

11 ACCEPTABILITY

11.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of recent acceptability studies, surveys and experiences and identifies open issues, acceptability barriers, and issues where additional knowledge is needed.

Acceptability refers to the attitude of relevant stakeholders towards road pricing. It describes the prospective judgement of road pricing schemes proposed for introduction in the near future. Relevant stakeholders in the implementation process have been identified as: i) the citizens; ii) decision makers and technical experts in the cities; iii) the business community and iv) the media (Schade and Schlag, 2000).

The chapter is organised as follows: First, the importance and relevance of acceptability for the implementation process is outlined. Second, the present knowledge concerning the acceptability of road pricing among the stakeholders identified above is presented. Third, implications for the implementation process as well as links to the other report themes are addressed. Finally research gaps and directions for future research are identified.

11.2 WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE THEME?

Economists have favoured the use of pricing in regulating transportation for decades. However, with a few exceptions, urban road pricing is rare. Practical experience shows numerous kinds of barriers to the suggested pricing policy measures. While important institutional barriers remain in many countries (e.g. Glazer *et al*, 2001) most commentators acknowledge that the main barrier to implementing transport pricing strategies is now a lack of public and political acceptability (Jones, 2003; Schade and Schlag, 2003).

Several good reasons exist for considering acceptability. Firstly, we live in a democratic society, so societal, political and technological innovations must be introduced via the democratic process and must prevail against competing innovations (Frey and Eichenberger, 1999). Usually they cannot be imposed against public will. Secondly, the acceptability concept stresses the user perspective (Bartley, 1995). Even if most technological and political innovations might result in societal benefits, opinions and intentions of the people concerned are often not canvassed when new measures are being considered for implementation. This may lead to “irrational” resistance not only from the people concerned, and ultimately to the failure of an originally useful innovation.

Insufficient acceptability of a certain policy may have several consequences: for instance, strong public resistance may inhibit implementation, as political parties fear consequences for their next election. Secondly, with a sensitive topic such as mobility, the introduction of road pricing may lead to active resistance by different groups, which might be exhibited in the form of demonstrations, boycotts or even sabotage. Several examples demonstrating the power of resistance are known e.g. from nuclear energy, information technology, biotechnology and even from transport. Thus, acceptability of systems is assumed to have major influence on the effectiveness of the implementation and maintenance of a system (Van der Laan, 1998). Lacking acceptance might even undermine efficiency of a per se useful innovation.

This is reflected in the results of the *User Needs Assessment Questionnaire*, in which 20 out of 22 city users ranked this topic as very important to them (CURACAO, 2006). Low acceptability by citizens as well as the politicians and administrative decision-makers are regarded as the most important barriers to successful implementation of road pricing schemes. Furthermore a rather negative media attitude adds to the currently unfavourable climate for road pricing implementation in cities and regions.

11.3 WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE THEME?

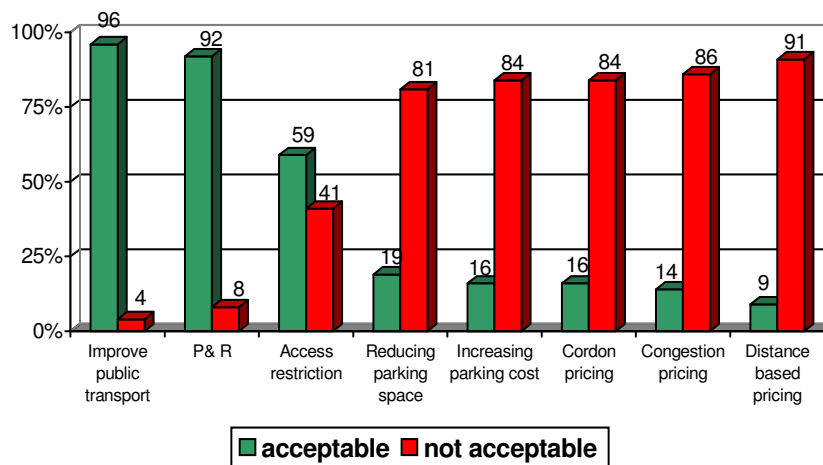
11.3.1 Public Acceptability: A Definition

In the past 15 years a range of studies dealt with acceptability of road pricing (for an overview see Schade and Schlag, 2003). A common finding of past research is the lack of conceptual clarity, regarding definitions, methodology, and general research frameworks. For instance, the term public is conceptually rather fuzzy, as it is unclear what exactly is meant by the public. Some authors focus on motorists, others on voters, consumers, citizens or inhabitants. Likewise, the notion of "acceptability/acceptance" may express - according to the particular study - various concepts such as support, agreement, feasibility, to vote for, favourable reaction, etc. Only a few authors have attempted a clear definition (Schade and Schlag, 2000). Generally, the construct can be conveniently described by questioning "acceptance of what, through whom and under which conditions and circumstances". The term "acceptability" describes the prospective judgement of measures to be introduced in the future. Thus the target groups will not have experienced any of these measures, making "acceptability" an attitude construct subject to strong situational and temporal factors. "Acceptance" involves respondents' attitudes including their behavioural reactions *after* the introduction of a measure.

11.3.2 Levels of Acceptability

Meanwhile, an extensive literature demonstrates the low public acceptability of urban road pricing schemes (e.g. Jakobsson *et al*, 2000; Schade and Schlag, 2000, 2003; Jaensirisak, Wardman and May, 2005). For example, Figure 11-1 illustrates the acceptability of various travel demand management measures among other different forms of road pricing. Road pricing is the least accepted form of travel demand management. Only up to 20% of the respondents agree with this form. Somewhat more optimistic Jaensirisak *et al* (2005) found in their review of a number of British acceptability studies a mean acceptability of 35%. However, they also found considerable variations in the levels of public acceptance of road pricing ranging from 8% to 76%.

Figure 11-1 Acceptability of Travel Demand Management Measures



Source: Shade(2003)

11.3.3 Individual Characteristics and Acceptability

Concerning factors determining the degree of acceptability, in particular personal attitudes, expectations, perceptions and subjective evaluations about road pricing have been investigated. Among these, variables like negative outcome expectations, perceived unfairness, negative social norms and perceived infringement on freedom have been identified as important determinants (for a comprehensive overview see Schade and Schlag, 2003). Socio-economic factors like income revealed a smaller and rather unsystematic impact on acceptability than did attitudinal factors (Jaensirisak *et al.*, 2005). Schade (2005) found that especially the individual's personal outcome expectation explains most of the variance of acceptability. The impact of personal outcome expectation is exerted mostly indirect through other variables; i.e. those who perceive more disadvantages also view urban road pricing as less fair, less effective and less socially desirable! Those who expect advantages evaluate road pricing on all dimensions more positively.

11.3.4 Scheme Characteristics and Acceptability

Furthermore, the system characteristics of road pricing schemes and its impact on acceptability have become a matter of research. In particular, the preferred use of revenues has been investigated. The principal result of a number of studies is that with a *hypothecation of revenues* acceptability of road pricing considerably increases. Numbers vary, but in most cases such a package solution was accepted by the majority of respondents (e.g. 45% in Schade and Schlag, 2000; 55% in Jaensirisak *et al.*, 2005). Jones (1998) concluded that, "Most professional and governmental bodies in the UK now accept that hypothecation of revenues will be part of the price that will have to be paid to gain sufficient public support for urban road pricing to ensure its introduction in this country". It appears from the literature, that an integrative package which includes road pricing as well as some form of revenue hypothecation increases acceptability. However, the design of the package, including the proposed measures and form of revenue use will be included, is very much dependent on local circumstances (Ubbels, 2006).

Another important factor is the *level of charge*. The level of charge should not be too small in order to be noticed. But on the other hand high levels of charges may not be acceptable and therefore not implemented (Schuitema, 2003). In almost all cases where the charge has received attention, no quantified relationship between acceptance and the charge has been developed. As an exception Jaensirisak *et al.* (2005) systematically varied the level of charge and replicated the results by Cain and Jones (2002) and Harrington *et al.* (2001) that public acceptability diminishes as the level of charge increases. In a similar vein experiences from the PRIMA case cities indicate that rather low starting levels are needed to achieve acceptance and that the charges can be increased successively to meet financial requirements (Harsman, 2003).

According to economists variable or dynamic road pricing is the best way of overcoming congestion problems in urban areas. However, people have a clear preference for simple price structures (Bonsall *et al.*, 2004). People want to know what their journey will cost before they start. If price levels are changing according to the congestion levels, time of the day etc. it creates considerable uncertainty of the real costs of a journey. People may oppose complex road pricing schemes, since they find certain behavioural outcome more attractive than uncertain ones (Kahnemann and Tversky, 1984). Empirical research about the acceptability of complex versus simple urban road pricing schemes is underway (e.g. Bonsall *et al.*, 2006; Hoffmann *et al.*, 2006). Schlag and Schade (2000) found little difference between distance-based, currently congestion based and cordon pricing concerning acceptability. The Singapore experience with road pricing suggests that differentiated charges, and periodic well-advertised adjustments to them, are accepted as a sensible way to reduce peak period congestion and that the resulting variability in prices does not seem to have been a serious issue. The same applies to the Stockholm trial. However in a European context the German railway's failed attempt to introduce a complex charging structure shows that if the public regard price differentiation as unfair they will object very strongly and that, against this background, any perceived complexity will be one of the targets of criticism. The case of

Edinburgh illustrates how the public's limited understanding of the scheme increased opposition (Gaunt *et al.*, 2007).

The design of a road pricing scheme also determines who is to which degree affected by the scheme. The acceptability of the scheme is in turn influenced by the degree to which people are affected. It is known that motorists are much less in favour of urban road pricing than non-motorists are. Also citizens living within the charged area are much more in favour than people living outside the charged area. Furthermore, people who need to travel inside the charged area e.g. for commuting are much less in favour (see the examples of cities below).

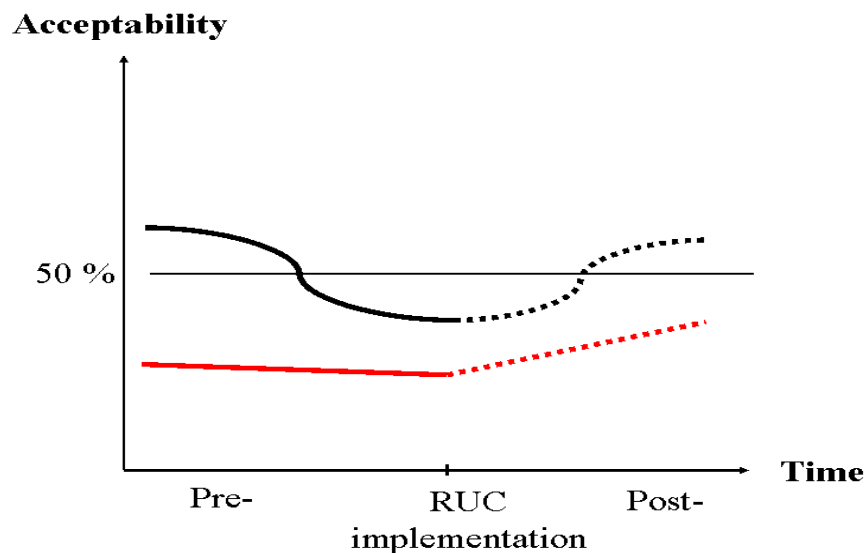
Rather unclear at the moment is the question how the benefits of road pricing schemes influence acceptability. The assumption is that once the scheme has been introduced the effectiveness of such a scheme becomes apparent to the citizens and changes their mind in a positive direction. However the exact nature of the relation between scheme benefits and acceptability is not known. The scheme benefits that will influence acceptability are the time savings and environmental improvements. However, it is uncertain that travel time reduction and environmental improvement are perceived by the public to be worthwhile enough to compensate for the charge (Giuliano, 1992; Harrington *et al.*, 2001). Jaensirisak *et al.* (2005) found that among the potential impacts of charging, an ability to achieve substantial environmental improvements was the single most important contributor to increased acceptability, followed by contributions to reducing delayed time for cars.

11.3.5 Implementation Process and Acceptability

The report has so far discussed individual and system characteristics that affect the level of public acceptability. This might give the impression that acceptability is a static factor within the implementation process. However, acceptability is not static but highly dynamical throughout the pre-, the decision- and the post-implementation phase.

Figure 11-2 illustrates possible acceptability developments as observed in cities implementing urban road pricing. After initial support acceptability decreases the closer and more specific the proposal gets. In addition, the higher the initial ex-ante acceptability the stronger may be the decrease of positive attitudes in the course of the implementation process. After implementation support increases again. So far the reasons for these shifts are unclear

Figure 11-2 Possible developments of attitudes towards road pricing



Source: Schade, Seidel and Schlag (2004)

Before implementation

Repeated attitude surveys show that acceptability is decreasing the closer and more concrete the proposal gets (cf. Edinburgh and Stockholm cases in the appendix). I.e., even if there is initial support for road pricing, there is no guarantee that this will remain over time. However, this is not a new observation. Examples like the introduction of the European currency or the extension of the European Union all show a decreasing support prior to implementation. This can be seen as an *approach-avoidance conflict*, which occurs when both hopes and fears are associated with an innovation and often lead to ambivalent attitudes (Loewenstein *et al.*, 2003). Applied to an innovation like road pricing the approach-avoidance model postulates that costs and benefits are associated with each innovation. Benefits (chances) generate a tendency to “approach” the innovation and costs (risks) produce a tendency to “avoid” the innovation. The problem is that the strength of the avoidance tendency increases more rapidly with nearness to the goal than does the strength of the approach tendency. I.e. negative aspects of the innovation (risks) become more and more important the closer the implementation of the innovation comes.

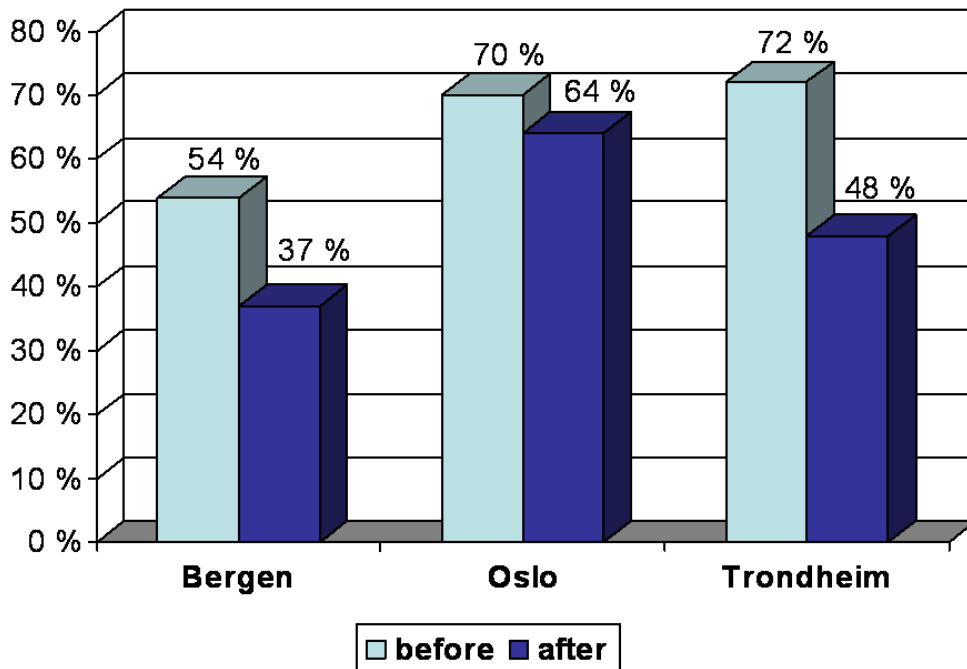
It is assumed that prior to implementation of road pricing approach-avoidance conflicts should occur in almost every city to some extent, which means decreasing support for the proposal. However, it seems possible that the higher the initial ex-ante acceptability the stronger should be the decrease of positive attitudes in the course of the implementation process. The reason is that not all supporters are “convinced” supporters. Acceptability research has shown that social norms play an important role in determining attitudes towards road pricing (Schade and Schlag, 2003). Many people have no ideas about the real consequences of road pricing and therefore strive for concordance between their own and others’ preferences. The pressure towards conformity exercised by relevant others is one of the strongest factors influencing personal opinions, feelings and behavioural intentions, especially in a situation with a rather uncertain physical basis for judgment. If there is a perception of a favourable “atmosphere” towards road pricing many undecided people will follow. However, these late adopters (Rogers, 1995) are rather unconvinced and will change attitudes quickly if negative aspects of the innovation will emerge. Conversely, in cities where acceptability levels are rather low (up to max. 30 %) the social climate should be rather against road pricing. People who still support road pricing under this “rough” climate can be designated as “innovators” and therefore should have more stable attitudes towards it even if negative aspects should come to the forefront. The above hypothesis is (indirectly) confirmed by the Trondheim case. Only a minority was positive towards road pricing which did not change a lot before implementation. However, after the introduction the support steadily increased until the early 1990s. The same attitude development has been reported from Oslo (Tretvik, 2003). Therefore two possible developments of attitudes towards road pricing are hypothesized. However, the decreasing support for the Trondheim scheme observed after 1992 emphasizes again, that attitudes are not stable and support has to be secured over a long period. The shift from positive towards more negative attitudes in Trondheim is attributed to major adjustments to the scheme design. This demonstrates that the public is sensitive to changes in the scheme structure or fee level. It indicates that a stepwise or gradual introduction of road pricing, which is often advocated (e.g. European Commission, 1998; Niskanen *et al.*, 2003) may face more or less serious acceptability problems, too. However, so far the reasons for this shift are unclear. Maybe rules of transparency and credibility are violated.

After implementation

In general after implementation support increases (but see the Lyon case below). In **Bergen** public opinion has shifted from strong opposition before implementation to almost majority support in the after situation (Tretvik, 2003). Larsen (1988) reports that a month before the opening of the toll ring, a newspaper poll showed only 13% absolutely in favour, with 54 % opposed (33% indifferent). Within a year, however, 50% were in favour and only 36.5% opposed. The remaining 13.5% were either indifferent or did not have any opinion. In the year before the implementation of the **Oslo** toll ring, 70 % of the city’s population were negative towards the toll ring. When the system had been operational for one year this opposition had been reduced to 64%. In 1998 this figure was 54%. The share being very negative decreased from 40 to 17% during the same period. The share being positive to the toll system steadily

increased during the period, from 30% before the toll system opened to 46% in 1998. Attitude surveys about the Trondheim toll ring indicated decreased opposition after implementation (Tretvik, 2003). In April 1991, about 70% of the respondents objected to the toll ring. In December 1991, two months after implementation, the negative share had dropped to below 50%. In succeeding opinion polls during the summer of 1992 and 1993, the negative share constituted about 35%, while the proponents' share dropped slightly from about 37% in 1992 to about 32% in 1993. The remaining respondents stated their indifference. The latest poll, from September 1994, indicated less support, with a negative share of 43% and a positive share of 29%. Figure 11-3 summarises the results.

Figure 11-3 Negative attitudes before and after (one year of) opening of urban tolls in Norway



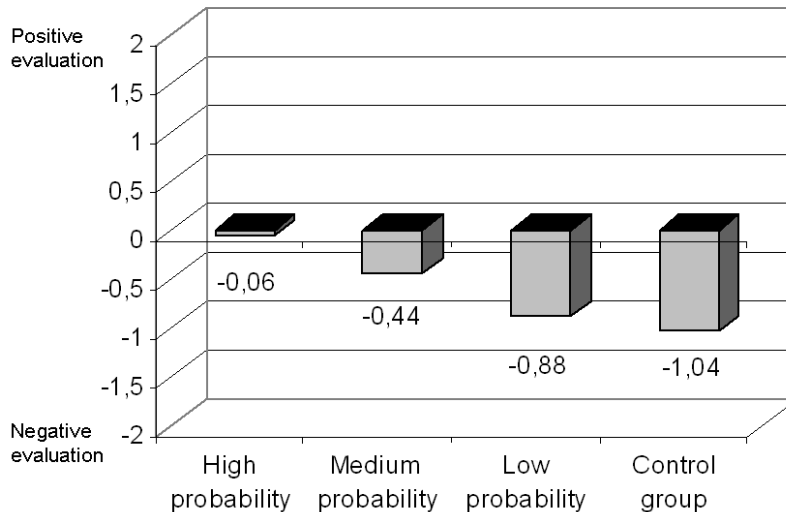
Source: Odeck and Bråthen (2002, 256).

Similar results have been observed in London (TfL, 2004). Before charging in late 2002 40 % rejected congestion charging (40 % support) whereas after charging in 2003 just 25-30 % still rejected congestion pricing (now 50-60 % support). On the other hand Raux and Souche (2003) report a remarkable exception: A failure of a tolling scheme in France due to public resistance. The northern boulevard périphérique of Lyon has been a privately managed toll road infrastructure which opened in 1997. From the outset, it was vehemently rejected by motorists. There was a movement to boycott the new road accompanied by weekly demonstrations at the toll barriers. These prevented users from paying and occasionally even led to the destruction of the barriers. Finally, the local authority repurchased the road which is now managed by a public corporation. The toll was considerably reduced and limited to a main central tunnel.

One of the assumptions for the positive development of attitudes *after* the implementation of road pricing is that the benefits of such a scheme become apparent to the citizens and change their mind in a positive direction (Odeck and Bråthen, 1997, 2002). Schade and Baum (2007) have challenged this assumption. They investigated how car drivers will react to the (planned) introduction of road pricing. Will people respond with even stronger negative attitudes, rejection or reactance towards such proposals, or will they adapt to the new

situation and develop more positive attitudes because they have to accept the inevitable? The results of the study revealed clearly that people with a strong conviction about a definite introduction of road pricing exhibit much more positive attitudes towards road pricing than people who are less certain about its imminent introduction (see Figure 11-4). In addition convinced people perceive only weak social norms against the toll and they state lower negative emotions like anger. Furthermore they report lower levels of infringement of freedom and they state a weaker motivation to restore personal freedom than people who have the impression that the introduction of road pricing is rather uncertain. Thus, the strength of conviction about the introduction of road pricing has a strong effect on the attitudinal evaluation of road pricing. Schade and Baum (2007) explain the results on the basis of the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) which predicts that people increase the attractiveness of an unavoidable event in order to maintain a consistent cognitive belief system. They conclude that once a road pricing system is decided and the citizens can no longer avoid it, their attitudes towards road pricing become more positive. Thus, the positive effects of road pricing scheme benefits after implementation might be overestimated.

Figure 11-4 Impact of perceived likelihood of road pricing implementation on road pricing acceptability (mean values).



Source: Schade and Baum (2007).

More detailed experiences gleaned from countries that have implemented road pricing measures are discussed in Appendix C of this report.

11.3.6 Political Acceptability

The opinion of local politicians and their subsequent actions are of paramount importance for the successful implementation of urban road pricing schemes. This is one common experience of all cities implementing or attempting to implement urban road pricing. They directly or indirectly determine whether or not the pricing scheme will be introduced as well as the speed of the policy implementation process (Schade *et al*, 2004).

Politicians obviously can influence the implementation process in two different ways. First, they may consciously and actively prevent the implementation of the scheme. Second, they may avoid a clear commitment to the scheme, especially if they are not sure about the

outcome of the political process. But a lack of strong political commitment acts as a benchmark for other stakeholders. Their attitudes may become more negative as well. This also contributes to a slower or even stopped introduction.

In this situation a political champion or figurehead, who takes ownership of the congestion charging concept, clearly facilitates the implementation process. However, unlike the officials involved in the preparation of any scheme, politicians depend on re-election, and the fear of losing elections by promoting road user charging holds many politicians back. Even where there is strong enough political support to go ahead with charging plans, politicians can easily be disheartened if they find that public support is eroding in the run-up to the scheme introduction (PROGRESS, 2004).

One way of divorcing the road pricing issue from elections is to hold a referendum. It should be noted, though, that a referendum just before the last steps of the scheme introduction is very likely to hit the lowest level of support, and therefore runs the greatest risk of failure. An alternative to an early referendum is the Stockholm approach: here the referendum was held around one year after a congestion charging scheme was implemented “on a trial basis”. Whilst this approach carries a large financial risk, it provides the best chances for the referendum to be won, since it has been shown that public support for a charging scheme increases again once it is up and running and people start to feel its benefits. In that respect the public opinion is the most important source of information for the politicians in the implementation process. Thus, presenting not only the benefits of the scheme to the politicians, but also pointing out where the public agrees with the road pricing scheme may increase political acceptability considerably.

Furthermore the factors influencing political acceptability are somehow similar to those that have been found to be important for public acceptability. Examples are problem perception, fairness and revenue allocation. Thus results concerning the public may be to some extent transferable to political acceptability as well. Further research is needed to clarify the factors influencing political acceptability and the relations to public acceptability.

11.3.7 Business Acceptability

The business community is one stakeholder whose opinion particularly counts in the introduction process. This is due to the fact that they are important local taxpayers and politicians fear relocation of important business sectors. The attitude of the business community toward the road pricing schemes can be described as ranging from sceptical to a negative attitude and opposition towards the scheme. This appraisal is not dependent on the progress of the implementation process (Schade *et al*, 2004).

Retailers that are located within the envisaged charging zone are generally among a scheme’s most vociferous opponents. They fear the competition from retailers located outside the zone, and a resulting reduction in their customer numbers. Since it is clearly the purpose of most of the current and currently envisaged schemes to deter car traffic from entering the charged area, this fear is understandable, and can only be allayed if retailers can be convinced that the public transport alternatives offered to their current customers are good enough to provide viable alternatives to the car. Another mitigating measure for the potential loss of customers would be to invest some of the charging income on promotional measures for the charged area. Further to the fears about loss of customers, there are also concerns that those customers that still come have less money in their pockets to spend. Ways to meet this fear would be a parking policy that would reduce parking charges during the main shopping hours, the creation of additional spaces (although this may turn out to be counterproductive for congestion reduction) or the use of some of the road pricing revenue to allow a reduction of public transport fares. The final concern for retailers is that they may have to increase the prices of their goods to accommodate additional costs for deliveries, and thereby become less competitive than their out-of-town rivals. However, especially where there is only a daily charge rather than a charge per trip and delivery vehicles that come into the charged area several times during the charging period, they have much more to gain from

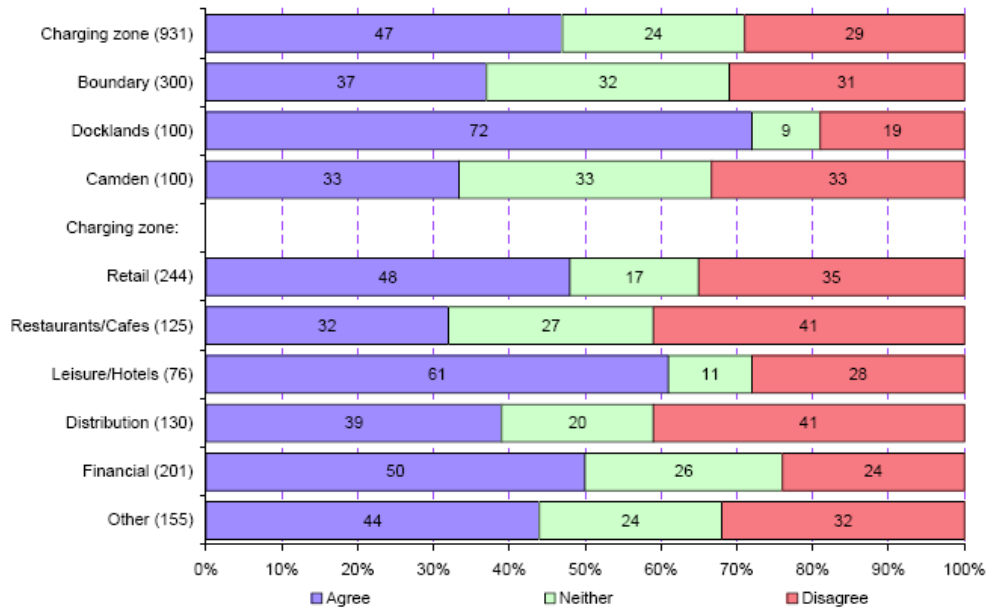
reduced congestion than to lose from the charge they pay once per day. Moreover, the low level of charges foreseen currently by European cities, will only add very marginally to the cost of any goods for sale (PROGRESS, 2004).

However, business expectations do not correspond with the experiences available in cities that have introduced successfully road pricing schemes. These cities have not reported considerable business relocation (Seidel *et al.*, 2004). For example, in its own study, the Trondheim Chamber of Commerce concluded that the 1991 toll ring hardly had any effect on trade at all. During the first months of 1992 there was evidence of some businesses located inside the toll ring losing trade, but from the summer of 1992 on, no distortion of competition due to the toll ring could be read from the trade statistics. It was concluded that there was no distortion of trade competition due to the toll ring. Thus, the concerns about the negative effects prior to the implementation were not justified by the evaluation (Tretvik, 2003). Furthermore, Rome also experienced a shift in business attitudes after the implementation of the electronic access points at the Limited Traffic Zone. There has been a 5 % reduction of retailers perceiving the access control system negatively. In summary, there has been an increase in the percentage of respondents believing that the electronic access system has positively affected both air quality and the modal split (Schade *et al.*, 2004).

Consequently, business acceptability of the implemented road pricing schemes may also increase after the introduction, as with public opinion. For example in Stockholm between 2005 and 2006 there was a change in attitude towards the Stockholm Trial as a whole. The proportion of companies that were negative fell from about 65% to 45%. The proportion of those who were positive rose from about 20% to approximately 35%. The attitude to a permanent congestion tax changed in the same direction. The proportion of companies that were negative to a permanent congestion tax fell from about 65% to 50%, and the proportion who were positive rose from about 20% to approximately 30% (City of Stockholm, 2006). That may imply that business representatives do not only judge a road pricing system on the basis of a pure rational cost-benefit analysis. Since the benefits of the road pricing system are often hypothetical and abstract prior to the introduction whereas the costs can be calculated in more detail, they may be weighted more than the benefits. The result would be a negative assessment of the road pricing scheme. A second possible explanation refers to the expectations of the business representatives. The perceived effectiveness is only one factor influencing the expectations. Other psychological variables may be relevant as well. Again there is more research needed to investigate the factors influencing business acceptability (Schade *et al.*, 2004).

On the other hand experiences from the Congestion Charging scheme in London shows that business support for congestion charging continues to be relatively mixed. Businesses were, on the whole, more supportive of the scheme than opposed to it. A majority of businesses continue to support the scheme, provided that there is continued investment in public transport (see Figure 11-5). When analysed by sector, the leisure, financial and retail sectors were the most supportive of the scheme, whilst the distribution and restaurant sectors were the least positive. The increased level of support from the retail sector in 2005, compared to the previous year, is the most positive trend of all the sectors (TfL, 2005).

Figure 11-5 Level of business acceptability of the London congestion charging scheme under the provision of investment in public transport



Source: TfL(2006)

11.3.8 The Media and Acceptability

The media is an often overlooked factor in the policy implementation process. However, by choosing the topics and the way of presenting it, the media can significantly influence not only the public opinion, but also the opinion of all relevant stakeholders.

The main focus of the media in reporting about urban road pricing is the opinions and behaviour of the key actors. This issue also becomes more important the more advanced and detailed the plans for implementation are. Whereas it mostly reports facts such as the technology trials it already focuses more on opinions of the stakeholders in the pilot demonstrations. It furthermore acts not only as an opinion reporter but also as an opinion former (see Ryley and Gjersoe (2006) for a demonstration of this effect for the failed Edinburgh congestion charging scheme). This is certainly more relevant in the latter stages of the implementation process where the key actors actively position themselves and try to exert influence in their favour (Schade *et al*, 2004).

Concerning the tonality of the media coverage it must be stated that the overall assessment of road pricing schemes in the media has been negative or at best neutral (see for example Gaber (2004) for an analysis of the London congestion charging reporting). Thus, the media will hardly be supportive in the implementation process. This result corresponds with general media research which has shown that especially the mass media focuses on aspects which can be presented in an emotional and thus empathetic way. Stories about people who are forced to change their travel behaviour and thus their daily life because of the scheme are far more suitable for this than abstract measurements of improved air quality for example. That might be also a reason, why the negative opinions are highly represented in the media.

Politicians and decision-makers have to take possible reactions of the media into account. In particular, they should avoid as much as possible everything which allows the media or opponents to negatively emotionalise the topic. This may mean, in some cases, that the policy measure has to be adjusted to prevent a negative media response. It may well be that this adjustment will lead to substantial departures from the "first best" policy.

11.4 WHAT ARE THE POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER THEMES?

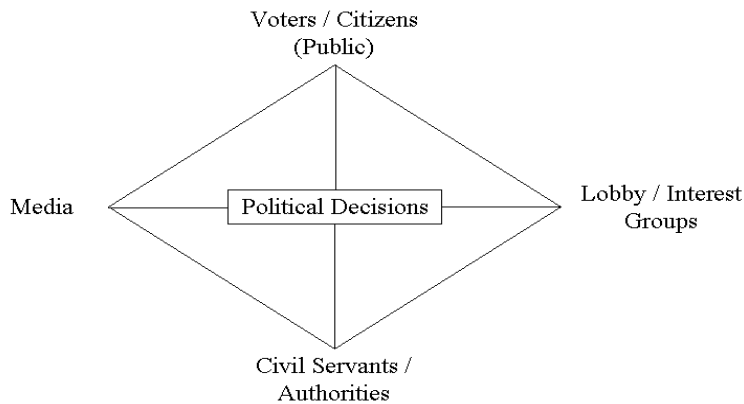
There are the following implications for other themes:

- **Objectives:** Acceptability of urban road pricing varies considerably with the stated objectives of the scheme. If road pricing is presented or discussed without any objective it faces strong rejection. But if the stated objectives of the pricing strategy meet main public concerns, the willingness to adopt urban road pricing increases considerably. In general, reviewed results show that raising revenue for public transport investments either in services or in reduced fares is favoured mostly, and to a lesser extent revenue for road infrastructure investments. However, if road pricing is presented to reduce travel times by car, support decreases drastically. It seems that time gains are too abstract to imagine or people understand that time gains mean less traffic achieved through higher user charges.
- **Scheme Design:** system characteristics, especially the hypothecation and the level of charge influence acceptability. The higher the charges the less acceptable they are. However, if they are combined with investments in public transport they become more acceptable.
- **Technology and Business Systems :** Privacy is no longer a major obstacle for acceptability. However, the technology needs to work and be easy to use for the citizens. Any problems will be taken of by the media and subject to public discussion and in this sense may become an obstacle to the implementation
- **Prediction:** For equity considerations, models are needed which predict the impact of road pricing on individuals, and individual journeys, disaggregated by income, location, time of day and journey purpose; ideally those models should also identify impacts on special needs, such as disabled drivers and those carrying bulky loads. Where scheme design includes exemptions and rebates, models should ideally be able to assess their impacts. It is recognised that the prediction of acceptability is also a major barrier.
- **Appraisal:** A scheme that may perform well in the appraisal which measures economic welfare/benefit may not be an acceptable scheme in the eyes of the public who have to bear the congestion charge.
- **Economy:** The scale and direction of impacts on the local economy are difficult to estimate, and will be further affected by perceptions of the impact of pricing, any complementary policy initiatives, the resulting image of the charged area, and its relationship with competing centres. This uncertainty is one of the main reasons for cities' reluctance to introduce road pricing. It is certainly a reason for low business acceptability prior implementation. On the other hand lack of public acceptability may well have an adverse impact on the urban economy and in the long-term on residential choice.
- **Environment:** An increased focus on the environmental benefits of road pricing has been shown to increase acceptability.
- **Equity:** Distributional as well as procedural aspects of equity and fairness needs to be considered very carefully. Problems which are not an issue in the pre-implementation phase may become more critical the closer the introduction gets (e.g. privacy which relates to technology, reliability, trust)
- **Transferability:** The acceptability of road pricing may differ between locations for many reasons, including the level of familiarity with alternative transport pricing / travel demand management approaches, prevailing perceptions of transport problems, the history of local transport planning processes etc. But there seem to be similar patterns of response of the various stakeholders in the process of implementing urban road pricing schemes which are independent from the individual city and its context.

11.5 WHAT THE RESEARCH GAPS AND PLANS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH?

It seems that there is now at least some reliable scientific consensus about the structure of acceptability. Likewise there is agreement about the groups of actors that play a key role in the transport policy process (Schade and Schlag, 2000). Figure 11-6 illustrates the main groups within the implementation process of urban road pricing. That is first the politicians and decision makers, that implement the policy, second the affected citizens, third lobby and interest groups that try to influence the policy and implementation process in favour of their clients' needs and finally the media which inform as well as influences the implementation process.

Figure 11-6 Key actors in the implementation of urban road pricing



Source: Schade and Schlag (2000).

However, there is less consensus on the relationships between these key actors, the factors affecting their acceptability and how these relationships and acceptability may change over time, for instance by coalition forming. The dynamics of acceptability is certainly an issue that needs further attention. The experiences in cities show a certain degree of changeability of acceptability. In the future it needs to be determined what the causes of these changes are and how they can be utilised in favour of the implementation process.

Stockholm and Edinburgh are the first two cities (see the appendix) that have used referenda as a form of public participation with mixed success. Public participation can be one way of increasing public acceptability and the credibility of the implementation process. However there is a lack of knowledge of the circumstances which could make public referendum a promising way to introduce urban road pricing. And if a referendum does not hold its promise, how could it be implemented even against the initial majority of voters and car drivers?