



Road tolls needed to ease congestion in Toronto: expert

"If you want to get to work faster, you're going to have to pay for it," says Transport Futures director Martin Collier



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A Toronto staff report suggests that tolling the Gardiner Expressway would raise enough money to cover the repair and maintenance costs of the elevated highways.

By: Luke Simcoe Metro Published on Mon Sep 14 2015

The solution to Toronto's congestion problem can be found inside drivers' wallets, says one transit expert.

With an average travel time of 65 minutes, drivers in the city already face one of the longest commutes in Canada. Transport Futures director Martin Collier believes road tolls and congestion pricing are the only way to get people moving again.

"In Toronto, there's no more room to build new infrastructure, so we have to manage demand," he said. "And the best way to do that is through road pricing."

Collier's comments come at a time when the city is considering [adding tolls to the Gardiner Expressway and Don Valley Parkway](#). A recent staff report suggests adding a three-dollar charge to the roadways could reduce travel times by 11 per cent on the Gardiner and 16 per cent on the DVP.

Collier said tolling the Gardiner is a “no-brainer.”

“It costs so much to keep it up. Making everyone in the city who doesn't use it have to pay is ridiculous,” he said.

While politically unpopular, road tolls and other pricing mechanisms have been successfully implemented in other cities. According to Collier, places like London and Stockholm have seen traffic in their downtown cores drop by as much as 30 per cent, while also raising revenue for other infrastructure projects.

“You can use that money to make transit better, build complete streets and make it safer for pedestrians and cyclists,” he said. “All it takes is political leadership.”

Four cities that have embraced congestion pricing

1. Singapore



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Cost: An average trip through the congestion zone will cost \$15 SGD (\$10.70 USD) at peak times.

Due to its small land area and large population, Singapore began feeling the congestion crunch earlier than other nations. The government implemented congestion pricing, known as the Area Licensing Scheme in 1975, charging drivers a toll to enter the central business district. When ALS was first introduced, studies showed a 76 per cent reduction in rush-hour congestion and a nine per cent increase in transit use.

Singapore modernized its congestion pricing system in 1998, replacing windshield stickers with electronic transponders. The change further decreased congestion and travel times and led to an increase in carpooling.

The country is currently exploring a GPS-based pricing system that would cover a larger area and charge based on the time of day and the type of vehicle.

“Singapore is the crème de la crème of congestion pricing,” said Transport Futures director Martin Collier.

2. London



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Cost: £11.50 (\$17.64 USD) per day

One of the most well-known congestion pricing schemes in the Western world was implemented in London in 2003. Known as cordon system, the London congestion charge is applied to any vehicles entering Central London between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. on weekdays. Studies have shown the scheme has reduced congestion by at least 10 per cent. About half of the revenues from the congestion charge have been reinvested in other transportation initiatives.

“It’s actually allowed them to take some capacity out of the system,” Collier said. “Areas that were for cars were converted into pedestrian spaces.”

A more recent study found the congestion charge also reduced the frequency of traffic collisions in Central London by nearly 40 per cent.

3. Stockholm

Cost: 2.41 EUR (\$2.72 USD) at peak times

After a period of intense debate, Stockholm implemented a seven-month congestion pricing trial in 2006. According to Collier, the city immediately noticed a 30 per cent reduction in congestion.

“Not only did people driving get a better trip, but all the transit started running better,” he said. “In fact, they had to change the timing of the buses because the buses were arriving at their stops too early.”

In a subsequent referendum, a narrow majority of residents voted to make the congestion tax permanent. However, in the intervening years, Collier said approval for the system has risen to nearly 80 per cent.

Foreign-registered vehicles are exempt from the charge in an effort not to dissuade tourism.

4. Milan

Cost: 5 EUR (\$5.64 USD)

Milan’s congestion pricing system actually began as an environmental initiative. Faced with a growing air pollution problem, the city began charging high-polluting vehicles a fee to enter the downtown core in 2008. Revenues from the program were re-invested in public transit, cycling paths and green vehicle programs.

After the charge was implemented, the number of vehicles entering the city dropped by about 12 per cent. Transit use increased by about seven per cent, according to the Milanese Agency of Mobility and Environment.

The number of smog advisory days in Milan also dropped by 33 per cent.

In 2012, the city replaced the environmental program with a congestion charge applied to all vehicles.