



**To:** Place Directorate  
**From:** Adrian Davis  
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**Subject:** Essential Evidence on a page: 151. The Need to Change How People Think About the Consequences of Travel

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Top line: In addressing the need for change in how people think about the consequences of travel a trustworthy dissemination of research findings is critical. Yet this is itself a challenge given the potential of vested interests to discredit robust evidence and introduce ambiguity about the validity of research findings.<sup>1</sup>

At the most basic level movement is necessary for the survival of a terrestrial animal such as *homo sapiens*. In cooperative groups of stone-age people, not every member needed however go for hunting. Likewise in contemporary societies, not every member of families needs to commute to work. Yet, urban sprawl has for almost everyone resulted in a need for complex travel beyond the isolated home-to-work journey. It is unlikely that recent and future developments in telecommunication will substantially eliminate the need for physical travel.<sup>2</sup>

Several possible explanations are conceivable of why people think less about the broad range of costs of travel for the society (and therefore indirectly for any individual including themselves belonging to the society as well as future generations) than they think about the direct benefits for themselves. Less knowledge of societal consequences than of individual consequence is one explanation. First, the societal consequences are more difficult to know about because they depend on the actions by many people, whereas the individual consequences are directly felt because they largely depend on individuals' own actions. Second, the societal consequences are more difficult to know about because many of them are deferred compared to the individual consequences that are more often immediate. Third, in contrast to the individual consequences, the societal consequences are more difficult to know about because many are global and not local such that they are directly encountered. A second explanation is that people are in general more concerned about their own well-being and the well-being of their close relatives than they are concerned about the well-being of unknown others.

Some researchers conclude that in a democratic society a change to sustainable travel requires that the noticeability of the long-term societal costs of travel is increased.<sup>3</sup> To accomplish this, they suggest, information about research findings documenting the long-term societal costs should be conveyed by governments, mass media, producers and providers of travel services, and other people. Knowledge may, however, be insufficient since another key factor is that people tend to be more concerned about their own and their close relatives' wellbeing than they are concerned about the wellbeing of unknown others. Filtering out, denying or simply ignoring information about societal costs is a likely consequence. Yet, some people (sometimes a majority) are concerned about others' wellbeing and will therefore, if they are adequately informed, act in the interest of the society. Others may be forced by the society to do this.

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<sup>1</sup> Eg See <https://travelwest.info/project/ee-118-car-manufacturers-global-road-safety>

<sup>2</sup> Eg Moktharian, P. Salomon, I., Handy. S. 2006 The impact of ICT on leisure activities and travel: A conceptual exploration. *Transportation*, 33, 263-289

<sup>3</sup> Gärling, T., Ettema, D., and Frimanc, F. 2016 The Need to Change How People Think About the Consequences of Travel, in *Handbook of Sustainable Travel*. New York: Springer.