

PE1607/A

Petitioner Submission of 4 September 2016

It will be easy for Parliament to dismiss this petition, stating that congestion charging must be left to individual city councils to decide, but before they do, they should reflect upon what I seek and why I seek it.

The present legislation calls for widespread consultation before the charge can be levied. This mitigates against the charge ever being realised. The more consultation takes place, the more opposition will be created.

To understand why Scotland will never see a congestion charge anywhere under present legislation, one needs to consider why there are two schemes in the UK, south of the border.

London implemented the charge without consultation. It was in the manifesto of Ken Livingstone and it was clear to all that if he was elected, the charge would follow. And so now London has a successful scheme that no party proposes removing. It has made a huge difference to the quality of life for those living within the zone and provides vital funding to improve the quality of life for those visiting, working or living in London.

Travel for London invest their income on schemes that will affect the lives of people who live and travel in London. Roads, cycling, tube station, buses, energy generation for the underground, public spaces- all benefit from the cash.

History

In 1995, the London Congestion Research Programme concluded that the city's economy would benefit from a congestion charge scheme, the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 required local authorities to study and reduce traffic volumes and any future London mayors were given the power to introduce "Road user charging" by the Greater London Authority Act 1999. In his manifesto for the 2000 London Mayoral election, Ken Livingstone had proposed to introduce a £5 charge for vehicles entering central London. Following his victory, the Mayor made a draft order and requested a report from TfL, which summarised the reasons for introducing the scheme. The charge was introduced on 17 February 2003.

At the time officials from 30 other British cities were reported to be considering introducing congestion charges if London's scheme was successful.

[Apart from Durham] that never happened and, further afield, the only cities to adopt a similar scheme since are Milan and Stockholm.

Mr Livingstone believes there are two reasons: political cowardice and "modern" cities built after the introduction of the car that do not need a congestion charge.

He said: "If it wasn't for the Republicans, who control the New York State Assembly, Manhattan island would have one. Mayor Bloomberg really wants to do it but he can't get the votes.

"In Manchester the politicians were so nervous they said: 'we'll have a referendum first'.

"If I'd had a referendum first, with all the hysteria in the newspapers - I had two and a half years of newspapers saying it would be a disaster - you'd never have got it through. It was all doom and gloom.

His successor, Boris Johnson has described the original scheme as a success which had benefited London. Mr Livingstone said:

"Political cowardice is always going to be a problem: people think they might lose votes if they do it - but very few cities actually need it." (from www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-21451245)

One other UK city has the charge. The Durham Road User Charge Zone is located on Durham peninsula, the home of the World Heritage site of Durham Cathedral and Castle, as well as the Durham Market Place, Durham Chorister School, Durham University colleges and a variety of shops and businesses. It is £2 a day and was introduced in 2002. <http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/3437/Durham-Road-User-Charge-Zone-congestion-charge>

In February 2016, the European Commission recommended that Councils should be introducing congestion charges in every town and city in the UK.

In Scotland

The petitioner believes Scotland's cities will never see the congestion charge because, unlike England, current legislation dictates it can only be implemented after consultation.

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 states at : www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2001/2/section/52

Before an order making, varying or revoking a charging scheme is made, the charging authority or charging authorities (acting jointly)—

shall consult such persons as may be specified in regulations made under section 50(3) of this Act; and

may consult such other persons as they think fit

about the scheme or, as the case may be, the variation or revocation.

Any new scheme is subject to the approval of Scottish Ministers under section 51 of the Act.

This requirement for consultation means that schemes will always be opposed even though they have been mandated for through local elections. The opposition will lead calls for a local referendum to take place which will most likely result on a "no" vote, since the media will always stir up a frenzy in order to sell newspapers and will polarise opinion on this specific issue. Citizens seldom vote for new taxes.

The petitioner asks Parliament to amend legislation so that political parties can choose to include it in their manifestos and if elected would have the power to introduce "Road user charging".

Clearly the details of each and every scheme would need to be discussed and voted upon by local Council Transport Committees, but it should be left up to each local authority to determine how much (if any) consultation is required.