
Congestion Charge Changes (Published Dec 2010)



Boris Johnson has formally announced the removal of the Western Extension of the Congestion Charge Zone (WEZ). In the latest of three consultations (yes TfL seem to work on the principle that if you don't get the right answer first time, keep asking), some 62% of respondents supported the removal of the zone. Anyway it was clear from all three consultations that there was general support for scrapping it.

TfL claim that traffic might increase in the WEZ, although it is likely to fall in the central zone as residents in the WEZ would no longer have free access. But the level of congestion in the WEZ did not in essence change after the WEZ was introduced.

The Mayor also pointed out the loss of revenue to TfL from charging in the WEZ, but as he said in his announcement: *"It has never been the justification for congestion charging that it raises revenue. The money no longer coming to TfL from payment of the charge will remain in the pockets of those who would otherwise be payers and will be available for spending on other things...."*

(Editor's Comments: Mr Johnson has clearly got a good understanding of economics, and it's worth pointing out that with the congestion charge in general almost all the revenue goes into operating the system so it goes into the operators pockets – Capita as was, now IBM – but in future it will stay in the pockets of the road users).

The WEZ will end on Christmas Even (Dec 24th 2010). The ABD issued a press release to celebrate which can be seen at www.freedomfordrivers.org/News.htm . Thanks to all the ABD members, and the West London Residents Association headed by Gordon Taylor for their work that made this happen. The ABD would of course like to see the main congestion charge scrapped also, and suggested it be removed in our consultation submission, as did Westminster City Council.

Charge Increase



At the same time as the WEZ is removed, the charge for the main zone will rise to £10 from £8 (it has now doubled since it was first introduced). However, there will be reduction to £9 for those who use the new "Auto Pay" system where you register your vehicle and then get debited automatically. This might reduce the number of accidental infringements from which TfL get a lot of the income from this scheme – indeed without those the system would probably lose money.

Travel in London

TfL stop have stop publishing their Annual Monitoring Report on the Congestion Charge system – the last one was in 2008. Was this because of the bad news it revealed – that congestion was unchanged and air pollution no better? We will no doubt never know. But a partial replacement is the Annual Travel Report.

This is well worth a read if you want to learn about travel patterns in London and it does contain a section on the Congestion Charge – see www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/about-tfl/publications/1482.aspx for the whole 380 pages. Some highlights are as follows (much of the data relates to 2008/09 due to delays in reporting):

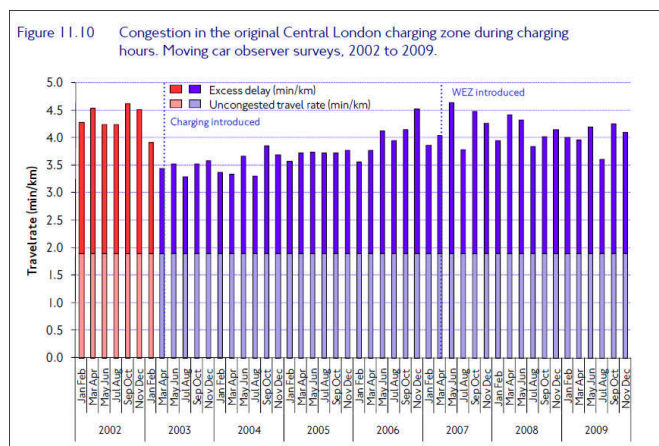
- Total road traffic fell in London by 2% in 2008, which accelerates the previous trend seen in London over the last few years. The fall was slightly higher in central London than in the suburbs. Meanwhile public transport usage (mainly buses and tubes) continued to rise. *(Editor's Comments: You will hear many people suggesting that London will suffer from gridlock as car ownership trends continue to rise, but the data demonstrates clearly that the truth is otherwise).*

- However traffic congestion in London generally continued to increase. To quote the report "Recent increases in congestion are thought to reflect a range of planned and unplanned interventions in the road network that have combined to reduce the effective capacity of the road network for general traffic". *(Editor's Comments: They mean road works combined with deliberate reductions in road space, more traffic lights and misconceived schemes such as Trafalgar Square and Aldgate. Indeed they mention in the report that loss of capacity between 2004 and 2008 in the central London zone might be as much as 30%! That's the legacy of the Livingstone regime).*

- Total CO2 emissions have grown by 7% since 2003, but ground based transport emissions have fallen by 5%. *(Editor's Comments: So road users are not to blame for increased emissions, contrary to what many politicians say. In reality, car users are contributing more than many other groups to emission reduction, and yet are the regular target of vilification).* Reductions in NO2 and PM10 emissions from ground based transport are even higher, although such transport continues to be the major contributor to these emissions and London continues to breach the EU Limit Values for PM10s at a small number of locations.

- The number of vehicles entering the central Congestion Charge zone declined in 2009 and the first half of 2009. This appeared to result in small reductions to delays, but congestion levels were "still well above those formerly achieved by the scheme". *(Editor's Comments: Looks like congestion improved slightly because of the recession's impact on traffic volumes. Otherwise it has not improved).*

Here's a chart from the report that shows the trends in congestion since before the charge was introduced:



Has there been any real benefit in terms of reduced congestion? It's not at all obvious from the chart that there has.

- Cycling is probably rising, but it is still only 2% of all trips. Cars and motorcycles take up 39% of trips, which is way ahead of public transport usage. For a breakdown of trips by borough see page 72 of the report, but bear in mind that multi-leg trips distort the figures e.g, a trip by walking, by train and tube might count as three trips, whereas motorised trips may be solely counted as one.