
No Environmental Benefit from the Congestion Charge Tax



Improvements to London air quality were repeatedly put forward by Ken Livingstone and others as one reason to go ahead with the Congestion Charge, despite experts saying it would not be so. A recent report published by TfL (the “Fourth Annual Monitoring Report”) makes it clear that no improvement has taken place as a result. To quote from the report:

“Table 6.3 shows a full breakdown of the estimated changes to emissions of key pollutants in relation to congestion charging between 2002 and 2003. Key observations from the table are as follows:

- Of those effects directly attributable to congestion charging, traffic volume changes are now assessed to have had only a relatively small impact on total emissions. This mainly reflects the relatively small contribution of petrol cars to total emissions in central London and a substantially increased proportion of the car fleet that is now assessed to be diesel fuelled in the inventory. Furthermore, these reductions are partly offset by observed increases in taxis and buses (diesel vehicles). These profile changes apply both to the charging zone and the Inner Ring Road, in the latter case a small increase in overall traffic volumes having been observed.

- The overall impact due exclusively to changes in traffic volumes and relative vehicle populations is therefore assessed to be: savings of around 1 percent in both NO_x and PM₁₀ within the charging zone; and increases of between 7 and 9 percent in NO_x and PM₁₀ respectively on the Inner Ring Road, although much of this reflects methodological changes to the inventory calculations, rather than ‘real’ change (see further below), and in any case is only one component of overall change.”

In other words the change within the zone is negligible and probably statistically insignificant, while there is a significant degradation on the Inner Ring Road. Any improvements from reduction in car traffic have been more than offset by the increase in number of taxis and buses required to transport people around the zone.

This is a good example of where Ken Livingstone misled the population of London in his keenness to adopt an anti-car strategy.

Note that air quality did improve somewhat within the zone but this mainly arose from the improvements in vehicle technology in the last few years.

Other Impacts Mentioned in the Report



The improvement in traffic delays following the introduction of the London Congestion Tax seems to be wearing off, although they are still better than before the charge was introduced (*Editor: Yes that is also noticeable from personal experience with jams seeming to return in many places*).

The report claims that the previously seen downturn in retail trade has recovered, and it claims that the charge has had a neutral impact on the central London economy.

Ambient noise levels seem to be unchanged, so it has had no impact on “noise pollution”.

The increase in the charge to £8 (from £5) caused charge payments to reduce by 11%. Net income from the scheme after expenses was £122 million in 2005/6, most of which was spent on improved bus services. As the scheme costs £90 million per year to operate, one can see how inefficient the scheme is as a tax collection device.

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