



To: Neighbourhoods and City Development
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Subject: Essential Evidence on a page: No 95: Motivations for active commuting

Top line: Promoting walking or cycling to work (active commuting) could help to increase population physical activity levels. Moving home or workplace is a period when people (re)assess, and may be more likely to change, their travel behaviour.

Commuting is habitual and relatively resistant to spontaneous change: in the absence of interventions to induce behaviour change, relocation is a type of 'natural' or proxy intervention which breaks the commuting habit and makes behaviour change more likely.¹ Research in behaviour change and the lifecourse is dominated by the use of quantitative research methods, but qualitative approaches can provide in-depth insight into the experiences and processes of travel behavior change. A qualitative study aimed to explore experiences and motivations regarding travel behavior around the period of relocation, in an effort to understand how active commuting might be promoted more effectively.²

Participants were recruited from the Commuting and Health in Cambridge study cohort in the UK. Commuters who had moved home, workplace or both between 2009 and 2010 were identified, and a purposive sample was invited to participate in semi-structured interviews regarding their experiences of, and travel behavior before and after, relocating.

Twenty-six commuters participated. Identifying relocators enabled an examination of travel motivations at the time of relocation, when travel behaviour is more likely to be considered, and therefore strengthened this investigation into what motivates commute choices. Participants were motivated by convenience, speed, cost and reliability when selecting modes of travel for commuting. Physical activity was not a primary motivation, but incidental increases in physical activity were described and valued in association with active commuting, the use of public transport and the use of park-and-ride facilities. The researchers concluded that emphasising and improving the relative convenience, cost, speed and reliability of active commuting may be a more promising approach to promoting its uptake than emphasizing the health benefits, at least around the time of relocation.

Providing good quality public transport and free car parking within walking or cycling distance of major employment sites may encourage the inclusion of active travel in the journey to work, particularly for people who live too far from work to walk or cycle the entire journey. Accordingly, overall distance from home to work should not be regarded as a barrier to active commuting. The researchers also noted that people do not necessarily decide how they prefer to travel, relocate, and then travel in their expected way; rather, there is constant negotiation, reassessment and adjustment of travel behavior following relocation which may offer an extended window of opportunity for travel behaviour change following context change (eg house or job move), and initial plans or intentions regarding travel behaviour are malleable and susceptible to adjustment or total change during this period. Efforts to promote active travel may therefore be effective if applied following context changes such as relocation.

¹ See Essential Evidence No 18 <http://www.travelwest.info/evidence>

² Jones, C., Ogilvie, D. 2012 Motivations for active commuting: a qualitative investigation of the period of home or work relocation, *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 9:109
<http://www.ijbnpa.org/content/9/1/109>

