

Living Streets Aotearoa



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Women and walking in New Zealand

New Zealand women love to walk. At least that is what the data shows. Walking is good for physical and mental health, for getting out as part of the community, and for our planet. However, in the last few months media stories have suggested the opposite. Walking (or wheel-chairing) is the usual way people get around and is part of every trip, so what's going on?

There are three main sources for data on walking in New Zealand that provide time comparable information.

The New Zealand household travel survey (2011 – 2014, an annual survey of 5000 New Zealanders) shows that women walk more than men, with an average per week of 54 minutes compared to 50 minutes for men. This is still far less than the recommended amount of physical activity required for an adult of around two and a half hours per week. And time spent walking has showed a big decline since 1989, with a drop from an average 72 minutes walk per week to 53 minutes walk per week in 2014.

It's important to note the caveats on what constitutes walking in this survey as only walking along a footpath or over a road is counted. Off-road activities such as tramping, or walking around the farm or shopping centre are not included in the data, neither is walking less than 100m unless it involves crossing a road.

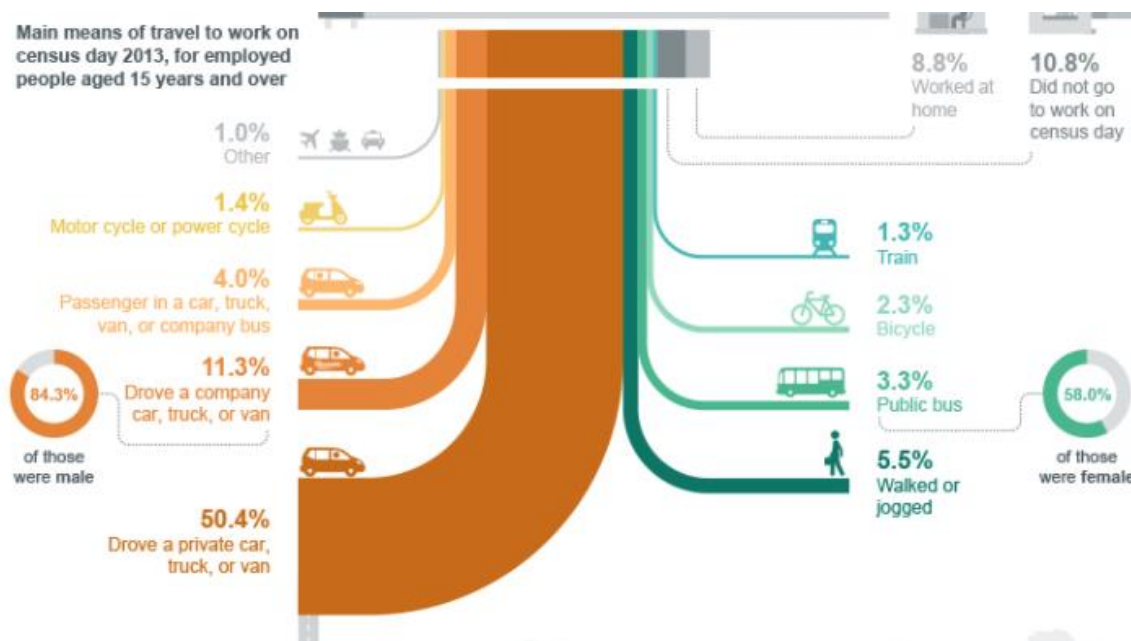
The latest information from the Household survey (2015 – 2017) shows that walking is an important part of many journeys. The table below shows the importance of what metric is used. Distance travelled is much less for walking but time spent walking (remember the caveats) increases.

Table 1: Mode share of time, distance and trip legs (2015-2017)

Travel mode	Trip legs in sample	Million km per year	Million hours per year	Million trip legs per year
Car/van driver	96,845	32,606	833	3,748
Car/van passenger	30,559	14,230	376	1,610
Pedestrian	18,934	691	153	833
Cyclist	1,968	319	22	80
PT (bus/train/ferry)	3,281	1,748	73	192
Motorcyclist	395	108	3	13
Other household travel	1,041	2,172	20	43
Total	153,023	51,874	1,480	6,520

Census 2013 (the 5 yearly survey of all New Zealanders) also showed that of those who walked to work on Census day 56% were women. And women made up more bus users so walked more as part of this journey as well. Census data only shows the main mode of travel not all the legs of a journey as in the Household survey above. It is interesting in this data that does include professional drivers, to note that only 54% of people used private motor-vehicles, and 20% of people either didn't work or worked at home on Census day. Unemployed people aren't included.

Table 2: Census 2013 main means of travel to work



Recreational walking is measured in an occasional survey by Sport New Zealand. Walking is the most popular recreational activity for New Zealanders by a comfortable margin over the next most popular swimming, and at every age and in every ethnic group. Women prefer to walk for recreation significantly more than men.

So, from this data it seems we can be in good heart that New Zealand women want to, and do enjoy their walks, whether to work or for recreation. The major issue

highlighted from the data is that as our main physical activity we don't walk enough to keep healthy, and we are walking less than we used to. What are the issues that stop us stepping out? The New Zealand data above only gives us a broad brush look at how we are doing without pinpointing why we are missing out.

The Stanford University Activity Inequality report based on smart phone measurements suggested that internationally women were walking less than men. The report highlighted the importance of getting enough physical activity to keep healthy and it seems women are more affected by less walkable neighbourhoods. The researchers found that high "activity inequality" – where a country has a wide gap between those who walk a lot and those who walk very little – was a strong predictor for a nation's obesity levels among the 47 countries studied.

Recent media on the Household Travel Survey results suggests we are lazy. One or two people might be called lazy but when this applies to a whole country something else is going on, a systemic issue. One that needs a concerted government approach that has been absent for the last decade.

Living Streets four-point plan asks for equitable funding for walking and pedestrian systems. Local territorial authorities fully fund footpaths currently and have the expertise in walking. Pedestrian matters just haven't appeared on the national agenda. A national approach and funding is needed and can easily be fixed in the revision of the Government Policy Statement on Transport.

Funding needs to be available for projects that meet good quality pedestrian design. We already have those design standards available with the NZ Pedestrian Planning and Design Guide providing basic guidance for all pedestrian services. Together with the standards NZS4121:2001 for accessible buildings and RTS 14 for blind and vision impaired pedestrians we can create accessible and walkable places that meet the needs of women.

One issue that affects women in particular is the ability to walk safely at night and is often seen as a barrier by women. It is the risk of physical harassment and assault that puts women off walking at night with concerns about walking in city centres, and poorly lit public areas. There are very many design elements that can improve safety for women using a CPTED approach (crime prevention through environmental design). Central funding of projects to improve safety trouble spots would go some way to help this.

One of the ways to increase walking rates is to measure and report on who is walking and how much in a meaningful way. To do this we need to meet a basic internationally comparable level of walk data reporting. Let's adopt the International Walk Data Standard in New Zealand to do that.

So, while women do walk at least as much as men in New Zealand we need to do more to get people walking more regularly, for their health, our environment and communities. Vienna, Austria ran a gender mainstreaming programme starting in the late 1990s to improve women's access to and enjoyment of their city. Two key factors were stressed, the safety and ease of movement of women. New Zealand would do well to emulate this approach. We will need to see more women in our

urban and transport planning fields, in engineering and architecture, and as our political representatives to achieve this. Rather than be overrun by the latest technological travel fad, women need to take the lead on walking, the free, social, healthy and fun way to get around.

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References

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How to design a city for women

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