

ROADS

The Cost of Congestion

Congestion in the UK is getting worse and this has serious implications for the economy, for the environment and for the stress levels of travellers.

The financial cost of congestion for the UK is often quoted as being £20 billion a year, based on figures from the CBI. This figure was supported by a government-sponsored report, the Eddington Transport Study carried out in 2006 that estimated that congestion would cost the UK economy some £22 billion in lost time by 2025. The study set out the need for action to improve road and rail networks as a "crucial enabler of sustained productivity and competitiveness" and warned that failure to invest in the transport infrastructure would have serious consequences for the economy.

The poor UK transport network has long been seen to be a constraint to business both by UK and international firms. Quite simply our congested roads, overcrowded railways and peak capacity airports are not up to the job.

Our congested road network is a particular problem. The majority of business travel and freight movements are road based. In a 2008 CBI London survey, 90% of respondents said poor reliability of the road network has a negative impact on their productivity. Across the UK, 80% of CBI members regard the road network as vital to their business.

Transport congestion puts the brakes on economic growth and so will make it harder to recover from recession. Government plans for high-speed rail links are welcomed as are some elements in its roads policy such as the trialling of hard shoulder running at motorway congestion blackspots. But while the investment for improving the rail network show vision that for roads is tentative and short-sighted. There needs to be a strengthening of capital investment in roads. Reducing capital investment on our road network is not the way forward if the economy is to grow.

Reducing congestion, investing in transport infrastructure and enabling the free flow of traffic and passengers is essential if UK plc is to trade productively and cost efficiently.



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