



**Attitudes toward
active travel in Glasgow:
Findings from a qualitative
research project**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Increasing population levels of physical activity and developing sustainable transport are high on political and public health agendas.^{1,2} The potential effects of active travel go far beyond the considerable contribution it makes to health enhancing physical activity. It has a role to play in reducing carbon emissions, reducing road traffic accidents and even producing stronger communities.^{2,3,4} Understanding the motivations and pressures shaping why people currently travel the way they do, and what can be done to promote more active travel, is therefore of vital importance in tackling a range of issues that face us, including obesity, climate change and social fragmentation.

The Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) commissioned JMP Consultants to explore attitudes and values towards travel in and around Glasgow. In commissioning this research the GCPH hoped to explore how far positive messages about active travel have become embedded in everyday decision making around travel. Greater understanding of this issue will allow discussion of what still remains to be done and what 'soft' as well as 'hard' barriers to modal shift remain.

¹ Scottish Executive Let's make Scotland more active: A strategy for Physical Activity. Edinburgh: The Stationary Office, 2003.

² Appleyard D, Lintell M. The Environmental Quality of City Streets: The Residents Viewpoint. *Journal of the American Institutes of Planners*, 1972; 38 (2): 84-101.

³ Appleyard B. *Liveable Streets for Schoolchildren: How safe routes to school programs can improve street and community liveability for children*. 2005. CBW Forum Article. National Centre for Bicycling and Walking

⁴ Hart J. *Driven To Excess: Impacts of Motor Vehicle Traffic on Residential Quality of Life in Bristol, UK*. MSc in Transport Planning Report, University of the West of England, Bristol, 2008. Website publication <http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/news/uk/-/driven-to-excess>

This briefing paper accompanies a full report by JMP Consultants available on the GCPH website⁵.

KEY FINDINGS

Attitudes to different modes of travel were explored amongst people making journeys to a variety of destinations in and around Glasgow (the city centre, the Southern General Hospital, Braehead Shopping Centre and the Fort Shopping Centre). Key modes of travel explored were walking, cycling, public transport (primarily bus travel) and car use.

If active travel is to become more popular, active *modes* of travel will need to be recognised as being convenient, safe, pleasant and efficient. The study highlights the degree to which this requires a combination of improvements in travel-related infrastructure as well as a change in individual and societal values and responses to particular forms of transport. In future, more thought should be given within planning and development settings to understand the links between the provision of transport infrastructure and the attitudes, values and norms it produces around travel and movement.

Encouragingly there was a degree of multi-modality (use of a variety of modes of travel) already demonstrated by participants in this study, with choice of mode being shaped by the circumstances of both the journey and traveller. Currently, some journeys make more sense undertaken by active modes, particularly to the city centre. However, cycling as a mode of transport does not make sense to the majority of participants, being seen as dangerous and difficult to adopt. In many instances, car travel is still the mode that appears to make most sense for many journeys when it is an available option. This is particularly the case when infrastructure is designed to facilitate car travel (such as at out of town shopping centres). Valuing convenience and the ability to undertake complex, multi-destination journeys can also promote car travel over active modes.

The modes of transport explored elicited the following values and attitudes linked to them.

Walking – was highly regarded, with evidence of its health benefits being well established. Being a ‘free’ mode of travel further added to its attractiveness. Significant barriers also existed for walking, however. For example, time pressures and the perception that walking can be inconvenient both featured.

Cycling – very few of the participants cycled. Indeed, the findings suggest a prevailing cultural norm that cycling is considered dangerous on congested city roads. Other barriers included fear of cycle theft, inclement weather, lack of storage space at home and lack of showering facilities at the workplace. There was also a perception that cycling was not effectively embedded in local culture and currently not a natural choice for the majority.

⁵ Qualitative Research Into Active Travel in Glasgow (2009) JMP Consultants and Glasgow Centre for Population Health. <http://www.gcph.co.uk/content/view/115/102/>

Bus travel – public transport use was almost synonymous with bus use in the destinations where the research took place. Many different views on bus travel were recorded – one person’s motivating factor such as socialising with other passengers was another person’s barrier to bus use (buses being seen as spaces where anti-social behaviour can take place). There were also differences in the perception of costs, dependent upon the individual’s circumstances. The requirement to plan journeys, more specifically before travelling by bus, was a barrier to use particularly for those used to the convenience of a car. This and other evidence pointed to a cultural norm that bus travel was a ‘second rate’ mode of travel. It was compounded by views that bus drivers could be rude and unhelpful, drive dangerously and that buses contributed to congestion and pollution, particularly in the city centre.

Car travel – was seen, for those who had the choice, as the most convenient mode of travel and the mode most commonly used. The health benefits of leaving the car at home seemed to be widely known. In addition, participants agreed that the introduction of interventions to make journeys by car less convenient and more expensive, alongside the provision of attractive active travel alternatives, could lead to modal shift.

Changing norms and values – some targeted measures to change norms and values are identified in the full findings report.⁵ These included addressing perceptions that active travel is slow, inconvenient, unsafe and expensive, because in reality it can actually offer improvements to travel experience (compared to the car). Provision of information to change entrenched views coupled with improved infrastructure to make active travel more convenient and easier should go some way toward change. However, for those who have a choice to travel non-actively (car owners), current societal norms around convenience and time usage continue to make active travel less attractive and accessible. Unless the fabric of our urban spaces begins to prioritise active travel over the motor car, cultural norms will continue to position active travel as the worthy but poor relation to car-based mobility.

AIMS AND PURPOSE

The main aims of the research were:

- To explore the development of norms and values around travel preferences through better understanding how and why people currently travel as they do.
- To explore the scope for encouraging growth in alternatives to car travel. For a shift to active travel to be made and sustained, it must ‘make sense’ and be easily integrated into the daily lives of those who are making the shift.

The purpose of the research was to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes and norms regarding travel to various locations in and around the Glasgow conurbation?
2. What are the barriers to the use of specific travel modes amongst those travelling in and around the Glasgow conurbation?
3. How easy or difficult is it for people to adopt active travel modes in light of attitudinal and infrastructural barriers to change, or support for existing choices.

APPROACH AND METHODS

Two different methodological approaches were taken. Firstly, members of the public at four separate locations were invited to participate in brief (approximately two minute) 'vox pop' video interviews outlining how they travelled to the location at which they were interviewed, their views on their chosen mode(s) and alternatives available for that particular journey. This method obtained a range of views, as well as highlighting attitudes and behaviours on travel issues surrounding various modes of travel to differing locations in Glasgow. (Findings were summarised through the production of a short DVD.)

Secondly, members of the public (at the same four locations) were recruited to participate in shared focus groups. Travellers who used different modes of travel were invited to discuss their travel methods firstly among users of the same mode, and afterwards with users of a different mode. This approach aimed to explore assumptions about using different modes and it was intended that participants would learn from each other's experiences.

The four study sites chosen were Braehead Shopping Centre (an out of town shopping centre with motorway access); Glasgow City Centre; the Southern General Hospital; and the Glasgow Fort (an out of town shopping centre with motorway access but also adjacent to the Easterhouse peripheral estate).

One hundred and five members of the public completed a vox pop video interview. Participants representing a range of ages, gender and locations were recruited to the study. Forty-four percent were male and 56% were female; 50% were in full time employment, 26% were retired, and the remainder were a mix of students, unemployed, and homemakers. On the day of the interview 40% of the interviewees had travelled by car as driver, 12% by car as passenger, 26% by bus, 14% had walked, and 10% had taken a train.

A total of 44 residents of the Greater Glasgow area participated in the shared focus groups. More women participated than men (61% of participants were female), 30% of the participants were retired and 18% were unemployed.

The majority of participants of the focus groups already had a good understanding of a variety of travel modes, and used different modes to travel around the Glasgow area, therefore ensuring a range of experiences were brought to each group.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Chosen travel modes tended to be based on perceptions of convenience for a particular journey with different modes chosen to match the purpose and destination. This indicated that contrary to the authors' preliminary understandings, modal choice is not entirely habitual in character. This is perhaps not a surprise as the study focussed on trips other than the daily commute and therefore many of the journeys examined were not regular and routine – two key components of generating habitual travel behaviour.

Walking

Attitudes and norms

Attitudes collected in the qualitative data highlighted that on the whole, walking was positively regarded with certain health benefits associated with this activity: 'losing weight', 'fresh air' and 'more energy'. Emotional benefits were also acknowledged in that it was generally seen to be less stressful than other modes. Indeed, 'happy' was the most common feeling response to walking, i.e. walking could 'make you feel good about yourself.'

If it's sunny I feel good if my lungs are getting full of good stuff.

I think walking and cycling makes you healthy. I know I have a cheek because I smoke, I don't drink, and if I didn't do the walking and cycling I would be really unhealthy.

I think it's relaxing and you can go into a world of your own, think about what you're doing what you aren't doing just in another world.

We walked back from the art gallery to the city centre along the river, it was a lovely day. We were busy looking at all the landmarks, we didn't realise that we had walked so far.

Linked to this were strong feelings of guilt around not walking, indicating the extent to which the health benefits of walking are embedded in cultural norms. Likewise, there was general disapproval for taking the car for very short journeys including taking kids in the car for the journey to school.

I feel guilt because it's a nice day and I could have walked home.

I know people who their shop is literally a minute round the corner, a two minute walk and they get in the car and drive round and spend petrol to turn round to come back. Why not get a bit of fresh air and exercise?

The distance people were willing to walk indicated the limitations of walking as a mode of travel and the evident differences in attitudes. Some would 'only be willing to walk half a mile', whereas others reported walking for over an hour to reach particular destinations, largely motivated by a desire to get some exercise. Despite recognising and acknowledging the benefits and possible normative censure of choosing not to walk (self-describing as 'lazy') a few participants were not happy to walk and felt it was not part of their identity.

Motivations and barriers

The environmental benefits (in terms of climate change) were occasionally acknowledged but more as a by-product of travel choice and generally, personal benefits took precedence.

Despite the 'good feelings' outlined, the underlying motivation for the majority of walking journeys undertaken by the study participants was that it was the only, quickest, or most convenient mode for the journey. Many of the walking journeys discussed in the research were conducted because it was the easiest option in the circumstances with other options ruled out on practical grounds.

Where I stay in Govan I have to walk to the Southern General, it's a 10 minute walk. I'm so near yet I have to walk and I can't get a bus.

Walking infrastructure was often seen as providing an unsafe environment; this was often the case at out of town developments where spatial priority was given to drivers.

If the traffic is really busy then the cars park across the green man crossing so you have to move around them. I don't like it if it's busy I'm scared the cars are going to run me over.

A factor relating to safety for walking was fear of anti-social behaviour and generalised fears around sharing public space.

I just think I wouldn't walk out at night anyway.

I think as you get older you get more frightened of walking places.

The cultural norm given to convenience means that when under a time pressure, walking could easily be ruled out as a mode choice. It being seen as not fitting people's lifestyles was a significant barrier.

Aye if I have more time I would walk, but when you're working and you have a million things to do you just don't have time.

Walking is out of the question when you are going out for a meal, and you're wearing your high heels, and your trousers are too long and you'd look ridiculous tucking them into your shoes.

Cycling

Attitudes and norms

Safety was a criterion that, given the current design of urban infrastructure around the car, disadvantaged the uptake of cycling. Currently, cycling appears to be the form of travel that makes least sense to participants, being seen as dangerous, inconvenient and practically difficult given the climatic conditions in the West of Scotland. Added to this was a degree of antagonism towards cyclists from other road users. Whereas some recognised the need for cyclists' to mitigate the risk of sharing road space with cars (such as occasionally cycling on pavements or setting off early through traffic lights) other road users thought this deplorable.

I've always thought of Glasgow as a bit of a no-no for cycling.

It's a bit dicey going on a bike with the volume of traffic. That's why most of them go on the pavements. And you don't blame them for that.

Cyclists have to abide by the same rules as cars, like if I go through a red light I will get a fine, and so should they.

Bikes don't pay any taxes, so why should they be on the road – that's what my friends think.

Motivations and barriers

Of the small numbers who did cycle, the benefits as both a pastime and mode of transport were passionately expressed – again underlining the personal health and wellbeing benefits, with environmental benefits being a by-product. Cycling appeared to work for people when it fitted well with an individual's identity.

It's a great form of exercise, it really is. You forget your woes and problems.

I just love going out on my bike – I can't explain it. I leave too many problems behind and I just go and I just love it.

Parts of the idea that Glasgow was not a place well suited to cycling stemmed from the perception that cyclists were vulnerable to theft, as well as inclement weather.

There's nowhere safe in the town that you could leave a bike. Do you not come back with your tyres missing? You take off your front wheel and lock it to the back.

I think the city in and around Glasgow you have this culture where you think your bike will get stolen.

Another feature of the data was that cycling was perceived as requiring a high level of fitness and ability. In addition to the perception of dangerous road conditions, the infrastructural and personal barriers against adoption of the bicycle both featured as factors that push people away from this mode of travel.

I would like to take up cycling but I don't think I would be very good at it anymore. I used to go with my kids and cycled on a bike when I was pregnant. But I'm not as fit as I used to be.

Cycle tracks never take you to where you want to go.

Travel by bus

Buses represented the most common form of active travel and public transport regularly experienced by the respondents. Reliance on bus schedules meant that the destination and time at which the journey was being made could influence the experience of travelling by bus both positively and negatively. It also meant that there were site-specific variations in experiences of bus travel. Some journeys, such as to the city centre, were easier than others, such as to out of town shopping centres.

Attitudes and norms

Attitudes towards bus travel varied. Not only were there different experiences of bus travel, often grounded in how well served people were by the existing routes, but individual preferences could also frame the experience of bus travel as either pleasant or unpleasant. For some, there was a perception that bus travel was ‘second rate,’ that it was slow and inconvenient, with the privacy and flexibility afforded by car travel being seen as preferential. Others, whilst recognising the benefits of the car (and often denied access to car travel) could interpret the experience of bus travel positively. Unlike cycling, many would not rule out bus travel even if they currently travelled by other means. For example, car drivers could be occasional bus users. There were however a variety of views in relation to the desirability of bus travel, making it difficult to pin down a general cultural norm. Consequently, it is important to understand the multiple factors that shape experience such as convenience and time, perceptions of safety and the sociability of bus travel.

Motivations and barriers

There were different interpretations of the convenience of bus travel although perhaps the more positive responses could at best be described as stoical. Dissatisfaction with the experience of bus schedules and routes is likely to increase with the need to carry out more complex journeys, particularly in the evening or at the weekend

Using the bus, you need to leave a lot earlier.

You can feel agitated on buses if stressing about missing appointments, worried sick about how to get there if the bus doesn't turn up. Missing an appointment can ruin a day and it's a toss up between leaving very early and waiting around in waiting room, or stress of being late.

We have moans, but generally it's ok. Every 10-15 minutes in the day you can get a bus. At night the service drops, the Arriva service still runs, but the Gibby buses disappear at 6pm.

The only time the service is bad is a Sunday.

Some reported a lack of confidence in using buses, in obtaining timetable and fare information and where and when to get on and off. Travelling by bus was generally seen to require greater levels of planning than travelling by car. 'Real-time' information on bus stops was considered helpful but was not fully available around the city. The increase in operators and services since deregulation could add to the confusion.

The bus in the centre can be difficult. If we think back to when we used a lot of buses it was a lot just word of mouth you could always ask or look at the time table, there are so many routes now its just confusing, there are so many options there are too many options so many times, you have Arriva and Gibsons all these different companies and its confusing.

I always have to go on buses with someone. I can go on and just stay on until it stops at the end of the day because I don't know where to get off.

The cost of bus travel, although an objective factor, could be interpreted differently by different people. These interpretations ranged from those who thought buses offered good value to those who recognised the cost implications for larger families or adults who did not work. In comparing with the costs of travelling by car, some factored in the cost not only of petrol but also parking charges at destinations such as the city centre.

Whether people found the bus a pleasant experience or not was in part shaped by how they framed the experience of the time it took to travel. Those who found the bus a pleasant experience saw the travel time, not as lost time but as time to relax. Those who were in a rush and felt that the journey time was beyond their control were less likely to enjoy it.

Two things I enjoy about it are watching the scenery go by and reading the metro.

As long as you've got ordinary cheery happy people about you there's nothing better than sitting on a bus.

It takes too long it's unreliable and it's not just the congestion, it's that they stop everywhere. Sometimes you just end up getting a taxi. I don't want to stand in the rain and be cold and wet on a cold bus and you won't get warm till you get home.

When the bus gets too busy and it stops at every stop and traffic lights I get angry.

However, at certain times of day or on certain routes, bus travel could be less pleasant due to issues arising from the sharing of an enclosed public space and differences in accepted behaviour between generations.

When you do use public transport you have everyone with their music in their ears and people talking on their phones it's just not as quiet as it should be and people listen in to other conversations and you have to listen to other people speak when you don't want to.

The research team reported relatively frequent complaints about the attitudes of drivers and the way some vehicles were driven. As well as reports of driver rudeness, driver behaviour on the roads was a problem associated with deregulation.

Coming down Renfield Street is horrendous at busy times. I'm surprised there's not more accidents, they don't give any respect, especially when the lights change.

They try to race each other to get more passengers on their buses.

Car use

Attitudes and norms

I'd feel as if my lung had been removed (if was forced to give up car)

The cultural preferences for convenience, freedom and flexibility were substantial attractions towards car use and push factors away from active travel. The complexity of modern living also produced an expectation of being able to make journeys involving multiple destinations and errands on one outing or trip. These factors, compounded by infrastructural support for the motor car, remain a significant barrier to the adoption of active travel on a mass scale.

I came straight from my friend's house, I didn't have enough time to walk and I'm going food shopping after this so I need the car for my bags. I was at the dump before I came here so I had to take stuff here.

There are some people I visit who I can't get to without a car though and that's the reason I keep it, otherwise I think I could live without a car.

Added to this was the continued idea that bus travel was 'second rate,' and that car ownership was a form of prestige and esteem.

I'm sending away for a driving licence soon. Then I won't need to get a taxi everywhere, I will get my mum to buy me a car. I wouldn't use the bus if had a car, so I don't need to wait on a bus and would get there faster.

If I could drive, I would probably drive absolutely everywhere.

However, some valued the relinquishing of responsibility that came with public transport. When someone else was doing the driving, it afforded opportunities for relaxation.

Driving is stressful sometimes. I find it a bit tiring as well. Although I have a car I might get the bus down there I think I'd find it relaxing. The bus is great you get to just sit there and daydream.

Motivations and barriers

Participants often cited a preference for car travel because it simply made sense when convenience, comfort and independence were primary decision making criteria. However, these factors could provide the push toward public transport when car use was made inconvenient through parking restrictions and charges or congestion, particularly for travel to the city centre where alternative transport links exist.

I have a car, saves me parking charges and petrol sometimes it's best for me just to use the bus and save fuel, and the bus is cheaper than the fuel.

You wouldn't take a car into town – parking is far too pricey.

Conversely, the overheads associated with car ownership (rather than the journey based outlays like petrol and parking) can act as a reason to travel by car even for journeys where it does not make sense.

I don't see the point in paying car insurance and tax if I'm going to walk. I drive even though it takes as long as I walk.

For others, these outlays themselves acted as a barrier to motoring.

I've never wanted to drive, the cost has put me off. I've got more things to do with my money than spend it on cars.

CONCLUSIONS

The centrality of convenience in decision making

In furthering understanding of the norms and values around current travel preferences, this research underlines the importance of convenience and time efficiency in shaping choice of travel mode. Health benefits of non-car based travel are well recognised and have a place in the normative backdrop around travel (car travel is 'lazy') but it appears that these benefits alone will not provide a significant push toward active modes unless they also begin to make sense against the convenience related criteria. The fact that many travellers in the study recognised alternatives to the car were available (particularly buses) suggests it is not a shortage of information that is the major barrier.

Travel mode, culture and identity

In addition to convenience, the perceived meaning of a mode of transport and its 'fit' with a user's identity are important influences. The contribution cars make toward wellbeing, through representing a source of esteem, has been well established.⁶ The evidence in this report also points to the way cars can support individualised lifestyles allowing complex trips with multiple destinations to be made. Independence and freedom from a reliance on existing routes and timetables is a key attraction to car use, but is neither sustainable nor health promoting. For shorter journeys, walking also generates this independence and sense of control. But for a behaviour such as walking to become a habit, it must also fit with the user's sense of who they are and be available as a travel choice for journeys. For those who need to make longer journeys, walking is not seen as an available choice.

Cyclists, though a small group, have overcome or reframed perceptions of both danger and inconvenience and have often successfully integrated cycling as a key component of their identity. They often benefit from an increased sense of control and independence when compared with public transport users. Cyclists can therefore be identified as 'positive deviants'⁷ by representing, in their actions, a successful value and behavioural shift. Those with a positive frame towards the pace of bus travel also fall into this category. Investigating their motivations can contribute to understanding how more active travel modes can be promoted more broadly.

⁶ Macintyre S, Kearns A, Ellaway A, Hiscock R. *The THAW report: Findings of a Study of Transport, Housing and Well Being in the West of Scotland*. The Department of Urban Studies and MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit: University of Glasgow, 2000

⁷ Sternin, J. Positive Deviance: A new paradigm for addressing today's problems today. *Journal of Corporate Citizenship* 2002; **5**: 57-62

Infrastructure

It is clear that when infrastructure is designed to facilitate car travel, this mode becomes the most convenient, and consequently the mode most likely to be adopted. Fears about danger from other road traffic can compound reasons not to make the shift from car based travel to modes vulnerable to traffic, such as walking or cycling.

Respondents identified congestion in the city centre as a factor which would motivate them to leave the car at home, but this also worked against bus travel, as buses are also susceptible to traffic flows. Deregulation of services has created a plethora of bus operating companies each with their own services and timetables that make bus travel harder to navigate for those who might otherwise make the shift. However, there is a clear indication that when interventions are put in place to make car travel less convenient or more expensive, active travel modes do begin to make more sense.

As safety is a continuing issue for both walkers and cyclists, there appears to be a significant way still to go to shift the balance on our streets from prioritising car based movement to prioritising active travel modes. Fear of anti-social behaviour is another barrier and one that may seem beyond the scope of transport planners as it reflects a wider societal problem around trust and fragmentation. However, active travel modes have the potential to see people using public spaces in greater numbers, which in turn can enhance feelings of safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Convenience is defined by the journeys we are expected to make, those we believe we are able to make and the available infrastructure to support our journey choices. Currently, infrastructure and planning in the city often promotes the use of cars by facilitating their use over other modes. Promoting car use not only makes the non-active choice easier, it makes the active choice less convenient. Car dependency will continue if unsafe urban spaces less well disposed to walking and cycling are produced or poorly integrated into existing transport networks.

We suggest:

- Prioritising active travel modes in planning decisions that affect personal travel choices and to think broadly about how planning shapes these choices. The complexity of journeys we expect to make can be compounded through planning, such as out of town developments established at the expense of local facilities based where people currently live and/or work.
- Discouraging car use through disincentives where suitable public transport or active travel alternatives are available and actively incentivised. Parking charges in the city centre appeared in our data to push people toward active travel modes.
- Making active travel more convenient by supporting initiatives that can reduce the number and complexity of journeys which need to be made, such as home or distance working.
- Making active travel a safer and more pleasant experience through improving connectivity, appearance and signage of walking and cycling routes. Understanding the priority given by individuals to convenience of travel, relative travel times to key destinations could be published either on active travel maps or signage. This could produce a swing in favour of valuing active travel as a convenient mode of transport.
- As confidence is also an issue with cycling, schemes such as cycling hubs at railway or bus stations (such as Northern Rail's Cyclepoint) should be more widely provided, offering cycling support such as safe storage, cycle hire, repairs and route information as well as transfer to other forms of public transport. These are a key element of transport infrastructure in other European countries such as the Netherlands where cycling is the norm.
- Given that public transport, walking or cycling will not be appropriate for some journeys, car-clubs provide a means of providing access to a car for journeys which require it. These have the added benefit of reducing the overheads that once paid, can promote continued use of a car. Extension and promotion of these schemes in Glasgow could enable people to become confident active travellers whilst having back-up access to a car for complex or longer occasional journeys. Similarly pool cars in workplaces have the potential to reduce individual car ownership. Out of hours access could also be considered.

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