Private Car Use as Resistance to Alternative Transport: Automobility's Interminable Appeal

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Abstract:

Use of the private car is often viewed as highly problematic with the car implicated in an array of health and environmental harms. Policies to address these problems include provision for day-to-day mobility based on alternatives to the private car such as public transport, walking and cycling. Still, the private car continues as the preferred way to travel in many cities. A deeper understanding of this preference can reveal as yet under explored sites of resistance to alternative transport modes.

This paper reports the results of a study which used qualitative methods to record very personal barriers to the uptake of alternative transport. Its focus is on the journey to work in outer suburban Sydney – Australia's largest city. Applying a novel approach to participant selection, the paper explores the daily practices and perceptions of those who continue to drive, despite having access to viable alternative transport.

The research finds that individual decisions to drive are not necessarily motivated by the desire to save time. Barriers to the uptake of alternative transport are more complex than research to date suggests. In proposing that private car use is deeply embedded in ways of navigating modern life, it exposes the way transition away from private car use will only occur in the face of unprecedented disruption to existing ways of 'being' in modern life. This way of conceptualising resistance to alternative transport sheds light on a series of inconsistencies between the expectations of those planning for alternative transport and those anticipated to one day practice its use.

Introduction

The endemic use of the private car regularly engenders scathing critique for its relationship with global physical, social and ecological harms such as climate change and epidemics of lifestyle diseases including obesity. As a result, automobility is often situated as a problem that needs urgent attention. Ways of being physically mobile without the use of the private car are increasingly promoted in multiple regulatory arenas as a solution to this problem (Docherty and Shaw, 2008). Collectively labelled alternative transport, these substitute modes include public transport (such as fixed rail, light rail and bus transport) and active transport (such as walking and cycling[1]). Despite this endorsement, there remains resistance to alternative transport (Sheller, 2012). While there is evidence that some cities have experienced a plateau or even decrease in private car use (Millard-Ball and Schipper, 2011), in many urban areas private car use continues to dominate as the preferred way to satisfy requirements and desires to be mobile (see for example the Australian Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics, 2012).

Successful promotion of alternative transport modes needs to be underpinned by better understandings of preferences for automobility. This paper contributes to these understandings by examining the role the car as a time saving device plays in automobility's ongoing appeal. Its central proposition is that individual decisions to drive are not exclusively motivated by the desire to save time. The role time plays in sustaining automobility is explored, and a number of alternative explanations for why car-use continues to endure are proposed.

The paper draws on empirical evidence on the journey to work in Australia's largest city, Sydney. As a low-density city characterised by a dispersed geography of employment, Sydney's 4.6 million residents are highly reliant on the private car for day-to-day mobility (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). This reliance endures in the face of attempts to regulate and plan for the use of other modes, and, in some cases, the availability of time competitive alternative transport. Accordingly, this study has an intentional focus on those who continue to drive in the face of expedient alternatives. Using a systematic process of trip substitution analysis, a group of people were identified who could use alternative transport to get to work in the same amount of time it currently takes them to drive. These people then participated in a series of in-depth interviews where deeper attachments and motivations for private car use were explored. This approach has enabled development of the multi-layered understanding that informs the central proposition that individual decisions to drive are not exclusively motivated by the desire to save time.

Transport and Time

Time is portrayed across a range of discipline areas as something that an individual needs to save. It has a latent social power (Harvey 1990, pp. 226), with modern life regularly portrayed as time obsessed where snippets of time are scheduled to extreme degrees (Bauman, 2000; Honore, 2004; Tranter, 2010). In traditional utilitarian approaches to transport behaviour, time is often regarded as a major barrier to the uptake of alternative transport in that walking, cycling and public transport use is usually positioned as taking more time than driving (see for example Newman (2003) on walking; Winters et al. (2010) on cycling and Corpuz (2007) on public transport). In this literature, the car dominates travel choice partly because it allows people fast access to the destinations they want to access. It allows people to save time. Inherent to this approach is the idea that time spent on transport is time that is wasted and should be minimised. More recent transport research, however, presents a powerful rebuttal to this assumption by suggesting that the benefits people gain from automobility extend beyond simple accessibility. Time in the car, therefore, is not necessarily time that is lost.

Research exploring and demonstrating this suggestion comes from various fields, ranging from psycho-social approaches, to those that focus on driving as a practice that is culturally inculcated. At a very utilitarian level is research describing the way people use their travel time in the car productively.

[1] Public transport is often treated in health-related literature as active transport. The distinction of 'active transport' within the phrase 'alternative transport' has been retained in recognition that barriers to walking and cycling are often explicitly different to those articulated for public transport. Any reference to the collective of transport modes, other than the private car, is termed 'alternative transport'. Where relevant, distinction is made between public and active transport as alternative modes.

An ethnographic study by Laurier (2004), for example, describes in detail the work a female executive undertakes to do in the car transitioning from one appointment to the next. This work was recently extended by Laurier and Dant (2012) who conclude that automobility is increasingly a practice of using the space of the car during travel time. This space, they claim, will become increasingly functional as technology renders the driver within the car progressively less 'preoccupied' with the actual task of driving and increases opportunities to undertake other tasks, such as making phone calls, scheduling appointments and paying bills. Patricia Mokhtarian and colleagues have also explored the way people gain utility other than simple accessibility from travel time and modelled the impact this has on transport behaviour (see Mokhtarian et al., 2001; Mokhtarian and Salomon, 2001; Redmond and Mokhtarian, 2001 and Mokhtarian and Chen, 2004). For example, Redmond and Mokhtarian (2001) studied the travel behaviour of 1,300 full-time and part-time employees from the San Francisco Bay area to prove that people have an ideal commute time that is substantially greater than zero. Using a questionnaire, they conclude that 15 to 20 minutes was the most desirable commute time primarily because it enabled the transition between work and home roles. They reviewed an array of other studies arriving at similar conclusions. This finding was qualified by Jain and Lyons (2008), whose research specifically conceptualised travel time as a gift instead of a burden. Bull (2004) also describes the way the car offers "temporary respite from the demands of the other" (pp. 249) – a respite which is only enhanced through personalisation of sound within the cocoon of the car.

While this brief review reveals a body of research to warrant the claim that transport practices are not simply a product of individual desires to get from A to B in the fastest time possible, the implications of this finding for transport policy attempting to encourage a transition towards alternative transport have not been clearly articulated. Indeed, transport policy continues to seek to challenge automobility by making alternative transport time competitive. This study contributes further evidence that the promotion of alternative transport based primarily on making it time competitive is inherently flawed. It demonstrates the extent to which time is disregarded as a factor when considering transition from the private car to alternative transport modes.

Method

The primary method used for data collection was a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews. This is not a probability sampling such that statistical inferences can be made (Miles and Huberman, 1984), it is a sampling that enables in-depth study of a specific aspect of transport behaviour. Indeed, a particular emphasis was placed on participant selection. As established above, the car's unrivalled speed, ability to cover distance and, by implication, time saving capacity is often identified as a barrier to alternative transport use. What if, however, people could travel using alternative modes in the same amount of time as it takes them to drive? What then would be the barriers to alternative transport? To answer this question, this study used a complex process of participant selection to remove time as a rational barrier to alternative transport. It did this by selecting participants who could travel to work using alternative transport modes in the same amount of time as it currently takes them to drive by private car.

Finding participants who fit this very particular selection criterion required a detailed and relatively manual analysis of a cohort of journeys to work. Recruitment for this analysis was initiated in May 2011, when employees of three organisations were invited to fill out a web-based questionnaire. These organisations were selected because they were located in suburban employment areas that are relatively well serviced by public transport, yet mode share for the journey to work is overwhelmingly characterised by private car use (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The journey to work was selected because it represents the key component of peak period travel demand and as a result is often relied upon by transport decision makers to inform policy (Redmond and Mokhtarian, 2001; Mees et al., 2008; Xu and Milthorpe, 2010).

The questionnaire was short. It was designed to illicit the minimum information about the respondent's journey to work required to undertake a trip substitution analysis. This included trip mode, duration, time of departure, origin and trip chaining behaviour. Respondents were advised that the questionnaire formed part of a larger study and that they may be contacted at a later date to participate in a series of face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire was available on a website hosted by the University of New South Wales for a period of two weeks. Resultant data were then exported to

Microsoft Excel for further scrutiny, with 119 journeys deemed suitable for the trip substitution analysis.

The aim of the trip substitution analysis was to determine whether the respondent could substitute his or her existing car journey with an alternative mode in the same amount of time as they perceive it currently takes them to drive by private car. This was a necessarily manual process. It required exploration of modal combinations of trips from multiple destinations using several service providers (from state-run bus and train services to smaller, private bus services). Automated mapping of trip options using GIS software was not considered viable. Firstly, datasets for all service providers and all modes (for example, local cycling and walking maps) were not available in an appropriate format. Secondly, it was thought that any automation of the mapping process might miss potential trip combinations only obvious through manual exploration.

The street network distance from the respondent's estimated origin (home) to destination (work) was first calculated using Google Maps. Respondents living less than five kilometres from their destination were automatically categorised as being able to access their destination by cycling as a single active mode. Substitute trips for respondents living more than five kilometres from their destination were then developed as a staged and multimodal trip, starting with a walking or cycling component, progressing to a public transport component and concluding with a walking component (for example, cycle – train – walk or walk – bus – walk). To do this, the origin and destination were entered into the trip planner function of a government public transport information website (http://www.131500.com.au). The trip timing was set to match the respondent's answer to the question "What time, on most days, do you start your trip to work?", with the day of travel set as Tuesday (representing a typical working day). The trip planner function plans a public transport trip based on the user's input of trip origin and destination, as well as the time and date at which they wish to travel. At the time of analysis (August – September 2011), this function already allowed for a walking component of the trip to access and egress public transport. This is limited to less than one kilometre. A combination of public transport maps, Google Maps and local cycleway maps was used to manually expand this access component to a maximum of five kilometres for each trip suggested by the trip planner. Several modal combinations were explored with data on trip times, distances and trip descriptions all recorded in Excel.

In each case, the timing of the substituted trip was calculated by adding the estimated time for each component. Based on existing research, it was calculated that it would take the average person 13.5 minutes to walk one kilometre (Knoblauch et al., 1996; Burke and Brown, 2007) and 4.5 minutes to cycle one kilometre (Transportation Research Board, 2005). The public transport time was taken from the timetables listed on the 131500 website and a 'contingency time' of five minutes was added to each trip to account for the time it might take to, for example, lock up a bike and buy tickets. The total time calculated for the substituted trip was then subtracted from the perceived time of the current trip indicated by the respondent in response to the question 'From the time you leave home to the time you arrive at work, how long, on most days, does your trip to work take?'. If the time estimated for the substitute trip was within five minutes of the perceived existing driving trip, the respondent fit the key selection criterion for in-depth interview. That is, they could substitute their current car journey to work with an alternative mode that would take less than five minutes more than the time they perceive it takes them to do their existing car journey.

For example, Table 1 demonstrates the feasibility of replacing respondent X's 45 minute car trip with a multi modal combination of a 2.3 kilometre cycle, a 35 minute train trip and a 200 metre walk, with a contingency time of 5 minutes.

Table 1: Trip substitution analysis feasibility example

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
Cycling distance (km)	Cycle time (mins) =a*4.5^	Public transport time (mins)	Walking distance (km)	Walking time (mins) =d*13.5^^	Continge-ncy Time (mins)	Total time (mins) =b+c+e+f	Perceived driving time (mins)	Feasibility (mins) =g-h
2.3	10.5	35.0	0.2	2.7	5.0	53.2	55.0	-1.8

^13km per hour is translated to 4.5 minutes per kilometre by the calculation 60/13 rounded to the nearest .5 minute

^^4.5 kilometres per hour is translated to 13.5 minutes per kilometre by the calculation 60/4.5 rounded to the nearest .5 minute

The resulting feasibility time is -1.8, meaning this respondent's substitute journey would take 1.8 minutes less than the time they perceive it currently takes them to drive. They would therefore be suitable to participate in the second phase of the study.

After analysis of 119 journeys, 26 participants fit the key selection criterion for in-depth interview. From this group, three participants were e-mailed at a time with an invitation to participate in the second phase of the study. As each participant agreed to take part, the trip that had been mapped as his or her alternative trip was 'ground truthed' by the author. This entailed actually going into the field and 'doing' the alternative trip. This process allowed the efficacy of the trip substitution method to be tested. In each case it confirmed that the alternative trip would indeed take a similar amount of time each participant's self-nominated car-based journey. It also allowed the author as interviewer to speak knowingly about the alternative trip as it was introduced to each participant. For example, the topography of the streets, the condition of the roads and footpaths, the location and design of the bike parking, the exposed or otherwise design of the station platform, and the dominant demographic of fellow travellers were all recorded during the ground truthing process and could be described in some detail. Throughout this entire process of participant selection, trip substitution and participant interview a journal of reflective memos was maintained which were subsequently incorporated into the data analysis process described below.

In total 15 people participated in 30 interviews lasting between 55 and 70 minutes[2]. All interviews were conducted by the author in the period from October to December, 2011. Interviews were in-depth and semi-structured. The first interview had an explicit aim to avoid revealing too much about the study, particularly its focus on alternative transport. It was first explained that the research was on Sydney roads – a topic of considerable public interest and debate. Participants were then asked to describe the way they drive to work, including details on the specific route or routes they take. They were asked to talk about the traffic en route, as well as the way they occupy their time in the car. The interview

[2] The process of participant recruitment and interview was approved by the University of New South Wales as compliant with the requirements as set by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (project reference number 115122, issued 12 October, 2011). The names used in this study have been changed to protect participant anonymity.

progressed to ask participants to describe what they do at work, their home life and the structure of their typical day. They were also asked about their aspirations in life and encouraged to speak without restriction and in detail about the things that were important to them, exploring ideas they had about where they'd like to be in the future, how they work towards these goals, as well as their priorities, values and special interests. This approach to qualitative explorations of automobility is relatively novel. Qualitative research using in-depth interviews to study transport behaviour usually has a more explicit focus on mobility. By opening with an interest in the practice of driving, progressing to frame this practice with details on other routines and further with insights into each participant's goals and values, a layered appreciation of the way the use of the car for the journey to work is embedded in each participant's lifestyle could be developed.

The second interview was conducted between six days and two weeks after the first. It was purposefully more structured. At the beginning of the second interview, participants were asked about the type of car they drove, the age at which they'd obtained their drivers' licence and the basic travel patterns of their household. The alternative trip developed from the trip substitution analysis described in the previous section was then outlined in detail. The participant's reactions were subsequently explored. Potential benefits and barriers relevant to the trip were discussed, both entirely as perceived by the participant.

With permission from participants, interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. Systematic coding of all data from both trip journals and interviews using the CAQDAS (computer aided qualitative data analysis software) program QSR NVivo 9 was undertaken at the completion of each interview. Methods for coding the transcripts and reflective memos followed a grounded theory methodology and involved constant comparative analysis of data against emergent themes (Charmaz, 2006). Data analysis began during the data collection phase, in an effort to maintain the dialectic between theory and data consistent with a grounded theory approach. A series of themes emerged through a process of topic, initial, primary and axial coding (see Saldana, 2009). A selection of these themes is now discussed under the headings "time", "reliability", "freedom" and "comfort".

Results

Theme 1 - Time "but it's not how I want to spend my time, on a train..."

The analysis starts purposefully with the theme of time in an effort to explore each participants' response to the alternative trip prescribed through trip substitution analysis. Study participants did not appear to be any less time-stressed than the observations of sociologists from Harvey (1990) to Bauman (2010) suggest is characteristic of modern life. Many were required to work long hours and had commitments to family and other time-consuming interests outside of work, including study and secondary employment. They described practices of micro-managing time. These included using time on the weekends to cook the approaching week's dinners, "squeezing in" an evening run between dinner and bed, laying out clothes for a morning gym session the night before and eating breakfast on the run.

Time was conceptualised in a variety of ways - time waiting, time lost, time saved, time given, time taken, time spent. First and foremost, however, participants treated time as a currency of high value and something that should not be wasted. Ben, for example, described the way he cherishes spare time to spend with his baby boy:

> *Ben:* I guess, every little minute that you get now, even if it's just sitting down talking, sitting down watching TV together, sitting down with the boy, just holding him sort of thing, it's just precious. Time is precious.

This study's approach to participant selection attempted to remove time as a barrier to alternative transport by ensuring that each participant could travel to work by alternative modes in the same amount of time as it currently takes him or her to drive. As each participant was introduced to his or her alternative trip, it was emphasised that it would take the same amount of time as their car-based trip. Indeed, extremely detailed descriptions of the different components of the trip were offered. This included an estimation of how long each component of the trip would take, the structure of the timetables, the dominant demographic that might accompany the participant, and the way connections

between modes would work. As described above, ground truthing the trips enabled the interviewer to do this. Refuting utilitarian models of transport behaviour, which stress time as a key determinant of transport mode choice, none of the participants contemplated a change in their travel behaviour by presentation of a time-competitive mode.

Participants tended to cite the car as a device to *administer* time rather than save it. Time as a barrier to alternative transport use was often viewed in quite an irrational and vague way:

> *Anthony*: For some reason the bus doesn't grab me and I think it's just the time. It's not that it'd be longer because I know it wouldn't. It's the restriction – I want to be able to leave without looking at a timetable [pause] and then there's that idea that I want my space [pause], it's lots of things.

Using alternative transport was considered an inferior way to spend time when compared with time driving:

> *Rebecca:* Yeah, like, I know it's [the alternative trip] going to be the same time, but it's not how I want to spend my time, on a train or whatever.

Regardless of efforts to remove time's impact, it continued to feature strongly in the way the participants spoke about their choice to drive. It was not that the car was necessarily perceived as faster than alternative transport, it was that the participants perceived time taken on trains, buses, or walking and cycling, as more of an investment, more frustrating, less comfortable and more disempowering than the time they spend in their car. This persisted to the extent that some participants even indicated they did not mind if driving to work actually took more time than the use of alternative transport. Frederick compared his 65 minute alternative trip with the time it currently takes him to drive:

> *Frederick:* I remember, a long time ago, I used to catch the train to work. It was really busy, people always trying to find their way, and people trying to squeeze in, sometimes the door shuts too early. ..So then I think about taking my car, even if it's about 1 hour, 1 hour 15 minutes, I don't care. I think, ah, it's fine I have the air conditioning, I listen to a bit of music, best of the 80s, the news from ABC.

It was more important to participants to spend their time being comfortable and in control than 'wasting' their time by, for example, waiting for bus connections or dealing with crowded public transport. Analysis now turns to other explanations for why study participants continue to drive in the face of time competitive alternatives.

Theme 2: Flexibility and Reliability - "you hear it in the office"

Participants expressed a strong need to be flexible and reliable, both at work and home. The requirement to be on call and available at times outside of traditional working hours for off-shore meetings was not unusual. Many participants described requirements to accommodate the demands of different time zones and businesses that operate '24/7'. "Staying back" at work was a common theme:

> *Megan:* Sometimes you have to stay back and get the job done..You can't just pack up and walk out. The pressure, you can feel it. Like no-one would ever say anything but you know, you hear it in the office…. we had a staff member in our team that used to leave between 4 and 4.30 every day and you'd hear comments.

Many participants expressed the idea that they have a lot to gain by being flexible, bending their time around schedules of socialising, networking and parenting. Ways to increase flexibility and availability are therefore valuable. In this context, the rigid timetables and unpredictability of alternative transport modes are impediments to its uptake. The autonomy afforded by the car, however, supports the demands of flexibility and reliability.

Jennifer: Why do you drive?
Larry: Because [pause] well, I'd have to be at Parramatta at a particular time to get the shuttle bus and leave at a particular time to get it back and I find that restrictive if something's going on and I need to keep working. It's either beg, borrow or steal a cab charge to get back to Parramatta or say, “no sorry, can't keep working, I have to go home”. It gives me the flexibility and flexibility is important. It's a bit rude too, to stand up half way through a meeting and say "no, I have to catch a train", I don't want to do that to people. They would be flexible for me if I needed it.

In many ways, participants’ expressed appreciation of the flexibility and reliability associated with the car can be conceptualised through more traditional models of transport behaviour including utilitarian approaches (for example Brownstone and Small, 2005). To be flexible at work, for example, is required to maintain employment. Use of the car is therefore tied to the avoidance of dis-utilities such as lost income. For many, however, the car’s flexibility was also about avoiding a ‘loss of face’ associated with not being seen as flexible by their work colleagues or friends. This finding echoes that of psycho-social research on transport behaviour which suggests that mode choice is, in part, motivated by appeals to social-norms. This finding, however, extends beyond the idea that people choose to travel in a certain way to conform to societal expectations around travel. It is not the mode of transport itself that is appealing to normalcy, but the flexibility the mode enables. The car here is deeply embedded in culturally acceptable ways of working out in the suburbs. To abandon the car therefore entails not only a change of transport mode, but a change in practices of, for example, working, socialising and parenting.

Theme 3: Freedom and Control

Although regularly punctuated with experiences of traffic and delays, the way participants spoke of their use of the car for the journey to work was more often characterised by a dialogue of freedom. “Taking my back roads”, for example, was a common practice. Participants often expressed pride in their ability to master the traffic as well as a sense of ownership over the various combinations of streets that play host to their journey to work. By negotiating the trip, choosing which route to take each morning, embarking on suburban explorations at will, and avoiding traffic, participants are exercising freedom.

> *Chris:* I guess part of it is being in control to an extent because I know if I’m driving, I know what’s going to happen.

Again, this resonates with psycho-social research indicating that empowerment and mastery are central to motives for automobility (Steg, 2005; Mann and Abraham, 2006; Gardner and Abraham, 2007) however it has also been the subject of cultural research on the “tactics” of contemporary everyday life (Katz 2000, p. 36). Once more refuting the importance of time saving, participants perceived that the freedom to control their time, rather than an inherent ability to save it, as a motivation for car use:

> *Jennifer:* So, you said the cost is something that prevents you from thinking about public transport?
> *Frederick:* That’s why. Apart from the independence, to say, well, what time do I have to leave to go to catch the train in the morning.

Theme 4: Comfort

The idea that alternative transport modes are perceived as uncomfortable surfaced persistently throughout the interviews. To travel in discomfort was conceptualised as having to endure a sense of close proximity to strangers, to be with people you wouldn’t normally choose to be with, to be out in the weather, to have to climb over people and be “squashed together” (Ben). Many participants described the crowding, the smells, the sounds and sensations of other people and other environments associated with alternative transport, which were then compared unfavourably to the privacy and controlled space of the car. Larry, for example, reflects on the discomfort associated with crowding:

> *Larry:* When I was going into the city [to work] there were a lot of times when I caught public transport. But then there were a lot of times when the trains were crowded, the weather was crappy, there were just days when you think “nah, I don’t want to do this”. Sitting in the car, I rarely get that feeling.

In contrast, study participants shared detailed descriptions of the way they feel more comfortable in their cars. This can be seen by the way people set themselves up in the car, the way they use the car as their own comfortable private space, and, quite simply, the way sitting in and driving a car makes them feel good. Participants used their cars for a lot of different activities, many of which require the space, privacy and physical separation provided by the car. Cars are “listening rooms” (Larry), a place to talk to the kids, listen to audio books, music and university lectures, a place to call parents and catch up with friends, as well as a place to chill out, relax and de-stress after work:

> *Diane:* … nine times out of ten I'll talk to my mother [pause] probably more of an emotional baggage time to talk to mum and all the things that have happened during the day. Yep, so generally speaking most afternoons I will call her. It's sort of, like, quality time with my mum on the phone because she lives in Concord and I don’t see her much. I do that most days, I have the hands free in the car and I talk all the way home. That's probably why I don't notice the traffic.

Many participants used the opportunity provided by both the cocoon of the car and the need to concentrate on the road to listen to things. For Larry, it was time to listen to things he would otherwise not have had the opportunity to experience:

> *Larry:* The car is my space, it’s my listening room, I listen to music in the car that if I played at home I'd be told to turn it off.

When asked directly whether the phone calls and other activities undertaken in the car could be performed on public transport the answer was generally negative. Many participants indicated that the conversations they have with their parents are private. Larry cited the idea that the acoustics in the car were far superior to those on headphones and therefore better for listening to music. Others mentioned that they often felt travel sick when reading on public transport.

Doing things in the car was not just about occupying ‘dead’ time. The car was also used as a place and time to zone out, to escape and reflect. For many participants, sitting in the car was described as actually quite enjoyable:

> *Anthony*: …you know, I enjoy it. I don't mind sitting in the car. Actually, I like sitting in the car and yeah, that's my primary motivation.

Echoing existing research (for example see Jain and Lyons, 2008; Laurier et al., 2008; Basmajian, 2010), other participants relished the opportunity to find some space and time that is their own, a gap between the work-self and the home-self:

> *Jackie:* It's a chance to have a chat with the kids on the way [to child care]. It's also, when I drop them off, it's the only time in the day, driving from childcare to work, that I'll have time to myself. It's good me time.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper opened by situating automobility as a problem that needs urgent attention. It proposed that successful promotion of alternative transport modes needs to be underpinned by better understandings of preferences for automobility. The paper progressed to detail these preferences as expressed by a cohort of people who continue to drive in the face of expedient alternatives. It explored the role time plays in sustaining automobility and provided a number of alternative explanations for why car use continues to endure. These explanations are based around notions of flexibility and freedom, as well as the interminable pull of the sensory experience provided by the cocoon of the car.

The removal of time from the equation allowed for a focus on the relationship between the car and everyday life. The way participants were encouraged to discuss their aspirations and values alongside

everyday practices of getting to and from work, has revealed how automobility assumes a feature role in the performance of modern life. The car enables freedoms and flexibilities that are considered inextricable from ways of working and 'getting ahead'. For some people, these freedoms are more important than saving time.

Given the composition of the sample, the focus of the study is on barriers to alternative transport for one particular group in Australian society. This focus has allowed full development of the proposal that car use can be considered as not only a way to save time. Because of this qualitative approach, participants were not selected randomly. As a result, the meanings of car use, and indeed interpretations of a 'normal life' held by study participants, are not necessarily representative of the population. There is no reason to believe, however, that participants' experiences differ significantly from other commuters working in any other urban area characterised by low-density residential uses, a dispersed geography of employment and a car-dominated mode-share for the journey to work.

A number of very tangible policy and research implications can be drawn from this study. The most obvious is that any approach to the promotion of alternative transport based primarily on making it time competitive is inherently flawed. The findings presented here suggest that people are not as interested in saving time as they are in being comfortable, fitting in with the requirements of their flexible work life and having autonomy over the way they manage their time. This confirms and deepens existing understandings of transport behaviour which have long recognised the myth that transport is a product of utility alone. Yet transport planning continues to prioritise rational and instrumental motives for mobility over those that are less quantifiable. It is politically and practically appealing to attribute a collective aversion to alternative transport to something as quantifiable as time. However the findings of this study suggest that transport planning needs to incorporate consideration of the deeper meanings inherent to mobility as it is practised in many urban areas around the world.

A second policy implication relates to the finding that the car is unlikely to disappear from the lives of suburban office workers. A 'no car' urban utopia is an impractical pursuit in a low-density city characterised by a dispersed geography of employment and a population highly comfortable and indeed secured living lives that are auto-mobile. "Of course the car is here to stay" (Freund and Martin, 2009, p. 477) and recognising this has significant implications for transport policy. Policy provision for ongoing automobility should therefore continue to fill a comfortable space in transport planning. This will inevitably mean planning for people to drive less, through provision of alternative transport infrastructure. It may also mean the further affirmation of a place for the car that is not privatised, such as through car sharing programs. However there will need to be continued provision for people to drive with less impact, using alternative fuels and technologies. There being a technological and socially modified role for the car in the future suggests a need to move beyond essentialist understandings of automobility that view the car as demonised and its demise inevitable. The car in the future should be conceptualised as 'tamed' rather than entirely restricted or non-existent.

A final and related implication to be drawn from this research is that greater attention needs to be paid to the way automobility continues to exist in the lives of ordinary, everyday people. There is evidence that the dominance of the private car in the land use and travel geographies of cities is being challenged by alternative modes. While there are undoubtedly cracks in the hegemony of the private car, they are inadequate to effect the change required to address the problems associated with endemic car use. They are limited geographically, to certain areas in certain cities, and culturally, to certain demographic and socio-economic sub-groups. For many people, automobility continues to support the things that matter in life, despite rising congestion, environmental and health concerns and associated monetary costs. These things include ways of working, parenting, caring and socialising. Transport planning, policy and research needs to consider travel as more than just a matter of accessibility. We need to understand that a shift to alternative transport is an imposition on deep-seated notions of freedom and entitlement, as much as it is on time.

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