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N.J. drivers with long commutes speed and fill travel time with unsafe behaviors

Drivers with long commutes are more likely to speed and engage in other unsafe behaviors than those with shorter commutes or no commute at all, according to a recent study by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind™, co-sponsored by the state's Division of Highway Traffic Safety.

More than 6 in 10 (61%) of those who drive 20 miles or more to work say they drive more than 65 mph on the highway "most of the time" or "often," compared with only 53% of those with shorter drives and 42% of those that don't drive to work at all.

A quarter of all New Jersey drivers (25%) say they regularly drive more than 70 mph on New Jersey highways. But again, drivers with long commutes (39%) are more likely to regularly travel at this speed than those with shorter drives (22%).

"In 2009 alone, unsafe speed was a factor in more than 23,000 crashes on New Jersey roads," said Gary Poedubicky, acting director of the Division of Highway Traffic Safety. "Long commutes can certainly be frustrating at times, however we have to recognize the serious danger that results from chronic speeding."

Despite the fact that they are more likely to speed than other drivers, those with the longest commutes are less likely than those with shorter commutes to think they will get a ticket for going over the limit (80% compared to 89%). However, this belief is not borne out by reality, as 14% of drivers traveling more than 20 miles to work have received a speeding ticket, compared with only 7 percent of those who don't regularly drive to work.

Garden State drivers are more respectful of the speed limit on local roads. Just 18% say that they regularly go more than 5 miles per hour over the speed limit on streets that have a limit of 30 mph, and four of five (81%) say that they "never" do it or only do it "once in a while."

"Our results indicate that drivers don't take the speed limits on highways too seriously, especially if they have a long drive every morning," said principal investigator Dan Cassino. "But the speed limits where they live, and where their kids play, are a different matter."

One of five drivers with long commutes (19%) say that they talk on a handheld phone "very often" or "sometimes" compared to one in 10 who don't drive to work at all (9%). But a similar proportion of New Jersey drivers with commutes of less than 20 miles (17%) report they talk on a handheld cell phone "sometimes" or "very often."

While the proportion of drivers with short commutes (32%) who admit to texting and driving is similar to drivers with commutes of more than twenty miles (31%), each group is significantly more likely to text-while-driving than those who don't commute to work (16%).

“Texting while driving appears to be out of control on our roads,” said Poedubicky. “It is frightening when you consider the dangerous combination of texting and speeding.”

Despite their preponderance of engaging in unsafe behaviors, drivers with long commutes (76%) are more likely to rate their driving skills as “above average.” This is 10 points higher than those who have shorter commutes (66%), or don’t drive to work at all (66%). These same drivers are also more likely to admit to having made a rude gesture at another driver: 36% of those with commutes of more than 20 miles have manually expressed their frustration on the road, compared with just 25% of those who don’t regularly drive to work.

“It makes sense for drivers with long hauls to work to get more frustrated,” said Cassino. “They feel like they know these roads better, they’re better drivers, and they just want everyone else to get out of their way.”

The Fairleigh Dickinson University survey was co-sponsored by the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety and carried out by telephone from April 14, 2011, to May 17, 2011 using a randomly selected sample of 1,002 New Jersey residents aged 17 and over who report they drive regularly, including an oversample of drivers under the age of 30. It has a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points.

Tables, questions, and methodology available on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>
Radio actuality line: (201) 692-2846. For more information, please call (973) 443-8756.

Background Memo and Tables

This study was conducted by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind and co-sponsored by the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety. The survey was conducted by telephone from April 14 through May 17, using a randomly selected sample of 1,002 New Jersey residents aged 17 and over who report they drive regularly, including an oversample of drivers under the age of 30. The sampling error for 1,002 randomly selected respondents in a statewide survey is +/-3 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error.. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers. PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a land-line phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected. Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phone-only-households, interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender among the voting population.

When you're driving on a New Jersey highway, how often would you say you drive over 65 miles an hour?

	All 2011	Length of Commute		
		Doesn't Commute	0-19 M	20+ M
Most of the Time	26%	20	27	33
Often	25%	22	26	28
Just Once in a While	34%	37	34	30
Never	14%	19	13	8
Don't Know/Reused	1%	2	0	1

And how often would you say you drive 70 miles per hour or more?

	All 2011	Length of Commute		
		Doesn't Commute	0-19 M	20+ M
Most of the Time	10%	9	7	16
Often	15%	10	15	23
Just Once in a While	40%	38	47	32
Never	34%	41	30	27
Don't Know/Reused	1%	2	0	1

And what do you think your chances are of getting a ticket if you drive over the speed limit?

	All 2011	Length of Commute		
		Doesn't Commute	0-19 M	20+ M
Very Likely	33%	34	36	28
Somewhat Likely	50%	46	53	52
Not Very Likely	10%	11	7	13
Not Likely at All	4%	5	2	2
Don't Know	3%	4	1	4

In the past three years have you personally, received a speeding ticket?

	All 2011	Length of Commute		
		Doesn't Commute	0-19 M	20+ M
Yes	10%	7	11	14
No	90%	92	89	86
Don't Know/Don't Remember	0%	1	0	0

What about driving on local roads where the posted speed limit is 30 miles per hour: how often would you say you go over 35 miles per hour on that kind of local road?

	All 2011
Most of the Time	9%
Often	9%
Just Once in a While	44%
Never	37%
Don't Know/Reused	1%

Now let me ask about driving and cell phones. How often do you personally drive your car at the same time you hold your cell phone and talk into it?

	All 2011	Length of Commute		
		Doesn't Commute	0-19 M	20+ M
Very Often	4%	2	5	7
Sometimes	10%	7	12	12
Rarely	25%	22	27	25
Never	60%	68	55	55
Don't Have a Cell	1%	2	1	0

In the past three years have you personally sent a text message while driving?

	All 2011	Length of Commute		
		Doesn't Commute	0-19 M	20+ M
Yes	25%	16	32	31
No	75%	84	68	69

How would you rate your own driving skills compared to most other drivers on the road?

	All 2011	Length of Commute		
		Doesn't Commute	0-19 M	20+ M
Above Average	68%	66	66	76
Average	32%	32	34	24
Below Average	0%	1	0	0
Don't Know/Refused	0%	1	0	0

In the past three years have you personally, made a rude gesture at another driver?

	All 2011	Length of Commute		
		Doesn't Commute	0-19 M	20+ M
Yes	30%	25	33	36
No	69%	75	66	63
Don't Know/ Don't Remember	1%	0	1	1