

Traffic decline on M6 Toll is something to be welcomed

One little word in the article on the M6 Toll illustrates precisely why it is a bad idea to use private money to fund road capacity: “blamed” (“Toll road traffic drops 13%’ *LTT* 11 May).

You report that the M6 Toll operator has “blamed” the latest decline in traffic on the “continuing weak economic conditions”.

Whether this explanation is right or not, why should we be looking to blame anything or anyone for a trend that policy-makers have been trying to achieve for decades – namely a welcome decline in road traffic?

If roadspace is privately funded, and revenues are earned on a commercial basis through user or shadow tolls, the private investors have a direct incentive to increase the throughput of traffic.

This runs directly counter to the Government’s objectives of reducing congestion, carbon dioxide emissions and other environmental impacts.

No, the Government in its forthcoming review of road infrastructure financing should steer well clear of any system that rewards private investors or operators for an increase in road traffic.

Perhaps in any case, given the halting of traffic growth nationally, and the experience of the M6 Toll road, the private sector will itself want to steer clear!

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Toll road traffic drops 13%

TOLL ROADS

TRAFFIC VOLUMES on the M6 Toll in the West Midlands dropped 13% in the first three months of this year.

Figures published by the road operator show the average daily traffic level for January-March 2012 was 30,418 – 12.9% below the 34,909 recorded in the first quarter of 2011.

The drop was greatest on weekends and public holidays, with average traffic volume down 15.2%, from 21,958 to 18,618.

Average traffic on a workday fell 9.6%, from 40,459 to 35,396.

Overall, average daily traffic volumes were 28% below the highest quarter 1 level recorded on the road in 2005. Weekend and public holiday traffic is 45% below Q1 2005.

The M6 Toll operator has **blamed** the latest decline on the “continuing weak economic conditions” and the managed motorway measures on the competing M6. It made no mention of the toll increases that took effect on 1 March.

