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Search

[Advanced Se](#)[Home](#) [Glossary](#) [Index](#) [Contact Us](#) [Parliament Live](#) section...

Select Committee on Transport [Seventh Report](#)

SUMMARY

Summary

Failure to comply with parking restrictions disrupts traffic, increases road congestion, heightens levels of danger, results in injuries, and delays public transport schedules.

Fifty million estimated illegal parking acts take place each year in London with a cost of £270 million a year in additional delays and accidents. The scale and cost of illegal parking throughout Britain is not known but is clearly significant. The police have failed to enforce parking regulations in Britain properly for decades as other policing priorities have taken precedence. The result is that illegal parking is widespread.

It is fifteen years since local authorities were given the power to take over control of parking enforcement from the police. Transferring responsibility for parking enforcement to local government has succeeded in raising the levels of enforcement and compliance. In 2003, local authority parking attendants issued 7,123,000 Penalty Charge Notices in the then 75 local authorities and 33 London boroughs where decriminalised parking enforcement powers were in operation. By contrast, the police issued 1,043,000 Fixed Penalty Notices in the remaining 313 authorities.

To retain two parallel parking systems is irrational, and it is high time to move to a single country-wide system of decriminalised parking enforcement. There must be one system of parking, not two.

Despite its success, serious flaws remain in the decriminalised parking system. For example, 20 per cent of the 7.1 million Penalty Charge Notices issued in England in 2003 were cancelled; local authorities do not always make the process for challenging Penalty Charge Notices clear; and local authorities' duty to use discretion in considering challenges is not always properly discharged. This poor local authority administration causes frustration and anger, wastes resources, and brings the decriminalised parking regime into disrepute. These problems need to be put right by a cooperative effort lead by the Government.

In addition to the *main* task of introducing a unified system of parking enforcement in Britain, we have found that the following action is required:

- Clear performance standards in applying parking restrictions must be established
- It must be made clearer to drivers what regulations are in force and how compliance is to be achieved
- Appropriate recruitment, remuneration and training is needed to ensure a professional parking service throughout the country
- The process for challenging penalty charge notices must be made much more

transparent

- The impact of the parking adjudication service must be increased and its profile heightened
- Scrutiny of local authority parking departments is woefully inadequate and needs to be strengthened
- Local authorities must develop parking strategies which meet local objectives fully, focusing particularly on congestion, road safety and accessibility.

The Department for Transport intends to publish draft revised statutory guidance on decriminalised parking enforcement. This is long overdue. The last national guidance document on this subject was issued in 1995. It is essential that, as a first step to making sensible improvements, the guidance addresses the key shortcomings of the system *in detail*. Generalised guidance will not do.

The Department has failed however to undertake a systematic, nation wide evaluation of decriminalised parking. This is a pity as it will lessen the authority of any draft guidance issued now. The Department needs to consider how to remedy any deficiency in its research before issuing guidance.

Guidance is of course only a first step. Using the forthcoming guidance as a basis, we expect the Department for Transport to encourage vigorously improved standards in all local authorities. Follow-through action will be essential if the guidance is not merely to gather dust.

This report sets out in detail the changes that need to be made in order to improve parking in Britain. No one measure is intrinsically difficult to implement. But as a coherent package these will require vision and sustained effort to get right. The Department needs to show will and stamina to carry the project through successfully.

We are confident that the effects of the package will be to: reduce motorists' frustration, increase transparency and accountability, to promote increased compliance with the regulations and, overall, to raise the professional standards of parking enforcement. Improvements will take some time. But the case for reform is compelling. We expect the Government and the local authorities to start the process of improvement now.

[previous page](#) [contents](#) [next page](#)

[House of Commons home page](#) [Parliament home page](#) [House of Lords home page](#)

[search page](#) [enquiries](#) [index](#)