

Comment

More voices needed for increased road investment

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The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has recently highlighted transport infrastructure as an area where the UK lags significantly behind other countries. Plus, the Asphalt Industry Alliance's 2005 annual road condition survey has discovered that non-principal roads in rural areas are suffering most from lack of highway maintenance funding; an average of 75 years passing before they are resurfaced.

This is clearly a huge problem but it is only indicative of the general lack of political will to do anything to improve and expand the UK's road network. Why is it that the most highly taxed motorists in Europe have the worst roads?

Through its members, which include the Federation of Small Businesses and the British Chambers of Commerce, the Road Users Alliance is acutely aware of the real

cost to the UK economy of under investment in roads. British industry and commerce, already suffering from congestion costs of £20Bn per annum, are dismayed at the lack of appreciation that both the public and politicians have of the challenge we face.

The 'de-trunking' of the Highways Agency network, thereby shifting more of the maintenance burden onto local authorities, demonstrates an ignorance of the importance of the UK's road network. The Government wishes the roads sector to adopt the asset management concept in highway maintenance. So Government should treat our road network as a valuable asset.

With the ground being prepared for general acceptance of road user charging, we are presented with a potentially realistic means of getting optimum use of a scarce

network and promoting additional investment.

The M6 Toll demonstrates that motorists are prepared to pay for a congestion free journey. But the fuel protests of 2000 also show that Government will not be able to exploit this by raising the tax burden higher than the current £42Bn. An independent authority ensuring a transparent connection between the 'toll' and the road service would address this lack of trust.

An independently funded strategic road system of a capacity and quality to meet the needs of motorists as customers will then set the standard for the local roads which connect to it. Those of us aware of the vital role our road network plays in our overall quality of life should be raising our voices now to ensure that roads receive their fair share of the income to be raised from any additional tax on road users.