3 Generational Mobilities: Transitions for the millennial generation

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Auto-mobility through the life course

Mobility and accessibility plays a fundamental role throughout the life course. Accessibility enables participation in essential tasks such as work and education, as well as psychosocially important activities such as recreation, socialisation and intergenerational care (Metz, 2000; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Although some of these tasks can be undertaken in the home or through alternative means (such as online shopping or e-communication, see Chapter 13), evidence suggests that out-of-home mobility has its own benefits (Metz, 2000; Ettema *et al.,* 2010; Bergstad *et al.,* 2012). Indeed, an increasing body of research has demonstrated that restricted mobility and accessibility can result in a range of negative outcomes, from greater social exclusion (Delbosc & Currie, 2011a; Delbosc & Currie, 2011b; Stanley *et al.,* 2011), to poorer health outcomes (Frank *et al.,* 2006; Jones *et al.,* 2008), to reduced psychological well-being (Bergstad *et al.,* 2012; Delbosc, 2012; Reardon & Abdallah, 2013).

In most of the developed world, the majority of this mobility is provided directly or indirectly through the private car (Kenworthy, *et al.,* 1999; Lucas & Jones, 2009). Although this provides mobility benefits, it also results in a range of negative impacts on the environment, health and safety of the community. Road collisions globally cause 1.2 million deaths each year and are the eighth leading cause of death globally, as well as the leading cause of death for those aged 15-29 (WHO 2012). Globally, in 2010 transport was responsible for 14% of greenhouse gas emissions, or 6.9 gigatons per year. Decades of growth in car travel have worked against goals to improve the safety and sustainability of the transport system.

Yet our relationship with car travel varies significantly through the life course. Household car ownership follows a 'life cycle effect' (see Figure 3.1), increasing as young households form and peaking when the head of household reaches the

mid-40s; from there, car ownership declines (Dargay & Vythoulkas, 1999). Part of this pattern is a reflection of household size (first as households form, then have children, then children move out), yet even car ownership *per adult* tends to follow a similar pattern (Klein & Smart, 2016). The reason for this is that the role of the car changes through the life cycle.

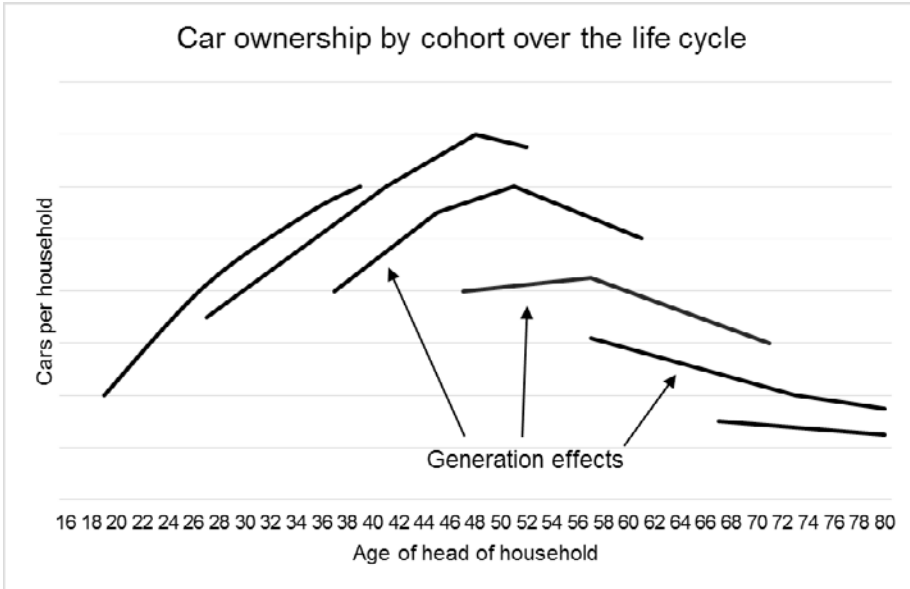

Figure 3.1: Car ownership by generation cohort across the life cycle. Adapted from Dargay and Vythoulkas (1999).

Babies and young children are entirely dependent on adults for their mobility and these trips are increasingly being conducted in cars rather than on foot or by bicycle (Fotel & Thomsen, 2002). In addition, as part of a greater shift toward supervised parenting, children have less freedom of movement than in the past (Fotel & Thomsen, 2002). Whereas in the past children were more likely to engage in unstructured, unsupervised play throughout the local neighbourhood, modern childhoods are characterised by scheduled and supervised activities, usually facilitated by car travel (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001). So too the journey to school has transitioned away from a walk or bike ride to the closest school and is more likely than in the past to take place in the back of the family car (Department for Transport, 2007; McDonald, 2007). This has potentially discouraging implications for the future of sustainable transport, as there is evidence that parental attitudes toward independent travel of children influence their travel habits through adolescence and young adulthood (Baslington, 2008; Driller & Handy, 2013; Thigpen & Handy, 2016).

In adolescence, teenagers seek and are granted greater freedom of movement. Their travel and activity needs – including after-school activities, sporting, visiting friends and part-time employment – become more complex and independent

(Currie, 2007). This is also the small window in the life course when the only way a young person can practice fully independent mobility is through 'alternative' transport modes – walking, cycling, skateboarding or taking public transport. There is a strong suggestion that adolescents would prefer to use these modes when they are feasible and available (Currie, 2007). The alternative, relying on getting lifts (generally from parents or other family members), can put significant time pressures on other household members (Bell & Currie, 2007).

For many young people, the chance to get a driving licence then becomes the ultimate expression of independent mobility (Nakanishi & Black, 2015). Especially for those teenagers who had to rely on parental lifts, getting a driving licence provides their first taste of freedom. In cities with an auto-centric transport system, access to a car broadens the potential pool of locations to work, study, shop and live, expanding economic opportunity (Cervero *et al.,* 2002). However at the same time, young adults tend to have fewer economic resources to pay for a motor vehicle, forcing many young people to actively balance the trade-offs between the additional mobility and additional cost of a car. This is a time of life when young people are still exploring where to live, where to work, what to spend their money on and what to save money for.

These choices about where to live, where to work and how to travel tend to lock into place when people transition into the traditionally 'adult' life stages of full-time work, purchasing a home, cohabitation and raising a family (Nakanishi & Black, 2015; Schoenduwe *et al.,* 2015). Each of these life stage transitions is associated with higher rates of drivers licensing (Delbosc & Currie, 2014a). Cohabitation usually requires a compromise between two different job locations, often balanced against the current or future need for family amenities. These compromises often require one or more household vehicles to manage these travel needs. This is only exacerbated in households with children, who in turn develop their own travel needs.

In the context of societal pressures to increase sustainable travel, this transition into 'adult' life stage, and the associated shifts in travel mode choice, is a crucial window of time. There is clear evidence that once driving has become a habitual behaviour it becomes ingrained in how households organise their daily lives (Gärling & Axhausen, 2003; Verplanken & Orbell, 2003). This tends to set up life-long travel habits that are difficult to change, even when people reach later life stages (Nakanishi & Black, 2015).

When households reach the 'empty nest' stage and retirement, travel needs change once again. Although work may become less central during this transition, work and home locations and travel habits are likely to be strongly entrenched. Once households have become accustomed to choosing their shopping, leisure and socialisation destinations based on the freedom provided by the private vehicle, it is not common for households to willingly forgo that mobility (Nakanishi & Black, 2015).

Eventually people do lose the physical ability to drive a motor vehicle, and where no alternative travel methods are available the loss of a driving licence

is strongly associated with negative well-being (Fonda *et al.,* 2001). There is an increasing amount of work being undertaken to help older people manage this transition (e.g., NZ Transport Agency, 2015).

This overview of automobility through the life course highlights the importance of encouraging and supporting sustainable transport choices early in the life course. Children who are allowed less freedom of movement before they can drive are more likely to drive early and often (Baslington, 2008; Driller & Handy, 2013; Thigpen & Handy, 2016). Young adulthood is a time when many are exploring a range of travel options, due in part to lower incomes before full-time work is established. But when someone starts to shape their daily travel choices around the mobility provided by a car (often in association with 'adult' life transitions such as parenthood), car use becomes habitual (Gärling & Axhausen, 2003; Verplanken & Orbell, 2003). Changing habitual behaviour presents a much greater challenge to policy and planning.

Thus far, each generation has increased household car ownership across the life cycle, peaking earlier and holding onto their car for longer (note the 'generation effects' in Figure 3.1). This trend has discouraging implications for low carbon mobility transitions, creating an uphill battle for sustainable travel. Yet there is some hope that this trend may be slowing, providing an opportunity to encourage sustainable transport in the next generation.

At present, the millennial generation – also called generation Y – are starting to turn 30[1], which means they are in the middle of making this crucial transition into 'adulthood'. The next section explores whether this generation may provide an important opportunity to help the transport system transition to a lower-carbon future.

Millennial mobility – breaking new ground?

The baby boomer generation was the first to undertake their whole lifecycle facilitated by the mobility provided by the private car. They were, in a sense, the trail blazers that set these patterns in place for generation X that followed them. However there is emerging evidence that the millennial generation may be following a slightly different path (Kuhnimhof *et al.,* 2012; Blumenberg *et al.,* 2013; Delbosc & Currie, 2013; Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, 2014; McDonald, 2015; Rive *et al.,* 2015). Compared to previous generations, millennials are more likely to delay when they get a driving license, use public transport and active modes and take advantage of new ways to use the car such as car-sharing (e.g. ZipCar, GoGet) and ride-sharing (e.g. Uber, Lyft). Their propensity toward smartphones makes them a particularly suitable market for a range of apps that encourage different mobility patterns (see Chapter 13).

1 Although the exact cut-off for the millennial generation varies, they are generally considered to be born between the years 1980 and 2000.