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under the high patronage of Jacques Barrot, Vice President of the European Commission

TNS Sofres / GIE Objectif transport public survey

France's forthcoming EU presidency: Europeans want the impact of transport on the environment to be taken into account

On the occasion of Transports Publics 2008, the European Mobility exhibition, major stakeholders from the field of public transport sought to discover how urban public transport and related environmental considerations are perceived at the national and European level. The results show that over and above differences in use and perception of public transport, the French, British, Germans and Italians agree on the importance of paying due attention to the impact of transport on the environment during the French presidency of the European Union, which begins on July 1 next.

The survey, carried out in France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, conducted telephone interviews with representative national samples of 1000 people aged over 18 between May 15 and 22.

High national variations in the use and perception of urban public transport

Public transport is massively used in the four nations covered by the survey, but in different ways in each country: while 90% of the British and Germans use urban public transport occasionally, the same is true of only 81% of the French and 77% of Italians. Young, city-dwelling populations use this form of transport the most, regardless of the country in question.

Public transport users appear to be far more positive in Germany than in the other countries. Use of urban public transport is seen more as a necessity by the Italians, French and British (58%, 43% and 37% respectively), while the Germans are more divided on the issue: 30% of them use public transport out of choice, while 29% do so as a necessity. 19% of them even view it as a pleasure, far more than in the other nations (3% in Italy, 6% in France and 8% in the United Kingdom). Lastly, the use of urban public transport is not very linked to the concepts of restriction and routine. France is where restrictedness is felt the most, while a sense of routine is most pronounced in the United Kingdom (12%).

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Taking environmental considerations into account in public policy decisions in terms of transport: the United Kingdom leads the way, with the Italians bringing up the rear

When asked about trends in taking environmental considerations into account in public policy decisions in their nation in terms of transport, European interviewees held highly diverse opinions. While two thirds of the British (66%) and French (64%) think that public policy decisions in terms of transport have increasingly taken environmental considerations into account during the last five years, only 41% of the Germans and a mere quarter of the Italians (25%) hold this view.

Appraisals are much the same regardless of the type of urban area in which interviewees live, and seem to correlate more with their age and socio-economic status: the most favourable opinions are those of interviewees who are younger and with a higher socio-economic status, except in Italy, where appraisals are not only more negative but also more evenly distributed throughout the population.

Forthcoming European Union presidency: should the impact of transport on the environment be a priority issue?

When asked "During the forthcoming French presidency of the European Union, which starts this July, do you think that the issue of the impact of transport on the environment should be a top priority, important but not a top priority, or secondary?" the vast majority of Europeans said it should be important.

British opinion on the subject is the most divided: more people in the United Kingdom think this issue should be a top priority than anywhere else (47%, as against 45% in France, 41% in Italy and 34% in Germany). On the other hand, there are also more people than anywhere else who think that it should be secondary (23%, as compared to only 40% of Germans, 10% of the French and 6% of Italians). The intermediate response ("important but not a top priority") was chosen by only 26% of respondents in United Kingdom as opposed to around 50% in the other three countries.

Lastly, the view that this issue should be secondary in the forthcoming presidency of the European Union is held mostly by older people in the United Kingdom, but mostly by young people in Germany.

In conclusion, the less people think that their domestic policy decisions have taken into account the environmental impact of transport over the last five years, the more they think it is important for the European Union to take responsibility for this issue.

The survey questions were:

Q1. Which of the following best describes your use of urban public transport? Choose one answer: a restriction / a routine / a pleasure / a necessity / a choice

Q2. Do you think that over the last five years, public policy decisions in terms of transport in your country have taken environmental concerns into account much more, a little more, a little less or much less?


Q3. During the forthcoming French presidency of the European Union, which starts this July, do you think that the issue of the impact of transport on the environment should be a top priority, important but not a top priority, or secondary?

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