



## **An investigation into the reasons for the rejection of congestion charging by the citizens of Edinburgh**

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### **Abstract**

In February 2005, residents of Edinburgh, a medium-sized city in the United Kingdom, were given the opportunity to vote in a referendum on the introduction of a road user charging scheme, which had been in development for almost a decade. The public voted against the scheme by a ratio of 3:1 and it was consequently abandoned. This paper describes the evolution of the scheme, and presents results of research to determine the principle factors responsible for the public's overwhelming opposition to the scheme. The research used a postal, self-completion questionnaire that was distributed to 1300 randomly-selected households in central and southern Edinburgh three months after the referendum. The questionnaire responses were analysed to assess the influence of several factors on the way respondents voted in the referendum. Car use was shown to be the principle determinant of voting behaviour, with car owners strongly opposing the scheme while non-car owners only weakly supported it. The public's limited understanding of the scheme increased the strength of the opposing vote. Further, the public were largely unconvinced that the scheme would have achieved its dual objectives of reduced congestion and improved public transport. The findings suggest that more attention should have been paid to designing a simpler, more easily communicated, scheme and convincing residents, particularly public transport users, of its benefits. Some other aspects of the scheme that militated against its successful introduction are also briefly identified.

*Keywords:* Congestion charging; Road user charging; Road pricing; Public acceptability; Edinburgh.

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### **Introduction**

Until 25 February 2005, the City of Edinburgh in Scotland, UK, had advanced plans for a congestion charging scheme. However, these plans were abandoned at that time due to public acceptability problems and in particular to a referendum on the issue, in which the public overwhelmingly rejected the proposed congestion charging scheme.

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