

MobilityPulse

Frequently Asked Questions

Version 1.0 — 18 August 2026

MobilityPulse is a mobility-research initiative of United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), Al Ain. This document answers the questions participants ask most often — about the study itself, about setting the app up, about how it detects your journeys, and about what happens to your data. If your question is not answered here, write to us and we will help.

A research initiative of United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain.

Contact: support@mobilitypulse.ae · Website: mobilitypulse.ae

Contents

1. About the study (questions 1–8)
2. Getting started (questions 9–17)
3. Permissions and setup (questions 18–26)
4. How trips are detected (questions 27–39)
5. Reviewing and correcting your trips (questions 40–46)
6. Vehicles, cost and CO₂ (questions 47–52)
7. Your data and privacy (questions 53–62)
8. Your insights and reports (questions 63–66)
9. Rewards (questions 67–70)
10. Troubleshooting (questions 71–78)
11. Pausing or leaving the study (questions 79–83)

1. About the study

1. What is MobilityPulse?

MobilityPulse is a smartphone app and research platform that records how people travel across the United Arab Emirates. It runs quietly in the background, recognises when a journey begins and ends, works out how you travelled, and builds a picture of your travel that you can see for yourself.

It is a research instrument, not a commercial product. There are no adverts in it, and nothing in it is for sale.

2. Who is running the study?

The research team at United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), Al Ain. The study is conducted under the University's research-governance and ethics framework.

3. Why does the research need to track travel at all?

Transport planning depends on knowing how people actually move — which journeys they make, by which mode, at which times of day. Traditionally that came from asking people to remember and write down their trips at the end of the day, which is expensive, hard to repeat, and systematically loses short walks, connecting rides and forgotten errands.

A phone observes journeys as they happen. That produces a far more complete and accurate picture, and asks much less of you.

4. What will the research be used for?

Pooled, de-identified data is used to build transport models and to study travel behaviour: origin-destination patterns, mode shares, peak-period profiles, the effect of remote working on travel demand, and the emissions consequences of each. Those models inform infrastructure planning, public-transport provision and sustainability policy.

Findings are always published in aggregate or de-identified form. Nothing that identifies you is published.

5. Is my data sold, or used for advertising?

No. Your data is never sold, never shared for advertising, and never used to profile you commercially. The app contains no advertising software and no third-party analytics or tracking software of any kind.

6. Who can take part?

Anyone aged 16 or over who lives in or travels within the United Arab Emirates and has a smartphone that can run the app. If you are under 18, you should take part only with the agreement of a parent or legal guardian.

7. Does it cost anything, and am I paid?

The app is free. Participation is voluntary and unpaid. From time to time we may run reward campaigns as a thank-you for sustained participation — these are a courtesy, not payment for your data.

The app uses a small amount of mobile data to upload your trips; that is billed by your own mobile operator and is not reimbursed.

8. How long does the study run, and how long should I keep the app?

The research programme runs over an extended period, and the value of the data grows the longer you stay in it — a single week shows a snapshot, several months show how your travel actually changes. There is no fixed end date for your own participation: keep the app for as long as you are willing, and leave whenever you wish.

2. Getting started

9. Where do I get the app?

MobilityPulse is available for iPhone and for Android phones. Download links are on mobilitypulse.ae, and the app can also be found by searching for "MobilityPulse" in the App Store or Google Play.

10. How do I create an account?

Open the app, choose to sign up, and enter your name, email address and a password. You will be asked to confirm that you agree to your location being collected for research. We then email you a verification link to confirm the address is yours.

11. What are the password requirements?

At least eight characters, including an uppercase letter, a lowercase letter, a number and a special character. The app shows each requirement ticking off as you type.

12. The verification email hasn't arrived. What should I do?

Check your spam or junk folder first — automated mail is often filed there. If it still has not arrived after a few minutes, request it again from the app. If that fails, write to support@mobilitypulse.ae from the address you registered with and we will verify it manually.

13. What is the "Tell us about yourself" questionnaire?

A short one-time questionnaire in seven steps, covering your age group, gender, nationality group, residence type, employment, whether you hold a driving licence, cars in the household, household size, children under 18, income band, remote-working pattern and how often you shop online.

It matters because travel behaviour cannot be interpreted without it. Knowing that a journey was made by car tells us little; knowing it was made by car by someone in a one-car household with a long remote-working week tells us a great deal.

14. Do I have to answer every question?

Several questions include a "prefer not to say" option, and you are welcome to use it. The questionnaire is asked once and is never repeated.

15. Can I finish the questionnaire later?

Yes. Your answers are saved on the phone as you go, so you can close the app part-way through and pick up where you left off.

16. Can I use the same account on two devices?

Not at the same time. An account is active on one device at a time: signing in on a new phone claims the account and signs the previous phone out. This protects your data if a password is ever shared or stolen.

Your trips are stored in your account, so they follow you to the new phone. If you switch between an iPhone and an Android phone, everything carries across.

17. I changed my phone. What do I need to do?

Install the app on the new phone, sign in with the same email and password, and grant the permissions again. Your history is already in your account. Before you retire the old phone, open the app on it while it has a connection so any trips still waiting to upload are sent.

3. Permissions and setup

18. Which permissions does the app need?

Location, motion and activity, and — if you want them — notifications. On Android the app also works best when it is exempted from battery optimisation.

Every one of these is used for detecting and recording trips. None of them is used for advertising.

19. Why does it need location "Always" or "Allow all the time"?

Because the whole point is that you never have to press start. To notice that a journey has begun while the app is closed and your phone is in your pocket, the app has to be allowed to check your location in the background. "While using the app" would mean only recording journeys during which you sat staring at the app.

20. Why does Android show a permanent notification?

Android requires any app that uses location in the background to display a notification for as long as it is doing so. It is the platform being honest with you on our behalf, and it cannot be removed while tracking is active.

21. Why does it need motion and activity data?

Motion sensors are how the app tells walking from cycling from driving, and how it knows you have started or stopped moving without leaving satellite positioning running all day. Using motion first and GPS second is what makes the battery cost acceptable.

22. Do I have to allow notifications?

No, they are optional. They are used to tell you when a trip has been recorded and when something needs your attention. You can turn them off entirely, or use Quiet Mode in Settings to keep only the essential ones.

23. What is battery optimisation, and why should I exempt the app?

Android may put background apps to sleep to save power. If it does that to MobilityPulse, journeys will be missed or cut short. Exempting the app from battery optimisation tells the system to leave it running. On many phones — particularly Samsung, Xiaomi, Huawei, Oppo and OnePlus — there are additional manufacturer power settings that need the same treatment.

24. Can I use the app without granting background location?

You can sign in and look around, but automatic trip detection will not work, which is the core of the study. If you are not comfortable granting it, that is entirely your choice — and a good reason to consider whether this study is right for you.

25. How do I change or withdraw a permission later?

Through your phone's own settings, not through the app: iPhone Settings > Privacy & Security, or Android Settings > Apps > MobilityPulse > Permissions. You can revoke anything at any time.

26. Does the app have to stay open?

No. Close it as you would any other app. It works in the background, and you only need to open it when you want to review your trips or look at your statistics.

4. How trips are detected

27. Do I have to start and stop trips myself?

No, and that is deliberate. The app senses when a journey starts, follows it, and closes it when you have stopped. You never press anything.

28. Which modes of transport can it recognise?

Walking, cycling, scooter, car, bus and metro. Where it cannot decide, the trip is marked as unknown and you can set the mode yourself.

29. How does it know how I travelled?

From the pattern of movement: speed, acceleration, how the phone is being carried, and the activity your phone's own sensors report. Walking has a very different signature from driving; a bus has a different stop-start rhythm from a car.

It is a statistical judgement, not a certainty, which is why you can correct it.

30. How soon does a trip appear in the app?

Usually within a minute or two of you stopping. The app waits briefly to be sure you have genuinely finished rather than paused at a junction or a traffic light, which is why a trip does not appear the instant you arrive.

31. Will it drain my battery?

It is designed not to. Positioning accuracy adapts to what you are doing and sampling relaxes when you are stationary, so the app is close to idle when you are not moving. You should expect a modest additional drain over a full day, not a dramatic one.

32. Does it use much mobile data?

Very little. Trips are small records, and they are uploaded when a connection is available. If you would rather they went only over Wi-Fi, turn off automatic sync in Settings and press Sync Now when you are on Wi-Fi.

33. Does it work without an internet connection?

Yes. Detection and recording happen entirely on the phone, so the app keeps working in a tunnel, in a basement car park, or with mobile data switched off. The trips are held on the device and uploaded the next time you have a connection.

34. Why was one journey split into two trips?

Usually because you stopped for long enough that the app judged the journey to have ended — a long wait at a station, a stop to buy something. It can also happen when satellite reception is lost for a stretch, for example in an underground car park.

If two records are really one journey, you can review them in Trip History; the app shows trips that follow on from one another together so they are easy to spot.

35. Why were two journeys merged into one?

Because the gap between them was too short to look like an arrival. If you popped into a shop for two minutes, the app will usually treat the whole thing as one trip.

36. A trip is missing entirely. Why?

The most common reasons are that the phone's power settings suspended the app, that location permission was reduced from "always" at some point, that the phone was off or out of battery, or that the journey was very short. Home-location masking will also suppress journeys inside your home zone, if you have enabled it.

37. It recorded a trip I never made. What should I do?

Delete it in Trip History. Occasional false trips are normal — a phone left on a table near a window can drift enough on satellite positioning to look like movement — and deleting them improves the data.

38. Why is the distance a little different from my car's odometer?

Satellite positioning traces a slightly different line from the road you actually drove, and it loses precision under bridges, between tall buildings and in tunnels. Small differences are expected and do not affect the research.

39. Does it track me when I am not travelling?

No. Location is collected while a journey is being detected or recorded. When you are stationary the app settles into a low-power state and is not logging your position.

5. Reviewing and correcting your trips

40. What does "Trips to review" mean?

It is the app's prompt for trips that are still missing something — most often a confirmed transport mode. Reviewing them is the single most valuable thing you can do for the research, and it takes seconds per trip.

41. How do I correct the transport mode?

Open the trip from Trip History and change the mode. Your correction always overrides the detected value, and it is exactly the kind of feedback that makes the dataset reliable.

42. What else can I add to a trip?

Optionally: the purpose of the journey, notes, who travelled with you and how many people, what the trip cost in dirhams, and which of your registered vehicles you used. None of it is compulsory, and all of it makes the trip more useful.

43. How do I delete a trip?

Open it from Trip History and delete it there. It is removed from your account.

44. How do I find a particular trip?

Trip History has filters across the top: by trip set, by transport mode, and a map view. Between them you can narrow a long history down quickly.

45. Can I see the route on a map?

Yes. Every trip stores its route, and it is drawn on a map in the trip's details.

46. Why should I review trips promptly?

Because memory fades. A day later you will remember whether you took the bus or a taxi; a fortnight later you probably will not. A minute a day keeps your diary accurate.

6. Vehicles, cost and CO₂

47. Why should I add my vehicle?

Because emissions depend on what you actually drive. A registered vehicle lets the app use your car's fuel type and efficiency instead of a generic average, which makes your CO₂ figures meaningfully more accurate.

48. Do I have to enter my number plate?

No. The plate field is optional and exists only so you can tell your own vehicles apart in a list. Leave it blank if you would rather not.

49. How is CO₂ calculated?

From the distance travelled, the mode of transport, and — for your own vehicle — its fuel type and efficiency. Walking and cycling are zero. The same transparent model is used in the app and in the calculator on mobilitypulse.ae, so you can check the arithmetic yourself.

50. What is the petrol-car baseline the app compares against?

A typical petrol car is treated as 0.20 kg of CO₂ per kilometre. When the app says a trip "saved" a quantity of carbon, it means relative to making the same journey by car.

51. How is the cost of a trip worked out?

It is what you enter. Cost is one of the optional details you can add to a trip, in dirhams; the app does not guess fares or fuel prices for you.

52. Can I switch between kilometres and miles?

Yes, in Settings. The change applies throughout the app.

7. Your data and privacy

53. What data does the app collect about me?

Your account and profile details; the demographic answers you gave once; each trip with its times, distance, speeds, mode and route; the motion and activity signals used to detect trips; any vehicles you register; technical details of your device and app version; and a log of significant actions in your account.

The Privacy Policy, in the app and on the website, sets all of this out field by field.

54. Who can see my location and my trips?

You can see your own records and nobody else's — and that is enforced inside the database, not merely hidden in the interface. Researchers and ordinary administrators work with aggregated figures and cannot browse participant accounts or raw routes.

A small number of designated data custodians can access identifiable records when it is necessary for approved research operations, security, support or data-quality work. Their access is individually granted and logged.

55. What is home-location masking?

A setting that stops journeys being recorded near where you live. You mark your home on the map, choose a radius between 10 and 500 metres, and automatic detection pauses whenever you are inside it.

It exists because the most sensitive point in any travel dataset is where you sleep.

56. Is my home location uploaded to your servers?

No. Your home coordinates and the radius you choose stay on your phone. The effect we see is simply that no trips are recorded there.

57. How do I turn home-location masking on?

Settings > Home Location. Tap the map or use your current location, choose a radius, and save. You can change the radius or clear the location entirely at any time.

58. Is my data encrypted?

Yes — in transit between your phone and our servers, and at rest on the servers. Access rules are enforced at the database level, and the research dashboard is restricted by role.

59. Where is my data stored?

On managed cloud infrastructure operated on the University's behalf. Some providers may process data on servers outside the UAE; where that happens, it is under contractual safeguards covering security, confidentiality and permitted use.

60. Can I get a copy of my data?

Yes. You can export your trips from within the app, and your analytics as a PDF report. For a complete copy of everything held about you, write to support@mobilitypulse.ae.

61. Can I delete my data?

Individual trips, yes — delete them in the app whenever you like. For your account and all the personal data attached to it, write to support@mobilitypulse.ae and we will delete it.

The one exception is de-identified data already incorporated into completed analyses or published results: it can no longer be linked back to you, and research integrity requires that published findings remain reproducible.

62. What happens to my data if I stop taking part?

If you deactivate your account, tracking stops and the account is disabled while your records are retained. If you ask us to delete your data, it is deleted. The choice is entirely yours, and neither carries any consequence for you.

8. Your insights and reports

63. What does the Analytics screen show me?

How your travel changes over time: distance, time spent travelling, cost, the split between transport modes and your carbon footprint, week by week and month by month.

64. Can I export my report?

Yes. Analytics can be exported as a PDF you can keep or share.

65. Can I export my trips as a file?

Yes — your trip history can be exported from your account screen as a spreadsheet-friendly file containing dates, distances, modes, durations, speeds and any details you added.

66. What is the Impact screen for?

It puts your travel in environmental terms: the emissions your journeys produced, and how much you avoided by walking, cycling or taking public transport instead of driving.

9. Rewards

67. What are the rewards in the app?

From time to time we run campaigns that recognise sustained participation — for example a run of consecutive days. Where a campaign is running, the app shows your progress and lets you claim the reward when you qualify.

68. How is a voucher delivered?

By email, to your registered address. The app tells you when it has been sent.

69. My voucher email has not arrived.

Check your spam folder first. The app has a "Retry voucher email" option if delivery failed; your reward is safe either way. If it still does not arrive, write to support@mobilitypulse.ae.

70. Do vouchers expire, and can I exchange one for cash?

Vouchers may carry an expiry date and the issuing partner's own conditions, and they have no cash value. They are a thank-you, not payment for your data.

10. Troubleshooting

71. The app says I must update before I can continue.

Occasionally we set a minimum supported version, so that the data everyone contributes stays consistent. Update from the App Store or Google Play and you can carry on.

72. My trips are not syncing.

Open Settings and look at Sync Status. If it reports a failure, check your connection and press Sync Now. Unsynced trips are not lost — they wait on the phone until they can be uploaded.

73. Tracking seems to have stopped.

Check three things, in this order: that location permission is still set to "always"; that the app is exempt from battery optimisation and from any manufacturer power-saving feature; and that location services are switched on for the phone as a whole.

If all three are right and trips are still not appearing, write to support@mobilitypulse.ae and include your phone model.

74. The map will not load.

Maps need an internet connection. Offline, the app shows the route without the map underneath it — the trip itself is recorded normally.

75. I have forgotten my password.

Use the password-reset option on the sign-in screen. We email you a six-digit code and a reset link; enter the code in the app, or tap the link in the email, then choose a new password.

76. How do I change my password?

From your account screen in the app. The same six-digit code confirms the change.

77. The app is using more battery than I expected.

Check that you are on the current version, and that you have not left another location-hungry app running. If it persists, tell us your phone model and Android or iOS version at support@mobilitypulse.ae — battery behaviour varies a great deal between handsets and these reports genuinely help.

78. Something else is wrong. How do I report it?

Help & Support in the app has a Contact option that opens an email to support@mobilitypulse.ae pre-filled with your app version, device model and user ID — the details we would otherwise have to ask you for. Describe what happened and roughly when, and we will investigate.

11. Pausing or leaving the study

79. Can I pause participation for a while?

Yes. Turn off location permission for the app, or turn off trip detection, and nothing will be recorded until you turn it back on. You do not need to tell us, and nothing is lost.

80. I am travelling abroad. Should I do anything?

You may leave the app running — it will simply record journeys wherever you are — or pause it as above if you would rather it did not. The research is concerned with travel within the UAE.

81. How do I deactivate my account?

From your account screen in the app. Deactivating stops tracking and signs you out. If you later want the account back, write to us.

82. How do I withdraw completely and have my data deleted?

Write to support@mobilitypulse.ae from your registered address and ask us to delete your account and your data. We will confirm when it is done. You do not have to give a reason, and withdrawing has no consequences of any kind.

83. Who do I contact with a question about the research itself?

support@mobilitypulse.ae reaches the study team. For questions about how the study is conducted, say so in your message and it will be passed to the researchers responsible.