



Walking and driving cultures in Auckland

Cathy Bean

Presentation to Living Streets Conference
3 November 2006

Method

- * Discursive analysis of Auckland's land use and transport policy 1950s – 2005
- * Key informant interviews
- * Series of focus groups on the role of walking, and the complexities of household transport decision making

Auckland's transport development

- * Public transport: decline in patronage: 50% (1955) to 7.2% (2005)
- * Walking: decline in patronage: 9.6% (1971) to 3.5% (2001) - work trips
- * Auckland simply got what it planned for?
- * Funding bias towards roading

"severe road congestion and arguably the worst public transport levels of any western world city with a population of more than one million." (Laird et al. 2001: 2)

Transport related problems

- * Physical inactivity: accounted for 2600 premature deaths in NZ 1996-97 (MoH, 2003)
- * Increasing lifestyle disease: 32% of New Zealanders are overweight, a further 17% are obese (MoH, 2003)
- * Traffic accidents
- * Air pollution



7.30am, 22 July 2003
Source: ARC, 2004



8.30am, 22 July 2003
Source: ARC, 2004



9.30am, 22 July 2003
Source: ARC, 2004



10.30am, 22 July 2003
Source: ARC, 2004

Positive perceptions of walking in Auckland

- * Auckland has many great walking environments
- * Accessible community facilities encourage walking
- * Health as primary motivation for walking
- * Walking facilitates opportunistic and planned social interaction and holds a particular place within urban social life

CB: So, is health a big factor in choosing to walk? Who goes for a walk just for health?

Bridget: Yeah definitely

Nina: Yeah

Andrea: I do on behalf of my children, I consider it healthy for them to walk to school and so we do ... I would much prefer that they did walk than taking the car. Especially ... you read all of this stuff about child obesity and you know, they have a more sedentary life compared to what we used to have and so I like to try and get them moving as much as possible.

Bridget: Setting lifelong habits early.

Nina: Yeah

Andrea: It also just helps my son wriggle out a little bit of energy before he walks into the classroom, pings around the place.

Rebecca: I like walking where there are other people out, I think that pedestrians encourage pedestrians and that's my experience, so that's why it'd be fun walking through Kingsland, cos there's people on the footpath having their cappuccinos and that's quite lovely. And I love walking through our neighbourhood in the morning with the kids cos there's actually lots of people out walking and I have so many conversations with other kids and neighbours on the way to school and so, for me, it's about people being out encouraging me to be out really.

Walking and place

- * Participants identified that walking connects them with places

Anthony: And it's just the connection, I mean, you were talking about the route you follow down New North Road. That's not particularly picturesque or anything, but I don't know about how you see it but [when you walk] you get a connection where you just see so much and somehow it becomes more your space, you know, so that corridor that you walked, suddenly, you know, it's part of your space. But if you're just driving through it, well.

Barriers to walking

- * Auckland has many automobile-dominated areas that are perceived to be:
 - unpleasant for walking
 - unsafe for pedestrians, especially children

David: One of the phenomenal things that we have on our walking bus to school is that we cross the intersection of New North Road and Mt Albert Road, and the second part of that crossing ... the light before the green man is a right hand turn into our lane and ... the green man can go on and you can have four or five cars run that red light, and so we've had to teach the kids that when the green man goes on you DON'T cross.

Rebecca: Wow!...

David: You, you wait until all the cars have finished running that red light and then cross ... it's just frightening that out there people are prepared to run a red light and then, when our walking bus is standing there ready to cross, there's 10 kids ... about to walk out onto the road, and you just want to go up to these people and say, "How can you be prepared to run over a kid?" ... It's just, it bares belief.

Rebecca: But that's why you don't let your seven year old walk to school.

Jeremy: So, if that's the reasoning, and I agree, it probably is, and we're all sort of agreed that in Auckland there are wild attitudes amongst drivers in terms of speeding, running red lights, and not being prepared to stop.

Barriers to walking: personal security

- * Many women felt unsafe walking at night
- * Some men also feared for their personal safety when walking at night
- * Pervasive personal security fears for children

David: Right, so I'm really interested in this phenomenon, ... this worldwide increase in paranoia, you know, in my generation, when I was a kid, my Mum felt quite ok about me walking to school from age five...

Rebecca: ...I think that a big part of it is the way the media has influenced people's thinking about what it is to be a good parent. And that driving your kid to school is part of being a good parent and paranoia about something happening to your child, which I think the media has a lot to answer for. Cos the reality is that the statistics show that ... your kid's more likely to be injured by someone that they know ... than by a stranger. But we've all, well, I certainly as a parent was kind of raised to think, as a parent you know, teach your child stranger danger and I think that's gone way too far.

David: Because I feel personally very sad that I can't as a parent let my seven year old walk to school by himself. Something prevents me from doing that. But I think that in principle, well I mean, I did it, so I mean why can't I let him walk to school by himself? Something's stopping me.

Barriers to walking

- * Distance and time
- * Weather, topography
- * Retail design
- * Walking as 'alternative' or 'other'

Peter: I used to get hassled because I walked so much when I was younger.

Cecelia: Hassled?

Peter: Clear as hell, they used to say, "Why don't you just catch a taxi?" and I used to say "I just enjoy walking" and sort of

Elle: I have people say that to me as well, they're like, "I always see you walking round like where I live, why do you walk everywhere?" and I'm like, "I like it"; they think I'm weird.

Ubiquity of the car

- * The car is pervasive in the lives and social lives of almost all participants
- * Confirms claims of recent literature that we live in a civil society of 'automobility': the car has:
 - completely reconfigured civil society and urban social life – extended & flexibilised
 - changed the spatiotemporalities of everyday life
 - become completely woven into family & social life, leisure, employment & education
 - created a demand for flexibility which only it can fulfill
 - become one of the primary sites of lived experience

"...the car has transformed our everyday life and the environment in which we operate – the food we eat, the music we listen to, the risks we take, the places we visit, the errands we run, the emotions we feel, the movies we watch, the money we spend, the stress we endure and the air we breathe." (Wollen, 2002: 11)

CB: Has anyone been unable to travel somewhere that they've wanted to, because they don't have access to a car?

Peter: When my car's broken down I'm screwed ...

Holly: I'd like to go out to the beach and up North ... on the weekend but I don't have a car and

Cecelia: God it's been so long since I haven't owned a car that I just, honestly I didn't even think that that question was relevant, I didn't even know what you were talking about, that's outrageous.

Matthew: Yeah, I cannot imagine not having a car to fall back on if I needed it

Cecelia: That's right, absolutely imperative

Matthew: Yeah ... You'd make do, but there'd be lots of things in life that you normally take for granted because you have a car to get there that you just wouldn't be able to do.

Resistance to car use

- * Societal pressure
- * Traffic at the school gate
- * Traffic accident casualties
- * Traffic congestion & stress
- * Environmental degradation
- * Cost

CB: So is there a lot of pressure to drive your kids around?

Andrea: There's actually, in this area, probably more of a pressure to walk, because ... if I drove my children to school ... people are sort of like, "Did you DRIVE?" You know, because I live two streets away, and literally, even if it's teaming with rain, like this morning, you know like we would still walk to school

Melissa: Same with me...

Andrea: And if you sort of turn up to Plunket coffee group or something like that and you know, you sort of feel a bit guilty for driving if you're so close...

Complexity of transport decision making

- * Transport, housing & employment decisions
- * Habit
- * Car ownership

Anthony: So a typical day for me, on a work day is to usually do the morning run with the kids, so I would usually have the car in the morning, so we tend to do it sort of swap about, with the one car. So whoever's doing the morning run, they'll have the car, so typically, I usually do that, get my daughter down to the walking bus at the corner, but if I'm running late I'll put my youngest, the four year old, in the car and we'll actually go down the street, drop my daughter there and carry on to Point Chev where he's being taken care of, and then carry on and drive in. And so in the meantime my eldest boy's got on the train and gone to St Peters cos that's a great door-to-door set up and then at some stage during the day, my wife will come and pick the car up, usually at the end of the day.

So she's working in Queen St, come and get it from where I am over in Crafton, and then she'll go and pick the others up at the end of the day. And if it's turn about then maybe I've got the train early and gone to work early and she's taken the car and we swap so it works out...

You're almost like, you're fitting in with all of your other work mates as well. I mean, [you've] gotta really factor a lot of people into the equation when you're making the decision as to who's going to do the late run, who's going to do the early run.

Conclusions

- * Auckland's land use and transport planning have combined with a host of other factors to produce transport cultures which are persistently dominated by the car.
- * Other factors include:
 - the fact that the car is interwoven into the very sociality of New Zealand's urban life
 - the perceptions and social constructions of each mode of transport
 - individual, household, societal and environmental characteristics.

Conclusions

- * The car's dominance has significant negative social and environmental implications.
- * The car's dominance is likely to continue unless the factors which contribute to its dominance are more effectively addressed.

References

- Auckland Regional Council. (2004b). *State of the Auckland region report 2004*. Auckland: Auckland Regional Council.
- Fisher, G. W., Rolfe, K. A., Kjellstrom, T., Woodward, A., Hales, S., Sturman, A. P., et al. (2002). *Health effects due to motor vehicle air pollution in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Transport.
- Laird, P., Newman, P., Bachelis, M., & Kenworthy, J. R. (2001). *Back on track: Rethinking transport policy in Australia and New Zealand*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.
- Ministry of Health. (2003). *DHB toolkit: Physical activity*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.
- Sheller, M. (2004). Automotive emotions: Feeling the car. *Theory Culture & Society*, 21(4-5), 221-242.
- Wollen, P. (2002). Introduction. In P. Wollen & J. Kerr (Eds.), *Autopia: Cars and culture* (pp. 10-20). London: Reaktion.