



General Certificate of Education
Advanced Level Examination
June 2013

Critical Thinking

CRIT4

Unit 4 Reasoning and Decision Making

Unseen Source Material

The material consists of one source (**Document L**) for use with **Questions 5 to 8**.

A

Document L

Congestion for all (or none)

1. Professor Goodwin (see **Document K**) makes a strong case for a mixed response to the problems of congestion and related issues, such as land-use and pollution. Wisely he urges politicians to go for a long-term solution rather than a quick fix. In particular he derides the building of new roads in the futile hope of accommodating ever-increasing volumes of traffic. As experience and common sense tell us, the more miles of tarmac that are laid, the more cars roll out of the show-rooms to fill them. But nor can things be left as they are. Congestion on the roads is reaching unsustainable levels, and if unchecked will eventually reach grid lock. As Goodwin quite rightly claims: ‘...benefit can only be delivered by intervention, either in the allocation of road space...or by pricing.’
2. But pricing is already placing a huge burden on the motorist. The costs of owning, servicing, taxing, insuring, fuelling and parking a car are enormous. Parking alone can cost as much as £4 an hour in some London boroughs. If on top of this we are to see ‘green taxes’ in the form of higher fuel duty, and increasing introduction of toll-roads and congestion charges, variable road-user charging etc., motoring will eventually become a preserve of the rich. Sure, it will reduce the congestion, but at what price for those who, for financial reasons, are consigned to public transport, or to none?
3. The soaring cost of motoring might be defensible if the extra revenue it created were invested wholly in schemes to improve the quality of travel by other means. Goodwin’s premise is that the right kind of regulation will make the environment better for everyone, with pedestrianisation schemes and play areas to improve neighbourhoods; but also with better trains, express bus lanes, safe cycle tracks, and so on. But this won’t happen. If public transport is made just as attractive and convenient as the car, who will pay the extra cost of driving? It is the same with any valuable commodity. Who would pay the huge fees charged by private schools if state-funded schools were seen to be as good or better, with lower class-sizes and comparable results? Who would pay for private healthcare if there were no queues and equally good treatment from the NHS? It’s what is called a ‘no brainer’! Controlling road congestion by pricing will lead inevitably to a two-tier transport system, for the simple reason that people will pay more only if they think they are getting more for it. That’s how price control works: open roads for the rich; crowded buses and trains for the rest.
4. Of course, if you believe in the free-market, you will see nothing wrong with price controlling. But in any decent, remotely egalitarian society there is only one defensible way to allocate scarce resources, and that is by rationing. Transport is no different, and must be available to all in equal quantity: not affordable to some and beyond the means of others who are already less fortunate. And when demand exceeds supply, then whatever there is – in this case ‘units of travel’ – must be shared, not made the sole preserve of those who can pay. At least in a traffic jam everyone moves at the same speed, even if it is zero.
5. A start would be to allow each privately-owned car on to busy roads on just two, three or four days per week, according to demand. It already happens in some countries: look at South America. If a car-owner needs to travel on other days, they would have to get a lift with someone else or take the bus. That would slash the number of parking spaces needed at a stroke, reduce emissions and speed up journeys. And in case anyone objects that it is impossible or too costly to enforce, the technology is in place already – speed cameras.

Source: JADE CEDAR (*Friends of the Freeway*)

END OF SOURCE MATERIAL