

Public transport availability, delayed learning to drive and later-life car use

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Introduction

Reducing car dependency is a challenge for transport policy. Providing more frequent, reliable and well-connected public transport reduces car use in the short term. However, there may also be longer-term effects of improved public transport. This study examined whether access to public transport is linked to when people learn to drive and whether people who learn later rely less on private cars throughout adulthood.

Data and methods

The study combined data from a nationally representative survey of 2,086 respondents aged 16 years and older with Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) scores developed by the National Transport Authority. PTAL measures the accessibility of public transport based

on distance to bus stops and rail stations and service frequency and reliability. In the survey, participants reported the age at which they learned to drive and provided a recent driving diary.

Results

People living in areas with access to better public transport learned to drive at older ages. By age 20, almost 60% of people living in areas with effectively no public transport access had learned to drive, compared with around 40% of those living in areas with good public transport.

The study also found that delayed learning to drive was associated with lower levels of driving later in life. Each additional year of delay in learning to drive predicted a lower likelihood of driving on a typical weekday and a reduction in distance driven on days when people drove. The analysis suggests that a five-year delay in learning to drive is associated with driving 1,500 fewer kilometres annually.

The results persist even after accounting for other differences between individuals, such as employment and education. The findings are also consistent across age groups, suggesting that they are not explained by people choosing to live in areas with better public transport later in life.

Conclusion

The findings of this research suggest that public transport access during formative years may influence long-term travel habits and reduce dependence on private cars. This implies that public transport investment may have benefits that extend beyond the immediate effects on travel behaviour. Policies that improve public transport accessibility for young people may contribute to reduced traffic congestion and more sustainable mobility patterns over time

