

## 2. ROAD PRICING AS A MEANS TO REDUCE CONGESTION

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The notion of road pricing is based primarily on economic social welfare theory and the concept of consumption externalities. Consumption externalities are costs imposed on society as goods are consumed. Congestion and pollution from automobile traffic are classic consumption externalities. Justification for road pricing is that levels of congestion and pollution are too high to be socially optimal. It is argued that these externalities are too high because consumers (drivers) do not pay for the costs they impose on society. Road pricing advocates maintain that by charging people for driving, the amount of driving can be reduced to a socially optimal level. Road pricing has only been applied in few locations with the most influential location being London in 2003. The example of London (and more recently Stockholm) has been the impetus for discussions about road pricing in Switzerland.

Et il va encore s'écouler beaucoup de  
tours de roues sur les routes suisses avant  
qu'un projet voie le jour, car la Constitution  
interdit aujourd'hui les péages routiers,  
à l'exception du tunnel du Grand-Saint-  
Bernard.

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## 2. Road Pricing as a Means to Reduce Congestion

Reaction to the debate around road pricing has been different between the French and German-speaking parts of Switzerland. In the French-speaking part, official opinion has tended to be less supportive of road pricing. An article from January 27th, 2006 in *Le Temps* gathers the opinions of a number of public figures with respect to road pricing. The Assistant Secretary General Responsible for Transportation in Geneva is quoted as saying that road pricing was not being considered in Geneva. The mayor of Lausanne is reported to have said that while road pricing is something that could be considered, other measures to encourage people to take public transit were more important. From the perspective of stakeholder groups, opinion is not quite as homogeneous.

An official of Touring Club Suisse (an automobile lobby group) exclaims that there will never be road pricing in Switzerland. The president of the Swiss Transport and Environment Association in Geneva, on the other hand, is very much in favour of road pricing in Geneva. Furthermore, the reaction in the German-speaking part of Switzerland has been more amenable to the overall concept than in the French-speaking part.

The road network of the Canton of Zurich is regularly congested and it is expected that traffic jams will increase in the coming decades. Politicians on the Right are calling for massive road infrastructure. Politicians on the Left argue that more roads will attract more traffic and that priority should be given to slowing the fragmentation of living and activity spaces. Developing the new cantonal masterplan (plan directeur cantonal) gave the parties the opportunity to oppose their arguments. Since the Right holds the majority in the cantonal parliament, all proposals of the Left to slow down mobility were rejected. With one exception: road pricing!

The NZZ article of January 24th, 2007, shows why the smallest possible majority of the Zurich parliament agreed to give the cantonal government the mission to develop a road pricing instrument. Clearly, financial restrictions forbid building all the high performance roads the Right would like to get built. For certain on

Die Minderheitsanträge  
von SP und Grünen wurden  
zuweilen im Minutentakt  
abgeschmettert. Einen zwar  
wackligen- Erfolg konnten sie  
aber dennoch verbuchen.

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the Right, road pricing promises to generate the needed cash for more streets. It promises for the Left to discourage driving, especially on saturated segments during peak hours, and generate cash for public transportation. MPs debate about whether road pricing should be applied to the entire Canton or only the most saturated segments, whether the Canton should develop its own solution or wait for a national solution, and whether road pricing should be an additional tax or replace existing taxes.

Il n'est jamais bon de lancer en même temps deux projets politiques qui concernent le même thème.

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Dabei ist nicht an kundenunfreundliche, komplexe und auf bestimmte Sitzplätze in bestimmten Zügen fixierte System zu denken, wie sie im internationalen Verkehr um sich greifen, sondern vielmehr an den simplen Neun-Uhr-Pass des Zürcher Verkehrsverbundes, [...]

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article from September 16th, 2006 reports on this subject by explaining that the Swiss Constitution states clearly the exemption of taxes for road use. This clause was included in the constitution of 1848 as part of the abolition of tolls between

the Cantons. While exceptions to this rule are possible – as is the case with the Great St. Bernard Tunnel – it remains unclear if road pricing at the communal or cantonal level could receive the same treatment...