

## Road charging must be part of a complete motoring tax overhaul

A more measured approach to creating a system of road charging through the draft bill process is very welcome, says The AA Motoring Trust. In addition, the draft Road Transport Bills commitment to increase road capacity where needed reflects the reality on Britains roads.

However, any introduction of road charging must be balanced with a complete overhaul of motoring taxation to ensure that motorists pay no more to drive than they do now.

Most UK drivers understand the principle of paying more for the benefit of driving on less congested roads, as rail travellers have come to accept during peak-time travel. However, for road charging to be acceptable, it must be cost neutral with current motoring taxes reduced to ensure that drivers are not hit by a new and greater burden of tax unless they choose to travel at the busiest times.

Any overhaul should take into account: fuel duty, car tax, road and river crossing tolls, congestion charges and proposed environmental motoring levies. Road pricing charges must be easily identifiable and accountable.

Managing roads through pricing is only part of the equation: Britains transport system also needs financial investment at levels to match continental Europe where real transport choice exists.

Motorists choosing to restrict the times and the roads they drive on should have the option to pay less in motoring taxes, while those wanting reliable journey times on less congested, and sometimes improved, roads will be willing to pay more, says Paul Watters, head of roads and transport policy for The AA Motoring Trust.

Drivers will be deeply suspicious that road charging provides an opportunity for government to raise more revenue from them and the system needs to be transparent if it is to carry motorists support. It must also ensure that drivers are not paying significantly more only to sit in the same traffic jams day after day.

A sensible, fair and coordinated road charging system could also provide a consistent and nationally uniform means of influencing more environmentally-friendly car ownership and usage, as opposed to the current hotchpotch of central government taxes and local authority charges that are piling an ever greater tax burden on low-income car owners, families, the elderly and other less well-off drivers.