# Economists say dynamic tolls could ease traffic problems

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Aug. 2 (UPI) -- A team of economists say traffic problems in Germany and elsewhere could be eased by dynamic tolls.

In an op-ed, newly published this week in the journal Nature, scientists argue the use of dynamic pricing to positively influence driving behavior and alleviate traffic pressures on congested roadways.

"If the price were set at the right level, enough car drivers would choose to drive at a different time or take a different route or mode of transport to cut congestion," researchers wrote. "Limited road space would be managed in a similar way to airfares, electricity, hotel rooms and train journeys."

Often, the construction of more and bigger roads are proposed as a solution to traffic problems. But studies have shown that building new roads and increasing their size attracts more vehicles, sometimes worsening traffic problems. New roads can also spread traffic problems to previously quiet, uncontested streets.

A dynamic tolling solution would have to be deployed in real time, researchers argue. GPS and telecommunication technologies would allow tolling systems to analyze traffic and adjust pricing accordingly.

Especially busy roads would be priced higher, for example, and would be most expensive at rush hour, encouraging people to drive at different times, carpool or find alternate modes of transportation.

Researchers claim a solution to traffic congestion is needed to save money and protect the environment, not simply to save time and avoid inconveniences.

"Currently, road users who cause traffic jams, damage the environment and even incur costs are paying just as much as those who are not involved," Axel Ockenfels, economist at the University of Cologne, said in a news release. "Without a toll, this means that the general public is subsidizing these road users. That's unfair."

The researchers suggests their solution would not price people off the roads -- everyone would still be able to afford to drive.

"Pricing must be dynamic and offer options. Imagine pricing the left lane of regularly congested, multi-lane roads," Ockenfels said. "A lower traffic volume on the left lane would be the result. This in turn means that the flow of traffic on the right-hand lane also increases. That way, everyone benefits."