

Mobility – The impact of not driving on different non-driver subgroups

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Introduction

Reliable, efficient and effective mobility is essential for the well-being of all Australians. Good transport and mobility allows people access to essential services, to participate in social and recreational activities and to have some level of engagement with their community (Harris & Tapsas, 2006).

The primary mode of transport used by most people is the private car. However, the provision of adequate transport alternatives for people who are unable to drive is important. Poor transportation and mobility can have a detrimental effect on the health and well-being of older and disabled people, and can have social, education or employment disadvantages for young non-drivers (Whelan et al., 2006; Currie et al, 2005).

Non-drivers are a broad group of Victorians which include people who have stopped driving due to age related impairments, disabled people, financially or socially disadvantaged people who are unable to afford a car and young people without licences. There is also a group of individuals who are non-drivers by choice. The issues and challenges that each of these subgroups of non-drivers face is likely to vary, and subsequently needs to be examined separately.

The main aim of this study was to ascertain how different subgroups of non-drivers are dealing with mobility and transport issues in their daily lives. The non-driver subgroups that will be examined are older, disabled and young non-drivers. Analysis of those who are non-drivers by choice was beyond the scope of this project.

Method

The research was conducted in two stages. The qualitative stage involved in-depth telephone or face-to-face interviews. A total of 38 interviews were conducted, 12 with older non-drivers, 12 with disabled non-drivers and 10 with young non-drivers. Four youth workers were also interviewed. There was an even mix of genders and location, with people interviewed from metropolitan Melbourne, outer metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. The interviews were conducted by senior market researchers who followed a discussion guide.

The quantitative stage was divided into two components – a telephone interview with 301 older or disabled non-drivers and an internet survey with 207 young non-drivers.

The sample of older and disabled non-drivers was not mutually exclusive. For the purpose of this report, disabled non-drivers were defined as those who were under 65 and reported a disability (n=74), and older non-drivers as those over 65, with or without a disability (n=225). Seventy-two percent (n=162) of the older non-driver group also reported having a disability.

Young non-drivers participated in an internet survey that was promoted through an e-newsletter sent to free2go¹ members and in the RoyalAuto magazine. A total of 207 non-drivers between the ages of 16-20 years responded to the survey. This included learner drivers, young people with no licence and young people with a licence but no access to a vehicle.

Results and discussion

The research found that there were several differences in the impact of not driving among the different sub-groups of non-drivers. The results for each non-driver sub-group are detailed in the following section.

Older non-drivers

Almost half (48%) of older non-drivers stated that their transport needs were fully met, despite having difficulty performing many daily activities (eg. visiting family and friends or going shopping). Older non-drivers were often accepting of not being able to drive, and had difficulty delineating the impacts of ceasing driving and the reduced mobility that accompanies ageing. Eighty-three percent of participants had driven a car in the past, and two-thirds of these participants said no-one but themselves influenced their decision to stop driving. The main reasons cited for stopping driving were being too sick or incapacitated (48%) a lack of confidence (10%), or being scared after an accident (7%). The most commonly reported drawback of not driving was a loss of independence (28%). Despite the higher cost involved, the most common form of transport used was a taxi (54%) followed by an electric mobility scooter (39%). A possible reason for the high use of taxis and scooters is that buses and trains were reported to be the most difficult modes of transport to use (36% and 16% respectively), although there was a high level of awareness of these options being available in the local area (76% awareness for buses and 54% for trains).

Disabled non-drivers

Disabled non-drivers were more likely to state that their transport needs were only partially met compared to older non-drivers (61% vs. 45%). They were interested in getting out and about, but had difficulty using some forms of public transport. Sixty-four percent of participants had driven a car in the past. The vast majority of participants (70%) cited the reason why they had stopped driving was because they were too sick or incapacitated. Further reasons included being scared after an accident (9%), or a lack of confidence (6%). Sixty percent of participants said no-one but themselves influenced their decision to stop driving. The most common drawback of not driving was a loss of independence (27%). As with older non-drivers, the most common form of transport used was a taxi (70%) and the modes of transport most difficult to use were buses (50%) and trains (24%),

¹ free2go is a motoring assistance program for young people

although there was a high level of awareness of these options being available in the local area (74% awareness for buses and trains).

Young non-drivers

Young non-drivers were more likely to state their transport needs were met and were more independently mobile than older or disabled non-drivers. The main difficulty that this group faced was the unavailability of public transport particularly in the evenings and on weekends, which was often compensated by their parents. As part of the internet survey, participants were asked how difficult it was for them to access education or employment on a scale of 0-10 (where 0 = not at all difficult and 10 = extremely difficult). The mean score was 2.9 overall. This is compared to a mean score of 4.6 when participants were asked how difficult it was to get to other places. Mean scores varied by location (see Table 1). Young non drivers living in outer Melbourne or rural Victoria generally reported more difficulties with mobility than participants in inner city Melbourne and large towns. Fourteen percent of participants reported that they were not able to get to the places they wanted to go every week. The main reason cited for not being able to get to places was that there was no-one to drive them (73%).

Table 1: Mean scores of difficulty to get to places by location

Location	Difficulty getting to education/work	Difficulty getting other places
Inner Melbourne	2.9	4.1
Outer Melbourne	3.4	4.7
Large town	2.1	3.9
Country town	2.5	4.8
Rural areas	2.3	6.4

Conclusions

This research highlights that there are different issues and impacts of not driving in the non-driver subgroups which

need to be considered when addressing mobility issues and seeking ways to address them.

Older non-drivers were the most accepting of not being able to drive, despite having difficulties with daily activities and experiencing a loss of independence. This is compared to disabled non-drivers, who were more interested in getting out and about, and expressed a certain level of frustration with current transport options. Contrasting this is young non-drivers, who had minimal difficulty with mobility issues compared to older and disabled non-drivers.

The findings of this research show that for certain subgroups, not driving can have a significant impact on an individual’s mobility, level of social participation and well-being. Holistic countermeasures that incorporate transport and accessibility solutions, land use planning and social inclusion programs need to be addressed by all levels of government.

References

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