

Introduction

The fifth meeting of the European Road Pricing Network (EUROPrice) was held in Genoa on the 16th March 2000.

EUROPrice was formed to bring together major cities which are seriously considering the implementation of road pricing. It is supported by the European Commission and is contributing to the Commission's Green Paper on 'Clean Urban Transport Policy'.

The meeting was held in Genoa which had recently erected camera and detection equipment for a demonstration project designed to control access to a restricted zone. This equipment can also be used for cordon pricing as a means of reducing through traffic and improving the environment of the historic city centre. The picture below includes representatives of the seven cities, Mr Tom Howes of the Commission and Monsieur Vincent of CERTU.



EUROPrice delegates in Genoa

EUROPrice Cities

In December 1999 twenty-three access gates were installed in Rome; exit gates will be added later. The new system is based on Telepass and includes detectors and cameras for enforcement. The system is expected to become operative by summer 2000. This access control system is considered to be a prerequisite to road pricing.

A Government led project to test a fully electronic road pricing system will begin in Edinburgh in mid 2000. In May the City of Edinburgh Council, supported by the Scottish Executive, approved a four year development programme for a city centre road user charging scheme.

In Bristol detailed design work is being undertaken on a road pricing scheme which has been awarded national support for fast-track pilot status.

Road pricing in Belfast is included as an option in a public consultation process linked to a new 10 year Regional Transportation Strategy.

The Ministry of Transport in Denmark has discussed possible structures for road pricing in Copenhagen and two systems have been analysed in some detail.

Trondheim has had a road charging scheme since 1991. A new automatic toll system called 'autoPASS' has been developed in Norway and will come into operation in January 2001. It has technical interoperability but will require new tags in all vehicles.

Urban Road Pricing In France

French cities are not represented on EUROPrice but Monsieur Pascal Vincent was an observer at the meeting in Genoa. His attendance reflected a growing interest in urban road pricing in France.

In recent years charges have been introduced on an urban motorway in Paris and in urban tunnels in Lyon and Marseilles.

Lyon, Grenoble and St.Etienne are undertaking a study of urban road pricing in the three cities. The study is financed by the Ministry of Transport and seven different options will be considered, as will the integration of pricing and financing between different transport modes. The results are due in mid 2001.

2nd Technical Paper

The main issues on the policy and implementation of road pricing in Europe are being considered in three technical papers within the EURoPrice project. The second of these deals with policy issues faced by the cities of Belfast, Bristol, Copenhagen, Edinburgh, Genoa, Rome and Trondheim.

This technical paper provides valuable information on the experience gained by the cities in their efforts to introduce road pricing. Most of the cities are at the early stages so the report focuses on the critical first steps and these are probably the most important in the whole process.

The remainder of this Newsletter is a brief summary of four sections of the report: -

- technological issues
- legislation
- financing
- social and political acceptance

Technological Issues

The EURoPrice cities have indicated that technological solutions were not a major barrier to the implementation of road pricing programmes. Selecting technology which would be accepted and which would guarantee high reliability was considered to be the most important issue.

Technology being considered

There are a variety of technological options being considered. The most common is an electronic system based on in-vehicle tags and smart card technology. This is already in place in Trondheim and is being considered for Rome, Bristol and Copenhagen. Copenhagen is also considering a second option of distance charging based on a vehicle positioning system. For enforcement Rome and Genoa favour a system of gates based on plate recognition and central software data processing. Edinburgh favours a paper based system to avoid delays due to development of interoperable specifications and potential planning problems with the hardware.

Acceptance of necessary hardware

The acceptance of the necessary hardware is not seen as a major problem. Issues include cost and the visual impact of the hardware. Several EURoPrice cities have indicated the importance of selecting hardware which can offer flexibility in the pricing regime. This would allow the system to be more easily adapted to meet changing attitudes and demands. The only problem highlighted was that of visual impact in Rome.



Rome

Reliability of system

Reliability of the system is a critical issue for successful implementation. Enforcement is a particular problem because many people will not pay if they believe that they will not be caught. In addition, as with any system handling payments, there must be no doubt about reliability if user confidence is to be retained.

Experience already gained in Trondheim on the reliability of systems is likely to be added to by the proposed schemes in Rome and Genoa and by technical trials in Edinburgh.

Legislation

In Norway tolls may be introduced to raise revenue, subject to approval by the national government. The legislation is to be amended to allow road pricing to be also used for demand management.

Road pricing can be introduced in Italy to protect historical centres.

There is no national legislation which permits road pricing in the United Kingdom or Denmark. During 2000 this will be rectified in separate legislation in England and Scotland.

Financing

Edinburgh and Trondheim place high importance on the initial investment and on the use of revenues. The latter is also important to Bristol and Belfast. The level of charges is a high priority in Bristol, Copenhagen, Genoa, Rome and Edinburgh, while Rome also prioritises the issue of exemptions. The individual priorities generally reflect the stage each city has reached in the design phase but generally charging levels and the use of revenues are of most concern to the cities.

Initial Investment

Financing can affect the attitude of users towards road pricing. Investment includes not only that required for the implementation of the charging system itself but also that for improvements to bus services etc which will be paid for by the expected revenues. Most EURoPrice cities will implement additional investment schemes either before or during the operation of road pricing. This will enable users to see the benefits at an early stage.

The type of management envisaged by Belfast, Bristol and Trondheim tends towards public/private initiative while Rome and Genoa may favour a public initiative. Edinburgh has carried out quite an extensive assessment on the role that public/private partnerships can play in road pricing and these are discussed in some depth in Appendix A of the 2nd Technical Paper.

Use of revenues

EURoPrice cities have to decide how revenue generated by road pricing schemes would be distributed among the various transport sectors. Most of the cities rank public transport as the main area which requires more investment, but the additional funding will also benefit pedestrians, cyclists, the environment and car users.

If road pricing schemes are to be widely accepted then the benefits resulting from the new revenue must be clear to the road user. In Trondheim the investment package was implemented in parallel with fee collection but two projects were started before the tolling



Genoa

system came into operation. While this strategy initially improved public acceptance of road user charging, the amount of user fees now being allocated to loan repayments may have reduced public support.

Level of charges

Charging levels are a contentious issue. The common trend among EURoPrice cities is to focus on the identification of a daily charging time period and to maintain free access at all other times. Some cities favour differential charging levels based on various criteria; the level will be affected by local needs. It is therefore not feasible to establish a common rule for charging levels.

The level of charges in Trondheim was set after local and regional political involvement. The decision was a fine balance between the need for income to feed the investment package and user acceptability.

Exemptions

Exemptions are a necessary but difficult feature to manage and most cities want to keep them to a minimum. Trondheim currently operates exemptions for certain vehicles and in Rome the exemption process for access control is currently being revised. Procedures have not yet been developed in the other EURoPrice cities.

Social And Political Acceptance

Perceived Benefits

Four of the cities recognise demand management as a main perceived benefit. The other cities, Belfast, Edinburgh and Trondheim have raising revenue in this category. Bristol, Edinburgh and Rome include traffic reduction as a main perceived benefit and Rome puts a similar rating on the protection of high cultural value areas. The environment is considered to be a main benefit in Bristol, Copenhagen and Rome.

Justification of Road Pricing

Most of the cities have undertaken model simulations of potential road pricing schemes to test the impact of road pricing. These have been backed up with surveys, questionnaires, interviews and detailed analysis.

In Edinburgh a strategy of high investment funded from road user charges received over 60% support from an extensive survey of households and businesses as well as from a randomly selected Citizen's Panel. In Bristol 68% of responses to a questionnaire supported a similar strategy. The 1994 Trondheim campaign focused on existing congestion problems.

Social Exclusion

Road pricing is expected to reduce traffic in selected areas and this could disadvantage people with disabilities and low incomes. Most cities will consider the former group for exemption from charges. The latter would be helped if money raised is used to support public transport because many people on low incomes are dependent on it.

Economic vitality

It is important that road pricing is a net contributor to the economic vitality of the city and equally important to convince those affected that this will be so. On the one hand

there will be extra charges but benefits will include a reduction in congestion, easier access and less pollution.

Research in Trondheim showed that when toll ring charges were introduced the city centre enjoyed a modest growth in trade.

Privacy

Privacy is a difficult issue which is rated as a medium priority by most EURoPrice cities but this may change when a definite road pricing scheme is proposed. There is a clear need to maintain confidentiality of people's movements and finances .

In some cities privacy has been debated in connection with cameras being used for security, speed control, etc. This may help as may the fact that most systems will only identify those who do not pay.

Awareness Training/Marketing

All EURoPrice cities list awareness raising as a priority. The emphasis is on public acceptance programmes to win the 'hearts and minds' of road users. This is so even when research indicates that a majority support road pricing because attitudes could change as the proposals become reality.

Marketing is considered to be very important if people are to accept the principle and the practice of road pricing. When the debate is launched information needs to be clear and direct and specialised marketing consultants may be needed.

Bristol used demonstration projects to raise awareness and Belfast is considering this option. Rome plans a staged introduction which focuses on tangible benefits. Trondheim issued free electronic tags, an offer taken up by 80% of users in the first days of operation.

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