

# Overcoming small business opposition to sustainable transport projects that reduce car parking in urban town centres

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## Abstract

Business opposition to sustainable transport projects centres on the loss of car parking. If transport projects proceed, how businesses adapt (or not) to the changed environment could have implications for broader sustainable policy outcomes.

This paper reports on a study which applied Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT) to investigate if it helps to differentiate businesses by their sensitivity to two underlying concerns: the change in customer attracting opportunities and the change in security of customer attraction.

The experimental survey was conducted with 156 shop-based businesses in the inner city of Sydney. The survey recorded business concerns and strategic actions in response to a hypothetical scenario of losing car parking outside their business to enable more walking, cycling and public transport access.

Overcoming business concern will help increase community acceptance of sustainable transport projects. This study found customizing messages using RFT effectively redirected businesses' goal focus to positive attributes of the new street environment, thereby providing a rationale for businesses to take adaptive actions.

The value of RFT as a tool for predicting the strategic response of businesses was found to be limited by measures of Regulatory Focus behaviour. Measures used in laboratory experiments about RFT did not translate well in an applied policy context. Despite this, RFT was found to aid the analysis of business behaviour and specifically their willingness to adapt to the changed environment. This paper reports on the results of the experimental survey, and how a focus on Regulatory Focus goal concerns provides policy makers additional means to engage local business support.