

Public attitudes towards road congestion, November 2009 to February 2010

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report discusses the combined results for questions included in the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Opinions Omnibus Survey in November 2009, December 2009 and February 2010. The questions were designed and commissioned by the Department for Transport (DfT).
- 1.2 This report covers the following issues:
- patterns and frequency of road use
 - attitudes towards road congestion
 - effectiveness and fairness of alternative road charging schemes
- 1.3 A similar module of questions was included in October 2007 to November 2007, and January 2009 to February 2009 Omnibus Surveys so some comparisons can be made over time.
- 1.4 More detailed tables of the results will be published in due course.

Survey design

The ONS' Opinions Omnibus Survey is a probability survey of adults aged 16 and over living in private households in Great Britain. The November 2009, December 2009 and February 2010 Omnibus Surveys interviewed 5,451 adults face to face in their homes during those months, and 2,798 responded (a response rate of 51 per cent). The questions asked can be found in annex A.

The results presented in this report are weighted. The weighting ensures distribution across regions and age-sex groups match the Great Britain population. The survey results are subject to sampling errors. That is the results obtained may differ from those that would be obtained if the entire population had been interviewed or another sample selected.

Statistical differences over time or between groups remarked upon in this text are statistically significant at the five per cent level of confidence (that is, we can be 95 per cent certain that the difference exists in the population). A design factor (DEFT) of 1.2 was used when testing results.

A small number of respondents who travel on motorways were not asked questions MOT_5, MOT_8M, MOT_9 and MOT_10M.

2 Key findings

Patterns and frequency of road use

- 2.1 The vast majority of car drivers, 88 per cent, said they used their car at least twice a week with most of these saying they drove every day. Only 24 per cent of bus passengers reported that they travelled by bus with this frequency.
- 2.2 Motorway travel amongst car drivers is much less frequent, however, with less than one in five drivers saying they used these roads at least twice a week. Almost a quarter said they used motorways less than twice a year.
- 2.3 Adults' most frequent journeys occur mostly during 'peak' periods. As expected, this pattern is more pronounced for commuting journeys but smaller 'peaks' are still evident for other personal journeys, possibly related to school start and end times or shop opening hours.
- 2.4 Almost half of all adults who travel to and from work during 'peak' times said it would be easy for them to travel outside of these periods while a quarter said it would be impossible.

Attitudes towards road congestion

- 2.5 Over four in five adults thought that congestion was a serious problem in the country and nine in ten said that it was important for Government to tackle the problem although both of these proportions have fallen slightly over the last 2 years.
- 2.6 Just under a quarter of adults said that congestion was a problem for the majority of their journeys, a similar level to 2 years ago but more than the proportion reported last year. Three in ten said that road congestion was rarely a problem for them.
- 2.7 Two-fifths of adults thought that congestion was rarely a problem for them on their most frequent journey, while a quarter thought that congestion was a problem for the majority of these journeys.
- 2.8 Sixty six per cent of adults said that congestion was worse in and around towns than on major routes although this percentage drops slightly for those who frequently use motorways.
- 2.9 A quarter of motorway users said they experienced motorway congestion on a majority of these journeys, an increase on the proportion reported last year, and three in ten said unreliable journey times was the main cause of their concern.
- 2.10 Two in five motorway users said they routinely start their journey at different times to avoid congestion and over a third said they tend to take different routes or avoid motorways completely.

Effectiveness and fairness of alternative road charging schemes

- 2.11 Over half of adults agreed that the current system of paying for road use should change so that the amount people pay is based on how often, when and where they use the roads.
- 2.12 However, under a quarter thought that people driving on busy roads should pay more and a similar proportion said that people driving at busy times should pay more.
- 2.13 Three in ten adults thought that a new charging scheme based on times of travel and specific route taken would work in reducing congestion while over half said it would not.
- 2.14 Almost three in five of those who felt such a scheme wouldn't work gave people not being able to change their behaviour as a reason for this while a third said people wouldn't want to change.
- 2.15 Twenty six per cent of adults said that a new charging scheme based on these principles would be fair to road users, down from 2 years ago, while 55 per cent thought it would be unfair.
- 2.16 Again, the majority of those judging such a scheme to be unfair cited that people wouldn't be able to change their behaviour as a reason while over a third said the costs would be too much for some.
- 2.17 When asked whether they would be prepared to accept road pricing as long as there was no overall increase in the amount paid by motorists as a whole, 38 per cent agreed while 34 per cent disagreed. 2 years ago, 41 per cent agreed and 35 per cent disagreed.
- 2.18 Almost half of adults said that money raised from such a scheme should be spent solely on roads and transport while over one in ten maintained that they didn't agree with it under any circumstances.

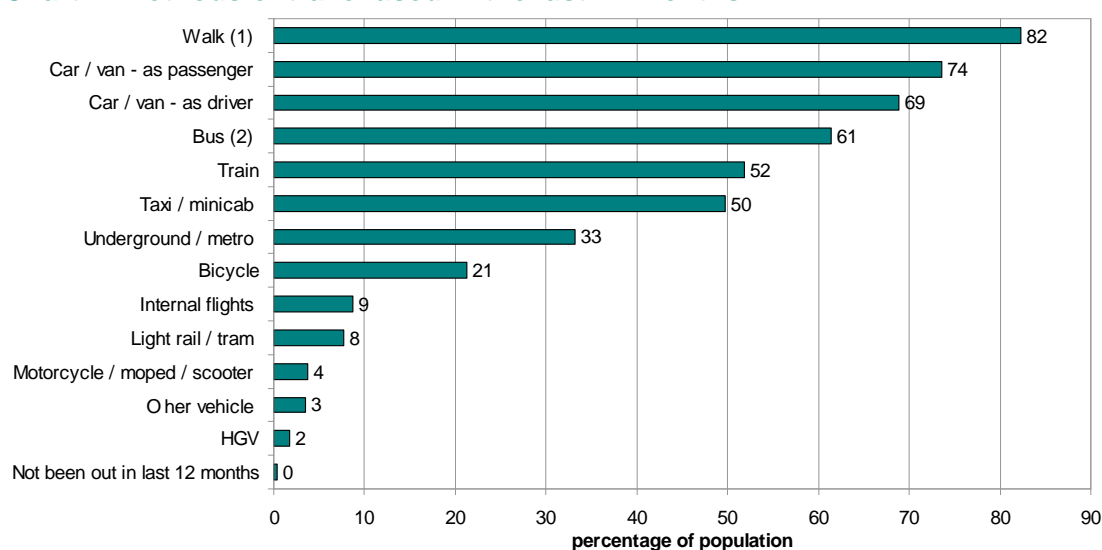
3 Patterns and frequency of road use

- 3.1 Respondents were first asked about their methods and frequency of travel over the last 12 months. They were also asked about the timings of their journeys and in the case of road travel, the types of road typically travelled on.

Method of travel

- 3.2 Walking was the most common method of travel used within the last 12 months with 82 per cent of adults having using this mode. Sixty nine per cent of adults had driven a car or van in the last 12 months, while 74 per cent had been a passenger in one of these vehicles. Chart 1 shows all modes of transport that had been used in the 12 months prior to the interview.

Chart 1: Methods of travel used in the last 12 months



(1) Walking a journey on foot of 5 minutes or more.

(2) Buses include coach and private buses.

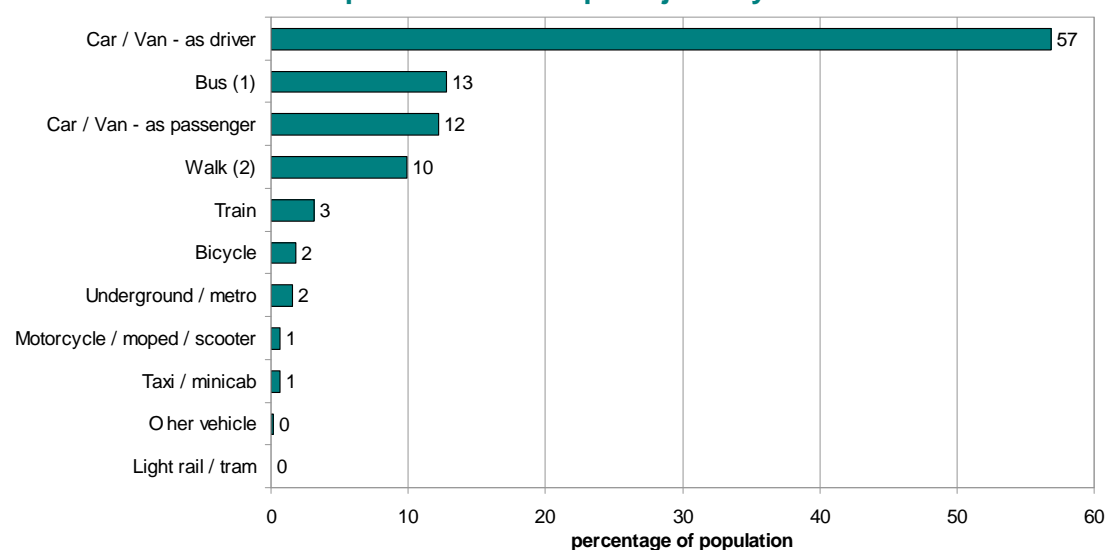
Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents = 2,790.

- 3.3 The most common form of travel for respondents' most frequent journeys¹ was driving a car or van with 57 per cent of adults having used this method. Travelling on a bus or in a car or van as a passenger were the next most common modes of travel with 13 per cent and 12 per cent respectively. The full breakdown of the modes of travel used by adults on their most frequent journeys can be seen in chart 2.
- 3.4 About half of adults said that travelling to and from work was the reason for their most frequent journey, while three in ten said that shopping was the reason for travel. Chart 3 shows all of the reasons for respondents' most frequent journeys.

¹ The most frequent journey is defined to be the journey between two geographical places that is made most often. This only includes personal journeys and travel to and from work.

Chart 2: Method of transport for most frequent journey



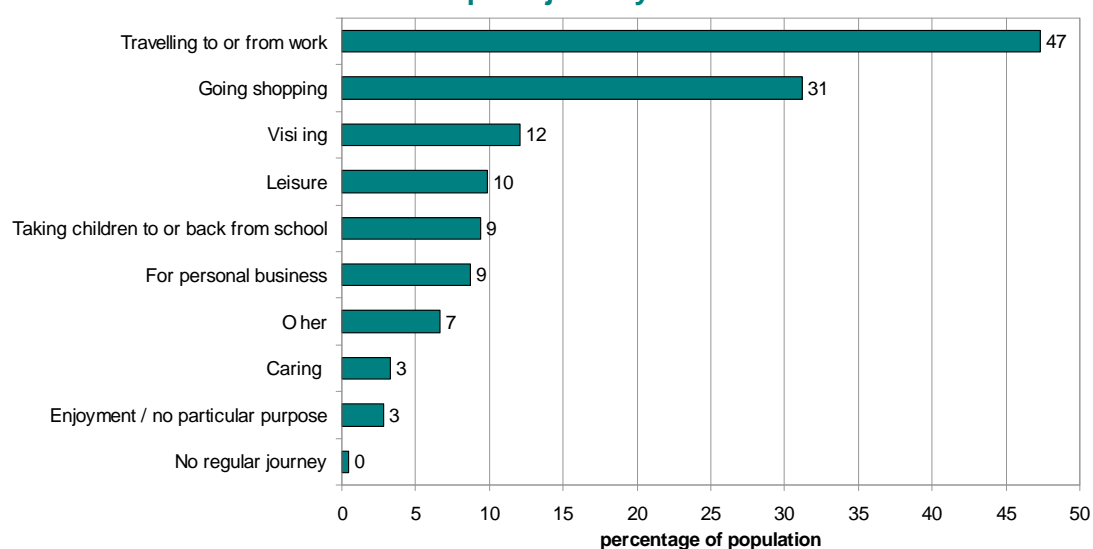
(1) Buses include coach and private buses.

(2) Walking a journey on foot of 5 minutes or more.

Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents = 2,762.

Chart 3: Reasons for the most frequent journey



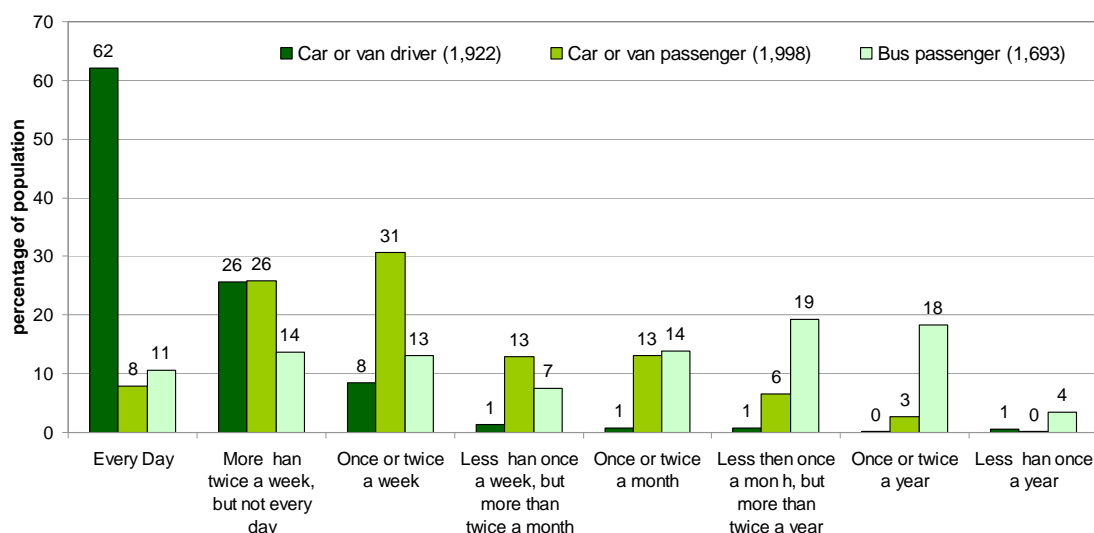
Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents = 2,790.

Frequency of travel

- 3.5 Chart 4 shows the frequency of travel for those who drove a car or van, travelled by car or van as passenger or travelled by bus in the last 12 months.
- 3.6 Sixty two per cent of adults who drove a car or van used them to travel on a daily basis. The proportion of adults who use their vehicle falls with the frequency of travel, with only 2 per cent driving less than twice a month.
- 3.7 The most common frequency of journeys for those who travelled as a car or van passenger was 'once or twice a week' (31 per cent), while 36 per cent travelled less frequently.
- 3.8 The majority of adults (55 per cent) who travelled by bus made journeys less than twice a month, this compares to 2 per cent for car or van drivers and 22 per cent for those who were passengers in a car or van.

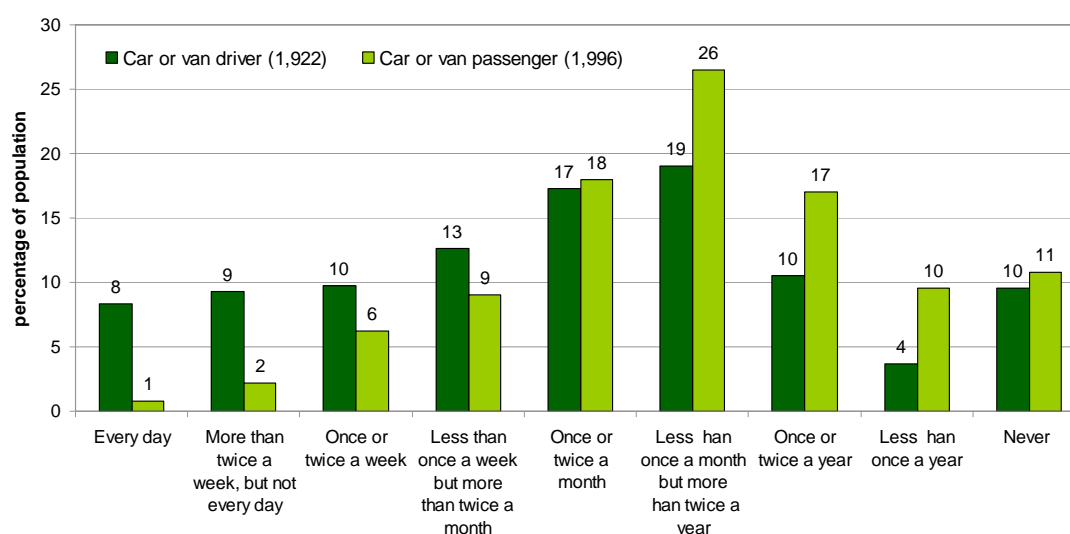
Chart 4: Frequency of travel



Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.
Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

- 3.9 Drivers and passengers of cars and vans were also asked about the frequency of their travel on motorways, and their responses have been illustrated in chart 5.
- 3.10 Only 27 per cent of car or van drivers travelled on motorways at least once a week, this compares to 96 per cent for all car or van journeys.
- 3.11 Motorway journeys for passengers of cars or vans were less frequent than those of drivers. Fifty seven per cent of drivers travelled at least once a month on motorways, while only 36 per cent of passengers did so.

Chart 5: Frequency of travel on motorways

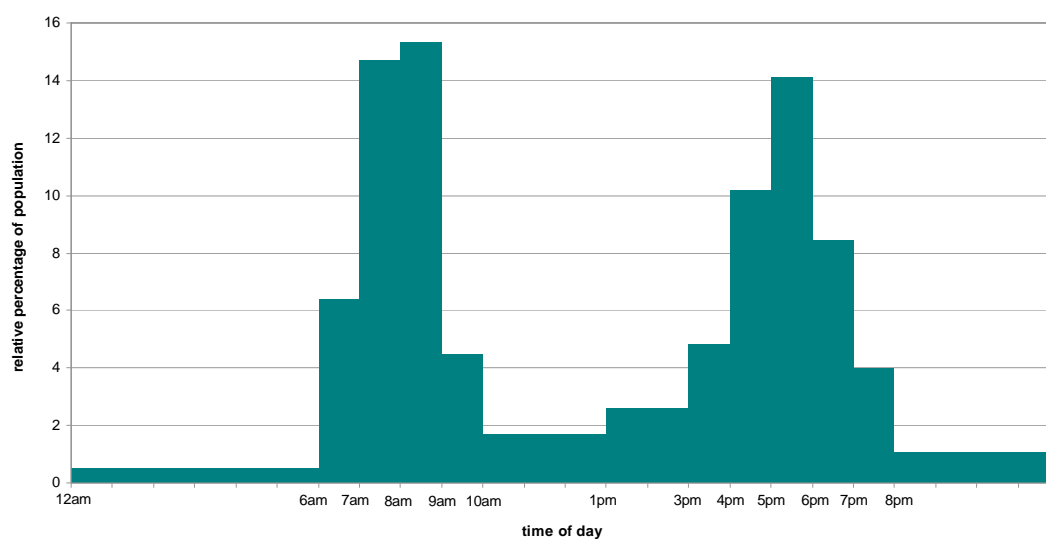


Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.
Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

Time of travel

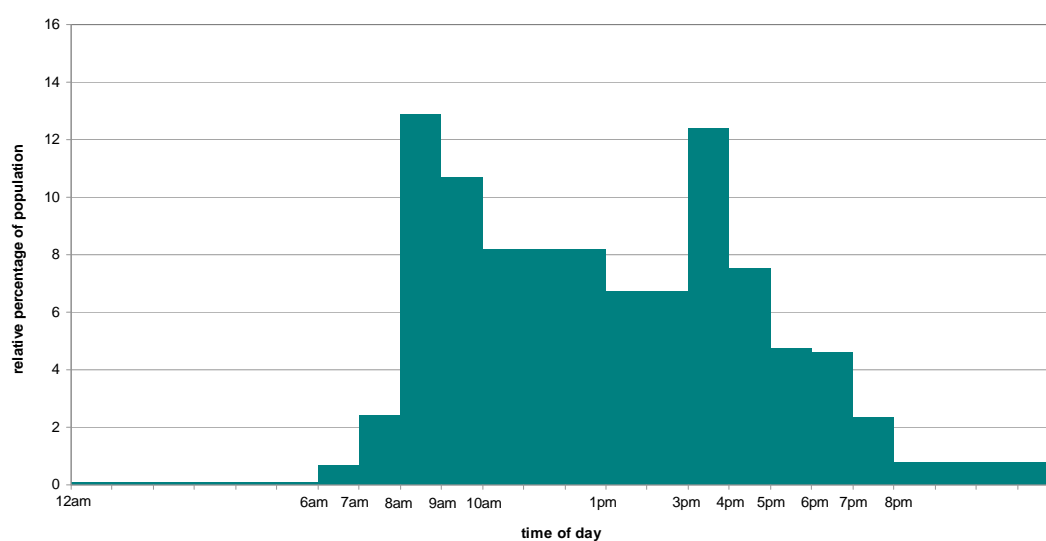
- 3.12 Charts 6 and 7 show histograms representing the times of day at which respondents' most frequent journey took place. The two distributions show the cases where the reason for this journey included travelling to and from work, and where work was not the reason for travel. The area of each of the bars in these charts represent the percentage of adults who made their most frequent journey within the given time period.
- 3.13 For those who travel to and from work, there is a clear morning peak between 7 and 9am and an evening peak between 4 and 7pm, which ties in with the times you would expect most people to be commuting.
- 3.14 However, there is still a morning peak between 8 and 10am and an afternoon peak between 3 and 4pm for those who travel for other personal reasons. These peaks may be driven by the need to drop off and collect children from school. When comparing the two distributions it is evident that proportionally more journeys take place between the peaks for those who travel for non-work reasons.

Chart 6: Time of most frequent journey – where reason includes travel to and from work



Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.
Unweighted base: all respondents = 1,167.

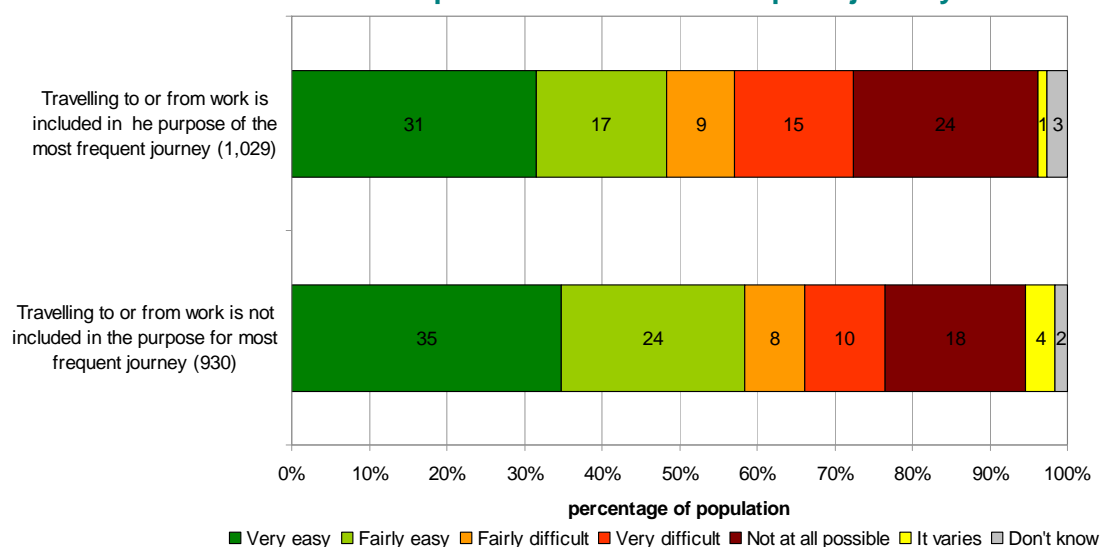
Chart 7: Time of most frequent journey – where reason excludes travel to and from work



Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.
Unweighted base: all respondents = 1,515.

- 3.15 Those whose most frequent journey occurred during peaks times, defined to be between 7 and 10am and 3 and 7pm, were also asked how easy it would be to change the time of their journey. Chart 8 compares the responses to this question for those who travel to work and those who travel for other reasons.
- 3.16 Forty eight per cent of those whose most frequent journey was travelling to work said that it would be easy to change their journey times. This compares to 58 per cent for those travelling for other reasons.
- 3.17 Almost a quarter of those whose most common journey was to or from work said that it was not at all possible to change the time of this journey. This compares to about a fifth (18 per cent) for those travelling for other reasons.

Chart 8: Ease of travel outside peak hours for most frequent journey



Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

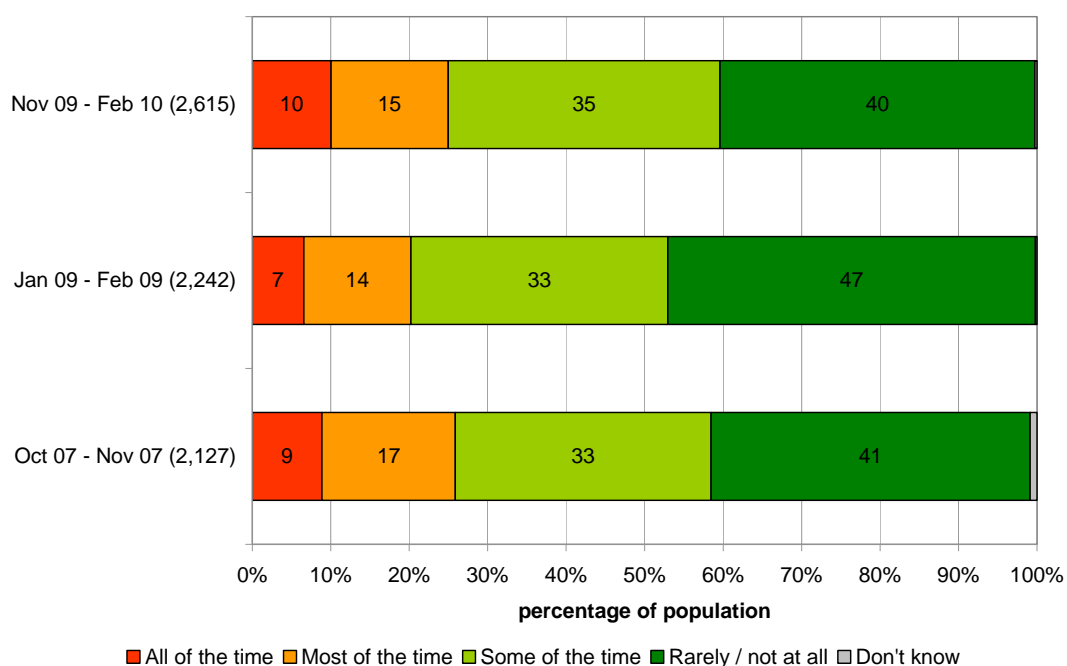
4 Attitudes towards road congestion

- 4.1 All respondents who travel on roads were then asked a series of questions to assess their attitudes towards congestion on their most frequent journey, all journeys made and specifically regarding travel on motorways.

Attitudes towards congestion on all roads

- 4.2 Two in five adults thought that congestion was rarely a problem for them on their most frequent journey, while one in four thought that congestion was a problem for the majority of these journeys.
- 4.3 These results were very similar to those of the October to November 2007 survey. However there were significant differences when compared to that of the January to February 2009 survey, in the extreme categories of 'all of the time' and 'rarely / not at all' categories. Chart 9 compares these results across the three surveys.

Chart 9: How often is road congestion a problem on your most frequent journey? ⁽¹⁾



(1) This includes attitudes whose most frequent journey is on foot.

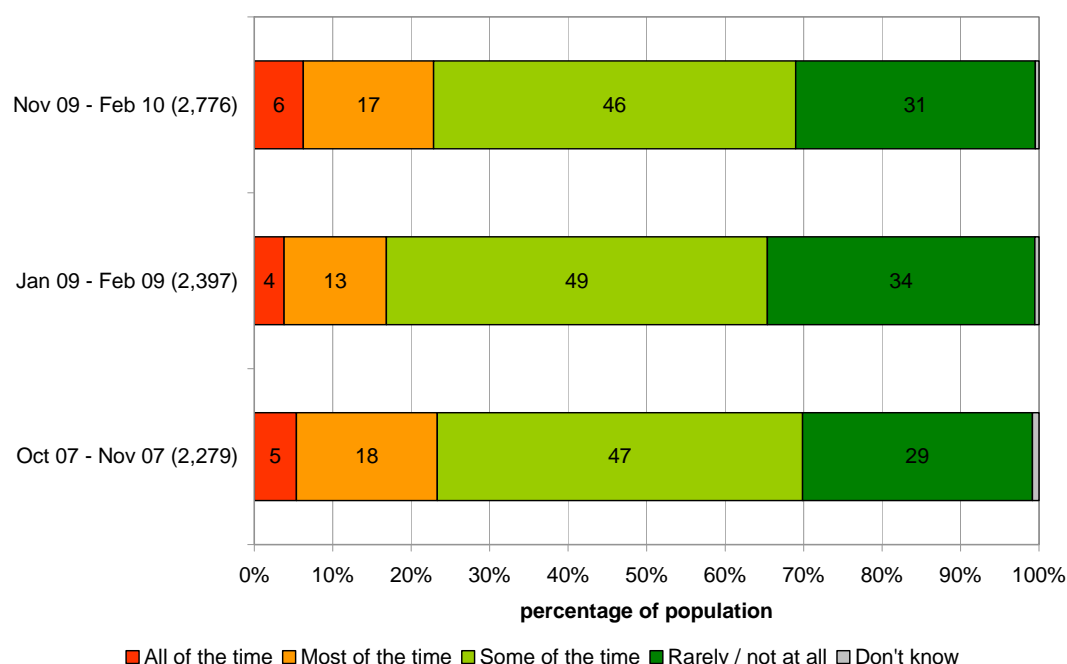
Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey results from October to November 2007, January to February 2009 and November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

- 4.4 Chart 10 shows the respondents' opinions of congestion on all road journeys. Twenty three per cent of adults thought that congestion was a problem on the majority of their journeys, while the most common response was that congestion was experienced 'some of the time' (46 per cent).

- 4.5 Again, these attitudes were similar to those reported in the October to November 2007 survey. However, the results were significantly different to those of the January to February 2009 survey with the exception of the 'some of the time' category which was broadly unchanged.
- 4.6 A lower proportion of adults thought that congestion was always an issue on all their journeys than on their most frequent journey, with 6 per cent compared to 10 per cent responding in this way. This could reflect the common reasons given for travel, with half the adults making their most frequent journey to get to and from work.

Chart 10: How often is road congestion a problem on all your journeys? ⁽¹⁾



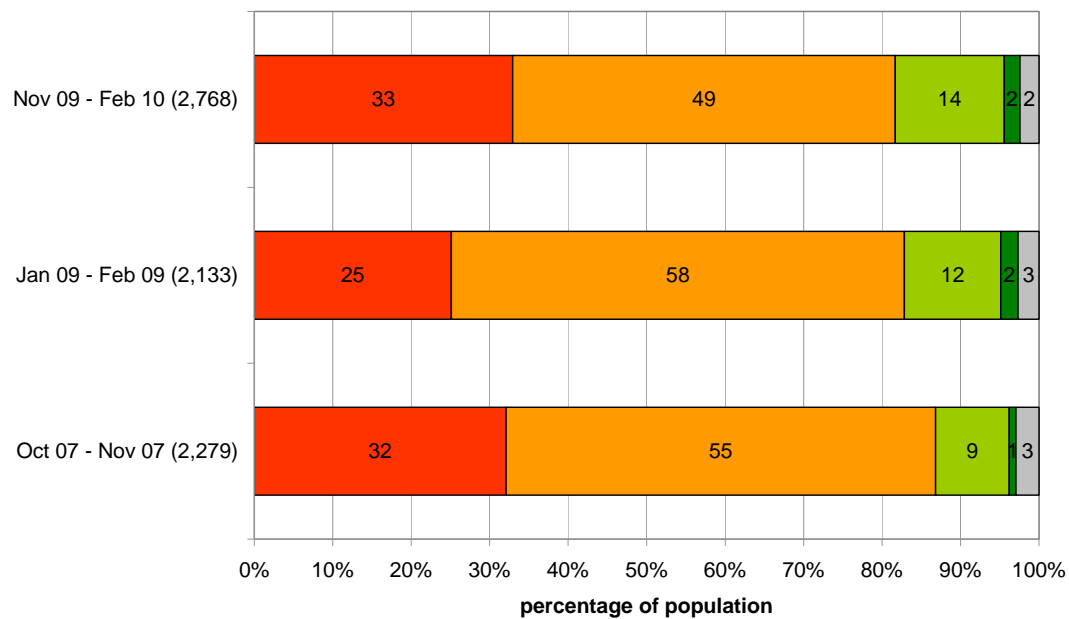
(1) This includes attitudes of those who travel on foot.

Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey results from October to November 2007, January to February 2009 and November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

- 4.7 A large majority of adults (82 per cent) thought that congestion is a serious problem for this country, this is 5 percentage points lower than when this question was asked in the October to November 2007 survey. The proportion of adults thinking that congestion is a serious problem has decreased over the course of the last three survey periods, as illustrated in chart 11.
- 4.8 However, the proportion of adults who believed that congestion was a very serious problem appears to have fallen between the October to November 2007 and January to February 2009, but then increased again between the last two surveys.

Chart 11: How serious a problem is road congestion in this country? ^{(1) (2)}



■ A very serious problem ■ A serious problem ■ Not a serious problem ■ Not a problem at all ■ Don't know

(1) This includes attitudes of those who travel on foot.

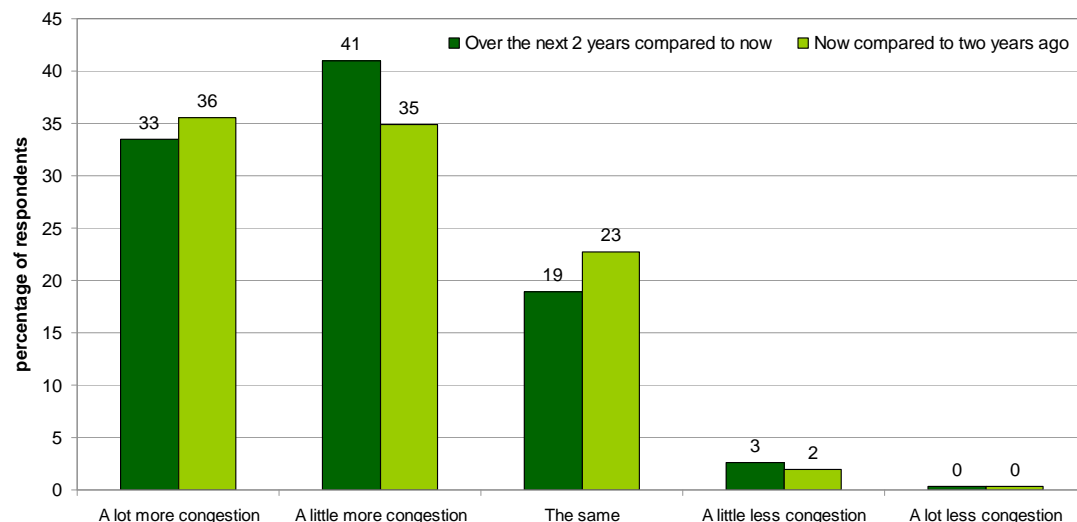
(2) "This country" for the purposes of this survey has been defined as England, Scotland and Wales

Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey results from October to November 2007, January to February 2009 and November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

4.9 Respondents were then asked whether they felt there was more or less congestion today than two years ago and whether they expected there to be more or less two years from now. Chart 12 shows the breakdown of responses to this question.

Chart 12: How has road congestion changed compared to now? ⁽¹⁾



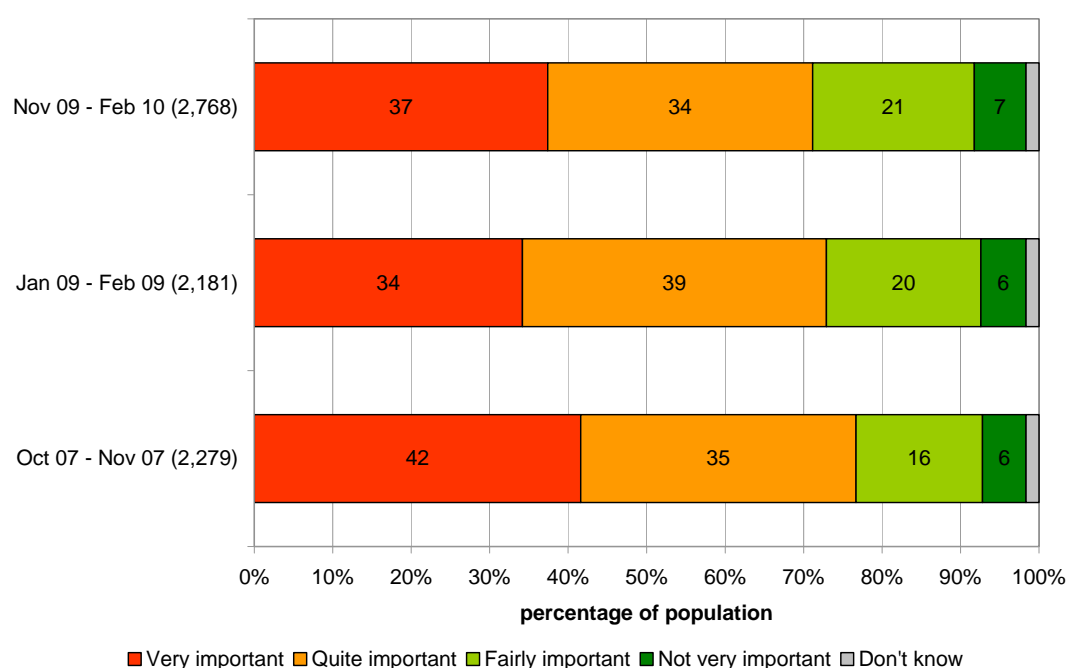
(1) This includes attitudes of those who travel on foot.

Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents = 2,768.

- 4.10 The majority of adults thought that there was more congestion on the road now than two years ago (70 per cent), and that over the next two years they expect congestion to increase further (74 per cent).
- 4.11 Thirty seven per cent of the population said they thought it was very important for Government to tackle congestion in relation to its other responsibilities. This is significantly lower than when this question was asked in the October to November 2007 survey when 42 per cent responded in this way.
- 4.12 Only 7 per cent of adults didn't think that congestion was an important issue to be tackled, and this has broadly stayed the same over the three surveying periods. The results for the last three surveys are shown in chart 13.

Chart 13: How important do you think it is for Government to tackle congestion in relation to its other responsibilities? ⁽¹⁾



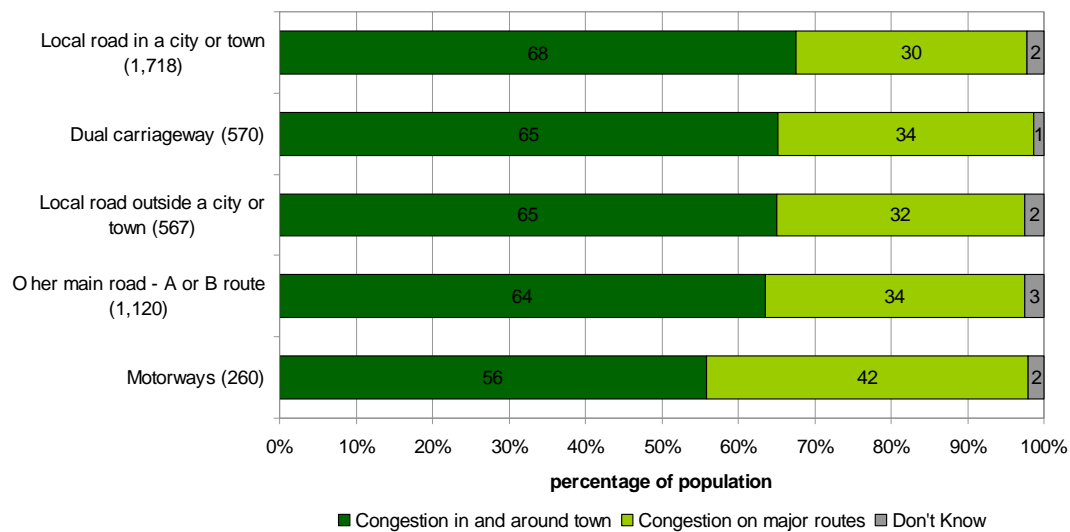
(1) This includes attitudes of those who travel on foot.

Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey results from October to November 2007, January to February 2009 and November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

- 4.13 Sixty six per cent of adults thought that congestion was worse in and around urban areas, while 31 per cent thought congestion to be worse on major routes such as motorways. These results have been broken down by the type of road used by respondents in chart 14.
- 4.14 About two-thirds of adults' most frequent journey was on local roads in a city or town. Of these 68 per cent said that congestion was worse in and around urban areas.
- 4.15 One in ten adults' most common journey was on motorways and, of these, 42 per cent said that congestion was worse on the major routes.

Chart 14: Which congestion is worse by type of road on your most frequent journey? ⁽¹⁾



(1) This includes attitudes of those who travel on foot.

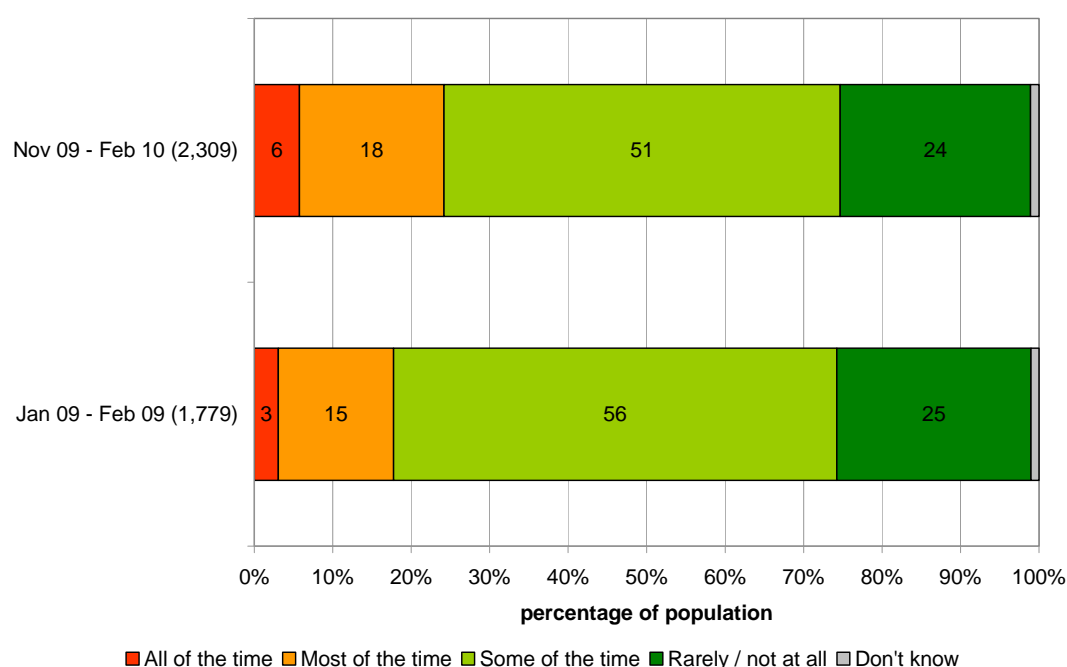
Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

Attitudes towards motorway congestion

- 4.16 The analyses of the survey results in this section come only from those who have either driven or been a passenger on motorway journeys over the last 12 months.
- 4.17 Almost a quarter of adults that use motorways thought that congestion was a problem for the majority of their journeys. Just over half thought that congestion was a problem on motorways some of the time.
- 4.18 Motorway congestion was more frequently reported to be a problem in the November 2009 to February 2010 survey, compared to that of January to February 2009. The proportion experiencing motorway congestion 'all of the time' and 'most of the time' have significantly increased by 3 and 4 percentage points respectively, while the proportion citing motorway congestion 'some of the time' has reduced by 6 percentage points. This shift in views can be seen in chart 15.

Chart 15: How often do you experience congestion on motorway journeys?

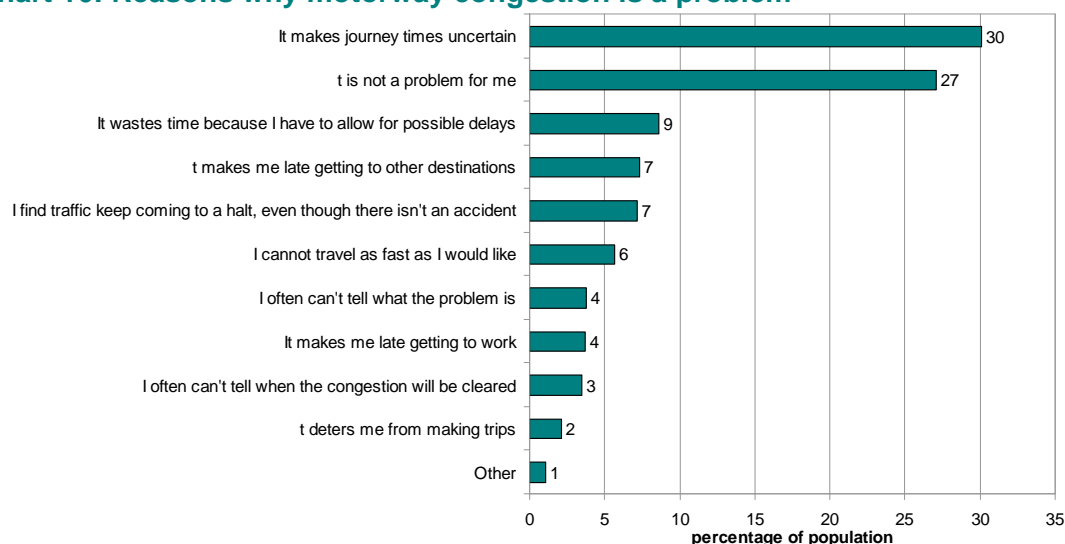


Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey results from January to February 2009 and November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

4.19 Chart 16 shows the reasons given why motorway congestion is a problem for the respondents. Three in ten said it was because of the uncertainty it had on their journey times while one in ten said it wasted their time. In line with the question above, 27 per cent said it wasn't a problem for them.

Chart 16: Reasons why motorway congestion is a problem ⁽¹⁾



(1) Where the respondent gave more than one response only the main reason was included.

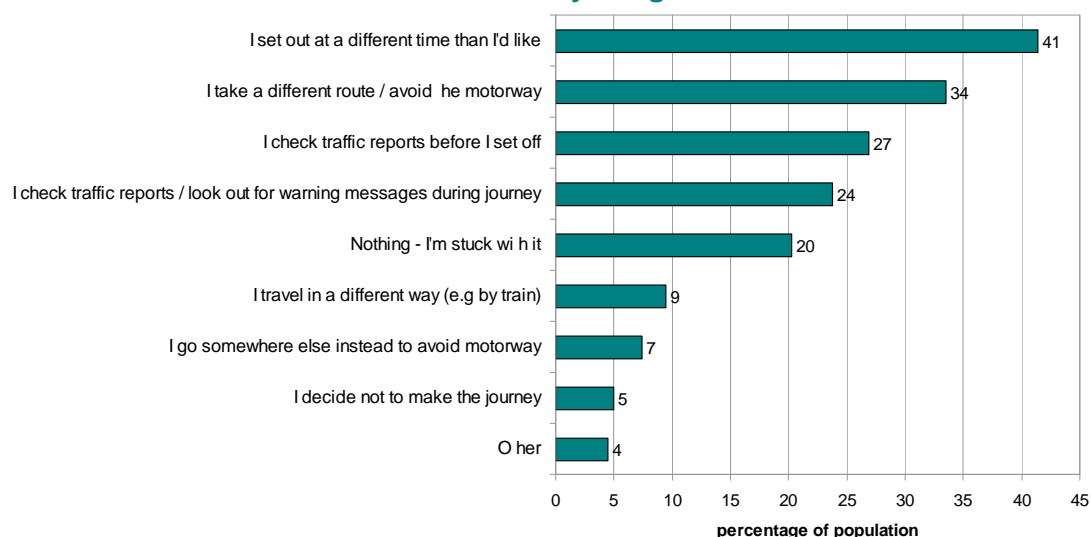
Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents = 2,309.

4.20 Chart 17 shows the actions routinely taken by respondents to avoid motorway congestion. Forty one per cent of adults said that they commonly set out at a different time to avoid congestion, while 34 per cent said that they change their route.

4.21 One-fifth of adults said that it was not possible for them to avoid motorway congestion; this possibly reflects the need of some to travel at certain times of the day.

Chart 17: Actions taken to avoid motorway congestion



Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents = 2,309.

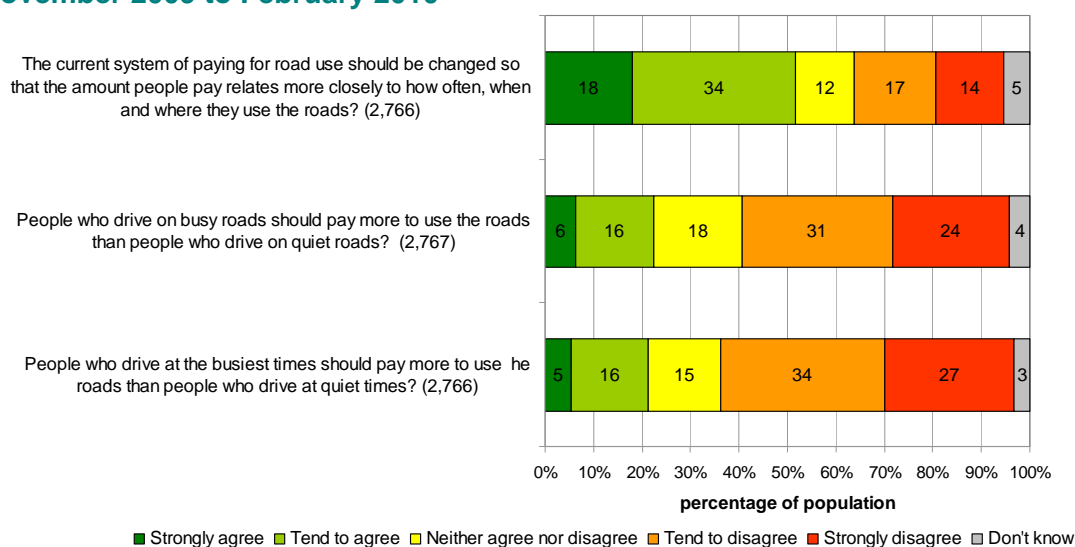
5 Effectiveness and fairness of alternative road charging schemes

- 5.1 All of the respondents were then asked to think about different methods of charging for road use that might encourage people to use their cars differently or change their travel behaviour. This section takes a closer look at attitudes towards these types of schemes.

Should the method of paying for road use change?

- 5.2 Chart 18 shows the extent to which respondents agreed with three statements about possible changes to the method of paying to use the road.
- 5.3 Fifty two per cent of the population agreed that the current method of road charging should change to reflect how often, when and where roads are being used while 31 per cent disagreed with this statement.
- 5.4 However, only 22 per cent of adults agreed that people who drive on busy roads should pay more than those who drive on quiet roads and 21 per cent agreed that users of the road at busy times should pay more.
- 5.5 The apparent disparity in agreement between these two statements and the first could be explained by the lack of a separate statement concerning only frequency of use or by the possibly more direct nature of the latter statements compared to the first.

Chart 18: Attitudes towards changing the method of charging for road use, November 2009 to February 2010

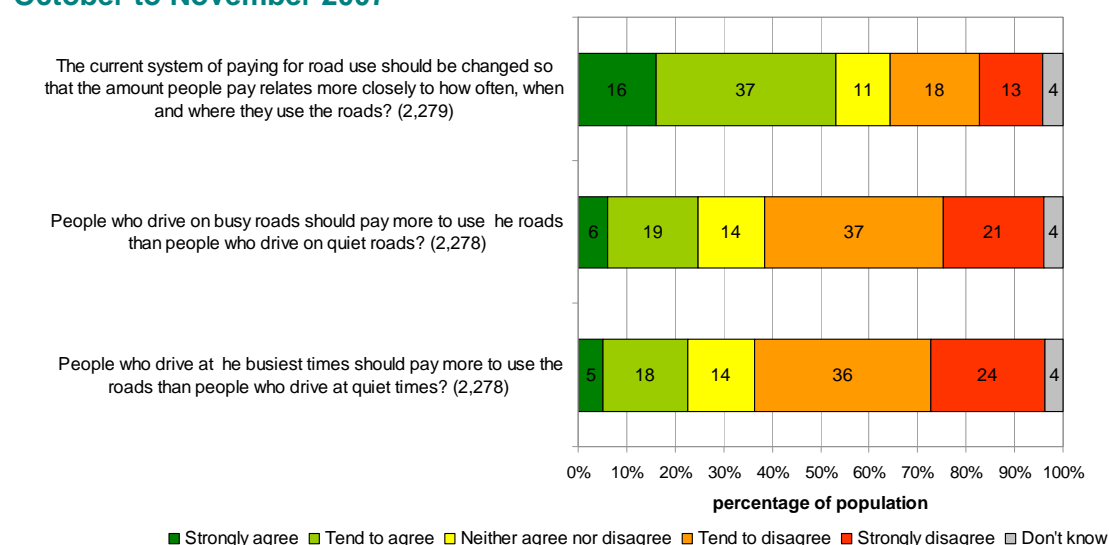


Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

- 5.6 The above questions were also asked in the October to November 2007 survey and the responses given at this time are shown in chart 19. The overall pattern of results from both surveys was very similar and the apparent disparity between the three statements was also evident in the earlier survey.

Chart 19: Attitudes towards changing the method of charging for road use, October to November 2007



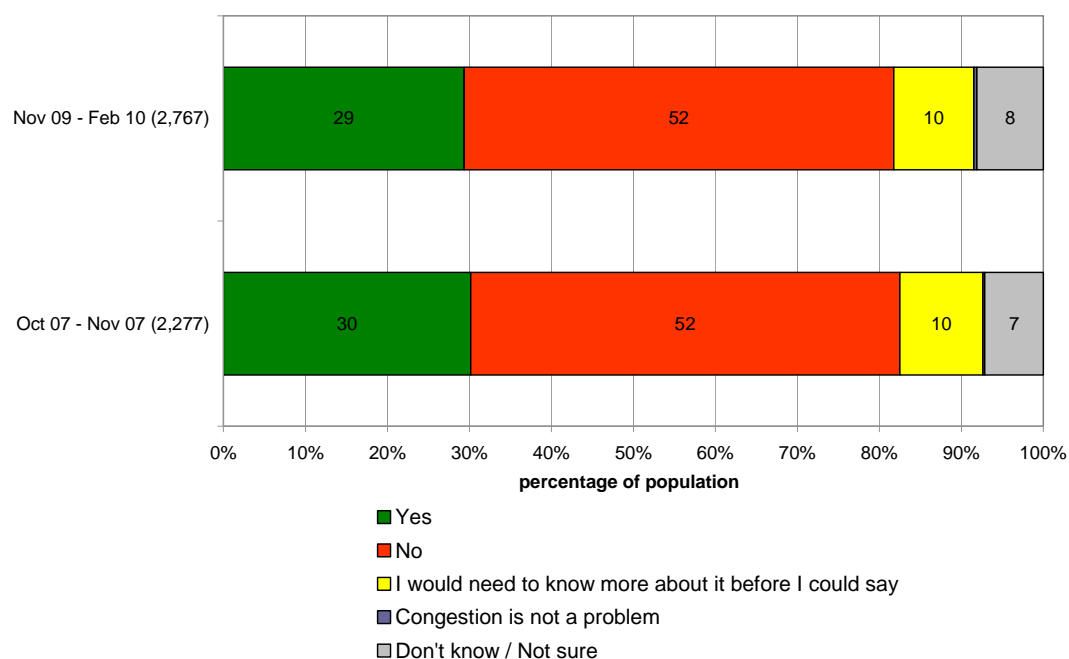
Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, October to November 2007.

Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

Would a new scheme of paying for road use reduce congestion?

- 5.7 Respondents were also asked whether or not they felt a new system for road charging based on the times of travel and specific routes taken would help reduce congestion.
- 5.8 Just over half (52 per cent) of adults said they didn't think that such a scheme would work in reducing congestion, while 29 per cent thought that it would. One in ten adults, however, were undecided and needed to know more about such a scheme before giving an answer, and a further 8 per cent didn't know or were not sure.
- 5.9 Chart 20 compares the results of this question between the October to November 2007 and November 2009 to February 2010 survey. The attitudes reported are very similar, with no significant differences between the two surveys.

Chart 20: Do you think a new charging scheme to use roads will reduce congestion?



Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey results from October to November 2007 and November 2009 to February 2010.

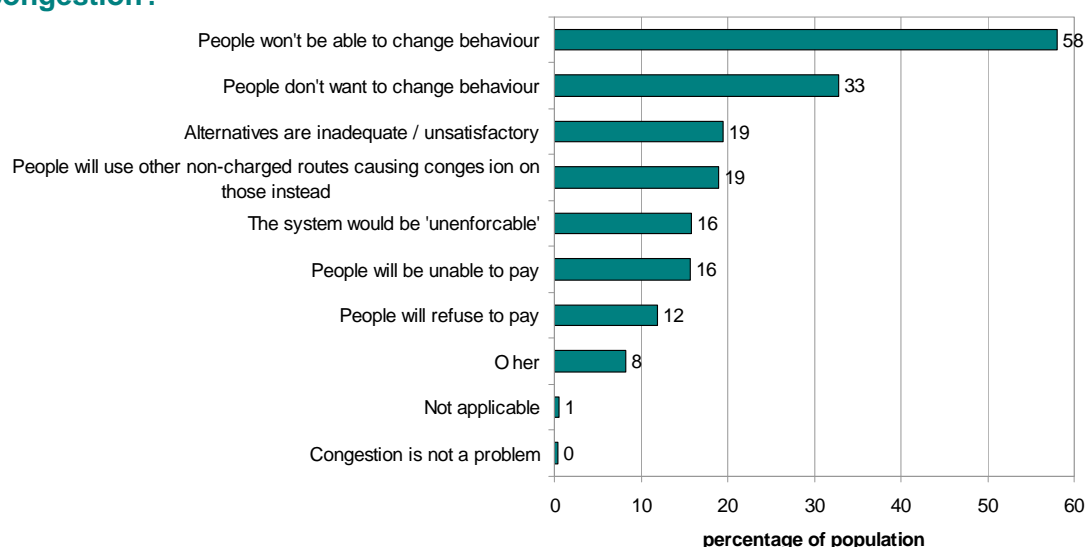
Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

5.10 Those who thought that such a charging scheme would not help in reducing congestion were also asked why they did not think it would work. The reasons given have been shown in chart 21.

5.11 Fifty eight per cent of those who said it wouldn't work felt the main reason to be that people wouldn't be able to change their behaviour, while 33 per cent said people wouldn't want to change their behaviour.

5.12 About one-fifth thought that it would create congestion on the charge free routes and a similar number felt that the alternatives were unsatisfactory.

Chart 21: Reasons why a new charging scheme won't work to reduce congestion?



Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

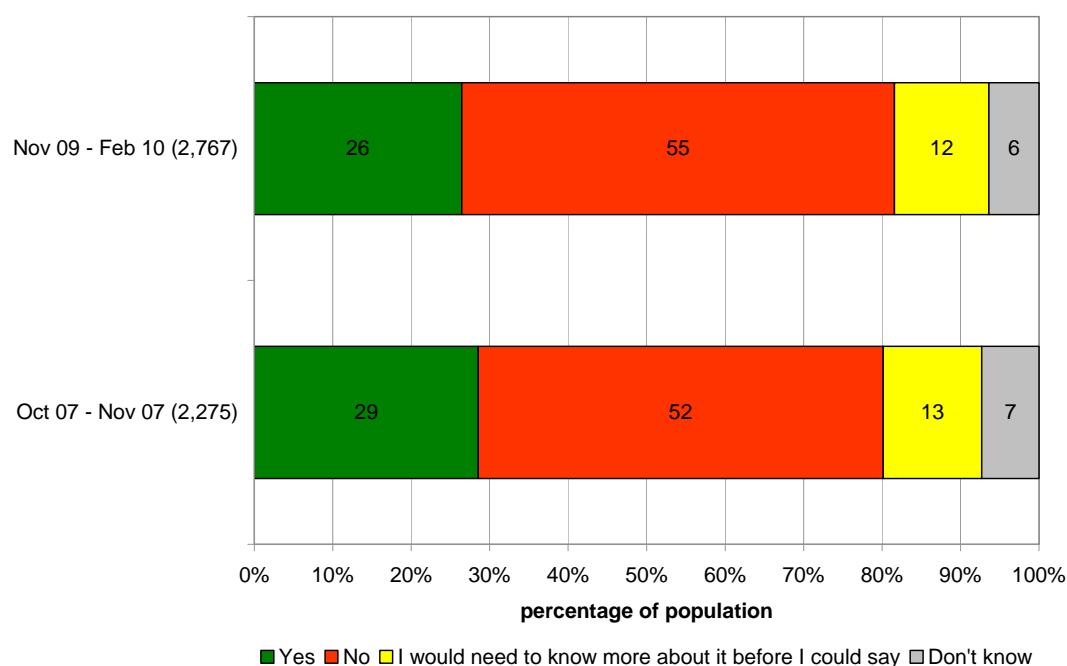
Unweighted base: all respondents = 1,456.

Fairness and impacts of a new method of paying to use the road

5.13 Fifty five per cent of adults also said that a new scheme would be unfair, while around a quarter thought that it would be fair. Twelve per cent of adults were undecided and felt they needed to know more about the scheme first.

5.14 When compared to the results of the October to November 2007 survey, 4 percentage points more thought that the introduction of such a scheme would be unfair in this survey. The results from both surveys are shown in chart 22.

Chart 22: Do you think a new charging scheme is fair?

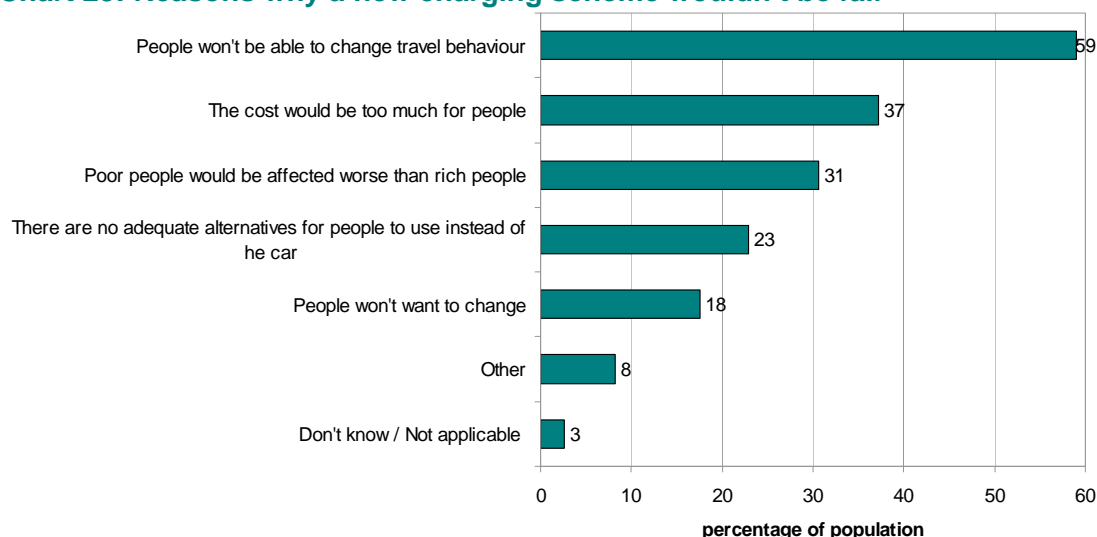


Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey results from October to November 2007 and November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

- 5.15 Those respondents who thought that this sort of charging scheme would be unfair on road users were then asked why they thought this were the case. As with the earlier question, almost three-fifths said that it was not possible for people to change their travel behaviour, the most frequent reason given.
- 5.16 The financial costs was also a common reason why respondents felt such a charging scheme to be unfair, with 37 per cent saying the costs involved would be too much and 31 per cent saying the poor would be more affected than the rich. All of the reasons given have been shown in chart 23.

Chart 23: Reasons why a new charging scheme wouldn't be fair

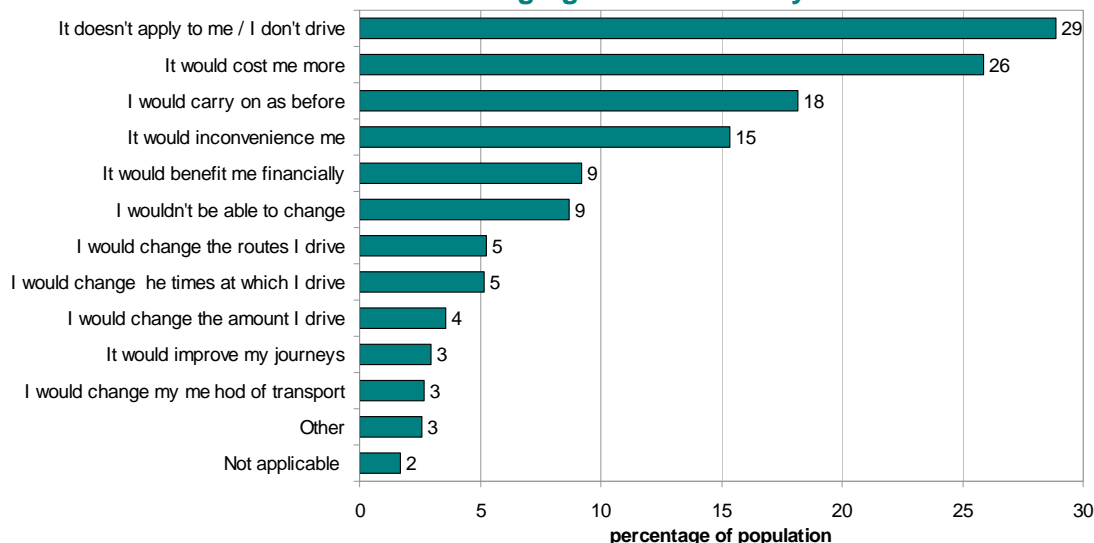


Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents =1,524.

- 5.17 The respondents were also asked to think about how a new scheme would impact on them personally. The results of this are shown in Chart 24.
- 5.18 Almost three in ten adults felt they would not be directly affected by such a scheme while 26 per cent thought it would cost them more and 18 per cent said they would carry on as before.

Chart 24: How would a new road charging scheme affect you?



Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents = 2,767.

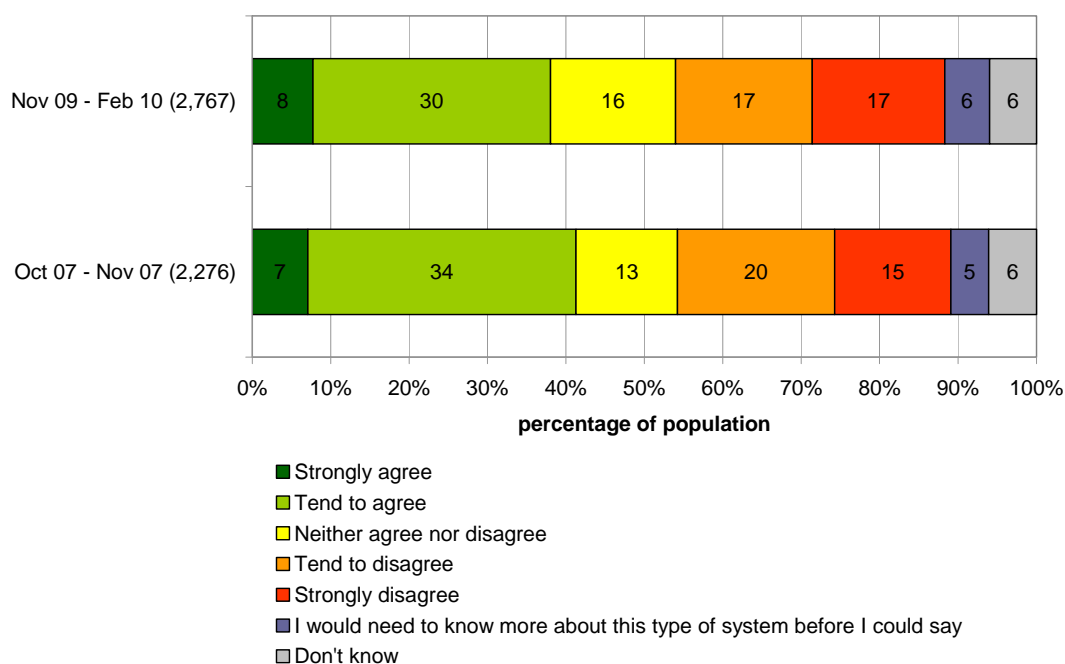
5.19 All respondents were then asked how much they agreed with the following statement:

I would be prepared to accept road pricing as long as there was no overall increase in the amount of taxation paid by motorists as a group, even if this meant some people paying more than they do at present?

5.20 Thirty eight per cent agreed with this statement, while 34 per cent disagreed. A small number of adults (6 per cent) felt they needed more information, and a further 6 per cent didn't know or weren't sure how to answer.

5.21 This question was also asked as part of the October to November 2007 survey. In that survey 41 per cent of the population agreed with this statement, while 35 per cent disagreed. All of these results are shown in chart 25.

Chart 25: Agreement to the statement “I would be prepared to accept road pricing as long as there was no overall increase in the amount of taxation paid by motorists as a group, even if this meant some people paying more than they do at present?”

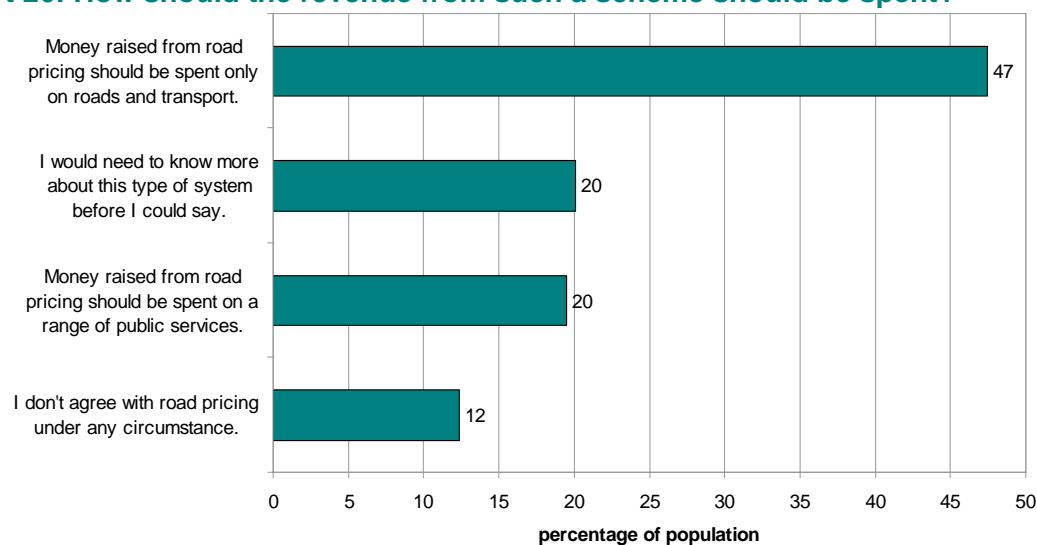


Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey results from October to November 2007 and November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents indicated in brackets.

5.22 All respondents were finally asked how the revenue from such a scheme, if it were introduced, should be spent. The responses given have been shown in chart 26. Almost half said that the revenue from such a scheme should be spent solely on roads and transport, while one-fifth said the revenues should be spent on a range of services and over a tenth (12 per cent) said they didn't agree with road pricing under any circumstances.

Chart 26: How should the revenue from such a scheme should be spent?



Source: ONS Opinions Omnibus Survey, November 2009 to February 2010.

Unweighted base: all respondents = 2,767.