

To: Transport & Health Policy Makers, & Practitioners
From: Prof Adrian Davis, TRI, Edinburgh Napier University
Date: 7th December 2020
Subject: Essential Evidence 4 Scotland No.32 Journey literacy: Walking & cycling despite the barriers

Top Line: Building up knowledge and experience of sections of commute routes which were more pleasant, and using them, somehow counteracted the predominantly unsupportive and sometimes dangerous conditions which active travel commuters faced on other parts of their route.

A clear understanding of the influences on walking and cycling is needed to develop interventions to encourage these behaviours. It is increasingly recognised that the environmental setting in which behaviour is undertaken might be an important influence on the behaviour itself. However, the findings of quantitative research on the environmental correlates of walking and cycling for transport are mixed, with different studies reporting positive, negative and null associations. Perceptions of the environment appear to be associated with walking and cycling.

In a study conducted in Cambridge participants were included in questionnaire analysis if they reported unsupportive conditions for walking or cycling on their route (e.g. heavy traffic), walked or cycled all or part of the journey to work, and completed qualitative interviews.¹ Using content analysis of these interviews, the researchers investigated the reasons for walking and cycling to or from work despite reporting an unsupportive route environment in a sample of commuters. Understanding this resilience might be just as important as investigating 'barriers' to cycling.

All participants had reasons for enduring adverse environmental conditions and had done so in a variety of ways. They had done this by acquiring experience, knowledge or confidence, by making pragmatic choices to use more convenient or cheaper travel modes or to make longer but safer journeys, or as a result of weighing up the perceived benefits and costs of the options given their own circumstances. It was apparent that many people endured conditions for reasons unrelated to the environment, such as childcare commitments or car parking arrangements at work. In addition, some of the more experienced active commuters may have responded in such a way as to represent broader public opinion; it might therefore have been others, such as family members or members of the general public, who perceived cycling or walking as too dangerous and whose behaviour was affected as a result. For example,

"I cycled to school from when I was a teenager . . . It's probably the most dangerous thing I do but . . . I read the statistics and it's more dangerous not to cycle from the health point of view! (laughs) And I don't believe you should give into things . . . you shouldn't allow yourself to be forced off doing it by a whole load of selfish people in cars." (Frank) aged 61 Cycles four miles a day to work.

"Well, being a Cambridge lad [boy] I do know all the little snickets [shortcuts] and sideways and I tend to use those... the roads that are shut off to traffic, anything that keeps me out of the traffic is good news and I'll use it . . . Because I know most of the routes I can duck and dive a bit, it doesn't speed things up but it makes it safer. As I say, I like to be kept away from the traffic. (Greg) aged 61 Cycles 25 minutes a day to work.

Having explored the reasons why active travellers endured these unsupportive environments on their everyday commuting journeys, the researchers suggested that developing commuters' knowledge of safe walking and cycling routes (journey literacy), improving cycling confidence and restricting workplace parking may form part of larger strategies to encourage walking and cycling to and from work.

¹ Guell, C., Panter, J., Ogilvie, D. 2013. Walking and cycling to work despite reporting an unsupportive environment: insights from a mixed-method exploration of counterintuitive findings. *BMC Public Health*, 13: 497.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-13-497>