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Cost of dropping off friends and family reaches record high as fees increase at seven UK airports

With airports up and down the UK about to enter the busiest period of the year with the arrival of the summer holidays, new RAC analysis shows that seven of the top 20 by passenger numbers have further increased their prices for drop-off parking since last summer.*

Four major airports have increased drop-off charges by £1 compared to 2023 – London Gatwick (£6 for 10 minutes), Edinburgh (£5 for 10 minutes),

Birmingham (£5 for 15 minutes) and Bristol (£6 for 10 minutes), with three – Glasgow, Leeds Bradford and Aberdeen – putting prices up by 50p since last year. Fortunately for drivers on drop-off duties, nine airports have frozen their prices this year.

Just three airports out of the top 20 in the UK – London City, Cardiff and Inverness – retain free drop-off zones. And while dropping off for up to 20 minutes at London Luton is currently free in its Mid Stay Car Park – after last October’s fire forced the closure of the airport’s Drop Off Zone – travellers should be aware that the terminal is a 10-minute walk or shuttle bus ride from the terminal building. Last year, Luton charged £5 for 10 minutes in its drop-off zone.

London Stansted – despite not increasing its charges this year, to the relief of drivers – remains the most expensive UK airport for dropping off, charging a whopping £7 for up to 15 minutes, the equivalent of 47p a minute. Leeds Bradford is a close second charging £6.50 for 10 minutes, with London Gatwick and Bristol the third most expensive, both demanding drivers pay £6 for up to 10 minutes. Glasgow and Aberdeen both charge £5.50 for 15 minutes.

On a cost-per-minute basis however, it is Manchester that takes the wooden spoon for offering drivers the worst value, charging £5 for just a five-minute stay – the equivalent of £1 a minute, way ahead of the next priciest per minute, Leeds Bradford which charges the equivalent of 65p per minute (£6.50 for 10 minutes).

It is perhaps not surprising then that 81% of drivers surveyed by the RAC this summer,** who have either dropped someone off at an airport or have been dropped off themselves in the last 12 months, describe the charges as a ‘rip-off’ with 71% believing all airports should offer free drop-offs. Just one-in-10 (13%) say they understand why airports charge what they do.

Despite some airports claiming the sky-high drop-off fees encourage people to travel there using public transport, separate new RAC research*** shows the extent to which this often isn’t realistic or even possible. Nearly four-in-10 (37%) of those who have dropped someone off say there is no feasible public transport alternative, while a further 34% say the public transport options on offer are too unreliable. But the overwhelming reason for driving and dropping off for six-in-10 drivers (59%) is the impracticality of travelling

with lots of luggage on public transport.

RAC senior policy officer Rod Dennis said: “It’s depressing, if perhaps unsurprising given what’s happened in the past, to see seven airports have hiked their drop-off charges once again this year. To have to pay £5, £6 or even £7 for the briefest of stops to simply open the boot and take some luggage out for a friend or loved one is bordering on the ridiculous.

“Increased charges at airports that have relatively poor public transport access – for instance, no direct rail or tram link – also seems pretty unreasonable. Some airports say the reason they charge for drop-offs at all is to discourage people from driving in the first place, but if the alternatives are non-existent, expensive or unreliable then what choice do people really have?

“Our research also clearly shows that a major reason for driving and dropping off is the practical challenges of travelling with heavy and bulky luggage, especially if you have elderly or very young people in tow. If the only public transport to get to an airport is, for example, a pretty impractical double-decker bus, it’s no wonder people turn to the car.

“Fortunately, most of the country’s busiest airports have frozen their charges this year and travellers have to hope things stay that way. For anyone having to drop off this summer, we strongly urge them to keep their goodbyes extremely short so they don’t stay a moment longer than they’re paying for. Those visiting London Heathrow or Gatwick should also be aware that it’s now not possible to pay the drop-off charge in-person at either airport. Instead, they need to pay online using the official airport website or by phone – an unfortunate extra piece of admin drivers could surely do without.

“It’s also worth remembering that many airports offer free or cheaper short-term parking further away from the terminal. This might be significantly less convenient, but it does save money.”

[View an interactive version of the table below here](#)

Cost for dropping off passengers at UK airports

Top 20 airports based on total passenger numbers reported to the CAA for 2023

	Airport	2024 initial cost ▼	2024 time allowed	2024 cost per minute	Increase since 2023	Drop-off area
1	London Stansted	£7.00	15 mins	£0.47	£0.00	Express set down, close to check-in
2	Leeds Bradford	£6.50	10 mins	£0.65	£0.50	Pick Up & Drop Off, outside terminal
3	London Gatwick	£6.00	10 mins	£0.60	£1.00	Directly outside terminals
4	Bristol	£6.00	10 mins	£0.60	£1.00	Drop and Go Car Park, adjacent to terminal
5	Glasgow	£5.50	15 mins	£0.37	£0.50	Express Pick Up & Drop Off, outside terminal
6	Aberdeen	£5.50	15 mins	£0.37	£0.50	Express Drop Off, outside terminal
7	London Heathrow	£5.00	n/a		£0.00	Directly outside terminals
8	Manchester	£5.00	5 mins	£1.00	£0.00	Directly outside terminals
9	Edinburgh	£5.00	10 mins	£0.50	£1.00	Ground floor of the multi-storey car park, outside terminal building
10	Birmingham	£5.00	15 mins	£0.33	£1.00	Premium Set Down, directly outside the terminal
11	Liverpool John Lennon	£5.00	10 mins	£0.50	£0.00	Express Drop Off and Pick Up, opposite terminal
12	East Midlands	£5.00	15 mins	£0.33	£0.00	Rapid drop-off, in front of terminal
13	Bournemouth	£5.00	30 mins	£0.17	£0.00	Premium Car Park 1, opposite terminal
14	Newcastle	£4.00	10 mins	£0.40	£0.00	Express car park, outside terminal
15	Belfast International	£3.00	10 mins	£0.30	£0.00	Drop-off zone, adjacent to terminal
16	Belfast City	£3.00	10 mins	£0.30	£0.00	Express Drop Off and Pick Up, three minutes from terminal
17	London City	£0.00	n/a	£0.00	n/a	Forecourt outside terminal
18	Cardiff Wales	£0.00	5 mins	£0.00	n/a	Drop-off zone, outside terminal
19	Inverness	£0.00	10 mins	£0.00	n/a	Drop-off and Pick-up Zones, outside terminal
20	London Luton	-	20 mins	-	-	Following a fire, the Drop Off Zone is operating out of the Mid Stay Car Park

Figures based on nearest drop-off points to terminal buildings. These areas go under different names but are listed. We know that all airports offer either free or differently priced alternatives in mid or long-stay car parks with connecting bus or shuttle services. 2024 figures correct as of July 2024; last year's figures correct as of June 2023. RAC first recorded prices in 2016.

Table: Rod Dennis, RAC • Source: RAC • Created with Datawrapper

Notes for those analysing the data

* Top 20 airports selected based on total passenger numbers reported to the CAA for 2023. Source: <https://www.caa.co.uk/data-and-analysis/uk-aviation-market/airports/uk-airport-data/uk-airport-data-2023/annual-2023/>. Figures based on nearest drop-off points to terminal buildings. These areas go under

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** Total of 1,778 drivers surveyed for the RAC in June 2024, of which 41% had driven or been driven to an airport and dropped off, or themselves been dropped off within the last 12 months

*** Total of 1,841 drivers surveyed for the RAC in May 2024, of which 72% had driven to an airport to drop someone off before a flight within the last 12 months

The press office email address is press.office@rac.co.uk and media centre is at media.rac.co.uk. **Please note:** the press office is unable to help with individual customer enquiries - please visit the [RAC contacts page](#) to find the right contact.

About the RAC

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to nearly 14 million UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. As well as its premium nationwide breakdown assistance service – with an expert branded patrol workforce attending more than two million breakdowns every year – it offers a wide range of market-leading products across insurance, legal services, vehicle inspections and service, maintenance and repair. Included in this is the first-of-its-kind nationwide Mobile Mechanics service which brings the garage to homes and workplaces.

At the forefront of new solutions for business fleets and consumers, the RAC's breakdown service is electric-ready with mobile EV charging technology and can be called on using [myRAC](#) – the all-in-one route planner, fuel finder and breakdown reporting app.

Visit the [RAC website](#).

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