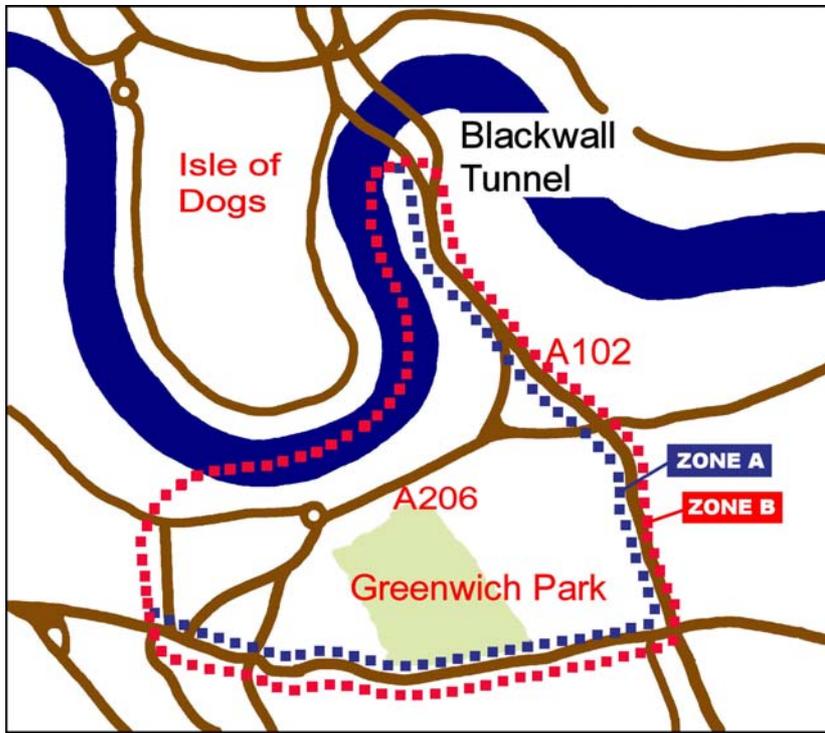

Greenwich Road Tolls



Transport for London (TfL) and Greenwich Council are conducting a joint study of “road traffic demand management” in the Greenwich area. This includes consideration of a congestion charge tax (ie. a road toll) on the area bounded by the A102 and A2 – which includes Greenwich park and Greenwich town centre.

As you can see on the map above, it might also cover the Blackwall Tunnel and one option, even if a wide area charge like the central London congestion tax is not implemented, is to impose a toll on the Blackwall Tunnel. The Blackwall Tunnel and the A2 are of course the main routes used by traffic from South-East London and Kent to reach central London.

The joint study of the options is being supported by surveys of residents – more recently by Accent Group but there was also a poll by Mori a few months ago. The latest survey asks respondents to consider two possible zones – marked A and B on the map, the time of operation and the charges - £2, £4 or £6 are mentioned but it could be higher for larger vehicles.

Note that the charging zone would include the A2209 (Deptford Church Street) to the west which would be the normal way for traffic from the Surrey Quays, Rotherhithe and Southwark areas to avoid Greenwich town centre, and it may also cover the A2 over Blackheath so most of the diversionary routes would also be covered. In fact to avoid paying the charge, traffic would have to go through the centre of Lewisham which is already severely congested, or take some minor back roads. Clearly this congestion tax would not be readily avoidable by most traffic.

In addition a lot of traffic would likely divert to the new Thames Gateway Bridge and residents in Bexley are already exceedingly concerned about the additional traffic that will generate on their local roads.

It is worth pointing out that the use of “surveys” to lead public opinion in the preferred direction is now a common element of TfL practices. By using a biased survey they can pretend that people support a scheme without doing open and full consultation. And of course so far there has been no indication that most of the road users such as people who use the Blackwall Tunnel will be consulted at all.



Bob Neill, MP for Bromley and Chislehurst and a Greater London Assembly Member spoke in the House of Commons on this issue in questions to Minister Stephen Ladyman. When talking about the proposed Greenwich scheme he said *“That would have ramifications well beyond Greenwich and the immediate area and would have an enormous impact on the national traffic network, including the A2 and A20, which are key feeder roads into London”*. He requested the greatest possible public consultation be undertaken and that such a scheme not be imposed against the will of the public.

The Association of British Drivers (ABD) totally agrees with this stance and is asking that a full referendum be conducted of all residents of the boroughs of Greenwich and the adjoining boroughs (Lewisham, Southwark, Bexley, etc). In addition all those people who live further away but use routes such as the Blackwall Tunnel should be given a voice.

Transport Innovation Fund

The funding for the initial studies is coming from central Government’s Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) for congestion schemes. The TIF funds are basically being used to bribe local authorities to set up congestion charging and road pricing schemes because the Government realises how politically sensitive such schemes are and does not want to be seen as promoting them directly.

Of course if you get a local scheme in somewhere like Greenwich, which encourages traffic to avoid the area, then you generate major congestion problems in adjoining areas which in due course can then justify their own scheme.

More information on the reasons for the TIF bid are present in the following internet document which was published in 2005 where the Greenwich bid is described in detail:

www.dft.gov.uk/foi/responses/2005/nov/bidsppf/

As it points out: *“...any attempt to impose significant peak hour traffic reduction on Greenwich Town Centre would give rise to objections similar to those associated with the earlier lorry ban. Measures that serve only to reduce traffic in one locality by transferring it to other equally sensitive locations, clearly, offer no net community benefits, while proposals that benefit one interest group by inconveniencing others will always present difficult choices. The Council would not wish to be a party to measures that are liable to inflict detriment on other communities or local authorities.”*

This revealing document even manages to suggest that because of the problems of traffic diversion if a congestion charge was introduced at peak periods, it might be best to introduce an “off-peak only” charge – this would definitely be a world first – a congestion charge when there was no congestion!

But Greenwich estimated the cost of a scheme at over £100 million, an enormous amount of money with no clear benefits.

The Problems of Greenwich

Greenwich town centre has been a notorious traffic bottleneck for many years. The nature of the geography also causes any generated air pollution over a wide area to collect in the river valley. Two alternative solutions have been suggested in the past to remove traffic from the town centre and enhance this World Heritage site – the first was to improve the A2 route over Blackheath, possibly by using a tunnel to avoid damage to the park – the second was by constructing a new road along the river frontage – both projects were effectively blocked by environmental objectors.

Air Pollution Issues

In 2002, an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) was adopted by Greenwich because of the known air pollution problems on some of the major roads. You can read this on the internet at: www.greenwich.gov.uk/Greenwich/YourEnvironment/Pollution/AirQuality/AirQualityActionPlan.htm

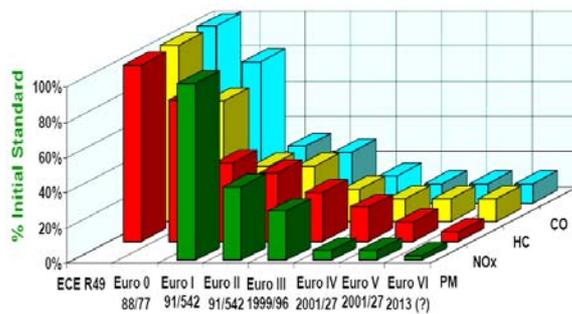
But although clearly many of the major routes in Greenwich generate much air pollution from traffic (for example the Blackwall Tunnel handles over 100,000 vehicles per day with heavy congestion during rush hours), it is not at all clear what the overall impact of traffic is on air pollution levels in Greenwich. Indeed the report fudges many of the key issues.

For example it says “*local road transport constitutes approximately 28 to 80% of NO_x emissions in the borough...*” and “*approximately 50% of the remaining background sources arise from road transport sources outside the borough*”.

For PM10 (particulates) it says “*between 5% and 40% of concentrations result from primary road transport emissions in the borough, depending on location, with approximately 60 to 95% arising from background sources*”.

In reality nobody knows how much general air pollution in Greenwich comes from local traffic, from industrial or other sources, or how much from outside the borough.

The proposed plans also don't seem to have taken any account of the proposed Low Emission Zone (LEZ) which will cover the whole of the greater London area and will reduce emissions from HGVs and buses quite substantially in the next few years. In addition the general improvement in the technology of vehicles is reducing emissions by large amounts – the chart below shows the impact on various emissions of European directives on vehicle pollutants from heavy duty diesel vehicles (source Prof. F.H. Palmer).



Note that private cars seem to produce less than 20% of total emissions of pollutants such as PM10s as HGVs, LGVs, buses and taxis are the main sources (see p.23 of AQAP).

It is also worth pointing out that the central London Congestion Charge has not resulted in improved air quality within the congestion charge zone – in fact it has got slightly worse since the charge was introduced – ask for more information on this if you need it.

The ABD suggests that it is unnecessary to introduce congestion charges in Greenwich to tackle air pollution issues and doing so would not be effective in tackling air pollution. More steps should be taken to reduce congestion which itself is the major cause of such pollution.

Cessation of the Blackwall Tunnel Tidal Flow

One action that has been taken by TfL recently is the cessation of the Blackwall Tunnel tidal flow system. This has undoubtedly increased congestion, and is likely to result therefore in higher air pollution. They justified this on the grounds of safety but the tidal flow system has been in use for 30 years without major incident, the accident statistics show that the tunnel actually has fewer reported accidents than most major roads in London, and independent consultants had actually recommended that alternative measures to improve safety be taken. TfL went ahead and stopped the tidal flow system without any public consultation, not even with the local boroughs, and without any prior notice. Of course many commentators have said that as allegedly happened with the London congestion charge, if you first make congestion worse then there is more justification for introducing congestion charges.

How to Oppose the Proposal

The Association of British Drivers (ABD – see www.abd.org.uk) is mounting a major public campaign to have road tolls in Greenwich thrown out. The public do not like road tolls of any form, and these proposals are in essence just an attempt by anti-car fanatics to raise the cost of motoring and restrict your freedom of movement. Make sure it does not happen by raising this issue with local councillors, your GLA members and your M.P.

Roger Lawson, ABD, July 2007

Contact roger.lawson@abd.org.uk or telephone 020-8467-2686 if you wish to support opposition to these proposals. There is also an on-line petition you can sign on the internet at: www.gopetition.com/petitions/no-road-tolls-in-greenwich.html . See also the following page on the web site of the Association of British Drivers: www.abd.org.uk/greenwichtolls.htm