

**Chapter 7- Communication and governance challenges in Greater Manchester's  
'congestion charge' referendum**

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# 1 Introduction

In December 2008, the Greater Manchester (UK) electorate voted to reject a £3 billion funding package including wide-ranging investment in the conurbation's transport infrastructure, together with, and partially funded by, congestion charging. The vote followed a two-year period of debating and campaigning, upon which this chapter reflects. The chapter focuses in particular on the ways in which the plans were communicated to the Greater Manchester public and the governmental, political and media context in which they were debated.

It adds to work by the author and others [1–4], providing a deeper analysis and reflecting on subsequent developments. By investigating the parameters of the debate and exploring the implications of the vote, it makes a contribution to the under-researched field of transport policy development in Greater Manchester through a highly significant case study in which tensions and political differences over the future of transport in the area are brought to the surface. It therefore contributes to international literature on sustainable transport in general, and road pricing in particular, and to the understanding of how to pursue policy developments even when they can be controversial and portrayed as 'anti-car'.

Given his personal involvement in the decision-making process, the author had access to sources additional to those normally available through a desk exercise. These include insider discussions, attendance of meetings of campaign groups and public debates, conversation with the public during campaigning activities, and campaign materials, such as leaflets and posters, that are not available in public archives. The author was personally engaged in the debate through a group that was part of the campaign supporting the plans. This affords a level of familiarity with, and closeness to, the field that would be difficult to achieve using retrospective approaches.

The chapter begins by looking at the ways our relationship with transport is both a burden and - looking to the future - an opportunity. It considers the lens of car dependency and employs this as a way of understanding the potential contribution of Greater Manchester's plans and to place them within the context of sustainable transport policy in the UK and internationally. It then looks at the reactions to the proposals, describing the viewpoints expressed by those in favour of and opposed to the plans. Particular challenges in progressing the plans are then explored, firstly in terms of media and communications and, secondly, government, business and politics. It then looks at the situation following the vote, firstly by outlining policy developments in Greater Manchester since 2008, and secondly through a discussion of implications

and lessons for road pricing as a whole: what does the experience mean for transport policy in Greater Manchester and other cities, and for our understanding of car dependency?

## 2 Transport as Challenge and Opportunity

Transport is at once the lifeblood of the our towns and cities and a burden to them, lubricating our economies and keeping people on the move whilst bringing with it a wide-ranging set of well-established impacts. Such impacts include environmental damage, such as climate change [5], local air pollution [6] and biodiversity loss; social issues including social exclusion [7], loss of community [8], and inactivity [9]; and economic impacts, including congestion [10] and healthcare costs [11].

The notion of car dependency provides a useful lens [12] and Hickman and Banister [5 pp36] argue that this is ‘still likely to be the reality, both now and in the short-term future’. In describing car dependency, commentators point to a vicious circle in which, as motorised traffic grows, and urban form shapes itself around it – sometimes dubbed ‘carchitecture’ [11 pp41] - walking and cycling can become less attractive options [9], public transport becomes stuck in the same queues as the car, and “the fragmented city becomes hostile and can even force reluctant users into their cars, thus exacerbating the problem” [13 pp26]. The dominance of cars enables the speeding-up of common tasks – although congestion constraints limit this - such that “with the remaking of space around the car comes a restructuring of temporalities” and, as more journeys become difficult or impossible without private transport, the car can “create the conditions of its own necessity” [14 pp492].

In car-dependent societies, lack of access to a car is a key defining factor in social exclusion [7], since it becomes increasingly necessary to own a car to access essential services such as education, healthcare and employment. In the most deprived wards in Manchester, 60% of households have no access to a car or van<sup>1</sup>. Across cities, communities enjoy varying levels of access to public transport networks, with implications for participation in society: ‘the availability or unavailability of transport... shapes people’s life opportunities’ [15 pp55]. High levels of private mobility can contribute to social exclusion through environmental degradation, health impacts and community severance [16]: those experiencing a lack of access to opportunities also suffer some of the worst impacts of the transport system – “they are both ‘less

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<sup>1</sup> The 2011 UK Census results indicate that 44.5% of Greater Manchester households have ‘no cars or vans in households’, and that figures for the Ardwick, Moss Side and Harpurhey wards are 63.3%, 60.2% and 58.3% respectively. Available at [www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk).

travelled' and more 'travelled-upon'" [17 pp5]. The pervasiveness of the car, it is argued, instils a cultural acceptance of its costs [9].

Whilst the notion of car dependency is compelling, however, there are aspects of car use not directly related to utility. In this sense 'the car is associated with both instrumental and affective emotions' [5 pp32], implying that policy to promote alternatives to car-dependence need consider not only getting from A to B, but also the experience that car-based mobility offers and the culture that surrounds it.

A range of measures are available to policy-makers. Santos et al. [18] divide these into physical policies, such as developing infrastructure for public transport, walking and cycling, and integrating with land use planning; soft policies, such as car sharing and car clubs, eco-driving training and awareness-raising; and knowledge policies, such as incentivising research and development into low-emissions and electric vehicles. Banister et al [19] classify policy approaches by their entry points into society, whether through lifestyle, market, regulation or public infrastructure and public transport. In the literature, there is increasing recognition of the importance of lifestyles and behaviours [20,21], and the importance of understanding transport as a socio-technical system [14,22].

Within this mix, road pricing and congestion charging are options that seek to disincentivise driving, at least at certain times and in certain places, and, through potential revenue generation, provide improved alternatives to the car. It is fair to say that this idea has long been considered a policy option but 'has enjoyed only spasmodic success in terms of actual implementation, more often failing to construct any climate of acceptance, and instead generally experiencing public and political rejection' [23 pp1145].

As the contents of this book evidences, Manchester's attempt to implement road pricing sits within an international story of the development of this approach. Prominent examples of implemented schemes include Gothenburg, Singapore, London, Stockholm, Milan and a set of Norwegian cities (chapters 6, 8, 14 and 18). Non-implemented cases include Copenhagen, Hong Kong, New York, and Edinburgh [24–26] (chapter 8). In Edinburgh, plans were developed but, like Manchester, were rejected in a public vote. In Copenhagen and New York the congestion charge was discussed and rejected by politicians [27].

Hong Kong ran a 21-month pilot stage trial of an electronic pricing system between 1983 and 85 but public opposition meant that it was not continued [28]; Manville and King [29] reflected that voters did not believe government promises to rebate toll revenue to drivers; but see chapter 8, section 8.4.5, for more recent developments. In Edinburgh, car use appeared to be a clear determinant of voting against the plans and Gaunt, Rye and Allen identify a range of factors including complexity and limited public

understanding, lack of faith that this would be an effective solution to congestion, and even that the public transport improvements were ‘insufficient, irrelevant or ill-defined.’ [30 pp100]

This chapter, then, contributes to ongoing work in understanding why schemes involving congestion charging often fail the public acceptability test, rather than the body of work that looks at the efficacy and impact of congestion charging itself. In reflecting on Manchester’s experiences, familiar themes of public trust, understanding and acceptance recur, and place it within this international debate, whilst particularities of political structure, spatial distribution and public transport provision emphasise the importance of situating the local within a global context.

### 3 Greater Manchester’s Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) bid

In July 2007 the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) placed a bid to the UK Government’s Transport Innovation Fund (referred to here as GMTIF). AGMA is the local government association for Greater Manchester, with representation from the ten boroughs in the conurbation. The decision to go ahead with the bid followed a period of public engagement. Less formalised discussion started earlier than this formal consultation, following the Manchester Evening News (M.E.N.) headline on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2007 “Congestion Charging: It’s coming our way” (Figure 7.1) [31].

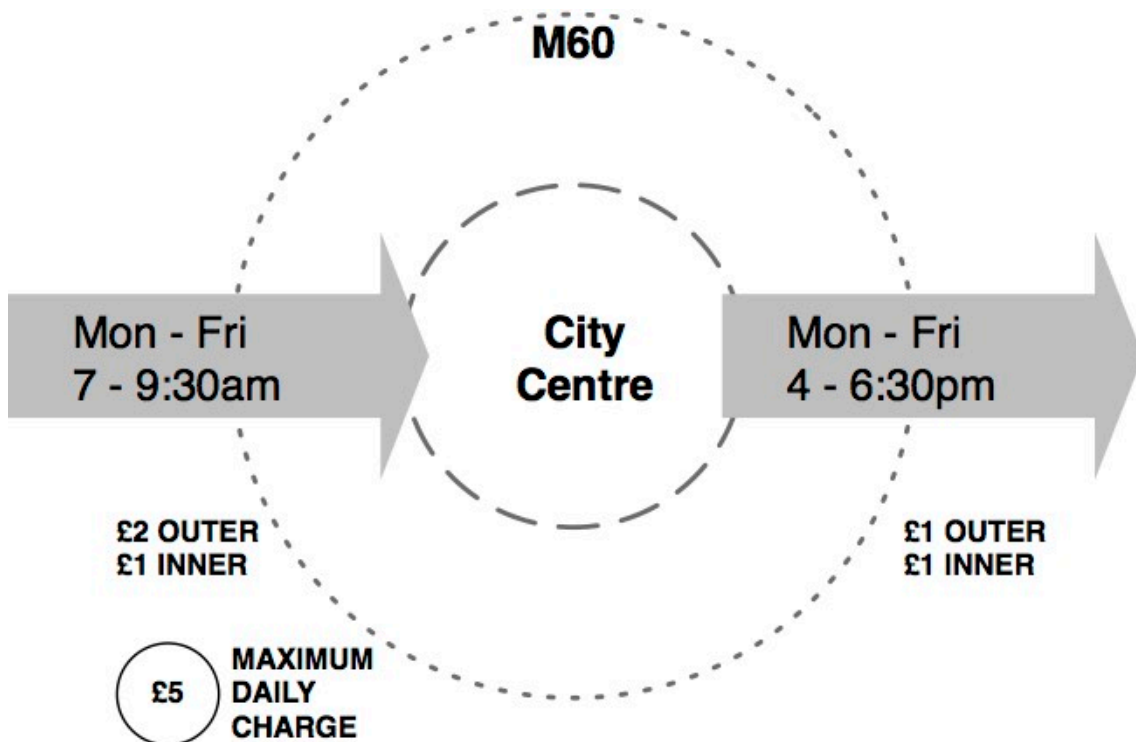


**Figure 7.1 Front page of Manchester Evening News, 24th January 2007**

From a UK point of view, the plans followed the earlier introduction of congestion charging in London in 2003. This happened alongside significant improvements in an already well-regarded public transport system [32]. It was implemented by Mayor Ken Livingstone and represented a “highly visible, very deliberate, very political effort to reduce car use and congestion in the capital” [33 pp473].

The Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) was aimed at local authorities and required a focus on demand management and anti-congestion packages, reflecting Government recognition of the London congestion charge combined, arguably, with reluctance to commit to a national scheme [34]. This followed a statement from Government to work alongside local authorities, with the Transport Act 2000 providing the necessary powers to local authorities to introduce charging regimes subject to approval by the Secretary of State (i.e. the Minister of Transport) [35].

In AGMA’s bid £1.5 billion from TIF would be made up to approximately £3 billion by borrowing on revenue from a congestion charge over 30 years [36]. This charging element was the most prominent part of the package, and would be weekday peak-time only, in the direction of flow of peak-time traffic, chargeable on driving through either or both of two cordons. Depending on when and how many cordons were passed, the charge would be between £1 and £5 over a day (see schematic, Figure 7.2).



**Figure 7.2 Schematic illustration of proposed congestion charging regime. Based on billboard advertisement 'Would you need to pay the congestion charge' shown in [37]. The M60 is the outer motorway ring road around Manchester.**

In so far as the congestion charging element of the plans could be considered a 'stick', other elements of the plan could be recognised as complementary 'carrots', with incentives for public transport and active travel, including extensions to the Metrolink tram network, an expanded cycle lane network, additional yellow school buses, new train carriages, improved interchange facilities and better integration of the bus network. Such investment would create opportunities for currently car-dependent commuters to take other options.

The plans included closer integration of services and smart ticketing and these, combined with an increase in the number and frequency of services, were intended to make public transport a more attractive proposition. With the currently privatised, multi-operator system of buses, trams and trains, the area can appear to have a collection of services rather than a network, a situation that has been observed in England and Wales outside of London [38].

The plans also included personalised journey planning and promotional activities. These 'soft measures', aiming to bring about behavioural change through information about consequences and alternatives [18], were intended to act alongside the infrastructure improvements and help commuters explore options, helping to tackle some of the behavioural aspects of car dependency, such as lack of experience of public transport and confidence when cycling.

#### 4 The plans as response to the challenge of car-dependent cities

The GMTIF plans can be understood to be a response to the challenges of car-dependency in cities and as an attempt to mitigate the environmental and social impact of increasing car use. However, whilst with hindsight it is possible to see these potential societal impacts, it has been noted that the discourse around the referendum was focused heavily on economic dimensions: 'given that one motivation for the proposed congestion charge scheme was protecting the environment through reducing car use, the campaign on the referendum had been overwhelmingly dominated, both online and off, by an economic discourse' [39 pp89]. Nonetheless, references were made to broader societal goals, including reducing carbon emissions, improving air quality and reducing social exclusion.

One way in which the plans responded to these challenges was the implication of modal shift. As mentioned, there was a clear 'carrot' and 'stick' approach. By making

driving more expensive at certain times, and investing in more sustainable modes, the plans had the potential to bring about modal shift by, for example, “produc[ing] a virtuous cycle in shifting motorists to public transport” [18 pp53]. It should be noted however that the ‘stick’ was primarily a financial one - there was no impediment on driving provided the individual was willing to pay the charge – whereas the ‘carrots’ related to quality of experience rather than price – for example bus coverage and frequency, ticket integration, and cycle lane provision.

In this sense the plans represented more than the provision of incentives and disincentives, since the intention was that they would give people more options to travel without a car. This can be understood in simple terms, in that new bus and tram routes would present the opportunity for some current car commuters to utilise public transport for some or all of their journeys – whether they would take this opportunity is of course a different matter, and some research has suggested that the provision of public transport itself does not affect vehicle kilometres travelled [40] . Similarly, new and improved cycle routes may have made cycling a more realistic or attractive option for some. At a more systemic level, indirect effects could be anticipated: a new school bus route may have freed a parent from driving a child to school, therefore reducing the need for trip chaining, making public transport a more viable option; reduced traffic levels during the rush hour could make walking and cycling a more attractive option.

Moreover, GMTIF represented something more than a trickle of transport improvements, important as they are individually. It would have been a programme of major investment over a five-year period with substantial changes to the public transport offer in the conurbation followed by the introduction of the congestion charge. This would create opportunities for transport provision to be a high-profile news item, at least in the time leading up to the introduction of the charge; for the personalised journey planning service to help people consider their modal choices; for businesses to work with employees to help them think about their commute and potentially introduce flexible working policies to facilitate modal shift. Accepting, again, that they remain a theoretical possibility, they resonate with Hull’s [41 pp96] observation that the cumulative effects of car dependency “warrant a coherent and focused intervention” and perhaps provide “window[s] of opportunity in which travel habits (e.g. driving) are disrupted and must be renegotiated” [42 pp485]. In this sense, the impact of GMTIF would have been more than the sum of its parts.

As a theoretical proposal, GMTIF contained within it many principles that transport researchers would associate with facilitating modal shift. This is not to claim that it was the perfect, complete package however. There were a number of omissions that could be seen as missed opportunities. For example, the plans contained nothing explicit that would encourage the use of cleaner vehicles. Whilst the publicity made claims around improvements in air quality and carbon emissions, the opportunity was not taken to reduce the congestion charge for electric or hybrid vehicles. There was also nothing



explicit to help people on low incomes, apart from a short term reduction on the congestion charge of 20 per cent for the first year [43]. Additionally, the authorities could not guarantee that public transport fares would be cheaper.

In many ways the complexity of the GMTIF scheme reflects an attempt to overcome some of the criticisms commonly made of road charging, as Vigar et al. agree [2]. By using a loan to enable public transport improvements before introducing charging, there was potential to overcome a common 'chicken and egg' dilemma: public transport improvements being required upfront, yet the money from charging needed to fund them becoming available only downstream. The planned charging regime could be seen as less 'blunt' than, for example, the London charge, with the charge being incurred only when crossing one of the two cordons, only at certain times, and only in the direction of peak-time traffic. This meant that the charge was in principal more precisely targeted at congestion itself, at the times and directions it occurred, and as a result afforded more options to drive and avoid paying the congestion charge.

## **5 Reactions to the proposals**

Once national Government had accepted the bid in June 2008, subject to public approval, there was a period of debate and a formal consultation on the proposals. Campaigning for and against had been continuing and there were calls for a referendum, particularly from opponents [44].

In July 2008, AGMA announced that there would be a referendum in December of that year. A representative sample survey of residents run by Ipsos Mori in August found before the referendum that just over half (53%) of residents were in favour of the Congestion Charge scheme [45]. However, the result announced on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2008 was strongly against: 78.8% against and 21.2% for, with an overall voter turnout of 53.2% [46]. The proposals were therefore not implemented. The discrepancy between the opinion polls and the final result may stem from a number of factors: the time between them, which would have been the period of most intense campaigning, during which voters had time to change their minds; the likelihood of those with only a mild interest in the issue responding to the poll but not being motivated to vote; and the difference between an 'in principle' commitment in an opinion poll and a more calculative vote that feels more real and anticipates the ways the charge would 'hit the pocket'.

Although in the initial stages there were no plans for a referendum, 'pro' and 'anti' alliances formed, and these could be mapped onto the subsequent 'yes' and 'no' positions. An early presence in the 'pro' campaign was Clean Air Now, a coalition led by environmental campaigners and later joined by the official 'yes' campaign and United City, a coalition of businesses. The 'anti' campaign was initiated by campaign group Manchester Against Road Tolls (MART), backed by the national Association of

British Drivers (ABD), and later joined by a coalition of businesses, the Greater Manchester Momentum Group (GMMG) [47]. Shark and squirrel characters became mascots for the 'no' and 'yes' campaigns respectively, with the shark attending consultation roadshows and appearing in viral videos taking money from people as they tried to buy a beer or go on holiday; the squirrel responding with the motto "Say no to £3billion? You must be nuts!". The arenas for campaigning included the local press, with some newspapers taking particular campaigning stances; local radio and television; various organised public meetings; the tables of the area's pubs, on beer mats; and billboards around the conurbation.

As a methodological note, it is important to remember that the viewpoints expressed on either 'side' represent campaign messages rather than being, necessarily, an accurate representation of public opinion. The views of the public are not necessarily the same as the claims being made by powerful interests and active campaigners. To this end, the claims have to be recognised to be as much tactical – i.e. the claims that the groups thought would help them achieve their goal – as representative. Hepburn [48] looked at the ways in which the referendum was discussed in online forums, for example. He noted the ways in which 'no' campaigners had been observed "supporting each other online' and endorsing others' comments and 'harassing' any 'Yes' campaigners who came online" [48 pp60]. In fact, a 'No' activist associated with the manchestertolltax.com website acknowledged to him that 'they had organised their supporters from across the country' [48] to interact with this debate.

Whilst the two 'sides' did not represent homogenous constituencies of opinion, there were overarching themes that characterised the arguments being made. We cannot, of course, assume that businesses and organisations who opposed or supported the plans necessarily signed up to all the claims made.

Within the set of viewpoints and campaign angles there are many stances that directly contradict. Where those against the plans argued that the congestion charge would benefit the rich, for example by 'keeping the roads free for the rich' (Figure 7.3) for whom the £5 proposed cost would be proportionally less of their income, those in favour argued that the plans contained socially progressive elements and that it would be the poorest who would benefit most from better public transport links and reduced air pollution.



**Figure 7.3 Photo of Manchester Against Road Tolls (MART) campaign billboard.**  
**Photo: anonymous**

An early advert claimed that the plans were tantamount to telling nurses, firemen [sic] and teachers to get 'On Yer Bike', (Figure 7.4) highlighting that the congestion charge would represent a higher proportion of the wages of lower paid workers, whilst those campaigning in favour organised a 'Tour de TIF' bike ride covering the whole of Greater Manchester and highlighting the potential for 'cleaner, cheaper and more convenient public transport options will take cars off the road and make cycling safer and more enjoyable' [49]. On the one hand, then, the plans could result in more people feeling that they needed to cycle to work, on the other, this may help to make cycling a more attractive option and have health and environmental benefits.



**Figure 7.4 Photo of Manchester Against Road Tolls (MART) campaign billboard.**  
**Photo: anonymous**

In the discourse against the plans, concerns about the costs to businesses were raised. Kellogg's, for example, welcome the public transport improvements in principle but argued that 'they will not help us move cornflakes' and therefore, the Manchester Evening News reported, that it would be 'too difficult to shift cereals from its Trafford Park plant' [50]. A coaster produced by the Greater Manchester Momentum Group argued that 'even if you don't commute by car, additional costs to business will be passed on through shops, pubs and other outlets' (Figure 7.5).



**Figure 7.5 Campaign coaster produced by Greater Manchester Momentum Group**

Conversely, campaigners in favour highlighted the potential positive impact on businesses and the economy in terms of the costs of congestion and unreliability, as shown in the 'That's why I'm voting Yes' billboards (figure 7.6): 'I can't afford to be late for any more meetings' and 'I want my deliveries to be on time.' It was also part of the core messaging of the 'yes' campaign to claim that 30,000 jobs in the area were at risk from congestion and that there is a general case for the economic health of the area: 'We can all have a laugh, but we are talking here about tens of thousands of people's jobs and the future of the region' [51]. 'Even drivers will benefit the argument goes,' reported the Manchester Evening News, 'because they will see their journey times reduced.' [51]





**Figure 7.6 Campaign billboards produced by the YES Campaign. Design by Creative Concern, Photography by Graeme Cooper**

Costs to individuals were also highlighted. A viral video showed a man standing at the bar in a pub with a beer and a shark coming up behind him and taking the drink with the message 'If the Congestion Charge comes in, it could cost you up to £100 a month... Don't let the Congestion Charge be last orders for your pint.' Conversely, pro campaigners highlighted that many people would not have to pay the charge, such as older people travelling off peak: 'And it is those who will not pay who feature in the Yes Campaign's big poster campaign – the off-peak traveller, the bus and train commuter – with the message "9 out of 10 people won't pay" [51] (see Figure 7.7 for example of this slogan). The campaign attempts to convince people that the charge is the fairest way to pay for public transport improvements.'



**Figure 7.7 Leaflet produced by YES Campaign. Design by Creative Concern, Photography by Graeme Cooper**

Those opposed to the plans referred to the financial risk the city was taking, with half the GMTIF money being in the form of a loan, paid back through the congestion charge. Conversely, campaigners in favour of the plans highlighted the opportunity and potential of the investment: an example being the leaflet 'You wait years for some transport investment and then £3 billion comes along at once. Going to let it go by?' (Figure 7.8). Whilst opponents tended to frame this as a 'bribe', proponents tended to emphasise the opportunity presented by the money.

## Typical isn't it?

You wait years for some transport investment and then £3 billion come along at once.



**Figure 7.8 – Leaflet produced by Clean Air Now**

An objection raised by those opposed was the extent to which the congestion charge apparatus would entail tracking drivers: an early advert contained the words 'We're watching you: Tagged, Tracked and Taxed. The Toll Tax'. The 'yes' campaign did not focus on this issue, but did seek to reassure people that the mechanism would not be 'tracking' per se, but would instead register whether cars pass cordons during the hours of charging: there was an implication, however, that this was a reasonable price to pay for the potential benefits of the scheme.

A prominent theme for the proponents of the scheme was a reduction in the emissions from transport and the impact upon air quality and climate change. Clean Air Now, a coalition of groups and businesses, focussed their campaign on this, arguing that the plans, in controlling traffic levels and introducing newer more modern buses, would contribute to reducing air pollution. A campaign towards the end of the period featured children in gas masks with the caption 'Is a congestion charge too much to pay for clean air?' [52].

These environmental issues did not feature in the campaigns of those opposing the plans. There were some examples of attempts to downplay the significance of air pollution for asthma and to claim that modern cars are cleaner, for example on the Manchester section of [notolls.org.uk](http://notolls.org.uk): 'They say that tolls are needed because it would result in a tremendous improvement in air quality and eliminate asthma and other respiratory diseases. But there is little evidence that external air pollution is a



significant asthma factor though it may have an effect on those who already suffer from it. Cars are many times cleaner than they were...’ [53]

It is noteworthy that the arguments presented by those in favour of and opposed to the proposals are often two sides of the same coin, or the same issue perceived differently: whilst the charge might ‘keep the roads free for the rich’, it would allow for improvements that would give low income commuters more options not to drive; whilst the plans seemed to be saying ‘on yer bike’ to poorer commuters, facilitating active travel can be seen as a positive way of boosting health and social inclusion; whilst the loan element was a risk, the funding was an opportunity; whilst businesses may incur charges, the proposals would help to reduce congestion therefore potentially helping businesses make their deliveries on time.

Fundamentally, these opposing viewpoints can be seen to reflect different conceptualisations of justice. The close association between mobility and freedom translated into claims of social justice, albeit differently framed. The justice claims of the opponents can be understood to stem from an emphasis on mobility and a close association between this and private car use. The potential for the charge to affect poorer drivers the most was highlighted, with the implication that the roads would, in effect, be ‘free for the rich’ (Figure 7.3) and the poor would not be able to access work without resorting to the other modes of transport, such as the bicycle (Figure 7.4).

Conversely, the proponents tended to present non-car modes positively. Clean Air Now (CAN)’s ‘Tour de TIF’ cycle ride highlighted the opportunity to promote cycling as a healthy and sustainable mode. Leaflets produced by CAN suggested a ‘yes’ was an early Christmas present and highlighted the extent of the public transport investment. They argued that it would be the poorest in society, who do not have cars, who would benefit the most from the investment. They also tended to make reference to environmental issues such as air pollution and climate change, and argued that quality and reliability of journeys would improve.

The claims, then, represent alternative approaches to addressing social exclusion related to car dependency. The ‘no’ campaigners argued that making car travel more expensive exacerbates social exclusion, whereas the ‘yes’ proponents argued that, by investing in alternatives and reducing the growth of car use, policy can seek to be more inclusive.

## 6 Communicating complex proposals

### 6.1 Introduction

As discussed above and previously [4], the proposals were relatively complex. Although GMTIF was routinely presented as a congestion charge plan, the reality was

that it was also a major public transport investment package that was contingent upon the introduction of a congestion charge. The project was “characterised by a complicated message” [3] in a field of planning that is already a complex, and contested, field.

This discussion is premised on the assumption that the media have a significant effect on opinions and attitudes [54]. “In our media-mediated world”, argue Brand and Fischer [55 pp13], “small chunks of information sell... information for the masses has to be made accessible and straightforward, which pushes towards a simplified picture of a complex scenario.”

Whilst the level of complexity reflected a level of sophistication that made the scheme more precisely targeted at congestion, and this should arguably have made it easier to justify and ‘sell’, the reality was that this complexity appeared to hinder rather than help its passage through political and public discourse.

Others have commented on the lack of penetration of some of the more complex elements of the plans, and highlighted a degree of simplification. Vigar et al., in their survey of media in the run-up to the vote, agree that “it is apparent that many dimensions of GMTIF were under-explained” [2]. Concerns over the clarity of communication have led some to question the extent to which people fully understood the plans and, in particular, the longer-term implications [34]. “Very few people”, argued Roy Newton of the Joint Transportation Policy Team, “got the message that a significant investment in public transport was the major component, and even fewer people knew that public transport investments would have to be fully implemented before the congestion charge would begin” [interviewed in 53]. Gaunt, Rye and Allen made a similar observation about Edinburgh’s proposed two-cordon system: ‘It was clear that it was too complicated to be understood, never mind supported, by a majority of the public’ [30 pp100]

There are several reasons to suppose that the public received a rather simplified version of the plans through publicly available discussion [4]. Firstly, there was a particular focus on the congestion charge element of the proposals with the process repeatedly referred to with variations on ‘congestion charge referendum’. This is clearly unsurprising, and certainly with the benefit of hindsight. £3 billion of investment in transport is not in itself controversial and therefore the vote was always going to be primarily about the congestion charge element. Vigar et al. agree, also finding that the improvements were often presented as a ‘sweetener’, with the congestion charge as a ‘bribe’ [2]. This framing was common from early in the process, an example being “The government is offering Greater Manchester up to £3bn for public transport improvements in return for the peak hour only charge of up to £10[sic]” [57].

Secondly, the plans themselves were routinely simplified, in both campaign materials and media reports, particularly the financial aspects. The complexity of the charging system created opportunities for simplification. Some advertising on billboards, beer mats and viral videos repeated annual and daily figures, typically £5 per day and £1,200 per year: in each case this was the maximum charge and, as discussed above, was contingent on time and direction of travel, but individuals would have to dig into the detail to find this.

The official 'yes' campaign, which could have broadened the debate to draw attention to the wider benefits, seemed to be pushed to respond at the level of how much the individual would pay. It circulated leaflets in the run-up to the referendum and these included information on the public transport improvements, but the core messaging of these and the billboard adverts that accompanied them was '9 out of 10 people won't pay – will you?' (Figure 7.7) apparently countering the 'hitting your pocket' focus of the opponents by appealing to those who would not, given their travel patterns or personal situations, pay the charge.

Thirdly, comparisons with the London system belied the comparative complexity of GMTIF. The GMMG coaster (Figure 7.5) states that it would "create the world's largest congestion charging zone – the area within the M60 motorway – that's 80sq miles compared to the original London zone of 8sq miles" – yet the schemes were quite different, with London's based on a zone and Manchester's around two cordons.

Throughout the almost two-year period of debate there are examples of potentially misleading information, whether wilful or not. One example is the M.E.N. front page in March 2007 "Congestion Charge, you say NO" on which it was reported that "two out of three reject plans to bring in pay-as-you-drive" and "but 59 per cent of you back move [to congestion charge scheme] – if it brings cash for Metrolink" [57] (Figure 7.9). The plans did include funding for Metrolink, so the headline would more accurately have read 'you say YES'. Whether intentional or not, such reporting would not have helped the public to clearly understand the proposals, and again seemed to consider the congestion charge in isolation from the proposed public transport improvements. Some media organisations openly ran against the proposals campaigns. This is not to argue that the media consistently misrepresented information or was always against GMTIF. Rather, it is to highlight the charged and potentially confusing way in which the details of the GMTIF were communicated to the public.



Figure 7.9 Front page of Manchester Evening News, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2007 (extraneous news items removed).

Also of interest in seeking to understand how the plans were communicated is the ways in which road users are framed. Given the focus of the media on the congestion charge element of the plans, ‘the driver’ seemed to take centre stage in media coverage, implying a simplified conceptualisation of mobility. The repeated headlines and claims like “Drivers to Pay £1,200” a year were simplifications of the proposals and belied the potential for public transport investment to create feasible alternatives for many ‘drivers’. One of the first headlines in the M.E.N., for example, was “Is THIS really an option for drivers?” with a photo of a crowded tram; implying not only that being a ‘driver’ is an identity, rather than a performance of the practice of driving, but also that public transport was in some way not good enough for them. However, as King et al. [58] argue, although the charging is likely to “harm most drivers, no one is only a driver” – a ‘driver’, or their family, could benefit from being able to use a new tram route, or benefit as a parent or resident from lower traffic levels. Constructing and perpetuating this identity of ‘driver’ can be seen to be problematic, considering that a core principle of sustainable transport is a shift from emphasising one mode (‘uni-modality’) to embracing plurality (‘multi-modality’) [11], such that the mode of transport is determined by the demands of a particular journey rather than habitual use.

Some proponents did question this. After the M.E.N. launched a survey to let ‘drivers’ report problems with congestion, Manchester Friends of the Earth, the Community Network for Manchester and the Environment Network for Manchester signed a letter to them arguing that “No one is simply a ‘motorist’ – we all have a range of transport modes available to use, depending on the journey we are making” [59].

Vigar et al. found that in general “the press resorts to a narrow repertoire of words and metaphors to define transport issues” [2 pp478] and identified a need to better understand how these are interpreted by the public. Brand [22] argues that the question that is asked, and by extension the way the question is framed, can delimit the perception-space of answers, such that “limits to describe are limits to imagine” [22 pp67]. It could be argued, then, that a certain poverty of vocabulary was evident in the press coverage and such poverty may have translated into a poverty of argument and vision.

## 7 Political leadership and governance

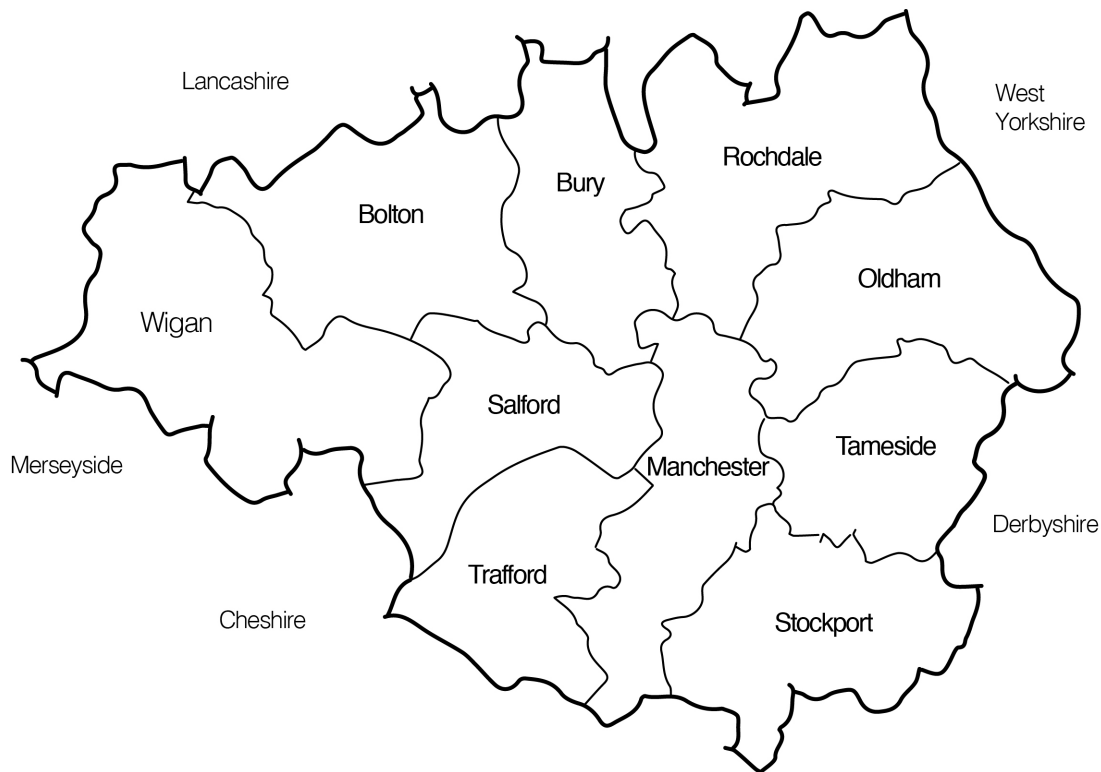
Ahmed makes the point that by this time the equipment for congestion charging was already available and proven and that ‘the emphasis has shifted to public and political acceptability as the key constraints’ [35 pp2]. Clearly part of this challenge rests with the decision-makers of a conurbation. Observations above of the GMTIF debate present a picture that is a long way from notions of the well-informed electorate and communicative rationality [60], and highlight the need to recognise power and knowledge disparities, strategic behaviour and deception [61]. They also highlight the ways in which governance structures can contribute to inertia in decision-making and the limitations of a referendum process in representing opinion on a complex issue.

It cannot of course be known what the outcome would have been under different circumstances, but it is clear that aspects of Greater Manchester’s governance undermined efforts to forge a decision to go ahead with these plans. GMTIF was born into a fragmented governance setting. The ten local authorities in AGMA (see Figure 7.10) were a combination of Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative and AGMA sought agreement between these political parties in order to progress the plans. For this purpose, AGMA amended its normal consensus vote to a majority vote [62] and decided, with a majority of eight, to bid for TIF funding. Central Government’s decision to award the conurbation the funding was influenced by AGMA being able to demonstrate broad support for the proposals, evidenced by an early consultation

exercise<sup>2</sup> [63]. Nevertheless, the months that followed were characterised by further political debates. At the time of the referendum three councils were opposed: Stockport, Trafford and Bury [47]. Stockport Borough Council was vocal in its opposition [64] and in the period running up to the vote attempted to arrange bus advertising to oppose the plans [65].

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<sup>2</sup> 57% of residents surveyed agreed with the principle of paying charges in return for the package of public transport investment. 68% agreed that a bid should be submitted to TIF, but that no decision should be made on the charging scheme until more details were available.



**Figure 7.10 Map of Greater Manchester showing borough and city boundary and neighbouring Counties**

The proposals lacked a high-profile, top-level figure to champion them, in contrast to London, where Ken Livingstone personally championed the congestion charging plans, and it was he, rather than national Government, who took the political risk [34]. The Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority (GMPTA) and AGMA were expected to maintain a neutral stance, co-ordinating the consultation and disseminating neutral information about the plans. In such a charged political climate, they could not be seen to be taking sides. Councillor Roger Jones, arguably the public figure most closely associated with GMTIF in 2008, lost his seat in the 2008 local elections and subsequently stepped down as chair of GMPTA. During the election much was made of his involvement with GMTIF. Having publicly supported the plans, this was seen by some in the media as something that should “send a message to his colleagues and potential successors” [66] and, by Manchester Against Road Tolls, as confirmation that “the congestion charge is a cast-iron vote loser” [66].

It is striking that this political ‘mud’ stuck. Even in June 2011, on re-election, the local press referred to him as “Congestion Charge Mastermind” [67] and referred to him having previously been “ousted”, illustrating the longevity of the reputational risk of supporting a controversial scheme. This legacy affected the Manchester Labour Party as a whole: when the Greater Manchester Combined Authority was created in 2010, it was decided that all issues would be decided on a simple majority, except for road pricing, which would require unanimity [68]. A local councillor commented that “this is a

very good safeguard against Labour leaders and non-elected civil servants within some councils trying to force a congestion charge upon Greater Manchester” [69]. More recently, when Greater Manchester Labour mayoral candidate Andy Burnham was tweeted a question ‘What is your stance re congestion charge for Manchester’, his response was ‘Completely off the agenda’<sup>3</sup> .

It is also important to shed light upon the interface between business and government. A group of prominent businesses in the area established the Greater Manchester Momentum Group (GMMG) to campaign for a ‘no’ vote, and another group of supportive businesses established United City. Hepburn describes the characteristics of opponent and proponent businesses, noting that the former, on the whole, had ‘economic interests in freight haulage and retail parks located on the edge of the urban area’ and included multi-national businesses, including Kellogg’s and Unilever as well as major national real estate companies such as Peel Holdings, owners of the Trafford Centre, a shopping centre. The latter, he continued, were more likely to be located in the city centre of Manchester and ‘whilst numerous were generally not in the same financial league as those businesses opposing the proposal’ [48 pp51].

In 2008, Peel Holdings was allegedly carrying out voter research in the constituencies of politicians related to transport, such as Councillor Roger Jones and Transport Secretary (Minister of Transport) Ruth Kelly, asking voters if they supported congestion charging [70] and, reportedly in one case, if they were aware of the position of Councillor Jones on this issue [71]. Another local company, Kellogg’s, was criticised for emailing its employees with a ‘cut and paste’ section of text with which to respond to the official consultation and reflect their employer’s stance against the proposals [72].

Hepburn [48], in his analysis of online discussions, observed that ‘the exercise of political power being wielded by dominant economic interests’ had muted the voices of, in his example, environmental campaigners, and notes that ‘this undoubtedly helped to deprive the civic debate of an important environmental dimension.’

Whilst businesses have a legitimate voice on policy in a city region, this example highlights the sometimes opaque nature of their interventions and the need for a good understanding of the ‘behind the scenes’ influences on policy and decision-making. Whilst business often has a privileged position in policy-making, as “government relies greatly upon business to carry out basic functions such as employing people and organising the economy” [73 pp99], its views are not necessarily unbiased or representative, and powerful interests with financial resources may “skew the outcomes of policy debates” [73 pp99], either directly, as stakeholders, or indirectly by

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<sup>3</sup> Tweet available at <https://twitter.com/andyburnhammp/status/821751320797396992>. Note that Andy Burnham was elected as mayor of Manchester in May 2017.



influencing the electorate. Given Hepburn's observation that national and multi-national concerns were disproportionately on the opposing side, one has also to question the extent to which this referendum can be seen as genuinely local democracy.

## 7.1 The referendum

The decision to hold a referendum, which followed campaigning primarily by opponents, appears to have been in part a result of the failure of the ten boroughs to reach agreement. Sir Richard Leese, Manchester City Council leader, had not been in favour of a referendum, arguing that it "would not work" for such a complex issue and preferred the decision to be made through the "system based on elected representatives who have to take difficult and important decisions" [74]. Some felt that the decision to hold the referendum was an "admission of failure" [56] or buck passing. Similarly, in the Edinburgh case, it was argued that the referendum was a "politically expedient way to distance the then ruling Labour group from making a decision on the congestion charging scheme" [75]. Whilst the Greater Manchester authorities may be criticised for lacking decisiveness in pursuing the programme, some local politicians felt that the buck had already been passed from central Government [56], which did not have the boldness to push congestion charging directly but had instead made anti-congestion measures essential components of bids to TIF.

The experience of the referendum illustrates the difficulty of translating a strategic long-term macro-level decision into individual decisions. It calls into question not only the suitability of a referendum process, but also the ability of the democratic system to bring about radical change, or, in lock-in [76] terminology, a discontinuity. The binary choice, and outcome, of the referendum arguably became a simplified representation of a complex issue and did not facilitate deliberation of the finer details, advantages and disadvantages, nor was voting able to communicate anything more than a 'signal' [77].

There was also an issue with familiarity with the subject matter. As Pierson [78] argues, many participants in politics engage in activities sporadically. He refers to studies that indicate that actors who operate in contexts of high complexity and opacity tend to filter information into existing 'mental maps'. This is pertinent to GMTIF: the majority of voters will not have engaged in transport planning prior to the referendum and will have had only a short amount of time to digest the plans and get to grips with the complex set of issues. They will have been bombarded by campaign messages and media content which, as has been seen, often did not do justice to this complexity. This would also apply to elected members outside of the transport and related committees. At the same time as the GMTIF was being debated, and concerns about the extent of the use of public finances and the debt were being raised, Greater Manchester Waste Disposal

Authority (GMWDA), serving nine of the ten AGMA boroughs, had signed a deal for waste services over 25 years with the value of £3.8 billion, including a mixture of grant funding and finance [79] – such high-value packages are not alien to local government.

## 8 Developments following the referendum

This section outlines developments in transport policy relevant to GMTIF following the rejection of the plans in 2009. Although some had emphasized that there was no ‘plan B’ for transport in the conurbation, the debate surrounding TIF had emphasized the importance of transport to the region’s economic prosperity and AGMA asked the Clerk to the Authority and the Chief Executive of the PTE to ‘examine alternative approaches designed to create investment capacity in transport and to maximise the contribution transport could make to the delivery of Greater Manchester’s employment and Gross Value Added growth potential.’ [80]

It was recognized that the decision to withdraw from TIF precluded Greater Manchester from accessing associated funds from DfT. An initial options document highlighted the potential for a workplace parking levy and supplementary business rates as a fundraising tool, but this was rejected by AGMA executive in 2010 [81]. AGMA chairman Lord Peter Smith related this decision to the economic downturn [81].

To the extent that the 2009 GMPTA<sup>4</sup> document ‘Post TIF Investment and Funding Strategy’ [80] represents local government thinking about ways forward, it suggests a business and economy focus, referring to transport as a ‘growth constraint’. The exercise of applying to and planning TIF furthered the evidence base for public transport investment had added to the bottom drawer of planned schemes. The document recommended the establishment of a Greater Manchester Transport Fund with a clear focus on economic growth: ‘to focus scarce existing and potential new sources of funding on the growth and productivity agenda’ [80 pp20].

A later report [82] detailed the components of this fund, which was established in May 2009. The GMTF, it stated, is a total investment package of £1,512 million and is described as a ‘Major Transport Scheme Prioritisation and Funding Strategy’ [83]. This comprised £448 million of Regional Funding Allocation; £165 million grant from the DfT relating to the South East Manchester Multi-modal Strategy (SEMMMS) road scheme; a Block LTP funding over a period of 9 years from 2010/11; up to £775 million from a combination of borrowing, and partly from local/third party contributors. In Local Transport Plan 3 it is stated that TfGM will repay the borrowings from a combination of Metrolink net revenues, annual ring-fenced levy contribution, and local revenue

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<sup>4</sup> Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority (now consolidated under Greater Manchester Combined Authority)

contributions [83]. This is noteworthy since it means that despite debt being one of the concerns that apparently influenced the referendum result, GM pursued a partly finance-based package, and public transport revenue, rather than congestion charging, was part of the payment strategy.

The GMTF had a list of capital projects attached, many of which are recognizable from the original GMTIF plans. Metrolink extensions are included but not the additional expansion to Trafford Park and the Trafford Centre. At the time of writing, work is beginning on this line [84], with funding through an earn-back model in which extra funding is secured if certain levels of economic growth are achieved [85]. Some, but not all of the new interchanges and busways mentioned in GMTIF made it into GMTF. Additionally, four road building projects were amongst the priority schemes<sup>5</sup>.

In terms of capital spend then, the authorities were able to find funding for some major schemes, particularly the Metrolink extensions, but not to provide all that was proposed under GMTIF. Other elements, like personalized journey planning, cycle infrastructure, walking routes and yellow school buses do not feature in the plans. The funding amounted to around half of what would have been available under TIF and, as would have been the case with TIF, about half was a loan. Interestingly, the loan is being paid back through Metrolink revenue and Council Tax rather than revenue from a congestion charge. There is no 'stick'; in fact, extra road capacity being allocated in funding could be seen as a nod to the motoring lobby. It is also important, when considering the significance of GMTF as a response to GMTIF that much of this money already existed in Greater Manchester or the North West region, in the form of Council Tax or the Regional Funding Allocation. GM has also managed to attract other transport-related funding and to gradually roll out other improvements in, for example, cycle infrastructure, but this has been in response to standalone Government grants, such as the Cycle City Ambition Grant of £20 million and the Clean Bus Technology Fund of £0.68 million [86], rather than a coordinated package of measures.

Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) superseded GMPTE in 2011. Its Consultation Draft of 'Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040: A Sustainable urban mobility plan for the future' [87] is a reasonable starting point from which to view the conurbation's ongoing plans for transport. The organization clearly recognizes the need for integrated transport planning and for modal shift away from private car use and recognizes, to an extent, a role for demand management: 'We will focus on measures that encourage people to travel, or freight to be moved: at a different time; on a different part of the network; or to change to a different mode to make more efficient use of available capacity, particularly during peak periods' [87 pp16]. Whilst

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<sup>5</sup> South East Manchester Multi-modal Strategy (SEMMMS) route, the Mottram Bypass and Glossop Spur, Ashton Northern Bypass Stage 2, and Wigan Inner Relief Road.

this is a policy goal to which a congestion charge could contribute, there is no mention of charging or of any real constraints on car use or parking. Whilst there is recognition that ‘many of the negative impacts of transport, such as congestion, high emissions, noise and road traffic casualties, are a consequence of our over-reliance on the car...’ [87 pp20], its responses to this can be classified as ‘carrot’ rather than ‘stick’.

This is not to say that there have not been policy steps in the direction of a more sustainable and multi-modal city, not least the Oxford Road bus priority scheme, which facilitates cross-city bus travel as well as featuring segregated dedicated cycle ways heralded as ‘Dutch style’ and, most relevantly for this discussion, closes a busy city centre route to general traffic between 6am and 9pm seven days a week [88]. Whilst a single example that must be viewed in the context of the wider 2040 strategy, this does at least show some willingness to limit space available to the private car.

## 9 Lessons and implications for road pricing

This section develops the themes discussed above with a view to drawing lessons from GM’s experience. This experience, and outcome of the referendum, highlights the extent of public scepticism towards road pricing and serves as a reminder of the powerful lobby that exists to challenge measures that are seen to penalise ‘the motorist’. What then could Greater Manchester do differently if revisiting plans that involve road pricing, what can other cities learn from its experience, and what does Greater Manchester’s experience contribute to our understanding of car dependency?

These lessons concern the political and public acceptability of the plans rather than the plans themselves: the efficacy of the package was never put to the test. Whilst these lessons do not assume that other cities would hold a referendum – in fact it is suggested here that they should not – it does assume that there will be a need to win over public and political support: the introduction of road pricing is a socio-political as well as a techno-economic process.

The GM referendum was the product of particular circumstances, a particular economic and political climate, and a unique set of plans. It formed a human story, with passions, fears, irrationalities and agendas much in evidence– in hindsight if not at the time.

Whilst we should not necessarily expect the same politics to play out in the same way in another setting at another time, it is important not to discount the national context, and to recognise that any local debate will be situated in ongoing national, and international, developments. Campaigns against restrictions on driving, be they anti-speed cameras, anti-parking restrictions, or anti-road pricing, are in evidence nationally, and we have seen that these campaigns infiltrated the local discussions. We have seen that multi-national concerns were active in the opposition campaigning. Similarly, concerns about air quality, climate change and fossil fuel dependency are

national and international concerns. One of the major players in the 'yes' campaign was Manchester Friends of the Earth, part of a network of Friends of the Earth groups nationally. Whilst locally rooted, GM's experience is also part of ongoing dialogues on a larger scale and provides an indication of the types of issues that are likely to arise.

**Our first lesson then, and a first step in any proposal for road pricing, relates to the importance of understanding each city's own configuration and its place in a national context, and of identifying important actors, arguments and agendas that are likely to shape a debate on this approach. This also implies that car dependency cannot be understood as a purely local phenomenon.** (See also chapter 4).

When reflecting with people involved in the debate, their first response is normally that there should not have been a referendum and that this was the death knell of the plans. The limitations of referenda in dealing with complex issues over a diverse population have been discussed above. It may have been possible to plough ahead with the plans had political consensus been achieved but it is not clear what the political fallout from such a move would have been and if difficulties that followed would have resulted in the plans being stopped or diluted.

The decision to hold a referendum can be seen as the result of a particular political situation in which agreement could not be reached and this in itself therefore relates to the city's particular characteristics. The enduring implication of the referendum, however, is the knowledge of a clear public vote against the proposals and this makes it very difficult in the future for politicians to engage with this issue. Sustainable transport planning requires a diverse toolkit that includes carrots and sticks, and the political reaction to the referendum result has been to in effect rule out certain categories of stick: the simplistic nature of the vote limits the potential for complexity in transport planning not only at the time but over years to come. **A referendum is an extremely limited way to make such a complex decision, provides no guarantee of the most sustainable or fair outcome, and limits the potential to revisit road pricing in the future. This is not to discount democracy – as opponents of referenda are commonly accused of - but to point out the relative benefits of persevering through existing democratic structures.**

It is worth noting, however, that not all referenda are equal. There was potential to hold a referendum after charging and improvements took place [35] to demonstrate the benefits before the vote, as was the case in Stockholm (chapter 14) and Milan (chapter 18). The difficulty for GM's situation was that the investment in public transport was dependent on finances from the congestion charge. Similarly, voting could have been restricted to those inside the charging rings, therefore affording greater weight to the opinions of residents than commuters from outside. This may have been an option, although the political climate would have made it very difficult to convince opponents that this represented the level of democracy being demanded. These possibilities

notwithstanding, referenda remain an extremely limited way to accommodate and balance diverse views.

Timing then becomes an important issue. If Greater Manchester was not influenced by national timescales to develop and approve the plans, could a slower pace have enabled a calmer, more deliberative decision-making process in which the ten Local Authorities could have arrived at a mutually acceptable plan, consulting the population in a more conventional way and not putting it to a binary vote? This would have avoided the disadvantages of a referendum, although it seems clear that the same issues would be fought, and other ways may have been found by opponents to derail the plans.

The difficulty in securing agreement can be seen in part to reflect the fact that GMTIF was a response to national priorities, and was presented as such. If it were part of an ongoing strategy for GM, or if more time had been allowed to develop one, then there would have been more time to develop consensus and the congestion charging policy may not have been so unexpected. In reality, GMTIF was seen by many to be an opportunistic grab of national funding. **There is a lesson here for national policy to avoid being counter-productive by expecting towns and cities to develop relatively quick and competitive responses to national calls. There is a related lesson for conurbations to be proactive in developing transport policy strategically, allowing time and democratic space for the involvement of businesses, citizens' groups and political representatives: far from an appeasement process – which opponents may cast it as - this should be seen as a collaborative development of transport policy and an opportunity to get to the roots of car dependency.**

One of the things that is striking on reflection is how quickly the debate centred around the congestion charge and how quickly it became polarised, even before it was known that a referendum would make the final decision. It has been noted above that this was inevitable - since it was the congestion charge that was the controversial element and without it calls for a referendum would have been extremely unlikely. This has important and problematic implications.

Firstly it has been established that many votes were contingent on the quality of public transport and the media attention on the congestion charge limited the extent to which people knew about the public transport improvements. I have spoken to people since the vote who had no knowledge that there were substantial public transport improvements proposed. Even if the congestion charge was the most controversial part of the package, knowledge of the whole package was – or should have been - an important part of decision-making. It is therefore insufficient to simply argue that, since the congestion charge was the most controversial element, it was somehow acceptable that this was the media's focus.

Secondly, debate air time and column inches focused on the congestion charge and there was little if any opportunity to discuss the detail of the public transport improvements. The other parts of the plans were denied both oxygen and critical attention. It is fair to say that much of the energy of the pro-GMTIF campaigners therefore went into defending the charge and countering claims rather than building and promoting an alternative vision for transport in the conurbation of which the congestion charge was one element. This contributed to certain perverse outcomes such as cycling activists saying they would vote against the plans because the cycling plans were not as they would have liked. **The lesson is to ensure that the congestion charge is seen in the context of a wider strategic transport goal for the area.**

**This, as the GM experience indicates, is not a simple task and implies the need for a proactive approach to communication. This should be based on full knowledge and anticipation of a backlash against the plans, but also avoid being on the defensive. The Greater Manchester experience at least helps to identify the likely points of contention.**

Important elements of such a communications strategy include working alongside businesses to develop the plan that meets their interests and reassures them about their concerns. This requires time, and therefore relates to the previous points about developing transport strategy over time. These businesses then become potential allies in selling the plans and it becomes harder for opponents to attack weaknesses. It would be naïve, of course, to expect all businesses to become supportive of a congestion charge and there would need to be a close eye on anything that could be seen to be unreasonable behaviour on behalf of businesses. The GM experience indicates that environmental organisations are likely to be allies in this process and it would be beneficial to build early and ongoing relationships with them.

The formation of the proposals would allow for the development of a more informed and positive relationship with the media about transport issues, and congestion charging in particular. In this process, congestion charging becomes one part of a strategy for sustainable transport rather than an individual 'shock' on which the media fixates. This is not, however, to underestimate how controversial it is likely to be and how much proactive work is needed. This demands an ongoing coverage of transport in the media and a widening of the narrow vocabulary often associated with it [2].

It seems also that the GMTIF package lacked an attractive name. This may seem unimportant, but left it open to opponents to, apparently very effectively, impose their own media-friendly branding with terms like 'C Charge' and 'Toll tax' and these helped to reinforce the focus on the charging element. Alternatives like 'clean air charge' or 'accessibility charge' may have helped to move the debate to the positive impacts of such a charge, but were not forthcoming.

One of the unknowns when reflecting on the referendum relates to the role of the Local Authorities and transport authority: what if there had been stronger, clearer leadership from the authorities with outspoken support for the plans? Whilst GMPTA and AGMA had submitted the plans in the form of a bid to Government and could therefore be assumed to be supportive of them, they were expected to take a neutral role in the debate, limited to providing information on the plans. On reflection, this stance did not help to dispel any sense that the plans were somehow not to be trusted and were being enacted 'on' the city, rather than part of its ongoing transport strategy. Close to the referendum vote, for example, a TV broadcast purporting to give a balanced account of the options was pulled off air following claims of potential bias [4]. **It is possible therefore that stronger leadership and political consensus on the plans may have helped instil a greater sense of public confidence in them.**

An issue that arose in the course of the debate was clarity over the purpose of the plans. Whilst the potential to reduce congestion was clear, and this was the primary message, claims were made about the potential to improve accessibility and air quality. However, it was pointed out that there were no specific elements of the plans that related to pollution levels, in particular there were no concessions to low emissions and electric vehicles. Apart from a temporary discount on bus fares following the introduction, there were also no clear concessions for low-income travellers. It could of course be argued that the modal shift resulting from the plans would have helped to reduce air pollution, but this was not explicit. As with other perceived weaknesses of the plans, these apparent inconsistencies are both a potential source of doubt for the voter and weaknesses that can be exploited by opponents. It is also likely to have been helpful to be more specific and committal regarding the public transport improvements, as Gaunt, Rye and Allen [30 pp100] noted in the Edinburgh context: 'whilst reduced congestion and improved alternatives to the car were abstract, the prospect of being charged was very much more tangible'. **The lesson here is to make sure the plans and claims about their impact are not inconsistent and that impact is clear rather than implied.**

The final point is more difficult and less tangible but important in terms of the societal context in which the debate is framed. It is necessary to build a vision of sustainable transport and to link this with notions of the good city, and what it is to be a resident of Greater Manchester. It is in the interests of opponents to keep the debate at the level of whether Josephine public will pay 50p, £1 or £5, or how many times larger the 'zone' is than London's. These encourage a focus on the costs to the individual driver rather than the broader societal balance of costs and benefits; and also refer exclusively to the perceived unfairness of the 'new' regime rather than that of the current one, the extent of transport provision and who pays for it

At the time of a referendum it is this 'new' regime that is being considered, but its fairness can only be understood in the context of the fairness of existing transport



provision. Could low-income communities with unreliable and patchy public transport and asthmatic children living on busy roads be framed as victims of the current system in the same way that 'drivers' are framed as victims of road pricing? Are people already paying an 'air pollution tax' that is imposed on them because there is a lack of restrictions on driving? These are vital questions are difficult to raise in a simplified debate with simplistic media coverage. This connects with the notion of developing transport policy strategically over time and emphasises the importance of education and awareness-raising through public engagement.

**This is challenging since it pertains to societal change in how the transport system is seen and how fairness is conceptualised in relation to it, but it points to widening the debate on transport to make it clear that this is not simply about the 'driver' verses the rest of society but about how a diverse range of people access the services they need, breathe clean air, and are protected from the impacts of climate change.**

These points reinforce an understanding of car dependency that transcends the individual's mobility experiences and connects with the ability of the city to adapt and transition to more sustainable transport profiles. It hints at a condition of lock-in [76] in which cities experience systemic barriers to radical change, and sheds light on some of the ways this is operationalised. Poor public transport becomes locked-in, as it erodes the public's confidence in the transport authority's ability to provide a quality service. Businesses that thrive in a car-friendly city flex their muscle when they feel proposals may challenge the status quo. Relatively simplistic media coverage reinforces the focus on the car and provides a narrow lens through which to view a complex issue.

With these points in mind, it is worth reflecting on the current situation in GM. A lot of the above reflects a holistic and strategic approach to transport planning that takes a longer term view and meaningfully engages stakeholders along the journey. If GMTIF were proposed now in 2017 would it have a different reception?

On the one hand, there has been substantial investment in public transport, particularly the Metrolink but also bus priority routes, smartcard ticketing is gradually being rolled out. Yet congestion continues to be a problem - TomTom have rated it the 8<sup>th</sup> most congested city in Europe for example [89]. There is also increasing awareness about air quality and health, as evidenced by the Client Earth legal case [90] in which the UK Government was taken to court over its record of tackling air pollution, and the Volkswagen emissions controversy in which it was found that cars had been programmed to perform better when under emissions testing than on the road [91].

On the other hand, perceptions and experiences of public transport remain problematic, especially in areas that have not enjoyed so many improvements. Ironically the expansion of Metrolink could weaken the case for another GMTIF, since

residents can see that a ‘big bang’ of public transport has happened to some extent, although there is plenty of scope for further extensions of the network. Economically, we remain in times of austerity with the potential of the UK leaving of the EU providing further uncertainty. A major factor may be ‘devo Manc’ in which the conurbation will get increased powers to manage its own affairs, including transport, and a mayor. Andy Burnham, who was elected the first Mayor of the conurbation in May 2017, will still have to work in conjunction with the ten local authorities, but in principle has the power to be a strategic lead. This, combined with the Bus Services Bill progressing through Parliament [92], presents an opportunity for greater control and therefore coordination, integration and price capping of buses, trams and trains. The 2040 strategy discussed above also indicates a willingness to at least in principle accept the need to challenge the growth of car use, and the closing of part of Oxford Road (a major Manchester thoroughfare running approximately one mile from the city centre through the University area to the southern suburbs) to general traffic during the day could be seen as an initial step [88,93]. This would be more convincing, however, if there were evidence of a strategy for further such developments.

## 10 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the challenges faced by Greater Manchester in decision-making around its plans for a package of measures that would include congestion charging and public transport investment. It has shed light on some of the ways in which party politics, local campaigning and the media contributed to shaping public opinion. In looking at related developments in Greater Manchester following the vote, it has shown that whilst some of the intentions of the proposals have been realised as part of subsequent policy initiatives there remains a reluctance to pursue the charging element. As someone who supported the GMTIF proposals, seeing their value for the conurbation in social, economic and environmental terms and recognising the central role of the congestion charge within them, I note that there is still a need for greater investment in public transport and active travel and to recognise that moving towards these more sustainable modes requires sticks as well as carrots. Whilst bold action on GM’s car-centred transport networks would therefore be welcome, it must be recognised that the referendum result makes that more challenging politically than it would otherwise be – though it is of course not impossible. Whilst the use of a referendum might enable politicians to defer to the ‘will of the people’, the challenges of meaningfully addressing the congestion in our cities and moving towards sustainable mobility remain.

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