



Cambridge, United Kingdom

Cambridge is situated approximately 50 miles (80 km) north-east of London. It is arguably best known for its university but the high-technology centre known locally as “Silicon Fen” is also a key centre of employment. According to the 2001 United Kingdom census, the City’s population was 108,863 (including 22,153 students), and the population of the urban area (which includes parts of South Cambridgeshire district) is estimated to be 130,000.

Cambridgeshire County Council, in their Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2006-11, set out a series of objectives, transport targets and programmes for addressing the challenges the county faces. The LTP sets out a package of measures that include improvements to bus services, demand management measures that include road user charging and funding mechanisms to realise their aims such as the Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) provided by the UK Government’s Department for Transport (DfT). This will allow local authorities to explore and develop an innovative proposal for a £500m (€575m) transport investment package of measures that would complement a road user charging scheme.

Why might urban road user charging be introduced in Cambridge?

61,800 new homes will be built in the Cambridge sub-region in the 20-year period between 2001 and 2021. This will inevitably add pressure to the road network and necessitate demand management measures to alleviate congestion. In Cambridge city itself, increased levels of congestion are predicted to cause:

- 84% increase in junction delays;
- 30% increase in distance travelled; and
- 46% increase in travel time.

In a ‘do nothing’ scenario, the number of car journeys is predicted to increase to over 300,000 by 2021 from a baseline of approximately 275,000 in 2006. Research suggests that the predicted impact of a ‘combination of improvements’ or measures, indicates a fall in the number of car journeys to approximately 260,000, if substantial public transport, walking and cycling and highway

Proposed transport improvements



improvements are introduced. This package of measures is considered an important component of the proposed scheme. The road user charging scheme would be part of this package.

The intention of the proposed charge would be to reduce traffic by 10% when compared to baseline figures.

What are the features of the proposed Cambridge scheme?

There are various components of the technology that would be used in the proposed scheme in Cambridge. Vehicles would be fitted with an "on board" unit that would register the vehicle passing or entering the charging zone. The dedicated short range communications (DSRC) transceiver and vehicle receiver unit would log entry. This is backed up by automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras mounted on the same pole and outrigger. Spatial matching on the vehicles would take place between the image read and recorded by the ANPR camera and the DSRC transaction.

The proposed charging scheme in Cambridge would have the following criteria:

- It would be a one-off charge for anyone driving into, out of, or within a congestion zone in Cambridge.
- It would operate between the hours of 0730-0930 (Monday-Friday).
- The proposed charge would be in the range of £3-5 (£3.45-5.75).

Cambridgeshire has been awarded a total of £2.4m (£2.76m) from the TIF pump-priming fund to date. Cambridgeshire also submitted a further bid for £500m (£575m) in October 2007 for a TIF Congestion Charging Scheme. Investigation and public engagement continues.

Conclusion

In June 2008 Cambridgeshire County Council reported that there had been a mixed reaction during public consultation to the TIF proposals. This has led to the County establishing a commission of stakeholders that will assess the plans before moving forward. A timetable of review has not been established to date.

Cambridgeshire, like many UK local authorities, faces the many challenges of establishing a road user charging programme. Public and media pressure, mostly fear of the unknown and viewing road pricing in isolation and not as part of a package of demand-management measures, do not help. This, combined with fears of a national recession and the rise in the cost of living in the UK in the last 12 months, adds to the problems of considering a charging scheme. It remains to be seen whether Cambridgeshire will progress with their road user charging scheme. At this time the proposal is on hold.

