

Mayor Pushes Ahead with Congestion Charging Extension

By Roger Lawson. Published August 2004.



Despite the fact that public consultation showed a large majority of all interested parties were opposed to the plans for extension of the London Congestion Charging Zone, Ken Livingstone is pushing ahead with the plans (outline map of likely area is above).

In one of the largest consultation exercises ever undertaken in London, the following were the preferences of those who submitted comments:

Responses	Stakeholders and other Organisations	Members of the Public	Businesses
Support	27	23,226	3,465
Oppose	98	52,512	13,380
Neutral	32	7,542	1,732
Totals	157	83,280	18,577

In other words, almost 70% of members of the public who had an opinion were opposed to it.

The mayor said that the proposal “was controversial” and went on to say in his announcement statement that “consultations of this type ...inevitably tend to elicit responses primarily from those opposed to whatever is being consulted upon...” and even went on to suggest that the negative responses resulted from an organised campaign against the proposal. To demonstrate that he is denying the obvious truth, the consultation process also included a public “attitudinal survey” from which the responses were as follows (the result is still strongly opposed to an extension of the charging zone of course).

Response	Percentage %
Strongly in favour	15
In Favour	21
Neither	18
Against	15
Strongly Against	30
Don't Know	2

This scheme also demonstrates yet again the lack of financial probity in the Mayor. The net revenue from the scheme is estimated to be about £10 million per annum, when it will cost up to £120 million to implement, which is a pretty poor return on investment. There is also the difficulty that the budgets for Transport for London are already considerably overextended so it is not at all clear where the cash investment would come from.

That of course ignores the even higher costs to residents in paying the charge, or avoiding it, most of which ends up in the pockets of residents of Coventry and Glasgow who operate the scheme. It also ignores the worsening of traffic likely within the existing zone when 120,000 extra residents of Kensington and Chelsea can use it at their discounted rate.

There may be a couple of sops to appease residents however which are the possibility of granting discounts to some residents outside the zone, and shortening the hours to finish at 6.0 pm instead of 6.30 pm.

(Editor: Like all great dictators, Mr Livingstone takes absolutely no heed of public opinion and the "Wisdom of Crowds" - the title of a recently published book by James Surowiecki which is worth a read if you have an interest in why democracy works better than a dictatorship. If you feel like I do that this is yet another example of Ken Livingstone's unreasonable behaviour I suggest you contact your Greater London Assembly Member - Bob Neill in the case of Bromley residents).