
Rapid Evidence Assessment: Distributional Impacts of Road Pricing

Background

As a result of a 2003 Government discussion paper, *Managing Our Roads*, a national programme of research was conducted in order to assess the feasibility of road pricing as a sustainable solution for reducing congestion. The feasibility study¹ noted that road pricing schemes should seek to promote social inclusion and accessibility, and concluded that road pricing could provide a number of benefits for different population groups suffering from social exclusion and/or limited accessibility to services.

However, the study also concluded that more work was needed to understand fully the potential impacts on different types of road user. For example, evidence is required on how changes in the costs of motoring might differently influence people's choices about how, when and where to travel, and what the wider implications for any changes in travel behaviour might be, such as in terms of people's ability to access work, schools, high quality food shopping and health facilities.

In December 2005 the Department for Transport (DfT) commissioned CTS to undertake a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) review of the empirical research findings available regarding the distributional impacts of road pricing.

The overall aim of the review was to evaluate the available international evidence on the distributional impacts of existing and 'near-market' road pricing schemes, *i.e.*, schemes which had reached an advanced state of planning at the time but had not yet been implemented (*e.g.* Stockholm), or would not

be implemented (*e.g.* Edinburgh). Hence, this existing evidence could begin to inform an understanding of the likely road pricing distributional effects that result from people altering the extent to which (and way in which) they meet their needs and aspirations through travel as an expressed behaviour.

Methodology

The REA approach is defined by Chapter 2 of the Magenta Book² as an accelerated application of the systematic review process based on "readily available" evidence identified by keyword searching of electronic databases and websites, as supported by other systematic electronic searches, *e.g.*, posting queries to email lists. It does not seek to include systematic hand searching of journals and textbooks, or searches of the grey literature, although relevant items identified by chance or from experience in a non-systematic way were included.

The REA for the DIRP study was based on the principle that research quality and relevance (defined in terms of reliability, validity and generalisability) is paramount, as it would be better to identify evidence gaps (and areas of limited understanding) than misleading evidence. In essence, a two-stage process was followed, whereby all items which appeared relevant from initial inspection were read in detail, and a compendium summary prepared. At this stage, then, some items, although accessed, were not considered sufficiently relevant in practice for inclusion.

¹ DfT, (2004). Feasibility Study of Road Pricing in the UK. DfT, London.

² Government Social Research Unit (2003). The Magenta Book: Guidance on Policy Evaluation & Appraisal. UK Govt Cabinet Office, London. http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/magenta_book/index.asp

One hundred documents were identified from the literature search as likely to be relevant and of sufficiently high quality to be included in the literature compendium, with a summary prepared for each.

Findings

Findings will be published in summer 2006.

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