



Green Paper: Summary of the Debate

"Gridlock or Growth - Choices and Challenges for the Future"



West Midlands Metropolitan Area Congestion Management Study

March 2007

Commissioned by:



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1 Overview

1.1 Introduction

The Green Paper 'Gridlock or Growth – Choices and Challenges for the Future' was launched on 22nd September 2006. The study was commissioned by the seven Metropolitan Authorities in the West Midlands and the Passenger Transport Authority. Gridlock or Growth identified current and predicted future levels of congestion and examined a range of solutions for tackling the problem. Gridlock or Growth set out what would happen to congestion under three scenarios:

- Continuing with existing plans and levels of investment
- Introducing 'lifestyle options' such as changing school times, work patterns, introducing more home working etc
- A package of public transport investment and road-pricing (three pricing models were scoped out: zonal, cordon-based and distanced based).

The report also included certain specific expenditure plans e.g. capacity improvements on rail, the majority of which would be funded through the Transport Innovation Fund, for up-front improvements to the local transport infrastructure as part of a package to tackle congestion. The report detailed a need for a £2 billion up-front investment and a further £2 billion to be funded from road pricing revenue.

Gridlock or Growth also sets out conditions that would need to be met before road pricing could be considered in the West Midlands as part of a package to tackle congestion:

- Any schemes must improve and not detract from the region's competitiveness
- Appropriate transport alternatives must be significantly funded and coming on stream to provide choice
- There must be clarity about the use of revenues for reinvestment in transport in the West Midlands
- The innovation and knowledge base of the West Midlands should be fully utilised in taking any initiatives forward
- There must be a 'fit' between any local road pricing pilot and the framework for national road-pricing

This report covers the period of debate following the publication of Gridlock or Growth. Contributions to the debate were invited over a three month period from 22nd September 2006 to 30th December 2006.

2 Methodology

2.1 Methodology

During the debate a range of methods was used to engage with a range of local audiences, including local businesses, transport organisations, interest groups, and members of the public.

A number of methods were used to get 'the debate' started, which included a launch event, seven area meetings, presentations, one-to-one meetings, press releases and the circulation of leaflets across the region. Engagement is and will be an on-going process as specialist research agencies are currently in the process of interviewing business representatives and residents across the region.

2.2 Launch Event

The debate was started with a breakfast launch event at the International Convention Centre on Friday 22nd September 2006. Invitations were sent to 125 stakeholders across the region, which included representatives from regional partners, local authorities, transport providers, representatives of business, environmental interests and statutory bodies. The launch event was organised to open the debate/discussion on the publication of the Green Paper 'Gridlock or Growth – Choices and Challenges for the Future'. A total of 69 stakeholders attended this launch event where they were shown a presentation that included video footage and had the opportunity to ask the Transport Innovation Fund team leaders questions relating to the scheme. Stakeholders were handed information packs at the event and copies of the presentation slides in a handout version.

2.3 Area Meetings

To assist with the debate of the Green Paper, workshops were held in the seven district areas. The workshop events all followed the same format, starting with the presentation and video footage and then breaking off into group discussions with a session at the end that summarised the group responses and allowed the delegates the opportunity to ask the panel questions. The group discussions were facilitated by local authority officers who followed the same discussion guide. Over 1,300 representatives of organisations had been contacted to attend any one of the seven events. Stakeholders included representatives from regional partners, local authorities, transport providers, representatives of business, environmental interests and statutory bodies. In the main these area meetings were not well attended with just 100 attendees overall.

Presentations/One-to-One Meetings

A number of presentations and one-to-one meetings were held across the region to keep the debate on the Green Paper going and to inform the wider public of the paper's publication.

Leaflet

In December 2006, leaflets were distributed to over 1,300 stakeholders by post and an e-mail newsletter was circulated to over 1,000 stakeholders to remind them of the closing date for comments.

2.4 Methods of Contact

The West Midlands Local Transport Plan website provided a dedicated section to promote the scheme and gain feedback from the general public. Members of the public could download copies of the full report and executive summary from this website. The web address www.westmidlandsltp.gov.uk was advertised in the Green Paper, information pack, leaflets and in all press releases.

Members of the public and local businesses could forward their comments relating to the scheme either online at www.westmidlandsltp.gov.uk or in writing to the Transport Innovation Fund Team, Faber Maunsell, Beaufort House, 94-96 Newhall Street, Birmingham, B3 1PB. This allowed for the opportunity of detailed comments to be fed into the engagement process.

3 Questions for Debate

Whilst Gridlock or Growth raised a number of key questions for discussion, this first period of engagement also allowed a wide range of views to be submitted and considered. The questions detailed in Gridlock or Growth were:

- *Do you agree that traffic congestion is a major problem that is getting worse within the West Midlands and something which needs to be tackled?*
- *How does congestion affect you and your organisation? Do you believe that it is hampering our economic growth potential and is having harmful effects on air quality and health?*
- *Should we simply accept increasing congestion levels or should we do something about it?*
- *What are your views on what should happen in the West Midlands and how this relates to the national position?*
- *If you are a regular road user, to what degree would you be prepared to change your travel habits to contribute to reducing congestion under current transport conditions enhanced by schemes such as car sharing, working from home initiatives and school buses? Are such options practical for you and your organisation? Do you think other road users would be prepared to make changes to reduce traffic pressures at peak times in peak locations?*
- *Would significantly improved public transport provision encourage you to consider its use as an alternative to some of the car journeys which you currently make?*
- *If certain trips you made involved a road user charge, would you consider alternative travel arrangements, if they were available?*

4 Gridlock or Growth – Local Area Meetings

Local area meetings took place in each of the seven Metropolitan Authority areas and were attended by around 100 key stakeholders. The questions raised in Gridlock or Growth were dealt with under the following headings:

- *Is congestion an issue?*
- *Could we reduce congestion effectively by changing the way we live and travel?*
- *What improvements to the transport system should be introduced that would reduce congestion?*
- *Could some form of Road User Charging (RUC) as part of a package of enhanced transport options be effective in reducing congestion?*

4.1 Is congestion an issue?

There was consensus that something needed to be done to tackle congestion and that prompt action was required.

It was recognised that congestion is an issue which affects all modes of transport, including public transport (including rail). It was also felt that congestion causes unreliable journey times for both public and private transport and that this impacts on work and family commitments. The impacts on buses and their ability to keep to timetables was raised at a number of meetings.

Issues with the amount of foreign freight which passes through the Region were raised on several occasions.

Crunch points were highlighted, particularly the school run and for those in 'nine to five' jobs. It was noted that congestion also affects local motorways and that they are becoming increasingly gridlocked.

It was generally felt that local congestion affects inward business investment, that there were problems accessing local shopping centres and that pollution was having a detrimental impact on health and the environment. There was also a view that those outside of the West Midlands had a negative image of the region as they associated it with congestion.

The view from across the city region is that a co-ordinated approach to tackling congestion was needed and that it should include addressing the road infrastructure, particularly signalling and road works and also creating a more joined-up public transport system.

4.1.1 District specific issues

There were concerns in Birmingham that congestion is now one of the biggest issues for local businesses. In Dudley it was commented that congestion is now causing journey times to double and even treble, and is forcing businesses to move out of the

area. In Coventry it was felt that there are local congestion hotspots, for example Holyhead Road and Allesley Old Road, but that local congestion is not on the scale of that in Birmingham or London. At the Dudley and Solihull meetings it was mentioned that the area surrounding Birmingham International Airport (BIA) was congested and that BIA lacks adequate public transport links. Solihull town centre was said to be affected by gridlock and congestion was deterring people from shopping in Walsall. A number of district specific issues were raised at the Walsall meeting, particularly the complex nature of intersections at Dudley bypass and regular traffic hotspots at Walsall Football Club and Bescot Sunday Market.

In Wolverhampton, local hot spots and network inefficiencies are problems for most people, and congestion is seriously impacting on business. It was also felt in Wolverhampton that EU directives on working hours are adding to congestion (although these were seen to be improving safety).

4.2 Could we reduce congestion effectively by changing the way we live and travel?

A number of methods for tackling congestion were raised and the options which were outlined in Gridlock or Growth received widespread support. Improvements to public transport were seen as a priority, particularly reliability, quality, pricing and information.

Other common themes included the need to provide car sharing schemes and creating more opportunities for home-working. There was also support for more and improved park and ride schemes. More detailed suggestions included the introduction of special school transport, staggering school hours and that workplaces provide more showers and cycle storage.

There was also a view that much more could be done to encourage cycling and walking but that it is also important to address personal safety issues.

4.2.1 District specific issues

The Birmingham meeting raised the issue that public transport is perceived to be poor, with buses in particular highlighted, and this counted against people's ability to change their mode of transport or lifestyle. There was also felt to be a need for more park and ride facilities. The Coventry session raised the need for more Green Travel Plans but also felt these should be backed by legislation. Fear over personal safety was seen as a disincentive to use public transport and was cited at a number of meetings, including Sandwell, where better facilities for cyclist and motorcyclists was also felt to be needed. Car sharing was raised as an issue that would benefit from more encouragement in Wolverhampton and Sandwell.

4.3 What improvements to the transport system should be introduced that would reduce congestion?

There was consensus that there is a need for an integrated, reliable and attractive public transport system in the West Midlands and there is broad backing for the major elements of the transport package detailed in Gridlock or Growth. A view was expressed that, for alternatives to become viable, personal safety issues need to be addressed. There was also a view that ticketing and travel information needed to be improved and that walking and cycling could be encouraged by improving facilities and

the cycle network. Road infrastructure was cited a number of times and improvements such as improving the management of the roads, for example re-evaluating traffic lights, junctions and signage were suggested.

The most commonly cited areas for focus were:

a) Metro, with comments including:

The need to build the extension to Five Ways

The need to extend the Metro along main corridors, for example Hagley Road

The attractiveness of Metro to car users

The benefits that Metro provides because it is a clean and frequent service

The importance of the provision of Park and Ride schemes in conjunction with Metro

b) Buses, with comments including:

The importance of encouraging bus use through Bus Showcase routes

The need for operators to deliver frequent services (not just on profitable routes)

The benefits of a cost-effective and accessible service

The need for more Bus Rapid Transport Schemes

The need to ensure that buses are safe, reliable and more available outside peak times

c) Integrated ticketing and real-time information

d) Enhanced facilities for walking and cycling

e) Improved management of roads (including use of Urban Traffic Control, and re-evaluation of traffic lights, junction control and improved signage)

4.3.1 Other improvements

There were a number of other specific improvements and issues mentioned, but less frequently cited. These include:

Improvements to Birmingham New Street station

The need for High Vehicle Occupancy lanes

Speedier completion of road works

Improved accessibility to key facilities (e.g. hospitals)

A concern about perceived low passenger numbers, limited lines and high capital costs on Metro

4.3.2 District specific issues

There was a high degree of commonality at the area meetings concerning priorities for transport improvements. However, there were some differences of emphasis. The issue of freight and HGVs was more marked in the Black Country, with suggestions at more than one meeting that some freight could be transferred from the roads to the rail network.

4.4 Could some form of Road User Charging (RUC) as part of a package of enhanced transport facilities be effective in reducing congestion?

There was a general willingness to discuss the role that road user charging could play in tackling congestion in the West Midlands, provided that certain conditions were met, and key concerns addressed.

In line with the criteria set out in Gridlock of Growth, there was consensus that significant upfront investment in public transport would be needed if road user charging were to be introduced. The use of road pricing revenues to fund transport improvements was also advocated. Participants at each of the meetings were also in agreement that the impacts of a road user charge on local businesses and the economy would need to be assessed, in particular to understand the implications for inward-investment in the West Midlands and for business decisions about location.

There were a number of other issues raised on at least one occasion across the seven meetings. These included:

- The possibility of bringing forward the timescales for RUC set out in Gridlock or Growth
- The need to assess carefully who might qualify for an exemption from any RUC scheme
- The need to ensure fairness and equity
- The costs of implementing a RUC scheme
- Concern that a scheme limited to the West Midlands (as opposed to one introduced nationally) would not work
- Anxiety about 'Big Brother' technology.

4.5 RUC options in Gridlock or Growth

Attendees at the meetings expressed their views about each of the three RUC options outlined in Gridlock or Growth. Broadly speaking, attendees favoured a distance-based scheme, on the basis that it appeared the most feasible of the three options and, to some, the fairest system as it tackled congestion where it occurred. Generally speaking attendees were not in favour of the zone based scheme set out in Gridlock or Growth, for the following reasons:

- Concerns over the siting of the boundaries (for example, the position of the NEC)
- Concerns that zones would split communities
- Perceived unfairness in that short distances across boundaries would be charged, whereas lengthy journeys within zones would not
- Fears that business would relocate outside the zones.

4.6 Barriers to the acceptability of road pricing

The meetings revealed some potential barriers to the acceptability of road pricing. The following issues were raised at least once:

- The perception that road users are already heavily taxed
- Concern that a charge would not be fair to those on low incomes
- View that revenues from road pricing would not be re-invested locally in public transport
- General concerns about the 'readiness' of parts of the West Midlands for RUC

4.6.1 District-specific issues

Some of the issues raised at the area meetings were specific to that area or district. There was a difference in responses in the Black Country that reflects the particular economic and social factors at play in that part of the West Midlands. In particular, Black Country audiences highlighted:

- The need for significant road improvements in the area
- The potential impact of RUC on low wage sectors of the economy
- The need for the Western Orbital to relieve traffic pressures (even if it were a toll road)
- The specific issues facing the freight industry which has few options but to use the road network

The zonal system was said to need more refinement at the Birmingham meeting and that boundaries between Birmingham and the Black Country and the conurbation and rural areas would need to be carefully assessed. Similar points were raised at the Sandwell meeting and it was said that the zones sizes and boundaries were questionable. The question of how fair a zonal system would be was also raised. It was also pointed out that a motorist could drive all day in a zone without charge, but if a boundary was crossed during a very short journey then this would attract a charge.

Respondents pointed to Coventry's geographical separation from the rest of the city region, and the different needs of the city. It was suggested that a zonal system could act as a barrier to attracting people into the city. However, there was general acceptance that Coventry needs to be part of the West Midlands area approach to tackling congestion, in part because it too requires significant transport investment.

At the Dudley meeting it was made clear that to gain the support of local businesses it was essential to secure the £2 billion of up-front funding for transport improvements. At the Walsall meeting the impacts on business were also raised. It was argued that any RUC would mean a cost that could tip the balance for a number of companies, resulting in them relocating.

The strongest opposition to RUC was seen at the Wolverhampton meeting. However, it was also said that if a particular scheme has to be chosen then it should be distance based but it would need to be backed by upfront investment in the transport system.

5 Gridlock or Growth – Public Comments

5.1 Overview

The debate attracted 46 responses from members of the public. Some responded in detail by letter and provided their full details, others responded online and gave their views anonymously.

Comments varied widely from strong support for bold measures to tackle congestion to entrenched opposition to any additional charges for motorists.

One of the few common threads was agreement that congestion is a problem that needs to be tackled, and that improved public transport has to be at the forefront of any efforts to improve the situation.

Because of the limited number of responses, care should be taken not to extrapolate any views as representative of the wider West Midlands public. More work clearly needs to be done to encourage continued informed debate on this issue.

5.2 Responses

Members of the public who responded online were asked to debate, discuss and comment on the following questions:

- Do you agree that traffic congestion is a major problem that is getting worse within the West Midlands and something which needs to be tackled?
- How does congestion affect you and your organisation? Do you believe that it is hampering our economic growth potential and is having harmful effects on air quality and health?
- Should we simply accept increasing congestion levels or should we do something about it?
- What are your views on what should happen in the West Midlands and how this relates to the national position?
- If you are a regular road user, to what degree would you be prepared to change your travel habits to contribute to reducing congestion under current transport conditions enhanced by schemes such as car sharing, working from home initiatives and school buses? Are such options practical for you and your organisation? Do you think other road users would be prepared to make changes to reduce traffic pressures at peak times in peak locations?

- Would significantly improved public transport provision encourage you to consider its use as an alternative to some of the car journeys which you currently make?
- If certain trips you made involved a road user charge, would you consider alternative travel arrangements, if they were available?

Some followed these questions closely. Others simply gave their views on what they felt was important.

The views of the public have been grouped under the following headings:

- Congestion
- Lifestyle Measures
- Public Transport Improvements
- Road User Charging

5.3 Congestion

The most common response was that congestion is getting worse in the West Midlands and this should not be allowed to continue. Some of that sentiment is clearly driven by personal experience of the inconvenience congestion causes, some is driven by the link between traffic and environmental concerns.

I think that something needs to be done to free-up the roads for the transport of goods and people.

Member of the public, Sutton Coldfield

Congestion is one of the most important things that needs to be reduced to combat climate change.

Member of the public, unspecified area

Members of the public highlighted some very detailed concerns about specific traffic hotspots they experience. Some are clearly sufficiently motivated by this negative experience to consider moving away from the area.

Congestion is causing me to consider leaving the Birmingham & Black Country region. There are many attractive areas to live and work around the UK and when you spend so much time in traffic, it allows plenty of time to consider your choices! Organisations have to allow more home working but this may require more management of employees. The train is too expensive and too congested to offer a realistic alternative.

Member of the public, unspecified area

And while not everyone was convinced congestion is a West Midlands-wide problem, the majority conceded this is a problem that is only getting worse.

There is little or no congestion in Coventry and I'm not convinced of the forecast for the future.

Member of the public, Coventry

Almost every day for the past 14 years I have driven from Edgbaston to Colmore Row. My family have made the same journey almost daily since 1840. In peak traffic flow the journey took my great great grandfather less time 160 years ago!

Member of the public, Birmingham

5.4 Lifestyle Measures

Members of the public commented less on the potential impact of lifestyle measures on congestion than businesses or other organisations.

What was not conveyed at all was the need for business to address their own business models and their dependence on the use of roads for their own future prosperity.

Member of the public, unspecified area

5.5 Public Transport Improvements

In contrast, there was almost universal reference to the need to provide a much more viable public transport option in the West Midlands – either as the sole solution to congestion, or as a precursor to potential acceptance of a road user charging scheme.

Before the Government consider road charging, they must provide a reliable public transport system.

Member of the public, unspecified area

A proportion of the driving public will transfer voluntarily to public transport if it was there, of good quality, safe, frequent and cheap, none of which is the case now. To tax people off the roads onto an unacceptable or non-existent alternative is a recipe for failure!

Member of the public, unspecified area

Those who responded are clearly struggling to visualise how the existing bus network could meet their future needs. Bus lanes continue to divide, with some expressing the view they are a key cause of congestion, while others would like to see more such measures to help make public transport more reliable and more attractive.

There are no buses that could get me to my workplace for 6am and no service that goes that way either. My wife drops our children off at school on her way to work. There is no public transport that passes the route that she takes.

Member of the public, unspecified area

I believe that in our area the local authority has not been bold enough in allocating bus priority measures.

Member of the public, Sutton Coldfield

Widen the motorways, put in by-pass roads.

Member of the public, Oldbury

We are told to make more use of public transport – but where is an integrated policy that connects these systems?

Member of the public, Dudley

5.6 Road User Charging

Whether road user charging would be the right policy for the West Midlands starkly divided members of the public. Some think it's the only solution, others remain to be convinced that it could be anything other than an extra tax that makes the region less competitive.

Of course something needs to be done. In traditional economics demand has outstripped supply, which usually results in reduced demand or increased supply. As these roads are in dense urban areas, increasing supply isn't going to happen, so you dampen demand by introducing road charging.

Member of the public, unspecified area

We are against any congestion charging, car park tax or tax on local jobs. The proposed measures would act as a disincentive to investment.

Member of the public, Wolverhampton

Even those who could consider it, are looking for additional incentives before it becomes acceptable. Unlike business groups and other organisations who are keen that public transport improvements would have to be part of any road pricing package – members of the public are more focussed on how their individual costs could or should be offset. They want to see public transport improvements, but are less quick to link that to their acceptability of road pricing.

If congestion charging were introduced without offsetting a large part of the cost by reducing petrol or other motoring taxes our business could not absorb the costs.

Member of the public, unspecified area

Few engaged on the detail of the road pricing schemes scoped out in Gridlock or Growth, but there was more clear opposition to a zonal scheme.

How could anyone possibly justify the inequalities and inequities of such a boundary based charging scheme?

Member of the public, unspecified area

6 Gridlock or Growth – Written Responses

A total of 29 written and emailed responses were received from stakeholder organisations including:

- Individual businesses, local chambers of commerce and other business representative bodies
- Environment groups
- Advantage West Midlands
- Public transport representatives
- Lib Dem PTA Group
- Public service providers.

Their views have been grouped under the following headings:

- Congestion
- Lifestyle Measures
- Public Transport Improvements
- Road User Charging.

6.1 Congestion

Delays have a negative impact upon the productivity of the region, reducing the speed with which goods and services can be delivered to their destinations and thus slowing down economic activity.

Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry

The general consensus was that congestion is a problem across the city region, and that measures must be taken to tackle it. Congestion was perceived to be damaging in a range of ways including:

- Reducing the city region's economic competitiveness, and damping growth
- Causing delays to local journeys and unpredictable journey times, affecting businesses
- Reducing the quality of service offered by public transport (especially buses)
- Hindering the response times of local emergency services

Congestion was felt to be a particular problem at peak times, at certain 'hot-spots' and to be increasingly prevalent on motorways adjoining the city region. Local Chambers of Commerce across the city region highlighted the damaging impact of congestion on business performance.

A number of responses detailed their concerns over delays impacting on their ability to deliver the necessary standards of service. Emergency services expressed concerns that congestion is already impacting on their ability to meet their response targets while the main provider of bus services in the West Midlands cited congestion as a key issue that affects their ability to provide the quality of service that passengers have a right to expect.

West Midlands Fire Service is primarily concerned about the increasing level of traffic congestion and the impact it will have upon our ability to respond to emergency incidents within our laid down attendance times.

The West Midlands Fire Service

Congestion very seriously affects the ability of our companies to deliver the quality of service that existing passengers have the right to expect and potential passengers would demand before considering swapping from private to public transport

National Express/Travel West Midlands

The majority of respondents commented that congestion was disadvantaging the local economy. This is not only felt to be an issue for the West Midlands' competitive position within the UK, but was also referenced as a concern in terms of the region's ability to compete internationally. Transport problems with the network as it stands is now recognised as one of the key handicaps for West Midlands business competing both in national and international markets.

Even though Coventry does not currently have major congestion problems in the city the congestion that happens around the region affects businesses severely...If the West Midlands region becomes congested businesses will move to neighbouring regions where they can move their goods and people freely and easily.

Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce

The region is finding it increasingly difficult to compete with other areas of the country, and internationally, because of the underperforming transport network.

The Black Country Chamber of Commerce – Walsall Division

6.2 Lifestyle measures

A package of measures to encourage people to make lifestyle choices in favour of sustainable transport modes should be included as part of any TIF application for funding. They should be used in conjunction with infrastructure measures, improvements to the quality of public transport and the introduction of road user charging,

Transport 2000 and Birmingham Friends of the Earth West Midlands

Respondents who commented on lifestyle measures insisted these form part of any solution to tackle congestion, and these measures are seen as an important component of any Transport Innovation Fund package. Amongst the lifestyles measures that were supported were:

- Walking and cycling
- Personalised travel plans
- Adjustments to working and school patterns.

It was felt that businesses could, or should, take more of a lead in this area, but that the public also have a collective responsibility to try and do more.

CWCC understands that there can not be a quick fix to congestion problems. Businesses and the public will have to do more by implementing lifestyle changes into their daily lives.

Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce

The majority of comments proposed specific changes, particularly the need for cycling, walking and flexible working to be considered. But it was also clear that few believe lifestyle measures could be a stand-alone answer to congestion in the West Midlands. Those who commented on this issue felt such measures would only be effective as part of a package of measures, including significant improvements to public transport.

The solutions that should be pursued in the short and medium term should involve a package of measures that significantly improves public transport, maximises 'softer measures' including travel planning and the school run and tackling of local congestion hot spots

Wolverhampton Freight and Business Forum

Some organisations, whilst supporting the need for lifestyle measures, also highlighted practical problems in their introduction. While the concept of flexible working was applauded, the Birmingham Chamber pointed out how this can be impractical for many businesses to follow through and implement effectively.

BCI supports the concept of flexible hours, home working and an increase in teleconferencing, it is often not possible for businesses to implement such measures.

Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry

6.3 Public transport improvements

There was a strong desire for local public transport improvements and there was broad agreement about the need for an integrated and attractive public transport system. Many respondents, particularly businesses and environment groups, agreed that public transport investment needs to be provided in advance of the introduction of any form of road user charging to offer choice and alternatives to the car.

It is automatic that any congestion charging scheme needs to be introduced in conjunction with improvements in public transport.

Road Haulage Association

Many respondents argued for specific improvements including

- Improvements to the bus network quality and reliability
- Expansion of capacity on the rail network
- Improved security and better policing
- More park and ride facilities.

Although the West Midlands is not proposing following the capital's lead with a London-style congestion charge, respondents felt there were lessons to be learned from London's experience with its charge. This was particularly true of the package of measures that accompanied the congestion charge in London, specifically public transport improvements and traffic management improvements.

Lessons need to be learnt from London...Measures included significant bus priority lanes and traffic management, altered traffic light sequencing in favour of buses, in addition to major increases in the number of buses operating on the city streets.

National Express / Travel West Midlands

Peripheral park and rides would be welcome. As an example, the construction of one at the Wythall/Earlswood area where the North Warwickshire line crosses the M42 would be ideal.

Road Haulage Association

In particular there will need to be a focus on improving the quality and reliability of the bus network within the West Midlands. With the aim of bringing it to the standard of the best in the country, and providing additional capacity on local rail services.

Friends of the Earth West Midlands

Some respondents argued for any revenues from a road user charging scheme to be 'ring-fenced' and re-invested in public transport. Few would support simply bringing in a road user charge in isolation. Vital to the perception that any such charge could be seen as 'fair' is how any money raised is used, and used locally. Views from this consultation echo national studies that show support for any kind of road pricing is increased by a commitment that money raised from it will go into improving transport locally.

Almost all respondents accept that this revenue would be vital in helping to ensure a really viable alternative to using the car was in place in advance of any such scheme going live.

Any funding raised locally from Road Pricing and Congestion Charging needs to be hypothecated towards public transport improvements in the West Midlands. Such public transport improvements also need to be in place before any such Road Pricing or Congestion Charging is introduced, as part of "carrot and stick" process, where the use of public transport would be an attractive alternative to the car.

Birmingham International Airport

In general we accept the need for some form of Road User Charging as in Scenario C on the understanding that the proceeds from congestion charging would be reinvested in the region's transport system.

CPRE

6.4 Road User Charging

Opinion was divided about the merits of road pricing. One driver of support for a form of road user charging was the feeling that the West Midlands, and the country as a whole, has a long way to go before it can boast an effective transport network. Road User Charging is seen as a potential part of a necessary solution, but to a serious problem created by under-investment in public transport over many years. With such a gap in provision to make up, some respondents felt it is now time to move on from smaller, incremental measures and consider road user charging as part of a package of measures.

The CBI's position on Road User Charging has been clear for some time i.e. we are in favour of some kind of distance based scheme providing it is part of a wider package of measures to address the chronic under investment in the transport infrastructure for the last twenty years.

CBI

It was felt that the West Midlands is going to need to understand the benefits of any such scheme before it can be accepted. Many respondents felt a road user charge could have benefits in principle, but more work needs to be done to articulate the benefits of taking such a step.

The Airport Company recognises the role Road Pricing and Congestion Charging could play, in the future, in terms of improving transport provision and travel in the West Midlands. The Airport Company is willing to support such measures, where it is clear that there will be a real benefit and improvement to transport and travel in the West Midlands, and surface access for Birmingham International Airport will be improved.

Birmingham International Airport

Those organisations that broadly backed road pricing argued that it is needed to improve the competitiveness of the region and journey time reliability. There is also a view that the West Midlands needs to be part of what would be a wider national framework for road pricing. It is important to note that support for road pricing was generally conditional, and depended upon:

- Improvements to public transport
- Clarity about the use of charging revenues, and in some cases their reinvestment in local transport
- Information about exemptions
- Further evidence about the impacts of a road user charge on business and competitiveness (and in particular evidence of net benefits).

Again, this demonstrates the need for business and other organisations to clearly understand the benefits of any road user charging scheme before it could be supported.

The BCI Congestion Charge Survey shows that many businesses would support the introduction of a road user charge within the West Midlands conurbation, although this is heavily dependent on the fulfilment of a number of conditions. In response to the question 'would your business support the introduction of a congestion charge in the West Midlands conurbation', 43 per cent of respondents stated that their support was dependent upon significant improvements to the region's transport network being delivered before the implementation of any scheme, although 41 per cent would not accept road pricing under any circumstances.

Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Understanding how any road user scheme could help, rather than hinder, competitiveness is key for these organisations. Instinctively some businesses think it will help, but others are concerned about how any extra costs might damage the health of their businesses. Not only would the West Midlands need to be clear about how any reduction in congestion would benefit business, but also how any money raised would go towards benefiting business. This might mean not only improving public transport, but also roads.

If such a scheme was introduced, we must ensure that businesses are able to remain competitive on all fronts; this includes multinational businesses down to sole traders. If businesses are paying a charge to use the road network the money raised must be put back into transport network to make the West Midlands the best place to do business. We have to make sure that any charge benefits businesses rather than heaping more pressure on an ever tougher market.

Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce

Some organisations had significant concerns about road pricing which included:

- The potential impact on the region's competitiveness (Road Haulage Association, Jafco Tools)
- Lack of transport alternatives, and concern that pricing was being pursued ahead of investment in public transport (Wolverhampton Freight and Business Forum)
- Existing levels of taxation on motorists (Churchill Office Solutions)
- How any scheme would fit with a national road pricing scheme.

In the road haulage sector we would not welcome any additional charges. Such costs would add to manufacturing costs and act against the competitiveness of the local economy. Goods and supplies have to be delivered into [the city region] areas and there is little or no alternative to this being carried out by lorries.

Road Haulage Association

A recurring theme in the written responses was a scepticism as to how the West Midlands' competitive position would benefit if it went first with any road pricing pilot, ahead of any national scheme. Respondents were particularly concerned that going first would be a significant risk to the region's competitive position and the well-being of many of its businesses. Business would need a clear case about how being part of any road user charging pilot would help, not hinder, their position with competitors outside of any such pilot.

The Forum strongly feels that the West Midlands should not be used as a pilot for congestion charging ahead of any national congestion charging scheme. It is felt that such an approach would undermine the area's economic health.

Wolverhampton Freight and Business Forum

Another recurring theme, in parallel with the national debate on congestion, is the feeling that motorists and businesses are already taxed enough. It was felt by some that any additional charge for driving locally would be resisted.

There are over 32 million driving licence holders in the UK with a strong belief by motorists and haulers that they are already heavily taxed, especially compared with their European counterparts.

John Spellar MP, Warley

With regards to the different types of road charging scoped out in Gridlock or Growth, distance based charging received most support as it was seen as the fairest option and the most effective in tackling congestion.

The third scenario of some form of road user charging would appear to have the most impact on reducing congestion provided it is accompanied by investment firstly in the regional transport infrastructure (both road and rail) and secondly in public transport.

Freight Transport Association

Whilst the cordon-based model outlined in the Green Paper provoked neither strong support or resistance from respondents, there was significant opposition to a zonal charging scheme as it was felt that it creates artificial boundaries and could lead to displacement of congestion. This sentiment was particularly strongly felt by those businesses and business groups who responded from the Black Country and Birmingham. In Great Barr and Perry Barr a petition organised by Cllr Jon Hunt opposing zones based on the line of the motorways attracted 208 signatures.

Crude zone charging proposals should be rejected because a few moments reflection shows they would have a massively distorting and unfair impact on some communities.

Lib Dem PTA Group

BCI calls for the introduction of Scenario C, Concept 1 - Distance Based Road User charging, through which vehicles are charged by a tracking system that uses satellite technology, depending on when, where and how far they travel. This is the fairest and most proportionate method by which vehicles can be charged. Whilst we accept that many businesses in the West Midlands may prefer the other road pricing options outlined in the Green Paper (as demonstrated by our survey results), we believe that both the zonal and 9 centre schemes would incur disproportionate costs penalties to firms and would not be supported by BCI.

Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Birmingham and Coventry Chambers of Commerce and industry state that they have both spent a lot of time over recent months consulting with their members on congestion and the best solutions, including road pricing.

Their position summarises the position of many of the businesses and business groups who responded to Gridlock or Growth. They support the need to do something about rising congestion levels that are already damaging business. They support keeping the option of road user charging alive, particularly a more sophisticated, distance-based scheme, but would require a number of conditions to be met for that support to be maintained:

1. "Significant investment in local transport infrastructure;
2. The costs do not outweigh the benefits – the overall impact on the competitiveness of the conurbation must be positive;
3. The charges must be variable;
4. Discounts/exemptions must be available to certain businesses;
5. Revenues must be hypothecated back into the West Midlands transport system;
6. Any charge must be part of a national scheme.

7 Summary of Responses

In summary, views of the key stakeholders and the general public were as follows:

- The publication of Gridlock or Growth, and the opportunity to debate congestion were broadly welcomed
- Congestion is perceived to be a serious and growing problem across the city region
- Congestion is considered to be impacting negatively on businesses and the city region's competitiveness
- The lifestyle measures outlined in Gridlock or Growth are thought to be essential part of any package to tackle congestion, as is fresh thinking about travel patterns
- There is a willingness to discuss the role of road pricing but only as part of a package of measures to tackle congestion
- Opinion was divided about the merits of road pricing in the West Midlands
- Some respondents broadly accepted the case for road-pricing, subject to the following conditions being satisfied:
 - The need for significant, upfront investment in public transport
 - Further evidence of business impacts and the net effect on the region's competitiveness
 - Clarity about exemptions and how the revenues will be used for local benefit
 - Details of 'fit' with a national road pricing framework
- Groups broadly in favour of road pricing cite improvements to competitiveness and the reliability of journey times as key factors

- A number of organisations and individuals have significant reservations about road pricing, including the potential impact on competitiveness, existing levels of taxation on motorists and lack of alternatives to the car
- On balance, respondents favoured a distance-based road pricing scheme, which was perceived to be fairer and potentially more effective in tackling congestion than other options
- There were concerns about a zonal scheme, namely about the siting of boundaries, the fairness of this approach and the impact of zones on local communities.

Appendix

Responses were received through a number of different channels. They ranged in substance from comments made at local area meetings and emails submitted through the website to some very detailed written responses from local organisations and individuals. More than 100 key stakeholders attended the local areas meetings, 29 organisations submitted written responses, and 46 responses from the public were received through the website and in the post.

Attendance Figures for Local Area Meetings

Area	Actual attendance (exc. Staff)
Birmingham	24
Coventry	19
Dudley	11
Sandwell	8
Solihull	11
Walsall	18
Wolverhampton	17

List of Organisations that Commented on the Study and their Method of Contact

Organisation	Method of contact
Advantage West Midlands	Letter
Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCI)	Letter
Birmingham Friends of the Earth	Web
Birmingham International Airport	Letter
Black Country Chamber of Commerce - Walsall Division	Letter/web
British Waterways	Letter
Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)	Letter
Carver plc	Letter/web
CBI West Midlands Region	Letter
Churchill Office Solutions Ltd	Letter
Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce	Letter
Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee	Letter

Organisation	Method of contact
Freight Transport Association	Letter
House of Commons - Rt Hon John F Spellar MP	Letter
Jafco Tools	Letter/web
ICE	Letter
Lib Dem PTA Group	Letter
Living Streets	Letter
Mid Counties Co-op	Letter/web
National Exhibition Centre	Letter
National Express/Travel West Midlands	Letter/web
Pushbikes	Letter
The Lunar Society	Letter
The Road Haulage Association Ltd	Letter
Transport 2000	Letter
West Midlands Fire Service	E-mail
West Midlands Friends of the Earth	Letter
West Midlands Regional Assembly	Letter
Wolverhampton Freight and Business Forum	Web
Wolverhampton Friends of the Earth	Letter