

DPTAC POSITION STATEMENT

ROAD USER CHARGING

This position statement sets out the position of DPTAC with regard to road user charging schemes. It is intended to give guidance to government, local authorities, private operators and consultants involved in considering, promoting and running such schemes.

Introduction

1. The cost of maintaining and developing the road network in the UK is currently secured through national and local taxation. Vehicle users contribute through vehicle excise duty, taxation on the purchase of vehicles, transport services and fuel and through parking fees.
2. Congestion imposes further costs on society in terms of delays, unreliable journey times, road safety and atmospheric pollution.
3. At present the costs to the road user of using roads are not directly linked to the cost to society of providing and using roads. Road user charging is being championed by Government and others as a fairer and more transparent way of funding transport expenditure and of managing the way our roads are used. Road user charging, however, has implications for the interests of disabled people. This statement represents the views of DPTAC on the subject.
4. The relevant DPTAC objectives on this matter are;
 - ***The provision of timely, focused and credible advice to Government on the transport needs of disabled people***
 - ***The provision of guidance and advice to the transport industry and others on how best to meet the needs of disabled people***
 - ***The promotion of the interests of all disabled people in relation to transport and the built environment***

Why Road User Charging?

5. Road user charging is seen as offering benefits in terms of managing the use of the road network and encouraging the use of public transport alternatives. The benefits include:-
 - Influencing the number of vehicle journeys and the time at which they are made

- Reduced congestion through use by fewer vehicles at peak times
 - Reduced and more reliable journey times
 - Reduced exhaust emissions (particularly where charges discriminate against more polluting vehicles)
 - A fairer and more transparent way of charging road users for the use they make of roads
 - A more transparent way of raising revenue for paying for the maintenance and development of transport infrastructure.
6. DPTAC recognises that disabled people potentially have as much to gain from this as anyone. Disabled drivers and passengers will benefit from reduced and more reliable journey times. Disabled passengers will also benefit from investment in public transport and disabled pedestrians and those who live near roads will benefit from reductions in atmospheric pollution. Road user charging also has the potential to offer positive financial benefits to disabled people.

Existing Road User Charging Schemes

7. Road user charging is not a new concept and there are various existing examples to be found in the UK.
- Charges are made for the use of many major bridges and tunnels (eg the Forth Bridge, Tyne Tunnel, Dartford crossings)
 - Charges have been levied for entry to the historic core of Durham city centre since 1 October 2002
 - Congestion charging was introduced in February 2003 in the central area of London with a flat rate charge for vehicles entering the charging zone between 0700hrs and 1830hrs.
 - The M6 northern bypass to Birmingham was opened as a toll road on 9 December 2003
8. In some cases, the charge is made to help in paying for cost of constructing and maintaining the bridge, tunnel or motorway. In the case of Durham and London, the purpose is to limit the number of vehicles entering the core area.
9. The London scheme has seen a substantial reduction in delays and the number of vehicles entering the central area. Journey times for buses and taxis have greatly improved and travellers have shifted from car to public transport. Travel by disabled people has been helped by concessions for Blue Badge Holders (who are not charged) and by complementary investment in new low floor buses.

Future Developments

10. A proposed scheme for a city wide congestion charging scheme in Edinburgh was abandoned in February 2005 when it failed to gain public support in a referendum. There are, however, other proposals in other parts of the UK. These include more congestion charging schemes and a further section of toll motorway.
11. Despite the setback in Edinburgh for the proponents of road user charging, government in England and in Scotland has indicated a continuing interest in road user charging. The technology to support road user charging is also developing rapidly both in the UK and elsewhere in Europe.
12. The Secretary of State for Transport has said that he wishes the UK to move towards a national system of road pricing. There is an emphasis in the distribution of the new Transport Innovation Fund in England towards those local authorities that included traffic demand management measures such as road user charging in their submissions.

Accommodating the Needs of Disabled People in Road User Charging Schemes

13. DPTAC recognises that road user charging is increasingly likely to feature in transport policy and financing in future. In considering road user charging schemes DPTAC believes that
 - ***Access for disabled people should be a condition of any investment***
 - ***Access for disabled people should be a mainstream activity***
 - ***Disabled users should be involved in determining access for disabled people***
 - ***Achieving and maintaining access for disabled people is the responsibility of the service provider***
14. Any scheme for road user charging which increases the costs of travelling by car is likely to have a disproportionate effect on the lives of disabled people. The reasons are that;
 - households including disabled people tend to have lower than average incomes
 - public transport or taxis may not be viable options because they are physically inaccessible or unaffordable
 - for many disabled people, only the car gives essential mobility

15. A key feature prior to the introduction of the London congestion charging scheme was extensive consultation with different user groups including groups representing disabled people. This led to the introduction of concessions for Blue Badge Holders and for vehicles that are not liable for Vehicle Excise Duty (such as Dial a Ride vehicles).
16. Concessions in other existing road user charging schemes also tend to be based on possession of a Blue Badge and/or exemption from Vehicle Excise Duty and/or receipt of the higher rate of the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance.
17. In Durham, the primary objectives of the County Council included improving access for disabled people. However, it is noted that in fact existing disabled parking bays were removed from the Market Place and replaced with Loading Bays for use at any time. There are no general exemptions for Blue Badge Holders. Provision for disabled people is made through subsidy of the local Shopmobility Scheme and through the provision of a high quality easy access bus service linking the station and various car parks to the city centre. While parking on street is free for Blue Badge Holders, there is a charge for off street parking.
18. The introduction of the London congestion charging scheme was accompanied by major investment in new low floor buses. However for buses, trams and trains to be fully accessible to all disabled people, it is essential to ensure that not only the vehicles but also the bus/tram stops and stations and the associated footway approaches are accessible and well maintained. Information about transport options needs to be accessible. Public transport vehicles have to be fitted with visual and audible announcements and operatives need to have appropriate disability equality training.
19. However, there is also a danger that as travel by private car is made more expensive, there is an opportunity for public transport service providers to increase their charges. This would lead to a double impact on disabled people. We therefore believe there is a need for some form of equity audit associated with all road user charging schemes to ensure that the benefits are locked in and so that any increases in costs for disabled travellers are offset (by say reductions in transport related taxation or the introduction of mileage allowances). The technology now becoming available for implementing and enforcing road user charging schemes could be used to promote such concepts of social inclusion.

20. In any road user charging scheme, DPTAC would therefore expect the following
- Extensive, full and early consultation with local groups representing disabled people
 - Consultation and participation that continues right through the development and implementation of the scheme and in subsequent monitoring and review processes
 - Information that is available in large print, tape, electronic and Braille formats (applies to all stages from consultation to operation, monitoring and review)
 - Eligibility for discounted charges that is common to all schemes to aid understanding and ensure equality of service for disabled people
 - Investment in high quality accessible public transport alternatives that precedes the introduction of road user charging
 - Accessible public transport vehicles that are accompanied by accessible bus/tram stops and stations and by well maintained and accessible footways with appropriate use of tactile paving
 - Avoidance of cluttered street environments on footways and other pedestrian areas
 - All buses, trams and trains to have operational visual and audible announcements
 - Operatives who are trained in the use of accessible information systems and dealing with disabled people
 - Where shopmobility forms part of any road user scheme, that this is promoted as a supplement to and not a substitute for direct access by Blue Badge Holders
 - Any road user charging scheme to lead to enhanced mobility for disabled people with no increase in the cost of travel
21. DPTAC anticipates that, as in the London congestion charging scheme, any discounted charging regime would be based on exemption from charges for Blue Badge Holders in recognition of the reduced mobility of disabled people. DPTAC recognises that there are concerns about the enforcement of the Blue Badge Scheme but measures in hand or under consideration by the Department for Transport will significantly improve the enforceability of the Scheme.
22. Finally, we would commend any scheme for traffic demand management and road user charging that goes beyond discounted charges and actually delivers positive benefits to disabled people.

References

In preparing this position statement, the following references have been of particular assistance.

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8. Response to Consultation Paper on Breaking the Logjam – Fighting Traffic Congestion and Pollution through Road User and Workplace Parking Charges; DPTAC, 1999
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12. Conference proceedings, The Success and Failure of Traffic Management Measures, 2-4 August 2005, Napier University, Edinburgh