

Public attitudes, climate change and transport policy

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Overview

- Background to DfT climate change policy
- Role of social research
- Evidence on public attitudes to climate change and travel choices

Background

Climate change

- Warming of the climate system is “unequivocal”
- Changes in atmospheric concentrations of GHGs are drivers of climate change
- Concentrations of GHGs (incl. CO₂) have increased as a result of human activity... primarily from fossil fuel use.

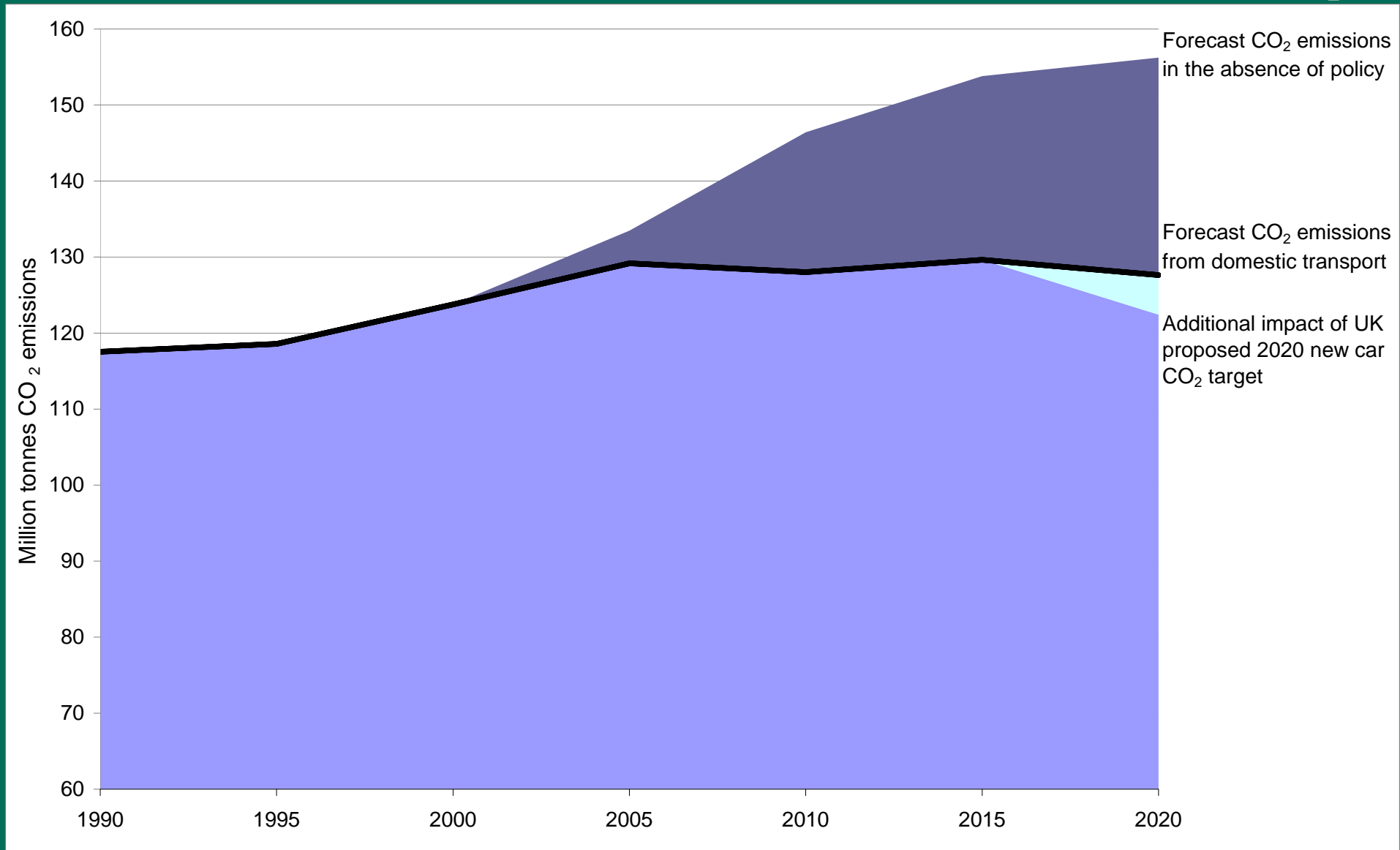
IPCC (2007)

Government policy

- Targets and legislation
 - Global (Kyoto Protocol), EU, national
- Stern (2007) 'three policy elements'
 1. Carbon pricing (e.g. EU ETS, CO2 based VED)
 2. Research and development (e.g. LCTIS, new car CO2 targets, RTFO)
 3. Removing barriers to behavioural change (e.g. PT funding, Smarter Choices, Act On CO2 campaign)

Forecast policy impact

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Transport



Role for social research

What does social research offer?

- Social research can:
 - Provide a clear picture of public attitudes to climate change and travel choices
 - Enable a better understanding of how engagement with the issues can be increased
 - Identify and better understand the barriers and motivations to appropriate (low CO₂) travel behaviours
- Social research evidence is used to inform a number of areas:
 - Policy development
 - Development of communications
 - Inform forecast analysis
 - Evaluation of policy impact

The DfT social research evidence base

- The department has a wide ranging social research programme on public attitudes to climate change and travel choices, which includes:
 - Evidence reviews
 - In depth/qualitative research
 - Surveys of public attitudes

Public attitudes to climate change

What is public awareness and understanding of climate change?

Awareness

- has increased dramatically to 'universal' levels
- Perceived increase in media coverage, availability of information and exposure to subject – though engagement with it is low

Understanding

- lower and variable especially as 'complexity' increases
- No evidence of increasing knowledge over past couple of years – despite increased exposure to information

What is public acceptance of and concern for climate change?

Concern

- Majority believe that climate change is happening and claim to be concerned
- Concern muted by lack of local impact and urgency

Acceptance

- Acceptance of climate change does not necessarily mean acceptance of human cause and recognition of personal contribution
- Individuals more willing to accept household behaviour change than transport behaviour change

How can engagement with climate change and travel choices be increased?

- Role for targeted communications
 - Clear gaps in public knowledge and understanding
 - Public able to identify informational needs – with high level of consistency
- Targeted information responded to positively. Notably information on:
 - Evidence of human role in climate change and scientific consensus
 - Range of transport behaviours and potential ease and impact of making changes
 - Primary benefits of behaviour change e.g. cost, health
- **HOWEVER** – information alone will not produce change and must be supported by other measures

How willing are people to consider travel behaviour change?

- High level of stated *willingness* to change – varies according to behaviour under consideration
- Lower proportion feels *able* to change
- Increased willingness and intention to change domestic behaviours compared with transport behaviours – though varies dependent on transport behaviour
- A ‘gap’ exists between stated willingness and demonstrated future behaviours - willingness typically *overstated*
- Important to understand the barriers limiting change

What barriers and motivations to travel behaviour change exist?

- Number of overarching themes exist – interaction complex though environmental concern in itself is not a primary motivator
- Public struggle to distinguish between *perceived* and *actual* barriers
- A barrier to some can be a motivator to others
- Important to better understand them as they relate to target behaviours

What barriers and motivations to travel behaviour change exist? (2)

- Attitudinal and emotional
 - Information needs, responsibility to act, aspirations etc
- Lifestyle
 - Perceived impact, habit, social norms, health
- Practical
 - 'context', cost, convenience, comfort

Implications for influencing travel choices

1. Need for communication of issues and how they relate to travel choices
 - Engagement with existing information limited
 - Information gaps exist
 - Impact of information positive

2. Need for supporting measures
 - Information, whilst necessary is not sufficient to encourage travel behaviour change
 - Develop and communicate measures based on understanding of barriers and motivations specific to different travel behaviours
 - Measures to support maintenance of changed behaviours important

Implications (2)

3. Attitudinal differences exist across population

- Key messages and levers vary for different groups
- No 'one size fits all' approach to communications, interventions and policy
- Need to understand the groups/communities and behaviours being targeted

4. Public grouped by 'attitudes' rather than demographics

- demographic differences will not explain differences in attitudes etc to climate change and travel choices
- Messages, measures to overcome barriers etc will need to consider attitudinal segments
- Need to better understand and quantify different groups