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Delivering the Goods for Drivers

A fundamental shift in the way England's roads are managed and paid for is essential if the country is to avoid traffic gridlock in the coming decades.

As part of the change, some form of 'pay as you go' scheme seems inevitable.

These are amongst the conclusions of '*Governing and Paying for England's Roads*', a report published today by the RAC Foundation and written by its director Professor Stephen Glaister.

The launch of the report coincides with an Ipsos MORI survey which reveals almost half (46%) of the British population support a charging system on the motorways and major roads which also contains measures including the abolition of road tax and a cut in fuel duty.

Professor Glaister identifies several major problems facing road users and the government in the future:

- A lack of vision for the road network
- A 33% increase in traffic by 2025 because of population growth and economic recovery
- An associated increase in congestion and unreliable journey times
- An imperative to meet targets for cutting carbon emissions from road transport
- Reduced spending on road infrastructure because of financial and political constraints
- A significant fall in fuel duty revenue as cars become more fuel efficient and increasingly use ultra low carbon fuels such as electricity

Professor Glaister said: "In terms of keeping the country moving we are almost at the end of the road. The population is rising and traffic is forecast to grow too. Something needs to be done. At the moment, nothing is."

He believes one long term answer is to make the running of the road network more arm's length from government and to introduce a 'pay as you go' system. Such a scheme would help change driver behaviour and deliver benefits such as an easing of congestion, reduced environmental damage and better, more reliable journeys.

The Ipsos MORI survey showed 58% of drivers agreed that a 'pay as you go' system across all roads would make them think about how much they drive.

Professor Glaister insists a system of charging motorists per mile travelled must come with:

- A cut in fuel duty and road tax

- A governing body to develop and implement a long term strategy for maintaining and enhancing the road network
- A guaranteed sum of revenue put aside to pay for the work
- A regulator to make sure the work is done efficiently
- More reliable journey times and compensation for delays

Professor Glaister continued: “Some form of ‘pay as you go’ system is inevitable because of the benefits it will deliver for motorists and the country, and the lack of a credible alternative. The Ipsos MORI poll shows that most people are instinctively opposed to road user charging when they think it is an extra tax. But when the details are explained and they realise the benefits then the opposition falls away dramatically.

“It is also telling that less than 1% of those opposed to ‘pay as you go’ see invasion of privacy as a major reason for objection.

“Motorists are resentful of the relentless rise in the cost of fuel, and feel short-changed by the amount spent on the road network. But these proposals address such issues. People are very familiar with the principle of ‘pay as you go’. For example we are already charged for gas and electricity on the basis of how much we use.

“If politicians shy away from making difficult choices then so be it, but it will be the next generation which has to live with the consequences.”

ENDS

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Notes to editors:

1. The RAC Foundation is a charity which explores the economic, mobility, safety and environmental issues relating to roads and responsible road users. Independent and authoritative research, carried out for the public benefit, is central to the Foundation’s activities.
2. Professor Stephen Glaister has been director of the RAC Foundation since October 2008. He is also Emeritus Professor of Transport and Infrastructure at Imperial College London. Previously Stephen was a board member of Transport for London and has worked for the Rail Regulator. He has advised government on numerous occasions.

3. A copy of Governing and Paying for England's Roads is available on request and will be on the Foundation's website - www.racfoundation.org - after its launch.
4. An Ipsos MORI survey of 1,005 British adults, commissioned by the RAC Foundation, was carried out by telephone over the weekend of 26th/27th June 2010.

Data are weighted to match the profile of the population by age, gender, work status, social grade, region and car in household.

When asked, "To what extent would you support or oppose the introduction of a pay as you go system in which car and van drivers pay to use Britain's motorways and major roads based on the distance they travel, that is a charge per mile?"

18% supported it.
65% opposed it.

But when subsequently asked, "Car and van drivers would be charged to use Britain's motorways and major roads; that is there would be a charge per mile. At the same time, road tax, the 'tax disc', would be abolished, fuel duty, that is tax on petrol and diesel, would be reduced, some of the money raised by this scheme would be used to improve roads, and compensation would be paid to drivers who are delayed. Overall, to what extent would you support or oppose this proposal?"

46% supported it.
34% opposed it.

When asked, "Why do you say that you oppose such a pay as you go proposal?"

17% said, unprompted, it would cost more
13% said they did not know enough about the system
<1% said it would invade the privacy of the motorist

When just drivers were asked, "To what extent do you agree with the following statement: 'The introduction of a "pay as you go" system on Britain's roads would make you think more about how much you drive?'"

58% agreed.
34% disagreed.

More information on the poll can be found at www.ipsos-mori.com

5. Changes in road capacity over recent years (according to DfT figures):

- In the ten years to 2008, motorway traffic increased 17%, yet the motorway network only lengthened by 4%
- Over the same period total traffic on all roads rose by 11% yet there was just 1.5% more road space
- At the same time the number of vehicles has risen by a quarter

Source: <http://www.dft.gov.uk/adobepdf/162469/221412/221549/227755/rrcgb2008.pdf> P104

6. 45% of drivers do less than 5,000 miles per year.
(Source: The Car in British Society - the RAC Foundation, 2009)

7. According to the DfT's vehicle factsheet from March 2010:

In 2008 the average annual mileage of company owned cars was 19,700 miles

In 2008 the average annual mileage of privately owned cars was 8,200 miles

Source:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/personal/ntsfactsheets/NTSVehiclesFactsheet.pdf>