



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England

## *Policy Position Statement*

# Road Transport Demand Management

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) supports strong action to manage transport demand to foster safer, healthier and thriving communities, protect the countryside, and help tackle climate change. Action should focus on promoting sustainable patterns of development which reduce the need to travel, by investing in alternatives to the car, by promoting lifestyle changes and by using fiscal measures, such as tax and charging regimes designed to avoid adverse effects on the countryside.

### **Why do we need to manage travel demand?**

Traffic is rising dramatically. In the 25 years from 1980 to 2005 the volume of traffic in Great Britain (measured in billion vehicle kilometres) rose by about 82%. Forecasts suggest that, without any action, traffic will continue to grow substantially over the next 25 years, adding between 24 and 45% more vehicles on our roads.

However, traffic growth is not evenly spread. It tends to be higher in rural areas, in contrast to urban areas where the road system is often already at, or close to its capacity. Growth also tends to be lower on heavily congested inter-urban routes, including some motorways.

As traffic grows, congestion becomes more widespread and occurs for longer each day. Once traffic passes

the capacity level of a particular road or network, the incidences of congestion will increase and small amounts of extra traffic will have a disproportionate effect on the network. If traffic is allowed to grow unchecked, congestion will become more widespread and in 25 years' time it will impose much higher social, economic and environmental costs than now.

Traffic growth has acted as a major catalyst for the sprawl of our cities and towns and urban migration to rural areas. This has led to social polarisation in both town and country. The growth in traffic has other serious consequences. It increases air pollution, noise and vibration, threatens the character of towns, villages and the countryside, and adds to road safety problems. Above all, road transport emissions are recognised as one of the most

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significant and growing contributors to climate change.

Providing more road space to keep pace with traffic is not the answer. It would be far too expensive and socially disruptive, and would exacerbate the long term problem it was trying to tackle. Some people argue that we should let traffic find its own level, thus forcing drivers to find alternative ways of travel, or not to travel at all. However, we believe this would mean abdicating our economic, social and environmental responsibilities. In the meantime, the countryside and urban areas would both suffer significant deterioration.

The only realistic option is to seek ways of first controlling, then reversing, the growth in traffic. This needs to be done in the most equitable way, acknowledging that there are sections of society for whom travel choices are more limited.

### **Can we manage travel demand without charging drivers?**

To avoid the traffic situation further deteriorating, we need to offer positive solutions. We need to ensure that the location of new development promotes sustainable travel choices by building housing at relatively high density in compact settlements and by supporting town and city centres.

We need to design our street layouts in ways which make walking, cycling and public transport use easy. A surprisingly large number of car

journeys cover relatively short distances so simple, local measures can often influence behaviour significantly. According to the National Travel Survey 2005, nearly a quarter of trips under two miles were by car, and 21% of trips of under one mile were by car.

We also need to invest in better traffic management, which is more responsive to traffic conditions. Speeding up traffic for part of a journey does not necessarily make the overall journey better and can actually lead to worse congestion at pinch points, as well as increase pollution.

Providing adequate alternatives is fundamental to changing behaviour. For many shorter journeys the best alternative is cycling or walking and they also are important in providing access to other forms of public transport.

The bulk of public transport journeys in many areas are undertaken by bus. Improving buses should be a primary goal of transport policy. However, rail services are also vital for longer distance travel. Providing reliable, clean and safe rail and bus services is essential, as well as good interchanges and appropriate access to stations, including the right level of car and cycle parking. Car sharing can also play a role in reducing the amount of traffic on the road.

And we can also provide specific solutions for particular sectors of

society. Travelwise is one way of providing information on travel choices. Significant numbers of people are prepared to change the way they travel when offered reliable alternatives. Travel Plans for schools, businesses, hospitals and other institutions are key ways of promoting alternatives. According to the *Smarter Choices – Changing the Way We Travel* report published by the Department for Transport in 2004, encouraging smarter choices could reduce traffic by 11%.

Together, all these positive measures will deliver improvements to transport and reduce traffic. However, the evidence from a number of reports, including the Government's own Multi-Modal Studies, suggests that on their own, they will not bring about enough change in travel attitudes to alleviate the problems of traffic growth. If we want to see thriving communities and local business activities, and if we want to reduce climate change emissions, we also need to consider how we pay for transport.

It is sometimes claimed that the cost of motoring is too high. However, its cost has generally reduced relative to income. Between 1997 and 2005 motoring became 6 per cent cheaper in real terms (taking into account purchase, maintenance, petrol, tax and insurance), while bus fares rose almost 16 per cent and rail tickets by 7 per cent according to Department for Transport 2005 figures. Rural areas have borne a disproportionately

high share of cuts in bus and rail services; In some areas, the loss of rural public transport has put basic services such as hospitals out of reach for people without a car.

### **So what about road pricing?**

We cannot be sure how oil prices will behave over the short term but they are likely to rise in the longer term, increasing fuel costs, tempering demand. The principle of motoring costs reflecting the environmental and social impacts which the car imposes on society is one which CPRE supports. For example, more polluting cars should bear higher driving costs. So we generally support the traditional use of fuel tax to manage demand. However, fuel tax is a blunt instrument and the revenue is not set aside (hypothecated) for investment in alternative transport solutions.

As a result, the government and local councils have begun in the last few years to consider options for raising charges specifically to manage traffic demand and in some cases, to invest in public transport. The government has concentrated on two options, car parking charges and road pricing.

Car parking charges are a strong determining factor in whether, and how far people travel by car. For example, the availability of free subsidised parking at out of town supermarkets competing with more expensive town centre parking is likely to influence where people shop. Similarly, a free car parking space at

work will influence whether people commute by car.

CPRE believes the government and local authorities should use parking policy to influence behaviour and enjoy stronger powers to restrict subsidised free car parking. The limitation of car parking charges is that they do not necessarily determine how far people travel or whether they travel in congested areas.

Road pricing seeks to address this limitation by charging drivers for using particular roads. The charge is usually based on how congested the road is (hence it is often referred to as congestion charging) but in theory, it could take into account other issues such as environmental sensitivity (for example, in National Parks).

There is currently a debate about whether to use road pricing and how to implement it. A number of local authorities are looking at local zonal or corridor schemes and the government is considering a more comprehensive national scheme exploiting new technology.

CPRE strongly believes that we need to act and that decision makers should not put off implementing other, more immediate, road transport management measures while the debate on road pricing continues.

CPRE believes that a road pricing scheme which delivered traffic reduction, significantly supports public transport investment and protects the countryside could be developed.

Achieving these goals would be prerequisites for CPRE supporting road pricing, whether at local, regional or national level.

We are firmly against road pricing schemes which would be introduced to fund new road projects or unsustainable development packages adding to local congestion. We are seriously concerned that the risk of traffic (and development) being dispersed into rural areas is not being taken seriously enough in many development package proposals. Measures to avoid dispersal must be integrated into all proposals.

#### **Further Reading**

*CPRE, Beyond Transport Infrastructure: lessons for the future from recent projects, 2006.*

*Department for Transport, Feasibility Pricing of Road Transport, 2004.*

*Department for Transport, Strengthening local delivery: the draft Local Transport Bill 2007*

*Department for Transport, Travel Trends 2005*

*HM Treasury, The Eddington Transport Study, 2006*

*Transport Select Committee, Road Pricing: the next steps, 2005*

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