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More than a third of drivers admit to accidentally driving in a bus lane

Drivers are being unwittingly caught out by 'confusing' bus lanes with more than a third (36%) saying they have accidentally driven in one, a new RAC study has found.*

What's more, four-in-10 (42%) of those who admit to having done it say they were caught on camera and asked to pay a fine. This is no doubt why an overwhelming majority (85%) want to see councils issue a warning letter the first time someone is caught driving in a bus lane, rather than an instant fine.

The RAC has long argued that few drivers deliberately choose to drive in bus lanes – something this research has confirmed with only 4% admitting to doing that – and that drivers either miss the signage or are confused by it.

Among drivers who have bus lanes operating only at certain times of the day in their areas, well over half (56%) believe the signage is inadequate. A third (33%) say signs are not easy to spot while driving and not easy to understand, while 23% say the signs are visible enough but not easy to understand. Forty-four per cent, however, believe the signage is easy to see and easy to understand.

In terms of why drivers think bus lane signs are hard to spot and/or understand, 85% say it's because there is too much information to read and take in about the hours of operation, all while they're trying to drive safely. Three-in-10 (29%) feel there aren't enough signs advising a bus lane is ahead and a quarter (26%) claim the signage is too small.

Fears about accidentally being caught driving in a bus lane run deep, with 28% saying they never drive in bus lanes – regardless of whether they are only operational at certain times – as that way they can't get fined. A third (32%) also say they tend to err on the side of caution by not driving in bus lanes if they miss or couldn't read the signs. Thirty-one per cent say they will only drive in a bus lane if they are absolutely sure it's not in operation.

RAC head of policy Simon Williams said: "We have always maintained that the majority of drivers don't deliberately set out to drive in bus lanes, so it's good to see this research confirming that. Our suspicions around the visibility and clarity of bus lane signage have also been borne out, with drivers expressing considerable concerns about signs often being hard to spot and difficult to understand.

"Bus lanes are more common in urban environments where the driver's job in spotting and comprehending bus lane signage is arguably even harder. There is so much else to take in, from vehicles and other road users to traffic lights and warning signs.

"For these reasons, we continue to call on councils to write to drivers who stray into bus lanes the first time, rather than simply issuing them with fines. While it's fair that anyone who deliberately drives in bus lanes should expect to be fined, our research shows that far too many drivers end up doing so

unwittingly, most probably because the signage really isn't good enough. This can be despite bus lane signage almost certainly meeting government guidelines.

“We therefore feel there's a good case for this guidance to be updated. Our findings suggest the quality and frequency of signage is a big part of why so many drivers fall foul of bus lanes.

“And it appears there is a very unfortunate knock-on effect for bus lanes that only operate at certain times of day, with drivers not using them even when they're allowed to. This seems to be for a combination of reasons ranging from an inherent fear of being fined to just not being sure of what the signs say. We have a great deal of sympathy for drivers because there is a lot of information to process when you're at the wheel of a car doing your best to drive safely. It is also worth noting that failing to use the available road space to its full capacity can have a detrimental impact on traffic flow.”

*Research conducted with 1,763 drivers by Online95 from 15-24 November 2024. Only those who hold a full, current UK driving licence, drive at least once a month and have a motor vehicle in their household took part.

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About the RAC

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to 14 million UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. As well as its premium nationwide breakdown assistance service – with an expert branded patrol workforce attending more than two million breakdowns every year – it offers a wide range of market-leading products across insurance, legal services, vehicle inspections and service, maintenance and repair. Included in this is the first-of-its-kind nationwide Mobile Mechanics service which brings the garage to homes and workplaces.

At the forefront of new solutions for business fleets and consumers, the RAC's breakdown service is electric-ready with mobile EV charging technology and can be called on using [myRAC](#) – the all-in-one route planner, fuel finder and breakdown reporting app.

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