

END OF COIN OPERATED PARKING METERS

Westminster council has removed the last of its 4,000 coin operated parking meters, which were first introduced in Mayfair's Grosvenor Square more than 50 years ago. The final five parking meters were removed from Warwick Square on 11 May - almost 51 years to the day after the meters were first installed in the borough on 10 May 1958. The removal follows what the Council sees as the successful introduction of cashless parking to the capital two years ago. Then the scheme was introduced as a convenient alternative to carrying around pockets of change. Now all of Westminster's 7,000 parking bays are cash free, so that motorists have to pay to park by mobile or text using the council's Pay by Phone system or via on-street payment machines that accept credit or debit cards.



Before the introduction of cashless parking the council was losing up to £120,000 per week through thefts from the meters, which are vulnerable to vandalism and require expensive maintenance or replacing. Councillor Danny Chalkley, Westminster's cabinet member for environment and transport, said: "The introduction of cashless parking has not

only proved to be a convenient, fast, popular and extremely cost-effective way for motorists to pay for parking but has also meant huge savings for the council. While the parking meter has a long history in Westminster stretching back more than 50 years, it's now time to look to the future and call time on its use."

DRINK-DRIVING - THE INSURANCE PRICE HIKE

Taking a taxi is definitely the cheaper option to a drink drive conviction. As well as the fine they incur, any motorist found driving, or attempting to drive, whilst under the influence of alcohol (penalty code DR10) can expect their annual premiums to rise by 48 per cent on average. Some insurers will not even return a quote to insure a previously convicted drink-driver. In addition to a year long ban from the roads, the DR10 conviction will remain on their licence for 11 years and could add £2,3001 on average to the cost of their premium over this period.

Steve Sweeney, head of motor insurance at moneysupermarket.com, said: "The rules of the road are there for a reason, especially when it comes to drink-driving. Motorists who consume alcohol before getting behind the wheel will find that their reaction times, co-ordination and judgement will be impaired - making them a danger not only to themselves but also to other motorists and pedestrians. It's not surprising that insurers take such a harsh view of those caught driving under the influence.

"Any increase in the price of your premium will be dependent on the severity of your conviction but finding yourself uninsurable or facing unaffordable insurance prices as a result must be something most motorists could do without; especially alongside a £1000 fine, 12 month ban and a possible prison sentence. Surely getting in the driving seat after drinking really isn't worth it."

SPEEDING AND MOBILE USE - THE PRICE HIKES

Insurers also frown heavily upon motorists caught speeding. One conviction will typically raise premiums by around five per cent and by almost 20 per cent the second time round. Three strikes though and motorists could see an increase of 33 per cent - or nearly £150 a year.

The story is similar for 'mobile-mad' Brits. Popular insurers such as Swiftcover will provide competitive cover for a motorist; for example a 30 year old teacher in Manchester with a clean licence, driving a Ford Focus for 10,000 miles a year, with 5 years No Claims Discount, at £383 a year - but will not provide a quote for the same person caught using a mobile behind the wheel. The next most competitive option is from Privilege at £473 a year; an increase of 24 per cent.

Steve Sweeney continued: "Unfortunately we are a nation of mobile lovers but it is unsurprising insurers take a stern view - just as they do with those caught speeding. Exceeding the speed limit or diverting your attention from the road for a text or call can be catastrophic, and it is clear the ramifications for convicted motorists are intended to hit wallets hard and act as a deterrent for this behaviour. My advice is to take care on the roads at all times and think responsibly about the potential consequences of your actions."

GET ON THE LOW CARBON ROAD

Business Secretary Peter Mandelson and Transport Secretary Geoff Hoon have told of the Government's vision to promote ultra low carbon transport over the next five years. Central to the strategy is an initiative to help put electric cars into the reach of ordinary motorists by providing help worth £2000 - £5000 towards buying the first electric and plug in hybrid cars when they hit the showrooms - which is expected from 2011 onwards.

Transport Secretary Geoff Hoon said: "Cutting road transport CO2 emissions is a key element to tackling climate change. Less than 0.1% of the UK's 26 million cars are electric, so there is a huge untapped potential to reduce emissions.

"The scale of incentives we're announcing will mean that an electric car is a real option for motorists as well as helping to make the UK a world leader in low carbon transport."

The strategy also includes plans to provide £20 million for charging points and related infrastructure to help develop a network of 'electric car cities' throughout the UK and an expansion of an electric and ultra-low carbon car demonstration project on the UK's roads. This project will mean over 200 motorists throughout the country will have the opportunity to drive a cutting-edge car and feedback the information needed to make greener motoring an everyday reality."

ACCELERATING THE ELECTRIC VEHICLE MARKET

With improvements to emissions from vehicles being high on the agenda for the Mayor, he has made his opinion of electric vehicles well known over the past few months. Boris Johnson has challenged the Government to 'put its money where its mouth is' and back his ambitious plans to make London the electric car capital of Europe, helping to create jobs, cut carbon emissions and improve air quality.

The Mayor wants to see a series of major initiatives to achieve at least 100,000 electric vehicles on the capital's streets as soon as possible, equating to 5% of total vehicles. The Mayor said: "The time for simply talking about electric vehicles is over - we need real action on the ground to make the electric vehicle an easy choice for Londoners. I am today committing millions to install the infrastructure needed for when, in just a few years time, these vehicles become much more widely available."

With the estimated cost of the 25,000 charging points and conversion of the Greater London Authority fleet at £60million, the Mayor has pledged funding for a third of this. The Government has committed £250million to accelerate the electric vehicle market across the UK. London is both the biggest car market and has the largest number of electric vehicles being already driven in the UK.



Boris Johnson, who has gone on record saying that his next car will be electric, has already taken a test drive in the Tesla Roadster. Produced at the Lotus factory in Norfolk, over 160 Roadsters have already been sold. With a 0 to 60 mph acceleration time of 3.9 seconds and top speed of 125 mph, the Roadster delivers super car performance. Tesla plans to begin manufacturing a four-door, five-passenger, all-electric, zero-emission luxury saloon in 2011.