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Nikitas, Alexandros

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Examining the Attitudes, Pro-Social Value Orientations and Social Norms of Older People to Road Pricing

Alexandros Nikitas

University of the West of England, Bristol, UK

Alexandros.nikitas@uwe.ac.uk

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 their significant others 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 research 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 and a follow up series of focus groups. It also makes use of secondary data analysis of three recent UK surveys about public attitudes to road pricing.

The research provides robust evidence that there are differences between the attitudes of older people to road pricing and those of younger people; there are distinctive age-specific differences even among older people. Some of the key findings are:

- People aged 60 to 74 are the people with the most negative attitudes to road pricing overall, while people aged 75 and over are the people most likely to be sympathetic or neutral to this measure.
- People aged 60 to 74 consist the group of individuals least likely to appreciate the pro-social character of road pricing. People aged 75 and over are the people most likely to ascribe pro-social values to road pricing.
- Individuals aged 60 to 74 are the people most likely to consider that their significant others have negative attitudes to road pricing. People aged 75 and over are the individuals most likely to consider that their significant others have positive attitudes to road pricing.
- Older people, and especially the ones aged 75 and over, consider the agreement of their significant others with road pricing more significant to them as a criterion for accepting this measure

than younger people do. This indicates that the 'social norms' influence is stronger on the attitudes of older people to road pricing than on those of younger people.

References

- Midlarsky, E. (1991), 'Helping as Coping', In M. S. Clark (Ed.), *Prosocial Behavior*, 238-264. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Rushton, J. P. (2004), 'Genetic and Environmental Contributions to Pro-Social Attitudes: A Twin Study of Social Responsibility', *Proceedings of the Royal. Society*, 271, 2583–2585.