
Travel behaviour change – opportunities arising from residential relocation

This briefing sheet describes a 3 year PhD study funded jointly by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Department for Transport (DfT). It is investigating how residential relocation might affect travel behaviour. The overall aim is to gain an understanding of the extent to which travel *habits* change or weaken as a result of residential relocation (without any deliberate intervention). Such knowledge could in turn be used to guide assessment of the potential for intervention strategies linked with residential relocation to positively effect behaviour change concerning mobility.



Background

Current government policy on transport is centred upon reducing the extent of dependence upon the car through improving the availability, viability and attractiveness of alternatives. In addition to investment in and improvements to the transport system itself, there is a need to influence travel choices and behaviour such that the share of travel undertaken by alternatives to the car is increased. A key point made in the 1998 transport White Paper is that significant improvements to transport overall can be attained by each individual making only modest changes to their behaviour. However,

achieving behaviour change in practice is proving far from easy.

There is a growing recognition that habit is a major inhibitor of behavioural change. Individuals settle into routines of travel behaviour in terms of the trips they make, the modes they use, the destinations they visit and so on, that become habitual and entrenched. This is a major barrier to positive effect being achieved from policies and initiatives geared to influence behaviour. An alternative line of approach to achieving behaviour change is therefore to target points at which habitual behaviours are likely to be weakened or subject to change. It is hypothesised that residential relocation represents one such juncture in people's lives. It is therefore the aim of this research to understand the impacts of relocation on habitual behaviour and travel choices and thereby identify opportunities to positively exploit this.

Research Justification

There are a number of reasons to suspect that residential relocation is likely to alter travel behaviour:

- A residential relocation is likely to alter the spatial distribution of activity centres such as food shopping, work and leisure destinations relative to the home.
- A residential relocation is also likely to have an impact on the choice set of (viable) travel options available. For example, there could be changes in proximity to rail and bus stations, parking availability or the attractiveness of walking or cycling to destinations.
- The change of circumstances provides an opportunity for habitual behaviours to be

given more consideration or thought. This is a key factor identified in the literature as contributing to breaking or weakening habits.

- Additionally, a possible reason for moving house could be to reduce commute or other journey times or to have better access to alternative means of travel, in which case the move would have been designed around changing travel behaviour.

Findings of studies exploring related issues such as life cycle and key events seem to suggest that there is indeed difference in travel behaviour before and after a residential relocation, particularly with regard to mode choice. However, no studies to date appear to have explored this in any detail. Therefore this study aims to take, firstly at least, an in depth look at what happens to household travel behaviour after residential relocation.

Methodology

As it is depth, rather than breadth that is of interest in the first stage, a series of semi-structured interviews will be conducted with households that have relocated within the past 6 months. Topics to be covered in the interviews will include issues surrounding the household travel behaviour before the move, and that after it, whether there were any differences, what they were and what the household thinks are the reasons behind any change or lack of change. They will also cover reasons for moving and selecting the current property. The interviews will be undertaken with one adult member of the household, with other household members welcome, and encouraged to join in with their opinions as well. People living in rural areas often have limited choice of alternative modes to the car. Participants will therefore be recruited from an urban area.

The outcomes from stage one of the study will be utilised in the design of stage two, which is anticipated to be a larger scale survey to give a broader picture of any trends in behaviour.

Outcomes and Benefits

It is necessary to gain an understanding of behaviour and events taking place before

attempting to exert influence, and this study is aiming to do just that - to find out how travel behaviour is already influenced by, and linked to, residential choice and relocation so that, in turn, this knowledge might guide policy developments that seek to promote positive behaviour change emerging from residential relocation. In particular it will assess the potential for this to happen, and the most effective timing. In this way the study contributes to the DfT's Ten Year Plan aims of reducing car dependency and the modal share of car use.

A greater understanding of the relationship between residential relocation and travel behaviour could also have many wider benefits of understanding how behaviours change without intervention, and this could prove beneficial in guiding other forms of behaviour change or demand management strategies.

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