

So London is moving to “scrap” the extension of its congestion tax zone which almost doubled the original tax zone. Notice that it may take 14 months or longer to implement the much sought for tax relief. Another reason that bad ideas ought not to see the light of day.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/nov/28/congestion-charge-western-extension-johnson>

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Johnson takes axe to congestion charge zone

- **Mayor abolishes western extension of scheme**
- **Fears over environmental impact of decision**

London's congestion charge zone will be reduced in size after the capital's mayor, Boris Johnson, announced yesterday he would scrap the western extension introduced last year by his predecessor, Ken Livingstone.

The move - which Transport for London estimates will result in an annual loss of £55m-£70m in revenue - follows a public consultation exercise in which more than two-thirds of people said they wanted the extension removed.

The Conservative mayor described the environmental impact of withdrawing the scheme as "marginal". He promised to introduce other congestion-busting measures before the scheme ends, including traffic light rephasing to help traffic flow more smoothly and a cycle hire scheme to encourage more Londoners to get on their bikes.

Traffic entering the extension zone, which covers the borough of Kensington and Chelsea and parts of Westminster, has been cut by 14% since the charge was introduced there, equivalent to 30,000 fewer cars each day, according to TfL.

The mayor, who insisted he was not "in principle" against road pricing schemes, said yesterday that the results of a five-week consultation exercise had given him a "clear mandate" to scrap the scheme.

Almost 28,000 people took part in the consultation, of whom 67% - along with 86% of businesses - supported the removal of the zone.

Nineteen per cent stated that they wanted the extension kept as it is, and 12% supported changing the scheme to improve the way it operated.

Johnson said: "I have asked Transport for London to begin the legal process to remove this charge with all convenient speed ... We can lift this tax within 14 months at the absolute outside and hopefully earlier than that."

Johnson pledged to scrap the extension of the charge zone during his mayoral election campaign this year.

The mayor described TfL's estimate of lost revenue as exaggerated, and said: "I think we will have no difficulty in finding the necessary economies out of the £8.3bn [TfL] budget."

He added: "It will be a marginal increase in traffic that will result. As for increases in CO2, they are trivial from the change we are bringing about. This is the right thing to do from a democratic point of view, and an economic point of view."

The business sector applauded Johnson's move but opposition parties in the London assembly condemned it.

Jenny Jones, a Green party assembly member, said the decision was "bad news not only for pedestrians and cyclists, but also for anyone travelling in London and everyone who breathes London's air". Val Shawcross, Labour's transport spokeswoman, questioned the move, which comes just a couple of weeks after Johnson cancelled some major transport projects due to budget pressures.

Shawcross said: "At a time when TfL's coffers are tight and the mayor is scrapping major transport projects, they will now have the added costs of removing the cameras, changing road signs and removing street furniture, which cost £100m to install. The mayor has shown his true colours today: petrol blue."

Johnson's decision to remove the western extension will now be subject to a 12-week statutory public consultation, due next summer, as well as a separate consultation conducted by TfL.

The western congestion zone is 17 square kilometres, and the original zone, which the mayor has no plans to scrap, is 22 sq km.