



Driving in later life: options for reform

Report on survey research

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November 2011



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This report was first published in November 2011 © ILC-UK 2011

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Acknowledgements

This publication has been kindly sponsored by over-50s insurance provider RIAS. The author wishes to thank Lucy Pope at RIAS, Alex Kennedy at Seventy Seven PR, Damien Broom at GfK NOP, and the whole team at ILC-UK for their support.

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Introduction

Older people today are driving further and more often than previous cohorts. Many older people feel reliant upon their car, and see driving as a genuine necessity.¹ This is related to the need to stay mobile in later life. Maintaining mobility helps to delay the physical and mental decline associated with ageing, and is vital for maintaining access to services, social connectivity, and fulfilling the various routines of daily life. The private car is available to individuals at any hour, and provides door-to-door transport, and therefore has a decisive role to play in meeting older people's mobility needs. Older people can feel suddenly isolated and vulnerable when they no longer have access to a car.²

Yet there are, inevitably, concerns about the road safety of older drivers. However, there is little or no evidence that older drivers, up to the age of around 80, are less safe behind the wheel than younger drivers. Older drivers are more likely to be killed or seriously injured in car accidents, but this is due to greater levels of frailty. They in fact have fewer accidents than most other age groups.³ This is in part because older drivers already *self-regulate* their driving behaviour in later life, that is, avoid driving in more risky circumstances such as heavy traffic or bad weather, or in unfamiliar areas, etc. Given that in an ageing society there will be increasing numbers of older drivers on the roads, it is right to consider whether the process of self-regulation is working effectively. It may of course be the case that some older drivers cease driving *too soon*, therefore unnecessarily undermining their mobility and well-being, in the absence of adequate support during the process of self-regulation. Equally, self-regulation may be inadequate for maintaining the road safety of some older drivers – and therefore what is needed is greater regulation of older drivers, or more innovatively, behavioural 'nudges' so that older drivers are self-regulating sooner and more effectively.⁴ If nothing else, the greater vulnerability of older drivers, when they are involved in accidents, means there is a strong welfare case for ensuring the regulatory system around driving decisions in later life is fit for purpose.

This report presents findings from survey research undertaken by ILC-UK, with the support of RIAS, in autumn 2011. The survey aimed, primarily, to gauge public opinion – including older people themselves – on the kind of restrictions that should be placed on drivers as they get older. It begins by profiling drivers in the UK, focusing on propensity to drive and attitudes towards driving across the lifecourse. The second section reports on public opinion on the main alternative to driving, that is, public transport. The third section presents results related to a range of possible restrictions on driving in later life, and the fourth section presents results related to various nudges designed to support self-regulation.

¹ Lucas, K and Jones, P (2009) *The Car in British Society* (RAC Foundation).

² Help the Aged (2008) *Old Age: Not the End of the Road* (Help the Aged).

³ Gandolfi (2010) *Infrastructure and Older Driver Risk: A Literature Review* (RAC Foundation).

⁴ Berry, C (2011b) *Older Drivers and Behavioural Change* (International Longevity Centre-UK).

Survey highlights

- ❖ Two-thirds of people aged 55-64, and 57 per cent of people aged 65 or over, are drivers.
- ❖ 30 per cent of drivers consider themselves to be superior to most other drivers. Only one per cent of drivers believe that they are worse than most other drivers.
- ❖ In terms of age, 30 per cent of drivers aged 55-64 claim they are better than most other drivers, and drivers aged 65 or over are only slightly less likely to make this claim.
- ❖ Half of drivers said that public transport would rarely or never be a realistic alternative to driving, with only one in five reporting that it would very often or quite often be a realistic alternative.
- ❖ Drivers aged 55-64 are more likely than any other age group to say that public transport would be rarely or never be a realistic alternative, but those aged 65 or over are the most likely age group to argue that public transport would very often or quite often be a realistic alternative to driving.
- ❖ 55 per cent of people are unaware that older drivers are required to renew their licence at 70.
- ❖ 63 per cent of people believe that individuals should be compelled to cease driving at some point as they get older. Almost one in four said that people should have to stop at 75, 70 or younger than 70 (although a similar proportion said drivers should never have to stop driving based on their age).
- ❖ 85 per cent of people argue that older drivers should be re-tested at some point, with 40 per cent agreeing that re-testing should take place at 65, 60 or younger than 60.
- ❖ Only twelve per cent of people aged 45-54, eleven per cent of people aged 55-64 and sixteen per cent of people aged 65 or over believe that older drivers should never be re-tested.
- ❖ There is a strong majority in favour of the idea of self-selected licence restrictions – 66 per cent support the idea, with 31 per cent opposed.
- ❖ More than two-thirds of people are in favour of the idea that older drivers who can demonstrate effective self-regulation (by driving less or avoiding unsafe conditions) should receive tax and insurance discounts, with around a quarter opposed.

1. Driving and age

According to ILC-UK's survey, around two-thirds of the UK's adult population are drivers. And if you are a driver, you are more likely to be:

- *Male.* 72 per cent of men are drivers, compared to 56 per cent of women.
- *Affluent.* 80 per cent of occupational group AB are drivers, compared to 46 per cent of people in occupational group DE.
- *Living at the far edges of England.* 73 per cent of adults in the North-East and 74 per cent in the South-West are drivers. The regions with the lowest proportions of drivers are Wales (54 per cent) and London (52 per cent).
- *Married or cohabiting.* 75 per cent of people who are married or living as married are drivers, compared to 46 per cent of single people.
- *In full-time employment.* 77 per cent of full-time employees are drivers, compared to 61 per cent of part-time workers and 49 per cent of those not in work.
- *Raising children.* 72 per cent of people who live in households with children aged under sixteen are drivers, compared to 60 per cent of people in childless households.

You are also unlikely to be very young – only 30 per cent of people aged 17-24 are drivers, compared to around three-quarters of people aged 25-54.⁵ Yet you are *not* unlikely to belong to an older age group: two-thirds of people aged 55-64, and 57 per cent of people aged 65 or over, are drivers – which is especially interesting given that we know most people have ceased driving by around the age of 80 (Berry, 2011).

It is also more likely than not that you live in a household with only one car (54 per cent of drivers). However, two-car households are not uncommon – 37 per cent of drivers live in households with two cars (a further seven per cent have three or more). In terms of age, older households tend to have fewer cars. Drivers aged 55-64 are slightly more likely to live in one-car households (57 per cent), and slightly less likely to live in two-car households (34 per cent). Drivers aged 65 or over are much more likely to live in one-car households (73 per cent) and far less likely to live in two-car households (26 per cent).

These age differences are probably partially explained by the impact of raising children. Drivers in households with children are more likely to live in two-car households (46 per cent, compared to 32 per cent of drivers in households with no children). 59 per cent of drivers who live in households with no children live in one-car households.

Drivers are also fairly likely to believe that you are better than most other drivers. While 69 per cent of drivers consider their driving skills to be 'about the same' as most other drivers, 30 per cent of drivers consider themselves to be superior to most other drivers. Only one per cent of drivers believe that they are worse than most other drivers. In terms of age, 30 per cent of drivers aged 55-64 claim they are better than most other drivers, and drivers aged 65 or over are only slightly less likely to make this claim.⁶

⁵ 73 per cent of people aged 25-34, 74 per cent of people aged 35-44, and 76 per cent of people aged 45-54 are drivers.

⁶ 25 per cent of drivers aged 65 or over claim to be better than most other drivers.

If we trust drivers' self-evaluation, the country's best drivers are in the North, with almost half of drivers in the North-East and over 40 per cent of drivers in the North-West claiming to be better than most other drivers. The country's worst – or perhaps most modest – drivers are in Northern Ireland, where 16 per cent claim to be better than most other drivers, and 84 per cent agree that their driving skills are 'about the same' as other drivers. Intriguingly, self-reported driving skill increases with the number of cars in a household: for drivers in households with one car, 28 per cent claim to be better than most other drivers; the proportion is 32 per cent for those in two-car households, 37 per cent for three-car households, and 43 per cent for drivers in households with four or more cars.

2. Public transport

ILC-UK's survey asked drivers to consider how often public transport would be a realistic alternative to driving, in light of the circumstances in which they usually use their car (see table 1). Half of drivers said that public transport would 'rarely' or 'never' be a realistic alternative, with only one in five reporting that it would 'very often' or 'quite often' be a realistic alternative. When asked what they considered to be the main limitations of public transport, almost two-thirds of drivers referred to limited public transport services that did not suit their travel needs. Around one-third argued that public transport is too expensive, and the same proportion argued that services were unreliable. One in four pointed to the physical inaccessibility of public transport, and just under a third consider over-crowding to be a significant limitation to public transport.

Clearly, there are some fascinating results in terms of age differences. The 55-64 age group is as likely as drivers in general to report that public transport would very often or quite often be a realistic alternative to driving, but more likely than any other age group to say that public transport would be rarely or never be a realistic alternative. In terms of limitations, this age group is the most likely to complain that public transport is too expensive (with the exception of the 17-24 age group), and interestingly the most likely to complain that services are physically inaccessible.

Table 1: Opinions on public transport, by age

	Age group (%)						ALL
	17-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	
<i>How often is public transport a realistic alternative? (a)</i>							
Very often	11	6	5	6	7	10	7
Quite often	20	11	7	9	13	24	13
Sometimes	28	40	34	31	21	23	30
Rarely	22	28	29	30	28	22	27
Never	19	15	24	23	31	22	23
<i>Main limitations of public transport (b)</i>							
Too expensive	47	32	36	36	42	21	34
Unreliable services	50	31	34	36	39	25	34
Limited services that don't suit my transport need	61	63	74	69	64	48	64
Over-crowding	38	37	32	32	22	17	29
Services are physically inaccessible	28	15	29	23	33	24	25
I don't think there are any limitations	13	11	7	10	7	14	10
None of these	1	3	2	1	4	10	4
Don't know	-	-	1	1	-	6	2

Respondents were asked (a) 'Considering the circumstances in which you use your car, how often would public transport be a realistic alternative to driving for you?' and (b) 'What do you consider to be the main limitations to public transport?'

Base: 1253 drivers (weighted total) aged 17+ (surveyed by GfK NOP between 14 October and 23 October 2011)

In contrast, those aged 65 or over are the most likely age group to argue that public transport would very often or quite often be a realistic alternative to driving; they are also less likely than those aged between 35 and 64 to report that public transport would rarely or never be a realistic alternative. This suggests there is an opportunity to increase public transport use among this age group – although it remains that close to half of those aged 65 or over do not consider public transport a realistic alternative even some of the time.

The survey also reveals some interesting regional differences. Drivers in the North-East and the South-West are the most likely to report that public transport is rarely or never a realistic alternative to driving (62 per cent and 63 per cent, respectively) and the least likely to report that it would very often or quite often be a realistic alternative (eleven per cent and fifteen percent, respectively). Interestingly, these are the regions with the highest proportions of drivers. In terms of opinions on the main limitations, there are few stark differences between the regions. However, it is worth pointing out that drivers in London are the most likely to complain that public transport is too expensive, and more than twice as likely as drivers in general to complain about over-crowding.

Surprisingly, there are few differences in opinions on public transport based on the number of children living in drivers' households. This may indicate that work-related rather than family-related circumstances create the most barriers to public transport. Indeed, people not working are far more likely than those in work to say that public transport would very often or quite often be a realistic alternative to driving, and slightly less likely to say it would rarely or never be a realistic alternative. There are few differences based on working status regarding opinions on the main limitations of public transport, although it is worth noting that part-time workers are far more likely than both full-time workers and those not working to report that public transport is too expensive.

Perhaps the most significant differences in opinion on public transport revealed by the survey are based on the number of cars in households (see table 2). There is a significant decline in drivers reporting that public transport would very often or quite often be a realistic alternative to driving, and a significant rise in drivers reporting that it would rarely or never be a realistic alternative, as the number of cars in the household increases. In terms of reasons, we can point to the fact that people in households with four or more cars are significantly more likely to report that public transport is too

Table 2: Opinions on public transport, by number of cars in household

	Number of cars in household (%)				All
	One	Two	Three	Four	
<i>How often is public transport a realistic alternative?</i>					
Very often	8	7	3	4	7
Quite often	17	10	6	2	13
Sometimes	30	31	27	19	30
Rarely	26	29	24	40	27
Never	20	23	39	34	23

Respondents were asked 'Considering the circumstances in which you use your car, how often would public transport be a realistic alternative to driving for you?'

Base: 1254 drivers (weighted total) aged 17+ (surveyed by GfK NOP between 14 October and 23 October 2011)

expensive or unreliable (59 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively, compared to scores of 34 per cent and 34 per cent for all drivers). Drivers in three-car households, however, are more likely than other drivers to refer to limited services that do not suit their transport needs (74 per cent, compared to 64 per of all drivers).

3. Regulating older drivers

The UK has a liberal regulatory system around driving in later life. Drivers are not currently required by law to cease driving, or even re-take their driving test, at any age. Instead, at the age of 70, drivers are asked to self-certify their fitness to drive (based on a medical questionnaire) – this process is repeated every three years thereafter. ILC-UK’s survey sought to examine attitudes to and awareness of the regulatory system among the general population.

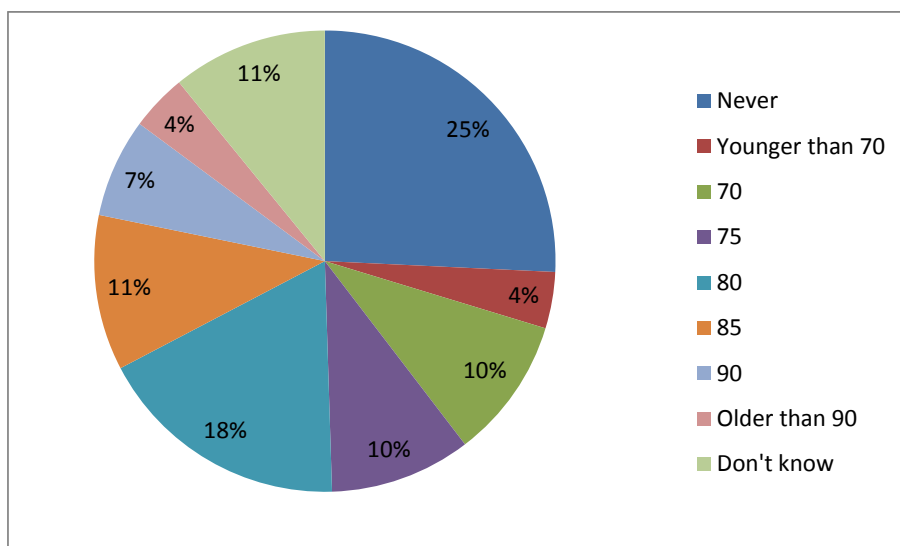
When asked for their opinion on the age at which most people should have to stop driving, the most popular answer was ‘never’ (26 per cent; see figure 3). This leaves, however, 63 per cent of individuals arguing that people should be compelled to cease driving at some point (eleven per cent answered ‘don’t know’) when currently no such restrictions exist on older drivers. In fact, almost a quarter said people should have to stop at 75, 70 or younger than 70, despite the evidence that drivers only become less safe on the roads at around the age of 80.

Disaggregating the survey by age does not produce significantly varied results – which in-itself is an interesting finding. The only major variations are a lower proportion answering ‘never’ among the 16-24 age group (fifteen per cent), and a higher proportion answering ‘don’t know’ among people aged 65 or over.

Perhaps the most significant differences relate to whether or not survey respondents are current drivers. Essentially, non-drivers are more likely to argue that people should have to stop driving at younger ages. One in three non-drivers said that people should stop driving at 75, 70 or younger than 70, compared to around one in six drivers.

The survey also asked when drivers should be compelled to re-take a driving examination. Incredibly, 85 per cent argue that older drivers should be re-tested at some point. The most popular answer was 70, with more than one in four people say re-testing should take place at this age, but 40 per cent of people argue that re-testing should take place at 65, 60 or younger than 60.

Fig 3: At what age do you think people should have to stop driving?



Base: 1005 adults aged 16+ surveyed by GfK NOP between 14 and 16 October 2011

Table 4: At what age do you think drivers should have to re-take a driving test (by age)?

	Age group (%)						ALL
	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	
Younger than 60	18	13	17	7	3	7	10
60	32	25	18	9	11	9	16
65	16	13	18	16	17	7	14
70	10	24	29	39	29	23	26
75	7	9	9	8	15	18	11
80	5	1	2	3	5	11	5
Older than 80	4	2	1	2	5	3	3
Never	2	4	4	12	11	16	9
Don't know	6	8	3	4	4	7	6

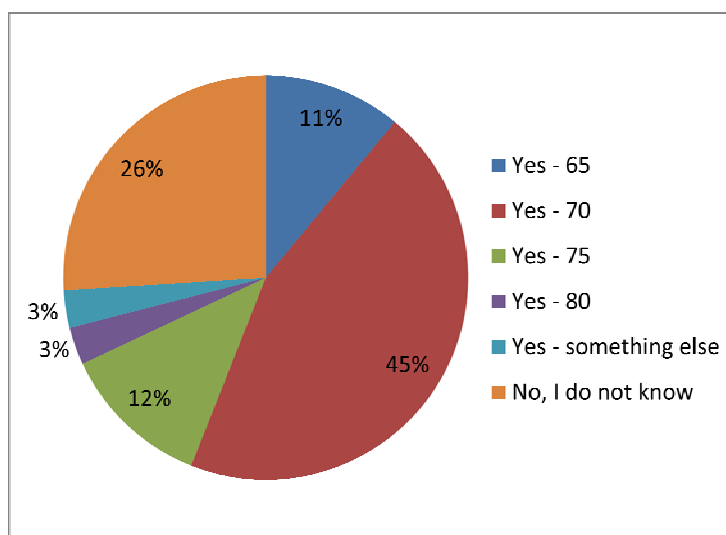
Base: 1005 adults aged 16+ surveyed by GfK NOP between 14 and 16 October 2011

As table 4 shows, people in younger age groups are much more likely to support earlier re-testing (66 per cent of people aged 16-24 are in favour of re-testing at 65, 60 or younger than 60, compared to 23 per cent of people aged 65 or over). Similarly, older people are more likely to support later re-testing (32 per cent of people aged 65 or over are in favour of re-testing at the age 75, 80 or older than 80, compared to sixteen per cent of people aged 16-24). As we would expect, people in older age groups are more likely to argue that drivers should never be re-tested; however, given that this is the status quo, it is remarkable that only twelve per cent of people aged 45-54, eleven per cent of people aged 55-64 and sixteen per cent of people aged 65 or over answered 'never'.

There appears also to be differences among survey respondents based on marital status. The most popular answer for single people was 60, with a quarter of people in favour of re-testing at this age, and over half supporting re-testing at 65, 60 or younger. The most popular answer for people married or cohabiting was 70, with almost a third of people choosing this age, and almost half supporting re-testing at 70, 75 or 80. Arguably, we could see these results as a corollary of age-based differences.

The current regulatory system requires licence renewal at age 70. However, 55 per cent of people are unaware of this rule, with this group roughly split in half between those that admit not

Fig 5: Knowledge of current licence renewal regulations



Respondents were asked 'By law, drivers have to renew their driving licence when they reach a certain age. Do you know what age this is?'

The answer 'Yes - 85' was also available but received negligible responses.

Base: 1005 adults aged 16+ surveyed by GfK NOP between 14 and 16 October 2011.

knowing and those that answered incorrectly (see figure 5). The proportion of people aged 16-24 or 25-34 answering 'don't know' is large (57 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively), but is constant at around one in five for all other age groups. The proportion of people answering correctly rises across the age distribution to 62 per cent among people aged 55-64, but then falls back to 57 per cent for people aged 65 or over.

The most knowledgeable region is the West Midlands: 56 per cent gave the correct answer, compared to 45 per cent for the general population. Almost two-thirds of people in the North-West did not know or answered incorrectly. Married people are much more likely than single people to answer correctly.

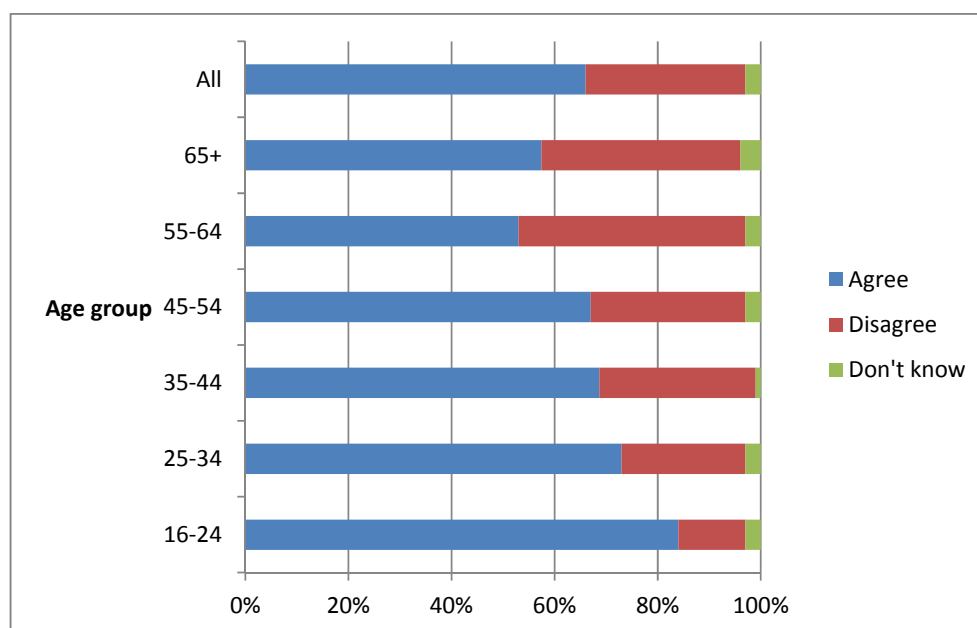
4. Options for reform

There is significant evidence that older people self-regulate their driving, but that they do not necessarily do so effectively.⁷ As such, ILC-UK has recommended several options for reform to support the process of self-regulation, including self-selected licence restrictions, financial incentives for older drivers that demonstrate self-regulation, and a requirement for older drivers to seek medical advice before self-certifying their fitness to drive.⁸ The survey sought the public's opinion on these proposals.

Restricted licences would impose limitations on how and where people above a certain age could drive, or would permit driving only if certain aids are used. Given the evidence that older drivers are already willing to impose such restrictions upon themselves, a system of self-selected licence restrictions would formalise the norm of self-regulation without removing the individual's control over decisions around driving in later life. Furthermore, more effective self-regulation should enable people to retain their licence for longer.

Clearly, there is a strong majority in favour of this idea – 66 per cent support the idea, with 31 per cent opposed, even though respondents were explicitly told it would lead to older drivers retaining their driving licence for longer (see figure 6). Interestingly, support is lower among older age groups – perhaps because more older people are in favour of *no* restrictions – whether self-selected or

Fig 6: Support for self-selected licence restrictions



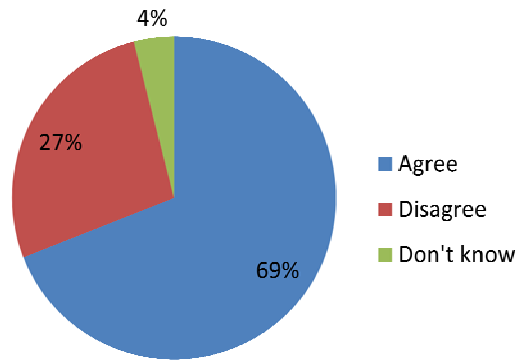
Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statement 'Older drivers should be able to voluntarily restrict their driving licence, and what and where they can drive, to ensure they retain their licence for longer. For example, they could agree not to drive in unsafe weather conditions, or only during the day, etc.'

Base: 1005 adults aged 16+ surveyed by GfK NOP between 14 and 16 October 2011.

⁷ Berry, C (2011a) *Can Older Drivers Be Nudged? How the Public and Private Sectors Can Influence Older Drivers' Self-Regulation* (RAC Foundation).

⁸ Berry (2011b) *Older Drivers and Behavioural Change*.

Fig 7: Support for tax or insurance discounts



Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the statement 'Some older people tend to drive less frequently than drivers in other age groups. Therefore, older drivers who drive less frequently and have demonstrated they are safe drivers should pay lower vehicle taxes or insurance premiums.'

Base: 1005 adults aged 16+ surveyed by GfK NOP between 14 and 16 October.

imposed. However, majorities in the groups aged both 55-64 and 65 or over remain in favour. In terms of regional differences, people in the North-East and the South-West are least likely to support the idea – the two regions with the highest proportions of drivers.

Where older drivers can demonstrate that they self-regulate their driving in later life (for instance, by adopting self-selected licence restrictions), should this behaviour be rewarded financially – thereby incentivising self-regulation in the first place? Incentives could be offered by the public sector through vehicle taxes, or privately by insurance companies. ILC-UK's survey asked whether older people who drive less frequently yet have demonstrated they are safe drivers should qualify for such discounts. More than two-thirds of people are in favour of this idea, with around a quarter opposed (see figure 7). Interestingly, support is strongest

among people aged 34 or under, and 55 and over; those aged between 35 and 54 are slightly less likely than the population in general to support the idea.

Finally, ILC-UK's survey asked people whether older drivers should seek medical advice before renewing their licence upon reaching a certain age. Currently, people renewing their licence at age 70 (and every three years thereafter) fill in a medical questionnaire, but are not required to seek medical advice before doing so. Around 9 in 10 people agreed that medical advice should be sought. This proportion is virtually constant across all age groups – although it falls to 82 per cent in favour among people aged 65 or over. Of course, this does not mean that seeking medical advice will necessarily improve driving ability in any straightforward sense; success may depend on enhancing the capacity and willingness of medical professionals to offer appropriate advice.⁹

⁹ Hawley, C (2010) *The Attitudes of Health Professionals to Giving Advice on Fitness to Drive* (Department for Transport).

Conclusion and recommendations

ILC-UK's survey seems to reveal fairly strong support for a range of punitive measures around driving in later life. Despite the fact that there is little or no evidence that, up to the age of around 80, older drivers are no less safe than younger drivers, almost a quarter of people said that individuals should be compelled to cease driving at some point, based purely on their age. Almost two-thirds of people believe older drivers should be compelled to cease driving at some point.

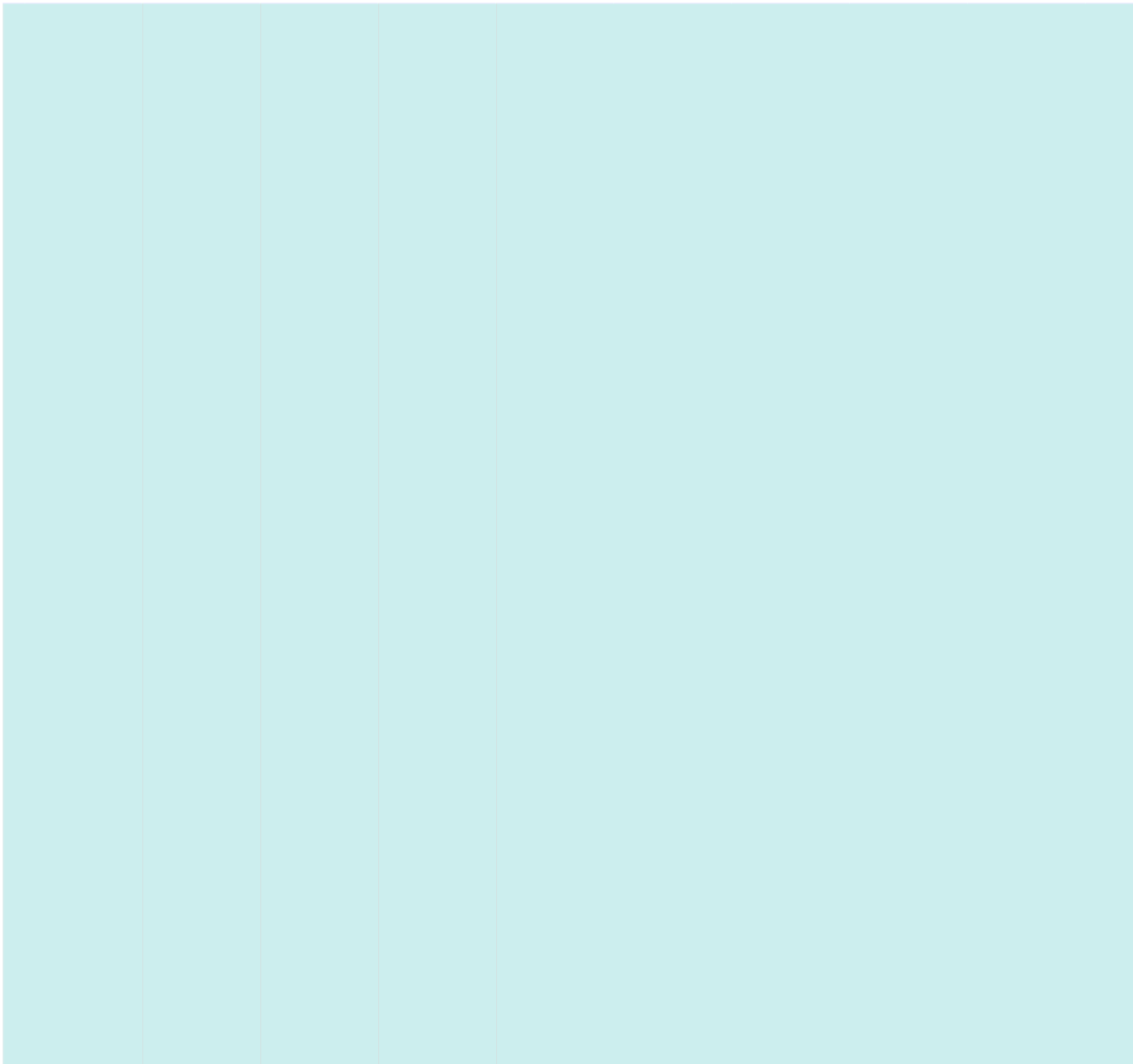
There is even stronger support for re-testing based on age: 85 per cent of people argue that older drivers should be re-tested at some point, with 40 per cent agreeing that re-testing should take place at 65, 60 or younger than 60. In fact, even among older drivers, few believe there should be no re-testing based on age.

These results have to be taken in the context of a lack of awareness of the current regulatory system around driving in later life. Only 45 per cent of people are aware that older drivers are required to renew their licences at the age of 70. Furthermore, when people are asked about a range of other measures, designed to improve the process of self-regulation by older drivers, significant public support is again evident. Two-thirds of people are in favour of the idea of self-selected licence restrictions, which would formalise the process of self-regulation by nudging older drivers towards sensible decisions about their driving behaviour without removing their ability to make decisions appropriate to their circumstances. Support is lower among older age groups – perhaps because more older people are in favour of *no* restrictions – whether self-selected or imposed.

An even greater proportion of people are in favour of the notion that older drivers who can demonstrate that they are responsible road users should receive tax and/or insurance discounts. This would serve as a financial incentive to undertake self-regulation. Similarly, around 90 per cent of people believe that older drivers should seek medical advice before renewing their driving licence; again, this would assist the process of self regulation.

ILC-UK recommends the following:

- There is limited evidence that more draconian regulatory regimes lead to safer roads. The government and other stakeholders should therefore focus on improving the process of self-regulation among older drivers.
- The DVLA should allow older drivers to voluntarily restrict their driving licences. This measure would 'nudge' people towards making earlier and better informed decisions about driving in later life.
- The government should offer a 10 per cent Vehicle Excise Duty discount for older drivers self-selecting licence restrictions, to act as an incentive for self-regulation.
- Insurance companies should develop ways to reward older drivers that have demonstrated they are responsible road users.
- At the point of licence renewal, older drivers should be required to declare that they have sought the advice of medical professionals before self-certifying their fitness to drive.



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