

## Active Transport in Deprived Communities: Why the Car is King

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## Active Transport

- Solution to multiple social concerns
  - obesity and health (Morris & Hardman, 1997)
  - climate change, local traffic congestion and air quality issues (Knox, 2008)
- Bristol: UK's first Cycling Demonstration City
  - home to some of the UK's most prominent cycling organisations
  - But lagging in uptake of active transport
  - Particularly in deprived areas of the city
    - where health concerns are most pronounced (Shouls, Congdon, & Curtis, 1996)



## Research methods



- Aim: to increase uptake of cycling and walking
- Collaborative research
  - University of the West of England (UWE)
  - Bristol Primary Care Trust
  - Bristol City Council
- 72 respondents - active and non-active transport users in 9 focus groups

n = 72	Active transport	Non-active transport
Parents of young children	1	2
Parent of older children	1	2
Older adults	1	2

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## Why car is king

- Use of active transport is rarely an active choice
- Cars are cocoons: providing
  - Security
  - Convenience
  - Social approbation
- Walkers/cyclists are seen as disadvantaged and poor
  - Significant social barriers
- Environmental barriers
  - Distances from work place
  - Hills!



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### Parents

- Cars reduce confrontation associated with walking with younger children
- Being a 'taxi' is tempered by knowing where teenagers are and how they will get home
- Fear accidents near schools with busy roads for cyclists and walkers

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## Older people

- Safety is top priority
- Independence and mobility are highly valued
- For all groups, being able to go where they want, when they want, is paramount
  - Simply having the car parked outside is seen as a means of escape
  - Any move to reduce car use is seen as restricting individual freedom

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## Why would these groups ever use active transport?

- Health
  - Parents want children to establish healthy habits
  - Older people want to maintain mobility & independence
- Cost
  - Rising petrol and car maintenance
- Habit disruption is key (Verplanken et al., 1997)
  - Health scares
  - Car breakdowns
  - Changing schools or workplaces
  - Retirement

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## Why would these groups ever use active transport?

- Leisure
  - Active *transport* unpopular
  - Walking or cycling for leisure, perhaps outside the area, was attractive to many
  - Many older people felt isolated by their travel habits.
  - Walking buses an attractive alternative for parents
  - Opportunities for learning new things or meeting new people were valued



## Implications for Policy

- Can active transport ever be a desirable alternative for these groups if not perceived as a viable alternative to driving?
  - Environmental barriers genuinely high
  - High conversion costs vs. middle class groups
  - Are perceptual associations of active transport with poverty and lack of freedom insurmountable?
- Ethical issues:
  - Widening the poverty/health gap?
  - Or accepting lifestyle differences – focus elsewhere?

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## Practical implications

- Intermediate measures may move towards a tipping point
  - E.g. short leisure journeys on foot/bicycle in summer months as a perceptual gateway to sustained behaviour change.
  - Second car ownership reduced owing to perceived time and financial costs
- Habit disruption is key
  - Cost effective targeting
  - Children starting/changing schools
  - Adults start new jobs or move house
  - Via GPs/local hospitals
- BUT– money is probably better spent elsewhere

## Any questions?

