

From: Jim Froggatt
Sent: 21 November 2007 11:14
To: opinion@derbytelegraph.co.uk
Subject: Congestion Charging

Sir

The Campaign for Better Transport (formerly Transport 2000) supports variable Road User Charging in principle.

There are times when it is sensible to use a car, and others when it isn't, and driving, alone, into a City Centre at peak time, then parking all day, is not a sensible use.

At present, it costs a fortune to own a car, but not much to use it, and about the only variable is the cost of parking. In contrast, using a bus or train involves paying as you go, often more at peak times. We would like to see national proposals to reduce the cost of owning a car, but increasing the cost of using it, particularly on congested roads. Local congestion charging schemes are a start.

As I understand it, the Councils of Derby, Leicester and Nottingham have to agree a rough plan to introduce charging in all three cities and what investments they would like to make, then get government agreement to produce a detailed plan. No-one thinks it will work if all three don't agree. So, at this stage, it's not worth getting worked up over the details of any charging scheme. What is needed, in the near future, is public comment on what investments they would like to see, to give the car user more choice than he or she has at present.

Given that demand for oil is increasing and supplies more difficult to find, it's obvious that in the long term we need to invest in alternatives to cars, particularly for journeys within cities. So, we would like to see better bus services, and making it easier to walk or cycle, take priority over road improvements. If people are using alternatives, not only are they not causing congestion, they aren't using fuel or creating emissions. In many cases people are simply not aware of what's already possible - a trial in Darlington, a marketing blitz reduced traffic by 10%, mainly by people walking or cycling instead.

If the three cities say "no" to a charging scheme, then the government is likely to spend its promised pot of money in places that say "yes", leaving us with enough to fiddle with traffic lights and paint white lines, but not much more. Bus operators will give up, as you can't make any profit on a bus that's stuck in traffic, traffic jams will last all day and you'll need a mask to walk around. It might even cost more than £2/day for the extra fuel spent going nowhere fast.

Jim Froggatt

Chair,
Derbyshire Campaign for Better Transport