



**To:** City Transport and Neighbourhoods

**From:** Adrian Davis

**Date:** 17/09/13

**Subject:** Essential Evidence on a page: No 106 Evidence form the 2011 Census on Walking, Cycling and Driving to work

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Top line: England and Wales remain car-dependent, but the trends are slightly more encouraging. Unlike many health behaviours, it is more common for socio-economically disadvantaged groups to commute using physically active modes. This association is, however, weakening and may soon reverse for cycling.

At a population level, commute modal share provides a reasonable proxy for broader travel patterns, enhancing the value of the Census in characterising background trends and evaluating interventions. The UK is one of various high-income countries in which levels of car use have flattened or slightly declined, as have the proportion of adults holding a driving licence. Simultaneously, much greater policy focus has been given to promoting and investing in active travel, often particularly in relation to cycling. A recent paper examined the results of the 2011 Census for commute trips and the longer term trends in changes in mode use.<sup>1</sup> 41.1 million adults aged 16–74 took part in the 2011 English and Welsh census, of whom 14.6 were not in employment, 2.8 million worked at or from home, and 23.7 million commuted to work.

Although most commuters still reported using private motorised transport, the trends suggested that this mode might be reaching saturation and perhaps starting to decline. In England, the decade between 2001 and 2011 saw a modest decrease in private motorised transport and a concomitant increase in public transport with this effect being driven by an increase in train commuting. Although these changes are relatively small in absolute terms, they acquire some additional importance when considered in light of the longer-term trends in the opposite directions. As for Wales, it differed from England in that private motorised transport continued to increase and walking showed a more marked decrease. These changes occurred at a slower rate than in previous decades, however, suggesting that in future years these trends may stabilise or even reverse in Wales.

In terms of the social distribution of commute modes, overall greater affluence was associated with a higher proportion of commuters using cars, vans or motorcycles as their main mode. Simultaneously, greater affluence was progressively associated with a lower proportion of commuters walking or (except for a slight reversal in the very most affluent areas) using public transport. Yet although greater affluence predicted lower walking, public transport use and cycling in the 2011 census, this was less true than it had been a decade earlier. Increasing affluence progressively predicted an increase in walking, cycling and public transport between 2001 and 2011, and a decrease in private motorised transport. For cycling, Cambridge, Oxford and Hackney were notable exceptions and showed strong positive associations between greater affluence and greater cycle commuting. This was also true for Greater London. There was also a small increase in more affluent commuters choosing cycling in Bristol (largest city experiencing a substantial cycling increase since 2001). This does raise some concerns that health inequalities may widen as health benefits are consumed by those with least health needs. Increasing the appeal of active travel to all social groups would be the most productive option.

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<sup>1</sup> Goodman, A. 2013 Walking, Cycling and Driving to Work in the English and Welsh 2011 Census: Trends, social-economic patterning and relevance to travel behaviour in general, PLOS ONE Open Access <http://www.plosone.org/article/fetchObject.action?uri=info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0071790&representation=PDF>