

# Mobile phone use by drivers: 2009

## Survey results for England

The Department for Transport has commissioned surveys to monitor the levels of mobile phone use by drivers across England since 2002. The 2009 survey was carried out at 30 sites in the South East of England in October 2009. Sites were selected to represent different road types, speed limits and rural/urban locations, and results weighted to represent the traffic distribution across England. Except where otherwise stated, results relate to weekdays only. The key findings of the 2009 survey were:

- Since the last survey in September 2008 the proportion of drivers observed using hand-held mobile phones whilst driving increased (from 1.1% to 1.4% for car drivers and from 2.2% to 2.6% for van and lorry drivers).
- An increase in the number of drivers who appear to be using hands free mobile phones (from 0.5% to 1.4% for car drivers and from 1.1% to 2.4% for van and lorry drivers) was observed in the same period.

**Table 1: Use of hand-held and hands free mobile phones by car drivers and van & lorry drivers (weekdays).**

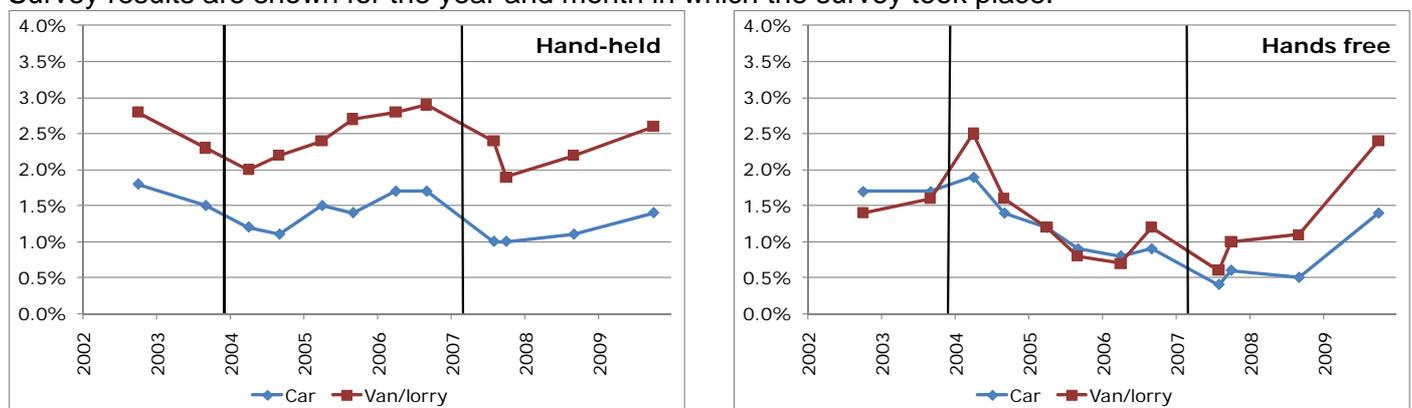
	Hand-held		Hands free		Overall	
	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009
Car drivers	1.1%	1.4%	0.5%	1.4%	1.5%	2.9%
Van & lorry drivers	2.2%	2.6%	1.1%	2.4%	3.3%	5.0%

### Trends over time

In December 2003, legislation came into force making it illegal to use a hand-held mobile phone whilst driving or riding a motor vehicle on the road. In February 2007, the penalty for using a mobile phone whilst driving was increased from a £30 fine to three penalty points on the driving licence and a £60 fine. Using a hands free phone is not illegal.

**Figure 1: Trend in hand-held and hands free mobile phone use by car drivers and van & lorry drivers (weekdays).**

Points at which the legislation was brought in and the penalty increased are marked with black lines. Survey results are shown for the year and month in which the survey took place.



The trend in use of hand-held mobile phones by drivers since the first survey (Figure 1 - left) was reactive in the short term to the changes in legislation. The proportion of drivers of cars (blue line) and vans and lorries (red line) observed using hand-held phones reduced after the introduction of the legislation in 2003, and after the increase in penalty in 2007 (marked with vertical black lines). After these immediate drops the proportion using a hand-held mobile phone increased again.

Use of hands free mobile phones by drivers is more variable. Until recently the observed use of hands free phones reduced as hand-held phone use increased and vice versa. Since 2007, use of both hands free and hand-held mobile phones by drivers has increased.

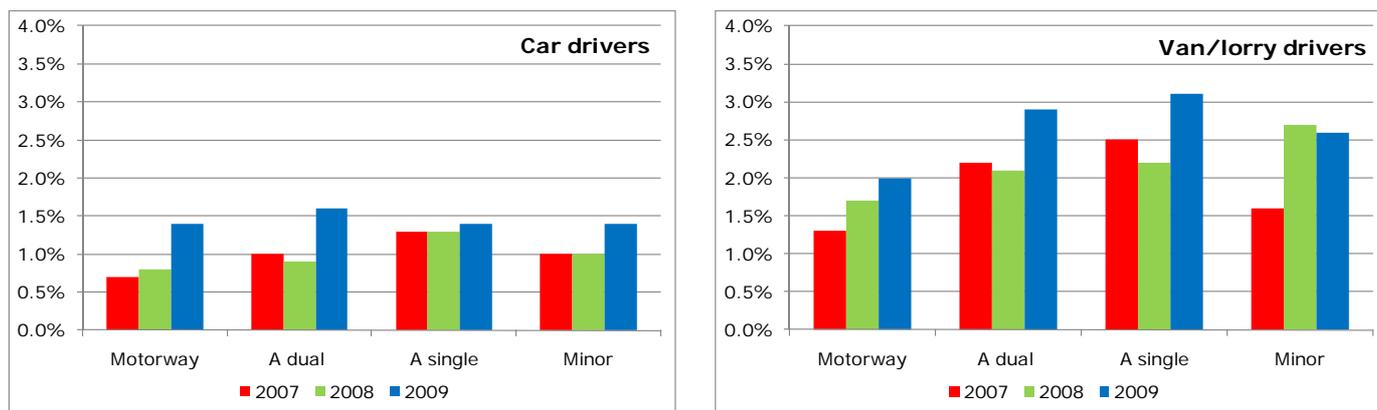
Mobile phone use by drivers varies across England. Therefore these results, centred on the South East of England, may not be nationally representative. However the pattern of use over the years is likely to be similar across the country.

### Factors associated with mobile phone use by drivers

The 2009 survey showed that:

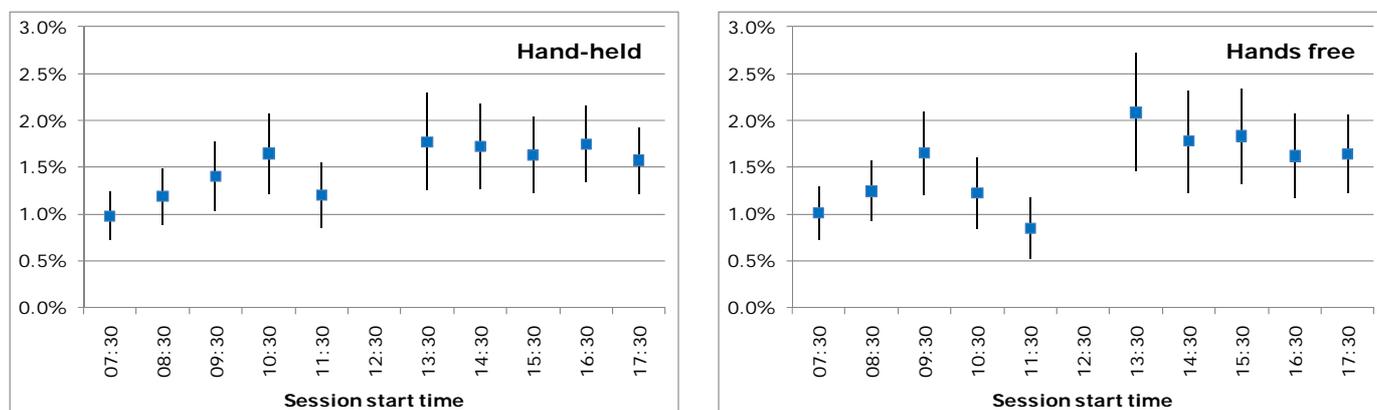
- Van and lorry drivers are significantly more likely to use a mobile phone whilst driving than car drivers (overall 5.0% compared with 2.9%) [table 1].
- Car drivers' use of hand-held mobile phone varies very little across road types [figure 2]. The use of hands free mobile phones is highest on minor roads (for both car drivers and van and lorry drivers) [table 4].
- Hand-held mobile phone use by drivers is slightly higher in urban than rural areas [table 3]
- Use of mobile phones by drivers appears to increase during the morning to a peak at lunchtime, and decreases again in the afternoon period [figure 3].
- Use of mobile phones by drivers is higher during the week than at weekends and considerably higher for car drivers using hand-held phones (2.1% compared with 0.9%) [table 5].

**Figure 2: Proportion of car and van and lorry drivers using a hand-held mobile phone by road type, 2007-2009 (weekdays).**



**Figure 3: Proportion of car drivers (with 95% confidence intervals) using hand-held and hands free mobile phones by time of day, 2009 (weekdays).**

Note: surveys do not take place between 12:30 and 13:30



## Data tables

**Table 2: Proportion of drivers using a hand-held or hands free mobile phone (weekdays).**

	2007 <sup>1</sup> (%)	2008 <sup>1</sup> (%)	2009 <sup>2</sup> (%)
Car drivers	1.6	1.5	2.9 *
Van & lorry drivers	2.9	3.3	5.0 *

**Table 3: Proportion of drivers using a hand-held mobile phone (weekdays).**

	Car drivers			Van & lorry drivers			Sample size (2009)	
	2007 <sup>1</sup> (%)	2008 <sup>1</sup> (%)	2009 <sup>2</sup> (%)	2007 <sup>1</sup> (%)	2008 <sup>1</sup> (%)	2009 <sup>2</sup> (%)	Car drivers	Van & lorry drivers
Overall	1.0	1.1	1.4 *	1.9	2.2	2.6 *	41,056	9,085
Motorway	0.7	0.8	1.4 *	1.3	1.7	2.0	5,751	1,588
A dual carriageway	1.0	0.9	1.6 *	2.2	2.1	2.9 *	7,869	2,414
A single carriageway	1.3	1.3	1.4	2.5	2.2	3.1 *	11,470	2,426
Minor	1.0	1.0	1.4 *	1.6	2.7	2.6	15,966	2,657
Rural <sup>3</sup>	1.0	1.1	1.4 *	1.7	2.1	2.5 *	24,530	5,384
Urban <sup>3</sup>	0.9	1.0	1.5 *	2.3	2.4	2.8 *	16,526	3,701

**Table 4: Proportion of drivers using a hands free mobile phone (weekdays).**

	Car drivers			Van & lorry drivers			Sample size (2009)	
	2007 <sup>1</sup> (%)	2008 <sup>1</sup> (%)	2009 <sup>2</sup> (%)	2007 <sup>1</sup> (%)	2008 <sup>1</sup> (%)	2009 <sup>2</sup> (%)	Car drivers	Van & lorry drivers
Overall	0.6	0.5	1.4 *	1.0	1.1	2.4 *	41,056	9,085
Motorway <sup>4</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
A dual carriageway	0.5	0.5	1.0 *	1.3	1.2	1.4	7,869	2,414
A single carriageway	0.7	0.7	1.4 *	1.1	0.9	2.3 *	11,470	2,426
Minor	0.4	0.4	1.6 *	0.8	1.4	3.1 *	15,966	2,657
Rural <sup>3</sup>	0.4	0.2	1.8 *	0.6	0.4	2.3 *	24,530	5,384
Urban <sup>3</sup>	0.7	0.7	1.0 *	1.8	1.7	2.5 *	16,526	3,701

**Table 5: Proportion of drivers using a mobile phone, weekdays and weekends**

Based on sites where a weekend survey took place, therefore not directly comparable with other tables.

	Car drivers		Van & lorry drivers		Sample size (2009)	
	2008 <sup>1</sup> (%)	2009 <sup>2</sup> (%)	2008 <sup>1</sup> (%)	2009 <sup>2</sup> (%)	Car drivers	Van & lorry drivers
Hand-held – Weekday	0.9	2.1 *	2.1	3.7 *	9,630	1,884
Hand-held – Weekend	0.6	0.9 *	2.6	3.0	9,047	931
Hands free – Weekday	0.5	1.5 *	0.6	2.9 *	9,630	1,884
Hands free – Weekend	0.1	1.0 *	0.5 <sup>5</sup>	1.2 <sup>5</sup> *	9,047	931

<sup>1</sup> 2007 (October) and 2008 (September).

<sup>2</sup> \* represents a statistically significant difference (p<0.05) between 2009 and 2008 results.

<sup>3</sup> In 2009, the DfT population based urban/rural definitions were applied. Up to 2008, the rural/urban category was defined by speed limit however the classifications were the same for the areas surveyed.

<sup>4</sup> Cannot measure hands free use robustly on motorways due to high speeds

## Survey method

Surveys have been carried out since 2002 to monitor the levels of mobile phone use by drivers across England. Each year the survey is carried out at 30 sites in the South East of England. A selection of road types, speed limits and rural/urban locations are surveyed each year, and the results are weighted to represent the traffic distribution across England. The sites are chosen to have free flowing traffic and cover a selection of road types and locations. Some changes were made to the sites in 2009 in order to be more representative of the traffic distribution across England<sup>6</sup>.

Surveys take place throughout the day from 07:30 to 18:00 (excluding the period between 12.30 and 13.30) and six sites are resurveyed at the weekend. In 2009, a total of 41,056 car drivers and 9,085 van and lorry drivers were observed.

Two survey staff visit each site (an additional member of staff is required at each motorway site due to the increase in traffic flow). The first counts the number of car, van and lorry drivers using a hand-held or hands free mobile phone, the second counts the total number of cars, vans and lorries. Observations of mobile phones, especially hands free mobile phones which are very difficult to see, are aided by a mobile phone detector.

The proportions of car drivers and van and lorry drivers using a mobile phone are calculated. The results are weighted to make the data representative across different road types. These weights are based on traffic flows split by road type and rural/urban classification (using 2008 traffic data).

## Survey definitions

The legislation states that a mobile telephone or other device is to be treated as hand-held if it is, or must be, held at some point during the course of making or receiving a call or performing any other interactive communication function.

For the purposes of the survey, a **hand-held mobile phone** is defined as a device that is being held at the time of observation. The driver may be receiving or making a call, texting or reading a text, or using it for some other interactive function.

**Hands free mobile phones** are devices which are in use but do not require being held. An observation of hands free is made if it is clear that the driver is having a conversation with someone who is not in the car and the relevant equipment is observed. Relevant equipment could include an earpiece and/or a mobile phone on the dash board or steering wheel.

If it is not possible to see equipment in use but the observer expects that a mobile phone is in use then this is recorded as unknown. Hands free observations could be underreported due to the difficulty in observing their use in free flowing traffic.

## Further information and references

Further information on the 2009 survey can be found in the forthcoming report 'Seat belt and mobile phone usage surveys: England and Scotland 2009' which will be available from the Department for Transport website from March 2010.

More detailed information on previous surveys can be found in the following reports:

Broughton J and Hill JP (2005). *Mobile phone use by drivers, 2000-2003*. TRL Report TRL634, Wokingham.

TRL (2008). *Mobile phone use by drivers, 2006-2008*. TRL Leaflet LF2105, Wokingham.

TRL (2006). *Mobile phone use by drivers, 2004-2006*. TRL Leaflet LF2100, Wokingham.

TRL (2004). *Mobile phone use by drivers, 2002-2004*. TRL Leaflet LF2094, Wokingham.

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<sup>5</sup> Figures based on fewer than 10 observations of drivers using mobile phones

<sup>6</sup> This has a minimal impact on the overall results. Using the same sites as in the 2008 survey, the proportion of drivers estimated as using mobile phones whilst driving in the 2009 survey would be 3.0% for car drivers and 4.9% for van and lorry drivers