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Editorial, road user charging

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Stephen Ison
Guest Editor



Howard Potter
Guest Editor

Editorial

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The chief purpose of road user charging is to tackle congestion and to bring about a more efficient use of the road network. Other objectives can include revenue raising and the funding of transport improvements. Some of the problems encountered in progressing road user charging are due to the lack of clarity of these objectives. It is not a new concept and can be traced back in the economic literature to the work of such as Pigou¹ and Walters.² It also received attention with the publication by the UK Ministry of Transport³ in 1964 of what became known as the Smeed Report. This report focused on the economic and technical possibilities of road pricing. While there is a great deal of literature relating to road user charging there are very few schemes in existence worldwide, which is due in no small measure to its lack of public acceptability.

There does, however, appear to be a shift of ground in terms of road user charging, primarily as a result of the growing concern with respect to the level of congestion to be found in towns and cities and the impact of road transport on air pollution and environmental degradation in general. It is also the case that the development of new technology has increased the likelihood of various transport-management measures being implemented, including road user charging.

This special issue of *Transport* covers a number of the important issues relating to road user charging, including scheme design and technology, public acceptance, the experience of various cities with respect to road user charging and the issues surrounding the introduction of a national road user charge.

In terms of the papers included in this road user charging special issue, Bayliss, Banks and Glaister seek to investigate the various contributions of efficient pricing and capacity expansion of the British road system that could provide for the expected increase in road user demand over the longer term.

Clearly, if road user charging is to be implemented to any great extent then issues of public acceptance need careful consideration. Gehlert, Nielsen, Rich and Schlag explain that whilst there may be low public acceptability, particularly before

being implemented, the acceptance of road user charging can change once it has been implemented. Their paper aims to analyse public acceptability changes and the reduction in car use in response to urban road pricing.

Three papers consider road user charging with respect to particular cities. Larsen and Nielsen deal with the optimisation of different designs for a road pricing system in the Copenhagen area; Ison, Hughes and Tuckwell assess how the Cambridgeshire authority is currently proceeding in terms of road user charging, having considered a road pricing scheme in the early 1990's; and Rogers and Eagney consider the alternative demand-management tools, including road user charging, which could potentially be used as a means of limiting the demand for private car travel to Dublin city centre.

Halden considers the conflict which individuals face between their desire to be good citizens and their aspirations as consumers.

Clearly scheme design is all important and Shepherd, May and Koh describe three approaches to cordon location design, namely a judgemental approach, an optimisation approach and an approach which lies between the two. Finally, Metz considers the impediments to introducing a nationwide road user charge scheme and suggests a possible alternative.

While there is no shortage of papers devoted to the subject of road user charging, the papers included in this special issue make an important contribution to the debate currently surrounding road user charging.

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