



Americans Willing to Consider Electronic Traffic Monitoring

A new national survey from graduate students at Boston University examines how big a problem Americans think their traffic is and explores what solutions they are willing to consider.

Boston, MA ([PRWEB](#)) July 1, 2005 -- Traffic in American cities is a mess. The U.S. Department of Transportation estimates that congestion in the largest cities causes 5.7 billion "person hours" of delay each other. The Federal Highway Administration estimates that 67% of peak-period travel is congested, up from 33% two decades ago. Travelers in the largest 75 urban areas spent an estimated 3.5 billion hours stuck in traffic in 2001, a five-fold increase in idling in twenty years. No matter how you measure it, traffic is in a jam. But what do Americans think about this problem -- and what are they willing to do about it?

These questions were addressed in an online survey of 1,049 adults in March of this year designed, conducted and analyzed by a graduate student team at Boston University. Astonishingly, only 30% of drivers report that they felt regularly delayed in traffic, even though the average commuter drives 31 minutes each way, experiencing rush-hour traffic 5 times a week.

Drivers routinely take steps to make their travel more efficient, suggesting that whether or not they describe traffic as a problem, they actively plan around it. For example, 69% of drivers will take alternate routes to avoid traffic and 67% will leave at a different time to avoid congestion. More constructive steps, like carpooling or taking public transportation, are only considered options by 11% and 16% of drivers, respectively. Yet 70% of drivers think that driving conditions would be improved if more people would carpool and 64% say that making public transportation more available would solve traffic congestion as well. This despite the fact that few of these people would consider either option themselves.

"Although people believe traffic can be fixed, they would rather deal with long commute times and other driving hassles than deal with the burden of having to actively participate in any solution," explained Jessica Morris, a student researcher on the project.

The survey also examined whether drivers would support the creation of an advanced traffic system such as the Advanced Traveler Information System (ATIS) being developed by researchers at institutions like Rensselaer Polytechnic and Cornell University. The ATIS system intends to improve the flow of traffic by taking real-time speed and direction measurements from individual cars and relaying the resulting picture of traffic flow this creates to individual drivers so they can make more informed routing decisions.

For ATIS to work, drivers will have to allow electronic devices in their cars to broadcast data about their driving behaviors. Forty percent of drivers say they would be comfortable with this, as long as it would reduce congestion. Interestingly, people are consistently more willing to electronically share this information with a private company rather than with a government agency, possibly because of the Big Brother implications of an electronic traffic surveillance system. This is supported by the finding that while 60% of drivers would allow the government to use the system to identify and apprehend criminals, their tune changes quickly when asked if the police could use it to spot minor traffic violations like speeding: only 25% think an ATIS system should be used for this purpose.

"Based on our findings, we believe that the ideal way to introduce an electronic solution to the traffic



problem is through a government-corporate partnership. A new organization would be created to operate privately, but be accountable to the government through subsidized funding which would help the public feel comfortable participating," Morris said.

About the Survey

The survey was conducted online during the third week of March, 2005. The sample of 1,049 participants (463 male, 586 female) was provided by online panel company Survey Sampling International, Inc. and the survey was conducted using Global Market Insights' online survey tool, Net-MR. As an online survey, the opinions reflected here only represent the two-thirds of households with regular Internet access. For comparison, the margin of error for a randomly selected sample this size is +/- 3%.

About the College of Communication at Boston University

The College of Communication at Boston University is home to the Communication Research Center where professors train undergraduate and graduate students in the science of consumer research and analysis. This project was designed by students under the supervision of Professor James McQuivey.

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