

Sadiq Khan's latest plan to [make it harder to drive](#) should worry us all. It's the worst assault on motorists we've ever seen. The London Mayor is determined to price working people off the roads and has ignored their overwhelming objections, giving them no choice, time or opportunity to avoid a ruinous bill. If Mr Khan gets away with this, any other city or regional mayor can impose reckless driving charges across the country. It must be stopped.

First, it is worth explaining why the [expansion of London's Ultra Low Emission Zone \(Ulez\)](#) would be so disastrous. The current, daily, £12.50 Ulez charge will no longer be contained to central London, where there are the best public transport options and car ownership is low. From August 2023, he will charge the capital's outer boroughs too, with their car-reliant suburbs and rural villages, hitting more than 200,000 older, non-compliant cars and vans daily.

The mayor's activist supporters may justify this assault by claiming it is a tax on the wealthy – but it is those on the lowest incomes who will be hit the hardest. Indeed, Transport for London's (TfL) own analysis shows that more than 50 per cent of outer London households earning as little as £10,000 a year own a car, with car ownership rocketing to 70 per cent of households earning above £20,000.

Does the mayor know what his tax raid would do to such people, who rely on their cars not just to work and pay their bills, but also to shop or visit family and friends? He should leave the comfort of City Hall and come to the doorsteps of my constituency, Orpington, on the very edge of Greater London, where thousands (83 per cent of households own a car) could be hit with an eye-watering annual driving bill of up to £4,500.

Mr Khan should be reminded that, unlike residents in Islington or Camden, my constituents don't have access to the Tube or trams. They can't be zoomed across the capital on the shiny [new Elizabeth Line](#). They do have Southeastern trains into central London, but in recent months these have often been disrupted by strikes, leaving people stranded.

Moreover, not everyone is a commuter; many work in and around our community, and some work in Kent and other areas outside Greater London. This is not unique – it is similar across many outer London boroughs, where even those with a Tube station often rely on their cars to access the public transport network.

But it seems Mr Khan is imposing his extra tax precisely because of – not in spite of – our reliance on cars. He claims to want to improve air quality, but it is really about raising money to save his failing administration. According to TfL's impact assessment, the air quality benefit from expanding Ulez would be

little to negligible. But with hundreds of thousands of people being hit by the new charge every day – or indeed the new hiked fine of £180 for failing to pay the charge – the mayor’s cash grab will raise millions.

There is real danger in this for the rest of the country. If Mr Khan gets away with it, he will have set a precedent for other cash-strapped city and regional mayors eager to make up their budget deficits. They will view it as an easy cash injection as opposed to the more tenuous task of spending taxpayers’ money responsibly. They will drool over their London counterpart’s ability to stage a highway robbery that no one voted for and that a consultation rejected.

Any councillor in the country knows a local authority cannot legally impose car-parking charges, fines or traffic-enforcement measures purely to raise money. But Mr Khan is exposing a loophole: all you need to do is tie the driving charge to poorly reasoned air-quality concerns, give people just nine months’ notice, hike the fine for non-payment, and target areas where you will catch the most people.

It is immoral and unfair, especially during an energy crisis and rising inflation but, shamefully, his war on cars might well succeed unless an urgent campaign is mounted.

It is time ministers looked seriously at the accountability of directly-elected mayors. Devolution has some benefits, but localism doesn’t work when the administrative system suffocates local democracy.