

Speed cameras:

A snapshot of public opinion



About the IAM

The IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists) is the UK's largest independent road safety charity. We are dedicated to improving standards and safety in driving, motorcycling and cycling through coaching, education and research. We are supported by more than 100,000 members, and 200 local volunteer groups, who provide coaching for the advanced tests. The commercial division of the IAM, IAM Drive & Survive, offers training to fleets and commercial drivers. The IAM's policy and research division offers advice and expertise on road safety, and publishes original research on road safety issues.

Speed cameras

Roadside safety cameras (more commonly known as speed cameras) have been in use for over twenty years, since the Road Traffic Act (1991) enabled courts to accept evidence from approved cameras.

The use of speed cameras to reduce road casualties is one of the most contentious areas of road safety policy, with some commentators claiming they actually hinder casualty reduction¹.

Other sources have promoted their use, for example the RAC Foundation argues that speed cameras help reduce road casualties and have safety benefits beyond individual camera sites².

Recent Scottish government statistics show that the number of people killed or seriously injured at camera sites is 68 per cent lower after camera enforcement³.

The myth that cameras merely generate cash for those who run them has persisted despite the fact that income from fines for speeding have always been returned to the Treasury. The government has also cut central funding for speed cameras leading to reports that some authorities had decided to reduce the number of cameras they operate.

The reported reductions in cameras led to criticisms that speed cameras were simply there to generate income rather than improve road safety. However, there is strong evidence that income generation from speed cameras has been negligible⁴.

The IAM supports the use of speed cameras, providing they are used alongside other education, enforcement and infrastructure measures. We believe their use as a deterrent and enforcement tool helps reduce road casualties and that they have become an essential part of the policing toolkit.

‘The IAM believes that the use of speed cameras to reduce road casualties is one of the most contentious areas of road safety policy’

Our focus has always been on preventing speeding from occurring in the first place through our advanced driving courses. However, when drivers do go over the limit we

‘The IAM welcomes the use of speed awareness courses as an alternative to fines and penalty points on licences’

welcome the use of speed awareness courses as an alternative to fines and penalty points on licences.

Such courses can help make drivers more aware of the risks of reckless and inconsiderate driving, and the dangers of speeding.

Speed cameras often catch media attention, and there have been several high profile stories relating to their use.

We wanted to know what the general public think about speed cameras and what their experiences of them are. Public opinion is important to road safety, as driver attitudes shapes behaviour on the roads.

Public opinion on speed cameras

We have commissioned a professional public opinion survey on speed cameras every summer for the last six years, giving us over 6,000 responses.

Each year we ask respondents exactly the same series of questions, allowing us to look at changes in opinions over time. The survey gives a useful insight into people’s views and experiences of speed cameras; it is not designed to be an analysis of the efficiency or effectiveness of them.

All of the survey results are weighted and have full breakdowns by gender, region and social class. This year we commissioned Lake Market Research to conduct the survey. The main findings from the 1,001 responses are:

- The vast majority of people find the use of speed cameras acceptable.
- Women are more supportive of the use of speed cameras than men.
- Most people believe that speed cameras improve road safety and also believe that accidents would go up if speed cameras were switched off in their areas.
- Respondents were less sure that speed cameras were always placed at sites with a history of road accidents.

Speed cameras: a snapshot of public opinion

- Only a small proportion of people believe that money is not the motive for speed cameras.
- The vast majority of people support the use of speed awareness courses. Their use is most popular among 25-34 year olds.

Acceptance of speed cameras

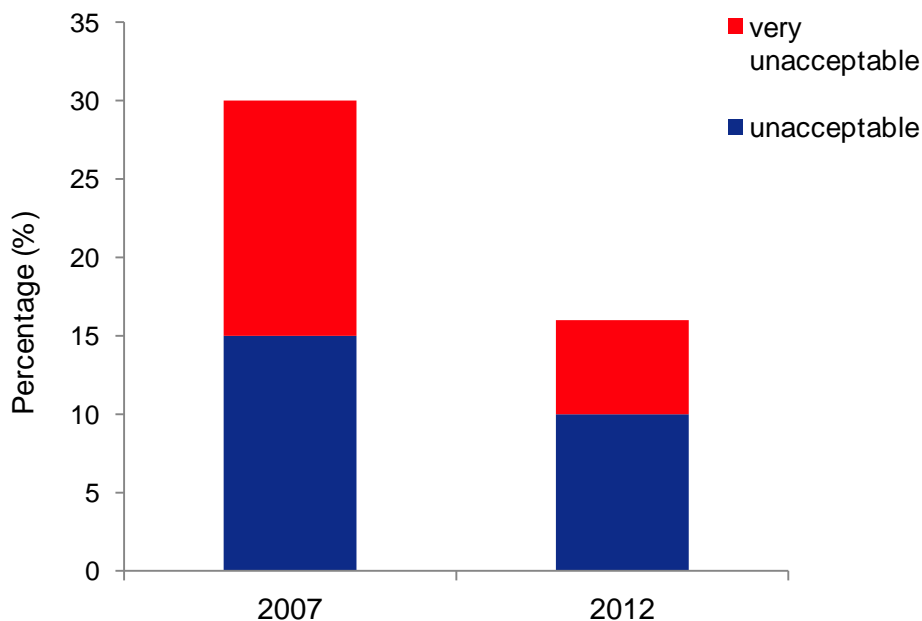
There is widespread acceptance of speed cameras; 82 per cent of people think that it is acceptable for authorities to use them on roads, 39 per cent think their use is very acceptable.

People also find speed cameras more acceptable than they did five years ago.

When we conducted this poll in 2007, 30 per cent of people thought speed cameras were not acceptable (with 15 percent saying that they were not at all acceptable).

‘82 per cent of people think that the use of speed cameras is acceptable’

Percentage who find the use of speed cameras unacceptable (%)



This year only 16 per cent said speed cameras were not acceptable (with 6 per cent saying they were not at all acceptable). The number of respondents who give this answer has decreased almost every year. This is a noticeable change even when a margin of error of about 3 per cent is considered.

Women are much more likely to think the use of speed cameras is very acceptable (38 per cent of women think this compared to 29 per cent of men). Women have been more supportive of speed cameras than men in every year that the survey has been conducted.

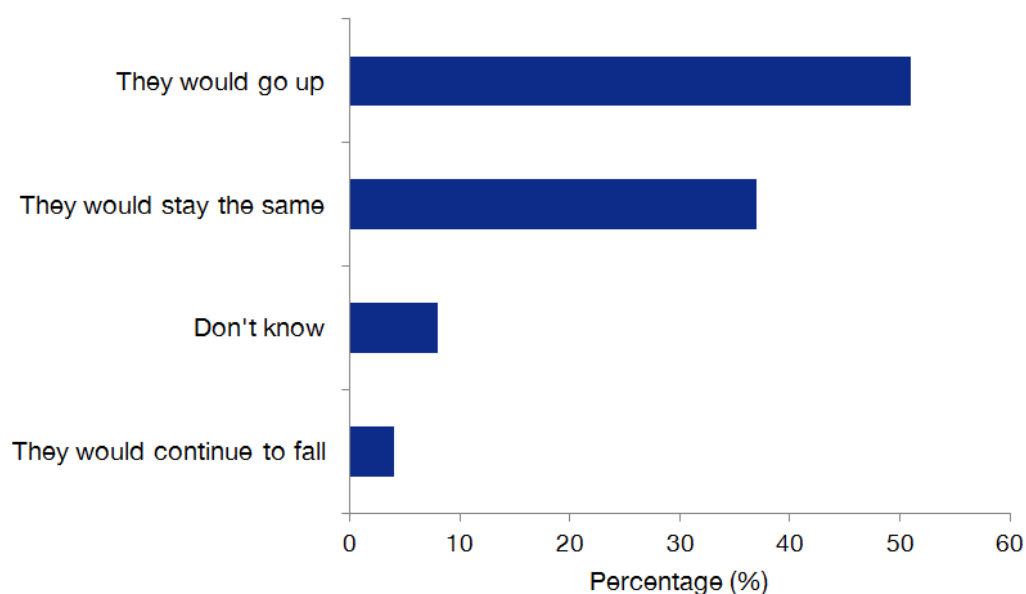
Belief that speed cameras improve road safety

The majority of people believe that speed cameras improve road safety. 85 per cent of respondents think that speed cameras have, in some way, helped contribute to the fall in road deaths since the 1990s.

Most of these (42 per cent) thought that they had helped a little; although a significant proportion (38 per cent) thought they had helped a lot. Five per cent thought that speed cameras were the only reason for the decline in road deaths. The same proportion (5 per cent) thought that speed cameras had made no difference at all to the number of road deaths.

The widely held belief that speed cameras improve road safety is also shown in responses to a question on what would happen if cameras were switched off.

What would happen to deaths and injuries if speed cameras were switched off to save money in your area?



Speed cameras: a snapshot of public opinion

Fifty-one per cent of people thought that deaths and injuries caused by road accidents would increase if speed cameras were switched off in their area, 37 per cent thought they would stay the same.

Only 4 per cent of respondents thought that deaths and injuries would continue to fall if speed cameras were switched off to save money.

Placement of speed cameras

The Department for Transport recommends that safety cameras should be installed:

- On roads with a history of road traffic collisions
- Where there is evidence of a speeding problem
- If there is a local community concern.

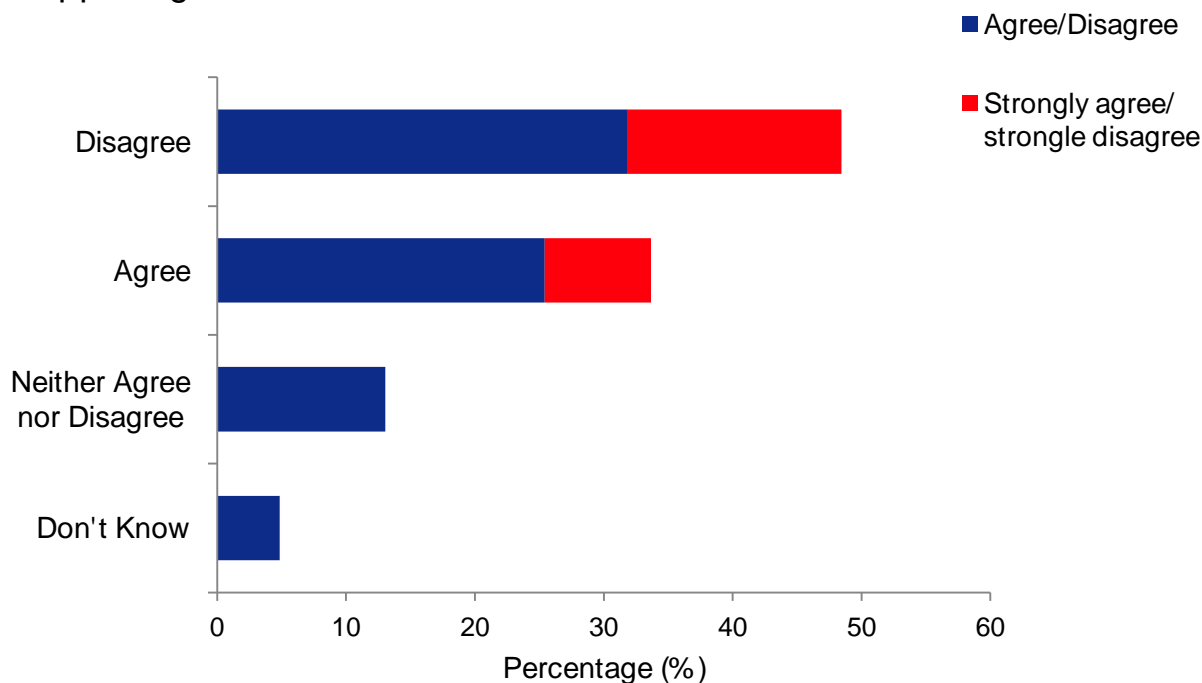
In 2011, the government published detailed local authority information on speed camera sites. This aimed to improve transparency around decisions to install cameras following criticism that speed cameras were used to generate revenue rather than respond to a genuine road safety problem.

‘48 cent of people disagree with the statement ‘speed cameras are only sited at places where accidents are happening’

Our survey results show that there appears to be some agreement with the idea that speed cameras are not always placed on roads with a history road accidents.

Forty-eight per cent of people disagree with the statement ‘speed cameras are only sited at places where accidents are happening’ (38 per cent agree). Respondents were far more likely to strongly disagree, than to strongly agree (17 per cent compared with 8 per cent).

'Speed cameras are only sited where accidents are happening'



The results shown in this chart have generally been consistent over time.

Views on motives for speed cameras

There are frequent criticisms that speed cameras are primarily a source of revenue rather than a road safety improvement. We asked respondents the extent they agree with the statement 'raising money from fines is not the motive for speed cameras'.

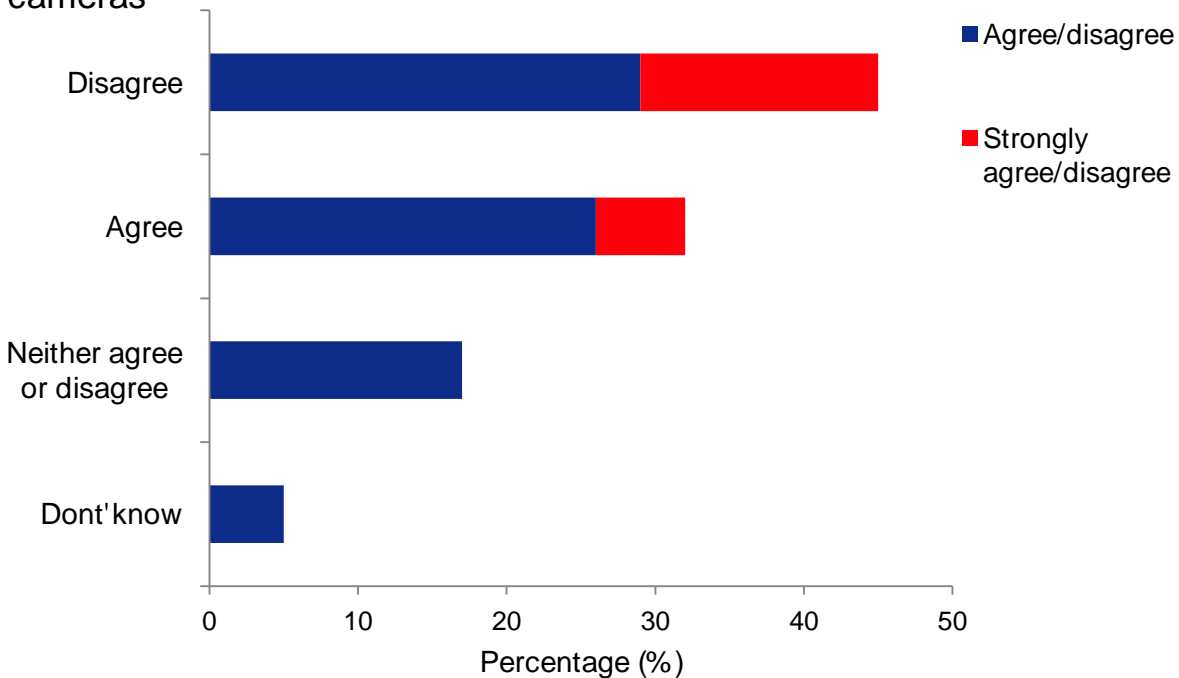
Only 32 per cent of people agree with this statement while 45 per cent disagree.

Despite the widely held view that speed cameras improve road safety, there appears to be scepticism about the motives for cameras. The figures suggest that a greater proportion of people think that money may be a motive for installing speed cameras.

With 17 per cent of respondents strongly disagreeing with the statement there is clearly a significant minority who think that money is a motive for speed cameras.

Speed cameras: a snapshot of public opinion

'Raising money from fines is not the motive for speed cameras'



However, the belief that speed cameras are primarily used to raise revenue is certainly not universal, as 55 per cent of respondents selected other options.

Speeding offence convictions

Almost one in five people (18 per cent) said that they or someone in their household had been convicted of a speeding offence in the last three years.

Those in the AB social group and high mileage drivers were more likely to report speeding convictions (24 per cent and 25 per cent of these groups said this).

There were not any major differences by age or gender; this may be because the question asked about entire households so automatically covered other ages and genders.

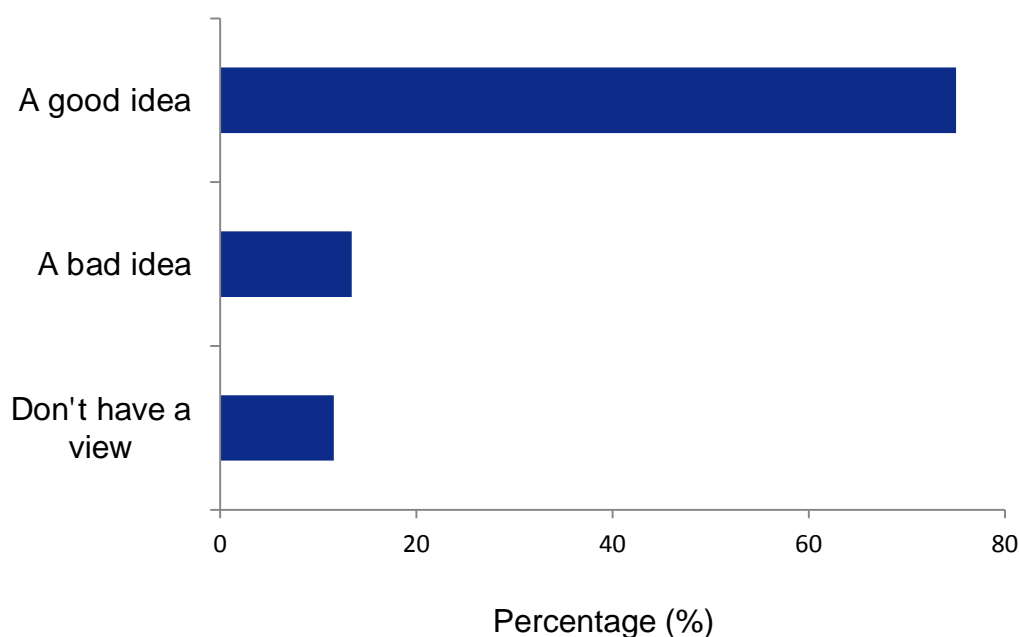
'Almost one in five people said that they or someone in their household had been convicted of a speeding offence in the last three years'

Speed awareness courses

Seventy-five per cent of people think that it is a good idea to offer speed awareness courses as an alternative to fines and penalty points.

This idea is most popular among the among 25- 34 years, 82 per cent of people in this age group think that speed awareness courses are a good idea.

Do you think that speed awareness courses are a good idea?

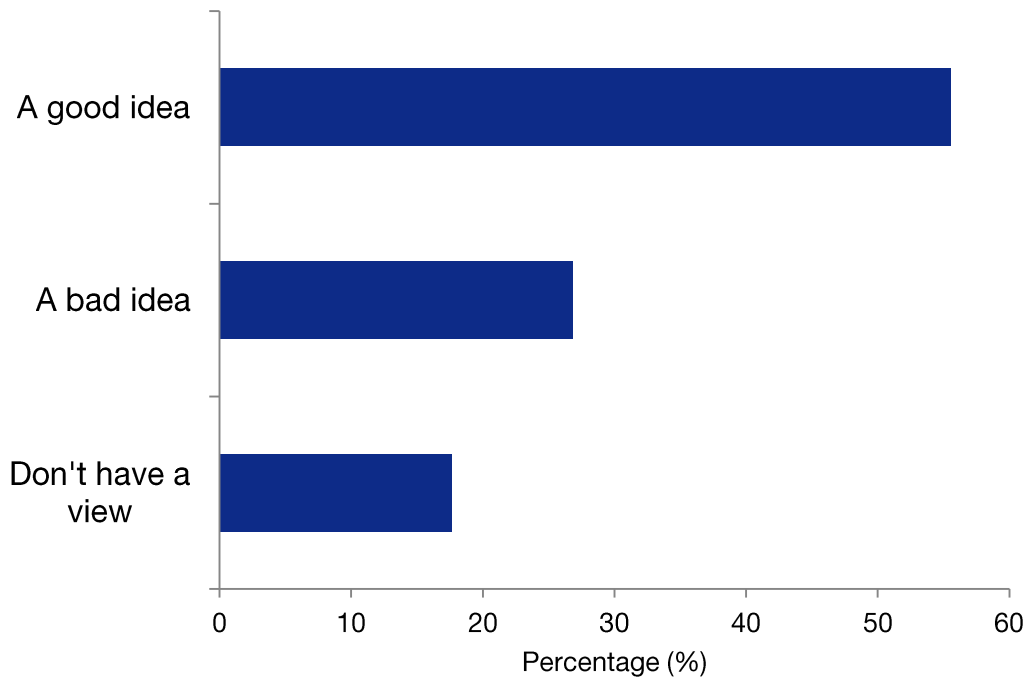


Respondents were less sure about using funds from speed awareness course to fund the operation of cameras.

Fifty-six per cent of respondents thought that it is good idea to use part of the course cost to fund the operation of speed cameras to replace government funding. This is much less than the overall support for speed awareness courses.

Speed cameras: a snapshot of public opinion

Part of that £100 cost will be used to fund the operation of speed cameras to replace government funding. Do you think this is...



Regional and devolved results

We have collated three years of survey data to produce results for Wales, Scotland and regions in England.

As the annual survey has around 1,000 respondents it is not possible to do a regional breakdown based on one year's worth of data. By collating three years, there are 4,003 results to look at.

Opinions and experiences may have changed slightly over the last three years and this needs to be taken into consideration. This means the regional results are more approximate than overall figures for the UK.

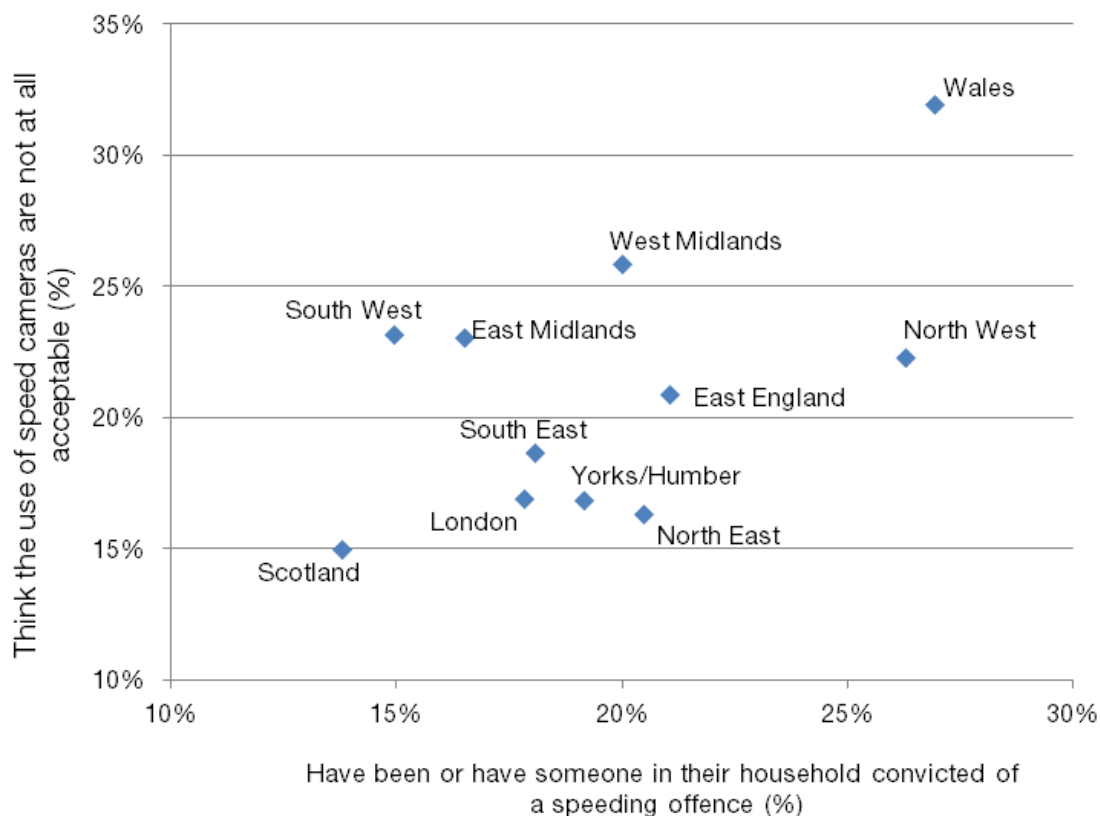
Some areas of the UK find speed cameras more acceptable than others. People in Wales are most likely to find speed cameras unacceptable (14 per cent), followed by the West Midlands (12 per cent).

There appears to be a loose correlation between opinions on speed cameras and experiences of being convicted for a speeding offence. For example, Wales has the

highest percentage of people who say that they or someone in their household has been convicted for a speeding offence in the last three years (27 per cent), and the highest proportion of people who find speed cameras unacceptable.

Scotland has the lowest percentage of people reporting being convicting of a speeding offence (14 per cent) and the lowest proportion of people finding speed cameras (very unacceptable). Forty-one per cent of people living in Scotland find the use of speed cameras ‘very acceptable’, the highest of any area.

People in Scotland are more likely to think that speed awareness courses are a bad idea than anywhere else in the UK (16 per think this).



Speed cameras: a snapshot of public opinion

	Yes, I or someone in my household has been convicted of a speeding offence in the last 3 years	The use of speed cameras is not acceptable
Wales	27%	32%
North West	26%	22%
East of England	21%	21%
North East	20%	16%
West Midlands	20%	26%
Yorks/Humber	19%	17%
South East	18%	19%
London	18%	17%
East Midlands	16%	23%
South West	15%	23%
Scotland	14%	15%

There may be differences in the numbers of cameras in Scotland and Wales that may have affected these results. The way the location and design of cameras affects public opinion may be worth exploring in the future. Some drivers may feel unfairly treated when they are caught speeding which may have an impact on their view of using speed cameras more generally.

Concluding comments

The variety of evidence on the funding and effectiveness of speed cameras has sparked several debates and criticisms of their use. However, it is clear that there is widespread public support for the use of speed cameras.

People believe that speed cameras have a positive impact on road safety, and acceptance of cameras has increased over time.

Although most people think that switching off cameras would have a negative impact on road casualties they are less sure of the motives for cameras. Few people believe that money from fines is not a motive for installing cameras, and many people doubt that cameras are only installed on roads with a history of traffic collisions.

We believe there should be even more transparency about the funding for cameras, the revenue from fines and the criteria for their installation and removal. This would

help improve the public's trust in cameras and hopefully increase their support for them.

There is widespread support for the use of speed awareness courses as alternative for fines and penalty points. We believe that speed awareness courses are an excellent opportunity to correct poor driving. They can increase driver's awareness of a number of hazards as well highlighting the dangers of speeding.

At the IAM we think that that preventing drivers from speeding in the first place should be the first priority. However, when they do it is important that we work to change their attitudes and behaviour for the long-term rather than focusing on quick fixes.

References

¹ There are a number of commentators who question the effectiveness of cameras – see Speed Cameras Dot Org <http://www.speedcameras.org/index.php> and the Association of British Drivers http://www.abd.org.uk/topics/speed_cameras.htm

² RAC Foundation, 2010 'The effectiveness of speed cameras: a review of evidence' (written by Richard Allsopp) <http://www.racfoundation.org/research/safety/effectiveness-of-speed-cameras>

³ The Scottish Government, 2012 'Key Scottish Safety Camera Programme Statistics 2011' <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/07/5039/downloads#res397970>

⁴ RAC Foundation, 2010 'The effectiveness of speed cameras: a review of evidence' http://www.racfoundation.org/assets/rac_foundation/content/downloadables/efficacy_of_speed_cameras_allso_1_81110.pdf