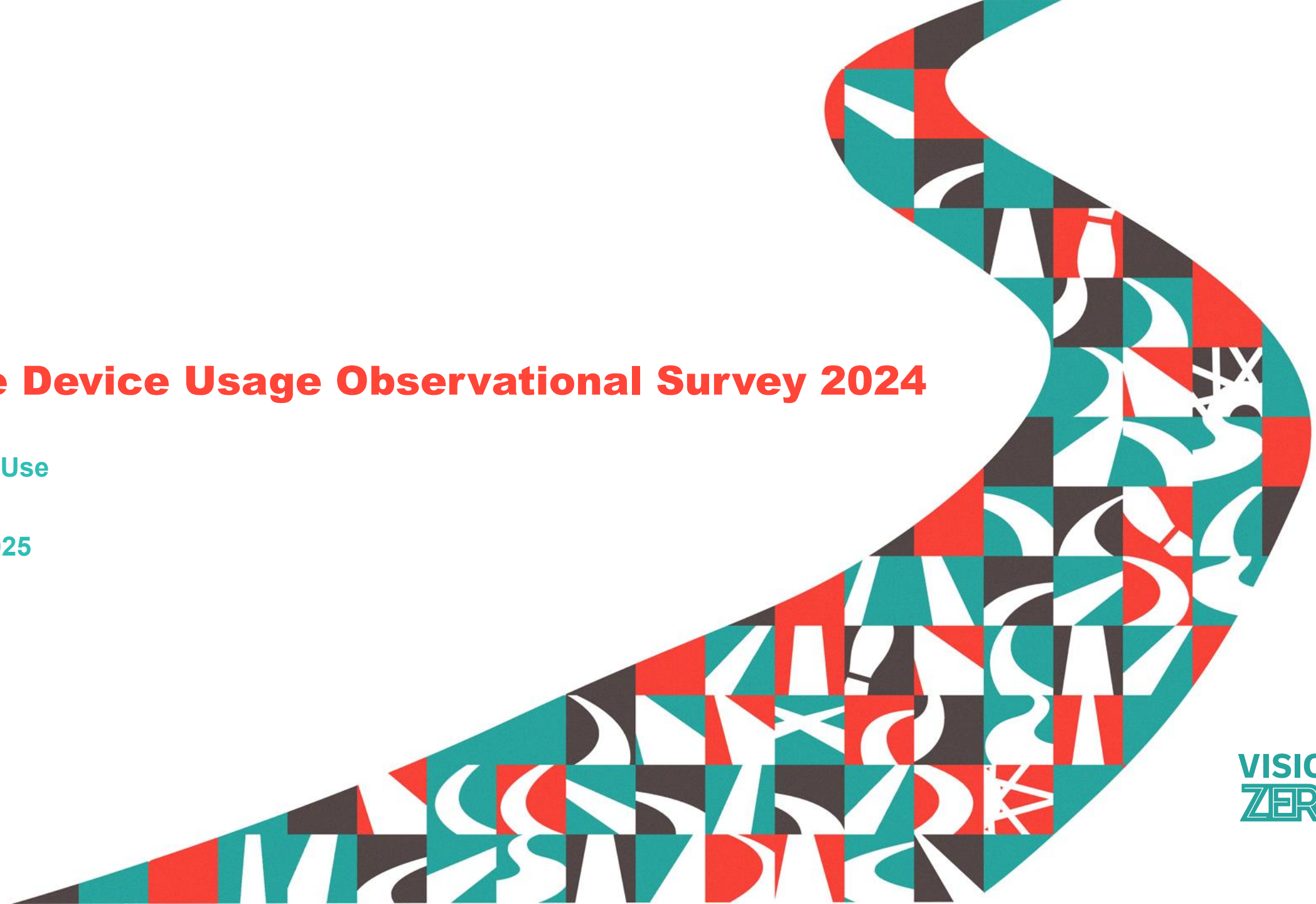
Mobile Device Usage Observational Survey 2024

Safe Road Use

January 2025



VISION ZERO

Report Overview

- Executive Summary
- Safety Performance Indicators
- Methodological Approach
- Analysis of mobile device usage
- Summary of main findings
- Historic Rates

Executive Summary

Executive Summary (1/2)

- Distracted driving due to handheld mobile device usage is one of the dangerous behaviours that leads to road traffic collisions. Recent data from the World Health Organisation indicates that drivers using a mobile phone are 4 times more likely to be involved in a collision.
- As part of the RSA National Surveys on Speeding & Mobile Phones 2022, in the past 12 months while driving:
  - 29% of motorists reported that they talked on a mobile hands-free often or very often
  - 20% of motorists reported that they read messages/emails often or very often
  - 18% of motorists reported that they wrote messages/emails often or very often
  - 17% of motorists reported that they checked social media often or very often
- Given these relatively high percentages, and the fact that international research acknowledges that mobile phone usage contributes to road traffic collisions, it is important to track handheld mobile device usage rates.
- The RSA has been conducting observational surveys on the use of mobile phones since 2009. The definition for the survey was broadened from 2022 to take into account usage of a larger set of mobile devices, including tablets and personal navigation devices.

Executive Summary (2/2)

- The results from this survey showed that 6% of motorists were using a mobile device, and this represents an improvement in behaviour when compared to the 2023 survey, where 9% of motorists were seen using a mobile device.
- The highest rate of handheld mobile device usage was seen by car drivers at 6%, with rates ranging from 2% - 4% amongst drivers of other vehicle types.
- Of the drivers observed using a handheld mobile device, 67% were using the device in hand, and 33% were using the device to their ear. In 2023, 59% were using the device in hand and 41% were using the device to their ear.
- The percentage of drivers seen using a handheld mobile device fell across all road types surveyed in the 2024 study, with the biggest improvement seen on motorway roads.
- In the 2024 study, males and females were equally likely to be observed using a handheld mobile device overall, and there was not a big amount of variation evident when analysing gender by vehicle type and road type.
- The 2024 study saw decreases in usage rates on each day of the week when compared with the results from the 2023 study.
- Handheld mobile device usage gradually improved over the course of the day in the 2024 study.

Safety Performance Indicators

Safety Performance Indicators (SPIs) in the Government Road Safety Strategy, 2021-2030

- This observational study on mobile device usage has been conducted in the context of the SPI approach as part of the Government Road Safety Strategy.
- Use of performance indicators has been recommended in international guidance from global organisations, including ETSC and ITF/OECD.
- It is critical that SPIs have an evidence base and established relationship with safety performance (i.e., death and serious injury reduction).
- They reflect elements of the operational and safety context to better understand the road traffic system.
- In an Irish context, SPIs will be used to measure our performance in specific areas, known to contribute to death and serious injury reduction, to help us refine our policy interventions.
- An SPI has been developed as part of the Safe Road Use intervention area to determine the percentage of drivers not using a handheld mobile device.

EC Projects

- Ireland participated in the EC Baseline Project from 2020 to 2022. A Baseline Project Report was published in early 2023: Baseline Project Summary.
- Trendline is the follow-up to Baseline and will last until 2025. Further details about this project can be found at https://trendlineproject.eu/.
- The main aim of these projects is to ensure that a consistent approach to data collection and SPI reporting is adopted across the Member States.
- A Trendline Project Report will be published by the end of 2025, and individual SPI reports will also be made available.
- A Distraction SPI was included as part of Baseline and has also been included as part of Trendline.

Methodological Approach

Study Objectives

- The aim of this study was to gather observational data of handheld mobile device usage rates among drivers on the Irish public road network.
- This report will outline the methodology used for the 2024 mobile device usage survey and will present the key findings from the study.

Methodology

- A manual observational study of handheld mobile device usage by drivers was conducted at 145 sites in September and October 2024.
- The observational procedure involved trained observers standing at the roadside and observing the rate of handheld mobile device usage among drivers of passenger cars, goods vehicles, and buses/coaches as they passed the site.
- There are limitations to this type of procedure, given that observations are recorded at a point-in-time, and it can be challenging to make entirely accurate observations. This may explain differences in rates when compared to self-reported mobile device usage.
- Fieldwork was conducted by Tracsis on behalf of the RSA.
- A nationally representative sample was used as part of this study, and observations took place in all 26 counties.
- The 2024 study included 25,960 observations in total, and followed the methodology specified by Trendline.
- The approach adopted was broadly in line with the method used by the RSA in historic mobile phone usage surveys.
- All route types were included in the study, and observations were made during daylight hours on weekdays and at weekends.

Analysis of mobile device usage

Mobile device usage by vehicle type

- Overall, 6% of observed drivers in this study were using a handheld mobile device.
- Rates of handheld mobile device usage were highest amongst car drivers (6%), with a lower percentage of drivers of other vehicle types being recorded using mobile devices (2% - 4%).

Table 1 – Mobile device usage rates by vehicle type

Vehicle Type	% Using Mobile Device (2023)	% Not Using Mobile Device (2023)	Sample Size (2023)
Car	6% (8%)	94% (92%)	22,385 (15,822)
LGVs	2% (13%)	98% (87%)	1,986 (3,141)
HGVs	4% (7%)	96% (93%)	882 (1,180)
PSVs	3% (6%)	97% (94%)	707 (408)

Type of mobile device usage

- A sub-analysis of the type of mobile device usage by vehicle category reveals that car drivers are most likely to be using a mobile device in hand, followed closely by HGV drivers
- Drivers of LGVs and PSVs are more likely to be using a mobile device to ear.

Table 2 – Type of mobile device usage by vehicle category

Vehicle Type	% Using Mobile Device in hand (2023)	% Using Mobile Device to ear (2023)	Sample Size (2023)
Car	68% (65%)	32% (35%)	1,348 (1,321)
LGVs	44% (46%)	56% (54%)	45* (419)
HGVs	65% (46%)	35% (54%)	34* (81*)
PSVs	45% (20%)	55% (80%)	22* (25*)

** The small sample sizes need to be considered when interpreting these rates.*

Mobile device usage by road type

- The percentage of drivers using handheld mobile devices fell across all road types surveyed as part of the 2024 study.
- Rates of handheld mobile device usage decreased by the highest percentage on motorway roads (-7%), with smaller declines in usage rates witnessed on the urban and rural road network.

Table 3 – Mobile device usage rate by road type

Road Type	% Using Mobile Device (2023)	% Not Using Mobile Device (2023)	Sample Size (2023)
Urban (50km/h and 60km/h)	5% (9%)	95% (91%)	10,508 (8,960)
Rural (80km/h and 100km/h)	7% (9%)	93% (91%)	12,834 (7,848)
Motorway (120km/h)	2% (9%)	98% (91%)	2,618 (3,743)

Mobile device usage by gender

- 6% of male drivers were using a mobile device in the 2024 study, down from 10% in the 2023 study.
- 6% of female drivers were also seen using a mobile device in the 2024 study, down from 8% in the 2023 study.
- Please note that in this year's study, there were 1,697 observations where it was not possible to determine the gender of the driver. Of these drivers, 4% were observed using a handheld mobile device.

Table 4 – Mobile device usage rate by gender

Gender	% Using Mobile Device (2023)	% Not Using Mobile Device (2023)	Sample Size (2023)
Female	6% (8%)	94% (92%)	8,590 (7,119)
Male	6% (10%)	94% (90%)	15,673 (13,432)

Mobile device usage by gender and vehicle type

- A sub-analysis of mobile device use by gender and vehicle type reveals similar rates of usage by male and female car drivers.
- No female LGV drivers were witnessed using a mobile device in this year's study and only 2% of male LGV drivers were seen using a mobile device. These represent improvements of 7% and 12% respectively when compared to the findings of the 2023 study.

Table 5 – Mobile device usage rate by gender and vehicle type

Gender	Vehicle Type	% Using Mobile Device (2023)	% Not Using Mobile Device (2023)	Sample Size (2023)
Female	Car	6% (8%)	94% (92%)	8,416 (6,942)
	LGVs	0% (7%)	100% (93%)	109 (123)
Male	Car	6% (9%)	94% (91%)	12,382 (8,880)
	LGVs	2% (14%)	98% (86%)	1,829 (3,018)

Mobile device usage by gender and road type

- A sub-analysis of mobile device use by gender and road type reveals the same rate of usage by male and female drivers on all roads in the 2024 study.
- The biggest improvement witnessed when compared to the 2023 study was for male drivers on motorways.

Table 6 – Mobile device usage rate by gender and road type

Gender	Road Type	% Using Mobile Device (2023)	% Not Using Mobile Device (2023)	Sample Size (2023)
Female	Urban (50km/h and 60km/h)	5% (9%)	95% (91%)	3,738 (3,271)
	Rural (80km/h and 100km/h)	7% (8%)	93% (92%)	4,124 (2,504)
	Motorway (120km/h)	2% (6%)	98% (94%)	728 (1,344)
Male	Urban (50km/h and 60km/h)	5% (9%)	95% (91%)	6,424 (5,689)
	Rural (80km/h and 100km/h)	7% (9%)	93% (91%)	7,461 (5,344)
	Motorway (120km/h)	2% (11%)	98% (89%)	1,788 (2,399)

Mobile device usage by day of week

- Weekday handheld mobile device usage was highest on Mondays (7%) and lowest on Tuesdays and Wednesdays (5%).
- Weekend surveys took place on Saturdays and Sundays and the rate of handheld mobile device usage was 5%.
- The 2024 study saw decreases on each day of the week when compared with the results from the 2023 study.

Table 7 – Mobile device usage rate by day of week

Day of Week	% Using Mobile Device (2023)	% Not Using Mobile Device (2023)	Sample Size (2023)
Monday	7% (10%)	93% (90%)	4,445 (2,910)
Tuesday	5% (9%)	95% (91%)	4,174 (3,092)
Wednesday	5% (9%)	95% (91%)	4,341 (3,659)
Thursday	6% (8%)	94% (92%)	4,331 (5,425)
Friday	6% (9%)	94% (91%)	3,736 (3,616)
Weekend	5% (10%)	95% (90%)	4,933 (1,849)

Mobile device usage by time of day

- Handheld mobile device usage gradually improved over the course of the day, with the highest rate observed in the morning period and the lowest rate seen during the evening sessions.
- The results of this sub-analysis are only presented for 2024, as the timing of the sessions is not directly comparable with the previous year's study.

Table 8 – Mobile device usage rate by time of day

Time of Day	% Using Mobile Device	% Not Using Mobile Device	Sample Size
07:30 – 9:15	7%	93%	9,281
12:00 – 13:45	6%	94%	8,675
17:30 – 19:15	3%	97%	8,004

Summary of main findings

Key Results

- Overall, 6% of observed drivers in the 2024 study were using a handheld mobile device, an decrease of 3% when compared to last year's study.
- Rates of handheld mobile device usage were lowest amongst LGV drivers (2%) and highest amongst car drivers (6%) in this year's study. The rate of usage amongst LGV drivers fell from 13% in 2023 to 2% in 2024.
- Of the drivers seen using a handheld mobile device, a higher percentage were using the device in their hand, compared to holding the device to their ear. Car drivers were most likely to use the device in their hand, and this finding is consistent with the results from previous year's studies.
- The percentage of drivers using handheld mobile devices fell across all road types in the 2024 study, with the biggest improvement seen on motorways.
- Overall, the same percentage of males and females were observed using a handheld mobile device in the 2024 study, and little variation was evident when analysing gender by vehicle type and road type.
- Weekday handheld mobile device usage ranged from 5% to 7%, while weekend usage was 5%.
- Handheld mobile device usage gradually improved over the course of the day in this year's study.

Historic rates

Appendix 1 – Historic Mobile Phone Usage Rates

Table 9 – Historic mobile phone usage rates

Year	% Using Mobile Device
2009	6%
2011	3%
2012	5%
2013	4%
2014	8%
2015	3%
2016	6%
2017	5%
2018	8%
2021	5%
2022*	6%
2023*	9%
2024*	6%

**** The definition for surveys from 2022 onwards was broadened to take into account usage of a larger set of mobile devices, including tablets and personal navigation devices.***