

# Social Influence, Past Experience and Transportation Mode Choice:



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*A case study of participants and non-participants  
in a commute alternative program*

# This research study suggests...

- The behavior and attitude of close social ties and a sense of participating with others help to explain commute mode choice.
- These social conditions and past transportation experience are reflected in perceptions, attitudes and behavior-specific competence that impact how much one considers alternative modes.

# Commute Alternatives



Alternatives to single occupancy *personal* vehicle (SOV)

# Transportation behavior research gap

- ‘Built environment’ and ‘rational choice’ variables (time, money, convenience) important but insufficient

(Bamberg et al., 2011; Morris & Guerra, 2014; Sherwin, Chatterjee, & Jain, 2014)

- **Social and subjective factors less studied**

(Di Ciommo, et al, 2014, St-Louis, et al 2014, Sherwin, et al, 2014)

➤ *“Participation” research* : **social mechanisms of influence**

(Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Putnam, 2001; Healy, 2010; Klandermans, 1984; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Schussman & Soule, 2005; Snow & McAdam, 2010; Snow & Soule, 2010; Dixon & Roscigno, 2003; J. Wilson, 2000; J. Wilson & Musick, 1997)

# Research setting: university commute alternative program

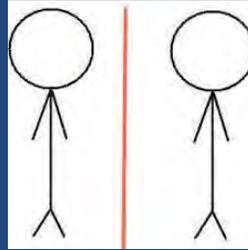


Participants =  
Commute Club



Non-Participants =  
Parking Permit  
Holders

# Study: matched pairs



## Sample

- Participants and non-participants in commute alternative program
- 5 matched pairs (n=10): location, options, cost, age, family situation, gender

## Methods

- Two in-depth interviews of each individual, initial and 3 months later
- Commute documentation activity

# Social conditions – behavior of social ties

Primary Commute Mode	Commute Alternatives	Driving
Bike commuter, 30+ years	Son and husband (recreationally); friends/book club; colleagues; women of similar age in bike course	Husband (commutes)

“My boss drives. I think Bob mostly drives. The person across the hallway drives. Luisa used to carpool, and now drives on her own. Yeah, pretty much everybody else drives in [this department].”

- car commuter

A group of people are socializing in a bar. In the foreground, a woman with long dark hair is smiling. Behind her, several other people are visible, some looking towards the camera and others looking away. The background is filled with warm, golden light from a large, ornate chandelier hanging from the ceiling. The overall atmosphere is lively and social.

# Social conditions and past experience

Attitudes of  
close  
social ties

- “Then, of course, at a young age, you go to college. You come back. The last thing you’re doing is riding bikes. That’s ... ‘kiddie stuff’. I’ve got bars to go to after work with adult people. You start establishing your own adulthood in a working environment.”  
- car commuter, 28 years

# Social conditions

A photograph of a crowded public transit station. In the foreground, a man with a backpack and sunglasses is looking at his phone. Behind him, a woman in a grey dress is also looking at her phone. To the left, a man with a bicycle is partially visible. In the background, a silver train car is parked at the platform. The scene is outdoors with trees and a clear blue sky.

## Participating with others

- “I kind of like the atmosphere of being with commuters—I feel it’s like the cliché. It’s like New York City when you see everyone pile into the subway and pile out. That’s what I feel. I kind of enjoy it. I see the same people. I sometimes see my friends on the train so it’s relaxing to me.”  
- train/bus commuter, 5 years

# Past Experience

- Non-participants
  - Negative commute alternative experience
  - Commute alternative experience NOT relevant
- Participants
  - Years of positive experience with chosen mode
    - Bikers- 'Copenhagen Effect'
  - Developed behavior-specific competence and knowledge



# Positive experience

“One of my favorite parts of the morning walk is the grove in front of the student art gallery, which is next to Hoover Tower.”

- train/walk commuter, 10 years

# Negative past experience



- S2- I've ridden BART to San Francisco many times. Your personal space is heavily cramped... If I have a choice, so long as the gap between the benefits and non-benefits between the two aren't too large, then I'm going to take the personal one, which is driving myself. -  
car commuter, most of 15-20 years

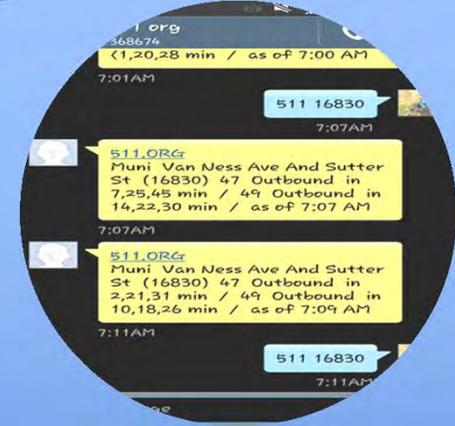
# Past experience and competence/knowledge



Knowledge of options



Preparational competence



Navigational competence



Train/bus commuter, 5 years

# Reflected in Perceptions, Attitudes and Behavior

Influence	Perceptions and Attitudes (example- Louis)
Social ties	talked about public transit as crowded, uncomfortable and unpleasant.
Past transportation experience	“your personal space is heavily cramped”
Transportation mode choice (behavior)	Car commute; interested in trying bus but wrestled with his attitude towards mass transit being uncomfortable and remained reluctant to try it

# More than built environment

Behavior  
and attitude  
of social ties

Participating  
with others

Positive  
experience

Positive attitudes and  
perceptions towards  
commute alternatives

Specific competence  
and knowledge

Alternative  
transportation  
behavior

