

Greater Manchester Congestion Conversation ~ Response from Campaign for Better Transport

November 2017

Campaign for Better Transport is a leading charity and environmental campaign group that promotes sustainable transport policies. Our vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Greater Manchester Congestion Conversation. Congestion is a major problem which requires action. That action should be rooted in a vision of the kind of city and region that the Mayor of Manchester and TfGM's policies and strategies seek to deliver.

The Mayor has set out a bold vision for Greater Manchester as a region where no person or place is left behind, including a world-class transport system, and a thriving economy. Getting transport right is key to delivering that vision.

Greater Manchester has great potential to compete internationally as a world class city, but this is dependent on having a high quality environment that people and businesses will want to locate to. Competitor cities are already engaged in cutting traffic and city centre parking, giving public transport, pedestrians and cyclists priority and managing freight better. Greater Manchester faces a critical choice.

If Greater Manchester goes down the route of building new roads and generating more motor traffic, it risks losing investment and business to other cities, here and abroad, while also condemning more people to premature death from air pollution, with more social exclusion and isolation for those without cars, and reinforcing unsustainable patterns of development.

By cutting traffic, reallocating road space to public transport, walking and cycling, and locating new homes and jobs near transport hubs, Greater Manchester can cut congestion and deliver a first class environment in which people and businesses can flourish.

We welcome the approach of engaging the people of Greater Manchester in considering solutions, while urging that any policy decisions are based on evidence. The most effective measures to tackle congestion will be those that move from away from the car-dominated environment of the past, rather than seeking to accommodate it.

The survey accompanying the consultation suggests three approaches to tackling congestion:

- Expand the amount of road space
- Reduce the amount of traffic, or
- Keep the same amount of road space but make better use of it.

1. Expanding the amount of road space

Expanding the amount of road space is the opposite of a solution to congestion.

There is no evidence that building new urban roads cuts traffic: on the contrary, there is a wealth of evidence confirming that increasing road space generates more traffic, while doing nothing to address the social, environmental and economic costs of congestion. Increasing traffic will simply worsen air quality and road danger while diminishing the quality of life and the public realm.

The survey suggests a number of ways to expand the amount of road space:

- Build new roads

It is understandable that people may believe that increasing road space will cut congestion: however, this is a mistaken belief. Recent research by TfQL published by CPRE confirms the evidence dating back to the 1994 SACTRA report that major new roads increase traffic above the general traffic increases for their areas, with the TfQL research finding traffic increases of up to 47per cent over 20 years. Building new roads simply generates more traffic and would only serve to shift the congestion to somewhere else within the city, while taking resources in terms of both space and funding from more effective solutions. This is a failed approach: Greater Manchester deserves better.

- Review the use of bus lanes
- Allowing cars with more than one person to use bus lanes

Bus priority measures, with dedicated bus lanes, are highly effective in cutting congestion and should be maintained. Buses are much more efficient users of road space than private cars and a full (double decker) bus can remove around 75 cars from congested roads. That is why removing bus lanes is often counterproductive. Another benefit with bus lanes and more people using buses, is that it reduces the need for car parking, meaning that valuable city centre space can be put to more productive economic and social uses.

- Restrict parking on busy roads

Parking restrictions do have a role to play in cutting congestion. The availability of parking will influence people's travel choices, with restrictions on parking encouraging people to choose other modes to reach their destination. Parking restrictions on busy routes as part of bus priority measures have merit. Simply removing parking to allow additional traffic will increase noise and pollution exposure for those living and working on main roads.

We would prefer to see a comprehensive policy on parking that includes controlled parking zones for residents; workplace parking levies for businesses; and fairly-priced parking for visitors that reflects the external costs of choosing to bring a car into the city.

- Build more lanes on existing roads

Allowing additional lanes of general traffic will increase congestion, with added noise and pollution exposure for those living and working on main roads. Taking additional land for road space in an already congested city is a backwards step. Where would this land come from? Space for trams, buses, walking and cycling is much more efficiently used than space for cars and should be extended not removed. Verges and trees enhance the appearance of the public realm, and play an important part in air quality, screening noise and pollution, providing sustainable drainage and contributing to biodiversity.

We believe the planning system could do more to reduce congestion, by incentivising developers to minimise parking space in their developments and consider at an early stage how their development will be served by public transport and active travel, including where appropriate developer-funded bus services and infrastructure.

New development needs to be built at a density that will result in new bus services being commercially viable (through numbers of people being served) reducing the need for local government financial support for bus services. Thought also needs to be given as to how to maximise walking and cycling within new developments, with careful consideration as to the siting of new schools, doctors' surgeries, local shops and other amenities.

In summary, we do not believe that expanding road capacity should be considered as a solution to congestion.

2. Traffic reduction

Traffic reduction requires intervention but is achievable and brings multiple benefits. It makes a positive contribution to CO2 reduction, air quality improvements, road safety and an enhanced public realm. Demand management mechanisms such as a Workplace Parking Levy also help businesses make better use of their sites, while providing an income stream to support better public transport, walking and cycling.

The survey suggests a number of ways to reduce traffic.

These include measures to make public transport more attractive, all of which we believe have a valuable role to play:

- Smart tickets (similar to an Oyster card) / contactless payment
- More tram lines/stops
- Cheaper public transport fares
- More convenient public transport (e.g. more reliable, frequent, timings etc.)
- More bus priority schemes and lanes
- Less crowded trains and trams

We welcome the concessions that TfGM has introduced for apprentices, young people and job seekers. To these we would add provision of part time season tickets (reflecting the fact that on average over 50 per cent of workers nationally now work flexibly or part time). We would also like to see more combined event/travel tickets for Greater Manchester's many leisure and cultural attractions.

We welcome proposals for more bus priority schemes and would like to see these include intelligent traffic light systems, enabling efficient bus priority. We would like to see wider use of the high quality information at modern bus shelters from which parts of the city region already benefit.

We support measures to plan a more cohesive bus network in Greater Manchester, using powers in the Bus Services Act. We propose a network review, balancing services between overserved areas (such as the heavily congested Oxford Road) and underserved areas, where the infrequency of buses incentivises people to drive instead, taking up extra road space.

Franchising and partnerships offer the opportunity to plan bus networks to connect better with other transport modes, and to agree timetables and frequencies. A more reliable and frequent bus network has been shown to encourage people to travel by bus rather than car, reducing congestion. In addition, more could be done to promote bus use with joined-up branding and marketing.

We also welcome the suggestions for other incentives to change behaviour:

- Better information about buses, trams and train, or walking and cycling routes you could use instead of driving
- Measures to incentivise car sharing
- More cycle lanes
- More homeworking/flexible working

There are additional measures that we would like to see considered. Information on alternative routes could be linked to information on events or to air quality alerts.

More could also be done to intervene around schools so that it is far easier and safer for children to walk and cycle to school either independently or in organised groups. This would help reduce the need for parents to drive, who often justify their need for the car because they cannot get their children to school and get to work on time without a car. Remove the need of the car for school run and the need for the car for the commute to work could also be reduced.

Car clubs and bike share schemes have demonstrably delivered reductions in car use, but require local authority support to provide parking spaces and docking stations.

As well as greater number of cycle routes, we urge that these are of high quality design, and well maintained to make cycling a safe and attractive option for a wider range of people.

A workplace parking levy, which has proved successful in Nottingham, would deter single occupancy car commuting, enable businesses to make better use of costly space and would generate funds to invest in more sustainable and less congesting options.

There are also opportunities to cut freight traffic, such as encouraging businesses to use local consolidation centres for smarter last mile delivery (including use of electric vehicles and cargo bikes as an alternative to conventional LGVs). This can provide new opportunities for local businesses as well as saving the costs of congestions to firms already operating in Greater Manchester.

Moving more inter-city freight from road to rail would also help cut congestion, because of the extra road space taken by HGVs: transferring 2000 lorry loads a day to rail would be the equivalent of taking 8000 cars off the road.

In summary, we believe there is great potential for reducing traffic, and multiple benefits to the local economy and environment from pursuing this approach.

3. Making better use of existing road space

Making better use of the existing road space complements traffic reduction, by prioritising public transport and active travel. Private cars, particularly those used for single occupancy commuting and short trips, make extremely inefficient use of urban road space: there is a strong case on economic grounds, let alone environmental or social ones, for more space to be given to more efficient modes such as bikes, buses, trams and pedestrians.

The survey suggests a number of ways to make better use of existing road space.

These include measures to manage specific journeys:

- Encourage employers / schools to vary start / finish times
- Manage events more effectively
- Timing of HGV traffic and deliveries
- Up to date real time information for road users

We welcome the suggested measures to improve traffic management and safety

- Preventing collisions through road safety measures
- Enforce traffic regulations to allow traffic to flow smoothly
- Re-time traffic signals to improve traffic flow
- Breakdown and/or collision recovery
- Improved traffic signal phasing to allow traffic to flow more smoothly
- Put in place better plans for extreme weather

The survey identifies measures to reduce the impact of road works.

- Reduce duration of roadworks
- Re-time roadworks (e.g. overnight)

There is great potential to work with street works contractors to share innovation and require industry best practice, including use of robotics, onsite recycling of surfacing materials, and space efficient covers, to reduce the time and space taken by road works.

Streetworks UK brings together examples of innovation and best practice: Manchester could set the aim to be a 'demonstration city' for streetworks excellence.

In summary, we believe that making better use of existing road space is worthwhile and should be integrated with measures to cut traffic to deliver maximum benefit in cutting congestion and delivering a first class environment for Greater Manchester.

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Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport's vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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