# TfL to raise congestion charge to £18 and cut EV discounts, unions warn of toll on couriers



Transport for London has proposed a significant overhaul of the central London Congestion Charge that would both raise the daily tariff and scale back exemptions for zero-emission vehicles — moves that unions say risk hitting low-paid delivery and private‑hire drivers hard. Under TfL’s consultation, published on 27 May 2025, the daily charge would rise from £15 to £18 from 2 January 2026, while the current 100% Cleaner Vehicle Discount would be replaced by a tiered discount giving electric vans and HGVs 50% relief and electric cars an initial 25% relief. TfL says the changes are intended to stop a rapid increase in electric vehicles from undermining congestion reduction in the central zone while still keeping incentives to drive cleaner vehicles.

The GMB union has been vocal in its opposition, warning that hundreds of self‑employed couriers and private‑hire drivers who switched to electric vehicles could be pushed into financial distress. Steve Garelick, London regional officer for the GMB, told the Evening Standard that the sums involved would make “a huge difference” to members who are private‑hire or self‑employed couriers, and warned: “If you’re a courier with Evri and you have converted to a green vehicle and are driving into central London, you are going to get hit with £13.50 a day. The income you get from a postable item that goes through a letterbox is about 40p, or if it’s a small package you might get 70p if you’re lucky. That means potentially you are going to have to deliver 30 to 40 items just to wipe out that charge.” The union has urged TfL to rethink the changes or introduce targeted exemptions and says it may pursue legal and political avenues to protect members’ incomes.

The concerns from GMB are underpinned by longstanding critiques of parcel‑by‑parcel pay models in the courier sector. Investigations into the parcel industry have repeatedly found that many couriers are paid per item and that, once expenses such as vehicle running costs and insurance are deducted, take‑home pay can slide below acceptable levels. Industry analyses of pay patterns show small ‘postable’ items commonly earn under 50p and many standard parcels pay only a few tens of pence — forcing drivers to achieve high volumes to make a living. Those payment structures help explain why a new per‑day congestion levy could rapidly erode already thin margins for self‑employed couriers.

TfL frames the proposal as a balancing act: preventing the policy gains from congestion charging being eroded by a growing fleet of exempt zero‑emission cars, while maintaining a sliding incentive for cleaner vans and cars. The transport body has also signalled further tapering of discounts from 2030, and opened a public consultation that runs until 4 August 2025 to gather evidence and stakeholder feedback. Supporters of the change point to the policy’s environmental and traffic‑management rationale; critics argue the timing and design pay insufficient attention to those who rely on vehicles to work in the central zone.

Small business groups and unions have argued that the burden falls unevenly on lower‑paid workers who invested in electric vehicles in good faith, effectively penalising decisions taken to meet environmental goals. GMB London’s public statements demand a rethink, calling for either exemptions for low‑paid drivers, targeted financial support, or a phased approach that avoids sudden income shocks. The debate has also revived wider questions about the gig economy’s business models — including per‑parcel pay and the lack of employment protections — which campaigners say leave couriers vulnerable to policy shifts.

Policymakers face a difficult trade‑off. Encouraging a faster switch to zero‑emission vans and cars remains central to London’s air‑quality and climate objectives, but blunt reductions in discounts risk undermining social fairness and worker livelihoods unless accompanied by mitigations such as targeted rebates, exemptions, hardship funds, or incentives specifically for small operators. Industry and worker groups suggest alternatives — for example, exemptions tied to earnings thresholds, time‑limited support for those who upgraded vehicles recently, or route‑based concessions — that would preserve congestion goals while shielding the most vulnerable.

The consultation is now the immediate focus: TfL has asked for evidence on how the changes would affect congestion, emissions and different groups of road users before deciding whether to implement the increase and discount tapering from 2 January 2026. Affected drivers and couriers are being encouraged to respond to the consultation and to engage with their unions and representative groups to press for protections; GMB has pledged to continue campaigning on behalf of members who it says will face disproportionate financial harm.

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## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[3]](https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2025/may/changes-proposed-to-the-congestion-charge-to-keep-london-moving), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/electric-levy-financial-ruin-for-delivery-drivers-b1242143.html), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cev41ewgz33o)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/electric-levy-financial-ruin-for-delivery-drivers-b1242143.html), [[5]](https://www.gmblondon.org.uk/news/gmb-demands-rethink-on-city-congestion-zone)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/18/hermes-couriers-paying-staff-less-than-living-wage), [[7]](https://www.ebusinessblog.co.uk/how-much-do-evri-drivers-earn/), [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/electric-levy-financial-ruin-for-delivery-drivers-b1242143.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2025/may/changes-proposed-to-the-congestion-charge-to-keep-london-moving), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cev41ewgz33o), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/electric-levy-financial-ruin-for-delivery-drivers-b1242143.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.gmblondon.org.uk/news/gmb-demands-rethink-on-city-congestion-zone), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/electric-levy-financial-ruin-for-delivery-drivers-b1242143.html), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cev41ewgz33o)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2025/may/changes-proposed-to-the-congestion-charge-to-keep-london-moving), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/18/hermes-couriers-paying-staff-less-than-living-wage), [[7]](https://www.ebusinessblog.co.uk/how-much-do-evri-drivers-earn/), [[5]](https://www.gmblondon.org.uk/news/gmb-demands-rethink-on-city-congestion-zone)
* Paragraph 7 – [[3]](https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2025/may/changes-proposed-to-the-congestion-charge-to-keep-london-moving), [[5]](https://www.gmblondon.org.uk/news/gmb-demands-rethink-on-city-congestion-zone), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/electric-levy-financial-ruin-for-delivery-drivers-b1242143.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/electric-levy-financial-ruin-for-delivery-drivers-b1242143.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/electric-levy-financial-ruin-for-delivery-drivers-b1242143.html> - Evening Standard reports that Transport for London is consulting on ending the Cleaner Vehicle Discount and raising the central London congestion charge from £15 to £18 from 2 January 2026, leaving electric car drivers with a 25% discount (£13.50) and electric vans with 50% discount (£9). The GMB union warns the changes would hit private-hire and self-employed delivery drivers, saying the charge risks financial ruin for those who switched to EVs. Steve Garelick of GMB highlighted per-item pay rates for couriers and warned that drivers, including many Uber and Evri workers, would be deeply affected by the new levy proposal.
3. <https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2025/may/changes-proposed-to-the-congestion-charge-to-keep-london-moving> - Transport for London’s press release outlines proposed changes to the Congestion Charge, published 27 May 2025. TfL proposes raising the daily charge from £15 to £18 from 2 January 2026 and replacing the current 100% Cleaner Vehicle Discount with a new tiered discount: 50% for electric vans and HGVs and 25% for electric cars initially, with further tapering proposed from 2030. The release explains the measures aim to prevent rising EV numbers from undermining congestion reduction while retaining incentives to encourage cleaner vehicles, and it opens a public consultation running until 4 August 2025 for stakeholder feedback and evidence gathering.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cev41ewgz33o> - The BBC reports TfL’s proposal to increase the Congestion Charge to £18 and to introduce a reduced Cleaner Vehicle Discount, meaning electric cars would receive a 25% discount and electric vans 50% from January 2026. The piece explains the change is driven by concerns that exempting all zero-emission vehicles would increase traffic in the central zone and undermine congestion relief, and notes the consultation timeline. It also records reactions from small business groups and public debate about fairness for workers who rely on vehicles to do their jobs. Several unions, including GMB, expressed strong concern for low-paid drivers and livelihoods.
5. <https://www.gmblondon.org.uk/news/gmb-demands-rethink-on-city-congestion-zone> - GMB London’s press page condemns the proposed changes to the congestion charge and urges a rethink, arguing private-hire drivers, couriers and key workers will suffer disproportionate financial harm. The GMB highlights that many members have invested in electric vehicles in good faith and warns rolling back the Cleaner Vehicle Discount amounts to penalising those workers. The page includes quotes from London GMB officials, outlines calls for exemptions or targeted support for low-paid workers, and provides contact details for media enquiries. It stresses legal and political pressure will be considered to protect members' incomes.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/18/hermes-couriers-paying-staff-less-than-living-wage> - The Guardian’s investigation into Hermes couriers, predecessor to Evri, revealed that many self-employed couriers were paid per parcel and some effectively earned below the living wage after expenses. The piece used detailed examples showing per-parcel payments and estimated hourly rates, highlighted lack of sick pay and training pay, and documented worker testimonies about precarious conditions. The reporting concluded that parcel pay structures can result in low take-home pay for couriers, underpinning wider concerns about gig-economy labour practices and prompting calls for regulatory scrutiny and better protections. Its findings are frequently cited in debates about courier pay and sector reform policy.
7. <https://www.ebusinessblog.co.uk/how-much-do-evri-drivers-earn/> - This eBusinessBlog analysis explains Evri’s pay model for self-employed couriers, emphasising that drivers are typically paid per item rather than an hourly wage. It reports common per-parcel ranges — small 'postable' items often earn under 50p, standard packets around 47p, while heavier parcels can pay up to £1. The article notes that variation by route, depot and contractor means earnings differ widely, and stresses that operating costs such as fuel, insurance and vehicle maintenance substantially reduce net income. The piece advises prospective couriers to carefully calculate expenses and parcel volumes before committing so they can assess realistic daily earnings accurately.