

Open Forum 88 1983: Energy Research at the OU

Clip: Energy Research Group

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Dr. Steve Cousins:

Obviously the transport sector is a very important consumer of oil, and it's one in fact which has increased its oil consumption since 1973, unlike the domestic heating and industrial sectors. So we want to look at the mechanisms as to why this has happened, and try and come up with some solutions.

Now if you actually look at how cars are used you can break them down into three quite important categories, and these are: household cars, where the car is owned by a member of the household and he or she pays for their use. There are company cars, where the company essentially pays for the car. And there are things we call public cars which are taxis and car rental where you use the car and pay for it at the time of travel. I think everybody will have experienced sitting in a back of a taxi and watching the meter, and you know how effective that is at reducing your use of cars of that type.

Now we've developed this particular meter. Each user of the car has a counter, a key counter and unless this key counter is inserted into the box, the ignition won't start in the car. So when the person gets into the car they put the key counter into the box and now the cost of travel will be billed on that counter and also displayed on a trip display at the side here.

Narrator:

When you're car sharing with someone then the cost of travelling is split between two counters. If the meter is fitted to a company car then the separate counters can be used to distinguish private use of the car, as against company use. The applicability of the meter to company cars has aroused the interest of a fellow researcher in the New Towns Study Unit.

Dr. Stephen Potter:

Well Company car use has grown immensely since the energy crisis of 1973. Even to the extent that now you've got something like 70% of all new cars that are sold, are financed by companies. Now this growth has quite strong implications for energy policy. In fact, Steve Cousins and I have worked out that there would be something like a 10% reduction in petrol use if company motorists bought similar cars to that which private motorists buy. Company cars tend to be taxed at a very low rate and in fact the company motorists are getting an effective subsidy from the Treasury of about two billion pounds a year, twice that that British Rail gets. You don't hear much about that do you?