the charge. Details of registered keepers supplied by the DVLA may not be sufficiently accurate to allow proper enforcement of the system. Unfounded speculation and gossip about possible evasions of the charge proliferate. There are dangers that the scheme will be over-bureaucratic, unwieldy and difficult to enforce effectively, particularly as, by the Mayor’s admission, as many as one vehicle in ten in London may not be registered. The scheme will stand or fall on whether such difficulties can be resolved. The test will be whether any substantial problems can be resolved within the Mayor’s two-month window.

81. London First, a supporter of the scheme, noted (in relation to the effects of the £5 charge) that “we have to accept that traffic forecasting is not an exact science. The only way of finding out for sure is to try it.” The genuine results of the scheme will take some time to assess. But the battle over urban charging schemes will not necessarily be fought on the basis of empirical observation. It will be very much more difficult to persuade Londoners of figures demonstrating the benefits of the scheme if they do not feel the scheme has benefitted them, either in terms of shorter journey times, less frustration, better public transport or better air quality. Those who support the scheme and are willing to pay the charge may feel cheated if the scheme fails to deliver the benefits which have been promised.

82. The Committee supports the objectives of the London scheme. It is unfortunate that the first scheme of its type to be implemented in the UK is also the largest, and does not have the benefit of a pilot study to iron out any teething problems. Nevertheless, we welcome the Mayor’s readiness to take action to address the problem of congestion in London. The substantial groundwork which has been done in preparation for the scheme should, we hope, reduce the lead-time required for the development of charging schemes elsewhere. A number of witnesses have told us that the London scheme, as it is designed at present, is too blunt in its operation and too indiscriminate in its effects. While the ROCOL report, which presented options to the Mayor, concentrated on the introduction of charging schemes in the Mayor’s first term, ROCOL did not direct that this scheme should be adopted.

83. We have noted above a number of concerns which have been raised over the operation of the London scheme. We have reservations over the robustness of the technology, the effectiveness of the communications campaign and the wider social effects.
of the scheme. We hope that these concerns remain unfounded. We recognise that the Mayor has considerable discretion over the scheme's operation, and we encourage him to use his powers judiciously to streamline the functioning of the scheme and to alleviate the worst of the pain the scheme may cause.

V. THE FUTURE OF CHARGING SCHEME POLICY

84. We agree with the Government that urban congestion is a serious issue, and that it must be effectively tackled. Charging for road use in urban areas is one means of influencing driver behaviour which has the potential to reduce traffic congestion to more acceptable levels. It may also raise some of the resources required to make the use of public transport more palatable to some motorists. Congestion in key urban areas is a problem which is ripe to be tackled. A consistent and coherent strategy to address urban congestion will bring benefits over and above those which may accrue from alleviating overall congestion on the road network. While urban charging schemes are far from being a panacea for urban congestion, a scheme which is fit for the purpose and properly targeted, assessed, supported and implemented could make a significant and positive impact.

Urban charging schemes in the 10 Year Plan for Transport

85. The 10 Year Plan for Transport, published in July 2000, set out the Government's strategy for the investment of a total of £179.7 billion of private and public funding across the transport infrastructure from the financial years 2001-02 to 2010-11. The Government initially projected that roughly £2.7 billion of this total would be contributed from revenue accruing to the Greater London Authority and other local authorities from the implementation of urban charging schemes. In the review of the Plan, published in December 2002, the Government cut its initial projections by more than half: it now believes that charging schemes will contribute only £1.3 billion to the funding of transport improvements over the lifetime of the Plan. We examine the reasons for this revision at greater length below.

86. Urban charging scheme legislation provides for the ring-fencing of local authority net revenues from charging schemes for a minimum of 10 years. Table 4 sets out the Government's initial and revised projections of the development of this revenue stream.

Table 4: Estimated contribution to total Plan investment of public spending derived from local charging revenue, by financial year (£bn)

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Sources: Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan, DETR, July 2000, annex 1 table A3
Delivering Better Transport: Progress Report, Department for Transport, December 2002, annex 1 table A1
87. Table 5 sets out the Government’s initial (July 2000) assessment of the effects by 2010 on traffic growth and congestion of the adoption of all the measures contained in the Plan, set against the estimated baseline increase. Table 6 sets out its revised estimate of these effects, following the December 2002 review. The Department has stressed that in preparing the review of the Plan it has used a new transport model, more recent data and revised assumptions, and has therefore cautioned that the two sets of figures are not directly comparable. The Government’s assessment is now that congestion in conurbations and large urban areas will increase by between 25 and 30 per cent without the Plan measures, while with the Plan urban congestion will increase by between 9 and 20 percent.

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<th>Change on 2000 levels (%)</th>
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Source: Transport 2010: The Background Analysis, DETR, July 2000, figure 13

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<tr>
<td>Plan</td>
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Source: Department for Transport [UCS 37c]

88. Our predecessors examined the assumptions underlying the Plan’s projections. They observed that the Government had calculated its revenue and traffic projections on the anticipated implementation of road user charging schemes in eight (unspecified) cities or large towns, in addition to London, and the introduction of workplace parking levies in a further 12.127 The Government then estimated that implementation of congestion charging in London would generate £1.5 billion net revenue for investment over the life of the Plan, while the twenty urban charging schemes it believed would have been introduced by 2011–12 would generate £1.2 billion, to be spent on local public transport and road investment.128 In addition, it expected charging to generate a further £0.2 billion which certain local authorities would be expected to contribute towards the construction of light rail projects.129

127 Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan, p 61; HC (2001-02) 558, para 45
128 Ibid., pp 104–05
129 Ibid., p 105
89. Professor David Begg, Chair of the Commission for Integrated Transport, believed that the introduction of the 20 urban charging schemes assumed by the 10 Year Plan was an “essential requirement” for the Plan’s success, and urged the Government and local authorities to ensure that charging was implemented at this level.\textsuperscript{130} His assessment of the reduction in urban congestion which could be achieved by implementation of the Plan’s provisions was between 20 and 25 per cent, roughly three times the Government’s initial estimate as set out in the Plan.\textsuperscript{131} We were unable to establish the reason for this significant difference in projections.

90. However, as we have seen, only four cities—London, Nottingham, Bristol and Durham—are pursuing urban charging schemes as committed policy. Although the Government told us that 35 local authorities have now expressed an interest in introducing urban charging schemes, and have included the possible implementation of such schemes in their Local Transport Plans,\textsuperscript{132} we have found no evidence that any local authorities, beyond those already cited, have since rushed to commit themselves to road user charging or workplace parking levy schemes.

91. Manchester City Council set out the position statement on charging schemes adopted by the ten Greater Manchester local authorities, all of them members of the Charging Development Partnership, in June 2000. The authorities confirmed their interest in developing schemes which would contribute to Local Transport Plan objectives, but entered several caveats. They stressed that charging schemes would have to support the social, economic and environmental development of Greater Manchester and the North West; that advance consultation with residents, businesses and stakeholders was vital; that charging authorities should not be put at a competitive disadvantage; and that charging would only be viable once the quality, attractiveness and convenience of public and other modes of transport were improved.\textsuperscript{133} Manchester City Council noted that “the theoretical attractions of charging have to be weighed against the very real risks that charging could entail for the City’s economy and social cohesion.”\textsuperscript{134}

92. The Secretary of State seemed less concerned than we were at the obvious disparity between the Government’s assumptions of two years ago and the very low level of local authority take-up. He contended that “congestion charging [is not] a means of raising money to finance the 10 Year Plan”,\textsuperscript{135} as it was up to individual local authorities to decide whether they would introduce charging schemes to fund the particular improvements they wished to make to local transport in their area: “it is money over and above that money provided either by central government or raised through the private sector, but if a council decides not to proceed with a scheme, it follows therefore it will not have the income to spend on whatever it was that it had in mind in relation to transport. It does not affect our overall level of spending across the whole country.”\textsuperscript{136}

93. The Government now concedes that local authorities will not commit to further development of urban charging schemes until they have been able to assess the outcome of the London scheme.\textsuperscript{137} Accordingly, it believes that “major urban schemes of the size and number assumed in the 10 Year Plan are unlikely to be implemented until towards the end of the Plan period” (that is, in 2010–11). Its working estimate is now that, in addition to the London scheme, eight road user charging schemes and five workplace parking levy schemes will be in operation by 2010–11. It assumes that the Nottingham levy will be implemented.

\textsuperscript{130} UCS 30
\textsuperscript{131} Q 176–177. See also HC (2001–02) 558, para 49
\textsuperscript{132} UCS 37, para 11 and annex A. See also above, para 29–30
\textsuperscript{133} UCS 40, para 3
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., para 9
\textsuperscript{135} Q 277
\textsuperscript{136} Q 251
\textsuperscript{137} Delivering Better Transport: Progress Report, para 4.53
in 2005, and one other major urban charging scheme will be implemented in 2006–07. These are projected to generate a total of £100m by 2011. The Department believes that these and the remaining eleven schemes it estimates will be implemented by the end of the Plan period will between them generate between £300 and £400 million.\textsuperscript{138}

**Urban charging schemes in the multi-modal studies**

94. Several of the multi-modal study teams commissioned by the Government’s regional offices have now issued their final reports. A number of these studies considered the introduction of urban charging schemes as part of an overall package to improve transport efficiency and encourage shifts to more efficient transport modes which reduced congestion. These recommendations, made directly to Government, stand outside the local transport plan cycle, but may be incorporated into local authority transport policies.

- The West Midlands Area Multi-Modal Study recommended introducing a £2.50 road user charge in five urban centres in the West Midlands—Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Solihull, Walsall and Merry Hill—between 2005 and 2015, to be supplemented by an area-wide road user charge by 2020. During our inquiry into the multi-modal study programme, Mr Terry Mulroy, a project director for Transport Planning International and a member of the study team, told us that the proposed charging schemes formed a key part of the study’s recommendations: “the mechanism of congestion charging allows us an enormous amount of flexibility to handle those [congestion-related traffic] problems which occur at the moment.”\textsuperscript{139}

- The Midlands to Manchester (MidMan) Multi-Modal Study has recommended the introduction of £5 road user charges in the city centres of the West Midlands, Merseyside and Greater Manchester, and £2.50 charges in Stoke-on-Trent’s urban centres, by 2011.

- The South West Area Regional Multi-Modal Study anticipated the introduction of road user charging in Bristol by 2010.

- The M1 Multi-Modal Study found that workplace parking levies should be introduced in Nottingham, Leicester and Derby.

Several of the studies also proposed area-wide charging schemes, where vehicle use would be charged on the basis of kilometres travelled. Both the South West Yorkshire Multi-Modal Study and the ORBIT study of the M25 zone recommended the introduction of area-wide charging by 2011.

95. A number of the studies considered the option of urban charging schemes and rejected them. The Access to Hastings study team believed that charging would run counter to the remit of the study, which was to encourage regeneration. The Cambridge to Huntingdon Multi-Modal Study considered a £3 charge for Cambridge city centre, but found it would reduce traffic by more than was necessary. The Hull East-West Corridor Multi-Modal Study reported that because of the need to provide access to the Port of Hull, and because suitable alternative routes were not available, the available area for road user charging was insufficiently large to be viable.

96. We will soon be reporting in more detail on the Government’s multi-modal study programme. We note that the recommendations emerging from the studies are directed at the regional Government offices and the relevant local authorities. If the recommendations for charging schemes emerging from the studies are to be implemented, they will need to be

\textsuperscript{138} UCS 37b
\textsuperscript{139} HC (2002–03) 38-i, 20 November 2002, Qq 254–61, 274
considered for inclusion in the next round of local transport plans, which local authorities will now be beginning to prepare. However, without a clear lead from the Government on the acceptability of urban charging schemes, it seems unlikely that the recommendations for urban charging schemes which have thus far emerged from multi-modal study teams will be taken much further than the drawing board.

**Funding a charging scheme strategy**

97. A key element of the Government’s overall policy towards urban charging schemes is the use that local authorities will be able to make of the revenue raised from the schemes, in supporting local public transport systems and developing alternatives to car use. The Government has guaranteed that the net revenues of charging schemes will be hypothecated to the funding of local transport initiatives for a predetermined period: charging revenues will be ring-fenced and devoted to public transport. The hypothecation of transport-generated revenue to fund local transport projects is a concession which will be viewed with considerable caution by the Treasury: several members of the public who submitted memoranda to the inquiry rehearsed, either explicitly or implicitly, the long-standing contention that the Government’s receipts from vehicle excise duty and fuel taxes should themselves be hypothecated to the funding of transport improvements.

98. Hypothecation is an essential component of urban charging schemes. Without the commitment that every penny paid in charges will be reinvested in local transport, it will be far more difficult to generate the levels of public support which are essential to the successful development and implementation of a charging scheme. If it is to be credible, hypothecation must also be secure. It is no good for local authorities to trumpet that the entirety of their charging revenue will be invested in public transport if they subsequently find that their funding allocation from central government is reduced. Hypothecation of revenue is central to the credibility of the London congestion charging scheme, and we were therefore concerned to hear from Mr Bob Kiley, Commissioner of Transport for London, that the ring-fencing of revenue from the London scheme was not secure, even at this stage: “one of our fears is that we could end up being penalised for the revenue flows from congestion charging and what we get with one hand will be taken away [by the other].”

99. Our predecessors welcomed the principle of hypothecation introduced in the Integrated Transport White Paper, and recommended that “the Government guarantee that the income from road user and workplace parking charges be hypothecated to transport spending permanently and in full. The new monies raised must also be additional to existing sources of funding.” In response, the Government confirmed that local authorities which piloted charging schemes would be able to retain the entirety of net revenues from their schemes for at least 10 years from the scheme’s implementation; that this revenue would be “additional and ring-fenced for spending on local transport projects”; and that, subject to the 10-year guaranteed minimum, the period for which councils would retain the revenue would be decided on a case-by-case basis.

100. Nevertheless, the Government believed that, in setting the level of charge, local authorities should principally consider the likely traffic management effects of charging schemes, rather than the need to raise a predetermined sum for public transport improvements. It anticipated that in the longer term there might be “a mis-match between the revenue raised and the amount of suitable transport expenditure”, and that it would, therefore, be sensible for the Government to retain its power to review the position on hypothecation at the end of the 10-year period.

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140 Oq 142–143  
141 HC (1998-99) 32, para 260  
142 HC (1998-99) 708, p xxiii [recommendation ppp]  
143 Ibid.
101. We do not believe there will necessarily be a significant mismatch between revenue raised and the scope for appropriate public transport expenditure. Local authority charging schemes must of course be submitted to the Secretary of State for confirmation before they are implemented. The Government has indicated that the Secretary of State will wish to be satisfied of the ‘robustness’ of local authority proposals for setting the level of charge and determining how the revenues are to be used.\textsuperscript{144} It will be his responsibility to determine whether the charges to be implemented are proportionate to the benefits which are intended to accrue from the scheme.

102. Common sense suggests, and the experience in Durham may confirm, that the more successful a road user charging scheme is in reducing traffic, the less net revenue it is likely to generate, year on year, for investment in public transport improvements. As London First pointed out to us, investment in such projects may require revenue streams to be guaranteed for 20 or 30 years. Local authorities will be hampered in their efforts to attract other investment partners if they cannot guarantee a revenue stream from charging past the 10-year point at which the Government insists on reviewing hypothecation, particularly given the uncertainties involved. We were heartened by the Secretary of State’s indication that he would review the 10-year period for hypothecation of funds from the London scheme.\textsuperscript{145} If the Government intends charging revenues to fund major public transport improvements, it must not hinder the process by setting up artificial barriers which may discourage investment. We repeat our predecessors’ recommendation that the income from road user charging and workplace parking levy schemes should be hypothecated to local transport spending permanently and in full. The revenue raised through charging should in all cases be treated as separate from, and additional to, local transport funding provided by central government.

103. In many urban areas, the introduction of charging schemes will not be practically or politically feasible unless and until significant improvements in public transport have been put in place. While the Secretary of State agreed with the premise that public transport must be improved before charging schemes designed to reduce congestion are put in place, he was not prepared to concede that the Government should provide additional funding to local authorities to improve public transport in advance of the introduction of a charging scheme.\textsuperscript{146} While the Government will make funds available for the start-up costs necessary for implementing a scheme, once a decision has been taken to proceed with it and costed proposals have been submitted, a local authority wishing to bring in a charging scheme will have to bid for funds for advanced improvements in public transport as part of its Local Transport Plan strategy.

104. Bristol City Council indicated to us the need for “a step change in public transport prior to the implementation of progressive restraint measures.”\textsuperscript{147} The council has given a political commitment to good quality public transport and the introduction of a tram system, and the completion of Line 1 of the proposed tram system has been explicitly linked with the introduction of road user charging. It was concerned that, although the Government had supported the development of light rail transit systems in general, its support was conditional on such schemes meeting value-for-money criteria, and argued for a “more flexible and enlightened approach.”\textsuperscript{148} In its second progress report on its Local Transport Plan, published in July 2002, the City Council set out its view on the linkage between public transport improvements and road user charging:

\textsuperscript{144} UCS 39, paras 5, 17
\textsuperscript{145} Q 289
\textsuperscript{146} Q 249
\textsuperscript{147} UCS 28
\textsuperscript{148} UCS 28
The city council remains concerned that appropriate transport improvements are in place in advance of a road user charging scheme being introduced in Bristol. To this end the city council will be expecting the government to play an active part in facilitating the early introduction of the specific transport improvements associated with . . . road user charging.\footnote{Bristol Local Transport Plan: Annual Progress Report 2002, Bristol City Council, July 2002, para 3.41}

The response of the Government Office for the South West is not encouraging:

We do not understand your reference to our involvement in the further delivery of this project . . . We are happy to discuss this with you in due course.\footnote{Extract from letter dated 10 December 2002 from Mr Tom King, Assistant Director, Avon Area, Government Office for the South West, to Mr Carew Reynell, Head of Paid Service, Bristol City Council: published at www.gosw.gov.uk/Transport/LTP_Settlement_2002.}

While the Government, in the recent local transport settlement round, has granted Nottingham City Council a further £1.9 million for the development of its workplace parking levy scheme in 2003-04, it is decidedly cool about the allocation of further funding to the development of the project prior to its planned introduction in April 2005. Citing “slippage” in the implementation of the scheme, and the level of funding already provided, the Government has told Nottingham that it is unable to guarantee any additional resources to the development of the scheme in the years 2004-05 and beyond.\footnote{Letter dated 10 December 2002 from Mr Mike Jackson, Director of Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire, Government Office for the East Midlands to Mr Paul Snell, Acting Chief Executive, Nottingham City Council: published at www.go-em.gov.uk/planningandtransport/decisionletters.htm.}

105. It is evident that before road user charging or workplace parking levy schemes are introduced in an urban area, a step-change in the provision of public transport alternatives to car travel is likely to be required. Without this change, it is far less likely that urban charging schemes will be practicable: nor will they be acceptable to the travelling public. Therefore, we believe it essential that additional capital and revenue funding should be made available to local authorities, through Local Transport Plan settlements, to assist them in making the necessary public transport improvements before the introduction of such schemes. Local authorities themselves have a responsibility to be prudent and efficient in the management of their public transport schemes.

106. Charging as a solution to the problem of urban congestion is not appropriate in all cases. The Secretary of State confirmed that local authorities who did not decide to introduce urban charging schemes—and therefore decided to forgo the potential benefits of a hypothecated revenue stream to fund local transport projects—would not be punished financially: “you can hardly say, ‘You have got a free choice but if you don’t do what we tell you, we will clobber you.’ That would not be very fair.”\footnote{Q 283} As the Government said in its response to our predecessors’ report on the 10 Year Plan, “it is for local authorities to determine the right solutions for local problems. The Government has given authorities powers and funding resources to tackle [congestion].”\footnote{Cm 5569, p 8} We agree with the Government that assistance to local authorities which decide to introduce charging should not detract from assistance to local authorities which have decided against charging, but have made other plans to tackle congestion. As a general principle, investment should be targeted on those areas most affected by congestion, at a level which is likely to make a genuine impact. It is also important that investment is made to limit congestion occurring.
Technical development and national specifications

107. There are potentially many different ways in which revenue from road user charges may be collected. Neither the Durham nor the London systems rely on direct electronic payment, although Transport for London has indicated that it may wish to develop an electronic system once the technology is available. Bristol is researching and developing an electronically-based system in partnership with a number of European cities. A year-long trial of electronic systems (the DIRECTS trial), funded by the Department for Transport, is due to start on the road network south of Leeds in the autumn of 2003.

108. The Government anticipates that authorities contemplating large urban schemes may wish to develop electronic payment systems, which would have to take future requirements for interoperability into account. Such systems would involve in-vehicle equipment which might be relatively simple (for example, the electronic ‘tags’ which can be used to pay tolls at the Dartford Crossing) or more complex (for example, an on-board unit which could communicate with roadside beacons or a central charging centre). It is envisaged that electronic systems, using technology based either on microwave communication or the Global Positioning System (GPS), could allow charges to be levied automatically by vehicle type and time of day or week. For example, the Singapore Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) system, which replaced the city’s area licence system in 1998, allows charges to be levied automatically on vehicles using specified stretches of road between charging gantries. Charges are levied according to the time of day and the class of vehicle. Users buy prepaid cards with magnetic strips, which can be topped up at designated outlets. These cards are inserted into an onboard unit and automatically debited at the relevant rate as the vehicle passes under the appropriate gantry.

109. The Government has stated that the mechanism for collecting any road user charge is for the local authority concerned to consider, based on the nature of the scheme and the local environment. However, the Secretary of State has the power, under the charging scheme legislation, to approve any roadside and in-vehicle equipment to be used as part of a road user charging scheme, and to designate payment systems. The Government has indicated that any electronic technology will have to meet “minimum standards of accuracy, reliability and interoperability” while allowing the flexibility for some operators to offer additional facilities. It envisaged regulating and giving type approval to electronic systems authorised for use in urban charging schemes.

110. The Government has a key role in ensuring the development of road user charging technology to a high standard, and the interoperability of any technology to be implemented within the UK. The development of a national standard for electronic road pricing technology is likely to boost the development of urban road user charging schemes. We have already noted Transport for London’s readiness to move to a second-generation charging scheme once the technology is available. Electronic road pricing may remove some of the difficulties of the area licence system as it is due to operate in London, and will allow authorities to charge by distance travelled, and by type of vehicle. The results of the DIRECTS trials will also indicate to Ministers whether the introduction of nationwide road user charging for trunk roads is likely to be technologically viable.

111. Bristol City Council, which is committed to introducing a scheme which it envisages will be based on electronic tag and transponder technology, is awaiting a decision from the Government on the type approval which is likely to be granted. Mr Richard Rawlinson, the Council’s Head of Traffic and Transport, indicated that the Council was already well

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154 UCS 37, para 23
155 Ibid., paras 25–26
156 Breaking the Logjam, para 3.28
157 Ibid., para 3.29
advanced in its awareness of road user charging technology, based on its participation in several consortia of European cities which have been examining the technical aspects of road user charging.\(^{158}\) He told us that the Charging Development Partnership was also examining technological developments, and thought it unlikely that the Council would commit itself to a system which would not be approved by the Government: "we have a fairly good steer on the type approval the Government may eventually come up with".\(^{159}\)

112. A form of nationwide road user charging is due to come into effect in 2005, when the Treasury implements its proposals for a distance-based road user charge on all freight traffic, to replace the present system of vehicle excise duties on UK-registered freight vehicles. The Freight Transport Association has stressed that any system brought in by the Department must be compatible with the system to be implemented by HM Customs and Excise.\(^{160}\) Mr Edmund King, of the RAC Foundation for Motoring, stressed that "we do not want different schemes in different cities, using different technologies so that you need different black boxes in your car".\(^{161}\) We agree. **Electronic charging scheme technologies must be developed to a national standard, which is compatible with any future European standard. The Government must ensure that they are interoperable, and that they are compatible with the electronic tolling systems in use or proposed elsewhere in the UK, for instance at the Severn and Dartford crossings and on the new M6 Toll.**

113. It is nevertheless important to ensure that charging scheme technology is not developed and implemented to the exclusion of provision for the motorist who only occasionally visits a city where a charging scheme is in force. The geography and demography of the compact city-state of Singapore ensures that the proportion of car owners who also own an on-board charging unit, required for use of the electronic road pricing system, is very high. But it would be an intolerable burden to oblige every motorist in the UK to acquire an on-board charging unit on the assumption of a possible future visit to a city which operates electronic road user charging. If a national standard is developed, and if the Government comes to a view on the desirability of inter-urban charging, motor manufacturers may consider building standard charging units into new vehicles. Even if that happens, it would be inequitable for a city council operating electronic pricing to impose charges on motorists which had units, but to allow casual visitors to use road space without being charged. **Local authorities which are developing electronic road user charging systems must develop their schemes in such a way that vehicle users without access to electronic technology are provided with alternative and convenient means of paying the charge.**

**The effects of the London scheme**

114. Some may find it peculiar that the first large-scale urban charging scheme to be introduced in the United Kingdom is also to be by far the largest and the most complex. Although the majority of recent research into urban charging schemes and their effects has been focussed upon London, many of the professional witnesses to our predecessors’ inquiry in 1995 believed that “the scale and complexity of implementation in London would be daunting”, and recommended a trial in a free-standing urban area, both to limit the scale of the initial investment needed and to ensure that impacts could be easily monitored.\(^{162}\) That Committee nevertheless observed that the political will for full trialling or implementation of urban charging schemes was likely to be greater in parts of London than in other urban areas.\(^{163}\)

\(^{158}\) The INTERCEPT, EUROPRICE and PROGRESS projects.

\(^{159}\) Q 51-52

\(^{160}\) UCS 09

\(^{161}\) Q 217

\(^{162}\) HC (1994–95) 104, para 31

\(^{163}\) Ibid., para 95
115. So it has proved. Legislation to allow congestion charging in London, without further reference to the Government, was introduced a full year before legislation to allow local authorities to introduce charging schemes. The process in London has been accelerated by the imposition of a statutory and a political deadline, namely the requirement for the new Mayor to bring in an integrated transport strategy for London during his first term of office.

116. While the introduction of a charging scheme in London has been accelerated, the implementation of charging schemes in the rest of England has dawdled. When, in March 2000, the ROCOL group reported its detailed findings, the Charging Development Partnership was in its infancy. The development of research into charging schemes and their implementation outside London has not kept pace with developments in the capital. The only English local authority outside London to have developed proposals sufficiently to apply for scheme approval has been Durham.\textsuperscript{164}

117. Why have local authorities been so slow to take up the powers available to them? We have identified a number of reasons. The first, which the Government acknowledges, is that local authorities are, understandably, waiting on indications of the technical outcomes of the London scheme, to assess how well it operates in terms of reducing congestion and generating additional revenue. As we have noted above, Manchester City Council is very concerned about the real risks charging schemes may pose to social cohesion. A number of local authorities—for instance, the West Midlands metropolitan borough councils—have decided to concentrate on improving their public transport infrastructure, or undertaking other preparatory work, before embarking on firm proposals for charging schemes.\textsuperscript{165} The effect of introducing charging schemes in some areas may jeopardise other initiatives already in place. For example, following consultations, the partner authorities developing the Merseyside Local Transport Plan have come to the view that introducing charging schemes during the first LTP cycle (2000–01 to 2005–06) could jeopardise the overall regeneration of the Merseyside economy, a key objective of local transport policy. Charging schemes may nevertheless be evaluated for implementation in the second Merseyside LTP (2006–07 to 2010–11).\textsuperscript{166}

118. Local authorities may also be driven by political arithmetic. The few submissions we have received from members of the public have been uniformly hostile to the introduction of charging schemes. There appears to be a widespread perception that the Government’s proposals amount to a further tax on the motorist, delivering more money to the Treasury with little return. For example: “I do not believe the Government is really trying to resolve the congestion problem, it is just trying to raise money in taxation”; “the Government and councils use vehicle owners like cash machines”, and “congestion charging could prove to be an unfair and unjust form of taxation, not too unlike the poll tax”.\textsuperscript{167} In evidence to this Committee’s inquiry into multi-modal studies, Councillor Stewart Stacey, Chair of the West Midlands Local Government Association’s Regeneration Conference, told us that the leaders of the West Midlands metropolitan authorities had formed the collective view that, since the transport system in the West Midlands was essentially road based, substantial investment in alternative public transport modes was necessary before any of the charging schemes recommended by the West Midlands Area Multi-Modal Study could be considered. He indicated that one of the factors contributing to this decision was likely to have been “political, electoral fear”.\textsuperscript{168}

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\textsuperscript{164} The City of Edinburgh Council applied to the Scottish Executive for approval in principle of its Integrated Transport Initiative for Edinburgh and South-East Scotland, which included road user charging proposals for Edinburgh, in October 2001. Details of the Edinburgh proposals are available at www.edinburgh.gov.uk/traffic/NTT.

\textsuperscript{165} HC (2002-03) 38-ii, 20 November 2002, Q 351

\textsuperscript{166} Merseyside Local Transport Plan 2001/2 – 2005/6: Opportunities for All, Merseyside Strategic Transportation and Planning Committee, July 2000, p 157

\textsuperscript{167} UCS 07, Ev 45 (Ian Ward); UCS 08, Ev 46 (Trevor Brown); UCS 05, Ev 44 (G F Burrows)

\textsuperscript{168} HC (2002-03) 38-ii, 20 November 2002, Qq 351–52
119. Electoral fear is, of course, not confined to the council chambers of local authorities. The Government has been very careful, in its public pronouncements, to distance itself from any responsibility for the actual implementation of road user charging schemes and workplace parking levies. It stresses that decisions on the appropriateness of charging schemes are entirely up to local authorities (or the Mayor of London).\(^{169}\) The Secretary of State argued that local authorities had been given the power to introduce charging schemes at their own request, rather than at the behest of the Government, and that schemes should be designed locally to address local congestion issues.\(^{170}\)

120. Local authorities understandably prefer to wait and see what emerges from the London scheme before they commit themselves to schemes which may be politically very unpopular. This has completely undermined the Government’s initial estimate of the number of local authorities prepared to implement charging schemes in the lifetime of the 10 Year Plan. Nevertheless, once reliable data from the London scheme begins to emerge in the autumn of 2003, authorities will be able to come to a more informed assessment of whether charging schemes are likely to be able to deliver real reductions in congestion. Their judgment on the political feasibility of such schemes may be influenced by focus group research, but is more likely to be dictated by the result of the Mayor’s re-election campaign in May 2004.

**Government support for local authority schemes**

121. The Government told our predecessors that the impact which a low take-up of local authority charging powers would have on the national congestion targets was “not very great”: these schemes were only estimated to be responsible for 1.5 per cent of the projected 21 per cent reduction in congestion across the road network. Any adverse effects resulting from a failure to introduce urban charging schemes would be at a local rather than a national level.\(^{171}\) We believe that this approach is an object lesson in the skewed thinking encouraged by the Department’s present congestion indicator. If 80 per cent of congestion occurs in urban areas, as the Commission for Integrated Transport has estimated, then we would expect schemes which are targeted on urban congestion to have a high impact on the overall level of congestion. There are, however, encouraging signs that the Government is moving away from a broad-brush approach to a more targeted assessment of key local problems. The Secretary of State told us that “we need to concentrate more on particular localised problems in relation to congestion far more than we are doing at the moment. At the moment we tend to be concentrating on the very big picture, and in so doing we might be missing some of the key points that we need to tackle.”\(^{172}\)

122. Although the focus on tackling congestion must be local, the issues must also be set in a national context. The Government has set out the benefits which it expects to accrue nationwide from the reductions in urban congestion brought about by charging schemes—a reduction in urban congestion, increased use of public transport, better fuel consumption, better air quality and improved environments for the pedestrian and the cyclist. **If charging schemes are not introduced where appropriate, congestion in urban areas will not be cut, public transport use will not rise and emissions will increase.** The Government is committed to addressing these issues on a national level. We therefore find it a matter of serious concern that the Government is not at present prepared to make a more positive and open contribution to the national debate on congestion charging.

123. The policy of charging for road use is politically unpopular. Many motorists resent having to pay increased charges for the use of roads, or having their freedom of action

\(^{169}\) UCS 37, para 10  
\(^{170}\) Q 268  
\(^{171}\) HC (2001–02) 558, para 48  
\(^{172}\) Q4 264, 262
constrained. The introduction of radical traffic restraint measures such as congestion charging therefore requires political courage. We may not agree with every aspect of the Mayor’s proposed scheme in London, but we believe it should be given the chance to work. It is unfortunate that the Government which initiated the implementation of charging schemes and gave local authorities a powerful tool to address congestion should now have decided to sit on the fence.

124. Outside London, the Government has committed itself to working with local authorities in developing pilot road user charging and workplace parking levy schemes. On present evidence, however, the de facto pilot schemes outside London—Bristol, Nottingham and Durham—seem to have been left to develop their schemes very much on their own. Apart from the mediation of the Charging Development Partnership, which is presently operating without direct ministerial involvement, there is little to suggest that the Government is itself actively involved in developing any pilot schemes for urban charging. This does not encourage other local authorities, within the Charging Development Partnership and outside it, to believe that they will be supported if they take the initiative in developing charging scheme proposals.

125. If the London scheme fails to deliver the benefits which have been claimed for it—in public perceptions, at least—the Government’s strategy for reducing urban congestion will be seriously flawed. This does not necessarily mean that the objective case for introducing charging schemes in other cities suffering from congestion will have diminished. It does mean, however, that the Government will have to reassess its strategy on urban congestion. If there are deep-seated reasons for the failure of the London scheme, which demonstrate that the concept is ill-founded, then alternative means of dealing effectively with urban congestion will have to be developed. If the problems in London are scheme-specific, they will not prevent other local authorities from pressing ahead with their own schemes: but those authorities will need a great deal more overt support from the Government.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

126. The Government has identified the need to contain congestion, and to work towards reducing it. No-one disagrees with this. The question is whether the Government has the political nerve to support bold experiments in reducing congestion. Legislation to enable such experiments, in the form of urban charging schemes, has been secured. The policy now has to be taken forward.

127. Charging schemes will not relieve urban congestion overnight. They are not designed to deliver quick political wins. And they can only be expected to cut congestion if they are implemented as part of a package of transport improvements. Such packages have an economic cost, and the Government must be prepared to bear its fair share of this cost if it is serious about reducing urban congestion. Charging schemes also carry a short-term political cost, and the Government cannot duck this either.

128. The Government needs to monitor the development of urban charging schemes very closely. If it genuinely believes that these schemes have the potential to deliver significant reductions in urban congestion, it must do more than merely offering these powers to authorities on a ‘take it or leave it’ basis: it must be willing to support those who take the risks involved in embarking on such schemes. At the very least, the Department should be prepared to provide political backing for local authorities which decide to introduce charging schemes; to identify areas where pilot schemes can best be taken forward; to work in genuine partnership with local authorities to develop and monitor these pilots; to establish robust and meaningful criteria for assessing the success of charging schemes, and to upgrade the Department’s ‘working assumptions’ into a structured programme for rolling out charging schemes in collaboration with local authorities.
129. The evidence we have received from the Department in the course of this inquiry has indicated that it is beginning to take a more focussed approach to the problems of congestion in particular areas. The review of the 10 Year Plan for Transport, published in December, has fuelled the debate about national levels of congestion and how they should be tackled. The Government’s assessment of the situation may be impaired by the significant difficulties it has experienced in measuring congestion, as we have outlined above. It is not reassuring that the methodologies used in assessing congestion in the 10 Year Plan and the Review are markedly different, and, therefore that the two documents are not directly comparable.

130. The Government is now developing a new and more meaningful measure of congestion. This is welcome, if overdue. We are concerned, however, that assessments of the effects of congestion may be drawn too narrowly. Congestion is often said to have a negative effect on business, and broad figures, taken from a CBI survey published in the mid-1990s, are often cited in support of this claim. But the effects of congestion on business competitiveness—or the effects of business competitiveness on congestion—have not been studied in any detail. If measures to reduce urban congestion and its impact on business are to be effective, the relationship between congestion and business competitiveness must be studied more rigorously than has hitherto been the case.

131. The Secretary of State assured us that the Government’s position on congestion charging was determined by technological factors rather than by political cowardice.\(^\text{173}\) Yet the Government decided as long ago as in 1998 that it was prepared to enable the proposed Greater London Authority, and local authorities in England and Wales, to implement urban charging schemes if they could assist in cutting urban congestion. Almost as soon as it announced this policy, it commissioned a study which found that a low-technology charging scheme could be implemented in the largest urban area in the UK, with the most complex road network, the largest economy and the most road users. This scheme is, by and large, the one which is to be implemented on 17 February.

132. The Government has, by default, adopted a twin-track approach to the introduction of urban charging schemes. This, more than anything else, has contributed to the muddle in departmental policy. Outside London, the Government has acted, at best, as a facilitator of urban charging schemes. It has barely acted as an enabler, and it has certainly not acted as a leader. It was willing to commission a review of charging options for an authority which was not then even established, but it has shown far too little focus on the areas where local authorities have needed genuine support in getting charging schemes off the ground. The template for a highly complex charging scheme in London was in place even before the Mayor was elected; but those local authorities still interested in developing charging schemes have yet to receive official departmental guidance on how their schemes should be designed and implemented.

133. The Charging Development Partnership has provided a useful forum for the dissemination of ideas and information on urban charging schemes, but it hardly constitutes a spearhead for radical change. Local authorities have, as the Department indicates, been waiting for the outcome of the London scheme. Yet, as several progress reports on Local Transport Plans reveal, they are also unwilling to make political commitments to urban charging schemes unless and until they are able to make the substantial improvements in public transport which will make these schemes viable. The 10 Year Plan for Transport foresaw the introduction of 20 urban charging schemes by 2011: this has now been downgraded to a ‘working assumption’ of 13 schemes, of which only two (Durham and Nottingham) are identified. It is not clear whether any of these schemes will proceed if the scheme to be implemented in London fails to cut congestion as promised, fails to raise

\(^{173}\) HC (2002-03) 38-iii, 17 January 2003, Q 549
sufficient revenue for significant public transport improvements or fails to generate the level of public support which would make a charging scheme politically viable elsewhere.

134. In recent evidence to our Multi-Modal Studies inquiry, the Secretary of State refused to commit himself to including inter-urban road user charging as part of the next review of the 10 Year Plan, due in 2004.\textsuperscript{174} He believed that the technology, and the associated charging and enforcement infrastructure, would not necessarily be available “in the next four or five years, even if we accepted it was the right thing to do.” This is no doubt an exercise in proper political caution, and the Secretary of State made it plain that he drew on the experience of managing the delivery of Government IT projects. It is important that research into electronic charging for urban and for inter-urban use should proceed hand in hand. If the Government decides that it should introduce inter-urban road user charging, it must of course be certain that the technology is robust. The London scheme may demonstrate that a ‘halfway house’ of camera-based enforcement is sufficiently effective for urban charging, pending the development of electronic charging schemes which will allow a more targeted form of charging. But the Government must maintain the momentum behind the development of effective technology. The DIRECTS trial in Leeds shows promise, but it has taken five years to put in place. The Government should avoid further delay by planning a roll-out of pilot schemes which can be implemented should the Leeds results prove encouraging.

135. We have found a good deal to commend in the Government’s approach to urban charging schemes. It has secured legislation which enables authorities to bring in charging powers without the need to resort to the delay and expense of the private bill procedure. It has established the principle of hypothecating revenue from charging schemes to fund local transport improvements. It has laid down framework criteria for the approval of individual schemes which appear sensible. It has established a forum for the development of schemes, and it has made funding available for preparatory work. But instead of driving forward its policy, it has now decided to hang back. With a different attitude, and more urgency, it could by now have achieved much more. Local authorities planning to introduce charging schemes will not be able to do so unless they can muster sufficient public support. They cannot do this if the Government is seen to be standing outside the debate, acting as a brake rather than as a leader.

136. We do not doubt the Government’s genuine willingness to address the issues of urban congestion. But its policy towards charging schemes is now drifting, awaiting events; and its overall approach to the introduction of urban charging consequently risks being fudged, muddled, compromised and undermined. It is time for the Government to take a more constructive and focussed approach to the real problems of urban congestion, and to promote the use of charging schemes as a powerful policy tool which can deliver real benefits to all road users.

\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Ibid.}, Qq 538-552
SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(a) We believe it appropriate to examine the London congestion charging scheme, though we do not seek to duplicate the London Assembly’s work. The impact of the Mayor’s scheme is likely to stretch far beyond the capital. If it is not successful, other authorities will be deterred from introducing charging. This will reduce their ability to cut congestion and raise the revenue necessary to improve public transport. Lessons from the London scheme will be of vital importance for the future development of urban charging schemes and the Government’s overall policy to reduce urban congestion (paragraph 9).

(b) While responsibility for transport policy in Scotland and Northern Ireland rests with their respective administrations, it is clearly desirable that policies on road user charging throughout the United Kingdom should be closely related, and that the charging technology should be interoperable. We urge the UK Government and the devolved administrations to co-operate closely on the development of charging schemes (paragraph 10).

(c) The Government, in its negotiations on any future European transport infrastructure directive, should ensure that it secures sufficient flexibility to enable the future implementation of local and national charging schemes without the imposition of unnecessary restrictions (paragraph 11).

(d) The primary objective of an urban charging scheme must be to make significant reductions in traffic congestion (paragraph 20).

(e) Charging schemes have the potential to make significant reductions in congestion and to improve the capacity, speed and reliability of public transport, but it is important that such schemes are designed to enhance the urban environment. Schemes which merely displace traffic from a city centre to suburban or inter-urban road networks may cure urban congestion at the price of urban decline, and will lead to problems elsewhere on the road network (paragraph 21).

(f) The present indicator used to measure congestion, while arguably well-fitted to the abstract task of national policy modelling, is of no help at all in demonstrating the actual problems of congestion in urban areas. The public will want to know how urban charging schemes will improve their daily journeys. Simple and transparent indicators should be developed to reflect these important concerns (paragraph 26).

(g) Any regular driver into or around an urban area—indeed, any regular listener to ‘drive-time’ local radio—is likely to be able to reel off a list of areas where acute road congestion regularly occurs. Areas of significant urban congestion ought to be well enough known to the transport departments of local authorities, if not to the Department for Transport. Resources which the Department may be earmarking for the identification of urban congestion hotspots would be better allocated to addressing the actual problems of congestion at those locations already identified (paragraph 27).
(h) We welcome the establishment of the Charging Development Partnership to promote the effective exchange of information between councils which are contemplating the introduction of charging schemes. We believe that there is scope for the Department to develop its role in the Partnership’s activities, particularly following the implementation of the London scheme (paragraph 34).

(i) It is quite clear that in London the levels of investment needed for the longer-term capital investment projects may require revenue streams which are secured for considerably longer than 10 years (paragraph 67).

(j) Short of the “catastrophic failure” which may prompt the Mayor to cancel the scheme, we believe that two months is not long enough to establish whether it has succeeded or failed (paragraph 69).

(k) We were pleased to hear from the Mayor that he was willing to submit the scheme to independent scrutiny, and we encourage him to do so (paragraph 71).

(l) If charging is to be regarded as a proven mechanism for reducing congestion, it is important that congestion charging in London should not only work, but should be seen to work. We believe that, in addition to the monitoring programmes established by Transport for London, a regular, authoritative, independent and impartial assessment of the effects of the London congestion charging scheme is essential to sustain public confidence in the scheme (paragraph 71).

(m) We believe that the monitoring programmes which Transport for London have established should make particular provision for examining the effects of the charge on the low paid, on public service workers and on the voluntary sector (paragraph 74).

(n) We believe that the switch to greener fuels encouraged by the exemption of alternative fuel vehicles from congestion charging is welcome. It may well contribute to overall reductions in the level of pollution. Consequently, it represents an undoubted benefit of the scheme. Significant changes to the exemptions for different vehicle types should be avoided. If not, investment in new technology will have been wasted and the overall credibility of the scheme will be damaged (paragraph 78).

(o) There are clearly dangers in implementing a scheme on this scale without any experience of smaller projects. The automatic numberplate recognition system may not build up a sufficiently robust database, and this database may not be properly maintained by the contractor concerned. Comparison of the two databases may be mishandled, so that drivers are either wrongly pursued or able to evade the charge. Details of registered keepers supplied by the DVLA may not be sufficiently accurate to allow proper enforcement of the system. Unfounded speculation and gossip about possible evasions of the charge proliferate (paragraph 80).
(p) The Committee supports the objectives of the London scheme. It is unfortunate that the first scheme of its type to be implemented in the UK is also the largest, and does not have the benefit of a pilot study to iron out any teething problems. Nevertheless, we welcome the Mayor’s readiness to take action to address the problem of congestion in London. The substantial groundwork which has been done in preparation for the scheme should, we hope, reduce the lead-time required for the development of charging schemes elsewhere (paragraph 82).

(q) We recognise that the Mayor has considerable discretion over the scheme’s operation, and we encourage him to use his powers judiciously to streamline the functioning of the scheme and to alleviate the worst of the pain the scheme may cause (paragraph 83).

(r) Congestion in key urban areas is a problem which is ripe to be tackled. A consistent and coherent strategy to address urban congestion will bring benefits over and above those which may accrue from alleviating overall congestion on the road network. While urban charging schemes are far from being a panacea for urban congestion, a scheme which is fit for the purpose and properly targeted, assessed, supported and implemented could make a significant and positive impact (paragraph 84).

(s) Without a clear lead from the Government on the acceptability of urban charging schemes, it seems unlikely that the recommendations for urban charging schemes which have thus far emerged from multi-modal study teams will be taken much further than the drawing board (paragraph 96).

(t) If the Government intends charging revenues to fund major public transport improvements, it must not hinder the process by setting up artificial barriers which may discourage investment. We repeat our predecessors’ recommendation that the income from road user charging and workplace parking levy schemes should be hypothecated to local transport spending permanently and in full. The revenue raised through charging should in all cases be treated as separate from, and additional to, local transport funding provided by central government (paragraph 102).

(u) We believe it essential that additional capital and revenue funding should be made available to local authorities, through Local Transport Plan settlements, to assist them in making the necessary public transport improvements before the introduction of such schemes. Local authorities themselves have a responsibility to be prudent and efficient in the management of their public transport schemes (paragraph 105).

(v) We agree with the Government that assistance to local authorities which decide to introduce charging should not detract from assistance to local authorities which have decided against charging, but have made other plans to tackle congestion. As a general principle, investment should be targeted on those areas most affected by congestion, at a level which is likely to make a genuine impact. It is also important that investment is made to limit congestion occurring (paragraph 106).

(w) Electronic charging scheme technologies must be developed to a national standard, which is compatible with any future European standard. The Government must ensure that they are interoperable, and that they are compatible with the electronic tolling systems in use or proposed elsewhere in the UK, for instance at the Severn and Dartford crossings and on the new M6 Toll (paragraph 112).
(x) Local authorities which are developing electronic road user charging systems must develop their schemes in such a way that vehicle users without access to electronic technology are provided with alternative and convenient means of paying the charge (paragraph 113).

(y) If charging schemes are not introduced where appropriate, congestion in urban areas will not be cut, public transport use will not rise and emissions will increase. The Government is committed to addressing these issues on a national level. We therefore find it a matter of serious concern that the Government is not at present prepared to make a more positive and open contribution to the national debate on congestion charging (paragraph 122).
PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE RELATING TO THE REPORT

At the meetings of the Committee on 23 and 30 October 2002 the following Declarations of Interest were made:

Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody, Member, Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers’ Union.

Mr Brian H Donohoe, Clive Efford, Mrs Louise Ellman, Helen Jackson and Mr George Stevenson, Members of Transport and General Workers’ Union.

Mr Graham Stringer, Member, Amicus-MSF.

Mr Robert Sym, holder of shares in Marden Holdings Ltd, a family business with interests in road haulage.

WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2002

Members Present:

Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody, in the Chair

- Tom Brake
- Mr Gregory Campbell
- Mr Brian H Donohoe
- Clive Efford
- Mrs Louise Ellman
- Ian Lucas
- Mr George Osborne
- Mr George Stevenson
- Mr Graham Stringer
- Mr Robert Sym

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report [Urban Charging Schemes], proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 12 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 13 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 14 to 19 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 20 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 21 to 56 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 57 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 58 to 70 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 71 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 72 to 75 read and agreed to.
A paragraph—(Clive Efford)—brought up, read the first and second time, and inserted (now paragraph 76).

Paragraphs 76 to 78 (now paragraphs 77 to 79) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 79 (now paragraph 80) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 80 (now paragraph 81) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 81 (now paragraph 82) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 82 (now paragraph 83) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 83 (now paragraph 84) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 84 to 103 (now paragraphs 85 to 104) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 104 (now paragraph 105) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 105 (now paragraph 106) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 106 to 120 (now paragraphs 107 to 121) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 121 (now paragraph 122) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 122 (now paragraph 123) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 123 (now paragraph 124) read and agreed to.

Paragraph 124 (now paragraph 125) read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 125 to 135 (now paragraphs 126 to 136) read and agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.—(The Chairman.)

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (Select committee (reports)) be applied to the Report.

Ordered, That the Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee be reported to the House.
LIST OF WITNESSES

Wednesday 23 October 2002
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Kate Hoey MP

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL
Mr Richard Rawlinson and Councillor Helen Holland

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL
Mr Roger Elphick OBE and Councillor Don Ross

NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
Sue Flack and Councillor Mike Edwards

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY
Mr Ken Livingstone

Mr Bob Kiley and Mr Derek Turner

Wednesday 30 October 2002
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COMMISSION FOR INTEGRATED TRANSPORT
Professor David Begg

RAC FOUNDATION
Mr Edmund King and Mr David Holmes

DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT
Rt Hon Alistair Darling, Mr Mike Goodwin and Mr Tim Fairclough
LIST OF APPENDICES TO THE MINUTES OF EVIDENCE

UCS:
01  Heart of Kennington Residents' Association
02  Mr John Adams
03  Mr Trevor Smith
04  Mr J Solomon
05  Mr G F Burrows
06  Ralph Welsh
07  Ian Ward
08  Trevor Brown
09  Freight Transport Association
10  Royal National Institute of the Blind
11  Marks and Spencer plc
12  The Boots Company plc
13  Stephen Plowden
14  Paul G Bickley
15  City of Nottingham
15a Supplementary Memorandum
16  London First
17  GNER
18  Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Industry
19  Capital Transport Campaign
20  Foreman Electrical Services
21  Joint Radio Taxi Association
22  Durham County Council
23  OFWAT
24  Capita
25  Jonathan Morse
26  Association of Convenience Stores
27  Institute of Logistics and Transport
28  Bristol City Council
29  Transport for London
29a Supplementary Memorandum
29b Supplementary Memorandum
29c Supplementary Memorandum
30  Commission for Integrated Transport
30a Supplementary Note
31  Transport 2000
32  Road Haulage Association
33  National Federation of the Blind of the United Kingdom
34  Allstar Limousines
35  Westminster City Council
36  British Motorcycle Federation (BMF)
37  Department for Transport
37a Supplementary Note
37b Supplementary Note
37c Supplementary Note
38  Corporation of London
39  Merseytravel
40  Manchester City Council
41  Transport Committee, London Assembly
42  Automobile Association
43  RAC Foundation
44  Nottingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry
45  London Chamber of Commerce and Industry
REPORTS OF THE TRANSPORT COMMITTEE
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