

Stockholm votes 'yes' to congestion charging

Voters in Stockholm have said yes to the city's congestion charge, but confusion reigns over whether it will be re-introduced.

After a seven-month trial earlier this year, Stockholm held a referendum this month on whether to make the charge permanent. In answer to the question: "Should congestion tax be used in Stockholm?", 53% voted yes and 47% no, making it the first European city to approve a road user charge.

Whether the vote will mean a reintroduction of the congestion charge is less clear thanks to a complicated set of political circumstances. A somewhat different referendum was held in 14 of the 25 other municipalities in Greater Stockholm – areas under control of centre-right parties – and in answer to the question "Should the congestion tax in Stockholm be made permanent?", 39.8% voted yes and 60.8% no.

The picture has been further confused by the change of government at national level, with the centre-left coalition being voted out of office and replaced by a centre-right coalition. The main parties of the new government have said they do not recognise a majority in favour of the charge so it will not be re-introduced. But the new governing coalition includes MPs who are in favour of congestion charging, and as *Bulletin* went to press negotiations to find a compromise to reintroduce the charge were in progress.

T&E director Jos Dings said: "The political dealings following the referendum and



A 'yes' vote campaigner in a papier maché car posing the question "Who should pay for the congestion?"

the national election should not obscure the fact that a majority of those people who were most affected by the charge voted for it. That is highly significant, because it shows that when you have a trial period and show people what benefits can come from

congestion charging, public perceptions change.

"Opposition to London's congestion charge was strongest before it was introduced, but it largely evaporated once the charge came into effect and proved to be effective. By contrast, the

vote on Edinburgh's proposed charge was taken before the charge came into effect, and a clear majority rejected it."

Stockholm ran a trial between 3 January and 31 July this year. The city authorities had hoped the charge (between €1 and €2 per city entry, up to €6 per day) would reduce cars entering and leaving the Swedish capital by 10-15%. The average reduction turned out to be 20-25%, despite exemptions for buses, taxis, electric cars, hybrid vehicles and all foreign-registered cars.

Attitudes survey

A new report from Germany throws new light on citizens' attitudes to the

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Commission threatens obligatory targets if car industry fails to reduce CO₂ from cars

The prospect of obligatory carbon dioxide limits for new cars is now on the official EU agenda, following the clearest statements yet from Commission officials that they are getting tired of Europe's car makers failing to reduce emissions.

The Commission presented its official data on 2004 last month, which shows the car makers falling still further behind their target of 140 grams per kilometre by 2008. An official news release said: "Commissioners Verheugen and Dimas underlined that if industry did not honour its commitments, the Commission would have to consider taking measures, including legislative ones, to ensure that

the necessary CO₂ reductions were achieved."

Verheugen himself said: "The situation is not satisfactory," and his spokesman Gregor Kreuzhuber added: "The Commission will not hesitate to replace the carrot with the stick. This would be regulation. The car industry should be aware that we are watching the situation very closely."

Further pressure for mandatory targets has come from nine of the environment ministers who approved the original voluntary agreement a decade ago. In a letter to the *Financial Times* newspaper, they called on the current EU leadership to impose "serious and legally binding" limits on the car industry.

In a parallel statement to a conference hosted by T&E, the former French environment minister Corinne Lepage warned that short-term competitiveness concerns were obscuring the long-term vision set out by her and her colleagues.

Also at T&E's conference, two EU member states, Great Britain and the Netherlands, confirmed that they support obligatory CO₂ targets for new cars.

In the mid-1990s the Commission set a limit of 120 g/km to be reached by the average car by 2005. The car industry – led by the umbrella organisation Acea, which represents 13 major manufacturers – protested strongly,

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EU threatens legislation for car makers

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and in 1998 succeeded in getting a voluntary agreement for 140 g/km by 2008. That was criticised by T&E and other environmental groups, who said a voluntary deal would never be adhered to.

The latest figures confirm that criticism. Data from 2004 show that average emissions were down to 161 g/km, which means that if the makers are to meet their target, they have to speed up reductions to a level not yet achieved. Data from 2005 published by T&E in May suggest the makers were down by only 1g in 2005 to 160 g/km.

T&E's director Jos Dings said: "The existing voluntary commitment not only fails to punish poor performance or reward progress, but it lacks transparency. By grouping all the makers to form one average, the best subsidise the worst for no benefit. It's important that any future deal holds individual car makers to account, and sets out incentives and penalties."

The EU situation contrasts with California, where strict CO₂ limits are being introduced and the state is suing six leading car makers for the damage caused by emissions.

- Commissioners and senior MEPs have cars with emissions at the level of the worst SUVs, according to information obtained by the MEP Chris Davies. He says the average level of CO₂ emitted by the 85 vehicles allocated to commissioners and other staff is 259 g/km, and the leaders of the two main political groups in the European Parliament are driven in cars each emitting more than 270 g/km.

Anger as environment committee sets back emissions improvements for cars

The European Parliament's environment committee has voted to delay the Commission's proposed Euro-5 pollution standards from cars, and to weaken some elements of the package.

In a vote earlier this month, the committee voted to delay implementation of Euro-5 standards until September 2009 and grant exemptions for off-road sports utility vehicles (SUVs) over two tonnes.

With a transition period before member states can deny approval for cars not complying with Euro-5 requirements, it effectively delays the new standards until 2011.

The committee has also set Euro-6 standards that will not enter into force before September 2014, with implementation not happening before at least September 2015.

As a result of the vote, EU-registered cars will not be required to reduce their NO_x emissions to 70 milligrams per kilometre until 2015. By contrast, new rules coming into effect in California next year will require all new cars to have a maximum of 40mg/km.

This means that any car makers wanting to sell a model in all 51 states of the USA will have to meet the 40 mg/km limit, indeed the world's leading car makers have said they would prefer one standard to work with.

Another part of the committee's vote will exempt SUVs from the same limits as other cars in the Euro-5 round of standards. In a tactical concession to win the support of centre-right EPP members, the committee agreed that SUVs could remain categorised as vans,

but called for the special treatment to be removed under Euro-6.

Although the committee's position still has to be approved in the full Parliament next month, the fact that it was a cross-party deal means major changes in the October plenary vote are unlikely. As the Parliament's position seems to be close to that of ministers, observers expect a final agreement to be reached before the end of the year.

The Green MEP Rebecca Harms said: "California and some other US States require cars to be almost twice as clean by next year. The technologies to reduce NO_x emissions would also lead to fuel savings. There are clear opportunities both to improve air quality and reduce the climate impact of cars, but they have been missed."

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VW boss and bank doubt 'first generation' biofuels

The head of Volkswagen has criticised tax concessions for biofuels, at the same time as a new report from the banking sector casts doubt on the sustainability of such fuels and the EU's current targets for increasing the use of biofuels in transport.

Bernd Pischetsrieder, VW's chief executive, said the "first generation fuels" derived from food crops were not sustainable, and the EU should stop giving them favourable tax treatment. He said it should instead use the money to encourage the development of "second generation biofuels" which he believes have much greater potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

His views are largely supported by "Biofuels – transporting us to a fossil-free future?", a report from a

leading Swiss private bank, Bank Sarasin. Warning of "substantial social and environmental impacts" it says biodiesel and bioethanol are not always as environmental and socially compatible as their "bio" label suggests.

The report is particularly concerned about the amount of biofuels that would need to be imported for the EU to meet its current target of 5.75% of transport fuels coming from biomass by 2010, a target likely to rise to 8% by 2015. It has concerns about the environmental impact of cultivating large tracts of monoculture energy crops, and says employment and social conditions in developing countries are sometimes "critical", with land for fuel crops often taken from land previously used for growing food.

As a result, it places "the present limit for the environmentally and socially responsible use of first generation biofuels at 5% of current transport consumption in the EU and US" – effectively dismissing EU aspirations to raise the limit above 5%. But it does say there may be more potential for second generation of biofuels.

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'Hype' over biofuels

The Danish environment minister has criticised what she calls "the hype over biofuels" and says she is buying a diesel car.

Connie Hedegaard said: "People think that just because something gets a 'bio' label then it must be green, but if a non-biofuel car is equipped with a particle filter, it is just as good."

Parliament deal lets down 3 billion people worldwide

What a golden opportunity missed – not just for Europe but for the whole world!

The decision this month by the European Parliament's environment committee to delay the introduction of the Euro-5 vehicle emissions standards is disappointing enough for Europeans worried about the health and environmental impacts of poor air quality (see story, page 2). But the consequences are not just bad news for them, but also for the three billion people in the rest of the world who live in countries that apply EU standards.

Emission standards for cars (and lorries) are probably the most powerful tool the EU has to reduce the environmental impact of transport in Europe, and even on a global basis. Almost all of Asia – including China, India and Russia – adopt European standards, generally a few years after they have been

introduced in Europe. This means the Euro-5 and Euro-6 standards are an opportunity to clean up the diesel car and give it a technology that can be sold worldwide, even in markets with much stricter limits like the USA and Japan.

Yet instead of embracing this golden opportunity to set standards for European automotive technology to be the envy of the world, the environment committee has approved a regime that will mean European car makers exporting their cleanest vehicles to overseas markets. And they have done this with a cross-party deal that excluded the Greens, and will probably now end the Euro-5 process before Christmas.

The committee's vote means Euro-5 standards, which include lowering the particle limit for diesel cars, would apply to new car sales as late as 2011. For the next



Jos Dings

EDITORIAL

four years, selling diesel cars without a particle filter would still be allowed in Europe. So despite the fact that filters are common technology in countries like Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, the large majority of EU citizens will still not enjoy the health benefits of them.

The next generation of standards, Euro-6 (which will involve lowering the NOx limit for diesel cars), will not apply to new car sales until at least September 2015. For the next nine years, European diesel cars will remain too dirty to be granted access to America and Japan. During all this time, European car makers will be exporting cleaner diesels abroad than they sell at home. And even Euro-6 diesels will still not be clean enough to make it in California and four other US states that set stricter standards. It is also worth noting that the enterprise commis-

sioner Günter Verheugen has said that Euro-6 could enter into force by 2013, almost three years earlier than the date requested by the European Parliament's committee charged with safeguarding the environment.

It is worrying that the environment committee has bowed so deeply to short term cost considerations and ignored the strategic international outlook and considerations of environment, health and innovation. In the past, MEPs have often done their duty towards the European citizens that elected them by consistently being "greener" than the Commission and the member states. That seems to have changed and that is bad news for Europe.

We can only hope the roles will be reversed over Euro-5: that the 25 member states see the big picture better than the MEPs on the environment committee did, and insist on stricter standards and an earlier implementation date.

Stockholm vote approves congestion charge but future still unclear

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introduction of road pricing schemes.

A survey from the University of Dresden suggests that once a road pricing system is decided or looks likely to happen and citizens can no longer avoid it, their attitudes towards charging become more positive.

The report of the survey, published in *Transportation Research* magazine, relates only to Germany and will need to be replicated by more evidence from other countries. But the author, Jens Schade, believes something similar happened with the euro: before its introduction those convinced that it would happen felt more positive about the euro than those who felt it could still be

resisted.

Schade said: "I would like to see more research so my conclusions can be validated, but I see no reason why they wouldn't be relevant for other countries. And if they prove to be right, policy makers should take the likely positive change in attitudes into account when considering the introduction of a road charging scheme."

Milan

Milan could become the latest city to try a congestion charge. Last month, the mayor of the Italian city, Letizia Moratti, said she wanted to test a variable toll from the beginning of next year, largely to fight the city's severe air quality problems. She says her aim is to cut the

number of vehicles in Milan by 30% in five years.

The charge is expected to average around €2 per vehicle per day, but adjusted to take account of the vehicle's technology. "The cars that pollute most will bear the greatest cost," a spokeswoman for the mayor said.

Singapore, Toronto and the American state of Oregon have all introduced forms of congestion charging, while other cities have imposed charges for entering historic city centres. San Francisco is currently conducting a feasibility study into a system similar to London's.

- The British transport minister Douglas Alexander has called for national standards for road pricing schemes in cities and on inter-city roads

to avoid confusion between different schemes in different cities. The idea of a full national scheme reflects the growing acceptance of road charging, but it is likely to be opposed by cities as it will take power away from local and regional government.

Parliament green light for car taxes

MEPs have approved the principle of a graduated progressive CO₂ taxation regime to favour low-polluting cars.

The car taxation package, which also includes abolishing registration taxes (which T&E opposes), is unlikely to come into force, as it needs to be approved by unanimous majority in the Council of finance ministers.

Campaigners ask EIB to suspend funding for motorway

Environmental campaigners in Slovakia have written to the European Investment Bank, asking it to suspend the financing of a section of the D1 motorway through western Slovakia which forms part of the Transport European Corridor V.

In an action likely to test the effectiveness of environmental guarantees in EU law for the EU's newest member states, Friends of the Earth Slovakia and CEE Bankwatch Network say the Slovak government is violating the terms of a €50 million loan agreed in June, and the EIB therefore has a duty to suspend the loan.

They say the chosen route for the motorway involves a bridge over a densely populated residential area in Povazska Bystrica, which was strongly criticised in the project's environmental impact assessment, yet alternative routes to by-pass the area were not considered. They also say consultation with local communities was badly handled, with no compensation offered to residents living next to the proposed route.

In addition, a legal challenge to the motorway brought by 15 citizens and

two local NGOs is still in progress. Ivan Lesay of Bankwatch says: "The Slovak government has not informed the Commission about the lawsuit, even though EIB contract obliges the borrower to 'promptly inform the Bank of any material litigation that affects the project'. We suspect this is because the government wants money from the Cohesion Fund."

FoE and Bankwatch have therefore written to the EIB president Philipp Maystadt asking him to suspend financing of the project until he is satisfied that EU law is not being violated.

STUDY FINDS FALSE COST ESTIMATES

A study for the Commission says EU laws drawn up to protect the environment are often rejected because they are forecast to be much more expensive than they turn out to be. The study says a failure to allow for technological innovation is a key reason that industry can predict that "green" laws will be prohibitively expensive. It adds that the EU's own cost estimates should draw on as many sources as possible, update its estimates frequently to take account of advances in environmental technology, include avoided costs such as lower energy use, and be more sensitive to likely innovation. Environmental campaigners have become increasingly frustrated in recent years by industrial interests protesting that the cost of cleaner technology will put them at a competitive disadvantage. This has been a feature of discussions over limiting carbon dioxide emissions from new cars and requiring particle filters to be fitted on new and used vehicles.

FALL LIKE A STONE

Some interesting statistics have emerged from an unforeseen closure of the St Gotthard road tunnel through the Swiss Alps. Falling rocks caused the tunnel to be closed from 31 May to 30 June, resulting in a drop of 80 000 lorry journeys on the St Gotthard route compared with June 2005. 50 000 of those used the three other Swiss Alpine passes, but the other 30 000 journeys appear to have disappeared. T&E's Swiss member VCS/ATE says the fall in road journeys suggests a lot of freight was transferred to rail, some was transferred at a later date, while some will have been moved by shippers not using transalpine routes.

RYUNFAIR?

Proposed increases in taxes on aviation due to come into effect in Sweden are likely to be abandoned following this month's Swedish general election. The new centre-right government led by Fredrik Reinfeldt is committed to abandoning the taxes proposed by the outgoing centre-left coalition. If that happens, it will be interesting to see how the Irish low-fares airline Ryanair reacts – it blamed the proposed increase in taxes for widespread cuts in its services between Great Britain and Sweden. Campaigners said the cuts were so large that they could not possibly be due to the taxes, and are not expecting Ryanair to reinstate the services.

DANUBE CANAL

A UN commission says work under way to build a new shipping canal in Ukraine will have significant environmental impacts across the border in Romania. The UN-ECE predicts "large-

scale, long-term cumulative impacts" on species and habitats from the Bystroe channel. Under a convention signed by the two nations, Ukraine must consult with Romania on the canal.

EXPENSIVE BURDEN

Private cars not only have major environmental impact but a high one per euro spent. That is the conclusion of a Commission report known as "Eipro" identifying products with a heavy environmental burden.

AND FINALLY ...

A woman in Wales has agreed to spend seven weeks crossing the world, in order to be a bridesmaid at a friend's wedding in Australia while keeping her journey as environment friendly as possible. Barbara Haddrill, an environmental worker who lives in a woodland caravan, accepted the invitation from the friend in Brisbane, as long as she was not forced to abandon her environmental principles. Her journey – which involves buses, trains and a large cargo ship – will cost her four times the price of a London-Brisbane air ticket, and will take 49 times longer, but emit 1.4 tonnes of CO₂, compared to 5.2 tonnes if she flew.

New Publications and Events

• **Biofuels – transporting us to a fossil-free future?**, Bank Sarasin, Basel. www.sarasin.ch

Events

• **NGO Conference on German EU Presidency**, Deutsche Naturschutzring, 18-20 October, Berlin. Contact: conference@dnr.de

• **Velo-city 2007**, 12-15 June 2007, first call for papers. Contact: info@velocity2007.com

Bulletin

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