

Life in the slow lane

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Most South Africans claim that our traffic problems are mostly due to selfish and uneducated drivers. 73% of South African respondents in a recent Synovate survey attribute South Africa's worsening traffic problem to people who don't know how to drive or those who drive selfishly, second only to rocketing private car ownership.

The survey on traffic was conducted on over 5,500 respondents in South Africa, Hungary, Russia, China, Hong Kong, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Synovate asked how many hours were spent in traffic everyday and how their behaviour has changed to cope with the daily ordeal.

Compared to our counterparts around the world, South Africans spend a relatively short time stuck in traffic - 26% sit in traffic for an hour to two hours per day, and 33% sit in traffic for 30 minutes to an hour. Comparatively, about three-quarters of UAE respondents and half of their counterparts in Hong Kong, Hungary and China are on the road at least one hour everyday. It appears that UAE residents in particular need to prepare themselves before getting into the car for a drive - 42% say they sit in traffic up to two hours everyday; four out of 10 claim it's more than two hours.

The reasons why traffic is the monster it is vary across the world, with the most common gripe being too many cars and not enough roads. A large portion of South African respondents also claim that poor road infrastructure and planning contributes to our traffic problems, as well as there being too many vehicles besides cars using the roads. Inadequate public transportation is a complaint reported by 50% of South Africans.

53% of respondents commented that there are not enough traffic police, which leads one to believe that more intervention from traffic police could help, but not when looking at the fact that four out of ten South Africans also believe that it is the traffic police themselves that are causing the problems!

The high proportion of respondents who believe other drivers are to blame for the traffic problems may explain the high incidence of road rage in our country, as reported by Synovate in August. An overwhelming 67% of those interviewed in that survey reported experiencing some aggressive (85.1%) or threatening (11%) behaviour directed at them in the past 12 months. "The latest road rage incident last Friday where a Johannesburg motorist fatally injured a taxi driver reflects the frustration described in these two surveys," comments Jon Salters, Managing Director of Synovate Sub-Saharan Africa.

When looking at how traffic affects the daily lives of South Africans, 37% of respondents indicated that this influences the social invitations that they accept. A startling 66% reported that the times they leave for work and home have been affected by the chaos on the roads during peak time traffic.

Perhaps these frustrations are on the way out, according to Salters. "In order to address these problems, national strategies and priorities have been formulated and will hopefully bring about an improvement in traffic problems. This year's international conference of the South African Society for Intelligent Transport Systems (SASITS) has raised hopes for alleviating road congestion by deploying such systems. We can also look forward to the increased spending on road infrastructure announced in the Mini Budget Speech in October."

Has traffic influenced:

	Total	China	Hong Kong	Spain	South Africa	Hungary	Russia	UAE
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The time you leave home and leave work	56%	41%	36%	78%	66%	49%	69%	90%
Where you live in relation to work and/or schools	52%	43%	35%	68%	52%	43%	57%	79%
The way you structure your day in general	47%	39%	28%	51%	54%	46%	55%	57%
The radius within which you conduct errands such as banking, food shopping, etc.	44%	27%	23%	51%	54%	38%	51%	48%
The social invitations you accept	39%	37%	29%	33%	37%	31%	34%	43%
None of the above	22%	35%	44%	6%	16%	31%	14%	3%

Source: Synovate

Time spent sitting in traffic every day

	Total	China	Hong Kong	Spain	South Africa	Hungary	Russia	UAE
Less than 30 minutes	29%	26%	22%	25%	33%	22%	35%	7%
30 minutes to 1 hour	26%	25%	27%	30%	33%	25%	33%	11%
1-2 hours	28%	31%	32%	33%	26%	29%	16%	42%
Over 2 hours	14%	14%	18%	12%	7%	19%	6%	40%
Don't know	3%	4%	1%	-	1%	3%	9%	-
Refused to answer	1%	1%	-	-	-	2%	1%	-

Source: Synovate

Why do you think traffic is so bad?

	Total	China	Hong Kong	Spain	South Africa	Hungary	Russia	UAE
Too many cars and not enough roads	81%	74%	76%	80%	85%	74%	92%	93%
Poor road infrastructure and planning	71%	62%	56%	89%	66%	84%	82%	85%
Selfish and/or uneducated drivers	66%	54%	64%	82%	73%	61%	68%	73%

Never-ending road works	64%	58%	67%	82%	46%	65%	68%	58%
Too many vehicles other than cars sharing the road	59%	54%	52%	60%	68%	47%	48%	34%
Unruly pedestrians	51%	70%	56%	43%	39%	47%	44%	31%
Inadequate public transportation	43%	28%	34%	56%	50%	53%	44%	30%
Not enough traffic police	38%	30%	20%	40%	53%	24%	32%	44%
The traffic police cause traffic	25%	21%	14%	29%	40%	6%	41%	35%
None of the above	3%	6%	4%	1%	3%	3%	1%	-

Source: Synovate

For comment on this please contact Jon Salters - (011) 709 7800

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