

Mind over motor

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Are you a malcontent motorist? Maybe you're an aspiring environmentalist? Do you know or do you even care? We should do because, according to travel behaviour expert Dr Jillian Anable, sustainable mobility projects need to work harder at understanding their audiences if they are to be successful.

[F071 Image 2](#)

Jillian Anable, senior lecturer at the Centre for Transport Research at Aberdeen University in Scotland, has spent her professional career striving to understand what makes people tick when it comes to transportation. She's particularly interested in applying behavioural and psychological theory to understanding the travel choices we make.

In her PhD Jillian identified four different types of car drivers: 'malcontent motorists', 'car complacents', 'die-hard drivers' and 'aspiring environmentalists'.

Two extremes

She says aspiring environmentalists have a practical approach to car usage, feel responsible for environmental problems, have already cut down on their usage and are prepared to reduce it even further given the chance.

“So programmes like In Town, Without My Car! really appeal to these people, but they're already switched on to environmental issues anyway. You're not really converting new people to the cause,” says Jillian.

She says any campaigners for the environment may be banging their head against the wall when they come face-to-face with a 'die-hard driver'. These motorists display the least desire to reduce the amount of time they spend behind the wheel, care about what their car says about them and have a psychological attachment to it. However, Jillian says these drivers are often early adopters of new vehicle technology. As targets for alternatively fuelled cars, these people are not total lost causes.

Fetch the carrot

Jillian adds that the other driver groups require a punishment and reward approach to get them involved.

“In Town, Without My Car! is all about the carrot, and there is no stick. For anyone other than aspiring environmentalists, sticks are required alongside carrots,” says Jillian.

[F071 Image 1](#)

She says malcontent motorists find driving increasingly stressful and feel they have a moral responsibility to reduce their car usage. They show some willingness to make sacrifices, feel guilty about unnecessary car use, get stressed out by congestion and the expense of operating a car, but feel there is no viable alternative. Jillian says policy intervention is required for these people to change their behaviour.

“They’re ready to use their cars less, but need to be shown the alternatives and provided with comprehensive information,” she says.

The car complacents don’t have problems with their car use and levels of congestion. They don’t love their cars unconditionally, but they make no attempt to reduce their mileage. These users are motivated by cost, not the environment, and have an indifference to public transport, says Jillian.

Jillian says the travel behaviour of car complacents and malcontent motorists can be changed, but some form of free promotion to get them on buses is required initially. This then needs to be reinforced by endeavours such as parking restrictions in town centres and at work to get their behaviour to stick.

Just one journey

One campaign that is aiming to change travel behaviour in the UK is Greener Journeys, which is headed by Britain’s big five bus and coach companies: Arriva, First Group, Go-Ahead, National Express and Stagecoach.

The campaign aims to take one billion car journeys off the road in three years by encouraging people to switch from car to bus or coach for just one journey in 25.

Greener Journeys is calling on the government to:

- set targets for local authorities to encourage modal shift; introduce a fairer tax regime for bus and coach passengers;

- launch a bus scrappage scheme to drive investment in low-carbon buses; promote park and ride and other schemes to cut car commuting; and reduce school run traffic by encouraging bus usage.

“Technological solutions are important in the battle to cut congestion and tackle climate change, but targets can’t be achieved without behavioural change. Initiatives like Greener Journeys are a start at least,” says Jillian.