

Costs

When considering the costs of driving, remember that it isn't just the cost of fuel that you need to take into account; you also need to consider insurance, depreciation, maintenance and road tax.

Safety

Statistics have proven that travelling by bus or coach is about as safe as travelling by air, rail or on water. All of these transport methods are less risky than driving a car or riding a motorcycle.

Travelling times

Remember that it's sometimes difficult to estimate the time for a journey by car because of delays that can be caused by congestion, incidents and roadworks. These factors should always be taken into account, especially if it's necessary to travel at busy times.



Section eighteen

➞ Avoiding and dealing with congestion

This section covers

- Journey planning
- While driving
- Urban congestion

➡ Journey planning

The information available to the modern driver means that journey planning to avoid congestion can often be just a matter of checking online or using a satellite navigation (sat-nav) device. Using this information can help you work out what time of day to travel, as well as whether there are any major route disruptions. It can also help you to schedule refuelling stops if you're travelling long distances.



Time of day

Much congestion is caused by work- and school-related travel. This causes delays in the early morning and late afternoon/early evening. If you don't have to travel at these times, try to avoid them. This will

- allow you to have an easier and more pleasant journey, and one that's less likely to be delayed
- ease traffic congestion.

Try to arrange appointments so that you avoid these times.



➡ While driving

Delays and diversions

Carry a map with you so that you can stop and check your position or identify an alternative route if you get held up or diverted.



If you're using a sat-nav system

- Your sat-nav won't always be correct, so take a hard-copy map with you in case of errors.
- You should always be aware that your sat-nav can be a distraction. Don't spend time looking at it when your attention should be focused on the road. If you're confused by any of its instructions, find a safe place to stop and review the route.
- Don't be distracted from making your own judgement about the safety of any manoeuvres.
- Before you turn, make sure you're allowed to do so by looking at any road signs.

Mobile phones

A mobile phone can be useful in the event of delays or breakdowns. However, remember that it's illegal to use one while driving. This includes while you're waiting in a queue of traffic.

If you have a passenger, get them to make the call. When you're travelling alone and you need to call, find a safe place to stop first. If you're on a motorway, you must leave the motorway before using your phone.

Hazard perception

Looking well ahead to see what the traffic in front of you is doing will help you to plan your driving.

If you see the traffic ahead slowing down, ease off the accelerator and slow down gradually, rather than leaving it late and having to brake harshly.

Plan your driving and slow down early – if you do this, the traffic situation ahead may have cleared by the time you get there.

Constant speed

When you can see well ahead and the road conditions are good, you should drive at a steady cruising speed. This is the time to use cruise control if it's fitted to your vehicle.

Whether or not you have cruise control, choose a speed that's within the speed limit and one which you and your vehicle can handle safely.

Make sure you also keep a safe distance from the vehicle in front. Remember to increase the gap on wet or icy roads. In foggy conditions you'll have to slow down to a speed that allows you to stop within the distance you can see to be clear.



At busy times, some stretches of motorway have variable speed limits shown above the lanes. The speed limits shown on these signs are mandatory and appear on the gantries above the lanes to which they apply.

These speed limits are in place to allow traffic to travel at a constant speed. This has been shown to reduce 'bunching'.

Keeping traffic at a constant speed over a longer distance has been shown to ease congestion.

Your overall journey time normally improves by keeping to a constant speed, even though at times it may appear that you could have travelled faster for shorter periods.

Lane discipline

You should drive in the left-hand lane of a dual carriageway or motorway if the road ahead is clear. If you're overtaking a number of slower-moving vehicles, it may be safer to remain in the centre or outer lane until the manoeuvre is completed, rather than continually changing lanes. Return to the left-hand lane once you've overtaken all the vehicles, or if you're delaying traffic behind you.

Don't stay in the middle lane. Remember that some vehicles are prohibited from using the right-hand lane, so if you remain in the middle lane they won't be able to get past you. If you stay in the middle lane an unnecessarily long time, you effectively turn a three-lane motorway into a two-lane motorway.



You mustn't normally drive on the hard shoulder but, at roadworks and certain places where signs direct, the hard shoulder may become the left-hand lane.

Using sign information

Look well ahead for signals or signs, especially on a motorway. Signals situated on the central reservation apply to all lanes.

On very busy stretches, there may be overhead gantries with messages about congestion ahead and a separate sign for each lane. The messages may also give an alternative route, which you should use if at all possible.

If you're not sure whether to use the alternative route (for example, whether you can reach your destination if you use the route suggested), take the next exit, pull over at the first available safe area (lay-by or service area) and look at a map.

On a motorway, once you've passed an exit and meet congestion, there may not be another chance to leave and you could be stuck in slow-moving or stationary traffic for some time. Take the opportunity to leave the motorway as soon as possible; you can always rejoin the motorway if you feel that's the best course of action once you've had time to consider the options.

If you need to change lanes to leave the motorway, do so in good time. At some junctions a lane may lead directly off the motorway. Only get in that lane if you wish to go in the direction indicated on the overhead signs.

Motorway signals can be used to warn you of a danger ahead. For example, there may be an incident, fog, or a spillage, that you're unable to see.

Amber flashing lights warn of a hazard ahead. The signal may show

- a temporary maximum speed limit
- lanes that are closed
- a message such as 'Fog' or 'Queue'.



Adjust your speed and look out for the danger.

Don't increase your speed until you pass a signal that isn't flashing or one that gives the 'all clear' sign and you're sure it's safe to increase your speed.

Urban congestion

Congestion in urban areas leads to

- longer journey times
- frustration
- pollution through standing and slow-moving traffic.

London suffers the worst traffic congestion in the UK and amongst the worst in Europe. Various measures have been introduced to try to reduce the congestion and make traffic flow more freely. Red Routes and congestion charging are two of the schemes initiated in the London area. These are also being introduced into other congested towns and cities.

Transport strategy

A wide range of other measures have been designed to make public transport easier, cheaper, faster and more reliable.

If it isn't necessary to make your journey by car, you might want to consider alternative forms of transport.

For London, the Transport for London (TfL) journey planner (tfl.gov.uk) can help you discover the quickest and easiest routes for your journey using public transport. Alternatively, you can call TfL's Travel Information Call Centre on **0843 222 1234**.



Red Routes

Red Routes keep traffic moving and reduce the pollution that comes from vehicle emissions. Stopping and parking are allowed only within marked boxes.

Overnight and on Sundays most controls are relaxed to allow unrestricted stopping.

There's a fixed penalty for an offence and illegally parked vehicles may be towed away.

There are five main types of Red Route markings.

Double red lines

Stopping isn't allowed at any time, for any reason. These lines are normally placed at road junctions or where parking or loading would be dangerous or cause serious congestion.

Single red lines

Parking, loading or picking up passengers isn't allowed during the day (generally 7 am to 7 pm). Stopping is allowed outside these hours and on Sundays.

Red boxes

These indicate that parking or loading is permitted during the day at off-peak times, normally 10 am to 4 pm. Some boxes allow loading and some allow parking; the rules in each case are clearly shown on the sign.

White boxes

Parking or loading is allowed throughout the day, subject to restrictions shown on the sign.

Red Route clearway

There are no road markings but clearway signs indicate that stopping isn't allowed at any time, apart from in marked lay-bys.



Congestion charging

Congestion charging is a way of ensuring that those using valuable and congested road space make a financial contribution. It encourages the use of other modes of transport and is also intended to ensure that journey times are quicker and more reliable for those who have to use the roads.

The London scheme requires drivers to pay if they wish to drive in central London during the scheme's hours of operation.

Extent of zone

Traffic signs make it very clear when you're approaching, entering and leaving the charging zone. Advance information is provided on the main approach roads. These signs advise how far ahead the zone starts and the hours of operation, and some give the amount of the charge.

As you approach the charging zone, directional signs indicate which routes take you into the charging zone and which you can take if you wish to avoid it.



As you enter and exit the zone, signs indicate the boundary of the zone. The sign on entry also gives hours of operation.

Paying and exemptions

You can pay the congestion charge

- in advance or on the day of travel before, during or after your journey
- daily, weekly, monthly or even for the whole year.

To find out more about how to pay and where you can pay, visit tfl.gov.uk or call **0845 900 1234**.

At midnight, images of all the vehicles that have been in the charging zone are checked against the registration numbers of vehicles that have paid their congestion charge for that day. The computer keeps the registration numbers of vehicles that should have paid but haven't done so. A penalty charge notice is issued to the registered keeper of the vehicle.

Not all drivers have to pay the charge. Those who are exempt include

- disabled people who hold a Blue Badge
- riders of two-wheelers.

There are also exemptions for low- or no-emission vehicles. To check whether your vehicle qualifies, visit **tfl.gov.uk**

Residents living within the zone obtain a reduced rate but aren't exempt unless their vehicle meets the minimum exemption requirement.

Some people may be able to claim reimbursement; for example, staff, firefighters and patients too ill to travel to an appointment on public transport.

Emission Zone London also operates an emissions zone for diesel vehicles with high carbon-dioxide outputs. The zone covers most of Greater London and operates for 24 hours a day, all year round. Charging days run from midnight to midnight, so if you entered the zone before midnight and were still driving through it at 1.30 am you'd need to pay the charge for both days. To see if your vehicle is affected by Low Emission Zone charges, visit **tfl.gov.uk**



Section nineteen

➞ Towing a trailer

This section covers

- Towing regulations
- Towing a caravan
- Towing a horse trailer
- Caravan and trailer safety
- Driving techniques