

Oslo does it, Stockholm does it, London does it

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Congestion charging and tolled highways are inevitable for Toronto, according to Harry Kitchen, a professor of economics at Trent University. It's just a matter of the public and the politicians accepting the reality that this city, in its current state, is grinding to a halt. Why? Because roadways are jammed and public transit systems are underfunded and inadequate.

Canadians already pay high taxes on their gas. And unlike most other countries, Canada exists more or less as a toll-free nation. Road tolls, for the most part, are a foreign concept, something Canadians rarely experience until they cross a bridge into the United States or drive on one of America's many tolled Interstates.

It wasn't always this way. Bloor St., Yonge St., Davenport Rd. and Kingston Rd. were all toll roads in the 19th century. Money collected by the toll keepers was used to pay for road development within the city. It was a pay-per-use system. But that disappeared by 1895.

Around the world, however, drivers are well acquainted with road pricing schemes. Here's how they've worked:

London: Introduced congestion charging in 2003, billing drivers who drive downtown. Downtown traffic soon decreased by 21 per cent and bus passengers increased by 6 per cent. But by 2008, traffic was back up to pre-charge levels. Net revenues from the charge (which, according to the British House of Commons, amounted to \$220 million in 2007 alone) is reinvested in London's transport system, with a large portion going to pay for the city's double-decker buses.

Stockholm: Introduced congestion charging in 2006. A plebiscite nearly killed the project shortly thereafter, but it's now permanent. As a result, traffic into the city centre fell by more than 20 per cent and travel times during rush hour decreased by nearly 33 per cent. Public transit use rose by 6 per cent. Funds raised by the charge have been earmarked for a ring road to direct traffic around the city.

Oslo: Norway has been using tolls for more than 70 years. Money raised from drivers in Oslo and five other cities is used to pay for road construction, bridges, trains and buses and other public transit projects.

Singapore: Introduced an electronic road pricing system in 1998. The system works on a "pay as



A car passes over congestion charge markers on London's Hyde Park Corner on Monday, March 3, 2003.

RICHARD LEWIS/AP

you drive" principle. Cars are equipped with short-range radios that monitor when they enter a restricted zone in the central business district, or when they drive down an arterial road. But unlike other cities that use such schemes to fund public transit, Singapore's system is meant only to combat congestion and keep the city moving. Money raised doesn't go toward anything specific.