

Council vote against controversial workplace parking levy

Plans to introduce workplace parking charges in Edinburgh have been shelved by the council.

City councillors voted against progressing towards the implementation of a controversial workplace parking levy (WPL) following a public consultation.

They said significant concerns around parking being displaced to residential areas, and the impact on shift workers and those without adequate public transport links to their place of work, remained unresolved.

The scheme, which the local authority has been considering since 2022, would see drivers charged as much as £650 a year to park at work if employers chose to pass the levy on to employees.

It was estimated this could raise up to £12m a year to reinvest in the capital's public transport and active travel, and was touted as being key to achieving the council's goal to cut car journeys by 30 per cent in the next five years.

Officials had asked for £100,000 to develop a final proposal. But instead councillors agreed to halt work on a WPL at the transport committee on Thursday, May 23, with one remarking it would be a "hammer blow to hard working people".

Kevin Lang, leader of the council's Lib Dems, who previously supported the consultation going ahead, said his

group “just don’t think it’s going to work”.

He said commuters could, in many parts of the city, “very easily avoid paying any charge at all simply by parking on a residential street and walking along a footway or across a road”.

He said there was “absolutely no guarantee here of any new bus services from this,” adding he could not see how these disadvantages could be resolved in time before the levy was introduced.

Labour transport convener Scott Arthur, an opponent of the scheme since it was mooted, said the WPL alone would not solve the city’s congestion problem.

He said: “It’s not a silver bullet but it could, if integrated with a wider suite of powers, have a part to play particularly through funding rather than actually discouraging people to use their vehicles.”

The consultation, which gathered views between November and February attracted more than 2,600 individual responses and over 30 from businesses and organisations.

Cllr Arthur said there were “mixed views,” adding: “It seems a lot of people don’t think a city-wide scheme would work; there’s talk of a zoned scheme in the city; or perhaps one that just focused on the city centre. And some employers said the rules weren’t entirely clear to them – and that’s because, to a large extent, the council has still to define how the scheme would work in Edinburgh.”

Council officer Gareth Dixon, who has led work on the project, said the purpose of the engagement was “a first chance to talk to the public and to businesses”.

Addressing the committee he said: “A workplace parking levy is not about banning cars outright, it is about encouraging

people to travel by car less for certain reasons.

“But the biggest impact comes from that raised revenue that it could potentially generate, and if that goes toward public transport it would encourage that modal shift which again would take people away from single private car use.”

Cllr Danny Aston, SNP, expressed disappointment at the proposal being “kicked into the long grass potentially indefinitely,” questioning whether it marked “the day we gave up” on reaching the 30 per cent reduction in car kilometres target.

He said: “I absolutely acknowledge there’s still work to be done to address trade union concerns and the points raised by employers.

“But I have yet to be convinced those are insurmountable, nor am I clear that all work on the WPL has to pause while that happens.”

Labour councillor Katrina Faccenda said moving forward with the introduction of a parking levy would be “hitting working people with a big huge stick” and “not giving them any carrots”.

She said many residents living in new houses on the edge of the city tended to lower-paid workers who commute into the city centre. “They are a fair walk to the bus stop or nearest train station,” she said. “If they’re working shifts we know making use of public transport sometimes becomes impossible at the moment or could even involve two or three buses.

“We talk so much about the workplace parking levy because we’re cash-strapped and the Scottish Government just isn’t prepared to devolve further revenue raising powers to councils and I do think we have to recognise that.”

Greens councillor Jule Bandel argued a WPL would be “really

good for demand management” while giving people “sustainable travel improvements that enable them to give up their car and achieve the significant modal shift that we desperately need”.

The Conservatives’ Marie Clair-Munro said the levy was “a tax by another name”.

She said: “Any introduction of a workplace parking levy . . . would be a hammer blow to hard working people – especially women, carers, potentially teachers, nurses, low-paid workers and businesses.

“The workplace parking levy clearly impacts those individuals more when there is no public transport available.”

She added: “I think the use of £100,000 of tax payers money from reserves to further develop what we believe are these unnecessary and damaging proposals would be reckless and a wasteful use of funds given the financial circumstances the council face over the coming years.”

An amendment by Labour and Lib Dem councillors, and supported by the Conservatives, agreed “no further work” should be undertaken on the WPL “until a plan is developed in partnership with trade unions, employers and community councils to address the predictable and non-trivial negative impacts such as displacement parking and the impact of shift workers”.

It said a city-wide scheme “is not appropriate for Edinburgh at this time” but called on officials to investigate “other legal and financial options available to the council which can address, in particular, the substantial number of vehicles travelling into Edinburgh from outside of the local authority area each day”.

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter