

MOBILE PHONE USE BY DRIVERS, 2004-2006

TRL has carried out a series of surveys on behalf of the Department for Transport into the use of mobile phones by drivers of cars and other motor vehicles, most recently in September 2005 and April 2006. The surveys were conducted at 30 sites in the South East of England that were chosen to represent the full range of conditions on British roads. They included motorways, dual carriageways and single carriageway roads and were located in towns, villages and on country roads. The single carriageway roads included A, B, C and Unclassified roads. The speed limits varied from 20mph to 70mph.

Observers were equipped with an electronic device that detects the microwave radiation emitted by both hand-held and hands-free mobile phones. Despite combining visual and electronic detection, the observers may have been unable to detect some phone use and the figures below could under-estimate the actual level of use. The observers recorded the total number of drivers, the number who were using hand-held phones and the number who were using hands-free phones. Car drivers were recorded separately from the drivers of other vehicles.

Table 1 shows how phone use varied by road type and between car drivers and other drivers in the latest survey. The latest results are based on a total sample of over 80,000 cars and 20,000 other vehicles that were observed on weekdays. Observations were also made on Saturdays at 6 of the sites, and the results showed that phone use continued to be substantially lower on Saturdays than on weekdays. The overall results have been weighted to reflect the distribution of traffic in Great Britain by road type.

Table 1 Percentage of drivers using mobile phones, by road-type, weekdays, April 2006

	<i>Car drivers</i>		<i>Other drivers</i>	
	<i>Hand-held</i>	<i>Hands-free</i>	<i>Hand-held</i>	<i>Hands-free</i>
Motorways	1.5	n/a	1.9	n/a
A roads, dual carriageway	1.7	0.5	2.7	0.9
A roads, single carriageway	1.9	1.1	3.5	0.6
Minor roads	1.5	0.6	3.0	0.8
Overall	1.7	0.6	2.5	0.9

It is not possible to record the use of hands-free mobile phones accurately on motorways because of the speed of the traffic.

Table 2 compares the results from the 4 most recent surveys. Previous results had shown that by April 2005 the rate of hand-held mobile phone use by car drivers had returned to the level found in September 2003, before legislation restricting the use of mobile phones took effect: it has since risen. The rate of hand-held mobile phone use by other drivers has risen since April 2004 and the rate of hands-free mobile phone use has declined. The overall rate of phone use for other drivers fell between since April 2004 and September 2005, but was unchanged in the latest survey.

Table 2 Percentage of drivers using mobile phones on weekdays, by survey

		<i>September 2004</i>	<i>April 2005</i>	<i>September 2005</i>	<i>April 2006</i>
Car drivers	Hand-held	1.1	1.5	1.4	1.7
	Hands-free	1.4	1.2	0.9	0.8
	Overall	2.4	2.7	2.3	2.5
Other drivers	Hand-held	2.2	2.4	2.7	2.8
	Hands-free	1.6	1.2	0.8	0.7
	Overall	3.8	3.6	3.5	3.5

% of drivers using a mobile phone, weighted by distance travelled on each road type.

Results from previous surveys of mobile phone use have been published by Hill (2005) and Broughton and Hill (2005). These surveys used 39 sites, but it was decided following a review of the survey design in the summer of 2004 that 30 sites in the South East of England provided a sufficiently robust sample to establish a representative baseline for future surveys. These 30 core sites have been used for each survey from September 2004.

Van and lorry drivers were grouped together as ‘other’ drivers in previous surveys, but from September 2004 observers at all sites recorded van and lorry drivers separately and Table 3 presents the unweighted results from the two latest surveys. Lorry drivers constituted 21% of ‘other’ drivers observed, so estimates of usage levels are less precise for lorry drivers than for van drivers.

Table 3 Percentage of van and lorry drivers using mobile phones, weekdays, April 2006

%	<i>September 2005</i>			<i>April 2006</i>		
	<i>Hand-held</i>	<i>Hands-free</i>	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Hand-held</i>	<i>Hands-free</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Van drivers	2.8	0.4	3.2	2.5	0.6	3.1
Lorry drivers	1.6	0.4	2.0	2.4	0.3	2.7

Mobile phone use has also been recorded as part of separate surveys of seatbelt use carried out by TRL for the Department for Transport using observation techniques only. This showed that drivers aged under 30 were almost twice as likely to be using a mobile phone as those aged 30 and over.

References

Broughton J and Hill J P (2005). *Mobile phone use by drivers, 2000-2003.* TRL Report TRL634. Wokingham: TRL.

Hill J P (2005). *A survey of mobile phone use by drivers, April 2004.* TRL Report TRL635. Wokingham: TRL.