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## Driven by necessity: dependency on the car jumps in last year

**Drivers' dependency on the car has jumped in the last year with a third (33%) of motorists – the equivalent to 13.2m – saying they are more reliant on their cars now than 12 months earlier, compared to just 27% in 2017, research for the RAC's annual [Report on Motoring](#) has revealed.\***

Data from the comprehensive study of motoring trends now in its 30<sup>th</sup> year shows car dependency had been dropping steadily since 2012 when 31% of motorists said they were more reliant on a car than the year before. The latest figures show the UK as a nation is now more wedded to the car than ever.

Of those who said their reliance on their cars has increased in the past year, 14% said they were much more dependent – a statistically significant rise of 5% on the 2017 figure – whereas the proportion who reported no change dropped by 6% to 55%.

The report, which is based on a representative survey of 1,808 motorists, also found that the percentage of drivers whose car use has increased in the last year rose for the first time in four years. In 2018, 27% of motorists say they are using their cars more than the year before, while only 18% say their use has reduced – this is in stark contrast to 2017 when the percentages were 20% for increased car use and 24% less car use. This means there has been a 12% shift from less to more car use, which represents 4.8m drivers.

**RAC chief engineer David Bizley said:**

“At a time when there is so much effort being put into tackling air quality issues and congestion, it is alarming to see that dependency on the car is

actually the highest we have ever seen.”

### Reasons why people are driving more

The top reasons people gave for using their cars more were having a greater need to transport family members (34%), having a longer commute (32%), and family and friends having moved further away (27%).

But a significant 24% blamed a deterioration in public transport services for using their car more often, with 44% of this group blaming public transport reliability, 39% higher fares and a third (33%) saying it was due to cuts in local services. This claim is supported by [a report from the Campaign for Better Transport](#)\*\* which found local authority funding in England and Wales for bus services had been cut by 45% over the past eight years and 3,347 routes have been reduced or withdrawn.

[Government data](#) also shows people are taking fewer bus journeys than 10 years ago.\*\*\* On top of this, rail commuters have recently suffered large-scale disruption to services in several regions with the Office for Rail and Road this week reporting delays on the rail network are the worst for 12 years.

### Motorists would use public transport more if it was better

However, six in 10 (59%) of those surveyed state they would use their car less if public transport was better, with only 11% disagreeing with this statement. In the first Report on Motoring published in 1989 the number of people who stated they would use their car less if public transport was better was a miserable 23%. Over the course of the next decade the percentage slowly rose, before jumping 20% to 68% in 2008, perhaps in response to petrol going above £1 a litre in November 2007 and rising by 20p a litre in just nine months.

In 2018 those who claimed they would use their car less if public transport was better were asked why they don't currently use public transport more. Forty-five per cent said fares were too high (rising to 62% among young

drivers aged 17-24), 42% said services don't run when they need them to, 40% said they aren't close enough to where they live or need to go and 39% stated they don't run often enough, while a frustrated 31% claimed they don't run on time. Other popular reasons included 25% saying both that services are too slow and too crowded, and 16% claiming there were too many cancellations.

### 75% would find it difficult to be without a car

Three-quarters of the motorists surveyed (75%) said they would find it very difficult to adjust their lifestyle to being without a car – a figure that has remained high since the first Report on Motoring was published in 1989 when it was 79%. When asked why, almost two-thirds (61%) said the car was essential for transporting people and going shopping, while 49% need one for seeing family and friends who live further away and for 23% there is simply no other way for them to get around due to where they live.

The expense of public transport was also a factor for a third of the motorists surveyed (33%) who claimed trains were more expensive than driving and a fifth (22%) who said the same about buses.

Fifty-one per cent of motorists questioned agreed they were frustrated by the lack of feasible alternatives to using a car for short journeys they make in contrast to only 22% who disagreed with this statement and 26% who were undecided.

### **David Bizley continued:**

“While there is much talk about improving public transport, the reality is very different as buses and trains are not meeting public expectations, and in fact in some cases have actually gone backwards.

“Our research clearly shows many people don't think public transport offers a viable alternative to the car for their needs, especially those living in more rural areas, 84% of whom say they would struggle to adjust to a car-free lifestyle in contrast to 70% of urban dwellers. There is a definite willingness among motorists to use public transport more if only it were better. Consequently, people end up driving by default as they feel public transport is either too expensive, non-existent or just doesn't go where or when they

need it to.

“It is particularly frightening to think we have fewer people travelling by bus in 2018 than we did in 2008. We need greater investment in public transport so that where feasible, drivers have an alternative to sitting in traffic and contributing to poor air quality and congestion. And the key to this must surely be making public transport as attractive as possible by ensuring it is reliable, frequent, comfortable and affordable.

“We must make it easier for public transport to be used on the journeys that the majority of people make most often. At the very least there should be comprehensive park and ride schemes operating in every large city, removing the need for commuters to clog up city centres simply trying to get to and from work. We should also reverse the current trend and make more rather than less cash available for councils and combined authorities to improve bus services, in both urban and, particularly in, rural areas.

“While rail use is clearly popular, for the vast majority of people the most likely alternative mode of public transport is the bus. It is therefore essential the Government maintains strong investment in the UK’s roads – as buses, as well as cars, cyclists, and even trams, rely on good quality roads.

“But judging by the findings of this year’s RAC Report on Motoring the car, however it is powered, is here to stay.”

**Darren Shirley, Chief Executive, Campaign for Better Transport said:**

“The message coming from motorists is clear: if they have public transport which was more reliable, cheaper, or in some cases just available they would rather use that than the car. The case for investing in sustainable transport and boosting rural public transport cannot be any clearer, with even car drivers wanting better public transport so they can move away from the car.”

**Xavier Brice, CEO for Sustrans the walking and cycling charity said:**

“With the UK’s air pollution a daily headline, there has never been a more important time to shift short journeys away from cars towards healthy, clean alternatives such as getting around by foot or on bike.

“One in four car trips are under two miles – a distance that can be walked or cycled.

“The research by RAC is a reminder to governments at all levels to take urgent action and prioritise the development of safe and high quality walking and cycling routes, alongside engagement programmes, to enable more people to walk and cycle.”

The RAC is encouraging drivers to make small changes, where feasible, to help cut overall car use and the resulting congestion and pollution. Below is a list of possible actions:

- Swap one regular ‘solo’ car trip per week for a bus or train journey
- Start car sharing to work
- Talk to your employer about adjusting your working hours to avoid contributing to congestion
- Use a sustainable form of transport, such as walking or cycling, for a local journey – 24% of all car journeys are two miles or less
- Write to your MP if you feel public transport in your area is in need of improvement

**David Bizley added:**

“Many will be surprised that a quarter of all car journeys are under two miles\*\*\*\*. For most of these short journeys, there may be a practical alternative to the car. By opting for the alternative, drivers will help to reduce congestion and pollution, and may even improve their physical and mental health.”

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**Notes to Editors**

\* Research for the [RAC Report on Motoring](#) was conducted by Quadrangle using an online survey of 1,808 motorists who hold a full, current driving licence, drive at least once a month and who have a motor vehicle in their household. The research was carried out from 2-18 May 2018.

\*\* Campaign for Better Transport – [‘Buses in Crisis’ report](#)

\*\*\* Department for Transport data – [table BUS0101](#)

\*\*\*\* Department for Transport, National Travel Survey 2017 – [table NTS0308](#)

## **About the RAC**

First formed in 1897, the RAC has been looking after the needs of its members and championing the interests of drivers for more than 120 years.

Today it has more than eight million members and is one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. Whether it's [roadside assistance](#), [insurance](#), [buying a used car](#), [vehicle inspections and checks](#), [legal services](#) or up-to-the-minute [traffic and travel information](#) – the RAC offers a solution for all motoring needs. The RAC is committed to making motoring easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for drivers and road users.

The RAC is the motorist's champion and campaigns to support the interests of its members and UK drivers at a national level. This includes voicing concerns about the increasing cost of motoring, particularly the price of fuel and the high level of tax levied on it, advancing levels of road safety, and supporting the needs of all drivers, from young to old.

The RAC's annual [Report on Motoring](#) – first published in 1989 – is one of a kind and provides a clear insight into the concerns and issues facing today's motorists.

For the very latest news on UK fuel prices, check [RAC Fuel Watch](#). It provides a comprehensive guide to the latest UK unleaded petrol and diesel prices – both at the wholesale level and at the pump - and tracks these prices daily to help drivers check if the price they pay to fill up is a fair one.

## Contacts



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