



**Beyond congestion charges
Fixing TO's traffic woes
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London is not the only game in town when it comes to examples of road pricing. Toronto and the GTA can learn a lot from other European jurisdictions that have initiated plans to ease traffic congestion.

Planner **Sue Flack**, managing director of **MRC McLean Hazel**, pointed to a workplace parking levy initiated in **Nottingham** and two incentives pilot programs underway in the Netherlands as examples of schemes that might work better in Toronto than London's famed congestion charges.

In a presentation at yesterday's Transport Futures Road Pricing and Smart Growth Forum, Flack noted that London's congestion charges only cover the city's central business district and thus, their impact was lessened by an almost immediate reduction in rates at private parking lots within the city centre, which offset part of the cost of the charges for drivers.

Though London is often used as an example when talking about road pricing, Flack said it is a unique case, due in part to the city's immense economic production, which cannot necessarily be considered a test case for other cities.

On the other hand, Flack pointed to a levy the City of Nottingham will begin placing on parking spaces at workplaces throughout the city.

"In Nottingham there are significant concerns about the viability of the city centre," Flack told *NRU* after her presentation. "London has no such concerns because the city centre has such a strong economy."



Flack pointed out that Toronto has similar concerns about the loss of businesses and noted that Nottingham's initiative might be another solution Toronto could consider.

"For Toronto, you've got a very vital city centre downtown and quite low density outside. You might say that the workplace parking levy would actually work better [than congestion charges]," Flack told *NRU* after her presentation. She added that a congestion charge cordon "might cause employers to move out and to have car parking instead of staying where they are."

The levy applies to workplaces that offer free or inexpensive staff parking, though retail stores, emergency services, frontline health services and businesses with less than 11 parking spaces are excluded. In essence, Flack explained, employers in the city centre, who typically have fewer parking spaces, will pay a smaller levy and those on the outskirts, who sometimes provide thousands of parking spaces, will pay a higher levy.

Nottingham's levy, which was approved in September 2009 with the charges coming into effect in April 2012, is estimated to generate more than \$22-million dollars (£14-million) per year over 23 years. As Flack noted in her presentation, the levy has been directly linked with improved transit, as all of the income generated will be spent entirely on improving the city's public transit. Expansion of the existing tram network is planned, as is redevelopment and modernization of the city's railway station and financial support for existing bus services.

The City of Nottingham estimates that congestion costs the local economy \$253-million (£160-million) per year in lost time and revenue. While the policy is seen as a tool to reduce congestion and fund transit expansion, the city has also considered it through a land use planning lens. According to the city's website, the levy will be particularly effective "in encouraging employers to give stronger consideration to the development potential/cost of land used as parking in the city."

In her presentation, Flack also highlighted incentive programs that are currently being tested in the Netherlands, including one pilot program that pays people to change their travel habits.

"It is an exercise where voluntary participants are paid three or four euros a day to either travel by public transport or travel out of peak time and it's



incredibly successful," Flack told the crowd. "They're getting a 50 to 60 per cent change in behaviour. That is a huge change in behaviour. This is just an experiment. If it could be replicated it does offer an alternative way of changing behaviour, particularly at peak times."

An even larger trial was initiated this year in which volunteers were given a monthly allowance to be spent on driving. The crux of the trial was that volunteers could keep whatever money was left over at the end of the month, effectively encouraging travel outside of peak times.