

7 Views on Road Pricing

7.1 The Business and Consumer Impact Studies undertaken as part of the project and referred to earlier, looked at both congestion impact and views in road pricing as a means to resolve it. Executive summaries of the impact studies are included in the Appendices and headline results are shown here.

Business

7.2 Around two-thirds of the consultees expressed opposition to road pricing, or have some reservations about its potential impacts, however, only a small proportion of consultees expressed outright hostility to road pricing,

7.3 The general nature of possible investments was discussed though not the specifics and consultees were insistent that the public transport improvement 'carrot' must come first before the road pricing 'stick'. This meant that business must see significant investment in the West Midlands now, not through the TIF process, before a further debate on road pricing should begin.

7.4 There was a great deal of cynicism expressed as to whether the revenues would be hypothecated for investment in transport improvements. Strong assurances were also sought that there would be business backing for any proposals, before any were implemented.

7.5 Consultees expressed great concern in relation to the potential impacts of road pricing on wage demands especially from low paid employees who remain dependent upon car travel.

7.6 It is clear that support from the majority will not be forthcoming unless:

- there is substantial increased investment in public transport prior to any road pricing proposition;
- revenue is hypothecated and re-invested in transport improvements; and
- care is given to pricing structures so as to reduce the risk of harm to the social inclusion agenda.

7.7 The majority of consultees considered that a "time-distance-place" charging regime would have greater positive impact and be more equitable than a 'cordon' approach.

Consumer

- 7.8 There is some support for road charging, however it is concentrated amongst non-drivers (as it would not represent a cost to them) and those who want to see car use reduced for environmental reasons. There is also generally stronger support from younger age groups and some of those who drive a lot or who feel the effects of congestion.
- 7.9 It is clear that there is significant opposition to road user charging in the West Midlands, noting that specific schemes or locations have not been disclosed to the public. Amongst many, this is an immediate gut reaction – *‘I think it’s absolutely disgusting’*, which appears to come from a baseline position that people feel motorists already pay more than enough in tax.
- 7.10 Other objections include equity concerns; that it would not tackle congestion because people would get used to paying and/or the problem would be shifted to other times/locations, and congestion would simply rise again as it has in London.
- 7.11 Using road pricing revenues to fund public transport improvements does, in some cases, soften attitudes to charging. However, the strongly anti-group feel taxes on motorists should already be paying for this.
- 7.12 Extensive communications on the real impact of growing congestion would be needed were road pricing to be pursued further, coupled with strong reassurance on public transport investments