

The Future of Travel Demand

DEMAND research shows that patterns of travel are changing. Yet, the assumptions which have, until now, underpinned thinking about growth in travel have missed key societal developments. It is time to adapt the methods used to understand and plan for future travel demand.

Gathering evidence over a 12 month period from experts across the UK and internationally, the Commission on Travel Demand, funded by the DEMAND Centre, showed that people travel less today than they did one or two decades ago. On average, people make 16% fewer trips than in 1996, spend 22 hours less traveling today than they did 10 years ago, and since the 1990s, there has been a 20% reduction in commuter trips per person per week. At the same time, other kinds of travel are growing, such as fast food deliveries, van traffic and traffic on the motorway.

Travel is a derived demand

The Commission explains that patterns in travel demand are a result of the activities we take part in. For example, the types of jobs people do, and where, when and how often they work is changing, and so are the patterns of commuting that follow. Understanding trends like these is central to developing an effective transport policy.

Adaptive approach to planning

Demand for travel will continue to change as infrastructures, practices and technologies develop and evolve. Yet, the current approach to transport planning tends to black-box variation and uncertainty. The Commission therefore recommends an approach to understanding and planning for future travel that puts policy goals at the front end of decision-making process. The Commission sets out ten recommendations, for example, to set up a cross-departmental FUTURES lab and develop a set of simpler modelling tools that are more speculative and that would allow for the exploration of future projects, policies and patterns of daily life. All of the recommendations challenge decision-makers, practitioners and researchers to make a step change in how they think about travel demand, how the future is planned for and what kinds of evidence is taken into account when planning and investing in the transport system.

Marsden, G. et al. (2018), 'All Change? The Future of Travel Demand and the Implications for Policy and Planning'. First report of the Commission on Travel Demand. DEMAND website <http://www.demand.ac.uk/commission-on-travel-demand/>

Response from Bernadette Kelly (Permanent Secretary of the Department for Transport) to the 'All Change?' report <http://www.demand.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/190304-BK-to-Greg-Marsden-Response-to-Commission-on-Travel-Demand.pdf>

Further comments on this response by Professor Greg Marsden <https://drgregmarsden.wordpress.com/2019/03/15/all-change-dft-responds-to-commission-on-travel-demand-report/>

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