
Understanding the Attitudes of Older People to Road Pricing

This briefing sheet describes a 3-year Government-funded PhD study. This study is set to improve the understanding of the links between ageing and road pricing. Specifically it will examine the attitudes of older people to road pricing and whether these differ from the attitudes expressed by the rest of the population. It will also investigate two aspects of social context (social norms and pro-social value orientations) that play a role in affecting older people's attitudes. This dual effort will assist in identifying problems and opportunities in the present context of road pricing.



Background and Justification

In an increasingly ageing society (in which more than 16% of the UK population today are older people but this forecast may be closer to 25% by 2041), the effects of ageing suggest that, without intervention, mobility difficulties could constitute a growing barrier to social inclusion. The implementation of an eventual road pricing scheme -not particularly straightforward nor economically affordable- might create an actual obstruction - or the perception of an obstruction - to the social inclusion and the accessibility of older people. However by studying older people's attitudes and achieving a better understanding of whether these differ from other age groups and the way these might be linked with social norms and pro-social values, it will be easier to plan less exclusive charging schemes, making road pricing publicly and

therefore politically more acceptable (in societal terms) as an option overall.

Objectives

- 1) To examine whether older people's attitudes to road pricing are different from the ones of other age groups.
- 2) To explore how older people's attitudes to road pricing are affected by their social norms and their pro-social value orientations.

Summary of Literature Review

At the moment there are significant research gaps in assessing the causal relationship between older age and road pricing. Despite some findings from UK-based national road pricing attitudinal surveys and other surveys for specific local pricing applications, no clear answer has been given to the question of whether older people's attitudes differ from those of other groups in society. A significant number of older people are more likely to face less time restrictions in their daily routine and enjoy the right of concessionary fares on public transport but on the other hand may have special and more complex mobility needs, live on a low income, have age related cognitive limitations, depend a lot in car use and have a less adequate linkage with technology than the rest of the population. This is why it is reasonable to expect at least for an initial period older people are going to be more sceptical in accepting a road pricing scheme.

Moreover it has been noticed that the existent road pricing literature does not discuss the way older people's attitudes develop; and specifically how older people's attitudes can be affected by social norms and their pro-social value orientations. Social norms are standards of behaviour that are based on widely shared beliefs on how individual group members ought to behave in a given situation. Pro-social value orientation, which findings in other disciplines suggest is stronger on older people than other age groups, is the tendency to ascribe more importance to collective consequences and favour what is positively valued for society. Since older

people will not be able to employ as they usually do, their vast experience in life as an effective guide, given that road pricing is an unfamiliar system to most of them, they might develop their attitudes based on what is viewed by the society as normal, acceptable, or even expected (social norms) and on what will benefit more the common good (pro-social value orientations).

Methodology

The methodology employed for this work consists of four parts: the conduct of a literature review, the construction of an appropriate theoretical framework, a two phase experimental procedure and analysis that will allow the identification of possible policy implications. Existent attitudinal survey datasets have been evaluated leading the researcher to the conclusion that primary data collection is necessary since data regarding pro-social values and social norms have never been collected before on the context of road pricing.

The primary data collection will require the employment of an initial quantitative study that will set the basis for a more focused qualitative phase. The first stage will be testing the hypothesis that older people's attitudes differ from those of other age groups, while the second one will involve a investigation of how attitudes link to pro-social values and social norms. Prior to each of the data collection phases a pilot study will take place to allow the identification of potential problems. The study area chosen is Bristol; a city that has been in the forefront of UK cities planning a road pricing scheme in response to the Transport Innovation Fund opportunity. Questionnaires delivered by mail were the chosen method for this initial data collection phase that will involve participants of all age groups. An unstratified random sampling method will be used; any Bristol voter stands an equal chance of receiving a questionnaire. The questionnaires will be distributed to 2300 individuals. 500 fully completed and returned questionnaires are the sample target size. Financial incentives and pro-notification briefing letters will be used to attract participation. The results will be validated through significance testing.

The engagement of older people in the second phase of this work will be achieved through the means of a series of focus groups. The reason for choosing focus groups is because they offer the opportunity to gather ethnographically rich data, to observe a large amount of social interaction and to obtain collective responses that will represent the group dynamics instead of individual thoughts. All the older people involved in this phase will be respondents of the quantitative questionnaire. Financial incentives and a feedback mechanism will be used in order to motivate the focus group participants. A scenario-type approach will be

employed, in which people will be presented with specific road pricing visions something that may lead to more homogenous and valid responses. It is likely that during the analysis a categorization of the older people in sub-groups depending on their age, their socio-economic group and their ability to drive or not, will take place in order to obtain more suitable research results since findings may vary from sub-group to sub-group.

Potential Outcomes & Benefits

Since public acceptability is the 'Holy Grail' of charging policy-making, revealing the special attitudinal issues of older people may help the identification of some of the potential social dilemmas of road pricing. This may be of use when deciding on some of the design criteria for any forthcoming British road pricing schemes.

Contact Details

PhD Student:
Mr Alexandros Nikitas
Alexandros.Nikitas@uwe.ac.uk
Tel: +44(0)117 32 81526

Director of Studies:
Dr Erel Avineri
Erel.Avineri@uwe.ac.uk

Co-supervisor:
Dr Graham Parkhurst
Graham.Parkhurst@uwe.ac.uk

Centre for Transport & Society
School of the Built & Natural Environment
University of the West of England
Frenchay Campus
Coldharbour Lane
BRISTOL BS16 1QY
UNITED KINGDOM

www.transport.uwe.ac.uk

