The Mobility Preferences of Generation Y: Transitioning Towards a Sustainable Transport System?

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Norwich Conference on Earth System Governance
July 2014
Mobility: modal choice
The automobile

• An artefact of automobility
• A highly contested, iconic commodity
• The hegemonic class of contemporary everyday mobility
• ‘Mobility-by-automobile’ as a human right
Automobility [1]

Material artefacts

Natural resources
Policy & legislative artefacts
Infrastructure
Organisations & agents

Together achieve functionality
Automobility [2]

“The self-organising, self-generating, non-linear world-wide system of cars, car-drivers, roads, petroleum supplies, and many novel objects, technologies, and signs” (Urry, 2004: p.27)

A system which both allows the opportunity to drive, whilst also enforcing the need to drive
Automobility [3]

The good
• Autonomy, freedom & access

The bad
• Reliance on fossil fuels,
• System of auto-dependence,
• Social inequality & injustice,
• Health issues (air pollution, obesity)

The ugly
• Vested interests,
• Power asymmetries
Sustainable mobility

Environmetnally, socially and economically sustainable mobility systems which provide equitable access to a range of mobility options.
The Sustainable Mobility Paradigm

• Reduced need to travel: travel substitution
• Transport policy: facilitating modal shift
• Land use policy: facilitating distance reduction
• Technological innovation: Increasing efficiency

(Banister, 2008, 2011)
Sustainability transitions are “long-term, multi-dimensional, and fundamental transformation processes through which established socio-technical systems shift to more sustainable modes of production and consumption”

(Markard et al., 2012: p.956)
Generation Y Mobility

GENERATION Y
Who are generation Y?


**Defining characteristics:**

• ‘Digital natives’ (rather than ‘digital immigrants’)  
• Growing up during a period of mass consumption and growing inequality

**Why do they matter?**

• Largest generation in the USA and Australia
Formative ‘youth’ mobility events:

Learning to walk, to ride a bike, to drive a car – gaining mobility-based competencies, “all form part of the fabric that constructs our everyday mobility”
(Pooley et al., 2005: p.1)

However, for generation Y:

“Leaving the family comes later nowadays, and complete integration to the economic system is postponed. At the same time, 18 year olds drive cars and act like adults in many other ways”
(Tully, 2002: p.23)
Global generation Y mobility trends

Declining rates of: licensing (average 0.6%/year), vehicle kilometres travelled (VKT) and car ownership
Generation Y Mobility

DRIVERS OF GENERATION Y MOBILITY PRACTICES
Factors which might reduce or replicate automobility for generation Y:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanatory category</th>
<th>Reduce</th>
<th>Replicate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Freedom, autonomy, prestige</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Willingness to use alternative transport modes, social acceptance, social groups</td>
<td>Driving as a ‘rite of passage’, car as a status symbol, encouragement from family &amp; friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Built environment</td>
<td>Infrastructure for alternative mode</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural environment</td>
<td>Increasing concern for climate change, environmental degradation, peak oil, health concerns</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>GFC, cost of learning to drive</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal/policy</td>
<td>Graduated learner scheme</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Technological</td>
<td>ICT, social networking &amp; virtual mobilities</td>
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Source: Hopkins & Stephenson, 2014
Generation Y Mobility

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS
Interview locations

- Auckland: 1.42 million (2013 census)
- Dunedin: 120,258 (2013 census)
- Rural: 563,871 (2006 census)
Interviews with generation Y

- N = 6
- Aged 21-32 years old
- 5 female, 1 male
- 1 additional pilot interview
- Average length – 44 minutes
- Dunedin, New Zealand
Values attached to car travel

• Independence
  “Being able to do things by myself and not have someone else wait around for me or run around after me. My car was recently broken for a week... and that was horrible.” (Participant 3, female, 26 years old)

• Freedom
  “My car is a station wagon, so I can pack it up and take a group of friends away to Central, that sort of thing...” (Participant 5, male, 25 years old)
Achieving freedom & autonomy without a vehicle

“I find the bus is fine because its, you know, it’s got a timetable and it’s at set times, and generally it can take me to close enough where I want to go. But I think its harder working around someone else because it changes every day, where they need to be, especially at home with siblings. It’s more difficult depending on someone else”. (Participant 2, female, learners licence, no car, 21 years old)
“I know I should have it... I think I should have it because I should have my own independence and not have to rely on somebody else, have my own way around. I feel like it’s limited jobs that I can get as well. They ask where do you live, and how will you get to work. So it’s definitely impacted on that.” (Participant 2, female, learners licence, no car, 21 years old)
“I just put it [getting restricted licence] off and put it off. I had romantic notions too, like ‘Oh I’m going to go and live in New York or something and no one needs to drive there’. But then I just kind of shaped it so that I’ve lived in places in Dunedin that are close to everything, so I don’t need to drive”.

(Participant 6, female, learners licence, no car, 32 years old)
“When I have Skype conversations, it’s just a conversation, whereas friends I see in Dunedin, we’ll normally meet up over lunch or a coffee or doing something, we wouldn’t just talk... you’d be doing something and talking at the same time.” (Participant 4, female, 23 years old, licence & car)

Does ICT replace physical meeting? “No, I think I just have friends in more places... it’s a lot easier to maintain friendships further away... I have a friend in Australia... I probably see her about as often as I would... you can’t really replace that face to face.” (Participant 3, female, 26 years old, licence & car)
THEORISING A SUSTAINABLE TRANSITION
Transition theory & the multi-level perspective (MLP)

• Replacing one socio-technical regime (automobility) with another (sustainable mobility) requires a socio-technical transition

• A framework to explore stability & change

• Transitions are non-linear processes, requiring interplay across three analytical levels: niches, socio-technical regimes and socio-technical landscape
## Generation Y & the MLP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical level</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Pace and direction of change</th>
<th>Examples of relation to generation Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-technical landscape</td>
<td>Wider context influencing niche and regime dynamics: urban design, political ideologies, societal values, beliefs, macro-economic trends etc.</td>
<td>Beyond the control of individual actors</td>
<td>Structured, slow change</td>
<td>Changing social norms &amp; values, global financial crisis</td>
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<td>Socio-technical regimes</td>
<td>The “deep structural rules that coordinate and guide an actor’s perceptions and actions” (p. 473)</td>
<td>Actors are embedded in socio-technical regimes</td>
<td>Slower, stable trajectories</td>
<td>Automobility, multi-modality, sustainable mobility</td>
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<td>Niches</td>
<td>‘protected spaces’ for innovation to occur</td>
<td>Niche actors work on radical innovations (differ from existing regime)</td>
<td>Can be rapid, random directions</td>
<td>Technologies (e.g. ICT developments), Car sharing businesses</td>
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**Source:** Hopkins (2014)
The Multi-Level Perspective (MLP)

Source: Hopkins (2014)
A sustainable transition?

Changes are occurring, in some but not all developed economies, however, if these changes are going to continue in the long term, and contribute to a sociotechnical transition, it will require:

- Support from powerful actors
- Policy and infrastructure developments
- Acknowledgment of alternatives to business-as-usual road building agendas.
References


Sivak, M. & Schoettle, B. (2011). Recent changes in the age composition of driver in 15 countries, University of Michigan Transport Research Institute, UMTRI-2011-43


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Sincerest thanks to Emeritus Prof Gerry Carrington, Dr Janet Stephenson, & Dr Michelle Scott for their help & guidance with the research presented in this seminar.