

Driven to distraction?

Crowded roads, overpriced trains and unreliable airlines leave commuters and holidaymakers fuming. What is the government doing about it? We ask Transport Minister Dr Stephen Ladyman



Transport Minister Dr Stephen Ladyman: 'Green cars have to be hot'

Q A *Which?* survey found almost half of people were put off using trains by the cost. What is the government doing to encourage people to use trains?

A The government subsidises the railways very, very significantly. We are spending £87 million a week on the railways. There is a limit to how much you can subsidise

a service because it's taxpayers' money. We do massively subsidise but equally passengers are right. The price of rail can sometimes be more than people want to pay.

Q Studies in other countries have shown that fitting new cars with electronic stability control can cut accidents by up to a third. Are there plans to make this mandatory here?

A Not mandatory. We are doing research at the moment to see if those casualty reduction figures from other countries would be applicable in this country. I do think electronic stability control will have an impact. I doubt very much whether it would be a third but it would have an impact. I'm anxious to see it flow through the British fleet a lot more quickly than ABS braking did, although ABS braking flowed through the fleet without it ever being made mandatory.

Q A recent survey found that 80 per cent of people won't switch to a greener car. How do you change that?

A We need to educate people about what the impact of climate change is. We need to educate manufacturers. I'm reasonably well known as a car lover. If you want to reach people like me then green cars have to be hot cars – the two have to be connected. The design of the car has to excite you and stimulate you. If it turns out to be a green car as well, that's a double whammy.

Q Motorists feel the parking system is often unfair. What are you doing about it?

A We are about to publish a new set of guidelines on how parking restrictions should be managed, how signage should be made available and what fines should be charged. We're going to launch a consultation on it and of course the views of *Which?* readers will be very welcome.

Q We think safety standards for child car seats should be raised to include realistic crash testing. What steps are you taking to raise standards?

A We're about to publish a new standard that deals with a lot of the issues that have been raised in your magazine in the past. There will be new products available based on that new standard by the end of the year and they will include products that take account of things like side impact protection. We're working on an information scheme and when this standard appears in the shops, you'll see a star rating on products that will make clear what extra protection they are delivering. I congratulate you on the campaign you've run over the years.

Q A £1 levy on air tickets has been proposed to cover people when airlines go bust – why do you oppose it?

A We don't charge a levy in any other area of commerce in case the company you're dealing with is going to go broke. More importantly, I think companies like British Airways, which are not going to go broke, had the argument – and I think it is a legitimate one – 'Why should we make our passengers pay £1 so that some under-financed airline can take our business away?'

What does the Minister think about speed cameras? For this – and more – visit www.which.co.uk/questiontime