

## Essential Evidence on a page: No. 18

### The role of habit in travel behaviour

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*Top line:* Personalised journey planning can increase awareness of alternative modes to car use and change travel behaviour even among those with a strong car habit.

As mobility is deeply ingrained in modern everyday life, making travel mode choices is an extremely repetitive type of behaviour. The habitual quality of travel mode choice behaviour is acknowledged as importance factor in travel behaviour research. Key issues are:

- Habit are triggered and reinforced by the physical and social environment - eg - including infrastructure, and behavioural norms including perceptions of socially and culturally acceptable behaviour
- when context changes or an individual changes context, old habits are disrupted, and behaviour has to be renegotiated. 'Naturally occurring' breaks in behaviour eg job or home move, retirement are ideal opportunities for travel behaviour change<sup>1 2</sup>
- when behaviours are well-practiced and repeatedly performed, frequency of past behaviour reflects habit strength and has a direct effect on future performance, i.e. 'old habits die hard'
- intentions to change travel behaviour have been shown to predict the use of car versus public transport *only* when existing car-use habits were weak but not where habit is strong
- additionally, individuals with strong travel mode habits are less likely to seek to acquire information about alternative options and travel mode choices compared to those with weak habits.

In a randomised control trial where 71 car users were recruited to either an experimental group or a control group, Eriksson and colleagues<sup>3</sup> interrupted travel habit by means of personalised journey planning advice. This sought to induce a deliberate consideration to reduce personal car use and intentions for changes in travel behaviour.

All participants reported car habit strength and moral motivation to reduce car use by means of a questionnaire, and recorded car use by means of weekly car diaries pre- and post-intervention. The intervention did make the choice of travel mode more deliberate since the association between car use and car habit strength were weakened while the relation between car use and personal norm<sup>4</sup> were strengthened after compared to before the intervention. Moreover, as a result of the intervention car users with a strong car habit and a strong personal norm were found to be more likely to reduce car use as compared to those with a weak car habit and a weak personal norm. Hence, a reduction in car use may be facilitated by interrupting habitual car use, specifically if the car user has a strong car habit and a strong moral motivation to reduce personal car use.

Conflict of interest declaration: Co-author of 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Verplanken, B., Walker, I., Davis, A., Jurasek, M. 2008 Context change and travel mode choice: Combining the habit discontinuity and self-activation hypotheses, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 28: 121–127.

<sup>2</sup> See Essential Evidence 12.

<sup>3</sup> Eriksson, L., Garvill, J., Norlund, A., 2008 Interrupting habitual car use: The importance of car habit strength and moral motivation for personal car use reduction, *Transportation Research Part F*, 11: 10-23.

<sup>4</sup> 'I think I should perform a certain behaviour' ie ideal behaviour.