To:	Neighbourhoods and City Transport
From:	Adrian Davis
Date:	31/01/2014
Subject:	Essential Evidence on a page: No 114 Impacts of a new public transport system on users

Top line: There exists a large group of people with the potential to change their travel behaviour, coupled with evidence for substantial potential health benefits resulting from such a change. This suggests that new public transport systems might be regarded as public health interventions. It is therefore important to understand how people experience and make sense of them in order that their benefits might be fully realised.

An increase in public transport use and a corresponding reduction in car use has the potential to contribute to improving population health[1], and environmental and transport objectives. A population shift from using private motor vehicles towards more public transport use could contribute to improved health through enhanced wellbeing and reduced disease risk including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and some cancers. The introduction of a 9.6-mile light rail line in Charlotte, North Carolina, was predicted to save $12.6 million in total healthcare costs over nine years.[2] Also, significant health benefits have been predicted to result from reducing the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the use of motor vehicles. In Britain, commuting to work is a large contributor to overall travel, accounting for 19% of the total distance travelled by individuals. While around 70% of commuting journeys are made by car, fewer than 10% are made by bus.

There is growing interest in innovative public transport systems world-wide. Yet how new public transport infrastructure is experienced and integrated (or not) into daily practice is little understood. Researchers investigated how the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway, UK, was used and experienced in the weeks following its opening, using the method of participant observation (travelling on the busway and observing and talking to passengers) and drawing on theoretical approaches to interpret the data.[3]

Using excerpts of field notes to support our interpretations, the researchers described how the ease with which the new transport system could be integrated into existing daily routines was important in determining whether individuals would continue to use it. It emerged that there were two groups of passengers with different experiences and attitudes. Passengers who had previously travelled frequently on regular bus services did not perceive the new system to be an improvement; consequently, they were frustrated that it was differentiated from and not coherent with the regular system. In contrast, passengers who had previously travelled almost exclusively by car appraised the busway positively and perceived it to be a novel and superior form of travel. The rich qualitative account highlights the varied and creative ways in which people learn to use new public transport and integrate it into their everyday lives. This has consequences for the introduction and promotion of future transport innovations. It is important to emphasise the novelty of new public transport, but also the ways in which its use can become ordinary and routine. Addressing these issues could help to promote uptake of other public transport interventions, which may contribute to improvements in population health.

[1] See Essential Evidence No 28 http://www.travelwest.info/evidence

[2] Stokes, R,. MacDonald, J., Ridgeway, G. 2008 Estimating the effects of light rail transit on health care costs, *Health & Place*, 14: 45-58.

[3] Jones, C., Cohn, S, Ogilvie, D. 2013 Making sense of a new transport system: An ethnographic study of the Cambridgeshire guided busway, *PLOS ONE*, 8(7): e69254 OPEN ACCESS