

Transport Research Summary 2012

The Use and Value of the Blue Badge Scheme

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The UK Blue Badge scheme was set up in the 1970s and operates across the UK, providing parking concessions for on-street parking for disabled people – travelling either as drivers or passengers. The Scheme has since been adopted by some operators of off-street car parks as a means of meeting their equalities duties. There is, however, little evidence about how Blue Badge holders use their Badges and what benefits they get from them. Transport Scotland commissioned ODS Consulting in partnership with Research Resource to explore how people in Scotland use their Blue Badges, and what difference it makes to their lives.

This research involved both a large-scale telephone survey and nine focus groups with Blue Badge holders to explore their use and experiences of the Blue Badge Scheme.

Main Findings

- Respondents used their Blue Badge mostly for shopping and medical appointments. Focus group participants spoke mostly of parking in off-street disabled person's parking bays such as supermarket car parks, hospital car parks or shopping malls. Where on-street parking was used, it tended to be on single yellow lines.
- There was consensus that there was a general lack of Blue Badge parking space provision. This was most noticeable in hospital car parks as well as with on-street provision in town centres.
- Telephone respondents indicated that the value of the Badge was that they could park closer to their destination and take benefit from the wider parking bays. While these were also mentioned as benefits by the focus group participants, for them, the greatest value of the Badge was securing their independence and ability to 'get out and about' allowing a certain quality of life.
- Without the Blue Badge, most people agreed that they would go out less often. Some went so far as to say they would be 'housebound' without their Blue Badge and for one participant it allowed her to continue working. Parents of children with Blue Badges said that they would be especially put off from travelling with children without their Badges.
- The vast majority felt that they had a good understanding of the rules and restrictions of using their Blue Badge. However, some debated the rules on where the Badge allowed you to park. For example, there were contradictory views as to whether parking on a double yellow line was allowed.
- Misuse of the Blue Badge Scheme was perceived as a significant issue, particularly the use of designated spaces by people without a Badge.

About this Study

In 2012, Transport Scotland commissioned ODS Consulting, in partnership with Research Resource, to explore the use and value of the Blue Badge Scheme with people who hold a Blue Badge.

Methodology

The research was mixed methodology. Research Resource carried out a large scale telephone survey with 812 Blue Badge holders. The sample of contacts came from the Scottish Household Survey which identifies Blue Badge holders. In addition, nine focus groups were held with Blue Badge holders, including parents of disabled children with a Blue Badge and young people with a Blue Badge.

Blue Badge Research

The overall aim of the research was to explore Blue Badge holders' views on using their Badge and the value the Badge gives them. The objectives were to:

- find out how people use their Badge, including how it is used (as a driver or passenger), where they are parking, for how long, and at what time of day;
- explore views on whether there is an understanding around the restrictions of the Scheme and the eligibility criteria for accessing a Blue Badge;
- the difference the Blue Badge makes and what circumstances would be like without the Badge; and
- how the Blue Badge relates to other types of transport provision such as the National Concessionary Travel Scheme.

Current Use of the Blue Badge

The research included those who were new to the Blue Badge Scheme; having their Badges only a matter of months, as well as those who had held a Blue Badge for over 20 years. Our analysis of the survey found that almost half of the respondents (48%) said that they used the Badge as a passenger, with just over a third (35%) being the driver. The opposite was true of focus group participants who tended to be the driver, rather than the passenger (67% and 13% respectively). Most used their Blue Badge for shopping and medical appointments. Parking was mostly in off-street disabled person's

parking bays such as supermarkets. Where on-street parking was used, it tended to be on single yellow lines, although some people would use double yellow spaces if it was safe to do so. There was no consistent time of the day, or day of the week, when Blue Badge holders used their Badges – it was dependent on the type and nature of their journey.

Value of the Blue Badge

Telephone respondents indicated that the value of the Badge was that they could park closer to their destination and take benefit from the wider parking bays. While these were also mentioned as benefits by the focus group participants; for them, the greatest value of the Badge was securing their independence and ability to 'get out and about' allowing a certain quality of life.

Without the Blue Badge, most people agreed that they would go out less often. Some went so far as to say they would be 'housebound' without their Blue Badge and for one participant it allowed her to continue working.

Rules and Restrictions

The vast majority of telephone survey respondents (92%) felt that they had a good understanding of the rules and restrictions of using their Blue Badge. However, some focus group participants debated the rules on using a Blue Badge. For example, there were contradictory views as to whether parking on a double yellow line was allowed.

The recent issue of a 'clock timer' by some local authorities to allow people to use their Blue Badges in restricted parking places in England was also a source of confusion for some. These participants were under the impression the use of the timer had been introduced in Scotland.

Participants commented that although they believed they had a good understanding of the rules, they did not think that traffic wardens or the police understood the Scheme sufficiently. Several participants indicated that they had received parking tickets despite displaying their Badges correctly.

Over three-quarters (76%) of the telephone respondents had experienced misuse of the Blue Badge Scheme or disabled parking spaces by non-disabled people. Young professionals, young mothers and taxi drivers were perceived to often park in designated spaces.

Suggestions for Improvement

During the course of conducting the qualitative research, participants offered suggestions as to how they thought the Blue Badge Scheme should operate. These are as follows:

Photograph: A number of participants suggested that the photograph that appears on the Blue Badge should be displayed while parking. Currently the photograph on the Badge is not displayed as Blue Badge holders must display the expiry date on their Badge. Participants suggested that if the photograph were to be displayed, this would cut down on fraudulent use of the Badge. However, some participants did not agree with this suggestion, claiming that displaying the photograph could alert others to a 'vulnerable' person or infringe the Blue Badge holder's right to privacy.

Cost of the Blue Badge: The cost of the Blue Badge varies by local authority. Each authority decides the charge for the Badge, which varied from being free to £20 for use for three years. Participants at the groups indicated that the charge of £20 still demonstrated good value for money when compared to the cost of parking charges. However, there was concern at the discrepancy between authorities. Some participants called for a universal cost to be set so that no one was paying more for the Badge than others.

Clearer rules and regulations: Some participants commented that their own knowledge of the Blue Badge Scheme was good, but traffic wardens and the police did not understand the rules of where parking was allowed. Several participants had received parking tickets, despite parking within the rules of the Scheme (on yellow lines or without parking tickets, but displaying the Blue Badge).

Disability awareness training: Participants called for more training for police and traffic wardens. Similarly, participants spoke of their negative experiences on public transport where bus drivers were not perceptive to the needs of the disabled person. Two participants spoke of having fallen over on the bus as it moved off before they were seated – despite having asked the driver to wait. Disability training for bus drivers was suggested.

Penalties for misuse: Participants discussed their perceptions of misuse of the Badge, which they

agreed was a problem. This was more so the misuse of disabled parking spaces by people without a Blue Badge, than misuse of the Badge itself – although some participants believed that the fraudulent use of Badges was also an issue. Stricter penalties were thought to be necessary including fines, clamping, towing of vehicles or points on the offender's driving licence.

More effective enforcement of the Scheme: Participants believed that the Blue Badge scheme could be better enforced – through more training for traffic wardens. There should be more enforcement officers in private off-street car parks such as supermarkets and shopping centres where it was perceived there was little monitoring of Blue Badge spaces. As a result, this was where most of the misuse was occurring.

Conclusions

This research provided a detailed insight into the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of Blue Badge holders. It comprised a mix of drivers and passengers; new Badge holders and those who had held a Badge for many years.

The Blue Badge is highly valued. Participants spoke of being 'fearful' to lend the Badge to others in case it was withdrawn. Others felt that it was just wrong to lend the Badge. Blue Badge holders spoke of the impact of the Badge on their lives and how it gave them opportunities to go out and retain their quality of life.

Without a Badge, participants indicated their circumstances would change considerably. They would be limited in their ability to go out and some stated that they would become housebound.

All agreed that the Blue Badge gave them independence, but also more practical considerations such as the wider spaces and the proximity to their destination. There were financial benefits of the Badge – most notable was the value for money that the Badge demonstrated when compared to the potential costs of parking.

This document, along with full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of Transport Scotland can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/analysis/research/publications>. If you have any further queries about social research, or would like further copies of this research findings summary document or the full research report, please contact us at info@transportscotland.gsi.gov.uk or on 0141 272 7100

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