

Annex C: Findings from the March 2004 and July 2005 ONS Omnibus Surveys

This annex examines public attitudes to road pricing based on modules of questions included in the ONS Omnibus Survey in March 2004¹ and July 2005. These modules are not directly comparable to the November 2005 survey reported earlier. Moreover, the questions included in July 2005 were not always identical to those included in March 2004. A number of changes were made to the March 2004 questions, partly to ensure greater clarity but also as a result of changes introduced by ONS to the survey. In particular, some of the questions included in March 2004 were open-ended allowing respondents to give spontaneous responses. From July 2005, respondents were required to respond to questions using a set list of response categories presented to them on a card.

1. Views on motoring taxation in the UK

- Overall, there was a small reduction in the proportion of respondents who considered current taxation levels to be too high between March 2004 and July 2005 (from 48% to 42%). The proportion of respondents who thought current taxation was 'about right' increased from 32% to 36%.
- Both surveys found that frequent drivers were more likely to consider current taxation levels too high than less frequent drivers. However there was a fall in the percentage of those who drove everyday holding this view between 2004 and 2005 (from 56% to 48%).

2. Views on congestion

- In both surveys, respondents were asked details of their most regular journey and whether or not they experienced congestion on this journey.
- In both surveys, the majority of respondents (78%) did not consider congestion to be a serious problem on their regular journey. 20% felt congestion was a serious problem.
- Congestion was more likely to be considered a serious problem on regular journeys by car as a driver (23%), for journeys made in the morning peak (24%) and for regular journeys to work (24%) or to school (28%) (July 2005 figures).

3. Necessity of car travel

- In both surveys, 68% of respondents who used a car to travel to work (as either driver or passenger) considered their car use to be essential for work.
- Respondents in London were less likely to say that car use was essential for their journey to work than those living in other regions. Those in managerial/professional and intermediate occupations were more likely to consider their car necessary than workers in routine and manual occupations.

¹ Findings from the March 2004 ONS Omnibus survey were published in July 2005, and are available on the DfT website at: http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_transstats/documents/page/dft_transstats_029807_hcsp

- In both surveys, the youngest age group was less likely to say car travel was essential for their journey to work than older respondents.
- Car users (drivers and passengers) were asked how difficult it would be for them to change to a different means of transport if road pricing were introduced in their area. In both surveys, 60% of car users said changing to alternative means of transport would be difficult.
- Car users who drove regularly were more likely to say changing to a different mode of transport would be difficult than those who drove less often or were only passengers. In both surveys, 76% of respondents who drove every day said they would find changing to alternative means of transport difficult.
- Car users in the most deprived areas were less likely to say they would have difficulties than those in the least deprived areas. In 2005, 45% of respondents living in the most deprived areas believed that they would have difficulty changing to alternative means of transport compared with 68% in the least deprived areas.

4. Acceptance of road charging as a concept and the importance of trade-offs

- Respondents were asked what they felt was the best way of dealing with congestion. The format of the question differed over the two surveys. In March 2004 responses were unprompted, whereas in July 2005 a set of response options was given. Because these response options were similar to the unprompted responses of 2004, they offer a degree of comparability.
- In July 2005, 5% selected the introduction of road pricing as the best option. Improving public transport was by far the most popular response (selected by 54%). In 2004, 7% of respondents had nominated 'pricing measures' and 40% had nominated improvements in public transport.
- Respondents were also asked if they would be prepared to pay road charges under various conditions.
- In July 2005, 64% of all respondents said they would be prepared to pay road charges if there were good alternative ways to travel, 58% would agree if the overall level of motoring tax did not increase, 49% if it would reduce congestion in their local area and 43% if it reduced the need to build new roads. The figures did not differ significantly in 2004 (66%, 60%, 54% and 44% respectively).

5. Opinion on public transport as alternative

- All respondents were asked whether they believed that public transport would be able to cope with increased demand should people be persuaded to use alternative means of transport as a result of direct charging.
- 70% of respondents believed public transport would not be able to cope with increased demand, 21% believed it would cope.

- Both surveys found that respondents who used public transport more frequently were more confident that the public transport system could cope with increased demand.
- Conversely, the more frequently a driver used their car the less confident they were that the public transport system could cope with increased demand. In 2005, 17% of respondents who drove every day believed public transport could cope with increased demand, compared with 27% of respondents who never drove.
- In 2005, 34% of respondents in the most deprived areas said they believed public transport could cope with increased demand, compared with 16% of respondents living in the least deprived areas.

6. Opinion of satellite based charging systems

- Respondents were asked to select statements from a list that best described their views about satellite based charging systems and were able to select as many statements as represented their views.
- People were more likely to select statements that were negative or indicated concern with road pricing than positive statements. There was an increase in the proportions reporting at least one negative response between the two surveys, from 68% to 79% (Table C.1).

Table C.1 Opinions on satellite-based charging systems

<i>Percentages</i>	2004	2005	Significant difference
Would be far too expensive to make it worth running	32	42	*
Bad for those who have no choice but to drive their cars	25	41	*
Such a complex system is bound not to work properly	25	38	*
I would be worried about losing my privacy	27	34	*
I don't trust the government to introduce system fairly	26	34	*
Worried that I'd end up paying a lot more than I do now	19	33	*
It's a good idea because I'd only pay for what I used	29	28	
It wouldn't reduce congestion however well it was done	12	21	*
I think it would reduce congestion if properly introduced	14	20	*
Good idea because I might end up paying less than I do now	9	14	*
<i>Base number</i>	<i>1730</i>	<i>1203</i>	

Source: March 2004 and July 2005 ONS Omnibus Survey. * indicates a significant difference between the two surveys.

7. Privacy

- In both surveys, all respondents were asked three questions relating to privacy. These were:

It would be acceptable for some information to be held on where drivers have travelled, so long as there were laws preventing it from being used for any other purpose.

It would be acceptable for some information to be held on where drivers have travelled, so long as this was held by an independent body and not the government.

I think it would be unacceptable in any circumstances for information to be held on where drivers have travelled.

- Table C.2 shows the views held in both 2004 and 2005. Between the two surveys willingness to accept the holding of information declined significantly on two of the measures.
- However, in both surveys there was a degree of ambiguity or inconsistency in the responses given by respondents. For example, in 2005, 19% of respondents who agreed to information being held so long as there were laws to prevent other uses of the data also agreed that there were no circumstances where information could be held.
- Privacy is clearly a concern for some people and DfT will be exploring the issue further through deliberative research, which will explore in detail the issues around the public acceptability of road pricing, including privacy.

Table C.2 Issues of privacy and direct charging schemes

		2004	2005
		%	%
It would be acceptable for some information to be held on where drivers have traveled, so long as there were laws preventing it being used for any other purpose	Agree	62	56*
	Disagree	29	35*
	Don't know	10	9
	<i>Base number</i>	1751	1203
		%	%
It would be acceptable for some information to be held on where drivers have traveled, so long as this was held by an independent body and not the government	Agree	49	38*
	Disagree	38	49*
	Don't know	12	13
	<i>Base number</i>	1751	1203
		%	%
I think it would be unacceptable in any circumstances for information to be held on where drivers have traveled	Agree	36	40
	Disagree	52	50
	Don't know	12	11
	<i>Base number</i>	1751	1203

Source: March 2004 and July 2005 ONS Omnibus Survey. * indicates a significant difference between the two surveys.