

Questions and answers on the new road user survey

What have we been asked to do?

According to the government's Road Investment Strategy, "The Watchdog will investigate how best to develop new surveys that provide a more accurate picture of road user needs and wants. We expect that the new surveys will be developed for use during Road Period 1 (the next five years) and initially run in parallel with the NRUSS (the existing survey of road users) to ensure that the results are consistent".

How did we decide what to do?

Transport Focus commissioned an Independent Review to look at the design of a new road user survey. The Review was led by Professor Graham Parkhurst, of the Centre for Transport and Society at the University of West of England and Adam Phillips of Real Research. The key recommendation is to develop a robust online panel to conduct both the satisfaction survey as well as other research.

Why an online panel?

An online approach has a number of advantages:

- It is considerably more cost-effective than alternatives such as face-to-face interviewing and postal surveys.
- Online interviewing automatically routes participants through the survey, so that the experience of completing the survey is more straight-forward than with a paper survey
- Online surveys can be designed so that participants can use a range of devices to input their responses, which increases the accessibility of the survey
- Online surveys can be designed to support interactive mapping
- Options to develop app versions of the online survey can make use of geo-fencing which may be useful for future developments
- Online offers better options to develop more real time data reporting

The main disadvantage of an online approach is that not everyone has access to the Internet. However, we accept the view expressed in the Review that the penetration of internet users amongst drivers is likely to be around 90% and rising, which we consider is acceptable.

Who will participate in the surveys?

The Review proposes that car, van and commercial drivers and riders of motorcycles are interviewed for the survey. The Review argues that drivers will have greater awareness of the Strategic Road Network (England's motorways and trunk roads) than passengers in vehicles typically will.

Transport Focus is investigating options to survey other users of the Strategic Road Network, including passengers in motorised vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians.

How will you contact the drivers and riders?

Ensuring that the sample is representative of all drivers is very important. Transport Focus proposes to invite drivers to join the panel from the DVLA's driver licence database. Using the DVLA database means that we can ensure that we include "hard to reach" groups that are not properly represented in the existing National Road User Satisfaction Survey (NRUSS), such as drivers of buses, coaches, LGVs and HGVs. It also allows us to ensure that we have sufficient numbers of participants such as novice drivers, older drivers and disabled drivers.

How many people will be invited to participate?

We propose that the minimum number of panellists should not be less than 20,000 and ideally would be 30,000. This is based on being able to provide robust data by Highways England 'region' and 'area' at regular intervals.

The questionnaire

We have developed the questionnaire in two parts. The first part will be the website registration page which will collect information about the driver and the second part will be the trip based satisfaction survey.

Piloting

We have drawn up plans to design and test the following aspects of the new survey:

- The wording of the invitation to participate
- The design of the questionnaire (including the need for alternative versions for some classes of driver)
- The length of the questionnaire
- The need for incentives to encourage responses
- The design of the website registration page
- The presentation of the online survey on different devices including smartphones
- The likely registration and survey response rates by driver classes
- The design of the Strategic Road Network maps

When will the new survey start?

We plan to start running the new survey in October 2016. For a period there will be dual running with the existing survey. During this period we will compare and report on differences between the results from the two survey.