



Competitive and Sustainable Growth Programme

PROGRESS Project 2000-CM.10390

PRICING ROAD USE FOR GREATER RESPONSIBILITY, EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY IN CITIES

Bristol • Copenhagen • Edinburgh • Genoa • Gothenburg • Helsinki • Rome • Trondheim



Deliverable D4.3

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES

Version 5.0
March 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The PRoGRESS project was developed in response to a Call for Proposals by the European Commission, and more specifically, to address task 2.3.1/9 ‘Testing the effectiveness and acceptance of urban pricing schemes’ of the Key Action ‘Sustainable Mobility and Intermodality’ within the Thematic Programme ‘Competitive and Sustainable Growth’.

PRoGRESS addresses one of the key challenges of European transport policy by exploring the use of pricing schemes to manage demand in congested urban areas while at the same time raising revenue that will enable the substantial improvements to the public transport infrastructure that are necessary to offer people viable alternatives to private car use.

The project centres on eight sites developing and demonstrating road pricing schemes: Bristol, Copenhagen, Edinburgh, Genoa, Gothenburg, Helsinki, Rome and Trondheim. Across these sites, a number of road pricing concepts and technologies are being developed and demonstrated.

The overall PRoGRESS project is broken down into seven workpackages, one of them being *WP4 Social, economic and political issues*. The objective of WP4 is to develop and assess the political, economic and social framework required for the implementation of road pricing. Deliverable 4.3 deals with consultation, both with stakeholders and the general public, and with marketing and awareness raising.

There are many stakeholders that will have a direct or indirect interest in any proposed road user charging scheme. The “key stakeholders” in the context of this report are those that have a particular need to use the road network within the charged area and/or have to be consulted by law. The principal groups of key stakeholders are government, emergency services and public utilities, business, transport operators and special interest groups; their roles are discussed in some detail in the early sections of this report.

This is followed by a discussion of the principal consultation methods that are available, initially for consultation with stakeholders, but later in the report again for public consultation. The methods discussed cover:

- Piloting changes;
- Open / public meetings;
- Using representative groups, face-to face interviews and focus groups;
- Questionnaire-based surveys;
- Citizens’ panels and citizens’ juries;
- Ballots / referenda / deliberative polling;
- Written consultation;
- Open days / roadshows / exhibitions; and
- Information technology.

Not all of these methods are equally applicable for stakeholders and the public and the report discusses in general how they can be best used in different cases, and in particular how they have been used in the PRoGRESS cities.

The main part of the report then consists of the individual reports for each city on results and conclusions for consultation with stakeholders, consultation with the public, and marketing and awareness raising. For each of these three sections, some common themes and key conclusions that are valid across sites have then been drawn together.

Consultation with Stakeholders

Different stakeholders have different agendas, and therefore different key issues have emerged for many of them, although there are some common themes as well.

Politicians

One of the most obvious observations is the need for a political champion or figurehead, who takes ownership of the congestion charging concept. Unlike the officials involved in the preparation of any scheme, politicians depend on re-election, and the fear of losing elections by promoting road user charging holds many politicians back. Even where there is strong enough political support to go ahead with charging plans, politicians can easily be disheartened if they find that public support is eroding in the run-up to the scheme introduction.

One way of divorcing the road pricing issue from elections is to hold a referendum. It should be noted, though, that a referendum just before the last steps of the scheme introduction is very likely to hit the lowest level of support, and therefore runs the greatest risk of failure. An alternative to an early referendum is the Stockholm approach: here the referendum is to be held around one year after a congestion charging scheme will have been implemented “on a trial basis”. Whilst this approach carries a large financial risk, it provides the best chances for the referendum to be won, since experience has shown that public support for a charging scheme increases again once it is up and running and people start to feel its benefits.

General Business

Business organisations as a whole tend to take a positive view on charging, in particular for the less restrictive schemes that operate only in the peak, or even only in the morning peak hours. Their membership is generally more divided, depending on their type of business. In any case, these organisations are good channels to reach business in any consultation exercise, both for providing them with information about the envisaged scheme and its potential benefit for the business community, and for seeking their views on the scheme design.

Retailers

Retailers that are located within the envisaged charging zone are generally among a scheme’s most vociferous opponents. They fear the competition from retailers located outside the zone, and a resulting reduction in their customer numbers. Since it is clearly the purpose of most of the current and currently envisaged schemes to deter car traffic from entering the charged area, this fear is understandable, and can only be allayed if retailers can be convinced that the public transport alternatives offered to their current

customers are good enough to provide viable alternatives to the car. Another mitigating measure for the potential loss of customers would be to invest some of the charging income on promotional measures for the charged area.

Further to the fears about loss of customers, there are also concerns that those customers that still come have less money in their pockets to spend. Ways to meet this fear would be a parking policy that would reduce parking charges during the main shopping hours, the creation of additional spaces (although this may turn out to be counterproductive for congestion reduction) or the use of some of the road pricing revenue to allow a reduction of public transport fares.

The final concern for retailers is that they may have to increase the prices of their goods to accommodate additional costs for deliveries, and thereby become less competitive than their out-of-town rivals. However, especially where there is only a daily charge rather than a charge per trip and delivery vehicles that come into the charged area several times during the charging period, they have much more to gain from reduced congestion than to lose from the charge they pay once per day. Moreover, the low level of charges foreseen currently by European cities, will only add very marginally to the cost of any goods for sale.

All Stakeholders

Good public transport alternatives to the car will be requested by most, if not all, stakeholder groups and generally comes through as the most important of all conditions for a road user charging scheme to be acceptable. It is crucial for the general acceptance of any scheme that people believe that these alternatives will be in place as soon as charging starts.

In all cities that are considering road pricing or have done so in the past, revenues are earmarked for transport investment. The majority now focus on local public transport, although there are also other alternatives, such as road infrastructure investment or packages that comprise public transport as well as cycle and pedestrian facilities, traffic calming and improved road surfaces. The most important key issue is that the revenue is used, and seen to be used, on additional transport investment, and not regarded as “just another tax”, another levy on the already highly taxed car driver.

Many of the stakeholder groups request exemptions from the charge for their members. The one group that is given exemptions in every scheme is (formally identified) disabled drivers. Other than that, exemptions vary between cities, and no general advice can be given, since there are not only cultural but also legislative differences to be considered.

A final consideration brought forward by stakeholders across all cities is the need for routes around the cordon that allow traffic to by-pass it. Stakeholders as well as the general public expect to be able to move between different parts of the city, which lie outside the cordon, without having to cross the cordon or by having to make excessive detours around it.

Consultation with the General Public

The key issues in the consultation with the general public overlap with those for consultation with the stakeholders, and only those not mentioned yet will be highlighted in the following.

Problem Pressure

The introduction of road user charging will only go ahead where people feel that there are very strong reasons to do so. Whether there is a new expensive piece of road infrastructure, normally a bridge or a tunnel, to be financed through road tolls, or whether it is a congestion charge, people will only willingly pay for this, if they perceive that the size of the problem is such that something needs to be done.

The most important implication of congestion in terms of the immediacy with which the problem is perceived, is generally the time lost in traffic jams whether by car drivers or passengers, public transport passengers or delivery vehicles. Where these problems are large enough, there are the best chances for the introduction of charging.

Another result of too much car traffic is pollution with its implications on health, the general environment and, in some cities, on the architectural heritage. All of these will provide additional arguments for demand management, and therefore for charging. However, in most cities, these will be supporting arguments that add to the urgency for action, rather than the primary incentive.

Need for a Long-Term Consultation Strategy

One key element coming through from charging schemes implemented so far as well as from those nearing the implementation phase, is the need for a coherent long-term consultation strategy. The level of public awareness of plans for a pricing scheme as such as well as the level of awareness of the details of any envisaged scheme are generally far lower than those who have invested in public relations and information campaigns (want to) believe. Strategies need to be drawn up very carefully to create and then carry public support through all the various phases of scheme design and implementation. The shorter the process from the initial scheme conception to its final implementation is, the easier it will be to maintain the initial momentum.

Moreover, the public will want to be seen as being consulted on the scheme and “to have had their say” in the final scheme design, and consultation with the public should therefore focus on the scheme design and the ways it could achieve its targets while minimising the pain for those who will have to pay.

Scheme design

One difference between consultation with stakeholders and that with the general public is that the latter are somewhat more directly concerned by the level of charges, since most of them have no opportunity to pass the extra cost for their journeys on to customers or employers. Therefore, the level of charges is crucial to general acceptability, and a very tight balance needs to be struck between making the charges

high enough to achieve the objective of congestion reduction, and keeping them low enough to avoid public unhappiness.

Any exemptions have to be, and have to be seen to be, “fair”, and residents within and outside the charged area will need to feel that they get a fair deal out of the overall charging and revenue re-investment package.

A final issue that tends to loom large in the public debate about charging schemes is the issue of privacy, but recent research shows people feel more and more that there are so many ways in which their movements can be traced, if authorities want to do it, be it through CCTV cameras that are present in so many places in today’s cities, mobile phones, bank cards or many other means of modern technology.

Marketing and Awareness Raising

The one single message that is coming through for every city planning the introduction of road user charging is: “be pro-active”. Informing the press and the public with the arguments for road user charging and the details of the envisaged scheme is preferable to chasing after them with corrections of misconceptions that are bound to find their way into the media through mis-reporting, biased media “comments” columns or the “letters to the editor” pages. The range of issues that should, and could, be presented to the media depends to a large extent on the stage of a possible scheme introduction.

Early Days

The main problem, when the introduction of some form of road user charging is first considered in a city, is to get people interested. The general public tends to take no note at all at these early stages, and even many stakeholders will think of it as an academic exercise or as something that may be relevant elsewhere, but not for their own city. Engaging the stakeholders will be the first step, if any progress towards scheme implementation is to be made. Since at such a stage, it is unlikely that any concrete scheme design can be discussed, the two main subjects of any presentations to the stakeholders will be the results of any studies that may have been carried out and results from other cities where schemes have already been implemented.

Moving towards Scheme Introduction

When ‘hearts and minds’ have to be won seriously, as plans for charging go ahead, it is essential that councils involve specialists in the planning and conduct of the awareness and marketing campaign. The messages that are being sent out fall into two categories. First of all, there are general messages about the expected benefits of the scheme to society at large. Such messages can be broadcast, printed in Council newsletters, planted on billboards etc, because they address anybody in the same way. But then there are other messages that must be tailored to different stakeholder groups, which are affected by the charging scheme in different ways and may benefit in different ways. In all of these cases, specific messages need to be designed, and specific channels have to be found to send these messages to the target audience.

The marketing campaign must also be tied in with the consultation. Winning hearts and minds works best when people have the feeling that they are not just being fed with information about what will inevitably happen, but also feel that they can still influence the scheme design.

The Run-up to the Charging Scheme Going Live

Finally, when the details of the scheme are finalised, and procurement and installation are under way, it has to be ensured that people are informed where, when and how the scheme will operate. In this last phase of marketing and awareness raising, the key message to anybody who will possibly travel into the charged area in the future, will be “how to minimise the pain”, and there are two aspects that need to be addressed by this: information about public transport and information about payment channels for the charge. The key again in this last phase will be the employment of marketing experts who know how to reach different groups in the population with different messages through different channels.