

Appendix C: topic guide

This guide: This guide is a menu of issues from which we shall choose relevant topics for individual sessions. There will not be time to look at every question from every angle in every interview.

It is a game-plan not a questionnaire - questions will not usually be asked in this form, and some information will emerge in conversation without direct questioning. The way we approach the task will also evolve across the sessions - the early groups will show us the most profitable ground to concentrate on.

The topics overlap, because there are many ways into a given issue – but this does not mean duplication in the interviews themselves.

This is a large menu, and the priority topics will be items B-L, with particular emphasis on F and I.

However qualitative research is exploratory by nature, and although the study must meet its objectives it needs to work outwards from what is found on the ground, rather than slavishly following a set pattern. New factors may emerge, and some issues may turn out to be more or less important than expected.

A. Background and warm-up

1. Family composition
2. Nature of employment
3. Brief details of travelling behaviour by different modes (particularly cars and vans):
 - a) Business or job-related?
 - b) Commuting?
 - c) Social/leisure, domestic?
4. Number of vehicles in the household
5. Details of vehicles normally used:
 - a) For business?
 - b) For private use?

B. Problems while driving

1. What problems do people meet while driving?
 - a) How and how far does congestion figure among these?
2. Which are the most important or most aggravating problems?
 - a) Why?

C. Meaning of congestion

1. What does ‘congestion’ *mean* to people?
 - a) What do they *understand* by it?
 - b) What terms do they use to describe it?

Try not to get hung up on terminology. Explore the phenomenon rather than just the words.
2. How do people define congestion in their minds?
 - a) Does ‘congestion’ cover any loss of speed due to weight of traffic, or is it reserved for real jams?
 - b) Are ‘congestion’ and ‘traffic jams’ synonymous, or are ‘jams’ a subset of a wider set of congestion phenomena?
 - c) Which of these conditions is mainly of concern to people?
 - d) Which of the agreed specimen definitions best represents their views?
 - Or do they have other definitions of their own?

Show congestion pictures if and when relevant

D. Experience of congestion

1. What is people's experience of congestion?
 - a) How *often* do they experience congestion?
 - b) When and where?
 - Times, places, situations?
 - Always the same places, or varying?
 2. How far is it a real personal experience as opposed to a general cultural notion?
-

E. Importance of congestion

1. How *important* a problem is congestion to them?
 - a) Why, and in what ways?
 2. How *often* does it become a personal problem?
 - a) When, where and why?
 3. How important is congestion in relation to other problems travellers may face, and how does it compare with them?
 - a) Parking (difficulty or cost)?
 - b) Speeding?
 - c) Speed limits?
 - d) Cost of fuel?
 - e) Road safety?
 - f) Effects of traffic calming?
 - g) Behaviour of other drivers, poor or dangerous driving?
 - h) Condition of road surfaces?
 - i) Public transport problems?
 - j) Other issues?
-

F. Effects of congestion

1. *How* does congestion affect them as drivers or passengers?
 - a) Journey times or speeds (and how are these described)?
 - b) Unpredictability of journey times, having to leave earlier than needed?
 - c) Missed appointments, being late?
 - d) Stop-start conditions?
 - e) Pressure, stress or frustration?
 - f) Fatigue?
 - g) Fuel consumption, cost, wastage?
 - h) Wear and tear on vehicles?
 - i) Pollution build-up?
 - j) Effects on behaviour of other drivers?
 - k) Effects on safety, risk?
 - l) Other factors?
 2. Which aspects of congestion are:
 - a) Most commonly experienced?
 - b) Most difficult or inconvenient from a functional point of view?
 - c) Most distressing or aggravating?
-

G. Perceived causes of congestion

1. What do people perceive as the main causes of rising congestion?
 2. Do they see congestion as an inevitable phenomenon, or as a soluble problem?
 3. Who do they blame for it?
 - a) How far do they think they personally contribute?
-

H. Responses to congestion

1. Do responses to congestion depend on the perceived causes?
 - a) How would people respond to congestion if it was seen to be due to (eg):
 - Sheer weight of traffic?
 - Roadworks (active or inactive)?
 - Accidents?

- Careless or illegal parking?
 - Permanent road bottlenecks or junction problems?
 - Rush-hour jams?
 - School-run traffic?
 - Holiday/tourist traffic?
 - Other factors?
- b) Are some types of congestion seen as more tolerable or excusable than others? And why?
2. Does knowing the cause help?
- a) Why or why not?
- b) Does this relate to functional or emotional responses?
- c) What would they want or need to know?
3. Do responses to congestion depend on the driving situation or context?
- a) How far and in what ways would they vary between:
- Different types of road (motorways, urban roads, residential streets, rural roads)?
 - Work-related or private journeys?
 - Functional or pleasure motoring?
 - Where they have deadlines or appointments?
 - Different times of day, days of week, seasons?
 - Regular or occasional journeys?
 - Known or unfamiliar territory?
 - Permanent trouble-spots or unpredictable jams?
 - Long distance or local journeys?
 - Alone or with passengers, or travelling with children?
4. Is congestion more or less aggravating if it is:
- a) Consistent and predictable at certain places or times?
- b) Random and unpredictable?

I. Measuring congestion

1. Explain that the government plans to publish measures of congestion and the way it changes. Would people find this useful or interesting?
- a) Why or why not?
2. Explore reactions to different kinds of measure in terms of comprehension, usefulness and credibility.
- a) Explore spontaneous ideas, then present the prepared options:
- For the year 2000 data
 - For the 2010 data
- b) Measures include:
- Driving time lost per mile travelled
 - Driving time lost on a typical journey
 - Driving time wasted in the year
 - Average time spent in jams (time and percent)
 - Risk of long delays
 - Traffic density
- c) How do people perceive and react to these time/speed based measures?
- Which of them are easiest to take in and understand?
 - Are there any better ways of expressing them?
 - Which of them are most meaningful, useful or relevant?
- d) How do such measures relate to the types of concern expressed in F) above?
- e) Is there a need for other types of measure?
- If so what? What would people like to see being measured?
- f) How far would national measurements be acceptable, or would they need to be disaggregated – and if so, how?
- By time period
 - By type of road or area
 - By region

J. Changes in congestion

1. How do people perceive trends in congestion over time?
 - a) Is it seen as:
 - Getting better or worse?
 - How and why?
 - Changing in nature?
 - How and why?
 - b) What do they expect for the future?
 2. Do people adapt to congestion, or become more or less tolerant of it over time?
 - a) How does this work?
 - b) How does it affect their feelings and behaviour?
 - c) Does it depend on the type of congestion or situation?
 - How and why?
-

K. Coping strategies and behaviour

1. How do motorists behave in relation to congestion?
 - a) Do they act differently if they experience or expect congestion?
 - In immediate response?
 - In strategic behaviour?
 - b) Do they:
 - Change their routes?
 - Use another mode of transport?
 - Travel at another time?
 - Avoid or abandon journeys?
 - Just press on regardless?
 - c) When would they change their behaviour – and why?
 2. Do they have strategies or rules of thumb for dealing with congestion?
 3. Do they listen to traffic reports?
 - a) And how do they respond to them?
 4. Does congestion affect:
 - a) The overall amount of driving they do?
 - b) Their choice of transport mode?
-

L. Tackling congestion

1. Does it need tackling?
 - a) What needs to be done about it – and by whom?
 2. What are their reactions to options like:
 - a) Congestion pricing?
 - b) Tightening parking?
 - c) Improved traffic management?
 - d) Increasing road capacity?
 - e) Better information about congestion?
 - f) Providing better alternatives:
 - Better public transport
 - Safer walking and cycling routes
 - g) Other options?
-

M. Non-driving effects

1. How is congestion seen to affect people other than when driving?
 - a) Do they respond differently to congestion as passengers than as drivers?
 - How and why?
 - Is it more or less of a problem?
 - And in what ways?
 - b) How does congestion affect them:
 - If they travel by bus or coach?
 - When walking or cycling?

- As residents?
- c) How does congestion affect the environment?
- 2. How do these various non-driving effects stack up against the effects on motorists?
 - a) Are they more or less important?

N. Sub-group variations

1. How do experience of or responses to congestion vary between different types of motorist?
 - a) Different ages, sexes, socio-economic groups?
 - b) Experienced and confident motorists compared to anxious or diffident drivers?
 - c) Different mileages and types of driving?

Generalised attitudes to congestion are useful to explore, but it will also be important to ground these in the particular experiences of individuals. How much are they actually affected, and how often?

People's responses to congestion and its measurement are likely to have both rational and irrational components, both of which are important to assess. For example the impatience or frustration people feel about being delayed may sometimes be more important to them than the functional outcome or the actual number of minutes lost. The study needs to encompass people's feelings and emotions as well as their rational responses to the issues.

Commercial and business motorists will focus mainly on their work-related travel, but will also be asked about their private motoring and how it compares. Similarly those recruited primarily as private motorists will be asked about any work-related experiences they may have.

Alan Hedges

20 April 2001