



Phil Bowe

## CARROTS, STICKS AND CONGESTION CHARGES

As readers will be only too aware, in January next year Newcastle is introducing a congestion charge within the City Centre. And this has caused some consternation for both residents and business people who fear it will damage the City Centre economy irreparably.

**Many are blaming the City Council themselves, although in fact it is national government policy that pollution in city centres should be reduced – although the net effect is still going to be the same.**

Using my LinkedIn profile, I undertook a small survey recently and although only 39 people voted, it is some vague barometer of public opinion on the matter. To the question, “is a congestion charge for Newcastle City Centre a good idea?”, 20 people (51%) said no there shouldn’t be a charge, 26% (10 people) said there should be charges for all high emission vehicles, 18% (seven people) said high emission cars, and 5% (two people) said it should apply to all vehicles. I said in my conclusion to the poll that a lot of the solution lies in improving

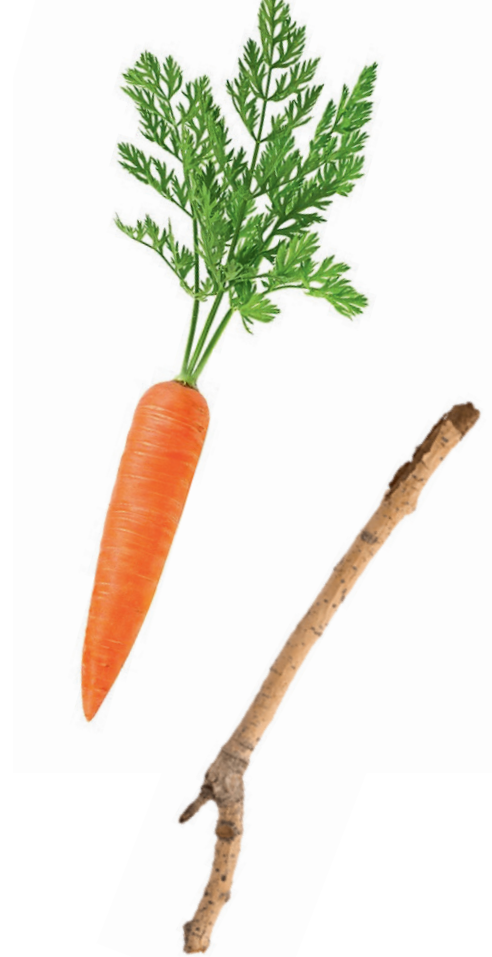
public transport and that the real solution lies in a carrot to use this rather than a stick not to use a car.

Some responses were also interesting. An Edinburgh resident said “a congestion charge is a short-term measure. In order for people to ditch their cars there has to be sufficient public transport measures in place. I do agree with the charge but living in a small city makes it a bit easier for me to travel about by bus (providing it turns up on time!)”, a Newcastle resident said “if there were to be a charge then parking should be free everywhere within a congestion charge zone. Are you wanting people to buy items that they have to see or hear, try on, are bulky to transport home or actually meet a service to provider face to face? I fail to see how this will invigorate a City Centre that is clearly in need of it.”

Another response was “we need to remind ourselves what our purpose is and what the city is and should become, a place for all and not a place to extort”.

Finally, a comment was, “on seeing the signs that have been erected already ready for January, “I saw these signs for the first time last weekend and was horrified. I already put off coming into Newcastle due to the constantly changing bus lanes and no entry lanes. I do use the metro where possible but I think this will finish off the City Centre as a destination for work, retail and leisure”.

It’s certainly a hot potato and that is going to need careful handling. From a personal point of view, I live on the east side of the city and my partner lives in County Durham. For us to commute between the two houses necessarily means going through the City Centre (or a crazily long diversion either through the Tyne Tunnel or using the Western Bypass) but we are not actually using the City Centre. Would it be possible – and this is a question for Nick Kemp



as leader of the City Council and his transport and traffic advisers – for the Central Motorway at least to be congestion charge free, or we risk clogging up these two already busy routes.

We need the City Centre to be vibrant because it affects so much of the whole economy for the region. I think it is fair to say that changes will have to be made, and obviously one of the hopes is that the new trains due at the end of next year or beginning of 2024 will improve the quality of the services on the Metro lines. That would be a help – but what more can the City Council, Nexus and National Government do?

*That’s it for 2022. Can I take this opportunity to wish all readers of my column and the magazine in general a very happy Christmas and a positive 2023.*

***If you disagree, tell me! If you agree, tell me! I also write on my LinkedIn profile every Wednesday morning at about 8.30 – follow me at [linkedin.com/in/philipbowe](https://www.linkedin.com/in/philipbowe). [www.bivbowes.co.uk](http://www.bivbowes.co.uk) Tel: 0191 462 6 264***