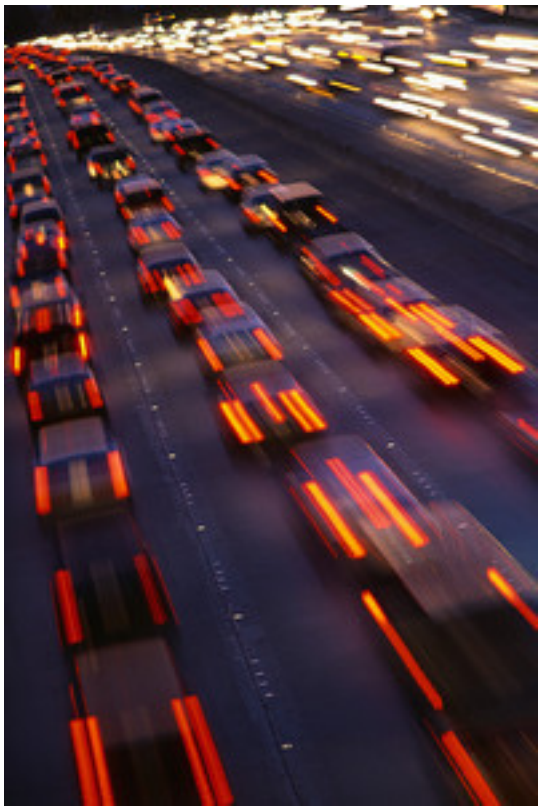
Common Error No. 79 [1]

Written by **Dr Madsen Pirie** [2] | Wednesday 2 April 2008

79. "We should discourage use of private cars by making them more expensive to drive."



Private cars are already hit by vehicle excise duty and fuel tax, in addition to parking fees and congestion charges. The money raised from these is part of the general budget, rather than earmarked specifically for transport purposes.

It is true that each car adds to pollution, but much less than they did a decade ago, and diminishing as new models incorporate new technology. Most of the pollution from cars is caused by older and badly-tuned models. A sustained campaign to improve those would achieve far more than a campaign to raise the costs of motoring generally.

It is also true that each car adds to congestion, but again, a sensible policy to reduce congestion at peak times and on peak roads would achieve more than a general increase in costs. Reducing the need for a 'school run,' for example, would cut congestion substantially.

The anti-car lobby does not seem to appreciate the benefits of private motoring. The extension of car ownership has opened up so many choices for so many people. It enables them to work from places ill served by public transport; it enables them to shop at places which offer more goods and at lower prices. It opens up the country, and even the continent, to ordinary people who had so limited travel opportunities before the spread of car ownership. It brings a degree of independence to people.

Planners might want to move people in blocks between chosen points, but the private car is far more flexible and versatile, allowing people to make different choices. Instead of pricing motoring beyond the

reach of all except the rich, we should be promoting the technology which can make car engines use cleaner and less scarce fuels, and the techniques which can spread out their use to avoid the congestion that overcrowding causes.

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