



Spatial Economics Research Centre

Friday, 12 December 2008

Congestion charging

Manchester voters have [overwhelmingly rejected proposals for a congestion charge](#).

There have been some suggestions that the problem was the particular scheme that Manchester was proposing. I haven't been following the details, but I have a sneaky suspicion that this may not be the root cause of the problem. Just take a look at the furious public response to Eddington's suggestion for national road pricing (nearly 2 million people signed an [online petition against the idea](#)).

Most experts agree that charging is the best way to deal with the problem of traffic congestion. When people decide how to make a journey they weigh up their personal costs and benefits of different ways of travelling. Unfortunately, choosing to travel by car also imposes costs on other people, but we ignore these costs when making our decision. The end result is too many car journeys. If only we could find a way to get each of us to take in to account the cost that we impose on others when we decide to drive by car. Congestion charging does this, while still leaving people free to choose how they travel.

Lined up against this are terribly emotive arguments around our right to travel, the effect on the poor and the impact on specific businesses. These are far easier to sell than the economists argument about large overall benefits outweighing any of these specific costs. Somehow, we need to convince the public that the latter really is the case. Sadly, the result in Manchester suggests we still have a huge way to go.

Posted by [Prof Henry G. Overman](#) on [Friday, December 12, 2008](#)

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