

P-06-1381 Reject all plans for Road User Payments, Congestion Zones and Workplace Parking Levies in Wales

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Petition title: Reject all plans for Road User Payments, Congestion Zones and Workplace Parking Levies in Wales

Text of petition: At a time when people are struggling with the cost of living it is simply not feasible for people to incur more cost simply for needing to travel between and across the towns and cities of Wales. Schemes like the one being considered in Cardiff, for example, will disproportionately affect those already struggling, despite claims that people in poorer areas are less likely to own a car. The people of Wales would like it known that we categorically DO NOT support their implementation. Road charging, Congestion Zones, and workplace parking levies are nothing short of a money making scheme.

Here is a link to the proposed plans for Cardiff which clearly show the intention is put yet another charge onto road users.

<https://keepingcardiffmoving.co.uk/project/cardiff-road-user-payment-scheme/>



1. Background

The introduction of road user charging as tool to increase modal shift away from private cars has been discussed extensively. The [Wales Transport Strategy](#) commits to developing a “fair and equitable road user charging” framework with the [National Transport Delivery Plan](#) (NTDP) giving a timescale of 2022-2026 for this work.

The Welsh Government previously commissioned an [independent review of road user charging in Wales](#), which considered the case for and against.

In its 2020 report, '[Covid-19 Recovery: Renewing the Transport System](#)', Campaign for Better Transport calls for “new sources of raising revenue such as workplace parking levies and road use charges to support the shift to sustainable transport”. More recently, the Centre for Cities 2023 report on [Understanding transport in Wales' cities](#) recommends the use of a congestion charge or workplace parking levy in Cardiff, and a workplace parking levy in Swansea, Newport and Wrexham to encourage modal shift.

The petitioner argues against motorists incurring additional costs given current cost of living issues. As explored in this [2020 Senedd Research article](#), Members of the last Senedd (then Assembly) expressed concern over plans in Cardiff at that time.

Welsh Government powers

The Welsh Government currently has powers under the [Transport Act 2000](#) (the 2000 Act) to introduce charging schemes on the [trunk road and motorway network](#) in very limited circumstances. [The Environment \(Air Quality and Soundscapes\) \(Wales\) Bill](#) (the Bill), passed [by the Senedd](#) in November but not yet in force amends the 2000 Act to enable schemes to be introduced for the purpose of reducing or limiting air pollution.

The [Explanatory Memorandum](#) (the EM) to the Bill also outlines the Welsh Government's intention to commence relevant provisions under the 2000 Act to enable local authorities (either by themselves, or in a regional partnership) to fully implement charging schemes on local roads.

Clean Air Zones

The EM refers to the powers being used to create charging Clean Air Zones (CAZs) where drivers of certain vehicles could be charged for entering a defined zone. During the stage four debate on the Bill, the Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS stated:

...any such schemes would provide a measure of last resort to tackle localised air-quality issues ... Such zones will only be introduced where evidence makes a sufficiently compelling case for schemes to address persistent air pollution problems, and where other means have not been sufficient to deliver compliance.

There are currently seven CAZs in England and four Low Emission Zones (LEZs) (where access to a certain area is restricted for the most polluting vehicles) in Scotland.

Most breaches of statutory air quality limits within the UK are a result of roadside NO₂, 80% of which comes from road transport. The burden of poor air in the UK is estimated to be the equivalent of between 29,000 and 43,000 deaths per year.

In 2018, the Welsh Government was taken to court for breaches of NO₂ and has subsequently introduced 50mph speed limits at five sites on the trunk road and motorway network. It's previously been reported in the media that CAZs could be introduced at two of these sites (the M4 in Newport and the A740 in Pontypridd) if the reduced speed limit does not lower pollution.

Workplace parking levy (WPL)

WPLs charge businesses for their parking spaces. To date there is only one WPL being used in Great Britain in Nottingham.

The South East Wales Transport Commission (the Burns Commission) recommended the use of a WPL in Cardiff and Newport “once new transport options exist and an overarching policy framework is in place”. Meanwhile the North Wales Transport Commission (also chaired by Lord Burns) suggests a WPL “would not be appropriate in north Wales at the current time due to the lack of alternatives to the car”.

Plans in Cardiff

The petitioner refers specifically to plans in Cardiff for a road user payment scheme. Cardiff Council says it “wants to look at a range of schemes including, but not limited to, road user payments, congestion zones, clean air zones and

workplace parking levies”. It suggests any such scheme would be implemented from around 2027.

Plans for road user charging were initially proposed in the Council’s 2020 Transport White Paper. The proposals prompted the Welsh Government to commission its independent review of road user charging discussed earlier.

2. Welsh Government action

In his letter to the Chair dated 12 January, the Deputy Minister for Climate Change, Lee Waters MS, states the use of charging CAZs would be a “last resort”. He outlines that CAZs “have been identified as ‘precautionary retained measures’ for A470 Pontypridd and M4 Newport” as discussed earlier in this brief.

The Deputy Minister states that discussions have been held between the Welsh Government and Cardiff Council on its plans.

While the letter suggests that schemes could be used to deliver against modal shift targets and to provide funding for “significant public transport improvements”, the Deputy Minister acknowledges that:

...road user charging schemes need to be carefully designed to avoid adverse unintended consequences, including increasing barriers to employment and disadvantaging those on low incomes.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The use of road user charging has been discussed in the Senedd on many occasions, including during scrutiny of the Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Bill as discussed above.

In October 2023 Sam Rowlands MS asked the Minister for Finance and Local Government, Rebecca Evans MS about WPLs. The Minister responded that she was not currently in discussions with any Councils on WPLs.

In November 2023 Andrew R.T. Davies MS asked whether the Welsh Government had plans to adopt any of the Centre for Cities report recommendations (outlined earlier in this brief). The Welsh Government responded it had “no plans to take forward its recommendations on congestion charging, road user charging, speed limits for buses or workplace parking levies”.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.