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Australians support road usage charges over fixed rego fee

Most Australians would prefer to pay a per kilometre road charge in exchange for lower annual vehicle registration fees, according to the latest Transport Opinion Survey (TOPS) conducted by the University of Sydney Business School's Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies (ITLS).

Around 60 percent of participants in the nationwide biannual survey were in favour of a combination of road usage and registration charges so long as the total was no more than they currently pay for registration alone.

The strongest support for a change came from Queensland motorists (67 per cent) and the lowest from those in Victoria (57 per cent).

"This shows an appetite for change and is a signal that government should take seriously," says Professor Corinne Mulley, the ITLS Chair in Public Transport.

When also asked how they would like to see any increase in registration fees spent, about 50 per cent of participants nominated improved roads while around 25 per cent said they would like to see rail services upgraded.

However, while half of all participants expressed a desire for improved roads, they also nominated public transport improvements as the highest priority transport issue for Australia.

"It is clear that voters find transport issues important," said Professor Mulley. "Even when given the choice of spending additional revenue on non-transport activities, 90% or more chose a transport spend."

Overall, the latest TOPS survey found that Australians are less confident about the prospects for improved local transport than they were in the previous survey. Those surveyed also doubted that transport across Australia will be better in one and five years than it is now.

"This is the first drop in community confidence since 2012 and the TOPS index is now at its lowest value since the survey started," Professor Mulley said. "Public transport improvements are top of the list of transport issues and this is not surprising since public transport is critical to well functioning cities."

“Changing the registration scheme to generate funds for public transport looks like a way forward and one that voters would support,” Professor Mulley concluded.

TOPS is the only national survey to measure public opinion on transport related issues. The first 2014 biannual report is at: <http://sydney.edu.au/business/itls/tops>.