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Sent via email to - CChargeConsultation@tfl.gov.uk.

28th June 2010

Dear Sir or Madam

Proposed Changes in the Congestion Charge

We are writing to provide you with our views on your proposed change to the London Congestion Charge. Environmental Protection UK has considered the draft document, and welcomes the opportunity to comment.

1– About Environmental Protection UK

Environmental Protection UK brings together organisations from across the public, private and voluntary sectors to promote a balanced and innovative approach to understanding and solving environmental problems, through policy development and education. We are a registered charity with 110 years experience of environmental campaigning, public information provision, producing educational resources and policy formulation.

Environmental Protection UK's air quality policy committee has been involved in the development of this response. The committee brings together policy makers, regulators and practitioners from local authorities, consultants, developers, academics, industry and interested NGOs, as well as members from Environmental Protection UK's regional divisions.

2 – Summary of Our Views

The introduction of the Congestion Charge in 2002 was a bold step forward in tackling congestion and its negative impacts on the environment, health and the economy. Follow up monitoring has confirmed that the charge has been effective at reducing congestion. As with any scheme, it is important that the criteria are kept under regular review to ensure that it is effective, and indeed that the aims of the scheme are still valid.

The need to reduce congestion in central London is still very pertinent. However, we believe that the majority of the changes proposed in this current consultation would weaken the ability of the Congestion Charge to reduce congestion, rather than strengthen it. We condemn the Mayor's proposals to remove the Congestion Charge Western Extension – implementation of this proposal will expose residents of west

London to greater levels of air pollution, as well as increasing congestion and CO₂ emissions. The Western Extension is also a tried, tested and significant measure that will help the UK meet legally binding European air quality Limit Values. There are no guarantees that any of the novel and untested measures in the Mayor's draft Air Quality Strategy will mitigate the air quality impacts of removing the Western Extension.

We also feel that the Mayor's proposed 'Greener Vehicles Discount' is misguided, effectively enabling many mass market diesel vehicles free entry to the charging area. We instead call on the Mayor to use congestion charging exemptions to encourage emerging vehicle technologies. What is the incentive for individuals and businesses to buy an expensive, short ranged electric vehicle if cheap, mass market diesel vehicles receive exactly the same congestion charge exemptions?

3 - Detailed Comments

Our comments on the three areas of the consultation are as follows:

Increasing the Charge and Payment Arrangements

We agree with the Mayor's proposals to raise the charge. It is important that the price of the congestion charge keeps pace with people's ability to pay (i.e. wages rather than inflation) to effectively maintain its ability to reduce congestion. We have no opinions on the new payment arrangements.

Removal of Western Extension

We strongly disagree with proposals to remove the Western Extension. TfL's own analysis¹ in 2008 suggested that the Western Extension had reduced traffic entering the zone by 14% and traffic circulating in the zone by 10%, with additional benefits probably being masked by an increase in development-related road works over the period of monitoring. Vehicle emissions in the Western Extension area also fell - oxides of nitrogen (NO_x) by 2.5%, particulate matter (PM₁₀) by 4.2% and emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) by 6.5%. These are all important benefits, and with the removal of the Western Extension we would expect to see congestion, air pollution and CO₂ emissions all increase without adequate mitigation measures.

The Western Extension was a key measure for tackling air pollution in central London, and is one of the measures included by DEFRA in their modelling for the recent re-submission for a time extension for meeting PM₁₀ limit values in London. The recent draft Mayor's Air Quality Strategy does not, in our view, introduce adequate mitigation measures to offset the impact of the removal of the Western Extension (please see our separate response to the consultation on this strategy). We note that the requirements of the EU Air Quality Directive not only require member states to meet air quality Limit Values, but also to maintain concentrations below them. We also note that the Mayor has a binding commitment to meet air quality standards, with GLA Act requiring the Mayor's Air Quality Strategy to contain '...policies and proposals - for the achievement in Greater London of the air quality standards and objectives prescribed in regulations made under [the Environment Act]'. The removal of the Western Extension may lead to new breaches of the daily PM₁₀ Limit Value in central London, and will certainly make the task of achieving the nitrogen dioxide Limit Values in central London much harder.

¹ <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/sixth-annual-impacts-monitoring-report-2008-07.pdf>

Paragraph 7.4.17 of the accompanying impact assessment states that 'Over time, a range of measures will deliver emissions reductions in the Western Extension area commensurate with those that the WEZ would have brought'. We have commented on these proposals as part of the mayor's concurrent consultation on his draft Air Quality Strategy, and in our view this statement is incorrect. The measures referenced in this paragraph are novel and untested, and their impacts are unquantified. There are no guarantees that they will adequately mitigate removal of the proven benefits of the Western Extension.

Alternative Fuel/ Greener Vehicle Discounts

We do not agree with the criteria of the new Greener Vehicle Discount, and instead call on the Mayor to use congestion charge exemptions to encourage new, emerging technologies. In 2007 we responded to the previous Mayor's proposals for emissions-related congestion charging, in which we warned that proposals to create a new nil charge group for vehicles that emitted less than 120 g/km of CO₂ would effectively encourage a large increase in the number of small diesel cars driving within the congestion charging zone, which would have a significant negative impact on both congestion and air quality. We are pleased to see that the current Mayor has looked again at the criteria for a nil charge group with the new Greener Vehicle Discount, and also that the Mayor has recognised the air quality issue by introducing a Euro V criteria for vehicles in the nil band. This will mean that if vehicles are diesel powered they will be equipped with a particulate filter.

However, just as the consultation document notes that 'the greener technology in conventional vehicles has now overtaken many of those that use alternative fuels', the Mayor's new proposals risk being overtaken by the pace of low carbon vehicle technology. 'What Car' magazine² currently lists 24 vehicle types (totalling 55 models) that meet the nil band criteria. Crucially, these are the main conventional diesel vehicles tuned for efficiency, and present few barriers to the ownership in terms of cost or performance. European Union legislation mandating 'fleet average' CO₂ requirements, coupled with UK initiatives such as zero VED for band A cars, means manufacturers will be increasing this number significantly over the next two years. The primary aim for the congestion charge is to tackle congestion, so it is not in the interests of the scheme to exempt a large number of vehicles from having to pay the charge. The results are likely to be an increase in congestion, with knock on negative impacts on journey times, air quality and ultimately emissions of carbon dioxide.

We believe that congestion charging exemptions should be used to develop the market for the emerging vehicle technologies that the mayor is seeking to encourage, rather than providing blanket exemptions for all vehicles meeting a certain CO₂ - related qualifying criteria. The current Alternative Fuel Discount has worked very effectively in this role over the past 8 years, for example hybrid cars were able to gain a toehold in the UK market through their exemption from the congestion charge. The Mayor is currently trying to encourage the use of electric vehicles (battery electric, plug in hybrids and fuel cells) and we agree very strongly with the continuation and expansion of congestion charge exemption for these vehicles. We also suggest that exemptions are given to vehicles running on compressed natural gas (CNG) and biomethane – these vehicles have very low emissions of both CO₂ and local air pollutants. Vehicles running on biomethane (which is chemically identical to natural gas) in particular can actually have a negative impact on greenhouse emissions if the

² <http://www.whatcar.com/car-reviews/search?dimensionIds=368&dimensionIds=63&page=1&pageCount=10&orderBy=GreenRating&orderDirection=Ascending>

fuel is produced from organic waste, as otherwise methane (a powerful greenhouse gas) would be released into the atmosphere.

4 - Contact Us

If you require any further information on the views expressed in this response please contact:

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