

# Road User Charging

A report from the RAC Foundation for Motoring

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## INTRODUCTION

The RAC Foundation surveyed motorists' attitudes to road charges and tolls in 2002.

Since then the Government has made a manifesto commitment to evaluate road pricing as a solution to congestion, and agreed to fund seven pilot schemes. The London Congestion Charge has been in operation since 2003. In the Midlands, motorists may choose to pay to use the M6 Toll Road.

The Foundation recently re-surveyed motorists to find out whether attitudes had changed as the issues have become more familiar to UK motorists.

In 2002, the RAC Foundation commissioned NOP Automotive to question 500 drivers in a Motorbus Survey between 8th and 10th March 2002. In 2005, GfK Automotive, part of GfK NOP, repeated the survey with 554 UK motorists polled between 25th and 27th November.

The study shows that the majority of motorists still accept the principle that it would be fairer to pay for the roads according to the amount of time spent driving in congestion rather than the current system of taxing fuel and vehicle ownership: the proportion agreeing to that has increased by two points to 62 per cent.

However, the proportion of motorists who support any particular application of road pricing has declined, which hints at suspicion about how pricing would actually work.

The Foundation is calling on the Government to change the way the debate is presented. Road pricing is not an end in itself but may in some places be one element of a package of measures required to give the UK a transport system fit for the 21st Century.

## THE RAC FOUNDATION VIEW

The RAC Foundation believes that this study shows that the opportunity to persuade motorists of the benefits of road charging is not being taken..

These results show much has to be done to convince motorists of the merits of charging.

In the interim, Government and local authorities need to step up the rate of road improvements to avoid gridlock. Road improvements are an essential part of the package approach which will be necessary to tackle congestion, yet the present rate of improvement is well below what is needed to provide a decent road system for the country.

The RAC Foundation supports the principle of road pricing on a limited proportion of the road network - but not if it is simply an extra tax on the motorist.

The Foundation has proposed five key conditions for any scheme:

- The charges must be fair, must be accompanied by reductions in other motoring taxes, and be overseen by a genuinely independent body.
- At least part of the proceeds must be re-invested in road transport, and be additional to current spending commitments.
- There must be a clear timetable for implementation, and time to allow people to adjust their travel routines.
- There must be protection of privacy.
- There must be protection for the least well off – road pricing must not be used to drive those on low incomes off the roads.

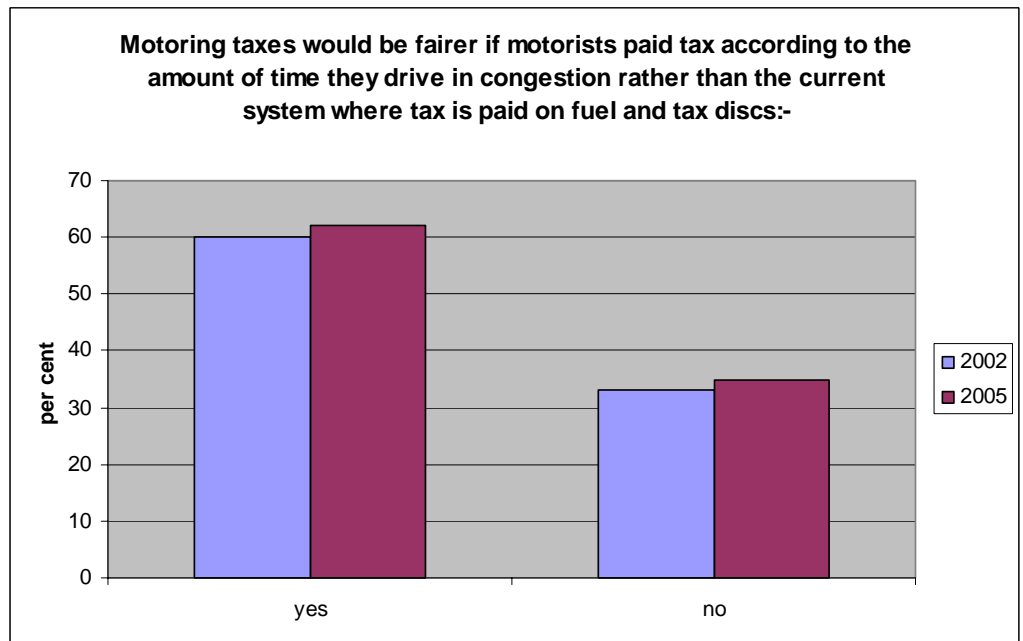
The study also shows that if the Government agreed to these conditions of acceptance, then support for pricing would grow.

# Road User Charging

## FAIRNESS

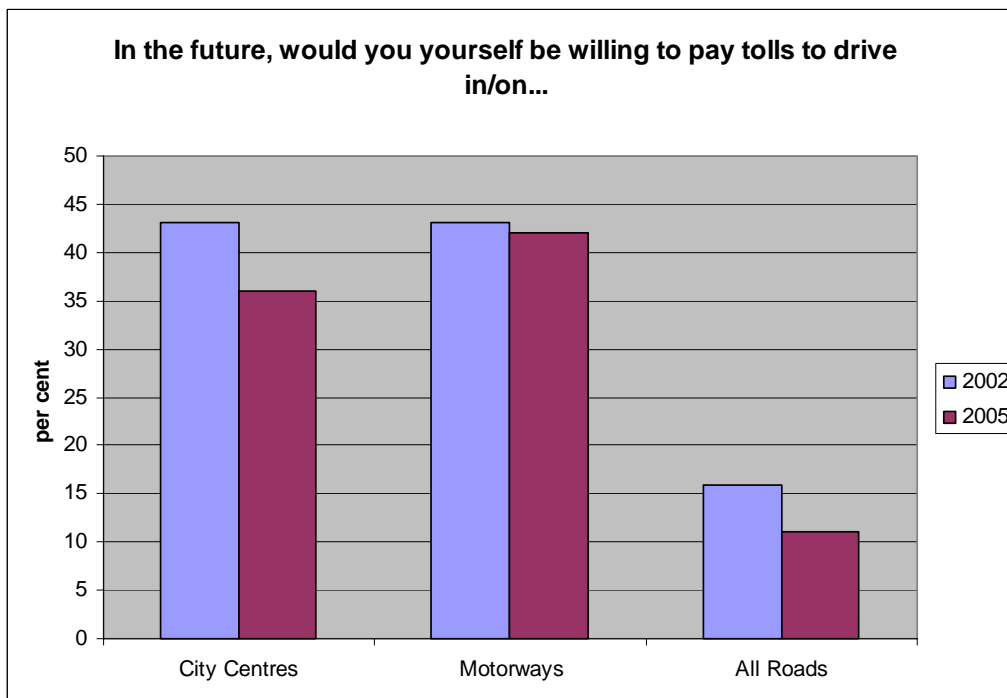
The majority of motorists accept the principle that it would be fairer to pay for the roads according to the time spent driving in congestion. Support for this view has increased slightly since 2002, rising by two percentage points.

Over 60 percent of UK motorists agree that a tax system based on time spent driving on congested roads would be fairer. However, just over one third say that it would not be fairer than the current system of taxes on fuel and VED.



## WILLINGNESS TO PAY

The proportion of motorists who support any particular application of road pricing has declined.

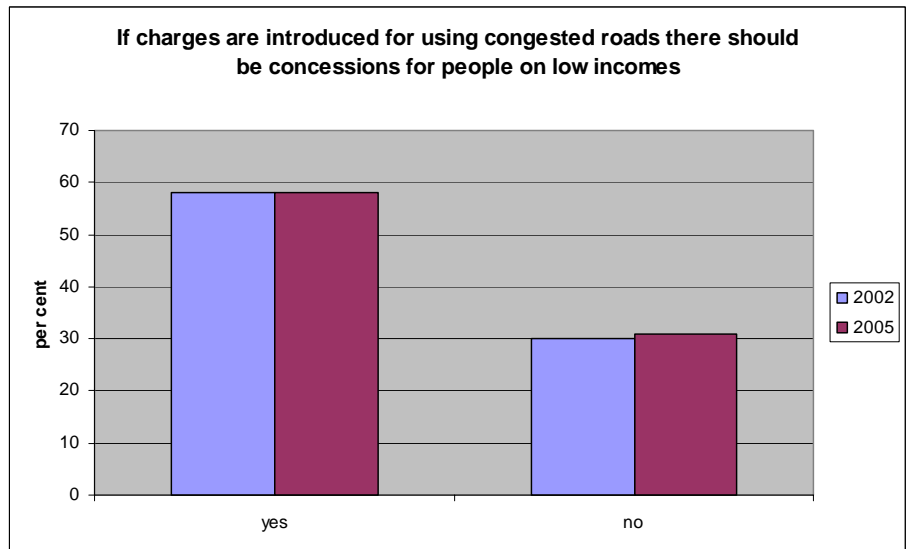


- In **city centres**: the number of motorists willing to pay a charge to drive in city centres has fallen by 7 per cent since 2002.
- on **all roads**: the number of motorists willing to pay to use the whole road network has fallen by 5 per cent since 2002.
- on **motorways**: the number of motorists willing to pay to use motorways has remained broadly the same, falling by just 1 per cent since 2002.

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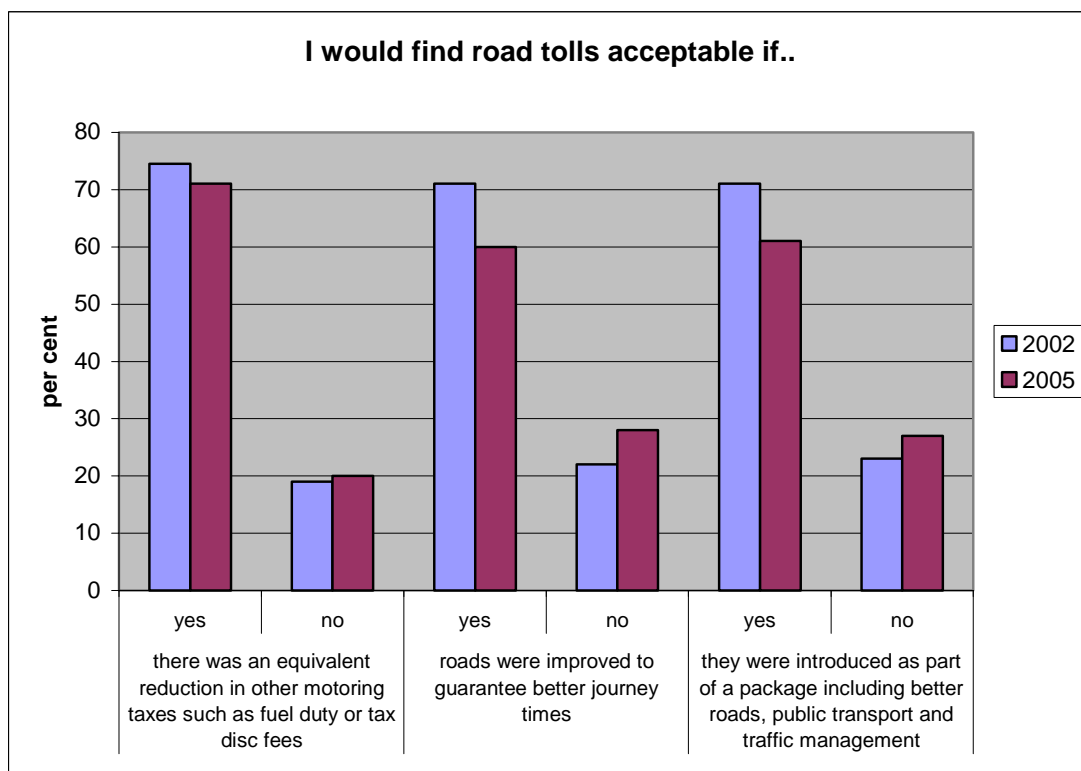
## PROTECTION FOR THE LEAST WELL-OFF

Another important aspect of fairness is how to deal with motorists on a low income. The survey shows that UK motorists believe that road pricing must not be a way of removing those on low incomes from the road. Fifty-eight per cent agree that there should be protection for this group. This opinion has remained consistent between surveys.



## WHAT WOULD PERSUADE MOTORISTS THAT CHANGES ARE ACCEPTABLE?

In 2002, the survey found that more than three quarters of motorists would accept charging if there were equivalent reductions in fuel duty, and over 70 per cent would accept them if part of a package of transport improvements. But the 2005 survey shows that motorists are now less willing to be persuaded by concessions in these areas.



- The number of motorists agreeing that tolls would be acceptable if other motoring taxes came down has fallen by 3.5 per cent
- The number of motorists agreeing that tolls would be acceptable if roads were improved to guarantee better journeys has fallen by 11 per cent
- The number of motorists agreeing that tolls would be acceptable if they were introduced as a package including better roads, better public transport and better traffic management, has fallen by 10 per cent.

# Road User Charging

## WHERE SHOULD THE MONEY GO?

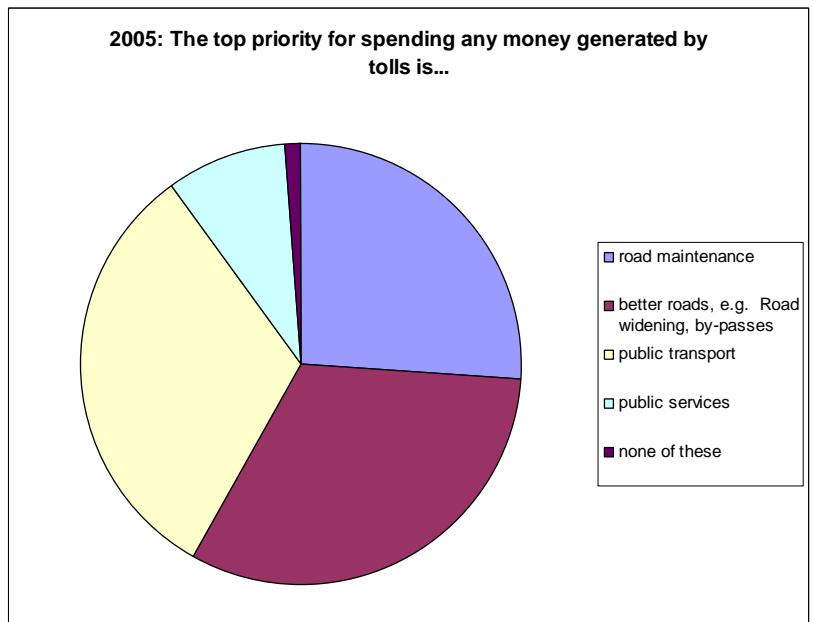
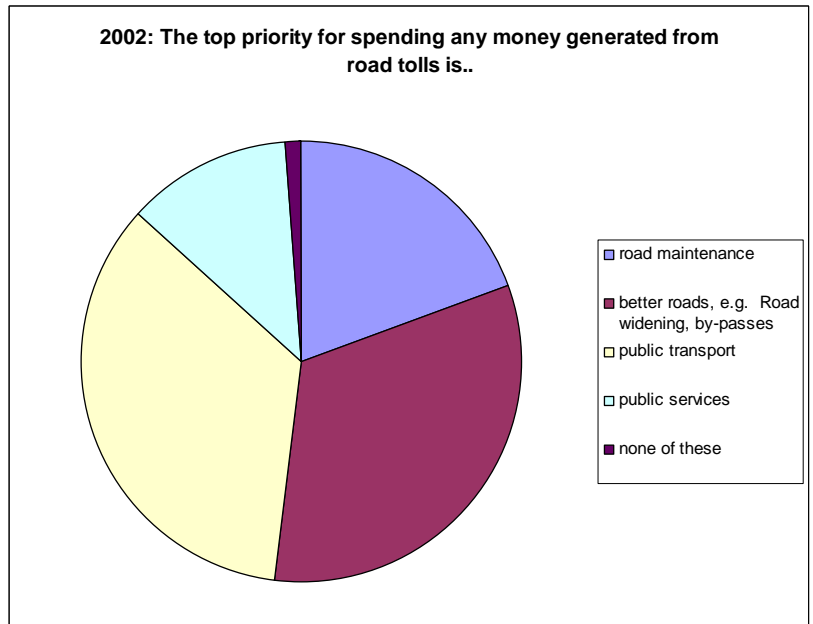
A comparison of motorists' priorities between 2002 and 2005 shows that the Government may need to consider an element of hypothecation for any revenues from a national scheme.

The number of motorists putting road maintenance as their first priority is up seven per cent. Support for revenue being used to improve public transport has fallen two per cent.

In both surveys the majority of respondents would like money spent on road improvements and maintenance. This level of support is growing.

The proposal that income from road tolls should go to general public services was the top priority for just 9 per cent of UK motorists, down three points since 2002.

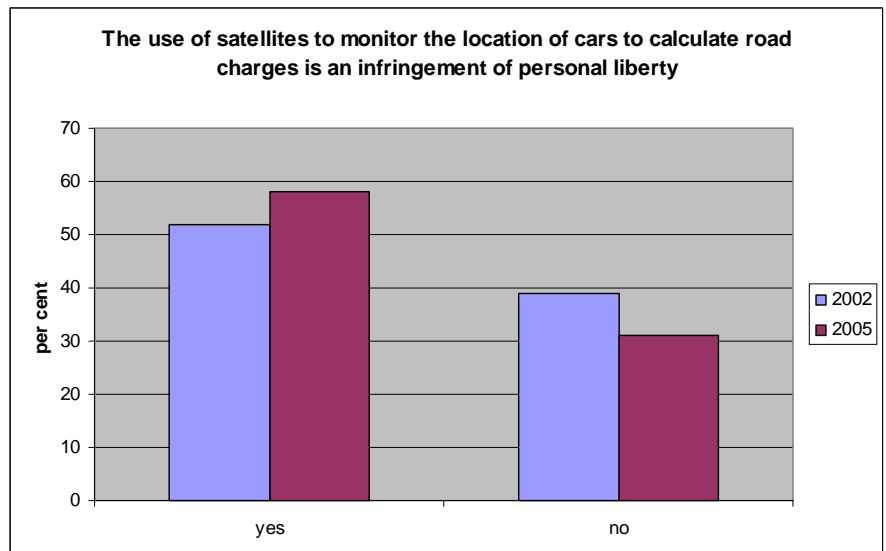
This suggests that motorists need to be persuaded that road pricing will lead to improvements in their own journeys. They are less willing to see the revenue being spent in areas which would not directly benefit their own travel needs.



## THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

One of the aspects which appears to worry drivers, according to these results, is that of privacy. More motorists are now concerned that the use of satellites to monitor the location of cars to calculate road charges is an infringement of personal liberty than when the research was first conducted.

This supports the RAC Foundation call for guarantees that information gathered for road pricing must not be used for other purposes, such as speed enforcement.



# Road User Charging

## TRUST

The RAC Foundation believes that there has to be an open dialogue with motorists, whose support is essential to the long-term success of any scheme. At present, motorists are concerned that pricing will be just another charge on top of what they already pay. Eighty seven per cent of motorists do not trust the Government to deliver any pricing scheme fairly.

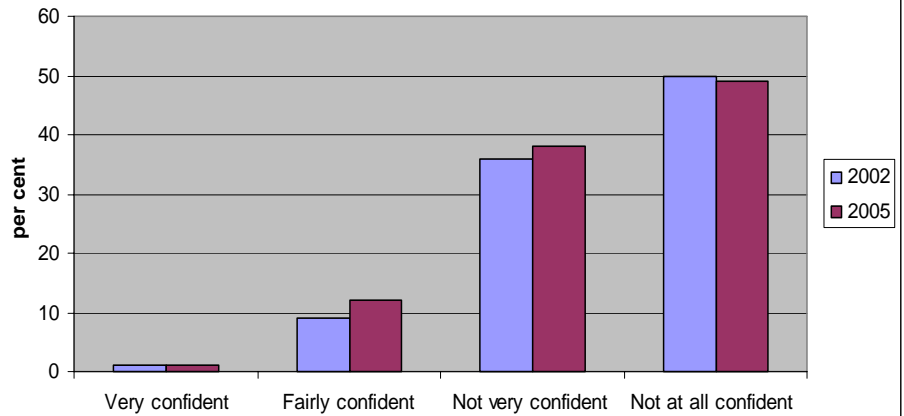
Seventy nine per cent of motorists now think there should be an independent body set up to safeguard the interests of road users. If such a body were in place a majority of motorists would be confident that the Government could deliver a fair scheme. Without such guarantees, support for pricing falls away.

**The RAC Foundation for Motoring is an independent charity established to promote the environmental, economic, mobility and safety issues relating to use of motor vehicles.**

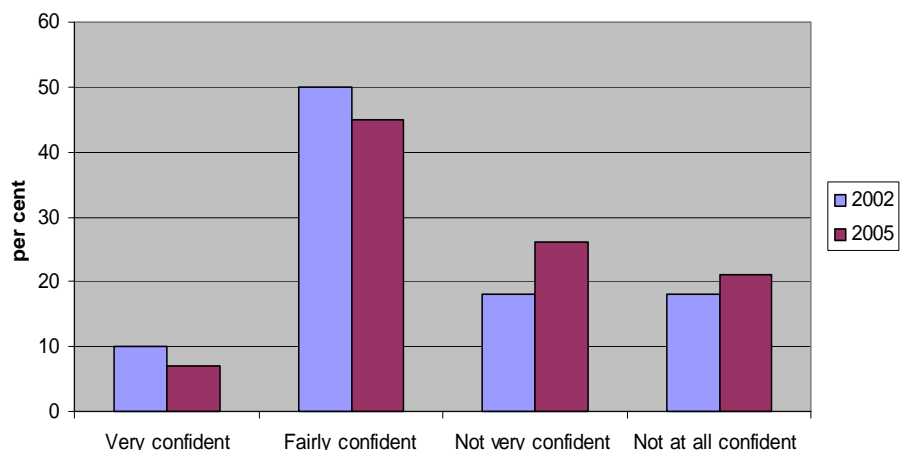
Our vision: Advocating innovative transport solutions for safer roads, safer drivers, greener cars, improved mobility and a fair deal for motorists.

For information, advice, research or interviews on issues that affect the motorist, please contact us or visit our website, [www.racfoundation.org](http://www.racfoundation.org)

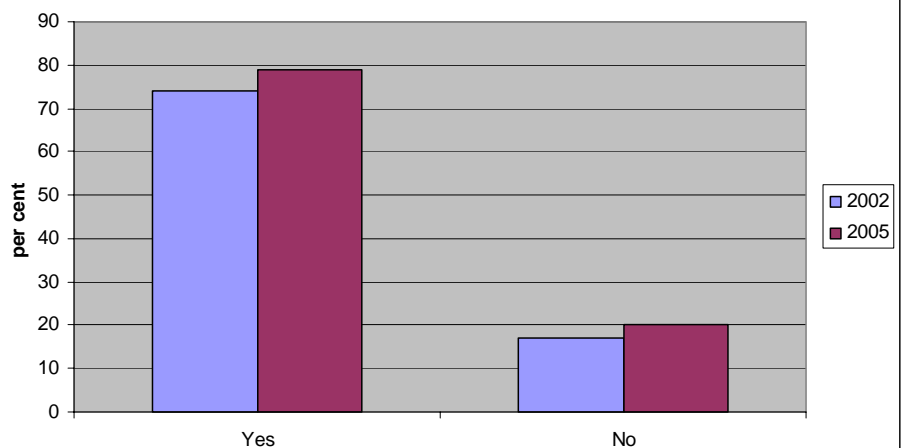
Research has found that the majority of motorists would support tolls on 10% of the most congested roads provided that there was a reduction in fuel duty. How confident are you that the Government would stick to this promise?



How confident would you be if toll charges were set and fuel duty reductions monitored by an independent body rather than by the Government?



Do you think there should be an independent body to safeguard the interests of road users?



# Road User Charging – summary of results

## SUMMARY OF STUDY RESULTS

<b>In the future, would you yourself be willing to pay tolls to drive in/on:-</b>	2002	2005	change
• City Centres	43	36	-7
• Motorways	43	42	-1
• All Roads	16	11	-5
<b>I would find road tolls acceptable if..</b>	2002	2005	change
• there was an equivalent reduction in other motoring taxes such as fuel duty or tax disc fees	74.5	71	-3.5
• roads were improved to guarantee better journey times	71	60	-11
• they were introduced as part of a package including better roads, public transport and traffic management	71	61	-10
<b>The top priority for spending any money generated from road tolls is:</b>	2002	2005	change
• road maintenance	19	26	7
• better roads, e.g. Road widening, by-passes	32	32	0
• public transport	34	32	-2
• public services	12	9	-3
• none of these	1	1	0
<b>Motoring taxes would be fairer if motorists paid tax according to the amount of time they drive in congestion, rather than the current system where tax is paid on fuel and tax discs</b>	2002	2005	change
yes	60	62	2
no	33	35	2
<b>The use of satellites to monitor the location of cars to calculate road charges is an infringement of personal liberty</b>			
yes	52	58	6
no	39	31	-8
<b>Increasing the tax on petrol is a better way of restraining traffic than a charge or tolls for use of congested roads</b>			
yes	22	22	0
no	69	70	1
<b>If charges are introduced for using congested roads there should be concessions for people on low incomes</b>			
yes	58	58	0
no	30	31	1

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	2002	2005	change
<b>Research has found that the majority of motorists would support tolls on 10% of the most congested roads provided that there was a reduction in fuel duty. How confident are you that the Government would stick to this promise?</b>			
Very confident	1	1	0
Fairly confident	9	12	3
Not very confident	36	38	2
Not at all confident	50	49	-1
<b>How confident would you be if toll charges were set and fuel duty reductions monitored by an independent body rather than by the Government?</b>			
Very confident	10	7	-3
Fairly confident	50	45	-5
Not very confident	18	26	8
Not at all confident	18	21	3
<b>Do you think there should be an independent body to safeguard the interests of road users?</b>			
Yes	74	79	5
No	17	20	3
Don't know	9	1	-8