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Motorists complain of worsening traffic on UK's major roads

Congestion on the UK's major roads, which carry two-thirds of all traffic, has increased in the last year according to more than half of the motorists surveyed for the 2017 RAC Report on Motoring*.

Fifty-six per cent of the 1,727 drivers questioned for the annual study said they believe traffic has got worse on motorways, high-speed dual carriageways and A-roads – a worrying finding considering that 65%** of all the motor vehicle miles are travelled on them, despite them comprising only 13% of the UK's road network by length.

Motorways – which alone carry 21% of all traffic despite accounting for just 1% of UK roads – are seen to have suffered the greatest increase with 61% of motorists saying congestion and journey times have worsened in the last 12 months. And, more than a quarter (27%) of this 61% claim the change has been considerable. High-speed dual carriageways and urban A-roads were both felt by 58% of motorists to have become more congested. Rural single carriageway A-roads fared slightly better with only 45% stating congestion had worsened.

Away from major roads, urban B-roads and unclassified urban roads are also thought to have become busier and less reliable in terms of journey times by 55% of respondents. Only country B-roads and unclassified country roads have not got any worse with 58% saying the traffic levels are the same and just under a third (32%) that they had increased.

In terms of the greatest motoring concerns highlighted by drivers in the 2017 Report on Motoring, 8% of drivers cite traffic congestion and slower journey times as their number-one worry from a list of 23 common motoring

concerns, making it the joint fifth highest ranked issue in the annual RAC survey. The only bigger concerns are the illegal use of handheld mobile phones at the wheel (16%), the condition and maintenance of local roads (10%) and the cost of fuel (9%). The cost of insurance was also cited by 8% of motorists as their top concern.

Concerns about slower journey times are even more pressing among those who drive for work with 11% of business drivers identifying this as their number-one concern.

Government statistics support the concerns of motorists that emerged in research for the Report on Motoring as road traffic estimates for 2016 show motorists drove 252.6bn vehicle miles, which is a 2.2% increase on the previous year and the highest annual car traffic estimate ever. These figures go some way to explaining why Highways England has reported a small increase in average delays in journey times on the strategic network since 2014/5.

RAC chief engineer David Bizley said: “With unwelcome evidence of increased congestion, it is essential that the schemes to increase capacity of the strategic road network which form part of the he first Road Investment Strategy are delivered to plan. The recent news from Highways England that some projects have been delayed is therefore very unwelcome. And with work well advanced on development of the second Road Investment Strategy which will be implemented from 2020/21, it is vital that proposals are included to debottleneck the most congested stretches of the network which were not included in the first Road Investment Strategy.

“We also believe tackling congestion in the UK’s towns and cities can make an important contribution to improving air quality. The RAC urges local authorities to consider all possible measures – including better traffic light sequencing and installing speed cushions for traffic calming in preference to speed humps – to improve urban traffic flow and average speeds.”

Motorists were also asked about the causes of worsening congestion. While a general increase in traffic volumes was largely blamed for increasing urban congestion, reasons given for greater motorway traffic included major roadworks (47%), middle-lane hogging drivers (45%) and lorries overtaking other lorries (40%).

Of the 61% of drivers who have seen motorway congestion worsen, almost half (48%) of the 61% think there should be tighter controls on lorries overtaking other lorries.

Among urban drivers, there is some discontent over the perceived encroachment of bus and cycle lanes into space that was previously available for all road users. Almost a third (29%) thought that bus lanes are primarily to blame for congestion in towns and cities, while 16% blamed cycle lanes.

Of the 29% blaming bus lanes, two-thirds (68%) think other vehicles should be allowed to use them at certain times – a policy already applied in some parts of the country

And, more than half (54%) of the motorists who say cycle lanes are the main cause of congestion think that cyclists should be compelled to use such lanes where they are available.

David Bizley added: "Motorists' perceptions about there being more traffic on the road are entirely understandable given that Government statistics clearly show traffic volumes are increasing.

"While traffic congestion has, not surprisingly, been a source of frustration for drivers over many years, concern rose sharply in 2016 and has remained at the same high level in 2017. More than a quarter (26%) of drivers surveyed cited congestion and slower journey times as one of their top-four motoring concerns, whereas in 2015 this figure was just 18% – a level that had not changed for several years.

Notes to Editors

* The RAC Report on Motoring 2017 is based on a largescale online survey of 1,727 motorists carried out on the RAC's behalf by Quadrangle.

About the RAC

First formed in 1897 the RAC has been looking after the needs of its members and championing the interests of motorists for 120 years.

Today it has more than eight million members and is one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. Whether it's roadside assistance, insurance, buying a used car, vehicle inspections and checks, legal services or up-to-the-minute traffic and travel information – the RAC offers a solution for all motoring needs. The RAC is committed to making motoring easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for drivers and road users.

The RAC is the motorist's champion and campaigns to support the interests of its members and UK motorists at a national level. This includes voicing concerns about the increasing cost of motoring, particularly the price of fuel and the high level of tax levied on it, advancing levels of road safety, and supporting the needs of all drivers, from young to old.

The RAC's annual Report on Motoring – first published in 1989 – provides a clear insight into the concerns and issues facing today's motorists.

For the very latest news on UK fuel prices, check RAC Fuel Watch or follow #racfuelwatch on Twitter. RAC Fuel Watch is a comprehensive guide to the latest UK unleaded petrol and diesel prices – both at the wholesale level and at the pump. RAC Fuel Watch analyses how prices changed through the previous month and compares the most recent prices with those from three, six and 12 months before.

Key facts:

- RAC patrols fix four out of five vehicles at the roadside and on average within 30 minutes
- RAC vans carry more than 500 parts and tools to get members' vehicles going again
- 92% of members would recommend RAC Rescue to their friends and family

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