

Encourage more independent travel by children, suggests new ITC research

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- **Report probes striking changes in child travel patterns in the UK over the past couple of decades, with children travelling less, making fewer journeys by walking and travelling less independently.**

The latest Occasional Paper from the Independent Transport Commission (ITC), "Children and Travel", authored by social research expert Kristine Beuret OBE, has uncovered striking changes in children's travel. Children are travelling much less independently than 40 years ago, and child walking has declined dramatically, replaced with travel by car. The analysis also explores some of the factors behind these trends, including negative perceptions of road safety, the causes of reduced childhood mobility, and how receptive public transport operators are to children's transport needs.

Through examples of good practice, the paper makes the case for encouraging greater independent travel by children and recommendations for making public transport more child-friendly in an effort to try to reverse some of these trends.

Key findings

- **Children's per capita distance** travelled is virtually the same today as in the mid-1990s, but the balance has changed with more of the travel being made by car and less by walking.
- **The decline in children's independent travel** applies to trips by all modes. The National Travel Survey shows that a growing percentage of trips by under 16s are accompanied by an adult - 62% in 2010 compared to 41% in 1971.
- **Children in London are travelling much more by bus and national rail**, whereas elsewhere the use of bus (but not rail) has declined.

The causes of these changes include much more time behind computer screens, longer journeys required to school because of changing catchment requirements, increased concerns by parents about safety, fear of criticism for allowing children to travel alone, confusion over child public transport fares, and a lack of consultation with children about their travel needs and wishes.

Headline conclusions

- Children seem to be largely 'invisible' as passengers in their own right.
- Transport messages and marketing are generally addressed to parents and there is a lack of knowledge about child views and priorities.
- We need more training and marketing for both transport staff and child passengers.
- We need better data on child travel and evidence-based road safety programmes.
- Better transport design for children is needed, including WC facilities and family carriages on trains.
- There is a requirement for enhanced public realm i.e. housing and neighbourhood design which prioritises children's play and safety needs.

"Only by arming parents, policy-makers and children with the knowledge about increasing levels of safety and public transport options, can we begin to tackle habits and attitudes at a young age that have a profound impact on behaviour in later life," commented **Kris Beuret OBE, author of the report and a Commissioner with the Independent Transport Commission.**

She added: *"This paper provides new insights on children's travel needs and, importantly, examples of best practice amongst transport operators and public bodies. By following these recommendations we can encourage children out of cars, onto public transport and to walk and cycle more, in the process creating a healthier and more mobile population."*

The **ITC research programme** covers a wide range of strategic transport and land use policy issues, including aviation strategy, High Speed Rail and cities, trends in road and rail travel, the impacts of technology on travel, and optimising the efficiency in UK freight movements.

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Media enquiries:

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If you would like more information on the research programme or the ITC, please contact ITC Director Dr Matthew Niblett on matthew.niblett@keble.oxon.org or 07813 174582.

Notes to editor:

- The author, **Kris Beuret OBE, FCILT, FIHT**, is Director of Social Research Associates and a Commissioner with the Independent Transport Commission. Kris has advised Government, the House of Commons Transport Committee, TfL and the DfT, including Crossrail, on diversity issues and she has also served on the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee.
- The **Independent Transport Commission** is Britain's foremost independent land use and transport think tank. The ITC is a research charity committed to providing insight and analysis of the most pressing long-term strategic issues in the fields of transport and land use. Founded in 1999, it is run by a small Directorate led by Dr Matthew Niblett of the University of Oxford, with an advisory team of 14 voluntary commissioners. It is based at Cowcross Street in central London. The patrons of the ITC include Lord Adonis, Lord Freeman, Sir Peter Hendy, Sir Patrick Brown and Sir Terry Farrell. For more information, please see the ITC website: www.theitc.org.uk
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