

Public Acceptability and perception research

Public Acceptability Research

In 2003, GWRC commissioned Gravitas Research and Strategy Ltd (Gravitas) to undertake a survey of community attitudes to congestion pricing in the Wellington region. This research was undertaken via telephone interviews of 1000 greater Wellington region residents likely to be affected by the introduction of congestion pricing. Key findings of the research are:

- 63% of respondents thought that congestion was a serious problem;
- 83% of respondents believed that congestion would get worse in the next few years;
- 94% of respondents thought that the congestion problem needed to be addressed (48% believing immediately and 46% in the next few years);
- 13% of respondents support road pricing (compared with 25% in the Auckland Road Pricing Evaluation Study);
- 34% of respondents consider congestion pricing to be an effective way of reducing congestion;
- 25% of respondents thought it was just another tax or way to raise money, although
- 26% of respondents believed that congestion pricing would create a large pool of money that could be used to improve roads, public transport and road safety; and
- 61% of respondents were open to the idea of congestion pricing at some level but would like further information.

In addition, the greatest share of perceived causes of congestion (58%) were attributed to issues motorists believe are beyond their control, particularly poorly designed or maintained roads.

When asked who or what organisations should have a responsibility to reduce traffic congestion, more than half of all suggestions (53%) related to local government and 35% to central government, while only 18% of respondents stated that individual motorists have at least some responsibility for reducing congestion.

Public Perception Research

The RLTS Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) biannual perception surveys (also telephone based interviews of 1000 regional residents) offers another, more recent insight into the public's perceptions. For example, since the surveys were started in 2003, consistently 60% of respondents state that they believe that the roading network is reliable. In addition, in the 2006 survey, 49% of respondents believed that traffic congestion was worse than it was two years ago, down from 62% in 2004.

Also, the AMR perception results show that the cost of private vehicles does lead to people choosing to use their private vehicles less. For example, in 2003 19% of respondents stated that the cost of running a private vehicle had led them to either not make trips or make fewer trips than they would otherwise have done. In the most recent 2006 survey, this figure had risen to 58%, representing a 55% increase over three years.

Presumably the marked shifts are due in some part to the significant increase in fuel prices during 2006. However, it also demonstrates how price signals can be effective in changing people's travel behaviour. In comparison, the number of respondents stating that the cost of PT has led them to making less or no trips by that mode has fallen, "improving" from 14% in 2003 to 10% in 2006.