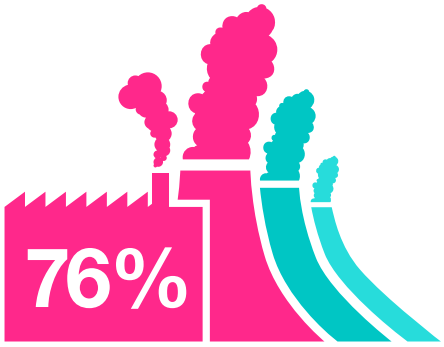
Transport
How far will people go to tackle climate change?

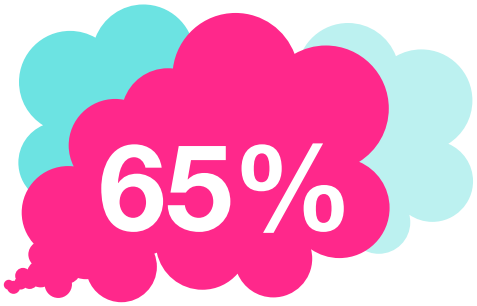
One important way the public can help to reduce global warming is by changing their travel behaviour. Yet people seem increasingly sceptical about climate change and its causes. How far do they believe in man-made climate change – and are they willing to cut car or plane use to tackle it?

Beliefs about climate change

Most people believe that climate change is real, however public concern about the environmental impact of climate change has declined.



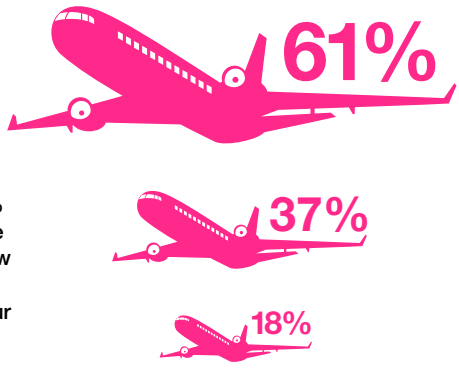
Three in four people believe **climate change** is happening and that humans are, at least partly, responsible. A minority (16%) believe that climate change exists but is not man-made. Only 7% do not believe in climate change.



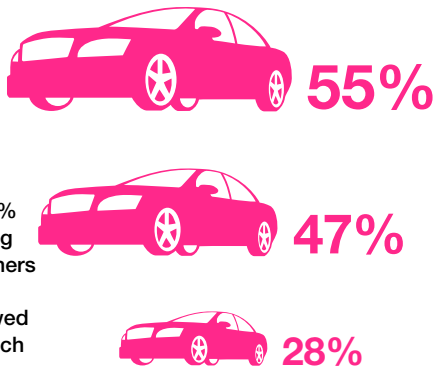
Two in three say they are concerned about **the effect of transport** on climate change – compared with 80% seven years ago. The proportion agreeing that motoring and air travel have a serious impact on climate change has also declined.

Air travel and car use

Although most people believe in climate change, they are less certain about action to restrict air travel or car use.



61% think people should be able to **travel by plane** as much as they like. 37% say air travel should be unrestricted even if new terminals or runways are needed. 18% favour unrestricted air travel even if it harms the environment.



55% think everyone should **reduce their car use** for the sake of the environment. 47% see no point in reducing their car use unless others do the same. 28% say people should be allowed to use their cars as much as they like, even if it damages the environment.

Authors

Alun Humphrey and Andrew Scott
Alun Humphrey is a Senior Research Director, Andrew Scott is a Researcher, both at NatCen Social Research

Introduction

As we saw in last year's British Social Attitudes report, the recent past has seen growing public scepticism about climate change (Taylor, 2011a). The climate change debate itself is well-rehearsed. On one side, the overwhelming majority of climate scientists and the world's leading scientific bodies stand in agreement that climate change is a significant threat to the planet and our way of life. While the causes are many and varied, 'greenhouse' gases (GHG) – especially carbon dioxide emissions from the combustion of fossil fuels – have been identified as the chief contributing factor. On the other side stand dissenting scientists, doubtful politicians and sceptical commentators. Their influence has been increased by controversies such as 'climategate'; even though the British climate scientists accused of manipulating and suppressing data were comprehensively cleared. The 'sceptics' have variously argued that man-made climate change is scientifically unproven, that the threat posed is exaggerated, or that there is little we can do to avert its predicted consequences.

The British public, while experiencing the most prolonged period of economic uncertainty since the 1930s, has had to contend with conflicting assertions about the veracity of climate change theory. In this context, last year's British Social Attitudes report found a 10-year increase from a quarter to more than a third in the proportion of people agreeing that many claims made about environmental threats have been exaggerated (Taylor, 2011a). While identifying significant concern for the impact of transport on climate change, the report also found a distinct lack of support for financial penalties to reduce vehicle use, such as road pricing (Taylor, 2011b).

Politically, each of the main Westminster parties maintain that tackling climate change is a priority. Recent Coalition policy initiatives have included the establishment of a Green Investment Bank, energy efficiency measures for housing and reform of the energy market. Though often criticised for not going far enough, this package of measures is intended to have the dual benefit of encouraging growth in the UK economy and helping to reduce the UK's GHG emissions. Tensions have, nevertheless, been observed inside the Coalition. For example, a party conference speech in 2011 by the Chancellor, George Osborne, was accompanied by media reports that he is critical of the 'green agenda', regarding environmental regulation as an unacceptable burden on British industry.

Achieving a significant transformation will require strong action to 'decarbonise' transport, but progress will also depend heavily on public opinion

Legislation passed by the previous Labour government commits the UK to a 34 per cent reduction in GHG emissions from their 1990 levels by 2020, and an 80 per cent reduction by 2050. It is estimated that transport is responsible for roughly a quarter of UK carbon dioxide emissions, making it the second biggest contributor to GHG in the UK after energy production (Department of Energy and Climate Change, 2012). So if these challenging targets are to be met, it is clear that the transport sector will need to play a major part. Although GHG emissions from the sector peaked in 2007, and have since returned to roughly their 1990 levels, there is still a long way to go. Achieving a significant transformation will require strong action to 'decarbonise' transport, including the further development of emission-reducing technologies. But progress will also depend heavily on public opinion and whether the British people can be persuaded to make transport and travel choices that are less environmentally damaging.

In examining the public's views about climate change and transport, this chapter pursues two main themes. Firstly, it investigates how far people accept the theory of climate change caused by humans and how their beliefs influence concerns about the effects of transport on the environment. It then explores the extent to which the public might be willing to change its transport and travel behaviour in 'greener' ways.

Belief in man-made climate change

For the first time, the 2011 British Social Attitudes survey included a question about belief in climate change. We asked respondents which of the following statements came closest to their view:

I don't believe that climate change is taking place

I believe that climate change is taking place but not as a result of human actions

I believe that climate change is taking place and is, at least partly, a result of human actions

3 in 4

believe that climate change is happening and that humans are responsible

Given the evidence from previous surveys that concern about the environmental impact of climate change has fallen to historically low levels, the replies to this new question may seem surprising. Three in four people (76 per cent) believe that climate change is happening and that humans are, at least partly, responsible. Another one in six (16 per cent) believe that climate change is taking place, although not as a result of human actions, while just seven per cent do not believe that climate change is taking place at all. In other words, public support for the scientific consensus on climate change is relatively high.

Taylor, in the 28th British Social Attitudes report (2011a), noted how 'concern' about the dangers of climate change to the environment varied by demographic group. Specifically, expressed levels of concern were lowest among older respondents, people without qualifications, those in lower income groups and Conservative Party sympathisers. 'Belief' is, of course, a different concept to 'concern'. It is possible, for example, to believe that climate change is occurring due to human actions but still be unconcerned about how it affects the environment. But do the beliefs about climate change voiced by people in different demographic subgroups vary in a similar way to their expressions of concern?

Table 4.1 shows that they do. People aged 65 and older (66 per cent) are less likely than others to believe that climate change is caused by human actions, while those under 65 (78–80 per cent of 18–64 year olds) are more likely to believe so. Likewise graduates (86 per cent) and people in the top quarter of the income distribution (82 per cent) are more likely to believe in man-made climate change than people without educational qualifications (63 per cent) or those in the lowest income quartile (73 per cent). Distinctions also emerge between supporters of the three main political parties at Westminster. Although the Prime Minister David Cameron has declared that he wants to lead "the greenest government ever",[1] people who identify with his Conservative Party are less likely (71 per cent) to believe that climate change is caused by human actions than those who sympathise with Labour (78 per cent) or his coalition partners the Liberal Democrats (89 per cent).

Table 4.1 Belief that climate change is caused by humans, by demographic group

	% believe climate change is caused by humans	*Weighted base*	*Unweighted base*
Age			
18–34	79	*752*	*948*
35–54	80	*1159*	*1171*
55–64	78	*541*	*496*
65+	66	*856*	*693*
Educational attainment			
Degree or higher	86	*624*	*673*
Below degree level	78	*1635*	*1722*
No qualifications	63	*743*	*636*
Household income (quartiles)			
Highest quartile	82	*799*	*641*
2nd highest quartile	83	*591*	*571*
2nd lowest quartile	75	*594*	*620*
Lowest quartile	73	*579*	*657*
Party identification			
Conservative	71	*926*	*881*
Labour	78	*1039*	*1062*
Liberal Democrat	89	*253*	*247*
All	76	*3311*	*3311*

The effect of transport on climate change

Turning more specifically to the effect of transport on climate change, we examine to what extent people are concerned about pollution from motor vehicles and its consequences for the environment. Each year since the middle of the last decade, we have asked:

> *How concerned are you about exhaust fumes from traffic?*
>
> *How concerned are you about the effect of transport on climate change?*[2]
>
> *[Very concerned, fairly concerned, not very concerned, not at all concerned]*

Although most people are worried about exhaust pollution and the effect of transport on climate change, the level of concern has decreased since 2005

Table 4.2 shows that, although most people are worried about exhaust pollution and the effect of transport on climate change, the level of concern has decreased since 2005. In both cases, the proportions expressing concern have declined from around 80 per cent to about 65 per cent. This downward trend was highlighted by Taylor (2011b) a year ago, and the latest data show it has continued.

Table 4.2 Concern about exhaust pollution and the effect of transport on climate change, 2005–2011

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
% concerned about exhaust fumes	81	82	79	74	76	70	67
% concerned about the effect of transport on climate change	80	82	76	74	75	68	65
Weighted base	*1107*	*3228*	*3082*	*3392*	*3421*	*3297*	*3311*
Unweighted base	*1101*	*3220*	*3094*	*3393*	*3421*	*3297*	*3311*

We have already noted how people's belief in climate change caused by humans follows a similar pattern among demographic groups to concerns about the consequences of climate change for the environment. In Table 4.3 we see, in addition, that concern about exhaust fumes and the effect of transport on climate change is highest among those who believe that human actions are at least partly to blame for climate change (74 per cent on both measures). Interestingly, almost four in ten people who do not believe in climate change nevertheless express concern about exhaust pollution. This seems likely to reflect the fact that exhaust fumes can be considered detrimental to personal health as well as the environment.

Table 4.3 Concerns about exhaust pollution and the effect of transport on climate change, by belief about climate change

	Belief about climate change		
	Do not believe in climate change	Climate change is not man-made	Climate change is man-made
% concerned about exhaust fumes	38	52	74
% concerned about the effect of transport on climate change	26	42	74
Weighted base	*240*	*517*	*2492*
Unweighted base	*222*	*515*	*2523*

64%

agree that the current level of air travel has a serious effect on climate change

Different modes of transport

We have so far established that three in four members of the British public believe that climate change is both real and caused by humans, and that most of these 'believers' are also concerned about the impact of transport on climate change. Our next step is to consider how the public perceives the impact of specific modes of transport.

British Social Attitudes regularly asks respondents to what extent they agree or disagree that:

The current level of car use has a serious effect on climate change
The current level of air travel has a serious effect on climate change

Table 4.4 shows how the proportions of those agreeing with these two statements have changed between 2005 and 2011. Two key points emerge. Firstly, after peaking in 2006, concern about the impact of both modes of transport has declined considerably: by 14 percentage points for cars and 10 percentage points for air travel. Particularly large falls were seen between 2009 and 2010. Second, the downward trend in concern about car use appears to have stabilised, posting a modest one percentage point increase on last year, while the decline in concern about air travel has slowed. Even so, the proportion of those agreeing that air travel has a serious effect on climate change (64 per cent) is at the same level as when we first asked the question – the lowest in the time series.

Table 4.4 Perceived impact of car use and air travel on climate change, 2005–2011

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
% agree the current level of car use has a serious effect on climate change	77	80	72	73	73	65	66
% agree the current level of air travel has a serious effect on climate change	64	74	71	72	72	66	64
Weighted base	*1107*	*3228*	*3082*	*3393*	*3421*	*3297*	*3311*
Unweighted base	*1101*	*3220*	*3094*	*3364*	*3421*	*3297*	*3311*

Freedom to travel?

Although levels of concern are lower than in previous years, we have seen that around two out of three people continue to worry about the impact of transport on climate change. Does this concern translate into a view that people should travel less?

Air travel

Since 2003, British Social Attitudes has asked whether people agree or disagree that:

> *People should be able to travel by plane as much as they like*
>
> *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*
>
> *People should be able to travel as much as they like, even if this harms the environment*

Reporting the responses to these questions in 2009, Shaw and Butt wondered if declining levels of agreement that people should be free to fly as much they liked was "evidence of the beginnings of a shift towards more consistently environmentally-friendly attitudes towards air travel" (p.138). This year, Table 4.5 shows that 62 per cent of Britons agree, the lowest level – a 17 percentage point decline – since we first asked this question.

37%

say people should be allowed to travel by air as much as they like even if this means new terminals or runways are needed

When asked, more conditionally, if people should be allowed to travel by air as much as they like even if new terminals or runways are needed, 37 per cent believe they should. This is a rather lower proportion than in the middle of the last decade. Views on this issue, however, are not clear cut: three out of ten (28 per cent) disagree while another three out of ten (28 per cent) neither agree nor disagree. Opponents and proponents of increased airport capacity in Britain will need to persuade this latter group if they want to win public support for their stance.

There has been little change since 2003 in the minority of the population – around one in five – who agree that people should be able to travel by plane as much as they like even if this harms the environment. Approaching half (45 per cent) disagree, with the remainder taking a neutral view. Since we also know that around a quarter of the population do not believe in man-made climate change (as discussed earlier), the scope for a further reduction in agreement on this measure may prove limited.

Table 4.5 Support for unlimited air travel, 2003–2011

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
% agree people should be able to travel by plane …									
… as much as they like	79	77	70	69	63	66	64	64	62
… as much as they like, even if new terminals or runways are needed	52	43	43	44	40	42	42	36	37
… as much as they like, even if this harms the environment	19	15	18	19	19	18	20	18	18
Weighted base	*967*	*889*	*911*	*932*	*851*	*1007*	*965*	*934*	*951*
Unweighted base	*972*	*872*	*913*	*930*	*847*	*990*	*958*	*928*	*936*

To understand how these views translate into support for air fare pricing that reflects the environmental impact of flying, British Social Attitudes also invites respondents to agree or disagree with the following statement:

The price of a plane ticket should reflect the environmental damage that flying causes, even if it makes air travel more expensive

Public agreement that the price of a plane ticket should reflect its environmental impact peaked in 2007 at around half of respondents (49 per cent) (Table 4.6). It has declined since then to around four in ten (41 per cent), though this is still higher than when we first asked the question in 2004. Continuing economic uncertainties seem likely to explain this change as well as the growing burden of Air Passenger Duty. Air Passenger Duty, payable by passengers on flights leaving and arriving in the UK, has increased steadily since it was introduced in 1994. In 2011, it ranged from £12 for short-haul flights up to £85 for the longest distances.

4 in 10

agree that the price of a plane ticket should reflect its environmental impact

Table 4.6 Pricing plane tickets to reflect the environmental costs of flying, 2004–2011

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
The price of a plane ticket should reflect the environmental damage caused	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	36	42	48	49	46	45	42	41
Neither	25	29	22	17	23	25	22	25
Disagree	34	24	24	28	26	25	30	27
Weighted base	*889*	*911*	*932*	*851*	*1007*	*965*	*934*	*951*
Unweighted base	*872*	*913*	*930*	*847*	*990*	*958*	*928*	*936*

Car travel

Most people use their cars much more than they travel by air. But does that make them more or less reluctant to accept that car use should be curtailed for environmental reasons? We asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed that:

People should be allowed to use their cars as much as they like, even if it causes damage to the environment

For the sake of the environment everyone should reduce how much they use their cars

There is no point in reducing my car use to help the environment unless others do the same

Table 4.7 shows more than half accepting the principle that everyone should reduce their use of cars for the sake of the environment, while only one in seven disagree. However, when it comes to whether people should be allowed to use their cars as much as they like, regardless of environmental damage, there is almost an even split between those who take a 'green' stance by disagreeing with the proposal, those who agree and those who are neutral. Responses to our third question add a further layer of ambivalence: almost half the public believes there is no point reducing the amount they use their cars unless others do too. Only one in four actively disagree.

Table 4.7 Car use and environmental protection

Reduce car use for the sake of the environment	**%**
Agree	55
Neither agree nor disagree	25
Disagree	15
No restrictions on using cars, even if it damages the environment	**%**
Agree	28
Neither agree nor disagree	33
Disagree	33
No point in reducing car use unless others do the same	**%**
Agree	47
Neither agree nor disagree	21
Disagree	25
Weighted base	*951*
Unweighted base	*936*

While more than half the public accepts the principle that everyone should reduce their car use to help the environment, we see that nearly as many people would be reluctant to cut their car use in practice unless they knew that others were doing the same. This suggests that policy makers need to tread warily if they want to reduce the environmental impact of car use in ways that win public acceptance.
We, accordingly, asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed that:

For the sake of the environment, car users should pay higher taxes

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

These two statements represent the 'carrot and stick' of policy instruments. The first implies increases in the cost of Vehicle Excise Duty on all drivers, while the second implies a reduction in Duty for those who drive more environmentally-friendly cars. Perhaps unsurprisingly, our survey finds much greater support for the 'carrot', with around six in ten (58 per cent) agreeing that people driving 'greener' cars should pay less. Just 15 per cent disagree. Conversely, 63 per cent disagree that car users should pay higher taxes, with only 13 per cent taking the opposite view. The responses show non-drivers are more positive towards car tax increases (19 per cent agree) than drivers (10 per cent). But a majority of both groups are opposed.

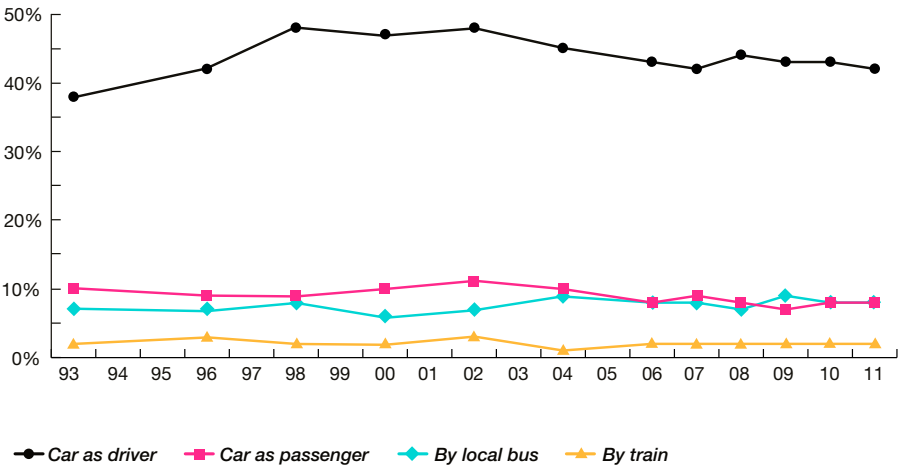
Britons are more supportive of incentives for environmentally-friendly behaviour through charging less for green choices, and less supportive of measures that will increase the cost of travel for all

Travel behaviour

We have seen that belief in climate change and public concern about the effects of transport on the environment are still both relatively high. In principle (and with caveats) most people support a reduction in the use of cars and air travel "for the sake of the environment". However, when it comes to policy, Britons are more supportive of incentives for environmentally-friendly behaviour through charging less for green choices, and less supportive of measures that will increase the cost of travel for all. With that in mind, we turn to what people say about their own travel behaviour. Does the practice of their travel decisions accord with the views they express in principle? Are those sceptical about climate change less likely to travel in an environmentally-friendly way? If so, might we expect growing scepticism about climate change to result in changes in the ways people choose to travel?

Our survey confirms one unsurprising fact: as a nation we are very reliant on the car. Of those interviewed 69 per cent identify themselves as drivers and – as shown in Figure 4.1 – around half say they travel by car as a driver or passenger "every day or nearly every day". Complementary statistics from the most recent National Travel Survey show that two-thirds (64 per cent) of all journeys undertaken in Britain are made by car (Department for Transport, 2011b). Figure 4.1 also shows how daily use of the car peaked 10 years ago before declining slightly. Since 2006 the proportion seems to have stabilised at around 43 per cent. In an analysis of trends up to 2007, Stradling et al. (2008) hypothesised that the modest adjustment in people's daily travel arrangements might have resulted from rising fuel costs, congestion, the rise of internet communications (reducing the need for travel) or possibly changes in attitudes in response to concern about the environment.

Figure 4.1 Daily transport use, 1993–2011



The data on which Figure 4.1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter

To investigate this last possibility, we now look at how closely travel behaviour is related to views about climate change and, specifically, whether climate change sceptics make greater use of cars than other people. The latest survey responses suggest this is not the case. Comparing people's frequency of car travel with their views about climate change, we find that 45 per cent of non-believers in climate change report using a car every day (or nearly), as do 46 per cent of those who acknowledge climate change but discount the causal role of humans and 50 per cent of those who accept that climate change is at least partly man-made. However, although three-quarters of the population believe in man-made climate change, they are likely to hold a spectrum of views about the seriousness of the problem and the extent to which transport impacts on climate change. If we compare people's car use against our more specific measure of whether they express concern about the effect of transport on climate change, we find that those who are most concerned make travel choices that are somewhat different from others. Table 4.8 shows that the level of car use (either as a driver or a passenger) among those who say they are "very" concerned about the effect of car use on climate change is noticeably lower (39 per cent) than for those who report being "fairly", "not very" or "not at all" concerned. This is particularly true of frequent car use.

Table 4.8 Frequency of car use, by concern about effect of transport on climate change

	Concern about the effect of transport on climate change			
	Very concerned	Fairly concerned	Not very concerned	Not at all concerned
Frequency of car use	%	%	%	%
Every day or nearly every day	39	51	53	43
At least once a week	44	39	40	42
Less than once a week	16	10	7	14
Weighted base	*649*	*1499*	*847*	*282*
Unweighted base	*645*	*1479*	*846*	*299*

Of course, people's daily travel choices are affected and constrained by a range of factors other than concern about environmental impact, not least the availability of suitable public transport options. This seems likely to explain why the association between concern about climate change and travel behaviour is relatively weak.

48%

of participants in the latest survey have flown in the past year, compared with 56 per cent in 2008

We also looked at air travel. Given the distances involved and a lack of practicable alternatives where most international travel is concerned, people's decisions about whether to fly will often be about whether to make their trip at all. There has been much publicity about the impact of air travel on the environment and the high 'carbon footprint' associated with flying. It is also worth noting that the use people in Britain make of air travel has stagnated in recent years. Since 2003, British Social Attitudes has asked people about the number of air trips they have undertaken by plane in the preceding 12 months. The replies show that 48 per cent of participants in the latest survey have flown in the past year, compared with 56 per cent in 2008. Figures from the Department for Transport also show a decline in air passenger numbers from the UK since 2007, associated with the economic recession. Despite this, air travel is predicted to grow significantly in the future (Department for Transport, 2011c) and the environmental impact of flying is likely to become an even more important issue.

As with car use, we can also investigate whether the amount people fly is linked to their views about climate change. Again, there turns out to be little difference in the frequency of flying between those who do not accept that climate change is occurring and those who do (Table 4.9). While 45 per cent of people who do not believe in climate change report flying in the past year, the same is true of 46 per cent of those who doubt that climate change is man-made and 49 per cent of those who believe it is at least partly caused by humans. Even when looking at our more specific measure of concern about transport and the environment, there turns out to be little difference in frequency of air travel between those who say they are "very" concerned and those who are less so. Indeed, those least concerned about transport and the environment are likely to have flown rather less than others, 63 per cent not having flown in the preceding year compared with around half of others.[3]

Table 4.9 Air travel in the last year, by concern about the effect of transport on climate change

	Concern about the effect of transport on climate change			
	Very concerned	Fairly concerned	Not very concerned	Not at all concerned
Number of trips by air in last year	%	%	%	%
None	51	50	52	63
One	22	22	16	15
Two	12	15	15	9
Three or more	16	14	17	14
Weighted base	*649*	*1499*	*847*	*282*
Unweighted base	*645*	*1479*	*846*	*299*

While there appears to be some relationship, though weak, between car use and concern about climate change, the amount that people travel by air does not appear related to their views or concerns about climate change. What then are the implications for future efforts to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases? Does the difference between public attitudes in principle and people's travel choices in practice mean initiatives to change travel behaviour are doomed to fail? That is the issue we examine in the final part of this chapter.

Willingness to change travel behaviour

Having considered people's current behaviour, we move on to look at how able and willing they are to change the way they travel in order to reduce the impact on climate change. One of the Department for Transport's key environmental impact indicators is the proportion of urban trips under five miles that people take either by walking, cycling or public transport (Department for Transport, 2011a). On a similar theme, British Social Attitudes asks how easy it would be for respondents to make short journeys currently undertaken by car by other means, although the question focuses on journeys of less than two miles. People were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with these statements:

Many of the journeys of less than two miles that I now make by car I could just as easily walk

Many of the journeys of less than two miles that I now make by car I could just as easily go by bus

Many of the journeys of less than two miles that I now make by car I could just as easily cycle, if I had a bike

There is evidence of some willingness to consider change for short journeys. Four out of ten (41 per cent) either agree or agree strongly that they could walk instead of driving, a third (33 per cent) say they could get the bus and another four out of ten (38 per cent) say they could cycle. These proportions have changed little during the decade the question has been asked. However, we must remember that these questions tap into people's ability to alter their travel behaviour as well as their willingness to do so. Their ability to use alternative means of transport even for short journeys may be constrained by health problems or the lack of a suitable bus service. Our results show that 25 per cent disagree or disagree strongly that they could walk instead of driving, and 39 per cent disagree that they could take the bus as an alternative.

We additionally asked the drivers in our survey about other transport choices they might be prepared to make "to help reduce climate change". We asked whether they agree or disagree that:

I am prepared to reduce my speed on the motorway to help reduce my CO_2 emissions

Next time I buy a car, I would be willing to buy a car with lower CO_2 emissions. This might be an ordinary car with a smaller or more efficient engine, or a vehicle that runs on electric or alternative fuels

I am willing to reduce the amount I travel by car

We then asked everyone taking part in the survey whether they agree or disagree that:

I am willing to reduce the amount I travel by plane

Note that respondents were also able to give a spontaneous response that they already engage in these behaviours.

The responses indicate considerable willingness to change. Seven out of ten drivers (70 per cent) say they would be willing to buy a car with lower carbon dioxide emissions, while a further two per cent say they already do so. Six out of ten (60 per cent) would be willing to reduce their speed on the motorway to help reduce climate change, with one per cent saying that they already do so. This finding compares interestingly with the government's proposal to increase the speed limit on motorways from 70mph to 80mph,[4] rather than reduce it. As might be expected from earlier replies to questions about reducing car and air travel, the response to these possibilities is less positive. Four out of ten drivers (40 per cent) agree they would be willing to reduce their travel by car, but an equal proportion disagree (a further four per cent say they are already travelling less by car in response to climate change). Meanwhile, although one in four (24 per cent) among the wider public say they are prepared to travel less by plane, one in three (32 per cent) disagree. We may also note that five per cent say they are already reducing their air travel to help tackle climate change, while almost one in four (23 per cent) insist they never fly anyway.

Looking at Table 4.10 we can see that there is – not surprisingly – a strong connection between people's willingness to change their travel behaviour to help reduce climate change and their beliefs about its existence and cause. Just 27 per cent of drivers who don't believe climate change is taking place are willing to reduce their speed on the motorway (or already do so), compared with 69 per cent of those (the majority of the population) who believe that climate change exists and is at least partly due to human actions. Likewise, only 34 per cent of drivers who don't believe in climate change would be prepared to buy a car with lower CO_2 emissions (or have already done so), compared with 78 per cent of those who believe in man-made climate change. We see similar patterns in relation to lowering car use and, across the population as a whole, to reducing travel by plane. Logistic regression analysis confirms that willingness to change behaviour in each of these ways is independently associated with belief in climate change (having controlled for sex, age, level of education, income, party identification and urbanicity).[5]

Table 4.10 Willingness to change travel behaviour, by belief about climate change

	Belief about climate change		
	Don't believe climate change taking place	**Believe climate change does not result from human actions**	**Believe climate change at least partly results from human actions**
% saying …			
… prepared to/already reduce myspeed on the motorway to help reduce my CO_2 emissions	27	42	69
… willing to buy/already bought a car with lower CO_2 emissions	34	60	78
… willing to/already reduce the amount I travel by car	19	34	48
*Weighted base**	*130*	*356*	*1770*
*Unweighted base**	*141*	*351*	*1760*
% saying …			
… willing to/already reduce the amount I travel by plane	13	22	33
Weighted base	*222*	*515*	*2523*
Unweighted base	*240*	*517*	*2492*

* *Base: all drivers*

Does this mean that increasing scepticism about climate change carries implications for policy efforts to tackle climate change through behaviour change? Potentially yes, given that climate change sceptics are clearly less willing to change. However, while scepticism has increased, it still runs at a relatively low level. Most people believe in climate change caused or partly caused by human behaviour and are concerned about the impact of transport on the environment.

Who is most willing to change?

When we divide individuals who are willing to change their behaviour to help reduce climate change into demographic subgroups, we find that women drivers are more willing to take action than men. Seventy per cent of women motorists agree that they would be prepared to reduce their speed on the motorway to help reduce the impact of climate change (or say they already do so) compared with 56 per cent of men. Women drivers are also rather more willing than men to consider buying a car with lower emissions (75 per cent compared with 70 per cent) and reduce the amount they travel by car (47 per cent compared with 41 per cent).

There is also some evidence that younger people are more willing than older people to make less use of air travel. The proportion agreeing that they would be willing to reduce the amount they travel by plane (or already do so) declines from 34 per cent among 18–24 year olds to 25 per cent among people aged 65 or over. However, older people are much less likely to fly in the first place. There is also a tendency for graduates and others with higher qualification levels to show greater willingness to change their behaviour than those with lower or no qualifications, though again it must be noted that those without qualifications are far less likely to fly in the first place. These differences in relation to age and educational qualifications are what we might expect to see given our earlier findings about the way people's beliefs in climate change vary between groups (see Table 4.1). People in higher income brackets were slightly less willing to reduce the amount they travel by car than those with lower incomes, or to reduce their speed on motorways. In terms of party political affiliation, people who identify themselves with the Conservatives express less willingness to change their transport and travel behaviour than those of Labour or the Liberal Democrats. For example, 36 per cent of Conservative supporters are willing to reduce the amount they travel by car (or do so already) compared with 50 per cent and 46 per cent of Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters respectively. It seems probable that the Conservatives' endorsement of 'green' policies before and after the 2010 General Election may have held less appeal for their own core sympathisers than for supporters of the other main parties.

For the first time, British Social Attitudes asked people directly about their belief in climate change and found that climate sceptics are in the minority in Britain

Conclusions

The findings reported in this chapter could be described as 'a mixed bag' for those concerned about the environment and how best to reduce the adverse impact of transport on the environment. For the first time, British Social Attitudes asked people directly about their belief in climate change and found that climate sceptics are in the minority in Britain. For those accepting the scientific consensus and its implications for reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, the recognition of climate change by the majority is reassuring. While there are demographic variations in this belief, a majority in all the social groups we have examined accept that climate change is real and that it is, at least in part, caused by human activity. Yet it is also clear that a substantial minority – around one quarter – either reject the notion of climate change altogether or believe that it is not man-made.

Since 2006, we have observed a trend of declining public concern about the part that transport plays in climate change. Our latest survey shows that this is continuing, albeit at a slower pace. A year ago, Taylor (2011a) suggested that declining concern may be a result of the economic uncertainties being experienced in Britain. Since both economic uncertainty and decreasing concern have continued into this year, this may well be the case. Only time will tell whether economic recovery can help to reverse the trend.

We have also found only a weak association between the amount people travel and their views about climate change and the environment. There is limited willingness to reduce car and plane use, and low levels of support for policies that make motoring or air travel more expensive. This suggests that policies geared to making transport more sustainable will be met with less resistance than those that try to influence travel choices. As Stradling et al. (2008) acknowledged in the 24th British Social Attitudes report, there are real difficulties facing any government that tries to apply demand-side measures as a way of influencing millions of individual lifestyle choices. In the latest survey it is even more apparent that willingness to change travel behaviour is lower among those who decline to believe that climate change is caused by humans or who are unconcerned by it.

Attempts by government to convince Britons to consider changing their behaviour are a long way from being realised. A significant minority have yet to be convinced about the need to take action in the first place. However, this does not suggest that attempts to bring about a shift should be abandoned. There is evident willingness among many people to consider reducing the amount they travel by car and plane, particularly among those who express concern about pollution and the environment. But the greatest challenge for those wishing to encourage environmentally-friendly travel continues to be that of convincing sceptics that climate change caused by humans is real – and a real threat.

Notes

1. Speech by David Cameron at Department of Energy and Climate Change, www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/news/pn10_059/pn10_059.aspx

2. This question does not ask specifically about car use, but is placed with other questions about road transport.

3. It has previously been noted that those most concerned about the environment can often themselves be the most frequent flyers (Commission for Integrated Transport, 2007).

4. Transport policy in Scotland is devolved so this would only apply in England and Wales.

5. The multivariate analysis technique used was logistic regression – more details of the methods used can be found in the Technical details chapter of this report. Further details of the analysis results are available from the authors on request.

Acknowledgements

NatCen Social Research is grateful to the Department for Transport for their financial support which enabled us to ask the questions reported in this chapter. The views expressed are those of the authors alone.

References

Commission for Integrated Transport (2007), *Attitudes to Aviation and Climate Change*, available at: www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Publications/attitudes-to-climate-change-and-aviation-2007-report.pdf

Department of Energy and Climate Change (2012)*, 2011 UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Provisional Figures and 2010 UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Final Figures By Fuel Type And End-User*, available at: www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/11/stats/climate-change/4817-2011-uk-greenhouse-gas-emissions-provisional-figur.pdf

Department for Transport (2011a), *Business Plan 2011-2015*, available at: assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/business-plan-2011-2015/DFT-Business-Plan.pdf

Department for Transport (2011b), *National Travel Survey, Statistical Release*, available at: assets.dft.gov.uk/statistics/releases/national-travel-survey-2010/nts2010-01.pdf

Department for Transport (2011c), *UK Aviation Forecasts*, available at: assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/uk-aviation-forecasts-2011/uk-aviation-forecasts.pdf

Stradling, S., Anable, J., Anderson, T. and Cronberg, A. (2008), 'Car use and climate change: do we practise what we preach?', in Park, A., Curtice, J., Thomson, K., Phillips, M., Johnson, M. and Clery, E. (eds.), *British Social Attitudes: the 24th Report*, London: Sage

Shaw, A. and Butt, S. (2009), 'Pay more, fly less? Changing attitudes to air travel', in Park, A., Curtice, J., Thomson, K., Phillips, M. and Clery, E. (eds.) *British Social Attitudes: the 25th Report*, London: Sage

Taylor, E. (2011a), 'Concern about climate change: a paler shade of green?', in Park, A., Clery, E., Curtice, J., Phillips, M. and Utting, D. (eds.) *British Social Attitudes: the 28th Report*, London: Sage, available at: www.natcen.ac.uk/BSA28

Taylor, E. (2011b), 'Congested Britain? Public attitudes to car use', in Park, A., Clery, E., Curtice, J., Phillips, M. and Utting, D. (eds.) *British Social Attitudes: the 28th Report*, London: Sage, available at: www.natcen.ac.uk/BSA28

Appendix

The data for Figure 4.1 are shown below.

Table A.1 Daily transport use, 1993–2011

	1993	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
% who usually travel every day or nearly every day by …						
… car as driver	38	42	48	47	48	45
… car as passenger	10	9	9	10	11	10
… local bus	7	7	8	6	7	9
… train	2	3	2	2	3	1
Weighted base	*1451*	*1235*	*1079*	*1133*	*1150*	*1069*
Unweighted base	*1460*	*1219*	*1075*	*1133*	*1148*	*1053*

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
% who usually travel every day or nearly every day by …						
… car as driver	43	42	44	43	43	42
… car as passenger	8	9	8	7	8	8
… local bus	8	8	7	9	8	8
… train	2	2	2	2	2	2
Weighted base	*3228*	*3082*	*3393*	*3241*	*3297*	*3311*
Unweighted base	*3220*	*3094*	*3364*	*3241*	*3297*	*3311*

At **NatCen Social Research** we believe that social research has the power to make life better. By really understanding the complexity of people's lives and what they think about the issues that affect them, we give the public a powerful and influential role in shaping decisions and services that can make a difference to everyone. And as an independent, not for profit organisation we're able to focus our time and energy on meeting our clients' needs and delivering social research that works for society.

Publication details

Park, A., Clery, E., Curtice, J., Phillips, M. and Utting, D. (eds.) (2012), *British Social Attitudes: the 29th Report*, London: NatCen Social Research, available online at: www.bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk

First published 2012

NatCen Social Research
35 Northampton Square
London
EC1V 0AX

info@natcen.ac.uk

ISBN 978-1-907236-24-2