# Charge!!

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| Congestion charging. Emission charging. Low cost solutions to addressing traffic congestion and lowering transport carbon emissions, or political suicide? On paper congestion charging makes perfect sense. It’s a way of harnessing the power of the market to swiftly reduce the problems associated with traffic congestion, such as emissions and delays to the essential movement of goods, services and people, without the need for massive investment in new transport infrastructure. Emissions charging, potentially as a part of a congestion charging scheme, is more directed at improving air quality by focussing on charging high polluting vehicles off the road. Either method can raise revenue that could be used to continually improve other travel options and/or subsidise both the scrapping of high polluting vehicles and the purchase of low emission alternatives.However, like all new “taxes” it can be a political hand grenade - one that few leaders have chosen to grasp. A number of congestion charge schemes investigated around the world have failed to be implemented because of public opposition, often from those who already feel over over-taxed, while others oppose charging based on equity concerns and fairness. What we know is that effective public engagement and consultation have proved critical success factors in all congestion pricing schemes. This starts with providing clear, consistent, simple information about the aims and the benefits, including relevant complementary measures.Could the answer to Auckland’s congestion issue, and a key way to decarbonise transport, be to implement congestion or emission charging while improving alternatives? The devil is always in the detail and charging can either be a blunt hammer or a subtle knife. Some of the most obvious approaches to charging are potentially at odds with our civic responsibility to ensure fairness and equity within the system.Is it time?  |