

LGA submission to the future of lane rental consultation

Date: 27th October 2017

Our view:

The LGA supports the further roll out of lane rental to any authority that wishes to make use of the powers. We would also support more options being considered developing the Government's proposed super permits.

We take this view because roadworks cause congestion, they take road space out of use and force traffic into less space. They are also unavoidable, as they are necessary to provide vital utility services and ensure road conditions are maintained. DfT estimates put the cost to the UK economy of traffic disruption associated with street works at some £4.3 billion each year. The social costs of utility works, meanwhile, are put at £5.5 billion annually, with street works giving rise to more pollution and accidents, less reliable journeys, and reduced resident satisfaction.

London tops a world list for driver hours wasted annually and for fuel consumed per vehicle while idling in roadwork congestion. Any attempt to reduce congestion therefore needs to include attempts to minimise the amount of time taken by roadworks. Whilst we can never eliminate them entirely councils are working to ensure that roadworks take place for the least amount of time, in the most co-ordinated way, while closing the minimum amount of road space to ensure that works can be carried out safely.

Lane Rental Pilots

The pilots in both Kent and London have proven that giving councils powers greater powers to regulate roadworks can deliver huge benefits by minimising the time spent in occupation of the road and encouraging greater collaboration between promoters.

The average occupation time for urgent and emergency works that cause congestion on the Kent lane rental scheme road network at traffic sensitive times dropped from four days to three days in the first year of the scheme. The main reason for the drop in occupation appears to be a reduction in the time taken to reinstate work sites. For example, repairs to failed utility equipment have been completed generally within a few hours whereas previously the reinstatement has taken a number of days. These delays have been reduced to avoid lane rental charges.

The London scheme has also been successful. In the most sensitive parts of the TfL network lane rental can prevent congestion with an economic cost of as much as £46k per day. Their current monitoring report states "Whilst it is hard to monetise precisely the benefits the TLRS generates, it would be reasonable to assume that the true overall benefits are in the tens of millions of pounds."

Whilst not all authorities would feel they need lane rental powers we can certainly see that many could benefit from being given the flexibility to pursue lane rental on their busiest routes. We can also see that this may be a power that mayoral combined authorities might seek to implement on their key route networks.

We believe the lane rental scheme offers a clear incentive for works to minimise the amount of time there are restricting the use of the carriageway and maximising the incentive to collaborate with other works providers in particular highways authorities themselves. This has been clearly demonstrated in the pilot schemes and is one of the main deficiencies of permitting on its own. As once a permit is issued there is no incentive not to use all the time available.

Advantages of Lane Rental

We do not regard the schemes as existing have disadvantages that are not significantly outweighed by their benefits. However we would propose some amendments to the workings of any future scheme.

We would support more flexibility for the way in which any surplus was distributed allowing it to be used for any measures that tackled congestion or supported modal shift to reduce traffic pressure on the road network

We would also welcome the ability for combined authorities and/or sub national transport bodies to access these powers where their constituent authorities felt that would be advantageous.

Level of Charge

Whilst we see no particular reason at this time to favour a higher or lower upper limit for charges we would support the following principles:

1. That the charge continues to be at a level that acts as an incentive to reduce the amount of time taken by works.
2. The councils are given as much flexibility as possible to reflect local circumstances.
3. It is able to be periodically reviewed or has some kind of inflationary measure to ensure its value is not eroded over time.

Development of Super permits

We would support the adoption of both options (lane rental and super permit) simultaneously. Whilst we would not support their use to replace lane rental schemes we can see how they would be useful in certain contexts. We would always support the maximum flexibility and variety of powers to be given to local authorities in order for them to tailor solutions to reflect their local circumstances.

We do not wish for Kent and London to lose their extremely successful schemes and the 'super permits' proposal would not allow for an incentive for speeding works up once they have begun. However we believe it could be useful for authorities that would find it easier than developing an entirely separate lane rental scheme.

Investment of surplus

The money should be available to be used as widely as possible. Any scheme that was able to reduce congestion would have a benefit to street works as less congestion on the network as a whole would improve our ability to maintain the transport network whilst conducting works. This should include modal shift work towards diverting journeys to active travel. We would seek to have the guidance interpreted with as much flexibility as possible in the future to allow us fund innovative projects that can reduce congestion.