



## Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Edinburgh is the capital city of Scotland, with a population of 448,624 (2001 National Census) which increases to around 1 million when including the surrounding "travel to work" area. The city's economy is based on a modern service industry. There is a large knowledge economy, with three universities and a number of further education institutions.

With the economy of Edinburgh booming in recent years, car ownership has risen rapidly; the number of cars per 1,000 population in Edinburgh increased by 77% from 211 in 1981, to 373 in 1997. The volume of peak-hour traffic coming into the city centre has actually stabilised in recent years but car use overall still continues to rise. The City Council considered that road user charging presented a real opportunity to meet transport objectives by directly influencing travel behaviour and helping to meet the investment requirements.

### Why was urban road user charging proposed in Edinburgh?

- to improve safety for all road and transport users;
- to reduce the environmental impacts of travel;
- to support the local economy;
- to promote better health and fitness; and
- to enhance equity and social inclusion.

### What were the features of the proposed scheme?

The City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) proposed a double cordon charging structure with a £2 (€2.30) charge on vehicles inbound to Edinburgh. The road user charging (RUC) legislation in Scotland requires all revenue to be ringfenced for transport investment. Additionally, the responsibility for setting the charge, collecting and overseeing revenue use has to lie with a single local authority – which in this case was proposed to be CEC. In 2003 CEC formed a wholly owned arms-length company, Transport Initiatives Edinburgh (TIE), to deliver major transport projects. TIE would have been responsible for administering the congestion charge and overseeing the investment of the revenue.

The proposed method of vehicle identification put to a Public Inquiry was an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system, and this was accepted by the Inquiry. The proposed scheme would:

- charge from Monday to Friday only (no charge at weekends or public holidays);
- include two charging cordons:
  - a city centre cordon operating from 0700 to 1830;
  - an outer cordon inside city bypass operating from 0700- 1000;

## Proposed charging area



- assess charges only on owners of vehicles entering the city. (No charge would be made for crossing either cordon on trips heading out of the city); and
- allow drivers to choose from a wide range of methods of paying the charge (i.e., ticket machines, internet, mobile and payment at shops, with payments made on a daily, weekly, monthly or annual basis).

Through an innovative procurement approach it was able to design and prove at prototype two solutions in a competitive environment to Through an innovative procurement approach it was possible to design and prototype two solutions in a competitive environment. The projected capital cost of the scheme was £25m with annual operating costs of £9-14m based on 120,000 daily transactions giving an average transaction cost of 40 pence (20% of revenue generated).

## How was the Edinburgh scheme developed?

CEC began promoting the charging scheme in 1999 under the heading of New Transport Initiative. The Scottish Government passed legislation enabling authorities in Scotland to develop charging schemes in 2001 and this introduced the concept of a Public Inquiry to hear objections to the scheme order in the latter part of the year. This found that on balance there were overall benefits to introducing the scheme and that CEC should proceed albeit with caution.

At the previous local government elections in 2002 the ruling Labour group within CEC had given a commitment to hold a referendum before any charging scheme was introduced. The most appropriate time for this to happen was after the Public Inquiry and before contracts were awarded for the implementation of the scheme and therefore it was carried out in early 2005. The referendum asked the city's residents to choose between two investment scenarios – a preferred strategy including congestion charging and a base strategy without it.

Turnout of some 62% was achieved, with approximately 75% of voters being against congestion charging. The scheme was immediately aborted thereafter. Had there been a positive result the scheme would have come into operation in the third quarter of 2006.

## Conclusion

Edinburgh was the first city to demonstrate the benefits of a congestion charging scheme through a Public Inquiry process. It was also able to develop a lower cost business operation meaning that more revenue could be invested in the transport schemes. Where it failed was ultimately in the decision to have a referendum in the first place and then holding it at a time just before implementation when public support was at its lowest.

It appears that the public consultation exercise was also not as effective as it might have been – too few resources were devoted to explaining the scheme and its benefits. There were also concerns that alternatives such as improved public transport would not be in place soon enough, and the use of revenue was not made sufficiently explicit. Undoubtedly the opposition of surrounding authorities and the view that the scheme unfairly favoured Edinburgh residents were significant factors. The fact that the scheme was being carried forward by CEC in isolation and that there was distrust that the revenue would be spent in the way promised will undoubtedly have added to this hostility.

Ultimately, the lesson of the Edinburgh experience is the need to build up consensus on a regional basis with an agreed and clearly committed use of revenue that is seen as both efficient and fair. It would seem that road user charging in Edinburgh is on hold for the moment.

