WORKING PAPER

ITLS-WP-26-14

Who Accepts Parking Pricing? Trust and Legitimacy in a Contentious Policy Change

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July 2026

ISSN 1832-570X

INSTITUTE of TRANSPORT and LOGISTICS STUDIES

The Australian Key Centre in Transport and Logistics Management

The University of Sydney

Established under the Australian Research Council's Key Centre Program.

NUMBER: Working Paper ITLS-WP-26-14

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines public responses to the introduction of paid visitor parking as a contentious local policy change in a tourism-dependent region. While parking pricing is widely recognised as an effective tool for managing demand and generating revenue, less is known about how such policies are interpreted and legitimised by affected communities. Using the Blue Mountains in New South Wales as a case study, the study treats the introduction of paid parking as a natural experiment in user-pays reform under conditions of infrastructure funding pressure and climate-related disruption. A mixed-methods approach is employed, combining survey data, factor analysis, clustering, and qualitative thematic analysis to identify patterns in attitudes and interpretation. The findings show that acceptance is not primarily driven by demographic characteristics or behavioural exposure, but by institutional trust, beliefs about collective responsibility, and perceptions of governance quality. Three distinct attitudinal segments are identified, reflecting differing configurations of support, trust, and normative beliefs. Despite the scheme's demonstrated effectiveness as a revenue-generating instrument capable of supporting substantial infrastructure investment, public acceptance remains contested. The policy is frequently interpreted through a "revenue raising" frame, particularly where trust is limited. The paper argues that parking pricing operates not only as an economic instrument but as a governance signal, with legitimacy contingent on transparency, fairness, and the visible reinvestment of revenues.

KEY WORDS: ***parking pricing, policy change, policy acceptance, institutional trust, policy legitimacy, local government***

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: NIL

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DATE: July 2026

1. Introduction

Recent years have seen increasingly severe and sustained weather events across New South Wales, placing growing pressure on infrastructure systems and local government resources. In Greater Sydney, 2021 was characterised by above-average rainfall and significant flooding, particularly along the Hawkesbury River, with temperatures also below long-term averages (BoM 2022). These conditions intensified in 2022, when rainfall across Greater Sydney reached approximately twice the annual average, with many locations recording their wettest year on record (BoM 2023). So extensive was the damage to road networks that the Australian Government initiated a national inquiry into the implications of severe weather events on the road network (Commonwealth of Australia 2023). This inquiry highlighted the growing vulnerability of infrastructure systems to climate-related events and the escalating costs associated with repair, maintenance, and long-term resilience.

Within this context, the Blue Mountains City Council introduced a Paid Visitor Parking Scheme as part of a broader strategy to address infrastructure funding pressures. The Council framed the scheme as a response to an estimated $400 million investment gap required to maintain infrastructure to a "Fit for Future" standard and improve resilience to climate change and natural disasters. The policy aimed to generate revenue from visitors to support infrastructure maintenance, service renewal, and road repairs, while minimising impacts on residents through the provision of free parking permits. It was also positioned as an equity-based approach, whereby visitors contribute financially to the infrastructure they utilise. While an earlier attempt to introduce paid parking in 2019 was abandoned following strong community backlash (ABC 2023), the policy has since been reintroduced in a revised form that reflects both fiscal necessity and changing political conditions. This approach is not unique to the Blue Mountains. Other local governments have similarly introduced paid visitor parking as a mechanism to generate revenue for infrastructure maintenance and to more equitably distribute costs between residents and visitors. For example, the Mornington Peninsula Shire implemented a Visitor Paid Parking Pilot explicitly aimed at funding foreshore infrastructure, improving access, and sharing maintenance costs, with evaluation findings indicating that net income from the scheme contributes directly to infrastructure improvement and ongoing asset management (MPSC 2024).

Despite this policy rationale, the introduction of paid visitor parking represents a significant shift in how public space is accessed and funded, and has the potential to affect residents, visitors, and local businesses in different ways. It also presents a valuable natural experiment, providing an opportunity to examine how communities respond to the introduction of user-pays mechanisms in traditionally free public spaces, particularly in the context of climate-driven infrastructure funding pressures. Understanding how such policies are perceived and experienced by the community is critical, particularly where implementation intersects with issues of trust, communication, and fairness.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Parking Demand and the Growth of Car Use

As urban populations and car ownership increase, parking has become an increasingly contested urban resource. Competition for limited curb space often generates congestion, inefficient land

use, and conflicts between residents, visitors, and businesses. Consequently, parking is widely recognised as an important urban policy tool influencing travel behaviour, accessibility, and land-use outcomes (Marsden 2006, Mingardo et al. 2015, Kong et al. 2024). Despite this importance, parking historically received less academic attention than other transport policy instruments such as congestion pricing or public transport investment (Ison and Rye 2006).

A key argument in the literature is that parking is frequently underpriced relative to its true social cost. When parking is free or inexpensive, its costs are embedded in housing and development rather than paid directly by drivers (Shoup 1997). Minimum parking requirements also encourage oversupply, reinforcing car dependence and increasing development costs (Shoup 1997, Shoup 2011). Underpriced curb parking can also contribute to congestion because drivers often cruise for cheaper spaces instead of using available off-street facilities (Shoup 2006). Because road pricing is often politically difficult to implement, parking policy is commonly used as a "second-best" instrument for managing congestion and influencing travel behaviour (Verhoef et al. 1995, Button 2006). The structure of parking markets can further complicate policy design. In dense areas, parking facilities may possess local market power because drivers incur walking costs between parking locations and destinations (Arnott 2006).

2.2. Effects of Parking Pricing on Travel Behaviour

Research consistently shows that parking pricing influences travel behaviour and parking demand, although the magnitude of responses varies by context. Evidence from Amsterdam shows that increased parking prices reduced parking demand and slightly reduced citywide traffic levels (Ostermeijer et al. 2022). Studies of off-street parking markets also find demand to be price elastic when alternatives exist (Seya et al. 2024), while price increases in Chinese cities have been shown to reduce parking duration and encourage shorter stays as drivers adjust over time (Wang et al. 2020). Parking pricing can also influence broader travel decisions. For example, parking price was found to be the most significant factor affecting whether drivers chose to park in the Sydney CBD or shift to alternative travel options (Hensher and King 2001). Similarly, comparisons of congestion charges and parking fees suggest both influence travel behaviour, although congestion pricing tends to generate stronger responses (Albert and Mahalel 2006). However, pricing alone does not always produce strong behavioural changes. Evidence suggests time restrictions may have a greater effect on parking turnover than price increases alone (Mingardo et al. 2022). More comprehensive approaches combining pricing, supply management, and intelligent parking systems may therefore be more effective in improving parking system performance (Najmi et al. 2021). These integrated strategies reflect a broader shift toward coordinated parking demand management (Mingardo et al. 2015).

2.3. Parking Policies in Retail and Visitor Destinations

Parking policy can influence visitor behaviour, particularly in retail centres and tourist destinations. Studies examining the introduction of paid parking in shopping areas suggest that pricing can reduce car-based visits and alter consumer behaviour. For example, paid parking in a Melbourne retail precinct reduced parking occupancy and prompted some visitors to change travel behaviour (Au and Young 2016), while similar policies in a Dutch shopping centre reduced visit frequency and shopping expenditures in the short term (van der Waerden et al. 2009). Nevertheless, the relationship between parking pricing and economic activity is complex.

Reviews suggest concerns about negative economic impacts are often overstated, as retail performance depends on many factors beyond parking availability (Marsden 2006).

In tourist destinations, parking price, travel time, and accessibility can influence visitor decisions, although leisure travellers often prioritise convenience and experience factors (Anderson et al. 2006). Parking pricing combined with park-and-ride systems may reduce congestion in high-demand areas such as beaches or scenic destinations (Antolín et al. 2019, Jou et al. 2024). In nature-based recreation areas, parking capacity itself can strongly influence visitor numbers and environmental pressures (Weitowitz et al. 2019). Visitor fees are also increasingly used by park agencies as public funding declines (Van Sickle and Eagles 1998).

2.4. Public Acceptance and Reactions to Paid Parking Schemes

Although parking pricing can influence travel behaviour, its implementation is often shaped by public acceptance and political feasibility (Ison and Rye 2006, Kong et al. 2024). Parking policies directly affect every day travel costs and therefore frequently generate strong public reactions. Perceptions of fairness are particularly important. Even economically efficient policies may face resistance if users believe charges are unjustified or disproportionately affect certain groups (Button 2006). Workplace parking policies illustrate these challenges, as employees may perceive charges as unfair costs associated with commuting (Rye and Ison 2005). Nevertheless, implementation can be more successful when objectives are clearly communicated and revenues are reinvested into transport improvements.

Financial incentives can also influence responses. Workplace parking “cash-out” programs, where employees receive compensation for giving up parking spaces, can encourage some commuters to shift travel modes (Watters et al. 2006). Public attitudes may also be shaped by environmental awareness, with individuals who recognise environmental consequences of car use showing greater support for parking pricing policies (Kresnanto et al. 2025). Equity considerations also influence acceptability. Dynamic pricing strategies may improve efficiency but risk disproportionately affecting lower-income drivers unless social equity is considered (Kappenberger et al. 2025). Public support may therefore depend on how revenues are used. Allocating parking revenues to neighbourhood improvements or public services can increase community support by providing visible local benefits (Shoup et al. 2017). User satisfaction with parking systems is also influenced by operational factors such as payment systems, parking availability, and congestion management. Studies suggest that while users may value digital payment options, dissatisfaction often remains high where parking supply or congestion problems persist (Ahmadian et al. 2025).

2.5. Research Objectives and Contribution

This paper contributes to the literature on parking policy by examining how local communities interpret, evaluate, and respond to the introduction of paid parking in a tourism-oriented setting. While existing research has largely focused on the economic and behavioural impacts of parking pricing, including effects on demand, travel behaviour, and congestion, less attention has been given to how such policies are understood, contested, and legitimised by affected communities. This is a critical gap, given that parking reforms are highly visible, directly affect everyday mobility, and are frequently shaped by perceptions of fairness, institutional trust, and governance credibility. The study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence from a real-world policy

implementation in the Blue Mountains, where parking policy intersects with tourism pressures, infrastructure funding constraints, and local place identity. By treating the introduction of paid visitor parking as a natural experiment, the paper examines how policy intent is translated into public interpretation, and how alignment or misalignment between these influences support for the policy. In doing so, it moves beyond conventional evaluations of parking pricing as a technical instrument, and instead situates it within broader questions of legitimacy, trust, and public acceptance.

The study has three primary objectives. First, it examines how residents interpret the purpose of the scheme, particularly in relation to revenue generation, infrastructure funding, and user-pays principles. Second, it evaluates perceptions of fairness and legitimacy, with a focus on the role of institutional trust, communication, and perceived proportionality. Third, it identifies distinct attitudinal segments within the community, demonstrating how different combinations of trust, normative beliefs, and engagement shape responses to the policy. By integrating quantitative segmentation with qualitative analysis of interpretive frames, and by revisiting the community following implementation, the paper provides insight into how attitudes toward parking pricing evolve over time. The findings demonstrate that support for parking policy is not primarily determined by demographic characteristics or exposure to costs, but by underlying beliefs about collective responsibility and institutional trust. In this way, the paper contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the social and governance dynamics that underpin the acceptability of user-pays mechanisms in tourism-dependent and car-oriented communities, particularly in the context of climate-driven infrastructure funding pressures.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine community responses to the introduction of paid visitor parking in the Blue Mountains. The analytical strategy combines descriptive statistics, statistical inference, latent variable modelling, clustering techniques, and qualitative thematic analysis to provide both aggregate and disaggregated insights into attitudes toward the policy. Descriptive statistics are first used to summarise the demographic and behavioural characteristics of the sample, alongside key attitudinal measures. Inferential statistical techniques are then employed to identify statistically significant differences in responses across survey items and respondent groups. These methods provide an overall understanding of patterns in awareness, evaluation, and support for the policy.

To examine heterogeneity in attitudes, a multi-stage segmentation approach is implemented. The first stage involves reducing a large set of attitudinal indicators into a smaller number of underlying latent constructs using exploratory factor analysis. This technique identifies the common dimensions that structure responses across multiple survey items, allowing for a more parsimonious representation of attitudes. Principal component extraction with orthogonal rotation is applied to ensure that the resulting constructs are statistically independent and interpretable. Factor scores are then calculated for each respondent, providing standardised measures of their position on each latent dimension. In the second stage, these factor scores are used as inputs to a k-means clustering algorithm to identify distinct attitudinal segments within the sample. The objective of clustering is to group respondents such that individuals within each segment exhibit similar attitudinal profiles, while differences between segments are maximised. Multiple cluster solutions are tested, with the final number of segments determined through a

combination of statistical fit measures and interpretability of the resulting groups. This approach enables the identification of meaningful patterns in how respondents differ in their support for, and interpretation of, the paid parking scheme.

The third stage integrates qualitative analysis to provide deeper insight into the attitudinal segments identified. Open-ended survey responses are analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in how respondents describe the purpose, impacts, and fairness of the policy. Coding is conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being imposed a priori. Responses are first organised by attitudinal segment, enabling comparison of how different groups frame and interpret the policy. Themes are then iteratively developed, reviewed, and refined to ensure consistency and analytical clarity. This combined quantitative and qualitative approach allows the study to move beyond surface-level attitudes, revealing the underlying interpretive frameworks that shape support and opposition. Finally, the study incorporates a follow-up survey conducted approximately three years after the policy's introduction. While not a panel design, this repeated cross-sectional approach provides indicative insight into how perceptions and experiences may evolve over time, particularly in relation to communication, trust, and lived experience of the scheme.

4. Main Data Collection and Sample

Data were collected from 194 respondents through an online survey, with participants recruited via letterbox drops within the BMCC area and locally targeted Facebook advertisements. The sampling approach was not designed to produce a statistically representative cross-section of the population. Instead, it aimed to capture responses from residents who were sufficiently engaged with, or affected by, the introduction of paid parking to hold and express an opinion. This is consistent with the study's focus on understanding how parking policy is interpreted, evaluated, and contested at the community level, rather than estimating population-level attitudes. As such, the sample is best understood as reflecting the perspectives of more vocal or engaged community members, including those with both supportive and critical views. This approach is appropriate for the study's quasi mixed-methods design, which seeks to identify patterns in how residents make sense of the policy and the factors shaping perceptions of fairness, legitimacy, and user-pays principles.

The survey was in field for the month of August 2023, noting that the paid visitor parking scheme was introduced in five town centres in the Blue Mountains in July 2023, with an extension to key tourist destination sites from November 2023. The survey sample broadly reflects key structural characteristics of the Blue Mountains Local Government Area, which has a relatively small population of 78,121 (ABS, 2021), however respondents were older on average (52 years vs. 46 years, though only respondents 18 year or older were eligible to participate), females were also overrepresented (64% vs. 51%), and the personal income of respondents in the sample ($73,650) is lower than the census median ($91,312). The average of two cars per household is consistent with census patterns; and the general car-dependent geography of the council area. Overall, the sample can be considered broadly representative of established resident households within the LGA, though findings should be interpreted as reflecting primarily the perspectives of older, long-term, civically engaged residents.

5. Results

5.1. Overview of Response to the Paid Parking Scheme

5.1.1. Awareness of Paid Visitor Parking Scheme

Respondents were asked if they were aware of the introduction of visitor paid parking and given the timing of the survey (shortly after its introduction) it is not surprising that the vast majority indicated that they were (see Figure 1). Asked when they first became aware, the largest group of respondents (around 45%) stated they became aware 4–8 months before installation, indicating awareness built mainly in early 2023 several months prior to implementation. However, a notable minority indicated that they only became aware shortly before, or after, physical installation of parking infrastructure. When asked about the locations in which parking would be introduced, almost all (97% of respondents indicated that they did). Of those that stated they did know the locations, approximately 90% correctly identified one or more locations included in the paid parking rollout (the most frequently cited were the Upper Mountains town centres of Katoomba, Leura, Wentworth Falls and Blackheath, along with Glenbrook village). Only a very small minority of responses reflected uncertainty.

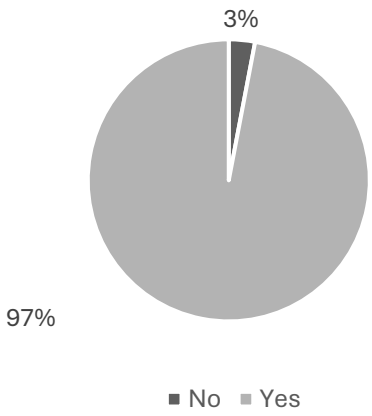

Figure 1: Awareness of Introduction of Visitor Paid Parking

In an open text question, respondents were asked to describe, in their own words, what they believed to be the BMCC's primary reasons for introducing paid parking. Responses were thematically coded to identify perceived policy motivations and evaluative tone; Table 1 displays these coding results. Participants largely interpreted the introduction of paid parking through a financial lens. The most common perceived motivation was revenue generation, with approximately half of respondents explicitly stating that Council introduced paid parking to "raise revenue," "make money," or address financial shortfalls. A further group linked revenue generation directly to infrastructure maintenance, particularly road repairs and upkeep of tourist facilities.

Many respondents also articulated a clear user-pays interpretation, suggesting that visitors should contribute to the costs associated with maintaining infrastructure used by tourists.

Others identified the policy as a means of avoiding increases in residential rates, indicating awareness of fiscal trade-offs facing Council. References to natural disasters, climate change impacts, and post-flood or bushfire repair costs were present but less frequent, suggesting partial but not widespread recognition of this element of Council's rationale. Only a small minority identified parking demand management or congestion reduction as a primary objective. Overall, there was substantial alignment between Council's stated objectives and community understanding at a broad conceptual level. Respondents generally recognised that the policy was intended to generate revenue to support infrastructure and reduce financial pressure on residents. The frequent identification of visitor contributions and infrastructure funding suggests that key elements of Council's messaging were received and understood.

Table 1: Believed Reasons for Introduction of Visitor Paid Parking

Primary Perceived Reason	Definition / Key Terms	Approx. %
Revenue generation	*Money, revenue, cash, budget*	50%
Infrastructure funding	*Roads, maintenance, facilities, repairs*	25%
Visitor/user-pays principle	*Tourists contributing financially*	20%
Avoid rate increases	*Protecting residents from higher rates*	15%
Disaster/climate recovery	*Floods, bushfires, climate impacts*	10%
Parking management	*Congestion, turnover, access*	5%

However, the emphasis placed by respondents differed from Council's framing in several important respects. First, respondents overwhelmingly simplified the rationale to revenue generation, whereas Council presented the scheme as part of a broader strategic response encompassing infrastructure sustainability, climate resilience, and long-term asset renewal. The complexity of the policy narrative appears to have been reduced in public interpretation to a single dominant explanation: financial necessity. Second, evaluative tone varied considerably. While many respondents accepted revenue raising as reasonable or necessary, a notable proportion framed the policy negatively, describing it as a "cash grab" or attributing it to perceived financial mismanagement. Importantly, these responses did not generally reflect misunderstanding of the policy's purpose; rather, they represented disagreement with or distrust of Council's justification.

Respondents were also asked to state what they thought would be a reasonable parking fare for the BMCC to charge. Comparison of official pricing with community median preferences reveals a pattern of moderate price tolerance coupled with sensitivity to upper-tier charges. Community responses most frequently clustered between $3 and $5 per hour, aligning closely with the Council's $4 per hour off-peak rate but falling below the $6 per hour peak charge. The divergence is more pronounced for the daily pass: while BMCC adopted a $38 per day rate in Stage 1, many respondents suggested substantially lower daily caps, typically in the $15–$25 range where specified.

With respect to possible exposure to the paid parking scheme, respondents were asked how often they visited the strategic areas in which visitor paid parking was to be introduced, with

visitation (by car) frequency varied considerably across centres. Glenbrook was used most frequently (approximately 1.72 days per week), indicating its function as a regular-use local centre. In contrast, Blackheath and Wentworth Falls were visited less than once per week on average, suggesting more occasional use by residents surveyed. Finally for this section, most respondents (78%) reported successfully obtaining their parking permits, with 70% indicating the process was relatively easy and a further 8% reporting success despite some difficulty. Only 5% reported abandoning the process due to complexity or technical issues. These results indicate that the permit registration system was broadly accessible and operationally effective for most residents. Anticipated difficulty was also low among those yet to apply, with only 4% expecting the process to be overly complicated.

5.1.2. Evaluation of Council Communication

Figure 2 shows that respondents reported generally positive views towards the roll-out of the scheme, with the largest proportions clustered in the "agree" and "strongly agree" with respect to consultation about, justification of, and access to information about, the visitor paid parking scheme. Testing the average level of agreement with each statement on the 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) scale confirmed significant differences across the three evaluations ($F = 16.68$, $p < .001$), with further testing revealing that the mean ratings for consultation ($\mu = 4.4$) being significantly lower than clarity of explanation ($\mu = 4.9$, $t = -4.49$, $p < .001$) and ease of finding information ($\mu = 5.1$, $t = -5.26$, $p < .001$). Taken together, the results indicate that respondents broadly recognised the availability and clarity of information about the policy but were significantly less convinced that the council had engaged in meaningful prior consultation.

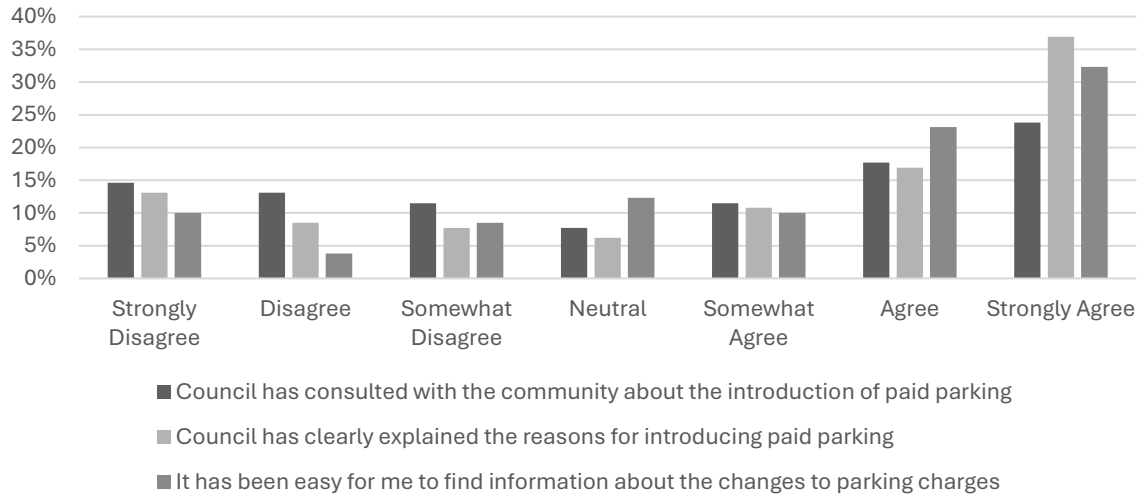

Figure 2: Evaluation of Consultation, Information and Justification

Respondents were further asked whether they believed that the BMCC had done all it could to make people aware of the introduction of paid parking in strategic locations. Figure 3 shows that two-thirds of respondents agreed that it had. When asked, what if anything else, the BMCC could have done, qualitative responses indicate that a majority of participants considered the Council's

communication efforts to be broadly adequate, approximately 50% explicitly stated that nothing more could reasonably have been done, often defending Council communication and referencing multiple information channels, including rate notice inserts, letterbox drops, Blue Mountains Gazette articles, social media posts, the Council website, and public meetings. Several respondents suggested that information availability was high and attributed ongoing confusion to limited public engagement rather than communication failure.

However, qualitative feedback also clarifies the nature of dissent among the minority who were less satisfied. Rather than indicating a lack of communication reach, critiques centred on procedural and relational issues. Around 15–20% of respondents preferred more direct or personalised notification (such as automatic permits or individual mail-outs), while 10–15% argued that consultation should have occurred earlier, before implementation decisions were finalised. Smaller groups called for greater on-the-ground visibility (e.g., signage or information stalls) or clearer explanations regarding enforcement, monitoring, and how revenue would be used. A similarly sized minority framed concerns in strongly distrustful terms, linking communication shortcomings to broader governance criticisms. Overall, the findings suggest that communication reach was extensive, but at the time of implementation the persuasiveness and perceived fairness of the policy remained contested among a small subset of residents.

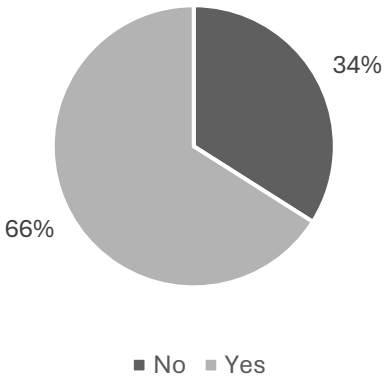

Figure 3: Has BMCC Done All It Can to Raise Awareness of Introduction

5.1.3. Commonly Mentioned Objections

In the series of open-ended questions around location, timing, cost and communication of the BMCC paid visitor parking scheme, any dissatisfaction identified was rarely centred on the mechanics of communication itself. Instead, opposition was more deeply rooted in concerns about institutional trust, economic fairness, and procedural legitimacy. Many critical respondents demonstrated clear awareness of the Council's stated financial rationale, yet interpreted the policy through a governance lens, framing paid parking as evidence of broader institutional shortcomings. Respondents frequently characterised the scheme as a "*cash grab*" or argued that Council was seeking to "*make money to cover mismanagement of council funds*" with several calling for greater transparency regarding expenditure priorities rather than

additional communication. These responses suggest that disagreement often reflected scepticism toward institutional decision-making rather than informational deficits.

Economic fairness considerations also emerged as a prominent dimension shaping dissent. Some participants expressed concern that cumulative parking costs could discourage visitation or alter travel behaviour, particularly for tourists visiting multiple locations within a single trip. Respondents noted that visitors could face "upwards of $45–90+ in parking fees," potentially leading them to bypass smaller centres, while others described the charges as effectively functioning as a "coffee tax" in popular villages. These concerns were frequently framed in terms of local economic vitality, with participants suggesting that pricing structures might disproportionately affect small businesses or shorter-stay visitors. Importantly, however, even critical respondents often accepted the underlying principle that visitors should contribute financially to infrastructure upkeep, indicating that resistance was directed more toward perceived proportionality and implementation design than toward the policy instrument itself.

5.1.4. Stakeholder Impact of Visitor Paid Parking

Survey respondents, not the stakeholders themselves, were asked to rate the potential impact of the scheme on various stakeholder groups, on a scale from 1 (extremely negative) to 7 (extremely positive). Figure 4 presents the average response for each group. On average, respondents believed that the Blue Mountains City Council would benefit positively from the scheme, while visitors of residents were viewed as the most negatively affected group, with mean ratings falling slightly below the neutral midpoint. ANOVA examining perceived impacts across stakeholder groups revealed a strong overall effect of stakeholder type, ($F = 31.57$, $p < .001$), indicating that respondents evaluated the consequences of the policy very differently depending on who was perceived to be affected. Post-hoc testing[1] revealed three statistically distinct perceptual clusters.

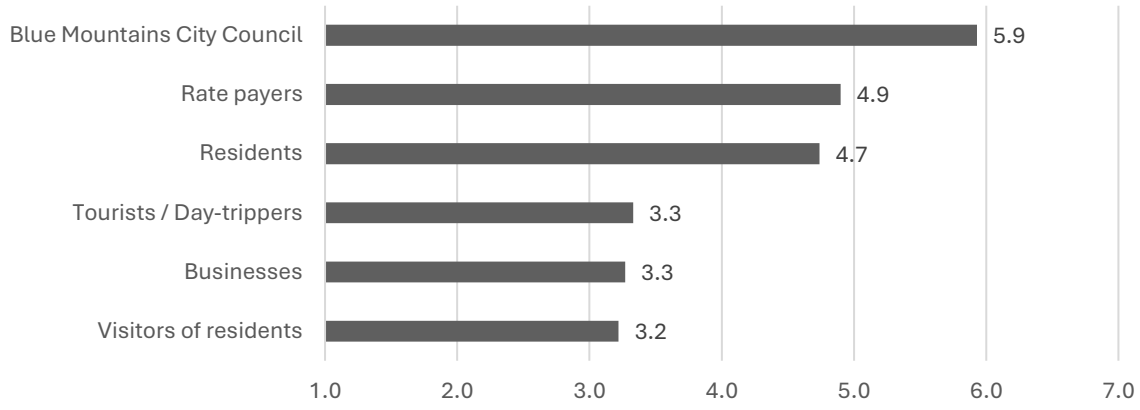

Figure 4: Respondents' Assessment of the Scheme's Impact Across Stakeholder Groups

[1] Given the number of comparisons levels of significance can be provided on request.

First, local stakeholders, namely residents and ratepayers, were not significantly different from one another, suggesting respondents conceptualised these groups as similarly embedded beneficiaries of the policy. Second, visitor economy stakeholders, including visitors, tourists and businesses, were statistically indistinguishable, indicating that respondents perceived impacts on externally oriented economic actors as broadly similar. Third, the Council formed a distinct category, being evaluated significantly differently from most other groups and perceived as the primary beneficiary of paid parking. Council evaluations were not significantly different from ratepayers, suggesting that some respondents viewed institutional gains as indirectly aligned with local fiscal benefits. Overall, the results indicate that respondents interpret paid parking through a distributive lens, distinguishing between locally embedded interests, visitor economy actors and the institutional beneficiary of the policy.

5.1.5. Paid Parking in Other Council Areas

Almost three out of every four respondents (72%) stated that they travelled to other areas in the wider Sydney region that had paid parking. When asked what locations, responses overwhelmingly referenced high-tourism or high-density urban areas where paid parking is already normalised, particularly the Sydney CBD, coastal tourism precincts, and major metropolitan centres. Several participants explicitly noted that paid parking is widespread and familiar, with comments such as "*Most councils in the Sydney basin have some form of paid parking…it's very common*" and "*Every other council I visit has paid street parking*". This suggests that most respondents possess direct experiential familiarity with paid parking systems rather than encountering the policy as a novel intervention. As shown in Figure 5, a majority of respondents (54%) expressed agreement with paid parking in other council areas, compared with 21% who disagreed and 24% who selected a neutral position.

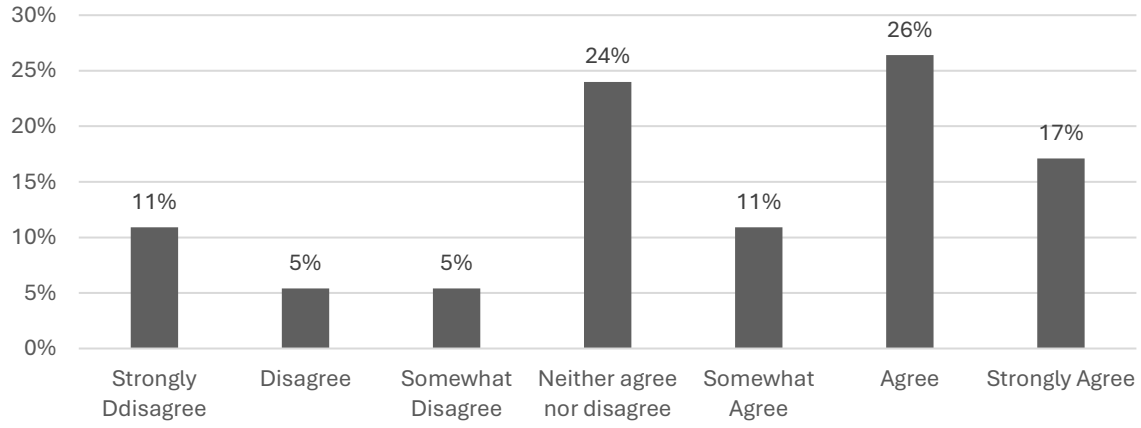

Figure 5: Comparison of BMCC to Other Paid Parking Areas is Appropriate

These findings indicate that paid parking as a policy instrument is broadly accepted when implemented in other jurisdictions, reinforcing the conclusion that opposition to the Blue Mountains scheme is not driven by unfamiliarity with or principled rejection of parking pricing per se. However, the relatively high proportion of neutral responses suggests that a non-trivial

segment of the sample remains ambivalent about paid parking more generally. This ambivalence may reflect conditional acceptance rather than strong endorsement, indicating that attitudes toward parking charges are malleable and context dependent. The distribution supports the interpretation that resistance to the Blue Mountains scheme reflects place-based legitimacy judgements, including perceptions of fairness, proportionality, and institutional trust, rather than categorical opposition to paid parking as a policy tool.

Respondents were also asked to further contextualise their response on this scale, explaining why they felt it was or was not reasonable for the BMCC to be compared to other locations where there is paid parking. Among respondents who rejected comparisons between the Blue Mountains and metropolitan or beachside councils, objections were structured and consistent rather than purely emotive. The most common argument concerned differences in population density and parking demand, with respondents noting that areas such as Bondi Beach or inner Sydney experience far greater congestion pressure. Many emphasised that tourism in the Blue Mountains is spatially dispersed, often involves long-duration activities such as multi-hour hikes, and lacks the concentrated demand characteristic of coastal precincts. Respondents also highlighted limited public transport alternatives, contrasting frequent bus and rail access in metropolitan areas with comparatively sparse services in the Mountains. Concerns about economic fragility were prominent, particularly the potential impact on small-town businesses and day visitors from neighbouring council areas. Finally, a subset of responses framed the issue in terms of place identity, arguing that a World Heritage landscape and regional community should not be evaluated against dense urban beach suburbs.

Respondents who considered comparisons with other councils reasonable overwhelmingly justified this position by emphasising the Blue Mountains' status as a major tourist destination. Many argued that, like Bondi Beach or inner-city attractions, the region experiences substantial visitor volumes that place pressure on infrastructure and public amenities. Consequently, respondents frequently invoked a user-pays principle, suggesting that visitors should contribute financially to maintenance costs rather than relying solely on local ratepayers. Several responses highlighted the scale of visitation and associated wear on facilities, noting that heavy tourist use creates funding demands comparable to those faced by coastal or metropolitan tourist precincts. Others emphasised parking management benefits, arguing that pricing encourages turnover and improves access in high-demand locations. A smaller group framed comparisons as reasonable because paid parking has become standard practice across many Australian councils.

5.1.6. Normative Beliefs About Fairness, Funding, and User-Pays Principles

Respondents were asked to evaluate a series of statements concerning the principles underpinning BMCC's paid parking policy on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The strongest average agreement was with principle that the BMCC should investigate as many funding streams as possible, and with significant disagreement that BMCC costs should be covered by council rates alone. ANOVA testing once again revealed significant differences in mean agreement across the scale items ($F = 75.74$, $p<0.001$). Post-hoc comparisons revealed a coherent attitudinal structure. Support for investigating new revenue streams, user-pays principles, and expecting non-residents to contribute did not significantly differ from one another, suggesting a shared fiscal responsibility framework. In contrast, the

statement that infrastructure costs should be funded through rates only was significantly lower than most alternative funding principles, indicating limited support for exclusive ratepayer funding. The belief that charging for parking is unfair was statistically distinct from user-pays and revenue-based principles, reflecting a minority moral opposition rather than disagreement about fiscal necessity. Overall, the findings demonstrate that respondents differentiate clearly between funding philosophy, fairness concerns, and practical management considerations.

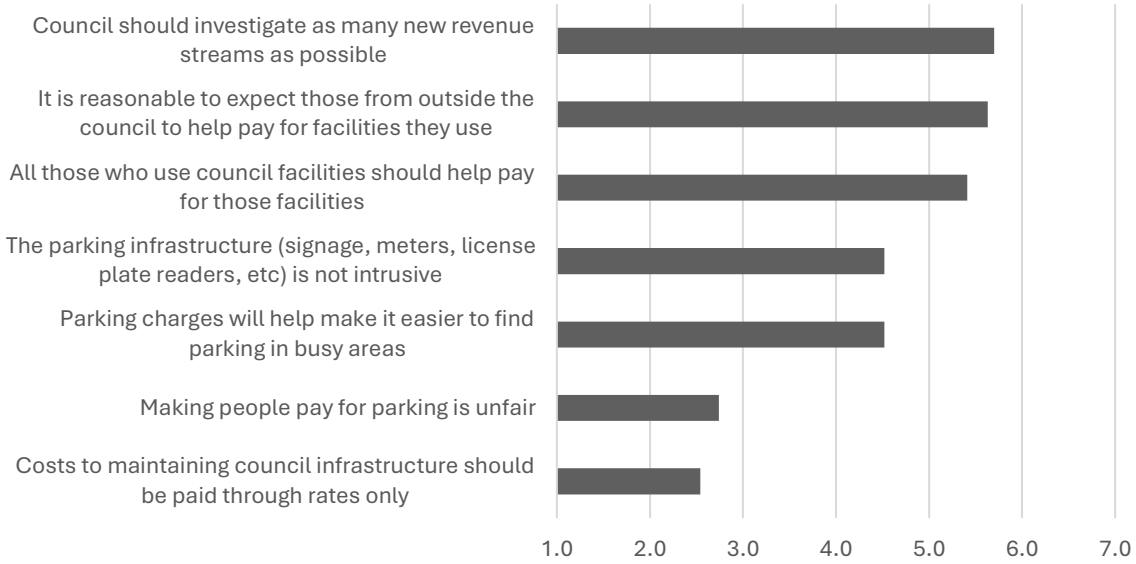

Figure 6: Attitudes Towards Council Costs and Paid Parking

5.1.7. Engagement with Council Decision Making

To better contextualise the nature of the sample, respondents were asked to rate how engaged they were with the process of BMCC decision making, on a 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) scale. The scale averages are shown in Figure 7. ANOVA revealed a significant difference in agreement across the three items ($F = 87.56$, $p < .001$), and post hoc comparisons showed no significant difference between perceived information accessibility and attentiveness to council activities, suggesting respondents who follow council affairs closely also generally perceive information as accessible. However, participation in formal engagement processes differed significantly from both information accessibility and attentiveness, with substantially lower agreement levels. These findings indicate a clear engagement gradient in which residents report being informed and attentive but comparatively unlikely to participate directly in institutional forums. The results suggest that civic engagement in this context is characterised more by relatively more informational awareness than by active participation, highlighting a behavioural gap with respect to monitoring local governance and engaging through formal deliberative mechanisms.

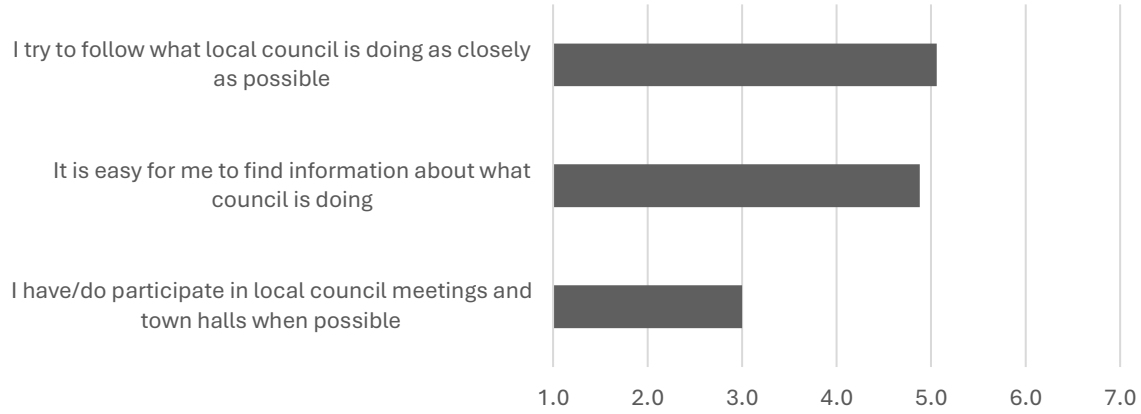

Figure 7: Engagement with BMCC Decision Making

5.1.8. Reaction and Negativity to the Paid Parking Scheme

As shown in Figure 8, almost two-thirds of respondents (63%) reported that paid parking would not change their behaviour. Among those anticipating behavioural change, responses were far more likely to involve spatial displacement (parking outside charging zones) than modal substitution, with only 2% indicating a shift to alternative transport. These findings suggest that paid parking is unlikely to significantly reduce car use but may redistribute parking demand geographically. A smaller proportion of respondents indicated they might avoid visiting altogether, raising potential concerns regarding economic displacement effects.

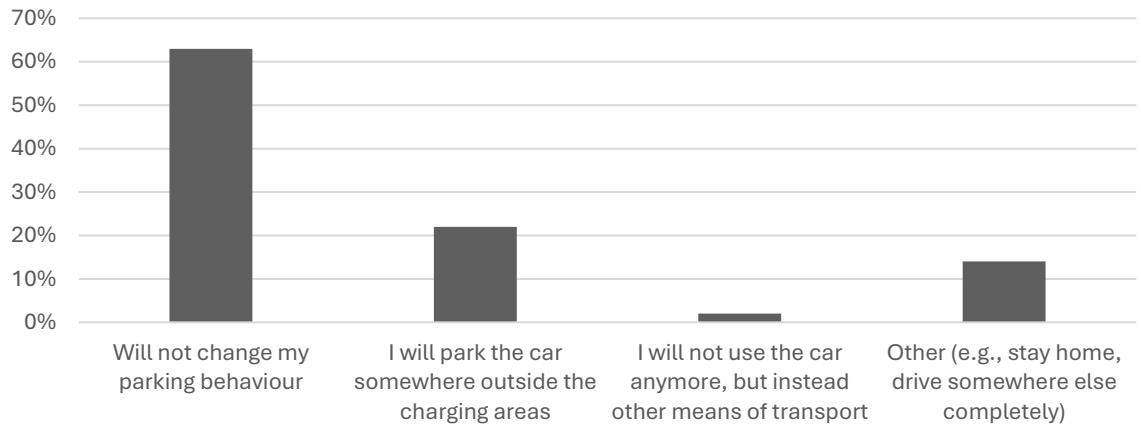

Figure 8: Impact of Paid Parking on Behaviour

With respect to negatively surrounding the introduction of the scheme, a large majority of respondents (78%) reported having seen and read negative publicity or counter-opinions regarding the introduction of paid parking, while only 6% indicated no exposure. Figure 9 shows the extent to which people agreed or disagreed with this negative commentary, with most not agreeing with those counter-opinions. A total of 58% expressed disagreement with the negative

framing, compared with 34% who agreed. This suggests that while the policy debate was highly visible within the community, counter-narratives were not universally persuasive. The findings indicate that respondents were active evaluators rather than passive recipients of public discourse, forming independent judgments despite widespread circulation of critical messaging.

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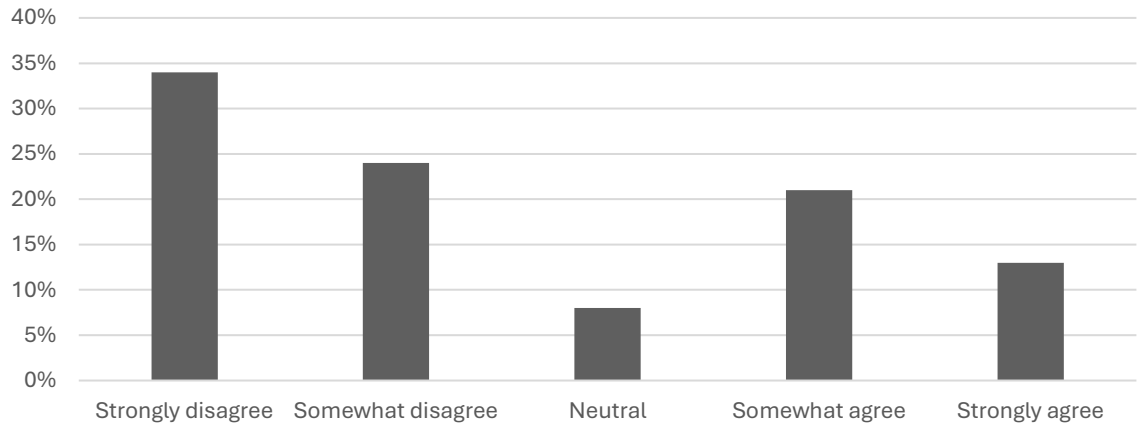

Figure 9: Agreement with Negative Commentary

5.2. Segmentation of Attitudinal Response to Visitor Paid Parking

To better understand the reaction to the implementation of the scheme, *k*-means cluster analysis was used to segment the sample into different attitudinal groups. This was done via a two-stage process. Firstly, the attitudinal questions were analysed via factor analysis in order to reduce the diverse attitudes explored into a parsimonious set of underlying attitudinal constructs. Table A1 in the appendix provides the results of this analysis, noting that five underlying attitudinal constructs were identified. The data was well suited to factor analysis, with a high Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (0.912) and a highly significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (χ^2 = 1984.888, $p < .001$). The five-factor solution reflects distinct but related dimensions of attitudes toward paid parking and local governance.

Policy Support captures overall endorsement of the paid parking scheme, reflecting positive evaluations of its impacts, perceived effectiveness, and rejection of claims that it is unfair or should be funded solely through rates. Institutional Trust represents confidence in the council's

transparency, communication, and consultation processes, indicating trust in how decisions are made and explained. Collective Responsibility reflects a normative belief that the costs of public infrastructure should be shared among those who benefit, aligning with a user-pays philosophy. Revenue Ideology captures broader views about how councils should generate income, distinguishing between support for diversified revenue streams and reliance on traditional rate-based funding. Finally, Civic Engagement represents active involvement and attentiveness to local government affairs, reflecting participatory behaviours rather than policy attitudes. Together, these factors demonstrate that responses to paid parking are structured not only by views on the policy itself, but also by trust in institutions, funding principles, and levels of civic involvement.

In the second stage of the segmentation analysis, estimated factor scores for each respondent on the five identified constructs were entered into a k-means clustering algorithm. Using these latent dimensions rather than the full set of individual survey items ensured that clustering was based on the underlying attitudinal structure of the data, reducing noise and multicollinearity while improving interpretability. The factor scores provided a standardised measure of each respondent's relative position on Policy Support, Institutional Trust, Collective Responsibility, Revenue Ideology, and Civic Engagement, allowing the algorithm to group individuals with similar attitudinal profiles. The k-means procedure partitioned respondents into internally homogeneous and externally distinct clusters, such that individuals within each cluster shared similar configurations across the five latent constructs, while differences between clusters were maximised. The resulting segments therefore represent meaningful attitudinal groupings.

Through a lens of cluster appropriateness measures (shadow coefficients), size of clusters identified, and behavioural interpretability of the resulting clusters themselves, it was determined that a three-cluster solution was optimal. Respondents were allocated to one of these three clusters based on their specific combination of factor scores. To better understand differences in these latent constructs across clusters, ANOVA analysis was conducted. The strongest differentiation in factor scores occurs on *Collective Responsibility*, followed by *Policy Support*, then *Civic Engagement*, suggesting that differences in beliefs about shared funding obligations, support for the scheme, and levels of participation are the primary drivers of segmentation. *Institutional Trust* shows a more modest but still statistically significant difference between clusters. In contrast, *Revenue Ideology* is only weakly significant (at the 10% level), indicating broadly similar views across segments regarding revenue diversification versus rates-only funding.

Substantively, the three segments reflect distinct configurations of support, funding norms, trust, and engagement. **Engaged Supporters** (33%) exhibit high policy support, strong endorsement of collective responsibility, high civic engagement, and relatively high institutional trust, indicating a group that both backs the paid parking scheme and is confident in, and attentive to, council decision-making. **Reluctant Pragmatists** (58%), the largest segment, display mixed or below-average policy support alongside solid endorsement of collective responsibility, but lower levels of civic engagement and somewhat weaker trust. This suggests a group that accepts the user-pays principle in theory yet remains cautious or unenthusiastic about the scheme in practice, reflecting pragmatic acceptance rather than strong advocacy. In contrast, **Institutional Sceptics** (9%) are defined most clearly by very low endorsement of collective responsibility, low

institutional trust, and limited engagement. Although not uniformly opposed to revenue generation in general, their profile indicates scepticism toward the fairness and legitimacy of this particular funding approach and the institution implementing it. Together, these segments demonstrate that reactions to the scheme are structured less by broad revenue ideology and more by differences in funding norms, trust in council, and levels of civic involvement.

Table 2: Profile of Resulting Attitudinal Segmentation

	Engaged Supporters (33%)	**Reluctant Pragmatists (58%)**	**Institutional Sceptics (9%)**	*F*	*p*
Policy Support	High (+0.80)	Low (-0.48)	Neutral High (+0.15)	*33.19*	*<.001*
Collective Responsibility	Neutral High (+0.15)	Moderate High (+0.24)	Very Low (-2.19)	*53.58*	*<.001*
Civic Engagement	High (+0.72)	Low (-0.38)	Neutral Low (-0.19)	*21.78*	*<.001*
Institutional Trust	High (+0.36)	Moderate Low (-0.16)	Low (-0.34)	*4.44*	*0.014*
Revenue Ideology	Moderate Low (-0.24)	Neutral (+0.06)	High (0.48)	*2.55*	*0.082*

Note: Factor scores are standardised to zero. Positive values indicate above-average strength of attitude; negative values indicate below-average strength of attitude.

Further analysis was conducted to identify potential sociodemographic differences between the clusters, however cluster membership unrelated to age, gender, income, vehicle ownership, residential tenure, parental status, or the extent to which daily activities were embedded within the BMCC area. This lack of differentiation suggests that support or opposition is less a function of material self-interest than of perceived fairness, legitimacy, and governance credibility. Opposition in this case appears rooted not in socioeconomic disadvantage or differential exposure to costs, but in divergent interpretations of the appropriate role of local government and the fairness of revenue generation mechanisms.

5.3. Who Supports the Introduction of Visitor Paid Parking?

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked whether they supported the introduction of visitor paid parking without being provided with any explanation from Council. Support was already relatively high at this stage (72%). Later in the survey, respondents were presented with the official rationale provided by BMCC and asked again whether they supported the scheme; support rose slightly to 74%, representing a modest two–percentage point increase. This small shift indicates that attitudes toward the policy were largely pre-formed prior to exposure to the Council's explanatory framing provided in the survey question. This in turn suggests that many respondents were already familiar with, or aligned with, the Council's stated rationale prior to the survey. In this context, the official explanation likely provided little genuinely new information, or any information that was going to persuade those opposed to the scheme.

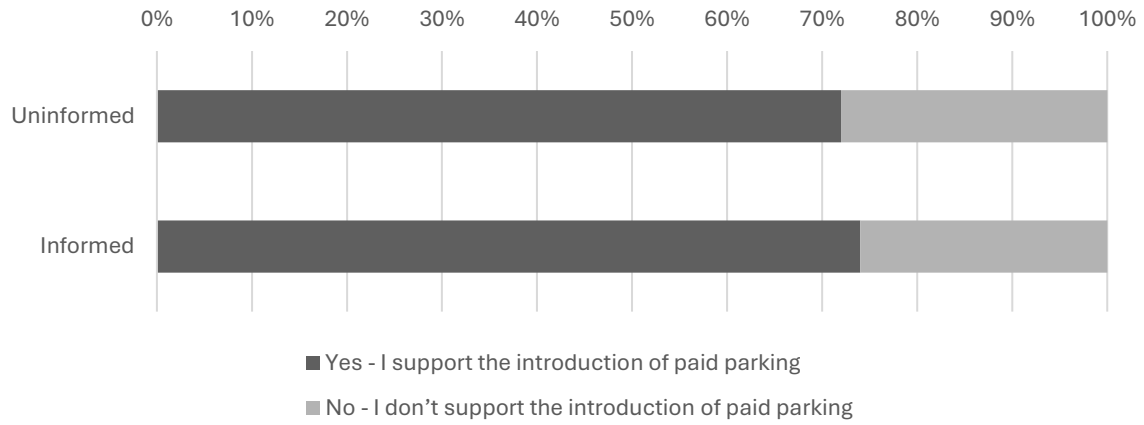

Figure 10: Support for the Introduction of Visitor Paid Parking

Support for the introduction of visitor paid parking was cross-tabulated against attitudinal segment membership, with the different levels of support by segment shown in Figure 11. Support for paid parking varies significantly across the three attitudinal segments under both uninformed ($\chi^2 = 24.60$, $p < .001$) and informed ($\chi^2 = 19.24$, $p < .001$) conditions. As expected, **Engaged Supporters** demonstrate near-universal backing for the scheme in both scenarios (98%), reinforcing the interpretation that this group is firmly aligned with the policy and the institution implementing it. Their support is stable and unaffected by additional informational framing, suggesting that their position is grounded in strong prior normative and institutional alignment.

The pattern among **Reluctant Pragmatists** is more divided. Under uninformed conditions, support is narrowly positive (55%), rising modestly to 60% after exposure to the Council's rationale. This shift, while small, is directionally consistent with their profile: they accept collective responsibility in principle but remain cautious and only moderately trusting. The explanation appears to provide some reassurance, though not enough to produce overwhelming support. **Institutional Sceptics**, meanwhile, show majority support under both conditions (82% uninformed; 73% informed), though support declines slightly after the rationale is presented. This pattern suggests that their scepticism is not directed at revenue generation per se, but at governance credibility and fiscal stewardship. While they appear open to a broader mix of funding sources, their lower levels of trust and rejection of collective responsibility norms indicate concern about how revenues will be managed, whether the burden will be distributed fairly, and perhaps whether ratepayers will or will not be the target of the new charges. Overall, the persistence of significant differences across clusters, coupled with relatively modest shifts following informational framing, reinforces the conclusion that attitudes toward the scheme are structured primarily by underlying beliefs about responsibility and institutional trust rather than by short-term exposure to policy messaging.

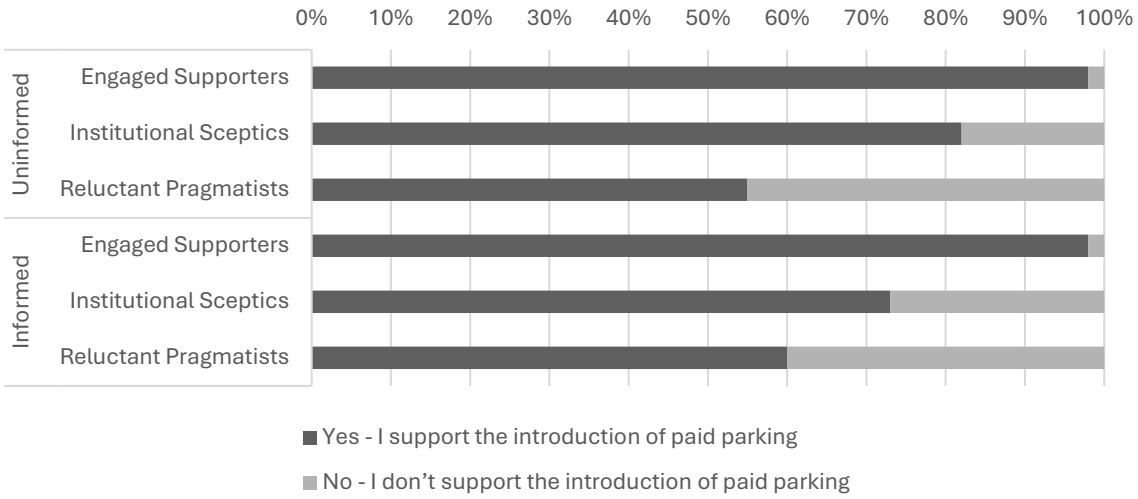

Figure 11: Support for Visitor Paid Parking by Attitudinal Segment

5.4. Insight into What Might Prompt Support or Generate Objection

To complement the quantitative segmentation analysis, qualitative responses already discussed in previous section were analysed in the context of which attitudinal segment the respondent was allocated to in the clustering process. The open ended questions centred around what respondents believed were the Council's main reasons for introducing paid parking (unpromoted), what else the Council could have done to better inform residents and businesses, why comparisons with other paid parking precincts were reasonable or unreasonable, and any additional comments regarding the strategy (an opportunity provided at the end of the survey itself). Table 3 shows the results of the thematic coding, which provides important contextual depth to the cluster solution and demonstrates that differences in support for the visitor paid parking scheme are structured not only by the strength of attitudes, but by the interpretive frames through which the policy is understood. The three segments differ systematically in how they narrate the purpose, legitimacy, and impacts of the scheme, and these narrative differences closely mirror observed variations in support levels.

Table 3: Qualitative Themes by Attitudinal Segment

Theme	Institutional Sceptics	Engaged Supporters	Reluctant Pragmatists
User-pays / tourists should contribute	55%	86%	55%
Infrastructure / maintenance rationale	18%	50%	29%
Revenue raising frame	55%	41%	69%
Price too high / expensive	18%	10%	27%
Business deterrence concerns	0%	12%	27%
Distrust / mismanagement	55%	0%	29%
Privacy / surveillance concerns	18%	7%	10%
Communication / consultation concerns	27%	19%	29%

Among **Engaged Supporters**, who exhibit near-universal support at 98 percent under both uninformed and informed conditions, the dominant frame is normative and distributive. A large majority explicitly invoke user-pays reasoning, often coupled with infrastructure maintenance arguments. Typical comments include statements such as, "*Visitors use the roads and facilities, so it is only fair they contribute*" and "*Like Bondi, we are a major tourist destination. Ratepayers should not foot the whole bill*". Infrastructure references are frequent, for example, "*We have over 4 million visitors. The roads and toilets do not maintain themselves*" and "*This is about fixing flood-damaged roads without increasing rates*". Distrust language is almost entirely absent. Instead, many respondents defend the Council's communication strategy: "*There has been plenty of information. If people did not know, they were not paying attention*". This narrative coherence aligns closely with their high policy support, high institutional trust, and high civic engagement. For this segment, the BMCC's rationale reinforces an already internalised fairness logic in which visitor contribution is normal, necessary, and legitimate.

The largest segment, **Reluctant Pragmatists**, displays a more ambivalent narrative structure that corresponds to their divided support. While over half still reference user-pays logic, their dominant framing shifts toward revenue raising and implementation concerns: "*I understand why they are doing it, but $12 an hour is ridiculous*" and "*The idea is fine, but it is poorly implemented*". Business impacts are more prominent in this group: "*This will hurt small businesses in Leura*"; "*People will just bypass Glenbrook and spend their money elsewhere*". Infrastructure rationales appear, but less frequently and often alongside reservations: "*Yes, tourists should help pay, but the fees are too high and the time limits too short*". Communication and design concerns are also evident: "*The signs are confusing*"; "*They needed better consultation before rolling it out*". These patterns align with their lower policy support and somewhat weaker institutional trust. Their position is not ideological opposition but conditional acceptance. Revenue is tolerated if it is perceived as proportionate, transparent, and economically sensitive. The modest increase in support after presentation of the Council's rationale suggests that information may reassure some members of this group but does not fully address practical and distributive concerns.

Institutional Sceptics exhibit a qualitatively distinct discourse that helps explain their more fragile support profile, which declines from 82 percent under uninformed conditions to 73 percent once the Council's rationale is explicitly stated. While some acknowledge the need for additional funding, this is frequently accompanied by distrust language and governance critique: "*Cash grab*"; "*Council wastes money already*"; and "*Show us exactly where the money goes*". Infrastructure references are less common and often framed sceptically: "*They say it is for roads, but rates keep going up anyway*". Concerns about fiscal stewardship and transparency are prominent (in line with the cash grab concerns): "*Be honest about what other fiscal measures are being taken*" and "*I do not trust them to spend it wisely*". A smaller subset express privacy concerns linked to number plate recognition and data retention. In this segment, revenue is interpreted less as fair redistribution and more as symptomatic of mismanagement or institutional overreach. The decline in support following exposure to the Council's rationale is consistent with this interpretation. When institutional justification becomes salient, scepticism about governance credibility is activated rather than reduced.

The thematic patterns reinforce the quantitative conclusion that segmentation is driven more by collective responsibility beliefs and institutional trust than by abstract revenue ideology.

References to revenue raising appear across all segments, but the meaning attached to revenue differs. For **Engaged Supporters**, revenue signifies fair burden shifting and responsible governance. For **Reluctant Pragmatists**, it raises questions about proportionality and economic impact. For **Institutional Sceptics**, it signals potential mismanagement and weak accountability. Support for paid parking therefore reflects not only acceptance of user-pays principles, but broader evaluations of legitimacy, competence, and fairness in local governance.

6. Longitudinal Insights into Community Responses to Paid Parking

A short follow-up survey was conducted in March 2026 to gauge how the BMCC community may evaluate the Paid Visitor Parking Scheme after almost 3 years of operation. The survey recruitment was conducted via the identical approach to the initial and more comprehensive survey conducted in 2023: via letterbox drops within the BMCC area and locally targeted Facebook advertisements. Again, the sampling approach was not designed to produce a statistically representative cross-section of the population, rather to target members of the affected community who might have a more vocal position on the scheme, one way or the other, to explore what lessons might arise from the experience.

This short follow-up survey again adopted a mixed-methods approach. It repeated key questions relating to consultation, communication, and information provision, as well as overall support for the scheme. In addition, it included qualitative questions exploring respondents' views on why BMCC introduced Visitor Paid Parking, their perspectives on how it was implemented, their personal experiences with it, and their assessment of how BMCC managed the process. A total of 170 respondents completed the short survey, the sample being a little older than the first (55 years of age on average vs 52 years), had a more equal gender balance of 51% females (compared to 64% in the main sample), and a higher reported income ($118,823 compared to $91,132).

6.1. Support for Council "Today"

Figure 12 shows the distribution of agreement with statements relating to community consultation, clarity of explanation, and ease of accessing information. In 2026, responses are more negatively skewed than in 2023, reflected in significantly lower mean agreement scores across all three measures: consultation (μ_{2023} = 3.47 vs μ_{2026} = 4.37; t = 4.02, p < 0.001); explanation (μ_{2023} = 3.97 vs μ_{2026} = 4.92; t = 4.17, p < 0.001); information (μ_{2023} = 3.38 vs μ_{2026} = 5.07; t = 7.95, p < 0.001). Figure 13 shows that, in 2026, more than half of respondents in this sample opposed the Paid Visitor Parking Scheme, compared with almost three-quarters expressing support in the 2023 sample. This apparent shift should be interpreted with caution, as it may not indicate a true decline in support for the scheme. Instead, the 2026 sample may be disproportionately composed of individuals with more negative, and consequently more vocal, perspectives or experiences. Similarly, respondents who supported the scheme's introduction in 2023 may have been less inclined to participate in a voluntary follow-up survey in 2026.

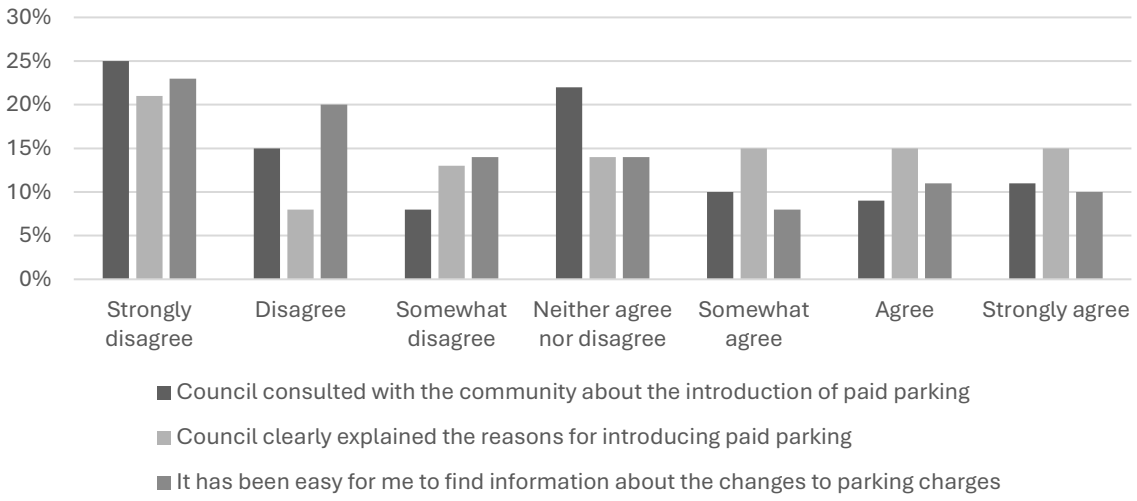

Figure 12: Evaluation of Consultation, Information and Justification

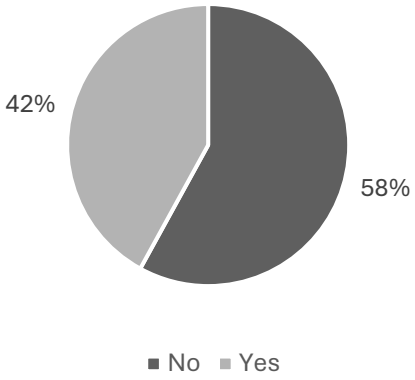

Figure 12: Support for the Introduction of Visitor Paid Parking

6.2. Perspectives on Reason for Scheme "Today"

Table 4 presents the prevalence of the key themes identified in response to the question asking what they thought were the BMCC's main reasons for introducing visitor paid parking. Perceived reasons were dominated by revenue-related explanations, with around 60% of respondents identifying revenue raising as a key motive. Other commonly cited reasons included managing tourism pressure (30%) and addressing parking demand and congestion (20%). A similar proportion (20%) referred to a user-pays or fairness principle, suggesting that visitors should contribute financially. While the substantive themes were broadly consistent across both supporters and non-supporters, differences emerged in both the emphasis placed on particular themes and the tone in which responses were expressed.

Respondents who supported the introduction of paid visitor parking most commonly framed it as a necessary and pragmatic response to increasing visitor pressures. Their explanations

frequently combined themes of managing tourism and congestion with a user-pays principle, suggesting that visitors should contribute financially to the upkeep of local infrastructure and services. Revenue generation was acknowledged, but typically positioned as a legitimate and appropriate outcome, particularly where it was assumed to support road maintenance, facilities, or broader community needs. As one respondent noted, *"It makes sense that visitors help pay for the infrastructure they use,"* while another described the scheme as *"a practical way to manage overcrowding in peak periods."* A third reflected the fairness framing, stating that *"locals shouldn't have to carry the cost for tourists,"* and another emphasised the broader benefit, noting it was *"a reasonable way to fund maintenance without increasing rates."* Overall, supportive respondents tended to present the scheme as a rational policy response to growing demand, balancing access, fairness, and financial sustainability.

Table 4: Qualitative Themes – Perceived Reasons for Introduction

Theme	Approx. %
Revenue raising	60%
Managing tourism pressure	30%
Parking demand and congestion management	20%
User-pays / fairness principle	20%
Infrastructure and service funding	15%
Avoiding rate increases	10%
Disaster recovery / financial pressure	5%

In contrast, respondents who opposed the scheme tended to interpret its introduction primarily through a lens of scepticism toward council motives. While revenue generation was also commonly identified, it was more often framed negatively as a *"cash grab"* or unjustified imposition, rather than a necessary funding mechanism. Other explanations, such as managing tourism or parking demand, were less prominent or viewed as secondary justifications rather than genuine reasons. This scepticism was a cross-cutting feature of responses, with many expressing distrust in the rationale provided and suggesting that stated objectives did not align with perceived intentions or outcomes. For example, one respondent stated that the scheme was introduced "*purely to raise revenue, despite what Council says,"* while another commented, "*They say it's about congestion, but it's really just about making money."* This distrust was further reflected in remarks such as "i*t feels like a money grab dressed up as policy,"* and "*the reasons given don't match what's actually happening."* Overall, opposition responses were characterised not only by different interpretations of the scheme's purpose, but also by a more critical and distrustful tone regarding its underlying intent.

6.3. Experiences and Issues with Scheme "Today"

Table 5 presents the prevalence of key themes identified in response to the question, "What else do you want to say about visitor paid parking?". Responses were dominated by concerns about negative impacts on residents (40%), including effects on everyday mobility, access, and the burden placed on locals and their visitors. Issues relating to implementation and communication

were also prominent (35%), with respondents frequently highlighting confusion, lack of clarity, and dissatisfaction with how the scheme was rolled out. Cost and affordability concerns were raised by around 30% of respondents, often linked to broader perceptions of fairness and equity (20%). A smaller but notable proportion of respondents (25%) expressed support for the scheme, although this was often qualified, with around 20% suggesting modifications or improvements to its design or implementation. Concerns about impacts on local businesses and tourism (20%) were also evident. Overall, responses reflected a mix of practical frustrations, perceived inequities, and conditional support, indicating that experiences of the scheme are shaped not only by its intent but by how it has been implemented in practice.

Table 5: Qualitative Themes – Experiences and Issues

Theme	Approx. %
Negative impacts on residents	40%
Implementation and communication issues	35%
Cost and affordability concerns	30%
Impact on local businesses / tourism	20%
Fairness and equity concerns	20%
Support for the scheme	25%
Conditional support / suggested changes	20%
Practical issues (signage, usability)	15%

Respondents who supported the scheme generally expressed their views in a constructive and pragmatic tone, often reiterating their overall support while suggesting ways it could be improved. The most common suggestions focused on refining pricing structures, improving accessibility and usability, and strengthening communication. For example, several respondents called for more flexible or lower-cost options, particularly for locals and frequent visitors, while others highlighted the need for clearer signage and easier-to-use payment systems. One respondent noted that the scheme was "*a good idea overall, but the pricing could be fairer for regular users,*" while another commented that "i*t works in principle, but the information and signage need to be much clearer.*" Others suggested expanding exemptions or concessions, with one stating that "*residents and their visitors shouldn't be penalised as much*." Overall, supportive respondents tended to frame the scheme as fundamentally sound, but in need of practical adjustments to improve fairness, clarity, and ease of use.

In contrast, respondents who opposed the scheme expressed their views in a more critical and often frustrated tone, focusing on perceived negative impacts and shortcomings. Their comments frequently raised concerns about affordability, fairness, and the burden placed on residents and their visitors, alongside dissatisfaction with how the scheme was implemented and communicated. Many also pointed to broader impacts on local businesses and community life. For instance, one respondent described the scheme as "*unfair on locals and their families,*" while another stated that "*it's too expensive and poorly thought through.*" While BMCC positions the scheme as necessary to fund infrastructure, maintenance, and climate resilience, these rationales were rarely reflected in responses. Instead, many respondents framed the scheme as

"*just a money grab,*" or "*revenue raising dressed up as policy*," with others noting that "*the reasons given don't match what's actually happening.*" This group's responses were often characterised by stronger emotional language and a sense of dissatisfaction, reflecting not only practical frustrations but also a deeper scepticism toward council motives and a perceived disconnect between official explanations and lived experience.

7. Discussion

The findings indicate that familiarity with paid parking as a policy instrument does not, in itself, translate into local acceptance. Most respondents demonstrated prior exposure to paid parking in other council areas, suggesting that the Blue Mountains scheme was not encountered as a novel or unfamiliar intervention. Yet acceptance remained strongly context dependent. Rather than evaluating the policy in abstract or technical terms, respondents interpreted it through locally grounded considerations of fairness, community identity, and perceived economic impact. While paid parking was widely regarded as appropriate in dense urban or high-intensity tourist environments, its legitimacy within the Blue Mountains was assessed against a distinct set of place-based expectations. Opposition, therefore, is not best understood as rejection of pricing as a policy tool, but as a response to how that tool is applied and interpreted within a specific social and spatial context.

More broadly, the absence of statistically significant sociodemographic differences across attitudinal segments indicates that variation in responses to the policy is not primarily explained by observable demographic or economic characteristics. Instead, differences in support are more closely associated with institutional trust, beliefs about collective responsibility, and perceptions of governance quality. Objections were rarely framed in terms of personal financial burden alone, but instead centred on consultation processes, fiscal stewardship, and the credibility of the institution implementing the policy. In this sense, the introduction of paid parking operates less as a purely economic intervention and more as a site of contestation over the legitimacy of local governance.

Importantly, these perceptions emerge in the context of a policy that is demonstrably effective as a revenue-generating instrument. Financial data indicate that the scheme is producing substantial and increasing income for the council, with parking revenue rising from approximately $1.43 million in 2023 to $2.63 million in 2024, to $3.1 million in 2025 (BMCC 2024, 2025). This represents a significant net revenue stream capable of supporting large-scale infrastructure investment, particularly in roads and drainage (BMCC 2025). As such, the scheme materially enhances the council's fiscal capacity and council will aim to resurface or repair at least 35 kilometres of roads each year as well as upgrading the drainage network; an initiative characterised as a historically large program of infrastructure expenditure (Curtain 2024). However, the findings suggest that this demonstrated financial effectiveness does not, in itself, resolve concerns about legitimacy. Instead, the prominence of a "revenue raising" framing in community discourse indicates that increased revenue generation may intensify scepticism where institutional trust is limited or where the linkage between revenue and tangible local outcomes is not clearly perceived. This highlights the importance of making the benefits of the scheme more visible to the community. Targeted communication strategies, including on-site signage at completed works, project-level attribution such as "funded by paid parking revenue", and regular updates via council communication channels and social media, may help to

demonstrate more clearly how revenue is reinvested locally, thereby strengthening perceptions of fairness, transparency, and policy legitimacy.

The findings in this paper point to a set of practical implications for policy design and implementation. These are summarised in Table 6, which distils the key areas of effective practice, identified limitations, and considerations for ongoing management arising from the analysis. These insights highlight that the effectiveness of parking pricing cannot be understood solely in terms of its technical design. While much of the existing literature treats pricing as a mechanism for influencing travel behaviour or managing demand, the results presented here suggest that public acceptance is shaped by interpretive and institutional factors that extend beyond the pricing structure itself. Adjustments to price levels, exemptions, or time limits may therefore have limited effect where underlying concerns about legitimacy remain unresolved. Acceptance appears to depend more fundamentally on whether the policy is perceived as fair, proportionate, and transparently governed. In this sense, pricing operates not only as an economic signal, but as a governance signal, communicating assumptions about responsibility, entitlement, and institutional intent.

Table 6: Key Policy Lessons from the BMCC Paid Parking Scheme

Area	What Worked	What Needs Attention / Going Forward
Awareness & Understanding	High awareness; most residents understood purpose of the scheme	Maintain clarity, but recognise that understanding alone does not secure acceptance
Communication vs Consultation	Information was widely available and generally clear	Perceived lack of meaningful consultation; require earlier, more participatory engagement
Policy Framing & Trust	User-pays logic broadly accepted in principle	"Revenue raising" framing dominates; need to visibly link revenue to local outcomes to build trust
Fairness & Local Impacts	General support for diversified funding approaches	Ongoing concerns about impacts on residents and proportionality; monitor perceived inequities
Long-Term Legitimacy	Limited behavioural disruption for most residents	Persistent vocal dissatisfaction; legitimacy depends on sustained transparency, accountability, and trust

The findings also provide insight into the implementation of the scheme within the Blue Mountains context. The Council appears to have been broadly effective in achieving high levels of awareness and baseline understanding, with most respondents able to identify the purpose of the policy and its underlying rationale. However, this informational success did not translate uniformly into perceived legitimacy. While communication was widely regarded as accessible and clear, respondents were less convinced that meaningful consultation had occurred prior to implementation. This distinction suggests that information provision alone is insufficient to secure public acceptance where concerns relate to process, influence, and procedural fairness. In addition, the dominance of a simplified "revenue raising" interpretation in public discourse indicates that, while the policy rationale was understood in broad terms, it was not always framed in ways that reinforced perceptions of fairness or local benefit. Where institutional trust was lower, this framing was more readily reinterpreted as evidence of fiscal opportunism or mismanagement.

Longitudinal responses further reinforce the centrality of these dynamics. While concerns about cost and impacts on residents remained prominent over time, these were typically expressed alongside broader scepticism toward council motives and decision-making processes. Importantly, such critiques do not indicate a lack of understanding of how the scheme operates, but rather reflect ongoing contestation over its fairness and legitimacy in practice. The increasing prominence of emotionally charged language suggests that lived experience of the policy may intensify underlying concerns about trust and governance, particularly where expectations around equity and local benefit are perceived to be unmet. At the same time, it is notable that most respondents reported no change in their behaviour, indicating that the scheme has not generated widespread behavioural disruption. This points to a divergence between behavioural impact and attitudinal response: a policy may be relatively neutral in practice, yet remain symbolically and politically contested.

These findings directly address the three objectives of the study and clarify its contribution. First, residents demonstrated a broadly accurate understanding of the scheme's purpose, particularly in relation to revenue generation and user-pays principles, although this was frequently simplified in public interpretation to a narrow revenue-raising frame. Second, perceptions of fairness and legitimacy were shown to be central to policy acceptance, with institutional trust, perceived proportionality, and views on governance quality playing a more decisive role than cost exposure alone. Third, the identification of distinct attitudinal segments highlights how different configurations of trust, normative beliefs, and engagement shape responses to the policy in systematic ways. Together, these findings extend existing research by demonstrating that acceptance of parking pricing is not primarily explained by observable demographic characteristics or behavioural exposure, but by how policies are interpreted and evaluated within a broader governance context.

8. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study is based on a small, non-random convenience sample and is likely to over-represent more engaged or opinionated respondents, particularly in the follow-up survey. The mixed-methods design, while enabling richer insight into both attitudinal structure and interpretation, also involves trade-offs, with quantitative simplification of attitudes and qualitative responses subject to self-selection bias. As such, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting patterns of interpretation and contestation rather than population-level attitudes. Future research could extend this work through larger or more representative samples, longitudinal panel designs, and comparative studies across different local contexts.

A further consideration relates to the nature of the sample, which is likely to over-represent more vocal respondents, including those expressing stronger negative views toward the scheme. While this limits generalisability, it is consistent with a substantial body of research on negativity bias and information processing. Across psychological domains, negative information has been shown to receive greater attention, be processed more deeply, and exert stronger effects than positive information (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Sensitivity to negative information also varies

across individuals and contexts (Hibbing et al. 2014), while perceptions of what constitutes “negative” information differ and shape behavioural responses (Lipsitz and Geer 2017). These dynamics contribute to the visibility of negative word of mouth in public discourse. Dissatisfied individuals are somewhat more likely to engage in word of mouth than satisfied individuals, although the magnitude of this difference is often overstated (Anderson 1998). Moreover, negative information is not necessarily more persuasive than positive information once contextual factors are considered (Wu 2013, Ahluwalia 2002). At the aggregate level, the influence of public opinion depends on salience and institutional context rather than the volume of negative expression alone (Burstein 2003).

Consistent with these insights, the findings indicate that although exposure to negative commentary surrounding the scheme was widespread, agreement with such views was more limited. This suggests that visible opposition may not be representative of overall community sentiment. The sample can therefore be understood as capturing those most likely to engage in and contribute to policy contestation, rather than providing a direct estimate of population-level attitudes. Future research could build on this by examining how negative discourse evolves over time, how it interacts with institutional trust, and how it shapes perceived legitimacy in contested policy environments.

9. Conclusion

This study examined how communities interpret and respond to the introduction of paid visitor parking in a tourism-dependent local government context, using the Blue Mountains as a case study of a highly visible and locally contested policy change. The findings demonstrate that acceptance of paid parking is not primarily explained by demographic characteristics or direct exposure to costs, but by institutional trust, beliefs about collective responsibility, and perceptions of governance quality. While respondents were generally well informed about the policy, demonstrating high levels of awareness, understanding of its purpose, and ease of accessing information. Support varied according to how the scheme was interpreted and whether it was considered fair, proportionate, and credible in practice. In this light, paid visitor parking thus operates not only as a mechanism for managing demand and generating revenue, but as a governance signal reflecting broader expectations about fairness, accountability, and institutional intent.

Importantly, the findings also highlight several areas of effective practice. The Council was successful in achieving high levels of awareness and baseline understanding, with most respondents able to identify the purpose of the scheme and its underlying rationale. Communication reach was extensive, supported by multiple channels, and the permit system was broadly accessible and operationally effective. In addition, the underlying logic of the policy, particularly the expectation that visitors contribute to infrastructure costs, was widely recognised and, in many cases, accepted in principle. These strengths

indicate that the Council was effective in communicating the what and why of the policy, even where the how and fairness in practice remained contested.

A key insight from the study is the divergence between the visibility of opposition and its representativeness. Although negative commentary surrounding the scheme was widespread, agreement with such views was more limited, indicating that public discourse may amplify dissenting perspectives without necessarily reflecting majority sentiment. This distinction is reinforced by the identification of three distinct attitudinal segments, **Engaged Supporters**, **Reluctant Pragmatists**, and **Institutional Sceptics**, which demonstrate that responses to the policy are structured by differing combinations of trust, normative beliefs, and civic engagement rather than by demographic characteristics. The largest group expressed conditional or pragmatic support, suggesting that opposition is often nuanced and contingent rather than absolute.

For policymakers, these results suggest that the effectiveness of paid visitor parking cannot be assessed solely in technical or financial terms. While the scheme generates substantial revenue and contributes to infrastructure funding, its long-term acceptance depends not only on awareness or clarity of communication, but on how convincingly it aligns with community expectations of fairness and transparency. Addressing opposition therefore requires more than adjustments to pricing structures; it necessitates sustained attention to institutional credibility, and the suggested visible reinvestment of revenues, and meaningful engagement processes. More broadly, while grounded in the specific context of paid visitor parking, the findings offer insight into how similar pricing-based policies may be interpreted and contested, particularly where they reshape expectations around access to public space and the distribution of costs.

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Appendix

Table A1: Results of Factor Analysis

	Policy Support	*Institutional Trust*	*Collective Responsibility*	*Revenue Ideology*	*Civic Engagement*
Council has consulted with the community about the introduction of paid parking	0.372	**0.787**	0.086	0.123	0.125
Council has clearly explained the reasons for introducing paid parking	0.298	**0.829**	0.127	0.194	0.084
It has been easy for me to find information about the changes to parking charges	0.226	**0.802**	0.118	0.269	0.194
Positive/Negative impact of scheme for Residents	**0.632**	0.536	0.309	0.054	0.09
Positive/Negative impact of scheme for Visitors of residents	**0.773**	0.306	0.186	-0.134	0.234
Positive/Negative impact of scheme for Tourists / Day-trippers	**0.787**	0.137	0.105	0.138	0.17
Positive/Negative impact of scheme for Businesses	**0.775**	0.235	0.088	0.098	0.295
Positive/Negative impact of scheme for Rate payers	**0.625**	0.538	0.292	0.136	0.04
Positive/Negative impact of scheme for Blue Mountains City Council	0.08	0.126	**0.871**	-0.053	-0.016
Agreement with paid parking schemes in other council areas	**0.556**	0.487	0.154	0.255	0.069
Reasonable for BMCC to compare itself to other paid parking council areas	**0.651**	0.473	0.16	0.223	0.031
Council should investigate as many new revenue streams as possible	0.044	0.224	-0.007	**0.796**	0.177
Costs to maintaining council infrastructure should be paid through rates only	**-0.553**	-0.174	-0.075	**-0.544**	0.031
All those who use council facilities should help pay for those facilities	0.375	0.248	**0.589**	0.292	0.151
It is reasonable to expect those from outside the council to help pay for facilities they use	**0.608**	0.19	0.378	0.483	0.12
Parking charges will help make it easier to find parking in busy areas	**0.634**	0.326	0.016	0.131	0.086
Making people pay for parking is unfair	**-0.706**	-0.441	0.032	-0.257	-0.034
The parking infrastructure (signage, meters, license plate readers, etc) is not intrusive	**0.532**	0.448	0.224	-0.051	0.066
It is easy for me to find information about what council is doing	0.353	**0.734**	0.138	0.084	0.28
I try to follow what local council is doing as closely as possible	0.151	0.217	0.299	0.246	**0.707**
I have/do participate in local council meetings and town halls when possible	0.178	0.131	-0.118	0.025	**0.835**