

Congestion charge

Having introduced a charge for driving into Central London last year, the UK is currently considering “pay-as-you-drive” charges as a way of further reducing traffic congestion.

- 1 Would you pay £5 (approximately €7.50 or \$9.30) to drive your car into the centre of London? Justify your answer.
- 2 Complete the following extract from a report on the congestion charge using the figures in the box.

16	20	35	49
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Of 500 companies surveyed about the charge, ____% believe the scheme works, ____% think it is not working and ____% are undecided. Actual traffic levels in London have fallen by ____%.

- 3 Scan paragraph 3 of the article to see if you were correct.

Pay-as-you-drive

The UK may scrap its current road-tax system as it tries to boost revenues, cut congestion and promote greener motoring, according to a recent study. In future, instead of paying a single annual tax for operating a car, road users will probably have to pay “as and when” they travel. Both the government and research companies are examining how Britain should develop its road network in the face of increasing numbers of cars and commuters. One of the main problems facing the government is how to keep tax revenues steady, and also offer incentives for consumers to switch to less polluting fuels and to prepare for when hydrogen- and electricity-driven vehicles come on the market.

The effects of traffic congestion on business can be dramatic. Seventy-nine per cent of managers interviewed in one survey say they had missed important business meetings due to transport delays. Forty per cent complain of being more irritable at work and nearly half have missed a family commitment. One

way to reduce stress would be for employers to allow staff to work from home occasionally or to adjust their hours.

It is predicted that in ten years’ time there will be real gridlock on the roads if nothing is done. Of 500 companies surveyed about the congestion charge introduced in London, 49% believe the scheme works, 16% think it is not working and 35% are undecided. Actual traffic levels have fallen by 20%. Among solutions under consideration is extending the congestion charge for driving in any area within the M25, London’s infamous orbital ring road. This would involve charging motorists driving to Heathrow airport. Another is using satellite-tracking devices fixed to cars to implement pay-as-you-drive charges, based on the time of day and location. The congestion charge scheme in London is being studied by many cities, including New York, Dublin, Madrid, Barcelona, Rome, Milan and Berlin as countries seek solutions to the continued growth in traffic.

- 4 Read the article again and underline any ideas for traffic reduction.

- 5 Find words in the article with the following meanings:

- a to decide not to continue with something such as a plan (paragraph 1)
- b people who travel regularly to and from work (paragraph 1)
- c likely to become easily annoyed or made angry (paragraph 2)
- d to change or move something slightly so that it works better (paragraph 2)
- e a situation in which there are so many cars on the roads that traffic cannot move (paragraph 3)

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- 6 Discuss the following questions in small groups and report your ideas to the class.

- a Would a congestion charge be feasible in your capital city, or other major towns? Why / why not?
- b Does / Would your company allow home-working or flexible hours to avoid rush hours?
- c How soon do you think that hydrogen- and electricity-driven vehicles will become popular?
- d Which other ideas do you think would reduce traffic?