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# Commuter Outrage

## Embarrassing: U.S. Embassy Refuses to Pay London Congestion Pricing Fees

by [Judd Wiley](#)

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The U.S. federal government is apparently not willing to put its money where its mouth is when it comes to congestion pricing.

In 2003, Great Britain mandated that drivers pay an £8 levy (\$16) to drive in central London during business hours. The levy was intended to reduce traffic, cut greenhouse gas emissions, and encourage people to use public transport.

According to Britain's foreign ministry, the U.S. embassy in London has [failed to pay](#) more than \$3,941,000 in traffic congestion charges, or 23,188 separate levies.



U.S. Ambassador Robert Tuttle claims the toll is a “tax” and argues that, since diplomats are exempted from paying local taxes, the U.S. embassy staff shouldn't have to pay these fees.

The Brits are rightfully outraged. As Norman Baker, a Liberal Democrat lawmaker, put it,

*This is a perfectly proper charge and the failure to pay such a huge amount is not only extremely discourteous to the people of London and the country as a whole, but is undermining U.K. domestic transport policy.*

Ken Livingstone, the former mayor of London, went further and called Tuttle a “chiseling little crook.”

Not only is Ambassador Tuttle a “chiseling little crook,” he's making the U.S. federal government look like it's managed by a bunch of idiotic, disorganized, hypocritical hacks who don't share information or talk to each other (all of which is true).

In April 2008, Mary Peters, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation, traveled to Los Angeles, California, to announce that the U.S. federal government was giving \$213.6 million to LA County to create [“high occupancy toll lanes”](#) on the I-210, I-10, and I-110 freeways. The idea was to convert existing car pool lanes to HOT lanes, which would charge a toll based on the amount of congestion on the road.

In other words, the U.S. federal government has supported and aggressively pushed for congestion pricing. The details are slightly different, but the concept is exactly the same. In order to reduce traffic congestion, the federal government via the DoT thinks drivers should pay a surcharge to drive on normally congested roads during peak hours. The intent is to price as many drivers off the roads as possible.

If this is the official policy of the DoT, which is part of the U.S. federal government, then the State Department, also part of the U.S. federal government, should respect the congestion pricing schemes of foreign countries.

Ambassador Tuttle's claim that London's congestion pricing is a "tax" doesn't fly. The DoT has gone out of its way to label its congestion pricing scheme as a "high occupancy toll" rather than the tax collection mechanism that it is. What's good for the goose is good for the gander.

The U.S. should immediately pay the Brits the money it owes them, and Ambassador Robert Tuttle should stop insulting one of our last remaining allies.

This is a national embarrassment.