How different are the attitudes of older people to road pricing in comparison with those of other age groups?

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Abstract
Worldwide the human population shows an ageing demographic structure. In 2000 approximately 600 million people were 60 and over and by 2050, that number is expected to be close to 2 billion. Older people often face the danger of social exclusion; arguably more often than other age groups. Nonetheless older people are more interested on local democracy and more likely to vote than younger people at least for the western world, so their decisions can be an important issue for social policy in general, and potentially in the acceptability of road pricing in particular. Therefore, the attitudes of older people need to be understood and examined thoroughly to assist deciding on the cases where road pricing schemes consist an appropriate solution and implement these, so that factors such as age will not constitute a transport barrier.

Older people favour, more than any other age groups (Midlarsy, 1991; Rushton, 2004), what is positively valued for society - a process described as 'pro-social value orientation'. Hence in a transport context, older people may be more likely to express positive or negative attitudes to the acceptability of road pricing depending on whether they believe it would be good or bad for others, or society in general. Family, friends or more generally the people most important to them may also have a particular influence on older people's evaluations about their intentions and choices - thus the importance of studying the influence of 'social norms' on older people's attitudes towards road pricing.

The paper develops a theoretical and empirical understanding of these issues. It is mainly based on the analysis of a primarily quantitatively-assessed survey of attitudes to road pricing at Bristol. It also makes use of secondary data analysis of a recent UK nationwide survey and specific surveys of public attitudes towards the unrealised road pricing scheme of Edinburgh.

The study area chosen for the experimentation is Bristol; a city that has been in the forefront of UK cities planning a road pricing scheme in response to the Transport Innovation Fund opportunity. Questionnaires delivered by postal mail to 2300 homes randomly chosen through a de-personalised Council list and members of Bristol's Older People's Forum enabled the collection of a sample of 491 respondents. 184 of them were aged 60 and over and 48 of them were aged 75 and over. This study looked into age-specific differences of the public attitudes to road pricing. Moreover, this survey allowed the comparison of older people's social norms and their potential to believe that road pricing could be a pro-social measure with those of younger people.

This research provides empirical evidence regarding the age-specific differences between the attitudes of older people to road pricing and those of younger people. Some of the key findings reported in this paper are:
- It was found that older people aged 60 to 74 are the people with the most negative attitudes to road pricing over all, while older people aged 75 and over are the people most likely to be sympathetic or neutral to this measure.
- Older people aged 60 to 74 consist the group of people least likely to appreciate the pro-social
character of road pricing. Older people aged 75 and over are the people most likely to ascribe pro-social values to road pricing.

- Older people aged 60 to 74 are the people most likely to consider that the people most important to them have negative attitudes to road pricing. Older people aged 75 and over are the individuals most likely to consider that the people most important to them have positive attitudes to road pricing.

- Older respondents, and especially the ones aged 75 and over, consider the agreement of the people most important to them with road pricing more significant to them as a criterion for accepting this measure than younger people did. This indicates that the 'social norms' influence is stronger on the attitudes of older people to road pricing than on those of younger people.

The work will also report on a qualitative in-depth study that is currently held by the researchers. It examines in depth the attitudes of older people, and how they are affected by their pro-social value orientations and social norms

Based on its empirical findings, this work introduces a theoretical model to explain the attitudes of older people to road pricing schemes regarding their likely effectiveness, fairness and goodness. The model provides explanations to age-specific differences.

Assessing the socio-psychological links between older age and attitudes to road pricing by developing a thorough understanding of these issues could assist in identifying problems and opportunities in the present context of road pricing. This will enable policy-makers to decide on measures that could assist in promoting and communicating better road pricing to older people, making road pricing publicly and therefore politically more acceptable - in societal terms - as an option overall. For instance, promoting campaigns emphasizing the pro-social potential of road pricing could be designed targeting older people and especially those aged 60 to 74. If older people are convinced of the pro-social nature of road pricing because of their strong pro-social value orientation they will be less reluctant to accept this measure.

References: