

Radical Transport Policy Two-Pager #4

Why are younger people travelling less by car? What follows?

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For 25 years, each new generation of young people has been taking up progressively fewer driving licences, and undertaking fewer trips and less mileage by car. The trend has gone almost unnoticed by transport policy makers, but it is likely to continue. It has major implications for transport policy.

Last year, DfT commissioned a study of young people's travel by a team of academics from the University of the West of England and the University of Oxford. Their report (Chatterjee et al. 2018) consists of 85 pages of detailed analysis, and some thoughtful comments about likely future developments¹.

What has changed? In the report's own words, "Driving licence holding among young people peaked in 1992/4, with 48% of 17-20 year olds and 75% of 21-29 year olds holding a driving licence. By 2014, driving licence holding had fallen to 29% of 17-20 year olds and 63% of 21-29 year olds. Between 1995-99 and 2010-14 there was a 36% drop in the number of car driver trips per person made by people aged 17-29 with a fall of 44% for men and 26% for women. The difference in the amount of car driving between young women and young men became negligible by 2010-14. Young people generally travel less now, with the total number of trips per person made by young men falling by 28% between 1995-99 and 2010-14, whilst the number of trips made by young women fell by 24%. There has been a small increase in the number of trips per person on public transport. The number of walking trips per person has fallen whilst the number of cycling trips per person has remained broadly constant. As young adults have moved into their 30s, the proportion with driving licences and the amount they drive has increased, but not so much that their car use has caught up with that of previous cohorts. Although there has been variation from year to year, the general trend has been for each cohort of young people since the early 1990s to own and use cars less than the preceding cohort, and for the growth in car use with age to also be at a lower rate. This suggests that their changing behaviour is more than just a postponement of driving."

These changes apply to car mileage (both as a driver and as a passenger) as well as car trips. This is significant because it is helping reduce carbon emissions².

Chatterjee et al. also finds that "changes in choices in early adulthood have long-term implications... Those who start to drive later tend to drive less when they do start."³ This confirms earlier research, which suggested that people who learn to drive in their twenties are likely to drive about 30% less than people who learn in their teens⁴.

Why has it happened? The report suggests that the causes are a combination of changes in young people's socio-economic situations (increased higher education participation, rise of lower paid, less secure jobs and decline in disposable income) and living situations (decline in home ownership and increases in urban living), changes in when people start a family, their social interactions (including mobile communication and social media), and the importance that people attach to driving. The traditional progression from education or training to a job, starting a family, moving to a house in the suburbs and adopting a car-oriented lifestyle has been delayed for some and broken down for others. Other factors include motoring costs especially insurance. Reductions in driving and increases in public transport use have occurred to the greatest extent in London and other areas with high population density, where alternatives to cars are more available and there are greater constraints on driving.

What follows? The evidence presented by Chatterjee et al. points to the need for a fundamental reassessment of transport, planning and housing policy. If, as seems likely, the current trend continues, or even accelerates, government must respond to the resulting change in travel requirements. The evidence also suggests an opportunity for society to reduce the environmental impact of transport by

‘going with the grain’ of what younger adults are increasingly doing, and supporting them in the transport choices that they are making.

Other recent evidence from the Commission on Travel Demand⁵ on transport policy, the Foundation for Integrated Transport⁶ on planning policy, and Shelter^{7,8} on the housing crisis (also a major issue for younger people), underlines the argument for some radical policy shifts.

We identify four main policy implications of younger adults’ changing travel patterns, related to public transport; land use planning and house-building; ‘mobility as a service’; and infrastructure planning.

First, it becomes more important to ensure that **public transport** meets younger adults’ needs. A growing group of younger adults have previously been written off as dedicated car users, but now rely increasingly on public transport. The new ‘millennial’ railcard for 26-30 year olds is a small acknowledgement of the importance of this group. But although it will reduce the cost of occasional leisure travel, it will not affect the cost of the daily commute⁹. There is no equivalent discount for buses, which are more widely used by young adults than trains and which are seen as expensive^{10,11}. Public transport should be more affordable for everyone. But there is a strong case for making local public transport entirely free to the under-30s¹², to encourage younger adults to maintain a habit of using public transport, rather than buying a car and becoming car dependent at key life transition points such as first job or starting a family. Public transport networks should also be better designed to meet younger adults’ needs. For example, in Zurich and its surrounding area, a comprehensive network of services operates 6am to midnight, seven days a week, making public transport viable for both work and leisure travel.

Second, as the proportion of the population that holds a driving licence progressively falls, it becomes crucial that most **new homes** are built within existing urban areas, with excellent public transport, and with a layout and density suited to walking and cycling. This urban development should be designed to meet the needs of families, so that young adults do not move out to car-dependent suburbs when they have children: with a mix of housing, lots of connected, green open space, and dedicated paths for buggies, scooters, cargo bikes, pedestrians and cyclists. The current speculative model of development¹³ builds houses in the wrong places, away from jobs, car-based, with few community facilities and little green space, and with vast areas of tarmac for parking¹⁴. An effective response to changing travel patterns requires a different way of building new homes. We need **new garden cities within our cities**, not misnamed ‘eco-towns’ at motorway junctions or suburban sprawl masquerading as ‘urban extensions’. Housing charity Shelter argues for a model they term New Civic Housebuilding¹⁵, and a recent review of the planning system argues for local authorities to play the role of ‘master-developer’, as in European cities such as Freiburg¹⁶. This model could deliver many thousands of new homes that are not car-dependent. To meet this end will require changes to the law to enable public bodies to buy land at a fair cost reflecting its existing use value¹⁷; a new legal duty for the planning system to promote sustainable development and wellbeing¹⁸; and, as part of that legal duty, policy guidance that housing should only be built in locations where the vast majority (e.g. 75%) of travel¹⁹ will be by non-car modes.

Third, ‘**mobility as a service**’ (MaaS) has potential to appeal to younger adults. Transport authorities could create monthly subscription plans offering a bundle of certain amounts of different transport services (bike sharing, public transport, car club, taxi). This would require car clubs, private hire vehicles (e.g. Uber) and shared bike schemes to be integrated into the public transport ‘offer’, with regulation of the number of PHV licences and fares / charges^{20,21,22}.

Finally, this societal trend gives opportunities for **better transport infrastructure planning**. The Commission on Travel Demand has argued that ‘demand is not just ‘out there’ waiting to be fulfilled or not by policies. It is *shaped by* policy’²³. The positive trends in younger adults’ travel could be amplified by the right policies (or dampened by the wrong ones). This implies a shift from traffic forecasting to scenario planning, in which policy options to achieve a range of changes in traffic volume (including traffic *reductions*) are explored. Many road schemes previously considered necessary in order to accommodate future traffic growth would no longer be justified. Funds allocated to road-building could accordingly be much less, providing opportunities for more investment in sustainable modes.

¹ Chatterjee, K., Goodwin, P., Schwanen, T., Clark, B., Jain, J., Melia, S., Middleton, J., Plyushteva, A., Ricci, M., Santos, G. and Stokes, G. (2018). Young People's Travel – What's Changed and Why? Review and Analysis. Department for Transport. www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-peoples-travel-whats-changed-and-why

² Data from National Travel Survey tables NTS0605 show that from 2002 to 2017, per capita *car driver* mileage fell 30% for 17-20 year olds and 12% for 21-29 year olds. Per capita *car passenger* mileage fell 22% for 17-20 year olds and 16% for 21-29 year olds. Per capita taxi mileage is more variable, but also tends to decline over this period. In other words, the reduction in driving by young adults has not been offset by other forms of car use, such as more travel by taxi or lifts (e.g. from parents, for younger adults still living at home).

³ Chatterjee et al. *ibid.*, page 31, figure 22.

⁴ Stokes, G. (2013) The prospects for future levels of car access and use. *Transport Reviews*, 33(3), 360-375. See also <http://www.gordonstokes.co.uk/transp-peak/analysis.html> (graph at bottom of page).

⁵ Marsden, G. et al. (2018) All Change? The future of travel demand and the implications for policy and planning, First Report of the Commission on Travel Demand, ISBN: 978-1-899650-83-5 http://www.demand.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/FutureTravel_report_final.pdf

⁶ Foundation for Integrated Transport (2018) Transport for New Homes <http://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/transport-for-new-homes-summary-web.pdf>

⁷ Shelter (2019) Building for our future: a vision for social housing. The final report of Shelter's commission on the future of social housing https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1642613/Shelter_UK_-_A_vision_for_social_housing_full_interactive_report.pdf

⁸ Shelter (2017) New Civic Housebuilding: rediscovering our tradition of building beautiful and affordable homes https://england.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1348223/2017_03_02_New_Civic_Housebuilding_Policy_Report.pdf

⁹ BBC news website 26 October 2018 'Four million millennials can get new railcard' <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-45982750>. The railcard is only available to buy on-line at <https://www.26-30railcard.co.uk/>. There is a £12 minimum fare before 10am.

¹⁰ See for example speech in December 2017 by Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, available at: <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/mayor-sets-out-major-transport-overhaul>, accessed 16.01.19.

¹¹ Transport Focus (2018) Using the bus: what young people think <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/using-bus-young-people-think/>. The 'Young people and bus – agency slide deck' on this page reports an on-line survey of 1,000 14-19 year olds in England (a younger age group than 17-29 year old 'younger adults', but likely to have fairly similar views). In response to the question 'If bus operators were to improve their bus services, what top 3 things should they prioritise?' the factor mentioned most often (out of 17) was 'cost of your journey / value for money', which was mentioned by 45% of all respondents (N=1003).

¹² Radical Transport Policy Two-Pager #1 makes the case for fare-free local public transport <http://www.transportforqualityoflife.com/radicaltransportpolicypagertwo/>

¹³ The vast majority of new homes in the UK are built 'speculatively' by a few big housebuilders. Shelter (2017) *ibid.* summarises why the speculative housebuilding model does not work in the public interest. Housebuilding companies compete against each other to buy land from landowners. The company which assumes it can sell homes for the highest price and spend the least money on unprofitable elements like affordable homes, green space and community facilities offers the most money to the landowner and wins the bidding war. A company that wanted to provide good quality transport services or infrastructure as part of a development (e.g. a tram line or cycle paths), would be able to offer less money to the landowner and hence would lose the bidding war. The Calcutt Review of Housebuilding Delivery (2007) identified the factors that reduce profitability: developers aim 'to negotiate planning consents which service the maximum amount of saleable product from the minimum provision of infrastructure'; 'seek to minimise the amount invested in the public realm'; and seek to 'negotiate down the planning contributions sought by the planning authority' as Section 106 agreements.

¹⁴ Foundation for Integrated Transport (2018) *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Shelter (2017) *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Town and Country Planning Association (2018) Planning 2020 – Final Report of the Raynsford Review of Planning in England <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/raynsford-review>

¹⁷ This will require reform of the 1961 Land Compensation Act, so that in areas designated for significant housing development, public bodies can buy land from landowners at its existing use value plus compensation. There is growing political support for this: e.g. the Labour Party's recent green paper 'Housing for the Many' (2018) proposes establishing a Sovereign Land Trust to work with local authorities to buy land at a price closer to its existing use value, and to consider changing the rules governing the compensation paid to landowners. <http://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Housing-for-the-Many-final.pdf>

¹⁸ TCPA (2018) op. cit. provides recommended wording for a new legal duty for the planning system to deliver sustainable development 'in a way which enables people and communities to provide for their social, economic and cultural wellbeing while sustaining the potential of future generations to meet their own needs; and promoting social justice and reducing inequality'.

¹⁹ In London, the Mayor's Transport Strategy includes an aim that 80% of all trips should be by sustainable modes by 2041. A major outer London development currently under construction at Barking Riverside (10,500 homes when finished) has a sustainable transport mode share target of 75% by 2031. Transport for London Programmes and Investment Committee 11 October 2018, page 129, <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/pic-20181011-agenda-and-papers.pdf>. In Freiburg (population 227,000), 79% of trips by inhabitants within the city are by non-car modes (Schick P., Freiburg department of transportation planning, personal communication with one of the authors, 18.01.19), and the non-car mode share at the major residential development of Vauban (3km from Freiburg city centre, 2,000 new homes) is 84%: see for example https://www.sutp.org/files/contents/documents/resources/C_Case-Studies/GIZ_SUTP_CS_Quartier-Vauban_EN.pdf, accessed 18.01.2019. These examples suggest that with the right planning and transport investment, non-car mode shares of 75% should be achievable.

²⁰ Matyas M and Kamargianni M (2018) The potential of mobility as a service bundles as a mobility management tool. Transportation <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11116-018-9913-4>

²¹ ESP Group (undated) NaviGoGo: Scotland's first MaaS pilot <https://www.youngscot.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NaviGoGo-Pilot-report.pdf>. This report of a pilot Mobility as a Service scheme in Scotland aimed specifically at young people found that if bus use was fully integrated into the service, 75% of trial participants said they would use buses more or a lot more, and 39% said they would use cars less, a lot less or never.

²² Depending on how it is designed, MaaS has the potential to be beneficial or damaging. Transport Focus (2018) op. cit. points out that more young people use the bus than any other age group, but they are the least satisfied, and may consider that the extra £2 to £3 cost of Uber is worthwhile because of the door-to-door convenience. Yet 'Uberisation' of the transport system is causing increased congestion, local pollution and carbon emissions, and starting to undermine the viability of conventional public transport, potentially with serious long-term consequences such as cutbacks in bus services – a classic 'tragedy of the commons'. MaaS 'service bundles' could incentivise use of buses and shared bikes. For example, cheaper service bundles might include free bus and bike travel and limited use of car clubs or taxis, while more expensive service bundles still offered free bus and bike travel but included more car club or taxi trips.

²³ Marsden G. et al. (2018) op. cit.