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Abstract Title: Participation in Workplace-Based Commute Alternative Programs: A case study of participants and non-participants in sustainable transportation

Abstract Text:

Workplaces are increasingly seeking to shift their employees from driving alone to work to sustainable transportation modes. A better understanding of what influences commute mode choice can help to inform workplace commute alternative programs. Rational choice theory has often been used to try and explain personal transportation behavior, in which individuals weigh factors primarily related to cost and time in making transportation decisions. Challenging the rational approach, social psychology and sociology perspectives have been applied to transportation behavior research in recent years. This study builds on this emerging research by examining transportation-related social context, past transportation experience and perceptions of participants and non-participants in a commute alternative program. Interviews and a commute documentation activity were conducted with five participants and five non-participants. All were employees of a large university with a well-supported, well-financed commute alternative program. Focusing on one organizational setting and with a purposive sample, the variables of trip purpose, residential location, available transportation options, family situation, work hours, age and gender were held constant, allowing more subtle influences on behavior to be identified and examined. The commute behavior and attitudes of close social ties were found helpful in explaining commute mode choice. Collective incentives specific to commute modes were found to be another influential social mechanism. Past transportation, mediated by perceptions, navigational knowledge and habits, were also found related to commute mode choice. Implications for social interventions include matching individuals by situational relevance, providing planning time for individuals, distributing navigational knowledge and timing interventions with contextual changes.