Transitions to Independent Mobility among Children and Young People

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Abstract

Independent mobility is a prominent theme in urban and transport research concerned with the wellbeing of children and young people in Australian cities. It is also important for children and young people themselves who, on the one hand, seek greater independence as they make their transition to adulthood but, on the other hand, express concerns about their personal safety and preferences for company when they travel. This paper presents findings from a grounded child/youth centred study exploring the issue of independent mobility through semi-structured interviews with children aged 9 to 12 years and young people aged 13 to 15 years living in five different neighbourhoods in Blacktown, Western Sydney. This qualitative research revealed a range of social factors that influence the degree of independent mobility utilised by children and young people in a contemporary Australian urban context. The participant responses enrich the prevailing discourse of independent mobility that tends to be focussed on physical aspects of the built environment of the residential neighbourhood. The findings suggest that independent mobility is not a singular attribute that is adult-bestowed and regulated but rather a process that is graduated over time and space, and contingent upon household circumstances, travel purpose and mode, among other factors. This more nuanced interpretation of children's and young people's independent mobility can help inform urban and transport planning and policy interventions to more effectively support children and young people to travel around their neighbourhoods and cities safely, actively and independently.

Key words: children; young people; independent mobility; everyday travel

Introduction

Children's and young people's independent mobility refers to the degree to which people under 18 years of age can travel and explore their communities, without being accompanied or supervised by an adult (Whitzman, 2013 p186). Independent mobility has been a prominent theme in urban and transport research concerning children and young people since the seminal study by Mayer Hillman and his colleagues in Britain in the early 1990s (Hillman et al. 1990), which found that between 1971 and 1990 there had been a dramatic decline in the proportion of children who were travelling independently.

While much research on independent mobility has been concerned with the influence of the built environment, this paper explores some of the social factors that might influence the degree of independence with which children and young people may travel based on findings from a qualitative study with children and young people in Blacktown, Western Sydney. In particular, it considers how independent mobility varies by age and gender, and extends into a discussion of the influence of the dynamics within the households as influencing factors.

In Australia, the interest in children and young people's independent mobility dates back to research by Tranter and Whitelegg (1994) with children in Canberra. Based on Hillman's earlier work (Hillman, Adams et al. 1990), Tranter and Whitelegg (1994) found that children in Canberra were less independently mobile than their British or German counterparts, and related this finding to the higher degree of car dependency generally. A number of other comparative studies have also pointed to the decline in active travel to school over the past three decades as representing a decline in independent mobility among children more generally (for example Malone and Rudner 2011; Fyhri et al. 2011).

Concern about declining independent mobility among children and young people has gathered momentum since the early 2000s, fuelled by debates in popular media about the children being overly protected by the parents (Fenech 2010) as opposed to being 'free range' (Whitzman, 2013, Skenazy 2010, 2012) or allowed to more freely explore their urban environments (Olding 2010).

There are several good reasons for this concern with independent mobility. Health and child development studies have shown that having the opportunity to be able to travel around local neighbourhoods without adult supervision supports children's social, cognitive and physical development (Mackett 2013, Carver et al. 2012, Donita et al. 1999). Children and young people's independent mobility is considered an important indicator of a 'child-friendly city' as highlighted in much of the literature on child friendly cities (Malone 2004; Tranter 2004; Gleeson and Sipe 2006, Malone 2006, Sipe, Buchanan et al. 2006, Woolcock and Gleeson 2007, Rudner and Malone 2011, Whitzman 2013)to the extent that it has been referred to as a measure 'of the success and resilience of a city' (Freeman and Tranter 2011, p 182). By extension, enabling children and young people to travel without an accompanying adult, increases their physical activity associated with using active transport (walking and cycling) and/or use of public transport (Page et al. 2009).

Independent mobility is equally relevant to broader concerns about city movement and sustainability because if children and young people (up to the age of 17 years) can travel independently of an adult, they will almost certainly not be travelling by car. It is also an important concern for children and young people themselves who, on the one hand, seek greater independence as they make their transition to adulthood but, on the other hand, express concerns about their personal safety and preferences for company when they travel.

Given that there are health and social benefits of having freedom to travel without adult supervision, considerable research attention has been devoted to identifying the factors that influence independent mobility (Alparone and Pacilli 2012). Much of this research has been directed towards identifying the modifiable physical characteristics within the built environment that influence levels of independent mobility (Giles-Corti, Kelty et al. 2009, Whitzman, Romero et al. 2012, Broberg, Salminen et al. 2013).

Since most of these studies focus on children under 12 years of age, rather than across a wider age span, there has been a tendency for the concept of 'independent mobility' to be treated as a singular, adult-bestowed attribute - something a young person has or has not acquired. In this view, independent mobility tends to be regarded as an opposite to adult-dependent mobility (Freeman and Tranter 2011, p 181). This dichotomous view of independent mobility implies that it is a freedom that adults either directly or indirectly allow or restrict. The problem with such an interpretation of independent mobility is that it runs counter to the sociological perspective of children and young people as agents, in their own right, who are actively negotiating their daily lives.

In contrast, this paper argues that independent mobility is a more complex concept, based on conversations with children and young people interviewed as part of qualitative research on children and young people's mobilities, and illustrates how the transition to independent mobility is a negotiated, iterative process.

Methodology

The research involved semi-structured interviews with children and young people in two age cohorts. In all there were 51 children in Years 5 and 6 from three government primary schools and 52 young people in Year 9 from five high schools selected from across the Blacktown local government area (LGA). From the total number of 103 interviews 65 interviews included discussions about independent mobility. The interviews were one component of a mixed method, child/youth-focussed research design.

Contemporary sociology of children and young people has emphasised the importance of valuing children and young people's views equally with those of adults (Christensen and O'Brien 2003, Skelton 2007, Porter and Abane 2008). In line with this position, the research sought to investigate the differences and similarities in mobility from the perspective of the children and young people themselves. Drawing from geographies of children and young people (Aitken 2001, Barker, Kraftl et al. 2009, Holt 2011, Horschelmann and van Blerk 2011), the child/youth-focussed, mixed-methods study was designed to

engage the children and young people in activities that were inclusive of different levels of ability, and in which they had an interest (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth and NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2008).

The schools were selected from five distinctly different localities, classified for the purposes of this research as Blacktown North East; Blacktown Central and Blacktown South East; Blacktown South West and Blacktown Outer West as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Blacktown local government area showing suburbs and research localities
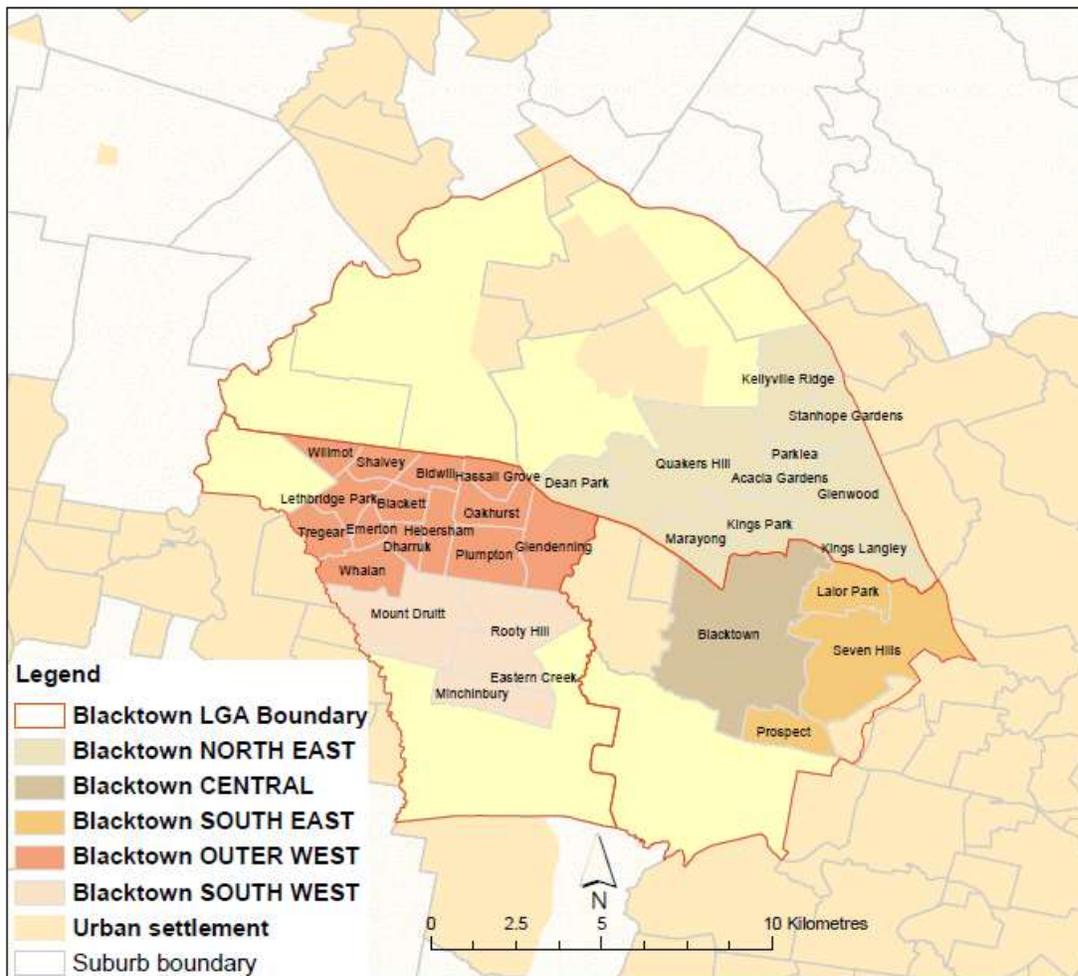
Each of the three primary schools was located within 500 metres of the high school within the research localities of Blacktown North East, Blacktown South East and Blacktown Central.

Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee and the New South Wales Department of Education School Education Research Approval Process. The required police-record check and a 'Working with Children' check were obtained.

Research sites in Blacktown, Western Sydney

Blacktown local government area (LGA) was selected as the site for the research because it has many of the characteristics, both social and spatial, that epitomise contemporary Australian urban environments.

Situated approximately 35 kilometres west of Sydney's CBD, Blacktown LGA has the fifth largest population among local government areas in Australia. The built environment of Blacktown shares many

of variations found across the Sydney region, from colonial heritage buildings to new multistorey residential development. Alongside its characteristic low density suburbs of quarter acre blocks (in Blacktown South East) and social housing estates (in Outer West), there are new master-planned estates and gated communities (in Blacktown North East), and high density redevelopment close to the main retail and commercial area of Blacktown Central.

In terms of its transport network, Blacktown lies at the junction of two train lines, three motorways and two rapid bus transit ways (and a speedway). Blacktown's population is socially and culturally diverse. Some of the most disadvantaged communities of Sydney live in the south west and outer west of Blacktown LGA, more affluent households in the north east, middle income communities in the south east and many newly-arrived migrant households in the central area. This combination of social, spatial and physical characteristics of Blacktown made it a highly suitable location to gather the views of children and young people from a range of backgrounds and circumstances.

Independent mobility among children and young people in Blacktown

Using qualitative methods, rather than survey methods that are usually applied in travel research, opened a different set of possibilities about what is understood as independent mobility and how it is practised by children and young people. What was immediately apparent from the 65 interviews in which independent mobility was discussed, was that the majority of children (75 per cent) and young people (85 per cent) reported that they could exercise some degree of independent mobility as part of their everyday travel. These children and young people, when asked the question, 'Are there places that you can go without an adult looking after you?' responded by describing at least one example of places in their local area that they travel to without adult supervision.

There was a broad range of responses, however, in how, where and why children and young people travelled independently For the younger age group the places to which they could travel independently were mainly local parks shops and the homes of their friends. For the older group there was a greater variety of places to which they could travel independently, including major centres. The interviews with children and young people affirmed the evidence from other urban and transport studies that point to the importance of having local social and recreational facilities like parks and shops that are accessible by walking or cycling, as an enabler of independent mobility *among primary school aged children* (Trapp et al., 2012).

What was particularly notable was that most children and young people interviewed could exercise some degree of independent mobility regardless of their mode of travel to school. The same proportion of children and young people who were driven to school responded positively to the questions about independent mobility (11 of 13 interviewees who were driven to school) as did those who walked to school (29 of 34 interviewees).

The variety in responses about how and where the children and young people could travel independently and the fact that the journey to school was not an obvious predictor of independent mobility for travel to other activities underscores two key points made in this paper. Firstly, that to understand children's and young people's independent mobility it is necessary to consider their travel *beyond the journey to school*; and secondly, that independent mobility is *not a singular attribute* that is acquired at a certain age. So rather than simply consider whether or not children and young people in Blacktown are independently mobile, the study investigated points of difference among the children and young people in the degree of independent mobility they exercised. It is the variations among the responses by age group, gender and household circumstances that are of particular interest in this paper.

Life stage transitions to independent mobility

Age in years is an important factor considered in transport planning and policy. It is a criteria for determining fares, obtaining drivers' licences and for restrictions on movement of children and young people as a measure to ensure safety of children and young people. It is somewhat surprising that age differences are less frequently the subject of research related to independent mobility. In this study, however, the everyday travel patterns of children and young people in Blacktown showed that there was

a notable difference between the two age cohorts in terms of where and how children and young people could travel independently.

Through the interviews it was apparent that the transition to high school, more than age *per se*, marked the difference between children and young people in their independent mobility.

The transition to high school

The transition to high school often involves a distinct change of daily travel routines for many young people because high schools have a wider catchment area than primary schools and often require longer journeys. For some young people, the transition to high school means their journey to school requires travel by bus or train for the first time.

Because many studies of children's independent mobility focus solely on primary school aged children, the transition to independent mobility with the transition to high school has not been obvious. What this research showed was that by the age of 14 or 15 years, the majority of young people across all five localities in Blacktown, both young men and young women, had a considerable degree of independence over their mobility, and some were able to go well beyond the boundaries of the LGA, as reflected in these responses to the interview questions:

I can go anywhere in Blacktown.

Young man, 14 years, Blacktown South East [109]

Just about anywhere

Young woman, 14 years, Blacktown South East [104]

Yeah quite a lot, I go to work on my own, I travel a lot on my own.

Young woman, 14 years, Blacktown Central [21]

My parents pretty much let me go out. I can go wherever I want most of the time as long as I keep in touch with them, Stanhope or Castle Towers or Blacktown by myself.

Young woman, 14 years, Blacktown North East [253]

In contrast to the older group of participants, the children in the research tended to be limited in their independent mobility to places they could walk to around their immediate neighbourhood. This reinforces the evidence for walkability of local environments being an enabler of independent mobility among primary school aged children.

Locational differences between high schools and primary schools might well explain some of the differences in patterns of everyday travel that might be found among children and young people across Sydney, but the findings from Blacktown study suggested school location does not explain all of the differences between age groups because the high schools and primary schools selected in each locality were either adjacent or very close to each other. In other words the physical and locational contexts, at least for school travel, were the same for both age groups.

Indeed there were a number of instances where older siblings reported using different modes to get to school while their younger siblings, who attended adjacent primary schools, were being driven. For example one young woman [127] from Blacktown North East explained how she travels at least part of the way to school on her own while her brother is driven and how that could change when her brother commenced high school:

Well, my mum drops my brother off at his primary school just there, ... And I get dropped off there and walk from there 'cause I kinda need some exercise but I can't be bothered to walk all the way there ...
Q: And what year is your brother in?

> *He's in year six, so he'll be coming here next year. And my mum says we might be taking the bus next year.*
> *Q: So it could change again?*
> *Yeah.*

Young woman 14 years, Blacktown North East, [127]

Gendered transitions to independent mobility

Although progression to high school may mark a step change towards fully independent mobility, the interviews suggested that the transition to independent mobility may start at an earlier age for boys compared to girls. This is evident in the following interview extracts from two participants in Blacktown South East public school, the first two from 11 year old girls and the second from a boy of the same age, in the same locality:

> *Q: Are there places you can go alone or just with friends?*
> *Just to Woolworths down the street. I have to tell my mum first and get permission.*

Female 11 years, Blacktown South East [153]

> *Q: Are there places you are allowed to go alone?*
> *Not really, not alone.*
> *Q: Are there places you are allowed to go just with friends?*
> *Yeah, to the park up the road.*

Female, 11 years, Blacktown South East [154]

> *Yeah I go to Franklins or Woolworths, or sometimes I go to Westpoint just with my friends and that.*

Young male, 11 years, Blacktown South East, [165]

This finding is consistent with other studies of children and young people's independently mobility that have found that, in general boys have a greater degree of independence than girls at a younger age (Brown, Mackett et al. 2008, Carver, Timperio et al. 2012, Romana and Giuseppina 2012).

The Blacktown study expands on this point, finding that while gender was a differentiating factor among the primary school children, its influence was less pronounced among the high school participants. However, the young women noted the distinction between travelling alone and travelling without an accompanying adult, and that they could travel to more places and further afield independent of adult supervision if they were travelling with friends. The need to be in the company of other peers is suggested in these two responses by young female participants from each of the two age groups:

> *Q: Are there places you can go without an adult going with you?*
> *If I go with my friends I can go to Westpoint with my friends. Sometimes I walk down to McDonalds with my friends. I can go to the park with my friends.*

Young Female 11 years, Blacktown South East [158]

> *Q: Are you allowed to go out with your friends without an adult going with you like when you go to the shops?*
> *Yeah.*
> *Q: And how do you get there when someone doesn't drive you?*
> *Oh we go on the bus or if we're going to Penrith we'll like meet at the station and catch a train together.*

Young female, 14 years, Blacktown Outer West [66]

These two responses suggest that the influences of age and gender on mobility are interconnected, Moreover, these examples point to the importance of having a local friendship network that can help overcome some of the gendered restrictions on independent mobility. Further, these examples highlight that an important step in the transition to independent mobility is young people's use of public transport.

Independent mobility by mode

Consistent with Sydney household travel survey data (BTS 2009) and other overseas studies (Fyhri 2012) a smaller proportion of young people in the Blacktown study recorded travel by car compared to travel by car recorded by children but the reverse was true for use of public transport. Figure 2 shows the proportion of travel by mode for single mode trips recorded by each age cohort. Two thirds (67 per cent) of recorded travel by the children was by car compared to 57 per cent of travel by car recorded by young people. In contrast, a greater proportion of young people than children recorded travel by public transport (bus or trains), 15 per cent compared to one per cent. There was not as great a difference between the two age cohorts in recorded travel by walking, 27 per cent of recorded travel by young people compared to 32 per cent of recorded travel by children.

Figure 2 Proportion of everyday travel recorded by age group and mode*
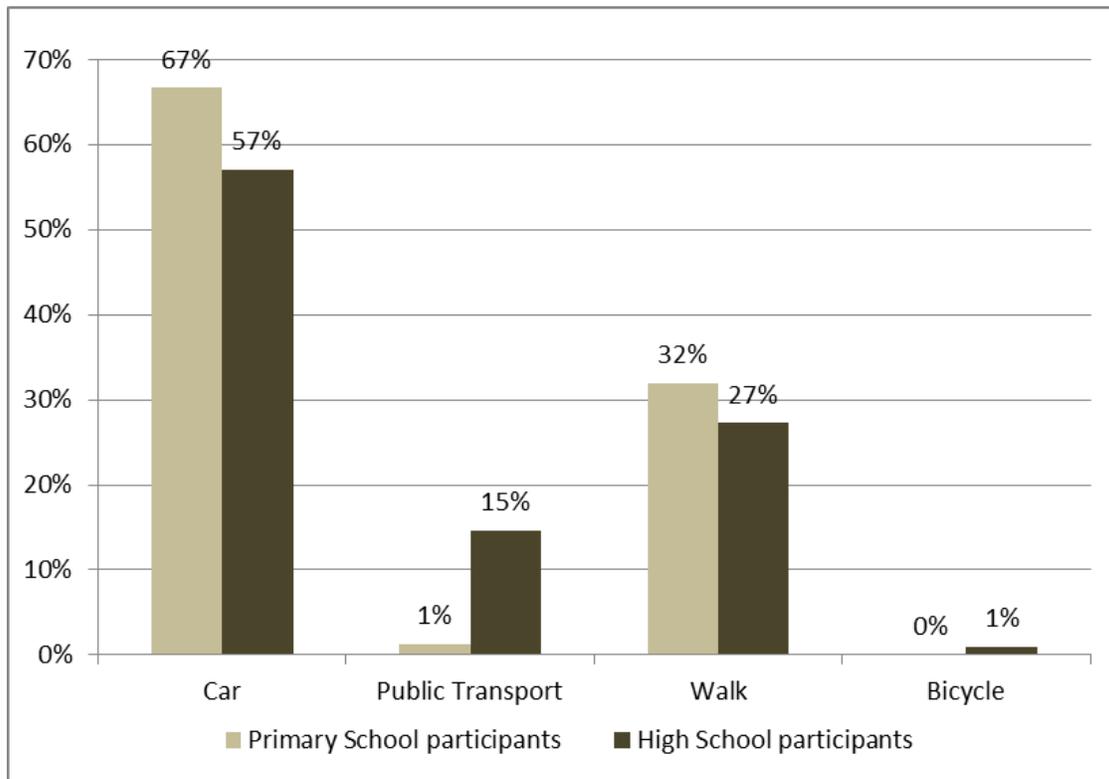
* Single mode trips only

Transport mode is a crude indicator of independent mobility because children and young people may be accompanied by adults while travelling on public transport, walking or bike riding. However, mode use can help identify differences among children and young people of different ages and life stages in the extent of their independent mobility. For most of the children, the spatial range of independent mobility

was the places they could walk or ride their bike to, while the older age group made use of the local bus service. This difference was illustrated in an interview with a boy from Blacktown North East primary [210] who was 10 years old and had an older sister, 15, who attended the adjacent high school:

> *Q: Are there places you are allowed to go by yourself?*
>   *I can go to the park and that's it.*
> *Q: Are you allowed to go on the bus by yourself?*
>   *No, not yet.*
> *Q: What about your sister?*
>   *Yeah she's allowed.*

<div align="right">Young male participant 10 years, Blacktown Northeast, [210]</div>

The following examples from high school participants suggest that they regard travelling on the local bus service and on the train as a relatively common place activity, even if in some cases, such trips are restricted by distance or time of day.

> *Q: Are there places you are allowed to go by yourself?*
>   *To my auntie's place in Glendenning in the bus. I can go to Westpoint in the*
>   *morning but not at night.*
> *Q: Are you allowed to go on the train by yourself?*
>   *No, I can to Parramatta, but not if it's a long distance.*

<div align="right">Young male participant 15 years, Blacktown Central [26]</div>

The young man in the next example similarly had his independent travel on public transport limited by distance:

>   *I have been on the bus by myself many times.*
> *Q: Any places you're not allowed to go?*
>   *It depends how far it is.*
> *Q: So how far are you allowed to go?*
>   *I've been to Parramatta a few times*
> *Q: With your friends yeah?*
>   *Yeah*
> *Q: But not much further than that?*
>   *Yeah not much further 'cause they [my parents] get a bit worried that it's*
>   *dangerous and stuff*

<div align="right">Young male participant 14 years, Blacktown North East [261]</div>

These two examples highlight the iterative nature of the transition to independent mobility. Familiarity with using one mode of public transport does not imply that all modes or all of the public transport network is necessarily available to a young person. However, these examples do point to the under-researched role that local public transport plays in providing opportunities for young people to develop, exercise and expand their independent mobility. The other element highlighted in these two examples is the role of the parents in determining the extent to which young people can travel on their own or with friends.

Household influences on independent mobility

The emphasis on the journey to school in urban and transport studies concerning children and young people has tended to treat them as a population group in isolation. This approach underplays the 'interplay between family practices and mobility' (Holdsworth 2013, p4). In the interviews with children and young people the household context, as opposed to parenting practices, emerged as an important, but as yet under-researched, influence over degrees of independence that the children and young people exercised.

From the perspective of children and young people, family networks, routines, customs and practices are all connected in their negotiations around their everyday mobilities in general and, in particular, to their transitions to independent mobility. As Holdsworth describes them:

> [f]amily mobilities include a complex array of movements, some of which are chosen, deliberated and beneficial, while others are enacted out of obligation or force (Holdsworth 2013, p4).

While family mobilities associated with household composition, work arrangements and daily routines are all relevant to independent mobility so too is the changing nature of families (Jensen and McKee 2003), which reflect broader social changes (Freeman and Tranter 2011, p 45). What emerged from the interviews was that household dynamics can have a direct impact on children and young people's mobilities, no more so than in the case of parental separation.

In Australia, the arrangements for care of children post separation favour a degree of shared care, where children spend an agreed amount of time with both parents. When parents couple with new partners, who may also have children, the relationships and travel patterns, in these 'blended families' can become very complex. As noted by Freeman and Tranter (2011, p 45), shared care arrangements often mean children have 'the status of temporary residents' in the homes of their parents.

There were many examples from the children and young people in this study of how parental separation, and other forms of household dissolution and reformation, complicate everyday travel for children and young people as well as their transitions to independent mobility.

In some cases, where both parents live in the same neighbourhood the impact of shared care arrangement on children's mobilities may mean a different transport mode is used for everyday trips, like the trip to school. For example, one girl [160], who lived in Blacktown South East, described how she usually travels to school depends on which parent she is staying with:

> *I usually drive or if I'm staying at my Dad's house then I walk.*
> Q: So your Dad lives around here too?
> *My Dad lives down the street from the school.*
> Q: How often do you stay to your Dad's place?
> *I live at my mum's but we stay at my Dads every second weekend.*

> Female participant, aged 10, Blacktown South East [160]

Long distance 'unaccompanied' journeys

In some cases parent separation not only creates a new journey to a child's usual travel, the distance in that journey between parent households often becomes longer over time as the parents 'move on' with their separate lives. The paradox lies in the fact that while parents may restrict their children's independent travel at the local scale while at the same time expecting their children to have to make long distance unaccompanied journeys to be with the other (separated) parent. For example, in the case of one young woman [131] in Blacktown North East the journey to visit her father was over three hours.

> *Oh also and some weekends I go with my dad. My parents drive me to Blacktown train station and I catch a train to Lithgow and then my Dad picks me up from Lithgow and we drive an hour and a half to his farm.*
> Q: And how often do you do that?
> *Every third weekend and in the holidays.*
> Q: Ok, so you stay there for the holidays? And he's got a farm?
> *Yeah, it takes a while to get there – an hour and an half on the train and then an hour and a half in the car. It's very tiring.*
> Q: Do you go by yourself?
> *Yeah and my little sister.*
> Q: How long have your been doing that for then?
> *Quite recently, the last few months. He only just moved there, like last year. He used to live close and he would pick us up.*

Q: And is that train ride ok?
> *Yeah, it's ok apart from the weird people on it. It's a bit ... er. [groan]*

Young woman 15 years, Blacktown North East, [131]

While perhaps not the norm, long journeys to maintain contact with a separated parent for other children and young people are not uncommon, and can mean infrequent travel, visiting their parents only a few times a year during school holidays, especially where parents have moved interstate or overseas.

The following example emerged from discussions about travel beyond the local area rather than through directly asking about family relationships.

> *.. most of the time [when] I go to the city I go to the airport to go to visit my dad.*
> *He lives near the beach on the Sunshine Coast [in Queensland].*

Q: Is that right?
> *Yeah*

Q: How often would you go there?
> *Um every holidays.*

Q: And when you go on the plane to visit your dad, do you go by yourself?
> *I go with my brother.*

Young male aged 9, Blacktown North East, [208]

In a small number of cases to these trips can involve international travel. An example of an epic journey to connect with a parent was described in an interview with a young man [235], aged 14 years, who lived in Blacktown North East. He speaks Arabic and he was born overseas and arrived in Australia in 1999 with his mother and grandparents. He described a trip to meet his Dad in some detail when asked about places he travelled to beyond Blacktown and Sydney:

Q: Do you ever go on holidays?
> *I went once to Sudan. I went by myself.*

Q: To Sudan? Why did you go there?
> *That was when I went to meet my Dad.*

Q: And you went all that way by yourself? Wow!
> *Yeah I got lost. I didn't get lost but like my plane they didn't put my name in the computer and I was so I didn't know what to do. So someone showed them what to do. And I went from here to Singapore I think like 4 hours and in Singapore I stayed there for an hour. And then from Singapore to Bahrain was fourteen hours and I had to stay there for six hours and then they delayed me nine hours and from there I had to travel another three hours.*

Q: How old were you?
> *It was about a year ago.*

Q:So you were about thirteen?
> *Yeah thirteen or twelve.*

Young male participant, 14 years, Blacktown North East [235]

This example not only opens up questions about of the spatial range of independent mobility associated with parent separation, it points to the connections between children's independent mobility and a broader discourse at the intersection between transport and mobilities: that of transnational travel, or global mobilities. This adds a different 'global perspective' to the notion of children's independent mobility. Rather than the more common international comparisons of children's mobilities the discussion of children's and young people's international travel brings to the fore the context of living in a 'global' city like Sydney and challenges some of the more stereotypical views that independent mobility is only about children's active travel to school.

Discussion

The conversations with children and young people in Blacktown about their everyday travel challenge some of the prevailing notions about independent mobility. Firstly, independent mobility is not a singular attribute. Independent mobility can refer to both solitary travel, but also to travel with a group. It can refer to different travel modes, purposes or spatial scales.

Secondly, the interviews suggested that most children and young people can and do, exercise a degree of independent mobility and that when they travel in a group the spatial range and variety of places they can access is expanded. The question for researchers and planners therefore ought to be extended from 'do children have independent mobility or adult dependent mobility? (Freeman and Tranter 2011, p 182) to 'where can children and young people (that is, girls and boys, young men and young women) travel independently?' This question shifts the emphasis away from personal travel behaviour to focus on accessibility. The question assumes that the transition to independent mobility can be facilitated through modifying not just physical environments but transport operations and services. An accessibility focus implies undertaking safety audits to assess whether the places children and young people need to travel to (such as parks, pools, schools sports fields, clubs, shops etc) are safely accessible by active or public transport.

Independent mobility is not simply about unleashing children and young people to roam freely about their local neighbourhoods. It is a negotiated process in which parents and children weigh up situated risk, personal capability and vulnerability. Not only is the availability of facilities like parks and shops, and good quality walking environments helpful but having local friendship networks and suitable public transport services can facilitate and extend independent mobility over a greater spatial range.

The study showed how the transition to independent mobility is an iterative and gendered process, linked to progress through the life course, marked especially by the move to high school and is, sometimes profoundly, affected by change within the households. It showed that these transitions are also spatially graduated, with proximity to local parks and shops, and to the homes of friends and family, being important staging posts on children and young people's progression to larger orbits of independence.

In some cases, however, necessity overrides preference in determining if children or young people travel independently. Changes in families generate new travel needs that can impose independent mobility upon children and young people whether they like it or not. Household dissolution can generate the need the travel for young people to travel unaccompanied on journeys that take them well beyond the boundaries of their neighbourhood, including intercity, interstate and international travel. These journeys highlight the significance of the household relationships among the factors that differentiate children and young people's mobilities. They highlight also the interconnectedness between scales, household, local, metropolitan and global, at which children and young people's mobilities occur.

Conclusion

For urban and transport geographers and planners, this exploration of independent mobility emphasises the point that school travel alone is insufficient as a focus of research if the aim is to understand children and young people independent mobility more specifically everyday mobilities more broadly. The findings contribute to what is already known about the physical characteristics of the built environment that can influence independent mobility and that is also influenced by the dynamics that exist within households and the social networks that exist within neighbourhoods.

The research suggests that, just as the built environment has been the subject of research to identify how it can be made more supportive of children's independent mobility, there is scope for further research into how local public transport can be made to be more supportive of young people's needs in their transition to adult independence. This might include changes to the use of concessions fares or school transport subsidies. Changed routes and timetables of local buses on weekend. In conclusion, the research suggests that to have child-friendly cities, we need to start thinking about (and researching) what it means to plan for child-friendly transport.

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