



# CAMPAIGNING AGAINST LEICESTER'S WORKPLACE PARKING LEVY

A TRADE UNION REPORT PRODUCED IN JUNE 2022

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LEICESTER'S WORKPLACE PARKING LEVY**

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# Introduction

Under the unfortunate leadership of Leicester City Mayor Sir Peter Soulsby and Deputy City Mayor Adam Clarke, Leicester City Council is taking the controversial step of trying to introduce a “Workplace Parking Levy” that would apply to all workplaces within the city’s boundaries with more than ten staff parking spaces. The main public consultation on this proposal took place over twelve weeks between December 16, 2021 and March 13, 2022, with perhaps upwards of 4,000 members of the public engaging in this consultation, with thousands making their opposition to the levy known to the Council. Now the people of Leicester are still waiting to hear back from the Council about their feedback from this consultation process.

To date the City Council has made it clear that they propose to introduce their Workplace Parking Levy scheme with a £550 charge per parking space (with annual increase linked to RPI-Retail Price Index). This will raise around £10 million a year. The only city in the UK which currently runs such a scheme is Nottingham and, at least during the early months of this year, they were charging workplaces £428 per parking space. However, the main difference between the two cities is that in Leicester the Council are proposing to charge NHS workplaces (with a 50% reduction applying for the first 3 years of the scheme).

In no instances will the levy apply to volunteer workers. However, the only other exemptions from the scheme are: “Premises from which frontline health services are provided by or on behalf of the NHS; -Premises occupied by the emergency services; -Places occupied by disabled blue badge holders” and of course employers with ten or fewer eligible workplace parking places.

Owing to the somewhat confusing presentation of information during the consultation process – which ran into hundreds of pages of official documents – it was initially believed that the levy might effect approximately 17,000 city parking spaces (in non-NHS workplaces) and a further 5,000 parking spaces across NHS sites. But it later became apparent that the Council are proposing to apply the workplace parking tax to 22,000 non-NHS workplace parking spaces and to a further 4,000 NHS workplace parking spaces, which brings us to a total of 26,000 spaces, or 68% of all available workplace parking spaces in the city.

Although an earlier consultation process appears to have slipped by most members of the public and their trade unions, last summer Leicester City Council undertook a prior parking levy consultation, which resulted in the input from just two trade unions. In addition, the Council met once with

regional officers from the Trades Union Congress, although at no point were any efforts made to contact the Leicester and District Trades Union Council.

Around the time of this summer consultation Peter Soulsby was reported as saying to the *Leicester Mercury* (July 2021) that: “We have had discussions with business leaders and trade unions which have been encouraging.” Yet when members of the local Trades Council subsequently met with Council officials including Adam Clarke (on February 9) they asked if the feedback from the two unions or that obtained from the TUC could have been interpreted as being supportive of the planned Workplace Parking Levy. Contradicting Soulsby’s statement to the media the city officials answer was “No” – the unions views were not supportive of the proposed levy. The representatives from the local Trades Council also highlighted the fact that of the 95 respondents to last summer’s consultation the City Council had reported that only 25 supported the idea of a Workplace Parking Levy. The City Council’s own analysis on this consultation however did not say how many respondents had opposed the WPL, but it eventuates that the answer to this question was that the 70 other respondents had all raised different concerns about the introduction of a levy.

By late January it was becoming increasingly clear that there were serious problems of equity related to the introduction of Leicester’s proposed Workplace Parking Levy. And initially a motion was passed by UNISON Leicester City Branch which noted that the levy raised “a number of serious problems” regarding the unions “commitment to promoting green policy initiatives that are fair and equitable.” This led on to a first organising meeting (held on February 10) that was called by the Leicester and District Trades Union Council to discuss the proposed levy, with delegates representing the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU), UNISON, GMB, the National Education Union, Unite, University and College Union (UCU), and Community. After several more discussions on how to move forward, on March 17 the Leicester and District Trades Union Council held their monthly meeting and agreed a motion that was submitted for discussion by the GMB Leicestershire Branch (L10). The text of the motion noted:

*“The promotion of a Workplace Parking Levy in Leicester in reality is just a regressive tax on workers and will only serve to under-mine efforts to promote inclusive environmental action. We therefore commit to organize between all different trade unions within our city to do our best to oppose this new tax on workers and do what we can to actively support the type of*

*progressive environmental initiatives that can act to unite all workers of our city.”*

At that meeting the trade union movement then launched a public campaign as a subcommittee of the Trades Council and two officers were elected to take responsibility for organising the “Campaign Against Leicester’s Workplace Parking Levy,” these being Michael Barker and David Holloway. It was agreed that the Campaign would hold weekly meetings (7pm on Thursdays) and that supporters would contact various trade unions to establish funding for the campaign. It was suggested that larger unions would be asked to donate £550 (the proposed cost of the levy for one worker) and smaller unions could contribute some multiple of £5.50.

On March 24, the first formal organising meeting of the “Campaign Against Leicester’s Workplace Parking Levy” was held online via Zoom, and the Campaign ordered the first 5,000 copies of a leaflet to build awareness of the Campaign through our ongoing public activities. Early successes in opposing the parking levy involved obtaining a joint statement from five education unions which recognized that the proposed levy represented “a regressive stealth tax, which will disproportionately impact the city’s lowest-paid workers – including the education, local government, social care, and NHS staff who have been so vital in supporting the city through the COVID pandemic.” As reported in the *Leicester Mercury* (February 28), the five unions to sign-up to this statement were UNISON, the National Education Union (NEU), GMB, NASUWT (The Teachers’ Union), and NAHT (The School Leaders’ Union). There followed a second joint statement that opposed the levy that brought together the three main trade unions that organise city council workers, these being Unite, UNISON and GMB (see *Leicester Mercury*, March 14).

Since then, the Campaign Against Leicester’s Workplace Parking Levy has been slowly growing in strength and influence. At the time of writing the introduction to this pamphlet in mid-June, our campaign had already achieved some significant victories. First, we have helped unite the local trade union movement in opposition to the levy, and we encouraged thousands of people (many of which were unions members) to raise their concerns directly with the City Council through the formal consultation process. The scale of the public opposition to the levy has now meant that the City Council have been forced to extend their review of the consultation process until the summer, which we suspect is to allow them to buy some time to consider alternative ways of implementing their regressive parking levy. Over the past few months we have been hearing that local Labour Councillors are coming under increasing pressure from their constituents to

state publicly that they oppose the levy, although to date, few seem willing to take this step publicly.

In terms of building our campaign, we continue to hold regular leafleting/information stalls in the city centre and are always looking for more volunteers to get involved so please get in contact with us. We continue to spread the word about our campaign at major events and festivals in the city, and we have already organised our first successful



public meeting to discuss how to oppose the levy on May 14 at Leicester Secular Hall. We have taken our Campaign banners down to the King Power Stadium to leaflet before football games and we continue to leaflet staff at major workplaces including at the Leicester Royal Infirmary and outside the General Hospital. We have posted our campaign leaflets and an accompanying letter inviting school workers to send a delegate to get involved in our work to around 130 schools/colleges in Leicester. While the

Campaign has also printed two detailed reports, the first of which outlines our criticisms of the levy, and the second which proposes socialist alternatives to the levy that can help deal with the ongoing climate emergency. These two reports are titled "How the city council's own consultation process undermines the case for a Workplace Parking Levy in Leicester" (published on April 2) and "Climate change solutions for Leicester" (published on May 14).

We have always understood that our country needs to urgently enact radical and progressive change to avert the ongoing climate emergency and we continue to make clear that the proposed Workplace Parking Levy is neither radical or progressive. A good example of the problems that lie ahead were featured in the *Leicester Mercury* (on May 3), wherein the headlines featured on opposite pages (page 2 and page 3) demonstrated why the UK (and Leicester) needs far-reaching improvements in public transport if we are serious about stopping our government and their friends in big business from destroying our planet. Leicester of course is a city with an expensive (in terms of fare prices) and substandard privately-owned bus network which means that many workers are reliant upon their cars to get to work. However, our Labour City Council ignore this fact and as can be seen on page 2 of the *Mercury* they are trying to punish workers (not just

education and NHS workers) for driving to work by charging them an unaffordable £550 a year – a fee that will also apply to school support workers earning a little more than £10,000 a year! Then if we look across the opposite page of the newspaper, we have an article that points out that it remains cheaper to fly to many other countries than it is to take a one-hour train journey down to London.



Here is it critical to note that the change we need to safeguard the environment requires a massively improved public transport network that is free for all to use, not the imposition of a regressive tax on workers for driving to work. And to build for this change we need to organise collectively across our trade union movement and across the whole of society to, first and foremost, make sure that the billionaire corporate polluters pay for this crisis not ordinary people. As a recent trade union report produced by the International Transport Workers' Federation put it:

*“Making public transport free at point of use would increase the number of passengers and very likely reduce congestion and CO<sup>2</sup> emissions. If supplemented by free ‘first and last mile’ public mobility services the environmental, social and economic gains could be hugely significant. When workers pay for public transport in order to get to work, this equates to a subsidy to the employer – one paid for in part by the workers themselves. Free public transport helps fight both inequality and climate change.”*

As just one small part of our ongoing attempts to build a mass campaign against the levy, trade unionists and members of the public – most of whom have been actively involved in our campaign – have written a series of informative letters and articles for social media, many of which have also been published on the letters page of the *Leicester Mercury*. This pamphlet for the first time therefore brings together all these letters and posts into one publication to allow the various different arguments that have been marshalled against Leicester’s proposed parking levy to be viewed in one place, and so more easily shared with friends and colleagues. We hope you will find this publication useful, and if you like what you read then make sure you get in contact with us and get involved in the struggle for a greener future, but a greener future without a Workplace Parking Levy.

## Carrots and sticks, a tale of two cities

For the past twenty years, all Local Authorities in the UK have had the ability to introduce Workplace Parking Levy's, but it is telling that only Nottingham has enforced such a measure. The primary reason why parking levies are not used is because they are widely understood as a regressive tax that punishes workers, including those on low pay.

Of course, if any given city could boast of reliable bus services, then the Local Authority might justify using the 'stick' of a levy when viewed alongside the 'carrot' of their already improving bus services. This logic perhaps explains why Nottingham has been the only city to introduce a Workplace Parking Levy as their bus infrastructure is vastly superior to that of most city's outside of London.

In fact, Nottingham bucked a national trend of generalized bus decline by fighting against Margaret Thatcher's privatisation of bus networks and it remains one of the few cities where the Local Authority exerts some (albeit limited) control over their buses. Hence as was reported in 2018:

*"Nottingham City Transport, the largest Local Authority-owned operator in England, has been found by Transport Focus to have the highest customer satisfaction of any bus operator in the UK...The majority owner of NCT, Nottingham City Council, receives a dividend of £2m a year from NCT.*

*"Thirty miles to the south is Leicester, about the same size as Nottingham and with about the same number of people (around 320,000). But Leicester City Council, having privatised its bus fleet in the 1990s, now pays £467,000 a year to subsidise a private operator." (Jonny Ball, "Municipal bus companies: can public ownership be profitable?," New Statesman, June 13, 2018)*

With this in mind, when in 2012, Nottingham City Council took the controversial decision to introduce a Workplace Parking Levy the public at least had a decent bus system. For example, in 2004 Nottingham City Transport (NCT) was awarded the UK Bus Operator of the Year (by the Bus Industry Awards), an award that they also obtained in 2012.

The quality of Nottingham's bus services was likewise reflected by their passenger numbers. In the decade preceding the introduction of the Workplace Parking Levy, the number of passenger bus journeys made per year in Nottingham had been increasing year on year, so that by 2011/12 just under 70 million bus journeys were being made each year. Contrast this with Leicester where over the same time period (from 2003/2004 until 2011/12) bus passenger journeys had decreased from approximately 33



million a year to 28 million journeys – a number that has since then continued to decline.

Of course, owing to the expansion of their city's tram networks (first established in 2004), bus usage has dropped off slightly since their 70 million passenger high in 2012. Nevertheless, prior to the onset of the pandemic, Nottingham's bus network still carried 62 million passengers a year in the city. (In the same year another 21 million passengers were carried on Nottingham's three tram routes.) Compare these numbers and trends to those of Leicester where pre-covid bus usage "was around 25 million passengers p.a. ...having fallen by 28% from 2008-2017." Leicester's bus infrastructure is in decline and is badly coordinated, despite having more buses on the road than Nottingham (413 versus the Nottingham's 391 buses).

The critical difference between the two cities is that in Nottingham the majority of buses are run by one company (Nottingham City Transport), while in Leicester you have multiple private sector providers competing with each other to increase their shareholder profits at the public's expense. This problem is acknowledged by Leicester City Council who note:

*"Leicester is unusual amongst the main cities in the UK in that it does not have a dominant commercial bus operator. Around 98% of the network is operated commercially by five operators. This makes partnership work more challenging, particularly in relation to setting network wide standards..."*

And as if that were not bad enough Leicester City Council admit that:

*"Although fare levels are on a par with comparable cities, they have risen by more than double the rate of inflation since 2006. Shorter journey fares have risen by three times the rate of inflation."*

It is for these reasons and many others that the introduction of a Workplace Parking Levy in Leicester makes no sense.

Bus prices are far too high (as they are across the country) and at present Leicester's bus services are clearly not reliable enough to encourage people to leave their cars at home. Leicester urgently needs an improved bus infrastructure which is precisely why the Labour City Council should pursue franchising as a means of taking limited control over our city's bus infrastructure as a step toward kicking the private-sector profiteers out of our transport network. This is how our city can make travelling by buses appear to be a viable alternative to travelling by car, all the more so if positive steps are made to incentivize bus travel for all by eliminating fares in their entirety!

## **Don't make ordinary workers pay for parking**

Leicester Socialist Alternative members fully support and fight for green initiatives to tackle the climate crisis. However, we reject attempts to make ordinary workers pay for it while the real culprits, the 100 corporations responsible for 71% of global emissions, continue to destroy the planet for profit. That's why we oppose the Workplace Parking Levy currently being consulted on by Leicester City Council. It is a brutal attack on working class people employed in the city.

With few exemptions, anyone unlucky enough to fall into the category of being employed at a workplace that has 10 or more parking spaces and who has no choice but to drive, will be hit with a massive £550 annual tax. The idea for the levy is based on the controversial policies of Nottingham City Council – the only other city to have such a levy at present. But there are many important differences between the two cities. Most significantly, Nottingham City Council has majority ownership of an award-winning bus network. The same is not true in Leicester, where private profit-seeking companies predominate.

Even Leicester City Council itself admitted in a recent report that “In many areas suitable bus services are either not available at all or are not fast, frequent and reliable enough to encourage people to use them.” This is to say nothing of the expense!

Leicester City Council also wants to impose a fee onto 5,000 NHS workers in the city, although with a 50% discount for the first three years before being made to pay the full rate. This is something Nottingham never dared to do!

The Council say the levy will raise around £10 million a year. Much of this money will be collected from factory workers and individuals involved in providing vital public services, many of whom have faced years of stagnant wages even while their bills spiral out of control. And this is not a fixed fee either – the parking levy is set to increase each year. Nottingham's Labour Council (who currently charge £428 a year) are now consulting on raising the levy by a colossal 7.1%!

The regressive Workplace Parking Levy clearly underlines the urgent need for socialist policies, such as properly funded, affordable (that is, free), and publicly owned transport services, to fight the climate crisis. We need to build a movement to take on the super-rich, to make them pay for the crisis caused by their system! The proposed Parking Levy takes us in the opposite direction to this.

Members of Leicester Socialist Alternative will be joining the lobby outside City Hall (Charles Street) on Wednesday February 23 at 4.30 to stand in solidarity with workers and their trade unions in calling for the Workplace Parking Levy to be scrapped.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on February 18, 2022 by Sofia Wiking*

***“The regressive Workplace Parking Levy clearly underlines the urgent need for socialist policies, such as properly funded, affordable (that is, free), and publicly owned transport services, to fight the climate crisis.”***

## **Serious reservations about the parking levy**

Many observations have been made about Leicester's proposed workplace parking levy (WPL). I subscribe to the well-voiced concerns re social equity, especially for the lower paid, working shifts. I am also not convinced the proposed transport improvements will actually have sufficient benefits for travellers. On the other hand, it will certainly favour the private bus companies, which will be subsidised to use the latest buses and cut their operating costs.

The concern I want to raise, however, relates to the prosperity of the city centre. Much tremendous work of recent years has transformed the physical appearance and connectivity of the centre. However, as the research of the highly regarded national think tank Centre for Cities has drawn out, perhaps the biggest weakness of the Leicester centre in macro terms is the low percentage of office accommodation and jobs.

It is about the lowest of any comparable-sized town or centre. The research points out such employees are, on average, in higher-paid jobs that are critical in supporting the economic health of many other sectors of a city centre's economy from shops to coffee bars.

Leicester competes for new relocating office jobs with comparable cities and in our case also with the Junction 21 Meridian/Fosse Park/Grove Park complex. With regard to the latter, this area will have no WPL charges, but stands to benefit from any improved public transport, as a consequence of Leicester funding improvements and the bus companies. That already has the advantage of free parking. It does not take an expert to see their competitive advantage for new jobs can only increase. I bet Everards, which relocated from the city centre 20-plus years ago and have further expansion plans, are rubbing their hands in glee.

Or would Mattioli Woods have relocated from Grove Park with a WPL in the city? In relation to comparable or competing cities, Nottingham is the obvious example. And it has had a WPL for many years. So am I being a dinosaur? I don't think so.

Nottingham does not have a competitor of the scale of an aircraft carrier of a Junction 21 etc sitting just outside its boundary and not subject to the charge. It also offered the wow factor of a tram, compared with Leicester's proposal for electric buses; and, finally, it has the benefit of integrated public transport controlled by one body.

Leicester, on the other hand, still has competing firms, which all want to serve the main routes for profit reasons, but ignore less profitable opportunities. No wonder Nottingham are helping us with our proposal.

I write as a former city centre manager and am passionate about the future of city centres in general and Leicester in particular. I feel compelled to raise my head above the parapet and express very serious reservations about the current proposals.

The purpose of the current consultation is to generate reactions, not to drive this levy through per se. I endorse that and hope my concerns can be addressed and factored into the debate.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on March 1, 2022 by Peter Wilkinson  
chairman, Friends of New Walk*

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*Many observations have been made about Leicester's proposed workplace parking levy (WPL). I subscribe to the well-voiced concerns re social equity, especially for the lower paid, working shifts. I am also not convinced the proposed transport improvements will actually have sufficient benefits for travellers. On the other hand, it will certainly favour the private bus companies, which will be subsidised to use the latest buses and cut their operating costs.”*

## Sort out buses—and give drivers a fair deal

One of the best ways to cut down on exhaust emissions in any city is to provide a viable alternative to individual transportation – i.e. decent, joined-up bus services that are free for all to use. The worst way, and the path that Leicester City Council is choosing to take, is to punish workers by forcing them to pay £550 a year for the privilege of parking at their workplaces – even while there is no alternative. If this seems wrongheaded, then prepare for this... Leicester's Labour Council are also planning on applying this charge to bus drivers who, out of obvious necessity, drive to work at the four bus depots based within our city!?

Clearly, what is needed is for the nation's public transport infrastructure to be nationalised and run democratically by workers' and users for need, not private profit. This may seem a long way off right now, but if the climate emergency is to be properly tackled, the question of ownership is key. So, we need to ask what can be done to take us in this direction. A key step is to support transport workers in waging a struggle against their employers, both to improve their own conditions but also to increase their confidence in demanding change.

As it stands in Leicester, our bus drivers remain underpaid and overworked, a trend that is replicated across most of the country. That is why last October, Sharon Graham, the general secretary of Unite the union, announced that she will be bringing together bus union reps from across the Britain and Ireland to develop a comprehensive battle plan to fight back against the constant attacks on jobs in the industry. As she put it:

*“The bus industry provides work for around 250,000 people but far too many of them are on low pay, long hours and under tremendous pressure.*

*“Our members have had enough. Some drivers aren't even getting £10 an hour but are on the road for long hours and have no decent breaks or even basic facilities.*

*“It's a disgrace. These are key workers who literally kept us moving during the Covid crisis - dozens of whom paid with their lives. Small wonder that we are now receiving reports of driver shortages in the industry as these workers vote with their feet and move onto other industries.”*

Looking at the national picture, what is becoming clear is that bus workers are increasingly fighting back. For example, just focusing on Arriva: when 2,000 Unite members across Liverpool, Manchester and the north west of England were successfully balloted for strike action last October, Arriva North West came back with an improved pay offer of 3% which the union

members accepted. 400 Unite members working for Arriva Cymru then took strike action from 14 November to 18 November 2021 which brought their bosses back to the table and forced their employers to pay them an hourly rate of £12 an hour.

Related pay disputes have been successfully resolved in other areas closer to Leicester. Earlier last month more than 400 Nottingham bus drivers employed by the council-owned Nottingham City Transport (NCT) threatened to take strike action and without having to lift a finger saw their pay rise between 8.3 per cent and 9.3 per cent, with the top rate of pay rising to £13.10 an hour. While last November more than 50 Loughborough Kinchbus drivers voted to call off a threatened strike to accept a pay offer that meant that drivers with less than six months service received an 8.5 per cent pay rise, while drivers with more than six months service received a 5.3 per cent increase.

Yet bus drivers deserve more than £13 an hour, and a base rate of £15 an hour should be considered a bare minimum for all workers, especially now that inflation is running at 7.5%. If the bus companies say they cannot afford such pay, then we need to organise to stand in solidarity with bus workers to force their greedy bosses to share their profits out with their drivers, and fight to nationalise our public transport infrastructure so it can be run properly and provide a viable alternative to individual transportation. Only such united action has the potential to take on the real polluters, the capitalist class.

*A shorter version was published in Leicester Mercury on March 3, 2022 by Michael Barker*

“*...what is needed is for the nation’s public transport infrastructure to be nationalised and run democratically by workers’ and users for need, not private profit.*”

## Workplace levy is not fair on charity staff

May I add my grave concerns regarding this proposed parking levy within the city. I am a trustee for RSPCA Leicestershire Branch, based at Woodside Animal Centre in Scudamore Road, and have been for some 30 years. As a local and independent charity, we do not receive government assistance and have had to raise funds through fund-raising endeavours within our branch area, to ensure that Woodside can consistently care for the needy animals of Leicester and Leicestershire.

Year on year the amount we have to raise to cover costs increases. Like all charities and businesses, we have endured almost two years of restrictions due to the pandemic, with all events and opportunities being put on hold, making fundraising difficult. Our dedicated team of animal care staff have worked throughout the pandemic to care for the animals.

The need for shelter and appropriate care has escalated during the lockdowns and we have continued to provide quality care and support to those animals who need us.

We are now able to welcome our visitors and volunteers back on to the site and this is reassuring. We have a small area marked as a car park for our visitors, visiting vets and volunteers by our entrance and this includes two disabled parking spaces. Our team of staff who work to cover 365 days of the year travel to Woodside and park where they can on our uneven site, ensuring the car park is left available for our visiting public.

We have been here since 1975, at the end of Scudamore Road, which is a very busy industrial area. I do wonder whether mayor Sir Peter Soulsby and his team have walked or even bussed their way along this road recently and observed the increased traffic — you would expect so as they have included this busy area in the grand plan for significant development. If our staff cannot get to work to fit in with shift rotas (and these include Christmas Day), who would look after the animals in our care?

The service of buses means a brisk and sometimes hazardous walk — oh, and there are no buses on Sundays and some holidays.

Are we to ask our supporters to raise even more funds in order to cover the cost of £550 per parking space, as well as helping us to provide for the medical, nutritional and rehabilitation needs of the animals we have at Woodside before they are rehomed? Or do we pass this extra 'tax' onto our hard-working animal care team?

Having been at this site since 1975, we've enjoyed little or no interest from the local authority for the work we do. Then suddenly we become a focus for the number of parking spaces we may or may not have. We have



officially responded to this proposal but just in case it gets overlooked, I just had to make my feelings know to a wider readership.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on March 3, 2022 by Ruth Lane  
Secretary for RSPCA Leicestershire Branch*

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*Are we to ask our supporters to raise even more funds in order to cover the cost of £550 per parking space, as well as helping us to provide for the medical, nutritional and rehabilitation needs of the animals we have at Woodside before they are rehomed? Or do we pass this extra ‘tax’ onto our hard-working animal care team?”*

## Ever hopeful Council miss out on bus travel millions

Today the *Leicester Mercury* reported that “City misses out in bid for bus travel millions” (April 5). Yet this negative outcome regarding government funding for our city’s public transport was not entirely unexpected, because as I wrote in February:

*“Government documents leaked to the press last month make it clear that “the budget for the ‘transformation’ of buses – a pot from which local regions can bid for funds – has now shrunk [from £3 bn] to just £1.4bn for the next three years.” And it is very clear that most local authorities will be unable to rely on this funding as “the amount of funding bids submitted by 53 out of 79 local transport authorities from the extra funding pot is already more than £7bn. This suggests the total is likely to exceed £9bn, against a total available of £1.4bn.” (“Michael Barker, “Demanding Better Buses: fight for free public transport,” Socialist Alternative, February 17)*

As it turned out the available money turned out to be even less, just £1.2bn.

Thus, despite Leicester City Labour Party’s high hopes that they would benefit from the Tories underwhelming handouts, the City Council’s hopes have now been well and truly dashed. But while Council leaders in other parts of the country responded to the Tories latest withholding of much-needed funding with outrage, Leicester’s Labour Council leaders decided that quietude was a more fitting response, which meant that they didn’t even bother to give an official response to the local press.

The local media were therefore left in the strange position of not even knowing how much money Leicester City Council had been hoping to receive from the government to help improve our buses.

But had the media done a little research they would have found that the answer to this question can be located in the Council’s recent “Bus Services Improvement Plan.” In this document we can see that the Council had been hoping that the government would provide them with somewhere between £41m and £51m depending on whether they the Council had managed to implement their regressive Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) scheme. As the Council’s bus plan noted: the “‘ask’ to DfT [Department for Transport] is for £31m-£38m of capital and £10m-£13m of revenue, the range dependent on whether the Council can implement WPL by 2023.” Despite being repeatedly disappointed by the government, strangely the City Council remain full of hope that the Tories will come to their aid. In stark contrast, workers in the city have no reason to hope that the Council will ever do much for them. This is because Leicester’s Labour Council

seem intent on implementing a regressive tax on 26,000 workers (4,000 of which work in the NHS) in order to fund public transport when what they should be doing is building a mass campaign to forcibly stop the Tories from attacking ordinary people.

But for the time being the City Council can count their lucky blessings that they have the local media on their side, as today's *Mercury* article, after outlining the Council's bad luck, then went on to promote the merits ("grand plans") of the Council's proposed Workplace Parking Levy. A levy that is now being opposed by the local trade union movement through the launch of the Campaign Against Leicester's Workplace Parking Levy. For details of this campaign see:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/StopLeicsWPL>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/StopLeicsWPL>

*Published on the blog Thoughts of a Leicester Socialist  
on March 5, 2022 by Michael Barker*

#### **Note**

Elsewhere, Campaign for Better Transport responded to the government's lack of funding by noting: "Today's announcement means that the majority of local authorities that submitted bids were unsuccessful and will not receive funds to deliver bus service improvement plans. Even those that have received funding will not have received all the money they requested and will therefore have to cherry-pick which improvements they can deliver. Campaign for Better Transport is warning that, with an estimated £10 billion needed by local authorities to improve bus services, the money awarded today falls woefully short." (April 4, 2022)

## Tax on workforce that is already struggling

The Workplace Parking Levy is a climate-related strategy to raise money to improve public transport and cycle lanes. The levy will raise £12 million a year. However, this levy is not equitable; these millions will be sourced from our wages as pay cuts.

The proposed annual charge is £550, and we already know such a charge is deeply unpopular: When the *Mercury* polled 3,000 readers in 2019, 72% of them opposed the levy.

The current economic situation is undeniably concerning; energy bills and inflation are skyrocketing, but wages are not rising to meet our needs. Many of us have not seen a pay rise for over a decade. It is regressive and unfair that the funding for a greener Leicester is coming from our pockets.

People who work irregular or early hours, such as cleaners, have little option but to drive into work. Having to face this £550 charge is a massive set back that many cannot afford.

Many workers have to resort to using cars because buses are unreliable. It is dangerous for people to be stuck waiting for a late bus in the middle of the night. I used to work in a bar in the centre and understand the stress and worry of getting home safely after dark. Nowadays, I rely on buses twice a day and it is a frustrating, expensive situation (sometimes buses are an hour late or more!). If our buses were cheaper, safer and more reliable, then more of us would use them.

There is a massive need to expand and improve public transport in our city. Who would disagree with the fact that public transport should be safer, reliable and more affordable?

Making matters worse, the council apparently plan to reduce the number of buses on the road from 413 to 400 by 2030. They say that the total capacity will be slightly better, but this is not enough.

The existential threat of the climate emergency calls for real change. This levy is unpopular and harms people's livelihoods. It has the potential to alienate people from climate related schemes.

Effective, safe and affordable public transport must exist as a viable alternative if a council is to insist on going down the root of taxing people to park and drive to and from work.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on March 5, 2022 by Daisy Bradford*

## Dispelling middle-class myths about car ownership

Leicester is a poor city where Tory austerity has wreaked havoc with ordinary people's lives. In 2019, the average gross disposable household income (per head) for our city was £13,802 compared to the UK average of £21,433 – so more than a third lower than the national average! The only area in the country with a lower income than this is Nottingham (£13,381). These extremely high rates of poverty underline why Leicester City Council's proposed Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) must be opposed. The WPL will thief a further £550 a year from tens of thousands of people who drive to work and are already struggling to live.

While it is true that many Leicester households cannot afford to run a car, and only 63% of city households own a car or van (the national average is 74%), thousands of our city's working poor remain dependent on their cars to live. Many people cannot afford to be without a car, especially considering the dismal state of available public transport. It is a middle-class myth that only the well-off own cars!

Government statistics show that of the very poorest 10% of UK households (those with an average gross disposable household income of £13,748), 35% of households own a car. It is these working poor who will be hit the hardest by taxing driving to work. Car ownership, as readers might guess, increases with income. However, 54% (a majority) of the next poorest 10% of the UK households also own cars out of necessity. Are these people really to be treated as the 'better off'?

I would love to live in a city where bus travel was frequent and cheap, but that city does not currently exist. Leicester would benefit by having less cars on the road, but it is wrong to tax people forced to drive to work (many of whom are underpaid 'key workers') for the so-called luxury of being able to access their exploitative workplaces.

The climate emergency must be addressed, but not, as some say, 'by any means necessary'. It would be nice if there was an easier way, but proposals like the WPL risk turning workers against green policies, pushing them into the hands of far-right climate denialists.

We need to build a movement to fight to take the wealth off the super-rich. There is enough money in society to pay for radical green initiatives. The WPL is a divisive distraction. We need to focus attention on making the billionaires pay for the climate crisis!

*A shorter version was published in Leicester Mercury on March 15, 2022 by Andrew Walton*

## Message to bus firm about service closure

An open letter to Centrebus management:

No doubt Centrebus thought long and hard before withdrawing your No 19 Nottingham to Melton Mowbray bus service “due to low passenger usage” (*“Axing bus route is ‘disgrace and another cut that’s isolating our town’,” Mercury, March 17*).

No doubt you have forgotten what “service” means: the action of helping or working for someone, helping the community.

No doubt you have dismissed the importance of this service to the community in terms of education, culture, recreation, shopping and sport.

No doubt you have not approached Leics CCC or Notts CCC and made a case for (more) government funding.

No doubt you hope that affected passengers are resigned to the loss of this service and will not bother to express their protest and disgust.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on March 18, 2022 by Frazer Speirs*

## Levy is a regressive tax on lower paid workers

In the UK, only the Labour Council in Nottingham currently enforce a Workplace Parking Levy, which stands as a regressive form of taxation enabling the Council to charge workers to drive to work. Few ordinary people however agree that the use of such a so-called green levy -- no matter what the money raised is used for -- represents an equitable way to fund environmental actions like improving public transport. As it turns out the same is even true for many Labour Party politicians from further afield.

For example, the Scottish Labour Party remain vocal campaigners against the use of such anti-worker parking levies; while, more recently, Sheffield’s Labour-dominated City Council opposed the Green Party’s attempt to introduce a similarly regressive Workplace Parking Levy. Of course, in their attempts to legitimise such regressive schemes, the Green Party likes to portray parking levies as a tax on employers rather than a tax on the workers who ultimately pay for the charges out of their wages.

This unfortunate argument was made by Sheffield Green Party Councillor Douglas Johnson, who in moving an amendment to promote a Workplace Parking Levy (on March 2), explained:

*“Just to avoid any doubt, that’s not a charge on drivers, and it is not a charge on small businesses. What we are talking about is a charge solely*

*on those bigger businesses, you know when you go by those big insurance companies with the big car parks outside”.*

What he forgot to mention was that the charge would apply equally to support workers based in schools as it would to the lowest paid Council workers. Yet to give the Sheffield Green’s some credit, at least they were not planning to force thousands of NHS workers to pay the levy, which is something that Leicester City Council currently has ambitions to do, as our Council aim to collect payment from more than 4,000 NHS workers!

Here it is worth repeating again (and again) that the only existing Workplace Parking Levy in this country, in Nottingham, remains the opposite of equitable in its consequences for the working-class.

Thus, even as the wages of low-paid workers fails to increase at the rate of inflation (RPI), Nottingham’s Labour Council still believe it is appropriate that the rates charged for parking at work should increase in line with inflation. Hence, Nottingham’s Labour Council have just announced that their cities Workplace Parking Levy will be increased by a massive 7.1% - a move that trade unions have described as an “opportunistic money-grab”. (*Nottingham Post*, March 11)

Back in Leicester the second consultation on introducing a Workplace Parking Levy in our city ended on Sunday (March 13), and now the local trade union movement, coordinated by the Leicester and District Trades Union Council, are in the process of launching a public campaign to force our City Council to drop their plans for implementing their regressive tax on

*Published in Leicester Mercury on March 25, 2022 by Michael Barker*

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*...the Scottish Labour Party remain vocal campaigners against the use of such anti-worker parking levies; while, more recently, Sheffield’s Labour-dominated City Council opposed the Green Party’s attempt to introduce a similarly regressive Workplace Parking Levy.”*

## Public transport is not up to replacing the car

Recently there have been lots of letters about charges for companies whose people need to travel into Leicester by car. I feel that we lack a good transport system within the city and country, with people needing a car to get to work at sometimes unsocial hours. Putting charges for travelling into Leicester will only encourage people not to come into the city.

If only we had a reliable bus service, which we do not, I see only a few passengers using the park and ride services with new electric buses. Also, in the evening, you are lucky to have bus services, one such case being the First bus 21 to Blount Road finishing at 7pm. To get into the city at night, the car is the only way.

Today, new housing and warehousing caters for the car, with some households having two cars as it is more convenient to get to the out-of-town supermarkets and shops. This deprives the city shops and market of business. Also, there are no additional bus services to new developments. I have travelled on the Centrebus 154 from Leicester to Loughborough and at Anstey there is new housing, but no bus stops and no additional people using it. The same applies to Magna Park, with empty buses and car parks full of cars. All new warehousing is built for the car as at unsocial hours there are no buses.

The sad thing is seeing money being spent in the city on roads, not public transport. Also the cost of diesel rising has meant that fares for travel have risen.

I also travelled on the threatened Centrebus 19 from Melton to Nottingham last week. Going to Nottingham there were 10 people but on the way back there was only myself and one other person. I find that most people using it were older people, as is the case on other bus services and they have no car. The driver mentioned that there was low patronage and the cost of running the service meant that they made no money from it. It is sad as lots of people rely on public transport as they do not own a car.

There is more money to be made from car owners than running buses. There are lots of fare differences between Centrebus and First Leicester and why cannot we have area tickets you can use on all bus companies within the city? I see it abroad with city tickets that you can use all forms of travel with train, bus and tram.

Birmingham has a good day ticket for travel called a Daytripper and you can use the tram, bus and train within a certain area for £6.90 after 9.30am and all day at the weekend. Sadly, Leicester does not have trams and no area to use the train. In Birmingham you can park free at some



stations. One such is Tame Bridge Parkway just off the M6.

I wish we had low fares for travel and a better transport system as it would make people use our public transport and get people out of cars. I own a car and need to use it for travel, especially on Sundays to get anywhere, but I also use the bus and train.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on March 31, 2022 by D.A. Cookson*

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*I feel that we lack a good transport system within the city and country, with people needing a car to get to work at sometimes unsocial hours. Putting charges for travelling into Leicester will only encourage people not to come into the city.”*

## Tax the super-rich, not parking at workplaces

The cost-of-living crisis is already killing the poor and vulnerable, of which Leicester sadly has more than its fair share. So, it is a further kick in the teeth that the government is repaying the hundreds of thousands of staff who run our hospitals by reintroducing car parking charges once again.

This is a recipe for disaster, particularly if we are concerned about keeping the dedicated NHS staff that have helped us (and continue to help us) throughout this pandemic. As a recent staff survey published by the Royal College of Nurses has shown: “Only 21% of registered nurses and midwives said there were enough staff for them to do their jobs properly. This is down from 33% on the previous year.”

Like in too many other workplaces, the staff survey has revealed that government underfunding and short staffing means that “67% of registered nurses and midwives are working unpaid hours to provide patients with the care they need.”

Instead of giving NHS workers a pay rise, the government do the opposite by handing them a whopping £90 million car parking bill. As the GMB union stated: “It’s almost like the Health Secretary has a personal vendetta against NHS staff.” Moreover, it is significant, as GMB have pointed out, that out of all the regions in the country, the workers in the Midlands will be paying the most in such parking fees – a massive £18 million a year!

“Those already on the brink of leaving the NHS,” stated Unison in another related press release, “may well see this as the final straw and head for the exit, just as the service needs experienced staff the most.” In Leicester pre-pandemic parking charges for NHS staff were already unbearable. Even the lowest paid workers, those earning under £10,000 a year, were paying around £100 a year to park at work; while hospital staff earning £11,000 a year were paying just short of £200 a year.

The renewed attempts by the government and our nations hospitals to recoup such money from their own workers was a disgrace before the pandemic, and it is even worse now.

But as if things couldn’t get any worse, Leicester’s Labour City Council are presently attempting to introduce a regressive Workplace Parking Levy which will see over 4,000 NHS workers in the city charged an additional £275 a year to drive to work for the next three years – a figure that the Council say will rise to some £600 a year thereafter.

This is why trade unionists and community campaigners are campaigning against the introduction of all workplace parking charges.

Instead of taxing workers for earning a living we need politicians who will stand fully on the side of the working-class, whether they be NHS workers or otherwise. We need the type of socialist politicians who will tax the idling scroungers among the tax-avoiding superrich. There is plenty of money in the corporate money-tree to pay for the type of first-class public services that our country demands it is just that the super-rich don't want to pay their way.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on April 4, 2022 by Michael Barker  
on behalf of the Campaign Against Leicester's WPL*

“*Leicester's Labour City Council are presently attempting to introduce a regressive Workplace Parking Levy which will see over 4,000 NHS workers in the city charged an additional £275 a year to drive to work for the next three years – a figure that the Council say will rise to some £600 a year thereafter.*”

## Why I'm not on board with public transport

With ever-increasing air pollution levels, most of us are only too aware we are in the middle of a climate emergency, much of which has been attributed to our reliance on cars. To mitigate against this we are encouraged to use public transport, which on the face of it seems fair enough but in reality I don't think enough has been done to encourage us to do this.

I used to travel by bus for my daily commute, but have it up about 20 years ago when the bus company did away with annual and six-monthly tickets and introduced monthly passes, which were more expensive and less convenient to obtain.

I recently had to use the bus and discovered there are many more reasons now as to why I would not want to use public transport. Firstly, there are fewer bus shelters and if there is one, the latest open designed shelters offer little protection from the cold and wind in the winter.

I also found that neither of the two bus shelters near me, one in Aberdford Road and the other one in Welford Road, had any timetables displayed, so trying to find out which bus went to the infirmary was a nightmare, even with the help of an iPhone, which resulted in me catching a bus which went into town instead of to the hospital. Waiting over 30 minutes for the bus on my return journey didn't help either,

What I also notice about the cost of public transport these days is the price of a ticket is the same on most routes, regardless of if you catch the bus a mile from your destination or four miles from your destination. Whatever happened to fare stages, which encouraged you to walk?

Those of us that are a little older in the tooth will remember that buses used to be a lot cheaper and ran more frequently until the mid-1980s, when the then Thatcher government introduced the Transport Act 1985, which effectively privatised public transport. Shortly afterwards bus companies were falling over themselves vying for customers and we were spoilt for choice with the introduction of such modes of transport as the Fox Cubs (minibuses), which were very frequent and offered relatively cheap fares. Unfortunately, these benefits were short-lived as the introduction of competition within the various bus companies led to less profitable routes being axed and the companies pricing each other out on the remaining routes and things seem to have gone downhill ever since.

When Leicester City Council introduced on-street parking charges a while back, we were told the money raised would be used to invest in public transport, yet, other than the introduction of bus lanes in various

locations, the benefits of which are debatable, there appears to have been little improvement in public transport. In fact, the opposite seems to be true, with fewer services and expensive fares which are on a par with taxis.

We're now being told the same thing about the workplace parking levy, which is under consideration, which to me is simply an attempt by the council to find an alternative source of revenue and little to do with improving public transport.

We know that Nottingham has introduced a workplace parking levy, which has been a success because of their system of trams, but as there is no likelihood of that happening in Leicester I believe the only way to provide a cheaper and reliable form of public transport here would be to take back public ownership of the buses.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on April 18, 2022 by Mahesh Patel*

## **Parking levy nothing but council cash cow**

It beggars belief that a Labour city council is pursuing plans to implement a workplace parking levy – which, we have to be clear, is just another tax on the working class. They're clearly so disconnected with reality that they're unaware that many have work patterns that determine they have no option but to drive to work.

At a time when there has a huge cost of living crisis for the working classes this Labour city council is preparing to heap even more misery and penalise people who are already suffering – the very people that a Labour council should be defending. It's disgraceful.

It's clearly not any scheme for environmental improvement because if it was, Leicester City Council would be bringing buses back under local authority control, reinstating a conductor to bring bus travel back to 1960s or 70s speeds and providing buses that run to places and at times real people need them.

This then is nothing but a cash cow for the city council and I'd have more respect for it if it had the decency and honesty to say so.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on April 23, 2022 by Nigel Holden*

## Politicians don't speak out on parking levy

When the City Council ended their second consultation on their plans to tax 26,000 car drivers £550 a year to park at work (on March 13) they knew their plans were deeply unpopular with the public. And while they are still reflecting on how they might best ignore the mass opposition to their proposed Workplace Parking Levy, they continue to use every opportunity to promote their regressive tax.

For example, on April 21 the Council and bus companies launched their so-called Leicester Buses Partnership to make bus travel “good value” whatever that means. Other buzzwords thrown about included “frequent” and “reliable”... but what is clear is that in a city that already had a bus fleet of 413 buses the grand size of the new bus fleet in eight years' time will be just 400. With no hint of embarrassment, the information showing this reduction is even prominently featured on the Partnership's new web site: [www.leicesterbuses.co.uk/better-buses](http://www.leicesterbuses.co.uk/better-buses)

Leicester deputy city mayor for transport and the environment, Cllr Adam Clarke used the recent launch event to say that the new toothless partnership with exploitative private sector profiteers “strengthens the case to generate locally the funding needed to sustain these improvements, which is why we are looking at schemes such as the Workplace Parking Levy.”

On the other hand, most workers -- including 4,000 NHS workers -- who are being punished in the Council's salary-sacrifice scheme are not as excited as Cllr Clarke and Sir Peter Soulsby of the prospect of paying private companies for the privilege of seeing our city's bus fleet reduced in size. The same is true with the cities' trade union movement who form the backbone for the growing campaign to oppose the levy and to raise genuine socialist demands for addressing the growing capitalist-driven climate catastrophe that is engulfing our planet at our expense.

To date only one local MP has come out publicly and visibly in support of the trade union led opposition to Labour's levy. And tragically, although some Labour councillors' have made criticisms of the tax within internal Labour meetings and within emails to their constituents, so far, they have refused to show their disgust with the levy by helping organise the public resistance to this attack upon the working poor. A first step in this regard might involve them publicising and attending our next public meeting taking place on Saturday May 14 at 2pm at Secular Hall to which everyone is welcome.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on May 6, 2022 by Michael Barker  
on behalf of the Campaign Against Leicester's WPL*

## **Levy will not deliver transformative solution**

Councillor Adam Clarke, Leicester's Assistant City Mayor for Environment and Transport, has referred to his proposed Workplace Parking Levy scheme as an "ambitious" scheme that can "match the huge environmental, health and economic challenges of our times." And while it is true that Leicester, like other cities, must adopt a bold and ambitious strategy to tackle the climate emergency, such an approach must be fair and equitable, which the WPL is not.

Instead of using the WPL to "nudge" car commuters to stop using their cars (by charging them a huge amount of money, £550 a year) the City Council should be doing everything in their power to bring together everyone in our city to promote the type of system-changing socialist solutions that will be necessary to match the huge environmental, health and economic challenges of our times.

Here it is important to remember that the City Council openly admit that their proposals will only have a limited impact on car use. Thus, Cllr Clarke has said that "we have been able to show" that the Council's "planned first 10-year investment programme, could reduce traffic to similar levels to when schools are on holiday (pre-Covid)." As the Council note in their WPL Business Case report, they hope that after 10-years their scheme would lead to "a 2% reduction in vehicle traffic".

Furthermore, the Council hopes – if all goes to plan -- that the total increase in the number of city bus passengers will be 9% higher by 2029/30 than it was in 2018/19 – which represents a hoped-for growth of 2,500 passengers (from 26,500 to 29,000). But this growth will hardly be averting the climate emergency as between those same years (2019 and 2030) Leicester's population is predicted to have increased by 18,000 people.

In contrast to pushing forward their WPL non-solution, our city's politicians must set their ambitions far higher if they are serious about delivering transformative change. That is why the City Council should ditch their proposed WPL and work with ordinary people and the local trade union movement to develop the type of initiatives that can deliver a huge improvement in public transport.

Our campaign does not pretend that we have all the solutions to dealing with the climate emergency caused by the relentless profiteering of the billionaire-class, but we understand that imposing another regressive tax on workers is a definite non-starter. That is why we think that a good place to look for green solutions lies within the trade union movement itself,

and most particularly within the excellent pamphlet “Climate Jobs: Building a Workforce for the Climate Emergency” (2021) which can be read online here [www.cacctu.org.uk](http://www.cacctu.org.uk)

*Published in Leicester Mercury on May 13, 2022 by Michael Barker  
on behalf of the Campaign Against Leicester’s WPL*

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*The City Council hopes — if all goes to plan — that the total increase in the number of city bus passengers will be 9% higher by 2029/30 than it was in 2018/19 — which represents a hoped-for growth of 2,500 passengers (from 26,500 to 29,000). But this growth will hardly be averting the climate emergency as between those same years (2019 and 2030) Leicester’s population is predicted to have increased by 18,000 people.”*



## Parking levy green claims are flawed

I have long held the belief that pollution in all its forms will adversely affect life on this planet and I accept that vehicle pollution is a major contributor. The argument that the Green Party puts forward about the workplace parking levy, however, is flawed.

It seeks to penalise a sector of the working community and those that rely on their services without having any effect on the wider problem. It is simply a revenue-raising exerciser. I doubt if there are many inner-city employees who travel to work by car who take any pleasure in driving but do so out of necessity.

Nor I suspect are they all top earners. They are more likely to be teachers, hospital workers, shop assistants and clerical workers, many working unsocial hours.

Taxing these workers, for that is what the levy is, will drive businesses and individuals out of the city centre over time.

I cannot see a job advert saying come and work in the city but we want to increase your tax burden being successful.

No one particularly likes paying tax but the way to reduce pollution is to have a universal proportionate tax not a tax targeting a small section of the working population.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on May 21, 2022 by Brian Alcock*

**“** *...the way to reduce pollution is to have a universal proportionate tax not a tax targeting a small section of the working population.*

## **Council should be driven to improve lives**

Few people would disagree with the RMT union that bus services provide “a sustainable and low-carbon transport” that can play “a vital role to play in our fight against climate change.” Yet although our government is happy to throw millions of pounds at private bus companies to help them electrify their profitable networks, the same government refuses to take the necessary actions that would help make buses an attractive and affordable form of transport for ordinary people.

In stark contrast to the government’s anti-worker nonsense, the RMT make clear: the union’s “position remains that municipal ownership, supported by ring-fenced national funding, rather than Enhanced Partnerships or franchising, which both rely on private operators to run services, is the most cost effective and efficient way for local authorities to deliver the improvement to local bus services set out in the [government’s National Bus] Strategy.” This however remains a position that is blocked at every turn by our government!

So, for the time being we will have to make do with endless government subsidies for the owners of failing bus networks. For example, in Leicester our city’s bus companies are obtaining a £19million aid package from the government towards a £47million programme that will see the introduction of almost 100 new electric buses. To take just one other example, Coventry is obtaining £50million from the government which “will be supported by a further £78m of investment from local bus operators into [297] new electric buses, depot charging facilities and associated power upgrades.”

With these two examples however there remain two important differences. Firstly, Leicester City Council also aims to force ordinary workers who drive to work to hand over a sizable sum of money to try to pay for the electrification of the rest of the city’s buses through their regressive Workplace Parking Levy.

The second difference is that Leicester’s Labour Council seem less concerned about workers’ rights than even Coventry’s Labour Council – a disgraced Council, which is currently engaged in a disgusting war of attrition against striking HGV drivers. I make this point because Leicester seems content on purchasing their electric buses from the powerful Chinese bus manufacturer, Yutong – a repressive state-backed company that fails to respect their workers’ basic democratic rights to organise in any trade union.

Although it remains the case that China continues to dominate global electric bus markets, at least Coventry's new buses are being manufactured at a Scottish ADL factory where workers are organised within a trade union, Unite in this case. Here it is important to note that the critical point is not that Leicester Council should be trying to "buy British" – as in any case ADL are owned by a foreign multinational -- but the point is that if there is an opportunity to support an employer that recognises a trade union, and one that does not, then a Labour Council should opt for the former. This argument has even more merit when the foreign government in question, the one that enabled Yutong to grow so powerful, is completely devoid of any semblance of democracy!

*Published in Leicester Mercury on May 26, 2022 by David Holloway  
on behalf of the Campaign Against Leicester's WPL*

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*Leicester seems content on purchasing their electric buses from the powerful Chinese bus manufacturer, Yutong – a repressive state-backed company that fails to respect their workers' basic democratic rights to organise in any trade union.”*

## Workplace parking levy is just tax on a minority

S. Williams has concerns that opposing the workplace parking levy are “using low paid workers as justification” (“*Workplace parking levy will benefit lower-paid,*” Mailbox, May 31). He or she states that it “gives opportunities to level up”. How is that going in Nottingham after 10 years,? No deprivation, no poverty and no foodbanks, or just thousands of working families worse off?

Bus services are expensive, and on the Leicester bus partnership — under the banner of better value — it states that they going to make it more expensive for the car by increasing the cost of council car parks and introduce a parking levy. It’s not making the buses cheaper. So, make more people poorer.

You state “the workplace parking levy gives a more predictable income” to the council — yes, it will as it is plainly obvious those people who travel in from the county to work in the administrative area, not just the city centre, often have no alternative but to use the car, as even with a £550 extra charge it will still be cheaper and more time efficient than using the bus.

It is grossly unfair to penalise people for trying to provide for their families. Also, with the levy only applying to companies with 10 or more parking spaces, it is totally illogical for a person in an efficient car or even electric car to pay a charge because they happen to work at a large company and a person with an inefficient car not pay because the work for a small company.

The council is just trying to find an easy way to raise revenue by picking on a small minority of the population and hiding behind a green agenda that does not stack up.

If the population of Leicester and Leicestershire think it’s a good idea to raise £10 million a year for public transport (private bus companies) then ask them — there are about a million in the city and county so it will be about £10 each, not £550 for the 26,000 and nothing for the rest.

Traffic is not the only cause of air pollution in deprived areas, there are 29 million gas boilers in the UK and gas boilers are responsible for 20 per cent of nitrous oxide emissions. The amount of emissions from cars is falling by 5 per cent per year, but there was a spike of 12 per cent last year as more people work from home ([www.igem.org.uk](http://www.igem.org.uk)).

You say the unions should be helping the employer implement this scheme, but that is not what the unions are for. They should be trying to help workers, not help implement unjust and unfair taxes on them.

To benefit the most disadvantaged we need to improve our housing stock, scrap zero hours contracts and pay a fair day's wage for a fair day's pay.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on June 9, 2022 by T. Horn*

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*You say the unions should be helping the employer implement this scheme, but that is not what the unions are for. They should be trying to help workers, not help implement unjust and unfair taxes on them.”*

## **Grave drawbacks with workplace levy plans**

T Horn articulated very well some grave drawbacks in the putative workplace parking levy (*“Workplace parking levy is just tax on a minority,”* Mailbox, June 9).

I would add that there is a clear iniquity in levying charges from vehicle users travelling to their places of work, in order to raise funds to combat air pollution, while multi-story car parks such as John Lewis, NCP etc continue to attract thousands of vehicles into the city at all hours of the day, every day, for profit.

I wonder if they will also be expected to contribute towards combatting the pollution that they are facilitating?

*Published in Leicester Mercury on June 11, 2022 by John Young*

## Let's be driving forces in showing opposition

Three months ago, Leicester City Council ended their 12-week public consultation on their illogical plans to charge tens of thousands of workers hundreds of pounds a year for the crime of driving to work, more than 4,000 of whom are employed in the NHS and already pay hefty parking charges (up to £13.30 a day).

So now is a good time to reflect upon the results of Nottingham's own 12-week Workplace Parking Levy consultation process which took place in mid-2007 – a consultation that led to the implementation of England's first ever WPL scheme. A scheme, which unlike Leicester's, took the decision to exclude all NHS workers from any additional parking charges.

The most important thing to note in relation to Nottingham's consultation was that it led to the introduction of a WPL scheme despite encountering majority opposition from both the public and from the business community. Opposition, not support!

Of the 2,485 consultation representations that were filed with Nottingham City Council, 50% were from residents outside of the city, 39% from people living within the city, and the rest came from organisations and businesses. The majority (55%) of those residents outside the city (many of whom must drive into the city to get to work) opposed the introduction of a WPL. The opposite was true of people with direct access to Nottingham's award-winning bus services, with 68% of Nottingham residents who filed a formal response with the consultation process actually supporting a levy.

However, critically, it needs to be emphasized that the majority of all representations to the Council (54.8% of the 2,485 representations) objected to the proposed WPL. In addition, it is noteworthy that the business community voiced the strongest opposition, and of the 101 businesses that participated in the consultation 83 opposed the scheme, 4 supported it, and the rest were unclear of their views.

Furthermore, it was significant that in Nottingham, a "WPL public examination was also held by the Council to encourage and enhance public and business participation in the consultation exercise and to allow for debate and independent scrutiny of the proposals." Some of the findings of this examination are worth quoting here.

This extra examination thus observed how: "Many respondents feel that the [WPL] scheme is fundamentally unfair because it would not discriminate between those on moderate or high incomes who choose to travel by car in the peak, regardless of other options which might be open to them, and those who have less income, and/or travel outside the peak,

and/or less choice, and/or caring responsibilities.”

Adding to this serious criticism of Nottingham’s proposed levy, the public examination determined that other respondents felt “that they would face genuine difficulties if they tried” to use public transport to get to work. “These include: those, especially women, who would have to walk through areas known to be high risk for crime, especially after dark; those, like teachers, who have to carry heavy materials to and from work; and those who have to use their car for visiting clients during the day.”

Remember also that at the time of Nottingham’s consultation the city could boast of having one of the best (and cheapest) bus networks in the country. Yet the public examination still found that “Many businesses stated that the current options were either inadequate or do not deliver a viable alternative to the car for their employees in comparison to using their cars; it was suggested that this is especially the case where employees live outside of Nottingham.”

The takeaway lesson for us in Leicester from this earlier consultation is that Nottingham City Council still managed to ignore the widespread opposition that existed to their proposed parking levy. So, that means if we are to succeed in stopping the planned levy for Leicester we will have to get organised within our communities and trade unions and ultimately be prepared to take to the streets in our thousands if our City Council try to sweep aside our opposition to their regressive tax.

*Published in Leicester Mercury on June 13, 2022 by Michael Barker  
on behalf of the Campaign Against Leicester’s WPL*

“ *If we are to succeed in stopping the planned levy for Leicester we will have to get organised within our communities and trade unions and ultimately be prepared to take to the streets in our thousands if our City Council try to sweep aside our opposition to their regressive tax.* ”

## Scots to make council rethink on city levy?

Most ordinary people seem opposed to our Labour City Council's workplace parking levy. The same is true in other parts of the world. In Scotland for instance even the Labour Party oppose the use of such levies.

In March 2019 Scotland's Labour Party transport spokesman Colin Smyth condemned the idea of introducing a workplace parking levy. He said "*what won't protect our environment is an ill-thought out, half-baked, short-sighted car parking tax that will hit low paid workers.*" He then concluded that then ongoing attempts to introduce such a tax in Scotland "*has ignited a backlash that will undermine public support for proper environmental action for decades to come.*"

Later that year, the Labour's soon to be shadow cabinet secretary for transport Neil Bibby said in the Scottish Parliament that a workplace parking levy "*is a regressive tax on workers that will hit the lowest paid hardest. It is not consequence free, it is not a solution to climate change and, far from incentivising modal shift, it penalises those for whom modal shift is not an option.*"

Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard made the same point: "*Many people across Scotland simply cannot rely on our crumbling transport system because it is more interested in profits than passengers. The solution to this problem is not to slap a new tax on getting to work, it is to transform our transport system.*"

Earlier this year, councillor Norman Hampshire, Labour leader of East Lothian Council explained that a parking levy would "*only serve to hit local commuters in the pocket at a time when they're already facing a growing cost of living crisis. There are many low paid working people who work unsocial hours like the hospitality industry that means there are limited public transport options available to get them to and from their work.*"

While earlier this month it was reported that Edinburgh's transport and environment convener, Labour councillor Scott Arthur, pressed home how ineffective and regressive levy's were. He observed: "*We've seen in Nottingham, where they introduced the workplace parking levy that it did not actually reduce congestion. And in fact traffic continues to increase in Nottingham. And that's because when you price some people out of using their car, it just frees up road space for people who can afford it. And that's a problem we have to solve.*"

Whatever will Leicester's Labour council make of all of this?

*Published in Leicester Mercury on June 13, 2022 by Franklin O'Riordan*



## Levy not an equitable or meaningful solution

Dear Peter Soulsby,

I am writing on behalf of the Community branch of Unite the Union. At our meeting on May 31st we unanimously voted to oppose the workplace parking levy. Our reasons were as follows.

Introducing charges for parking on workplace premises will effectively work as a tax on employment and or working. While it is optional whether employers pass the charge on to their employees the effect is still negative with regards to both employment in the city and the disposable income families have available in the city.

If it is passed on to employees it will be a tax on their jobs. It will also take a considerable amount out of the local economy in terms of employee spending. Given that family spending is generally heavily weighted towards purchasing of food and essentials, especially amongst the lower paid, it will result in a cut in the over-all economy in what is already a poor city. We would say that is not a positive step.

While private sector employers may choose to absorb the cost of the levy, they may equally choose not to. In any case in practice that is not feasible in the public sector. Hospitals, schools and other large employers do not have profits they can dip in to. Nor do they have costs they can reduce. In fact their budgets are already at breaking point. This means that either they will have to reduce spending on their core functions, inevitably leading to redundancies, job losses and poorer provision or pass the cost of the car parking levy on to staff, disadvantaging employees in the city when compared to those in the county. Again, we cannot see that as in any way being a positive step for the city.

The absence of an affordable, frequently running and comprehensive bus service to all parts of the city compounds the problems. While there are lots of services into the city centre there are relatively few cross city routes. This means that for many people switching from a car to a bus means taking two journeys, increasing the travel time to and from work. Unite as a union has long opposed the idea of such workplace charges as the projected parking levy. We opposed such a levy throughout Scotland's local authorities several years ago. As a union locally, the local branches and the Area and Regional Forums have indicated they are opposed to Leicester's plans.

We, therefore, urge you to withdraw all plans for any workplace parking levy and to seek alternative options for responding to climate change.

Taxing those who work for large employers in the city who travel by car is neither an equitable nor a meaningful solution.

Yours truly, Peter Flack, Chair Unite Community Branch, Leicester and Leicestershire

*Published in Leicester Mercury on June 14, 2022 by Peter Flack on behalf of Unite Community Branch, Leicester and Leicestershire*

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*Unite as a union has long opposed the idea of such workplace charges as the projected parking levy. We opposed such a levy throughout Scotland's local authorities several years ago. As a union locally, the local branches and the Area and Regional Forums have indicated they are opposed to Leicester's plans.”*

## City council want to impose £550 tax on workers

A £550 annual tax that Leicester City Council want to impose and euphemistically call a Workplace Parking Levy is said to play a vital role in bringing forward a comprehensive programme of transport improvements.

It is unlikely that many would oppose the principle of transport improvements so far as they relate to public transportation. However, these need to be significant and a great deal more than a few extra severely underused bus lanes - even Park and Ride services frequently don't use them. We need an affordable bus network of services that run to places and at times that relate to the many different shift patterns that exist in today's society.

Having a bus station next to the train station like many other cities could bring major benefits or a coach station with comfortable indoor waiting room open throughout the night for overnight coach services instead of expecting coach passengers to brave the elements while waiting for their coach.

If many support the principle of public transport improvements, it is just as likely that a roughly equal number would be wise enough to know that most of the requirements to create an ideal public transport system in Leicester are unachievable because we have a bus network that is not under public control.

An ideal for public transport should be to use the NHS model — free at the point of use. Truly affordable to everyone, not just the few! It would increase passenger usage and have a corresponding reduction in congestion and CO<sup>2</sup> emissions.

When workers pay for public transport it equates to a subsidy to the employer and one paid by the workers themselves.

Such a system is achievable with political will. Sadly, this City Council is more obsessed with a vanity project such as revolving the train station or following the Tory government by heaping even more tax (workplace parking levy) on those currently suffering most misery with the cost of living.

*Published in Leicester Mercury by Nigel Holden, RMT member*

## Get involved!

Around 26,000 workers in Leicester and Leicestershire will be directly effected by the City Council's proposed Workplace Parking Levy which the Council might try to implement as early as Spring 2023.

What is clear is that the only way that the levy will be stopped is if thousands of workers (which includes all those reading this pamphlet) get involved in the type of mass collective action that can force the Council to back away from their regressive plans.

Whatever you can do to help, no matter how large or small, will therefore play a decisive role in enabling you and those around you to contribute towards stopping this levy. Whether you distribute campaign leaflets, discuss the issue with your co-workers, or arrange union meetings to discuss suitable responses to the ongoing climate emergency, it will all help us win this campaign and help build for other working-class victories going forward.

If you want to find out more then read our online material and text "GET INVOLVED" to 07473 600 415.

Web site: [StopLeicesterWPL.com](http://StopLeicesterWPL.com)

Email: [Contact@StopLeicesterWPL.com](mailto:Contact@StopLeicesterWPL.com)

Twitter: [StopLeicsWPL](https://twitter.com/StopLeicsWPL)

Facebook: [StopLeicsWPL](https://www.facebook.com/StopLeicsWPL)

With life getting harder by the day, trade unionists are angry that Leicester City Council plan to make workers face another pay cut or employee tax through their proposed Workplace Parking Levy.

The introduction of such a levy would mean that ordinary workers, in both the private and public sector, will be forced to foot a £550 annual bill for the crime of being reliant upon their cars to get to work!

The Leicester and Districts Trade Union Council, which brings together workers' representatives from across the region are clear that that the parking levy is really just a regressive tax on workers, a tax that will only serve to undermine efforts to promote inclusive environmental action. The trade union movement have thus pledged to oppose this new tax on workers and actively support the type of socialist environmental initiatives that can unite ordinary people.

GET INVOLVED... trade unions from across the city and county representing workers in food factories or engineering firms, and employees in the NHS and schools, are now building a public campaign to stop the implementation of the Council's proposed levy. Trade unionists believe that taxing workers for driving to work is the wrong way to go about funding the improvements that our city's public transportation system urgently needs.

**CAMPAIGN AGAINST  
LEICESTER'S WORKPLACE PARKING LEVY**