

Beijingers fume over parking fees

Choking traffic jams in Beijing are prompting officials to look at reorganising car parking charges.

Car ownership has risen fast in recent years, and there are now two and a half million cars on the city's roads. The trouble is that the high status of car ownership is matched by expensive fees at indoor car parks, making motorists reluctant to use them. Instead roads are being clogged by drivers circling in search of a cheaper outdoor option. "The price differences between indoor and outdoor lots are unreasonable," said Wang Yan, an official from the Beijing Municipal Commission for Development and Reform quoted in the state-run China Daily newspaper. Mr Wang, who is in charge of collecting car parking fees, said his team would be looking at adjusting parking prices to close the gap. Indoor parking bays can cost up to 250% more than outdoor ones.

Sports fans who drive to matches may also find themselves the target of the commission's road rage. It wants them to use public transport, and is considering jacking up the prices of car parks near sports grounds. Mr Wang said his review team may scrap the relatively cheap hourly fee near such places and impose a higher flat rate during matches. Indoor parking may be costly, but it is not always secure. Mr Wang's team are also going to look into complaints from residents about poor service received in exchange for compulsory monthly fees of up to 400 yuan (\$48; £26). The Beijing authorities decided two years ago that visiting foreign dignitaries' motorcades should not longer get motorcycle outriders as they blocked the traffic. Unclogging Beijing's increasingly impassable streets is a major concern for the Chinese authorities, who are building dozens of new roads to create a showcase modern city ahead of the 2008 Olympic Games.