

Future road pricing 'inevitable' - RAC Foundation

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Charging motorists for each mile they travel is "inevitable" if future traffic gridlock is to be avoided, the RAC Foundation charity has suggested. A "pay-as-you-go" system could be the answer to congestion, according to its director Prof Stephen Glaister. Population rises and economic recovery, causing traffic to grow 33% by 2025, combined with road spending cuts will necessitate wholesale reform, he says.

The government says it has no plans to charge drivers on existing roads. However, a spokesman said it may consider charging on new routes, using the M6 toll road in the Midlands as an example.

The RAC Foundation launched its report alongside the results of an Ipsos MORI survey suggesting that 58% of drivers agreed that a per-mile, pay-as-you-go system would make them think about how much they drive.

'Short-changed'

According to Prof Glaister, to gain public support a system of charging motorists per mile would have to be backed by:

- A cut in fuel duty and abolition of vehicle tax
- Roads run at "arm's length" from the government, perhaps by a privatised utility
- A guaranteed sum of revenue put aside to pay for the work and a regulator to ensure it was done efficiently
- More reliable journey times and compensation for delays

Prof Glaister said: "Some form of 'pay-as-you-go' system is inevitable because of the benefits it will deliver for motorists and the country, and the lack of a credible alternative.

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"Our poll shows that most people are instinctively opposed to road charging when they think it is an extra tax. But when the details are explained and they realise the benefits then the opposition falls away dramatically.

"Motorists are resentful of the relentless rise in the cost of fuel and feel short-changed by the amount spent on the road network. But these proposals address such issues."

Local road pricing schemes already exist in the UK. Congestion charging was introduced in Durham in 2002 and in London the following year, while other areas have considered similar schemes.

However, the previous Labour government's drive to encourage such schemes was effectively abandoned after people in Greater Manchester voted four to one against its introduction.

A Department for Transport spokesman said: "We have no plans to introduce a charging programme for existing roads, which are publicly owned and have already been paid for by the taxpayer.

"To tackle congestion in financially constrained times we will ensure we are making the most of our existing roads.

"We might, however, consider building new toll roads. The M6 toll road is a good example of how you can create new capacity with private capital."

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1. Read the text and answer the questions

- a) According to Stephen Glaister what is making this reform inevitable?
- b) In which year was a congestion charge introduced in London?
- c) What main reason is given for motorists' resistance to road charging?
- d) What will be the charge on existing roads?
- e) What form of system is most likely to be introduced?

2. Read the text and decide if the statements are true or false.

- a) Traffic will grow 58% by 2025
True/False
- b) The M6 toll road in Manchester will be used as an example.
True/False
- c) The current government shelved plans for congestion charges in Manchester.
True/False
- d) Under pay-as-you-go charges are per mile you travel.
True/False
- e) Toll roads are likely to be run by the government.
True/False

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3. There are ten spelling mistakes in the article. List them below.

4. What are your views? Do you think we should pay to travel on our roads? We pay to use the railways, so why not the roads? Or, should they be free?

Write several paragraphs in the space below, giving your views on the article

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ANSWERS

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1.

- a. Population rises, economic recovery and road spending cuts
- b. 2003
- c. It is an extra tax
- d. They will not be affected
- e. Pay - as- you – go

2.

- a. false – 33%
- b. false - the M6 is in the Midlands
- c. false - the previous government
- d. true
- e. false – a privatised utility

3.

acording should be according
chargeing should be charging
relyable should be reliable
efficiently should be efficiently
regulater should be regulator
credable should be credible
abbandoned should be abandoned
programe should be programme
financialy should be financially
privat should be private