

FACT SHEET: **LEISURE TRAVEL**

The untapped savings

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Audience travel is the largest cause of greenhouse gas emissions in the performing arts sector. However, leisure travel has had little attention by government policy-makers, transport operators, and researchers to understand the travel choices and how these choices could be shifted to be more environmentally sustainable. There is incredible scope to reduce leisure travel emissions and have a knock-on effect in other areas of travel. This note provides an overview of why a focus on leisure travel is so important to target and what can be done to reduce its environmental impact.

Why leisure travel is important?

The apparently insatiable demand for the movement of goods and people, particularly by road and air, means that the transport sector is consistently responsible for around a quarter of carbon dioxide emissions in developed countries. About two-thirds of these emissions are accounted for by individual passenger movements, and the rest by freight demand. Most importantly, transport is one of the few sectors of the economy where emissions continue to increase year on year despite improvements in vehicle efficiency and the increasing potential for some journeys to be substituted by information and communication technology.

Policy, media and research attention focuses on the plight of the (urban) commuter, the problems created by the increasingly car oriented journey to school and, more recently, the unprecedented growth in air travel. This is despite the fact that, in the UK, these segments of transport activity currently account for only 24%, 2% and 2% respectively of domestic emissions from personal transport (1).

By contrast, leisure travel, in all its guises (but not including shopping), is responsible for around 30% of personal travel emissions and represents one of the only journey purposes with essentially universal participation. Importantly, nearly everyone participates in some kind of discretionary activity away from home at some point whereas, at the very most, only around 50% of the population travel to work, have children in school or fly in any one year. More poignantly, in terms of car dependency, leisure comprises one of the fastest growing sectors of car based travel demand. This applies to the UK context but will be typical for many western economies.

Yet, apart from the occasional focus on holiday traffic 'mayhem', leisure travel rarely hits the headlines or is afforded the policy and research attention it deserves. It is also true to say that within the black box of 'leisure' which encompasses a diverse array of activities, we understand little of the contribution of specific demands such as audience travel to cultural events.

Government transport policies

It is true to say that leisure journeys present a particular set of challenges for policy that is attempting to encourage lower carbon choices. In the study of leisure sociology and psychology, most authors agree that leisure participation is an expression of identity, personal values and attitudes. Precisely the same factors closely associated with leisure also conjure up notions of a state of mind connected with the 'love affair with the car' such as freedom of choice, freedom from obligation, liberty and free access, enjoyment, relaxation, a lack of evaluation, voluntary participation, and so on. Consequently, for policy to be successful in this area, interventions need to replicate the necessary conditions for this state of mind to be created whilst using transport modes other than the car.

In very broad terms, the options for policy to reduce carbon emissions fall into four categories: each tackling a main source of energy demand and emissions from transport. These include policies, which incentivise, invest in or regulate for:

- (i) The technical efficiency of engines used to power the vehicles;
- (ii) The operational efficiency with which vehicles are used, including their occupancy and how they are driven;
- (iii) The mode of transport used to meet a given demand;
- (iv) The demand for movement (distance travelled), itself derived from the need or desire to access goods and services and largely determined by land use patterns.

In the UK and elsewhere, the overwhelming balance of effort lies with technical solutions at the expense of attempts to alter mode choices and patterns of movement. The UK's low carbon reduction strategy for example, published in July 2009, expects 94% of the carbon savings from the sector by 2020 to come from technical based solutions, mainly improvements to car efficiency (2). On the one hand, the push for further improvements in vehicle and fuel technologies to reduce the environmental impacts of motorised transport without limiting distances travelled is an obvious priority. However, this emphasis leaves the problem that travel demand is growing faster than capacity possibly can. It also ignores the problem that efficiency gains can be offset by the uptake of vehicles with greater power and additional features and neglects the social issue that a significant share of the population cannot drive or does not have access to a car, for reasons of income, age, or ability.

The emphasis on vehicle and fuel technologies ignores the increasingly large body of evidence now pointing to the potential for the right combination of incentives, service improvements and information to alter travel choices over relatively short time periods, for many different types of journey at low cost. This evidence comes from the relatively recent attempts to address problems of ever increasing demands for road space by focussing on a range of activities defined as mobility management. This broad approach is aimed at encouraging the use of alternative modes by changing behaviour on behalf of organisations and individuals and utilises interventions such as travel plans, ticketing and pricing alterations, car clubs and car sharing schemes, personalised journey planning and promotional campaigns.

The important point is that the definition of 'behaviour change' in mobility management is not simply restricted to mode choice and 'getting people out of their car'. Solutions are built around making the best use of the available infrastructure and this relies, at least in part, on the cooperative behaviour of transport users, with car sharing being a common example of a means by which considerable efficiency savings can be made. It also involves using the transport mode most appropriate for each journey, flexible use of travel time and route choice. Most of all it involves increasing understanding of travel behaviour and the reasons for individual journeys within specific contexts and organisational settings in order that interventions can be designed and targeted accordingly.

This is where the lack of emphasis on leisure travel, and especially travel to cultural events, has been an incredible missed opportunity. Successful mobility management requires tapping into social influences on individual's decision making and altering the bounds of what is considered 'normal behaviour'. What could be considered more influential than popular culture and the associated social networks as a source of inspiration, creativity and alternative behaviour?

Guidance for how to reduce audience travel emissions

Targeting audience travel to venues hosting festivals, music, sporting and theatrical events has the potential to have an impact much greater than the sum of its parts. By altering aspirations, experiences, information channels and behavioural norms, successful changes achieved in audience travel behaviour could have a trickle down effect and help to embed lower carbon choices into a wider set of travel decisions. For instance:

- › The development of sophisticated information communication technology tools to facilitate car sharing could add to its position as a viable alternative to single occupancy car travel for a number of journey purposes.
- › Exposing people to the benefits of coach travel could have far reaching impacts given that it is the most efficient mode of transport over longer journey distances.
- › Altering just a small proportion of long distance journeys to cultural events could have a disproportionately larger impact than altering a larger number of short distance commuting and school travel journeys.
- › Stimulating the market for 'green' car hire and car clubs could even have the potential to reduce car ownership and the development of associated car dependent lifestyles.

The latter is based on the fact that many people are car owners and own large family cars chosen with the relatively infrequent number of annual leisure and holiday journeys in mind. Helping to alter car purchasing patterns and a shift away from owning large cars which are primarily used for single occupancy short urban journeys could have a far reaching impact on emissions from the transport sector.

Efforts to influence audience travel patterns necessitate excellent partnership working between transport operators, promoters, local authorities and venues. As the transport psychologists and sociologists suggest, the key will be to create and market journey experiences which rival the independence, flexibility and perceived lack of stress offered by the private car. The journey experience itself needs to become an integral part of the whole cultural and leisure experience. This includes integrated methods of payment which at least offer the illusion of 'free travel' to rival the often perceived 'free' marginal costs of car travel. Information between all the relevant actors needs to be shared to develop targeted and innovative information and exploit existing social networks. Most importantly, lower carbon alternatives need to be aspirational experiences to alter social norms and expose audiences to alternative ways of doing things which, if mainstreamed into everyday life, could have far reaching consequences on emissions from the transport sector.

References

1: Department for Transport (2008). Carbon Pathways Analysis: informing development of a carbon reduction strategy for the transport sector. Department for Transport, London

2: Department for Transport (2009). A Carbon Reduction Strategy for Transport: Impact Assessment. Department for Transport, London