



Department for Transport

# British Social Attitudes Survey 2017: Public attitudes towards transport

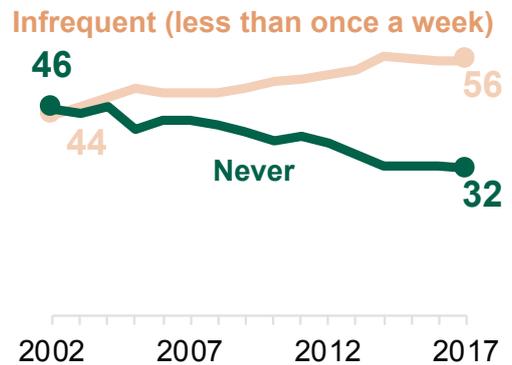
This statistical release is part of a series of surveys measuring people’s attitudes towards transport since 1996. The surveys include issues such as willingness to change current travel behaviours, attitudes to the environment and transport, congestion, and views on road safety. This report covers changes in long-term trends up to 2017.



## Infrequent journeys by mode

- ▶ The proportion of people saying they never travel by train has reduced, but infrequent travel (less than once per week) has increased. The proportion who do so frequently (1-5 times per week) has hardly changed. A similar pattern exists for travel by bus or as a car passenger.

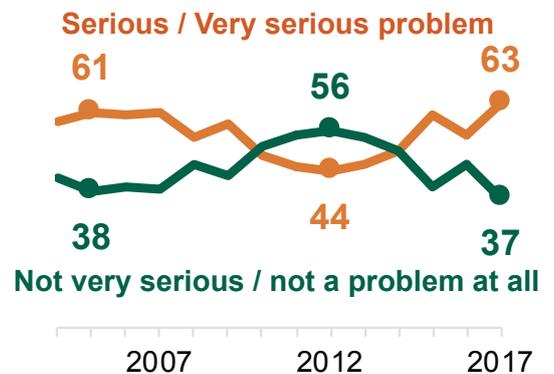
Frequency of travel by train



## Exhaust fumes in towns & cities

- ▶ Concern with exhaust fumes from traffic in towns and cities (63% in 2017) is now back at the same levels seen in 2005, after falling to a low of 44% in 2012. Willingness to buy a car with lower CO<sub>2</sub> emissions has risen to 79% in 2017, from 72% in 2011.

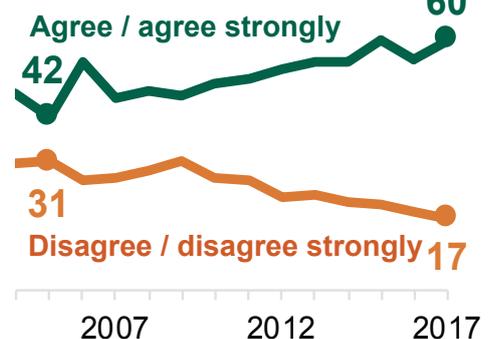
Perceiving exhaust fumes from traffic in towns and cities as a problem



## Speed cameras

- ▶ Belief in the efficacy of speed cameras has been increasing steadily since 2007, with 60% agreeing in 2017 that they save lives. Only 29% agree that “there are too many speed cameras” - down from 47% in 2008.

“Speed cameras save lives”





### **Section 1: Current travel behaviours and willingness to change** p. 3

- ▶ Current travel behaviours: how do people travel?
- ▶ Willingness to switch to more sustainable modes of transport
- ▶ Opinions on cycling safety



### **Section 2: Attitudes to transport and the environment** p. 5

- ▶ Transport and climate change
- ▶ Willingness to change travel behaviour for the environment
- ▶ Opinions on the environment and plane travel



### **Section 3: Cars: environment, congestion, road building, exhaust fumes** p. 8

- ▶ Opinions on the environment and car travel
- ▶ Opinions on congestion
- ▶ Opinions on road building
- ▶ Opinions on exhaust fumes



### **Section 4: Attitudes to road safety** p.10

- ▶ Opinions on road safety and drink driving
- ▶ Opinions on road safety and mobile phone use
- ▶ Opinions on road safety and speed cameras
- ▶ Opinions on residential streets

### **Background information** p. 13

#### **About these statistics**

The British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) is conducted by the National Centre for Social Research and includes questions on attitudes towards transport sponsored by the Department for Transport. It is a representative survey of adults aged 18 and over in Great Britain, collecting data through a combination of face-to-face interviews and self-completion questionnaires. The latest data for this report was collected in 2017. Some attitudes change very slowly; a relatively small sample means that other responses show yearly change due to sampling variability, which does not reflect real change. This report focusses on changes in long-term trends.



## Frequency of travel

### Infrequent users of public transport:

As well as being asked about attitudes to transport, respondents are asked how often they currently travel by different modes. For car, bus and train travel, the main changes have been among those using services infrequently.



The BSA suggests that there has been a small decline in the proportion of adults who never travel as car passengers (distinct from travelling as car drivers), accompanied by a rise in those who do so infrequently (less than once per week) (Chart 1). The proportion who do so frequently (1-5 times per week) has hardly changed.

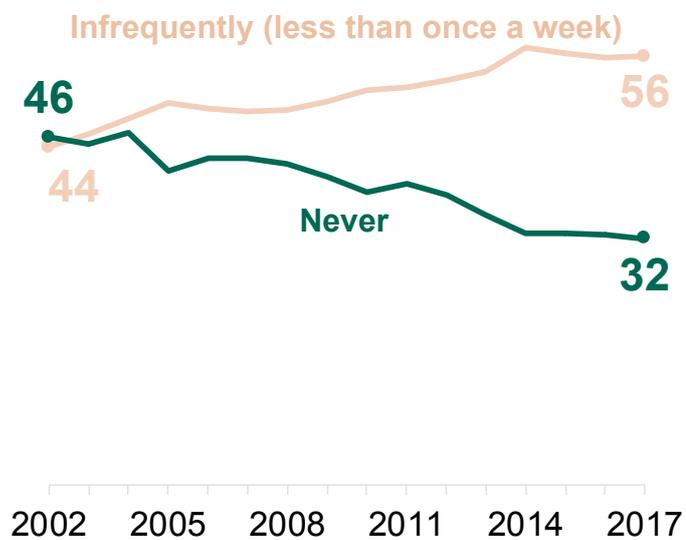
There have been similar patterns in frequency of those who travel by train or bus, with a rise in the percentage who do travel by these modes, but less than once per week, and a decline in those who never travel by these modes.

Whereas the proportion who never use a bus is *higher* than that for infrequent bus users, the proportion who never travel by train is considerably *lower* than the proportion who use trains infrequently (Charts 2 and 3).

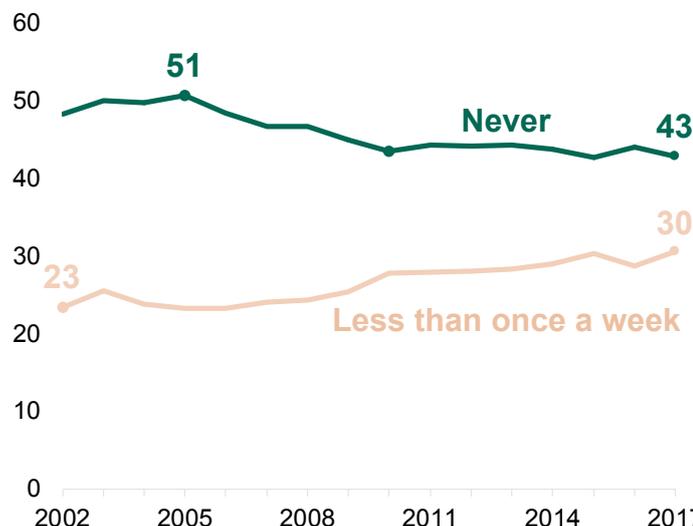
The proportion who never use a bus is greater than those who never use a train or a car.

The proportion of adults who made no flights in the last year has declined from a peak of 53% in 2012, to 44% in 2017.

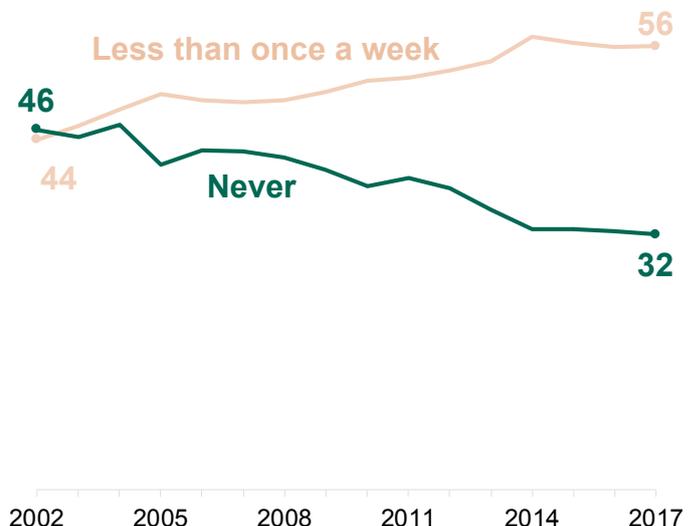
**Chart 1: Percentage travelling as a car passenger [ATT0302]**



**Chart 2: Percentage travelling by bus [ATT0303]**



**Chart 3: Percentage travelling by train [ATT0304]**





## Willingness to change

Respondents are asked how many short car trips they make (less than 2 miles) in a typical week. The results have changed little in the last 10 years. 29% either do not travel by car, or make no short trips; 26% make 1 or 2 short trips per week; 29% make between 3-9 short trips, and 11% make 10 or more (Chart 4).

Respondents were asked three questions about their willingness to make some of these short car trips by other modes.



Since 2006, opposition to walking short trips has declined, and the strength of willingness to change has increased. The proportion strongly agreeing that “Many of the journeys of less than 2 miles that I now make by car I could just as easily walk” has risen, from 6% to 10%, whilst the proportion disagreeing has fallen from 23% to 17% (Chart 5).



Opposition to taking the bus instead of short car trips has also declined. The proportion disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that “Many of the journeys of less than 2 miles that I now make by car I could just as easily go by bus” has fallen from 45% in 2006 to 38% in 2017 (Chart 6).

Chart 4: Percentage making short car trips, by short car trips per week [ATT0314]

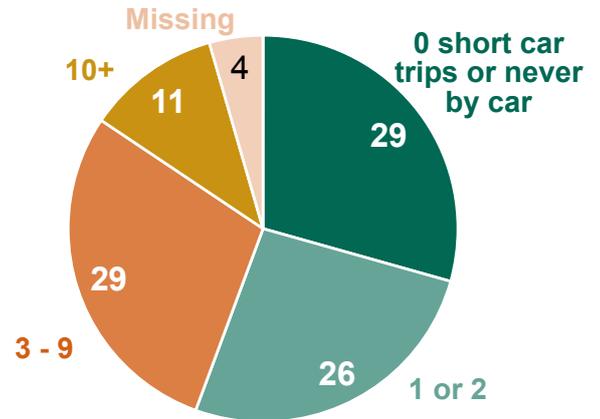


Chart 5: Many of the journeys of less than 2 miles that I now make by car, I could just as easily walk [ATT0315]

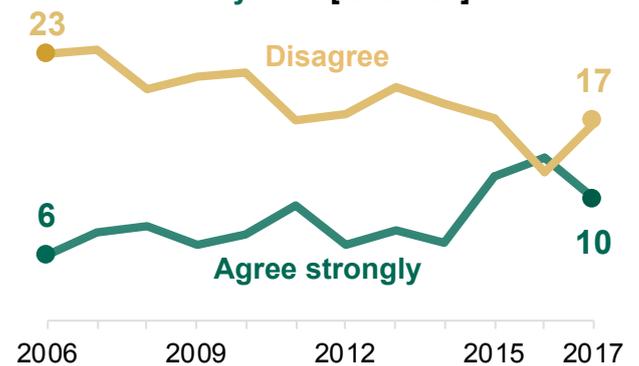
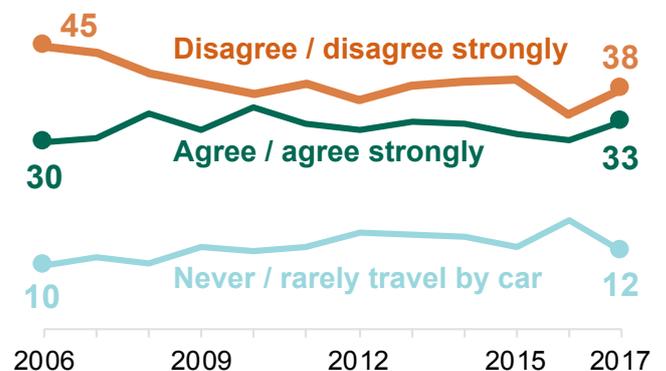
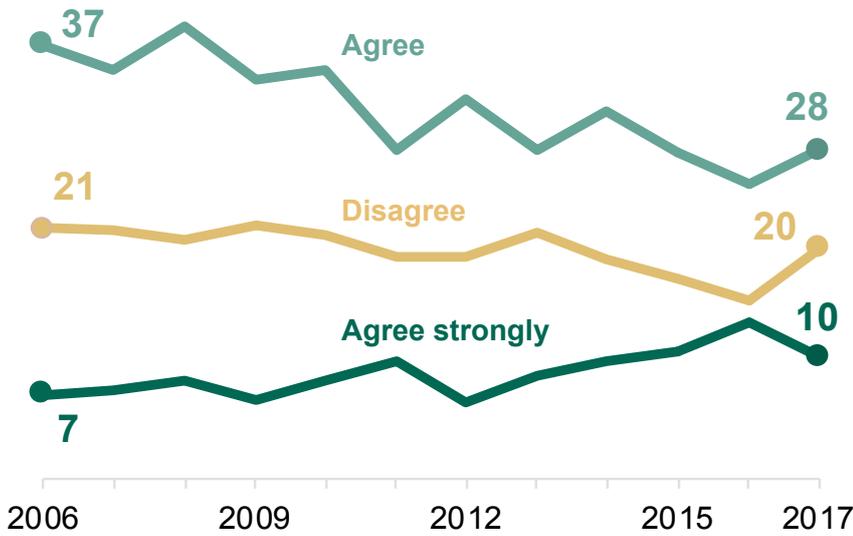


Chart 6: Many of the journeys of less than 2 miles that I now make by car, I could just as easily go by bus [ATT0316]





**Chart 7: Many of the journeys of less than 2 miles that I now make by car, I could just as easily cycle [ATT0317]**



Although more people are willing than unwilling to switch to cycling journeys of less than 2 miles, combined agreement / strong agreement with cycling short distances has declined, from 44 % in 2006 to 38% in 2017 (Chart 7).

**Cycling**

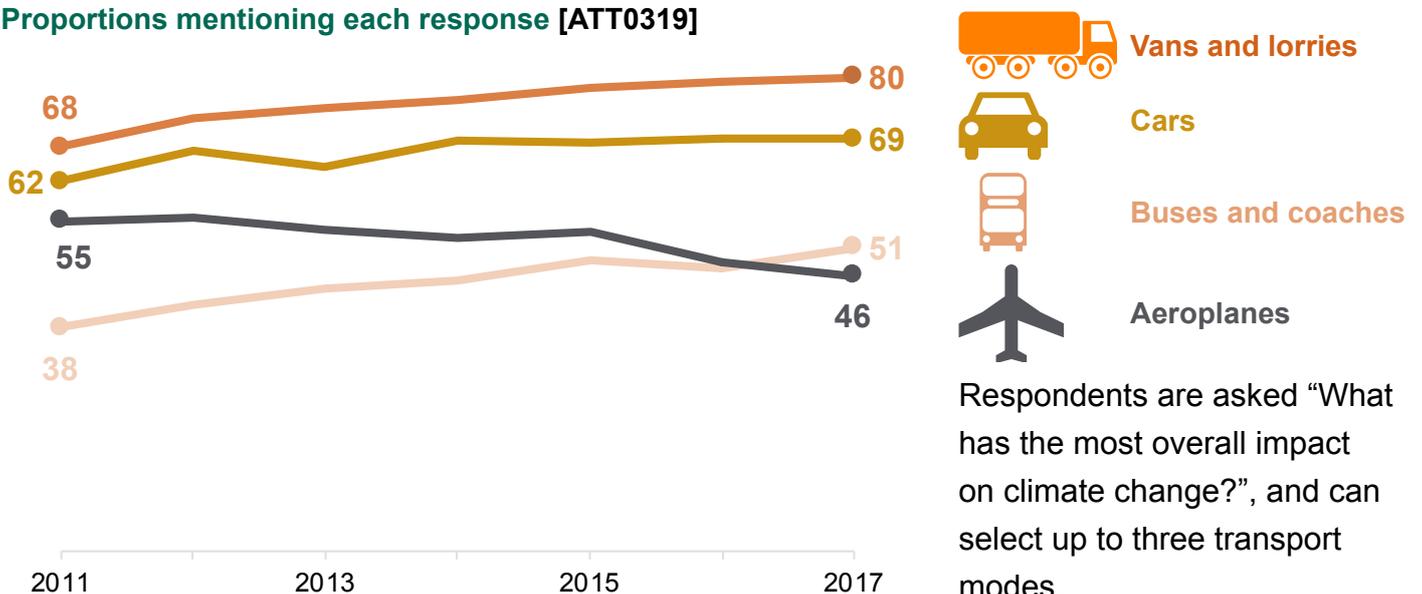
The BSA shows there has been little change since 2011 in the frequencies per week with which people cycle. In addition, 62% agree or strongly agree that “It is too dangerous for me to cycle on the roads”, which is the average level since the question was first asked in 2011 [ATT0313].



**Transport and climate change**

A large majority of adults (84% in 2017) believe that climate change is taking place and is, at least partly, a result of human actions. This proportion has increased from 76% in 2011 (ATT0318).

**Chart 8: “What has the most overall impact on climate change?” Proportions mentioning each response [ATT0319]**



Vans and lorries



Cars



Buses and coaches



Aeroplanes

Respondents are asked “What has the most overall impact on climate change?”, and can select up to three transport modes.



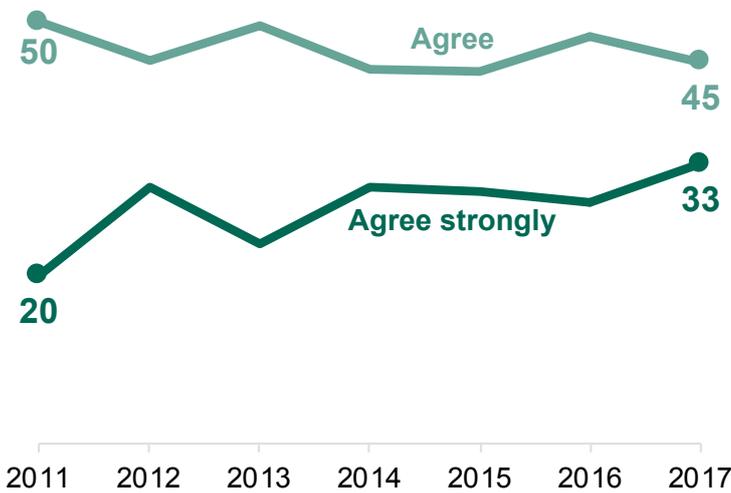
Vans and lorries are perceived as having the most impact overall, then cars, then buses and coaches. The proportions mentioning each of these modes have all increased since 2011. The fourth most commonly cited cause is aeroplanes, but the proportion attributing responsibility to these has declined, from 55% in 2011 to 46% in 2017 (See chart 8, ATT0319).

Respondents were then asked what they are willing to do to help combat climate change.



Willingness to buy a car with lower CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is high: 79% either already do this in 2017, or agree they are willing to do so next time they buy a car. This figure has risen from 72% in 2011. However, within this group, the strength of agreement has increased; as the proportion agreeing has declined by 5 percentage points, the proportion agreeing strongly has increased by 13 percentage points (Chart 9, ATT0321). (See also attitudes to exhaust fumes, page 9.)

**Chart 9: “I am willing to buy a car with lower CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, to help reduce the impact of climate change” - Proportions agreeing or strongly agreeing [ATT0321]**



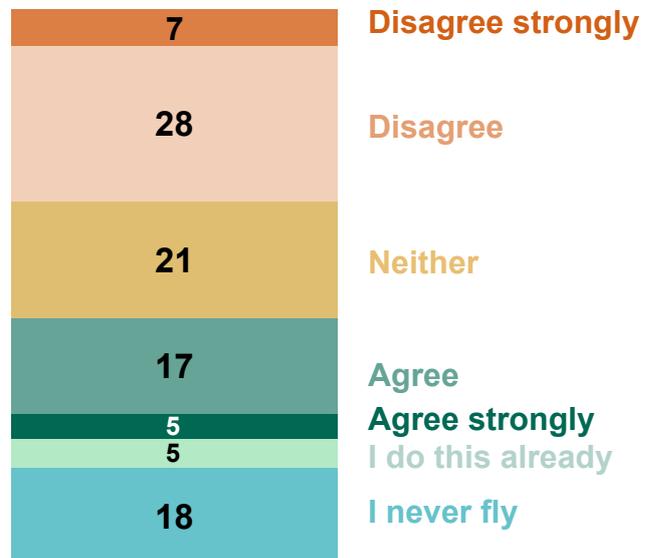
Willingness to drive less for the sake of the environment has not changed much since 2011. In 2017, 41% agreed they would be willing to do so, or are already driving less, whilst 38% said they were not willing to drive less for this reason (ATT0322).

**Chart 10: “I am willing to reduce the amount I travel by plane, to help reduce the impact of climate change” - Proportions agreeing or disagreeing [ATT0323]**



**Air travel**

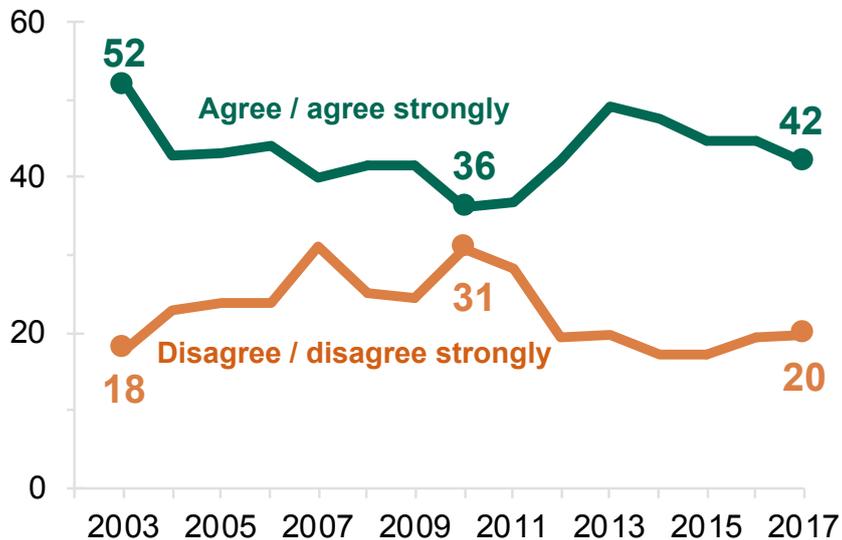
When asked if they are willing to reduce air flights to combat climate change, more people say they are unwilling to do so than agree they are willing (34% - after rounding - compared with 22%, in 2017). Opinion is quite varied, though; there is an additional 18% who never fly, 5% who say they are already reducing flights, and 21% who neither agree nor disagree (Chart 10 ATT0323).





About two thirds of people (67% in 2017) believe “People should be able to travel by plane as much as they like” (ATT0324). This proportion has remained stable since 2007.

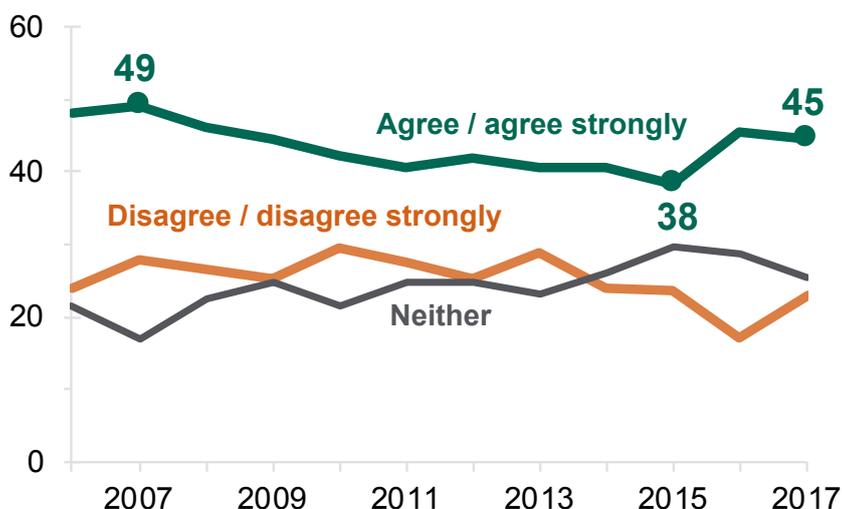
**Chart 11: “People should be able to travel by plane as much as they like, even if new terminals or runways are needed to meet the demand”- Proportions agreeing or disagreeing [ATT0325]**



If the question qualifies that new terminals or runways are needed to meet demand, the most common position is still support for the right to unlimited flying (42% in 2017), but this is lower than the unqualified 67% above. Year on year changes have been volatile since 2003. Opposition to flights which require new terminals or runways increased to 31% in 2010, then declined again to 20% in 2017. (Chart 11, ATT0325).

However, if unlimited flying harms the environment, support stands at just 19%. The most common position is disagreement, which has declined from 49% in 2008, to 42% in 2017 (ATT0326). It would thus appear that people are more concerned about the environmental impact of flights (which are more general) than the impact of new terminals and runways (which are more localised).

**Chart 12: “The price of a plane ticket should reflect the environmental damage that flying causes, even if this makes air travel more expensive” - Proportions agreeing or disagreeing [ATT0327]**



In 2017, 45% agreed or strongly agreed that “the price of a plane ticket should reflect the environmental damage that flying causes, even if this makes air travel more expensive” (ATT0327). In the last two years, this proportion has risen, from a low of 38% in 2015, after having declined steadily since 2007 (Chart 12).



Chart 13: “People should be allowed to use their cars as much as they like, even if it causes damage to the environment” - Proportions agreeing or disagreeing [ATT0329]

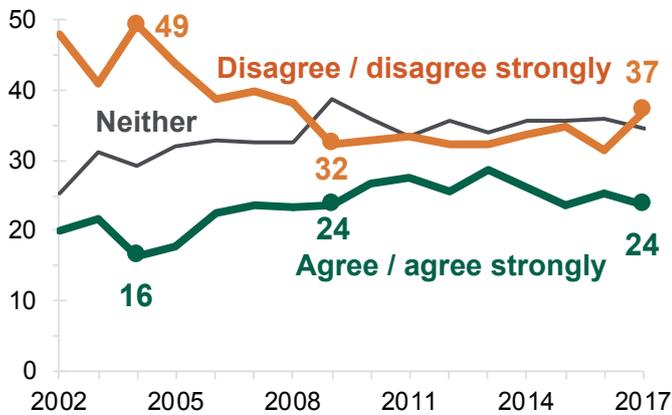


Chart 14: “For the sake of the environment, car users should pay higher taxes” - Proportions agreeing or disagreeing [ATT0330]

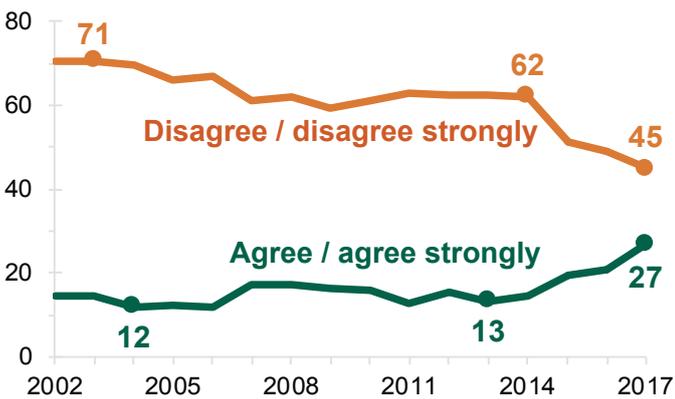
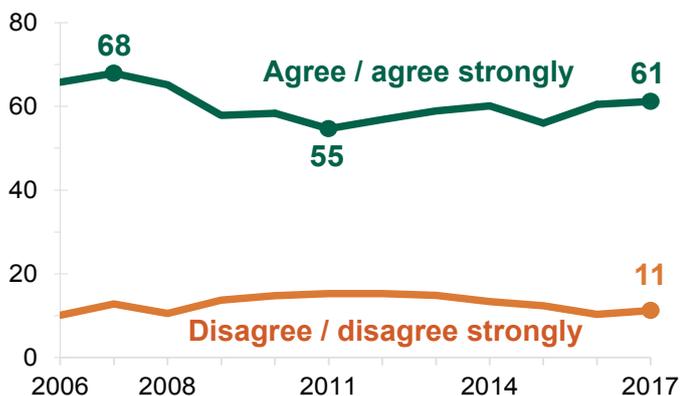


Chart 15: “For the sake of the environment, everyone should reduce how much they use their cars” - Proportions agreeing or disagreeing [ATT0332]



### Cars and the environment

Opposition to unlimited car use, even if it damages the

environment, was declining, from 49% in 2004, to 32% in 2009, then levelled out since (Chart 13, ATT0329). In 2017, this opposition was at 37%. The most common attitude, from 2009 to 2016, was a neutral one (34% in 2017), so public opinion has been fairly evenly divided for the last 9 years.

Disagreement with higher car taxes for the sake of the environment is the most common position, but there seems to have been a sudden drop in the last 3 years, to a low of 45% in 2017, whilst support is at a high of 27% (Chart 14, ATT0330).

However, there is a high level of agreement that “People who drive cars that are better for the environment should pay less to use the roads than people whose cars are more harmful to the environment” (66% in 2017). This level has changed little over the last decade (ATT0331).

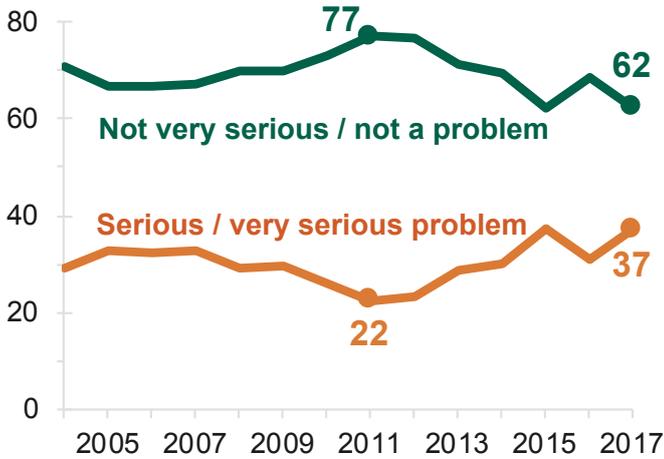
There is a strong majority agreeing that “everyone” should reduce car use, increasing from a low of 55% in 2011 to 61% in 2017 (Chart 15, ATT0332).

Nonetheless, there is a substantial amount of resistance: almost half say there is no point in reducing their own car use unless others do the same (47% in 2017, ATT0333).

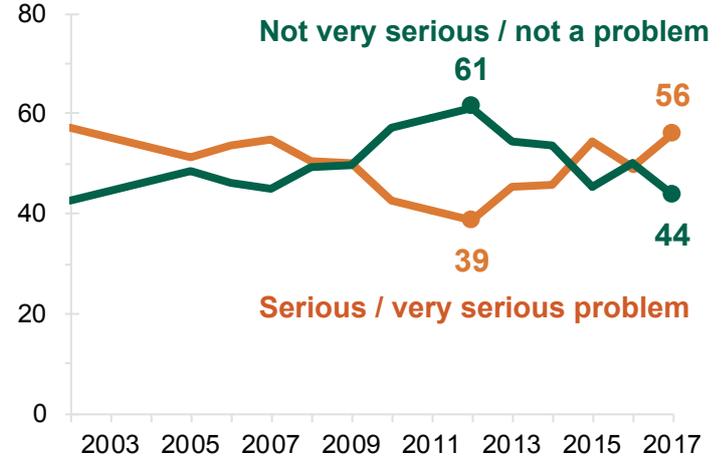


## Congestion

**Chart 16: Proportions perceiving motorway congestion as a problem [ATT0334]**



**Chart 17: Proportions perceiving congestion in towns and cities as a problem [ATT0335]**



Concern with motorway congestion has risen since 2011, but is perceived as much less of a problem than congestion in towns & cities: in 2017, 37% of respondents considered it as a serious or very serious problem (Chart 16), compared with 56% who thought congestion in towns and cities was serious / very serious (Chart 17).

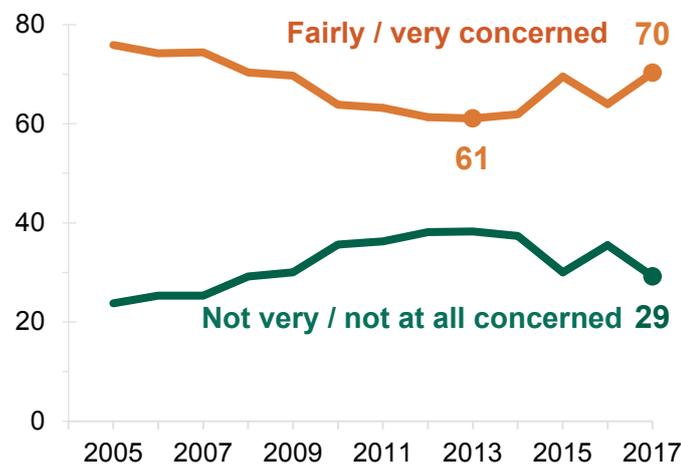


Concern with congestion in towns & cities (orange line in Chart 17) fell to 39% over the 10 years to 2012, at which point about three fifths of people thought urban congestion was not very serious or a problem at all. Concern has risen since then, and now the proportion expressing concern is higher than those not concerned.

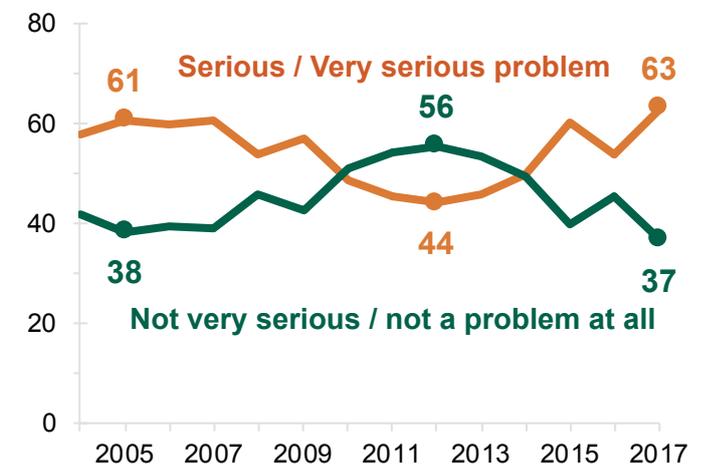


The proportions who are fairly or very concerned about damage to countryside from road building have remained consistently high between 2005 and 2017, between two thirds and three quarters of respondents (Chart 18). As with the figures for congestion, the concern has risen recently, after a gradual decline to a low of 61% in 2013.

**Chart 18: Proportions expressing concern or lack of concern about damage to the countryside from road building [ATT0338]**



**Chart 19: Proportions perceiving exhaust fumes from traffic in towns and cities as a problem, or not [ATT0339]**





Concern with exhaust fumes from traffic in towns and cities fell steadily, from 61% of adults in 2005 who said it was serious, to a low of 44% in 2012—by which point, 56% said it was not serious. Since then, the proportions expressing concern have risen again, to 63% in 2017, so the proportions are similar to what they were in 2005 (Chart 19).

The results for 2015 and 2016 were both broadly consistent with this latest 5-year trend, but the survey suggested a sharper rise in concern in 2015, followed by a slight decline in 2016. It is difficult to tell how much this was just the result of sampling variation over those two years, or how much reflects real shifts in public opinion. There were several events in 2015 which might have brought the question of air quality to greater public attention:

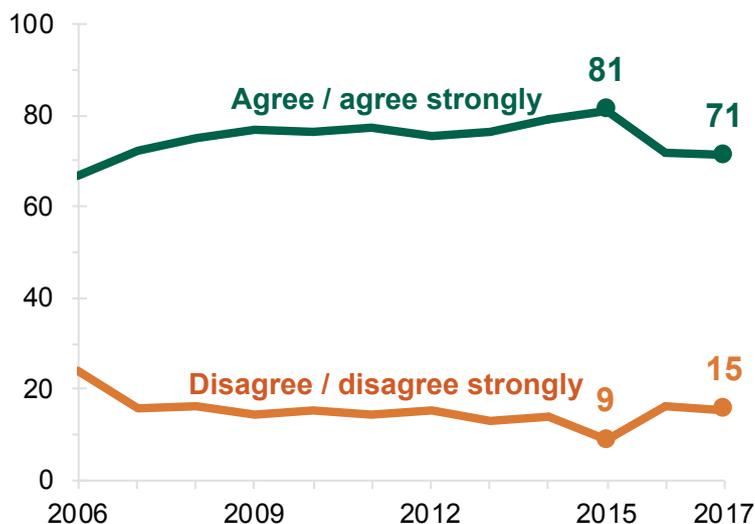
- In April, the UK Supreme Court ruled that the proportion of NO<sub>2</sub> in the air breached EU legislation
- In July, researchers at King’s College London published a report<sup>1</sup> on the health impacts of particulates and NO<sub>2</sub> from diesel fumes
- In September, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a notice of violation of the Clean Air Act to the Volkswagen Group, which affected people’s perception of the impact of diesel fuel on NO<sub>x</sub>
- In July 2016, the mayor of London initiated a public consultation on a new Toxicity Charge for London, which came into effect in February 2017

How far any of these events actually affected public opinion on exhaust fumes is not clear, however.



## Road safety: Alcohol, mobile phones, speed, residential streets

**Chart 20: Belief that “Most people don’t know how much alcohol they can drink before being over the legal drink drive limit” [ATT0347]**



**Drink driving**  
Belief that “If someone has drunk any alcohol they should not drive” has remained consistently high for the last decade, at about four fifths of adults - 85% in 2017 (ATT0346).

However, about three quarters of adults believe that “Most people don’t know how much alcohol they can drink before being over the legal drink drive limit”. Whilst those who agree rose to a peak of 81% in 2015, this share fell to 71% in 2017 (Chart 20).

<sup>1</sup> “Understanding the Health Impacts of Air Pollution in London”, H. Walton et al: King’s College London, 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2015



## Driving and mobile phones

Since 2006, respondents have been asked whether they agree or disagree with three statements about driving and mobile phones:

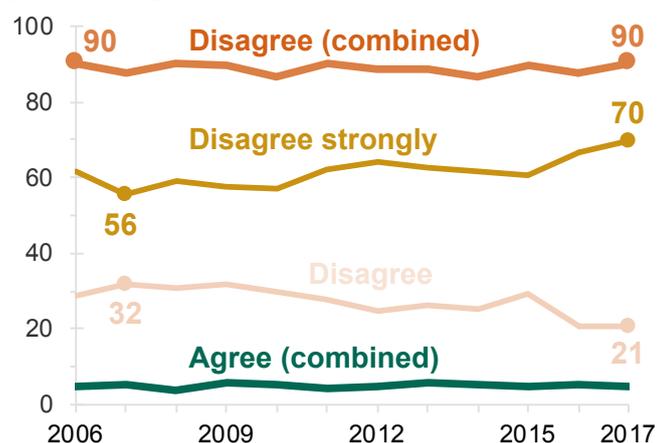
**“It is perfectly safe to talk on a hand-held mobile phone while driving” (ATT0349)**

(Chart 2 shows those *disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement*);

**“All use of mobiles while driving, including hand free kits, is dangerous” (ATT0350);**

**“All use of mobile phones while driving, including hands free, should be banned” (ATT0351).**

**Chart 22: “It is perfectly safe to talk on a hand-held mobile phone while driving” [ATT0349]**

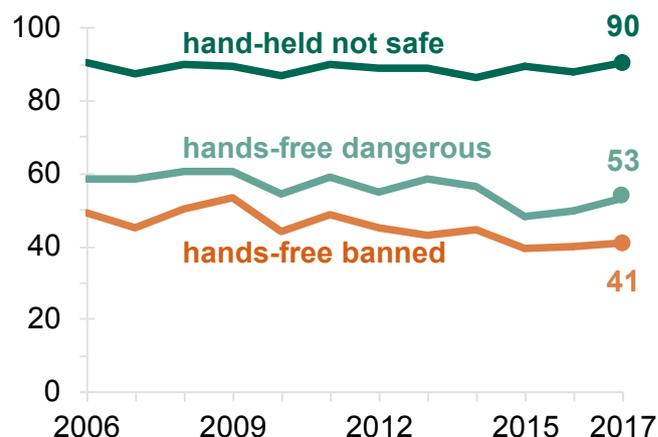


When the statement specifically includes the danger of *hands-free* phones, however, the percentage agreeing falls considerably, to 53% in 2017. (Chart 21).

When the statement is about *banning* all use of mobiles while driving, including hands-free, the percentage agreeing falls further, to 41% in 2017 (chart 21), whilst the proportion disagreeing is almost the same, at 38% - a difference of only 3 percentage points. This gap in public opinion has been steadily narrowing: in 2009, 53% supported banning all mobiles, including hands-free, while driving, and only 30% opposed a total ban — a difference of 23 percentage points. Support for banning all use of mobile phones while at the wheel has generally remained about 10 percentage points below those agreeing that mobile and hands-free phones are dangerous.

In 2017, 66% agreed or strongly agreed that “The law on using mobile phones whilst driving is not properly enforced” (ATT0352). This level has fallen from 81% in 2006, although most of the decline was in earlier years.

**Chart 21: Driving while using mobile phones - percentages agreeing or strongly agreeing with 3 statements [ATT0349], [ATT0350], [ATT0351]**



In 2017, 90% of adults disagreed that it is safe to drive while using a hand-held mobile phone. This percentage has remained consistent for a decade (Chart 21). Within this proportion, however, the strength of feeling has steadily increased (Chart 22). The proportion who disagreed that hand-held phones are safe while driving has fallen, from 32% in 2007 to a low of 21% in 2017. Over the same period, the proportion disagreeing strongly has risen, from 56% to a high point of 70%. These two trends have mostly balanced each other out, leaving the combined proportion generally constant.



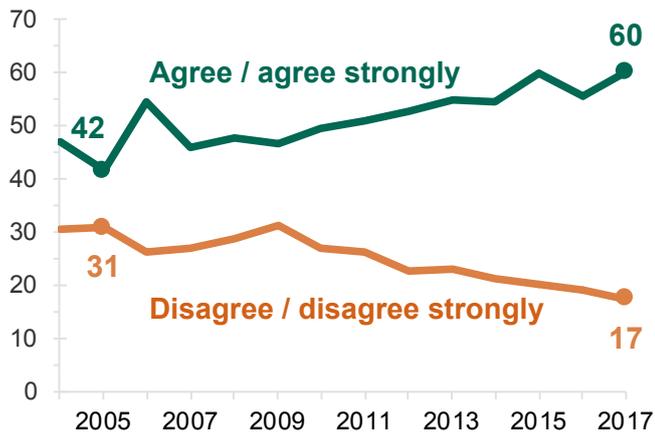
## Speed cameras



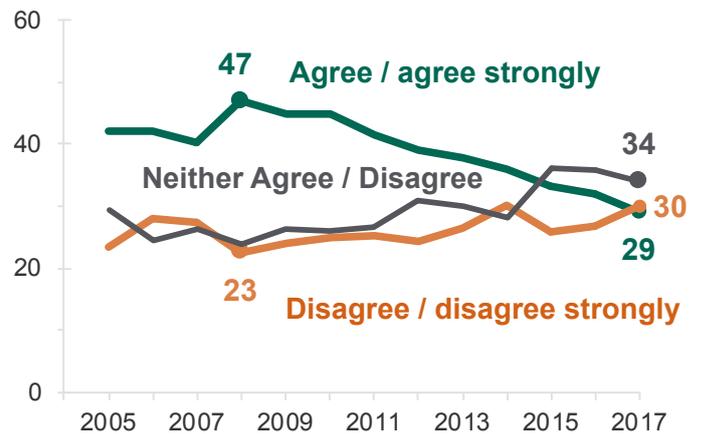
91% of adults agree that “People should drive within the speed limit”. This proportion has remained stable since 2005 (ATT0353). In 2017, 41% “agree”, and 50% “agree strongly”.

Belief in the efficacy of speed cameras has been increasing steadily since 2007, with 60% agreeing in 2017 that they save lives (Chart 23).

**Chart 23: “Speed cameras save lives” - Proportions agreeing and disagreeing [ATT0354]**

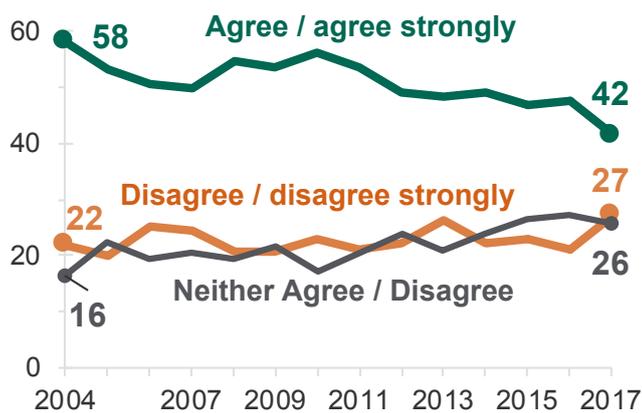


**Chart 24: “There are too many speed cameras” - Proportions agreeing and disagreeing [ATT0356]**



At the same time, scepticism towards speed cameras has been declining (Chart 24). In 2008, the dominant view was that “there are too many speed cameras”, with 47% agreeing, and only half as many (23%) disagreeing. By 2017, for the first time, the proportion disagreeing (30%) has risen above the proportion agreeing (29%). The most common position is now neutral: 34% neither agree nor disagree.

**Chart 25: “Speed cameras are mostly there to make money” - Proportions agreeing and disagreeing [ATT0355]**



Notwithstanding charts 23 and 24, the view that speed cameras are mostly there to make money is still the dominant view, although here too, there has been a net shift, with the proportion agreeing declining from 58% in 2004 to a low of 42% in 2017; the proportion disagreeing reached a high of 27%, whilst the proportion with a neutral view has increased from 16% to 26% over the same period (Chart 25).

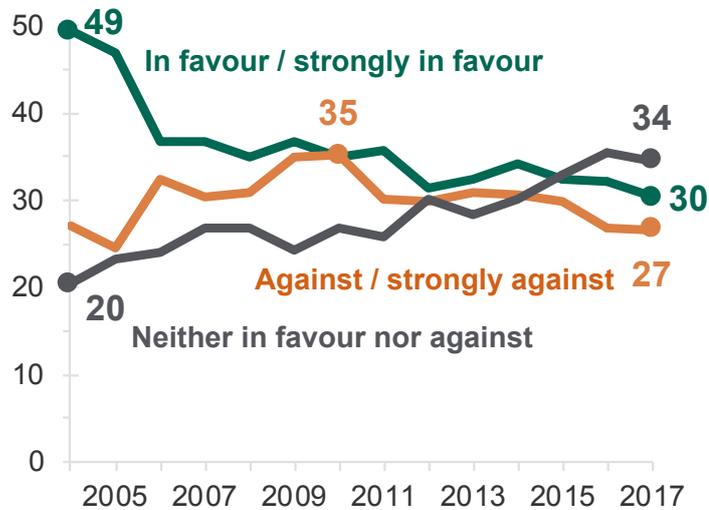
Taken together, charts 23, 24 and 25 suggest that public opinion has been growing more positive in its attitude to speed cameras for several years now.

Just over half of adults (55% in 2017) agree that “Average speed cameras are preferable to fixed speed cameras”, and over a quarter of people are neutral. There has been very little change in these levels over time (ATT0357).



## Residential streets

Chart 26: Proportions in favour or against “Closing residential streets to through traffic”: [ATT0358]

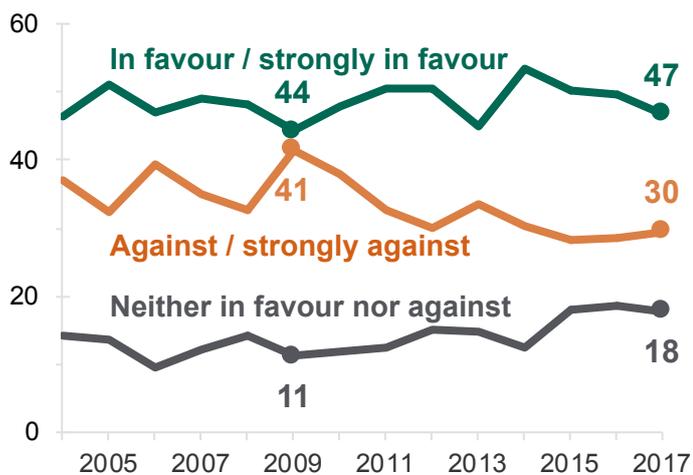


### “Closing residential streets to through traffic”



The peak of support was 49%, in 2004, and the biggest changes were in the first couple of years after that (Chart 26). Since 2004, the main net shift has been towards a neutral position (34% in 2017), although opposition has also declined somewhat since a peak of 35% 2010.

Chart 27: Proportions in favour or against “Having speed bumps to slow down traffic in residential streets”: [ATT0360]



### Speed bumps in residential streets

Opposition to speed bumps has declined, from 41% in 2009 to 30% in 2017. Proportions supportive or neutral were 47% and 18% respectively in 2017 (chart 27).



## Background information

### The British Social Attitudes Survey

The British Social Attitudes survey is managed and conducted by The National Centre for Social Research (NatGen), and contains questions sponsored by a number of organisations including Government Departments. This document contains results for the questions sponsored by the Department for Transport. The NatGen British Social Attitudes Survey report can be found at [www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk](http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk).

Please email [attitudes.stats@dft.gov.uk](mailto:attitudes.stats@dft.gov.uk) with any technical enquiries about this report.



### Detailed statistical tables

Excel tables ATT0301 - ATT0360 containing the results discussed in this report can be found on the Government website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/british-social-attitudes-survey-2017>

Detailed analysis of long term trends may be found in Trends in Attitudes to Transport, 1990 to 2009. Tables on public attitudes towards other aspects of transport are available here, although for varying years, as the surveys are not annual:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-on-public-attitudes-to-transport>

These include: ATT01 Public attitudes to buses, ATT02 Attitudes and behaviour to climate change, ATT04 attitudes to train services, ATT05 Public attitudes towards electric vehicles. The site also has reports on public attitudes to air travel, and towards mobility scooters.

### Methodology

The sampling frame is the Postcode Address File (PAF) and is limited to those living in private households. The sampling method uses a multi-stage design with three separate stages selecting postcode sectors, addresses and individuals. The survey is weighted to correct for the unequal selection of addresses, dwelling units and individuals and biases caused by differential non-response.

In 2017, respondents were randomly allocated to one of three versions of the self-completion questionnaire (A, C, and D). Thus the sample size for certain questions varies depending on which version(s) they featured in. There were no transport-related questions in version B.

Fieldwork was mainly carried out between July and October 2017.

### Further information

The achieved sample size for the 2017 face-to-face interviews was 2,963 respondents. This equates to a response rate of 46%. Of the 2,963 face to face survey respondents, 1,002 completed self-completion version A, 977 completed self-completion version C and 984 completed self-completion version D. All results presented here are weighted and any differences in results between 2016 and 2017 marked as statistically significant are at the ninety five per cent level of confidence, using an estimated design factor (DEFT) of 1.2.

### Future developments

In 2018, just nine key questions from the transport module of the BSA questionnaire will be retained on the standard British Social Attitudes survey, asked across 3 modules. The full set of transport questions, as asked in recent years, will be asked using the NTS Panel Survey, set up by the DfT and the National Centre for Social Research. This panel consists of people who have already answered the National Travel Survey (NTS), and agreed to be recontacted for further transport-related research. The panel questions will be self-completed online, with telephone follow-up for those unable to access the online questionnaire. The effect of this change will be to increase the sample size, compared with the standard BSA survey, and will also enable comparison between respondents' attitudes and their travel behaviour, as recorded in the NTS. Because it will be possible to recontact the same individuals on the panel, it will also make it possible to track changes in attitudes over time at the individual level, not just in net aggregate.