
Travel characteristics of older people

Barbara Noble

Transport Statistics Personal Travel Division: DETR

Key findings

- Travel declines with age. People aged 80 and over make less than half the number of journeys, and travel less than a quarter of the distance of those aged 50–54.
- Older people are travelling more than a decade ago. For example, men aged 75–79 travelled about 3,500 miles on average a year in 1996/98, nearly half as far again as men in this age group in 1985/86.
- About two thirds of women aged 50–54 are drivers in households with a car. In contrast, three quarters of women aged 80 and over live in households without a car.
- For people aged 50–54, car travel accounts for three quarters of journeys by men, and two thirds by women. For those aged 80 and over, less than half of journeys are by car.
- Less than one trip in five is on foot for men aged 50–54, increasing to more than one in three for men aged 80 and over, when men make almost the same proportion of trips on foot as women.
- Households headed by men aged 65–69 and women aged 60–64 are more likely to own a car aged one year or less than in any other age groups – probably new cars bought on retirement.
- The number of shopping and personal business trips made by men from their mid-50s is much higher than for younger men, peaking at nearly ten trips a week for men in their early 70s.
- Just under two thirds of people past retirement age in households without a car had a bus pass in 1996/98, compared with less than a third in households with two or more cars. Men were less likely to hold a bus pass than women.
- For those aged 80 and over, nearly half of men, and more than two thirds of women have some form of mobility difficulty.
- Currently, there are over 2 million people aged 70 and over who hold a driving licence. Over the next 15 years, increasing licence holding, and an increasing population of older people could mean that this figure may double to about 4½ million people still holding a licence over the age of 70.

Introduction

This article looks at how the travel characteristics of people change as they grow older. Most statistics are derived from the National Travel Surveys (NTS) for 1985/86 and 1996/98, and are analysed in five year age bands, starting at age 50. Comparison of the travel habits of older people with those aged 50–54 is interesting, as the great majority are active and most are still working. In addition,

this 'baby boom' group born just after World War II tend to have rather different lifestyles and travel patterns to earlier generations. Details of travel by younger adults (aged 25–49) are also shown in some tables for comparison purposes.

Small sample sizes do not allow separate analysis for sub divisions of those aged over 80.

General characteristics of travel in 1996/98

Table B.1 summarises travel patterns by sex. In each age group over 50, men make more journeys and travel further than women. For both sexes, travel declines with age. People aged 80 and over made less than half the number of journeys, and travelled less than a quarter of the distance of those aged 50–54.

The fall with age in the total distance travelled is even greater than the fall in the average number of journeys, because the average journey length reduces. This reduction in distance is more marked among men, who travel much further than women at younger ages. The average journey length for men aged 50–54 was 9.5 miles, more than 50 per cent further than the average of 6.1 miles recorded for women. For those aged 75 and over, the average journey lengths of men and women were almost the same, just over 4 miles, but as men made more journeys, the total distance they travelled was greater.

For men aged 80 and over, the average time spent travelling was 188 hours a year, or 31 minutes a day, less than 40 per cent of the average travel time for men aged 50–54. Women aged 80 and over spent only 23 minutes a day travelling on average.

The figures quoted above are averaged over all respondents to the survey, even if they did not record any travel in the sample week. Over 90 per cent of males aged 75–79 recorded at least one journey, but this fell to 79 per cent for men aged 80 and over. These percentages were a little lower for women in the same age groups.

These figures may be a little misleading as a guide to those who are effectively housebound. Some of those who did not record a journey may have made a short walk (less than a mile) during the first six days of diary keeping, when short walks are not recorded, so the percentages quoted above may overstate the proportion who did not leave the house. However, as the NTS is a survey of households, older people living in communal establishments are not included in the statistics. These people are more likely to be unable to travel, so the figures quoted may actually understate the proportion of elderly people who do not go out.

Table B.1 also shows the proportion of each group who were working full or part time. This proportion falls rapidly during the 50s and 60s. A third of men and half of women aged 55–59 were not in employment in 1996/98. As commuting is a significant part of the total mileage of people working, this fall in employment with age is a major factor in the reduction in total distance travelled (see later section 'Why do older people travel?').

Travel trends

Both men and women travelled more in 1996/98 than people of the same ages in 1985/86, particularly the most elderly. For example, men aged 75–79 travelled about 3,500 miles on average a year in 1996/98, nearly half as far again as men in this age group in 1985/86.

Table B.1 General travel characteristics by age:¹ 1985/86 and 1996/98

	Journeys per person per year	Distance travelled per person per year (miles)	Average journey length (miles)	Time spent travelling per person per year (hours)	Percentage recording a journey in the travel week	Percentage working full or part time	Base (sample size)
1996/98							
Males							
25-49	1,199	11,378	9.5	467	97	88	3,745
50-54	1,210	11,540	9.5	478	97	83	729
55-59	1,223	9,424	7.7	435	98	65	578
60-64	1,102	7,505	6.8	378	95	45	539
65-69	1,071	6,013	5.6	368	94	14	541
70-74	936	4,627	4.9	318	95	8	437
75-79	817	3,511	4.3	274	92	3	330
80+	562	2,110	3.8	188	79	1	252
Females							
25-49	1,270	7,303	5.8	393	97	71	4,035
50-54	1,137	6,951	6.1	378	97	72	712
55-59	958	5,967	6.2	328	96	49	628
60-64	879	5,123	5.8	314	94	25	563
65-69	822	4,649	5.7	304	95	8	581
70-74	750	3,555	4.7	278	93	4	547
75-79	623	2,756	4.4	211	88	2	422
80+	410	1,631	4.0	139	75	-	489
1985/86							
Males							
25-49	1,232	9,469	7.7	441	98	88	4,222
50-54	1,139	8,999	7.9	434	96	85	695
55-59	1,138	7,457	6.6	411	97	76	702
60-64	1,006	5,654	5.6	351	96	50	737
65-69	986	4,265	4.3	338	93	14	566
70-74	779	3,267	4.2	275	88	8	502
75-79	694	2,354	3.4	230	87	4	307
80+	491	1,485	3.0	153	71	2	238
Females							
25-49	1,191	5,492	4.6	357	98	63	4,391
50-54	991	5,026	5.1	328	96	63	722
55-59	892	4,326	4.9	301	94	51	770
60-64	793	3,373	4.3	272	94	17	828
65-69	734	3,248	4.4	268	91	7	672
70-74	637	2,388	3.7	225	87	2	665
75-79	482	1,952	4.0	171	79	2	463
80+	284	951	3.4	101	59	1	498

¹ People living in private households only

The decline in travel with age was slightly less pronounced in 1996/98 than in 1985/86.

In 1996/98, both men and women were more likely to record at least one journey than people of the same age in 1985/86. At that time, only 59 per cent of women aged 80 and over recorded a journey in the travel week, compared to 75 per cent in 1996/98.

Fewer men in the 55-59 age group were working in 1996/98 than in 1985/86, although men in this age group still made more journeys and travelled further on average than in 1985/86.

Access to cars

The single factor most affecting travel by older people is their access to car transport, both as a driver and a passenger (*Table B.2*).

For men aged 50–54 in 1996/98, over three quarters were the ‘main driver’¹ of a car. This proportion fell slowly with age for men in their 50s and 60s, but dropped rapidly for men in their 70s, declining to a third for men aged 80 and over. The small proportion of men who were ‘other drivers’ also fell, and there does not appear

Table B.2 Access to cars by age and sex: 1985/86 and 1996/98

	Percentage of people					
	Living in households with cars			In households without cars		Total
	Main driver	Other driver	Non-driver	Driver	Non-driver	
1996/98						
Males						
25–49	71	12	3	6	8	100
50–54	78	8	3	4	7	100
55–59	74	7	4	4	11	100
60–64	71	8	4	5	13	100
65–69	70	5	4	6	15	100
70–74	62	3	4	8	22	100
75–79	53	3	2	9	33	100
80+	34	3	6	12	45	100
Females						
25–49	53	17	14	4	13	100
50–54	47	20	21	2	10	100
55–59	36	18	28	2	15	100
60–64	29	19	25	4	23	100
65–69	22	18	27	4	29	100
70–74	16	12	26	2	44	100
75–79	12	5	18	4	62	100
80+	6	2	16	2	74	100
1985/86						
Males						
25–49	71	7	3	7	13	100
55–59	66	7	4	6	18	100
60–64	63	4	4	8	21	100
65–69	55	6	3	9	27	100
70–74	46	5	5	10	34	100
75–79	35	4	6	11	44	100
80+	27	2	5	8	58	100
Females						
25–49	27	15	33	2	23	100
55–59	23	13	35	2	27	100
60–64	14	11	34	2	38	100
65–69	11	8	27	1	53	100
70–74	9	5	20	3	63	100
75–79	5	3	20	3	68	100
80+	3	1	14	1	82	100

NB: ‘Drivers’ are people holding a full car driving licence.

to be any evidence that older men hand over the driving to their partners, who are younger on average. There were corresponding increases in the proportion of men who lived in households without a car:– 12 per cent of men over 80 still held a licence even though they no longer had access to a car.

Women were much less likely to be main drivers, and the proportion of drivers declined with age. In the age group 50–54, 47 per cent of women were main drivers, and a further 20 per cent were ‘other drivers’ in a household with a car. Three quarters of women aged 80 and over were non-drivers living in a household without a car.

1 A main driver of a household car is the person who drives most mileage in that car. A household with more than one car may have more than one main driver.

The patterns of declining access to cars with age were also apparent in 1985/86, but in every age and sex group shown, more people had access to a car in 1996/98 than in 1985/86.

Possible future trends in licence holding are examined later in this article.

How do older people travel?

Table B.3 and Chart B.1 show journeys travelled by mode. Patterns were generally similar in 1985/86 and 1996/98. Travel by car drivers decreases with age. However, the decline in car driver trips does not lead to an increase in car passenger trips, except for the very elderly. In each age group, women are much more likely to be passengers than men.

Car travel is partly replaced with travel on foot by men in their late 50s and 60s, and by bus for older men. Travel on foot remains fairly constant for women, but travel by bus increases with age.

Table B.3 Journeys by age, sex and main mode: 1985/86 and 1996/98

	Number of journeys per person per year						Percentage of total journeys					
	Walk	Car driver	Car passenger	Bus	Other	Total	Walk	Car driver	Car passenger	Bus	Other	Total
1996/98												
Males												
25-49	224	764	93	32	86	1,199	19	64	8	3	7	100
50-54	213	838	68	27	64	1,210	18	69	6	2	5	100
55-59	265	783	81	35	59	1,223	22	64	7	3	5	100
60-64	269	672	69	39	53	1,102	24	61	6	4	5	100
65-69	361	558	62	49	41	1,071	34	52	6	5	4	100
70-74	301	465	61	78	30	936	32	50	7	8	3	100
75-79	268	366	59	89	34	817	33	45	7	11	4	100
80+	198	172	83	64	45	562	35	31	15	11	8	100
Females												
25-49	327	604	227	60	53	1,270	26	48	18	5	4	100
50-54	266	496	276	57	43	1,137	23	44	24	5	4	100
55-59	267	307	283	59	43	958	28	32	30	6	4	100
60-64	244	229	270	90	47	879	28	26	31	10	5	100
65-69	260	180	259	88	35	822	32	22	32	11	4	100
70-74	264	117	218	114	36	750	35	16	29	15	5	100
75-79	227	69	189	105	34	623	36	11	30	17	5	100
80+	150	32	129	69	29	410	37	8	32	17	7	100
1985/86												
Males												
25-49	259	741	93	43	96	1,232	21	60	8	3	8	100
50-54	230	722	68	43	77	1,139	20	63	6	4	7	100
55-59	265	683	58	49	83	1,138	23	60	5	4	7	100
60-64	308	529	59	59	52	1,006	31	53	6	6	5	100
65-69	387	407	52	89	51	986	39	41	5	9	5	100
70-74	292	319	49	82	37	779	37	41	6	11	5	100
75-79	325	195	60	84	30	694	47	28	9	12	4	100
80+	232	124	53	57	24	491	47	25	11	12	5	100
Females												
25-49	401	400	247	83	60	1,191	34	34	21	7	5	100
50-54	329	262	254	94	51	991	33	26	26	9	5	100
55-59	316	204	229	93	49	892	35	23	26	10	5	100
60-64	322	112	203	127	30	793	41	14	26	16	4	100
65-69	336	69	180	121	29	734	46	9	25	16	4	100
70-74	305	46	136	121	29	637	48	7	21	19	5	100
75-79	223	22	123	94	20	482	46	5	25	20	4	100
80+	138	4	76	52	14	284	49	1	27	18	5	100

For people aged 50–54, car travel accounted for three quarters of journeys by men, and two thirds by women in 1996/98. For those aged 80 and over, less than half of journeys were by car. Less than one trip in five was on foot for men aged 50–54, increasing to more than one in three for men aged 80 and over, when men made almost the same proportion of trips on foot as women. For the very elderly, other modes, mostly private hire buses, but also taxis and minicabs, become more important as a proportion of all trips.

Although the number of car journeys decreases with age, most distance is travelled by car in all age groups (*Table B.4*). For men aged 80 and over in 1996/98, 72 per cent of distance travelled was by car, compared to 58 per cent by women in the same age group. ‘Other’ travel by private hire buses and taxi accounted for a quarter of the distance travelled by the most elderly women.

Table B.4 Distance travelled by age, sex and main mode: 1985/86 and 1996/98

	Distance per person per year (miles)						Percentage of total distance					
	Walk	Car driver	Car passenger	Bus	Other	Total	Walk	Car driver	Car passenger	Bus	Other	Total
1996/98												
Males												
25–49	145	8,612	1,145	143	1,333	11,378	1	76	10	1	12	100
50–54	139	9,086	914	116	1,285	11,540	1	79	8	1	11	100
55–59	158	7,234	947	145	940	9,424	2	77	10	2	10	100
60–64	179	5,780	683	153	710	7,505	2	77	9	2	9	100
65–69	210	4,480	583	176	564	6,013	3	75	10	3	9	100
70–74	200	3,098	678	304	347	4,627	4	67	15	7	8	100
75–79	168	2,006	518	303	516	3,511	5	57	15	9	15	100
80+	117	981	538	193	280	2,110	6	46	26	9	13	100
Females												
25–49	178	3,662	2,438	240	785	7,303	2	50	33	3	11	100
50–54	151	2,875	3,080	235	609	6,951	2	41	44	3	9	100
55–59	152	2,179	2,784	215	637	5,967	3	37	47	4	11	100
60–64	145	1,282	2,665	375	656	5,123	3	25	52	7	13	100
65–69	158	1,089	2,454	328	620	4,649	3	23	53	7	13	100
70–74	157	629	1,793	389	586	3,555	4	18	50	11	16	100
75–79	99	276	1,502	387	492	2,756	4	10	54	14	18	100
80+	61	99	847	217	407	1,631	4	6	52	13	25	100
1985/86												
Males												
25–49	174	6,926	917	181	1,271	9,469	2	73	10	2	13	100
50–54	153	6,785	768	169	1,124	8,999	2	75	9	2	12	100
55–59	181	5,622	562	174	919	7,457	2	75	8	2	12	100
60–64	214	4,073	541	208	618	5,654	4	72	10	4	11	100
65–69	273	2,689	454	306	543	4,265	6	63	11	7	13	100
70–74	203	1,896	456	315	396	3,267	6	58	14	10	12	100
75–79	183	969	568	299	335	2,354	8	41	24	13	14	100
80+	107	563	376	156	284	1,485	7	38	25	10	19	100
Females												
25–49	222	2,055	2,181	294	741	5,492	4	37	40	5	13	100
50–54	187	1,327	2,464	317	730	5,026	4	26	49	6	15	100
55–59	195	1,126	2,143	314	547	4,326	5	26	50	7	13	100
60–64	198	567	1,704	447	458	3,373	6	17	51	13	14	100
65–69	188	403	1,590	429	638	3,248	6	12	49	13	20	100
70–74	163	212	1,124	437	452	2,388	7	9	47	18	19	100
75–79	110	80	881	281	599	1,952	6	4	45	14	31	100
80+	55	17	568	174	137	951	6	2	60	18	14	100

Car ownership

Table B.5 shows details of car ownership by age of the head of household. For male heads of household in their 60s, more than four households in five had a car, and nearly a quarter had two or more. In contrast, households headed by a woman (which are more likely to be single person households) had much lower car ownership. For households headed by a woman in her 60s, three in five had no car, rising to nine in ten for households headed by a woman aged 80 or more.

Chart B.1 Journeys by age, sex and mode: 1996/98

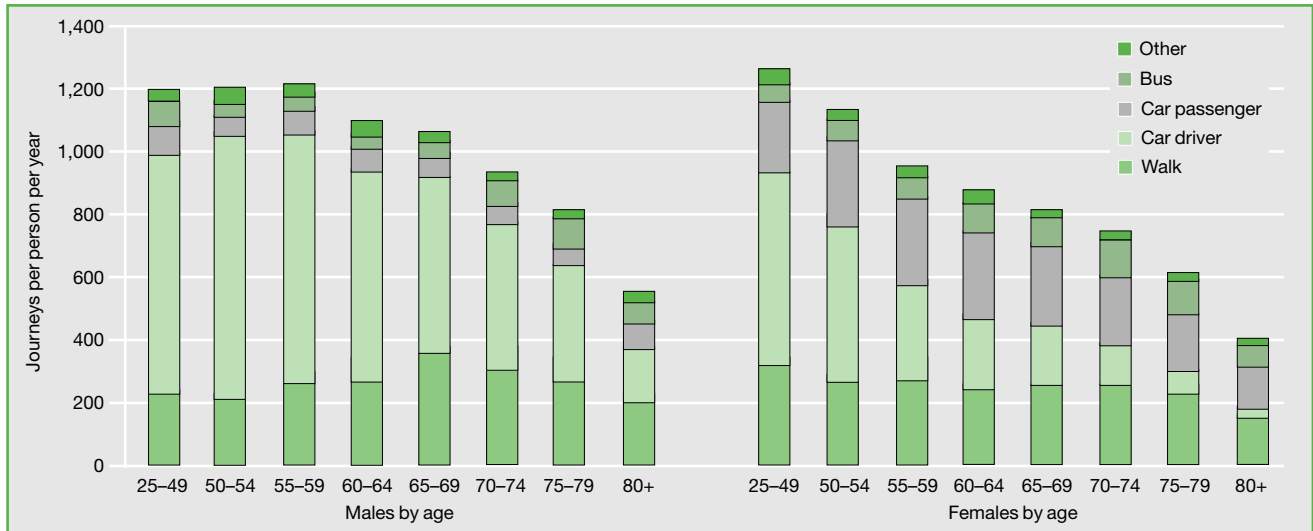


Table B.5 Household car ownership by sex and age of head of household: 1996/98

				Percentage
	No car	One car	Two or more cars	All households
Males				
50-59	12	43	45	100
60-69	19	58	23	100
60-64 years	17	56	27	100
65-69 years	21	61	18	100
70-79	35	54	10	100
80+	59	37	4	100
Females				
50-59	41	50	8	100
60-69	60	38	2	100
60-64 years	60	38	2	100
65-69 years	60	38	2	100
70-79	75	24	1	100
80+	90	10	-	100

The age of household cars are shown in Table B.6 and Chart B.2. In 1996/98, households headed by men aged 65-69 and women aged 60-64 were most likely to own a car aged one year or less. This is also true in comparison with younger age groups (not shown on Table B.6). It seems likely that some men and women buy a new car on retirement, possibly to replace a company car, or as they have a lump sum available.

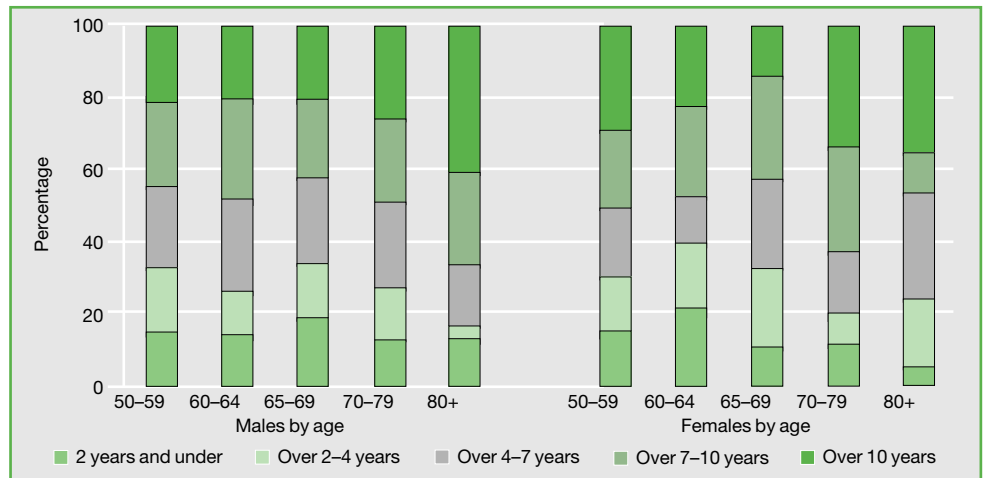
After retirement age, the age of household cars increases, so that only a third of

households headed by men aged 80 and over had a car aged less than 7 years. In comparison, over half of cars owned by people of all ages were less than 7 years old.

Table B.6 Age of household cars by sex and age of head of household: 1996/98

	Cumulative percentage											
	Age of car (years) less than:											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	13	18	all
Males												
50-59	7	16	26	33	39	47	54	62	79	92	98	100
60-64	6	15	21	27	36	44	52	63	79	92	98	100
65-69	10	19	27	34	41	49	59	66	79	93	98	100
70-79	8	14	21	27	35	42	52	60	74	88	97	100
80+	7	13	16	17	24	30	34	42	59	82	95	100
Females												
50-59	7	16	23	31	37	43	50	58	71	91	98	100
60-64	12	22	28	40	48	52	53	60	78	91	100	100
65-69	4	11	24	33	44	51	58	65	86	92	99	100
70-79	6	12	16	21	26	33	38	47	67	88	98	100
80+	-	5	19	24	30	41	54	59	65	86	97	100
All cars	8	16	24	31	38	45	52	60	76	91	98	100

Chart B.2 Age of household cars by sex and age of head of household: 1996/98



Travel by area type

Table B.7 shows the variations in travel by area of residence. Small sample sizes mean that less age detail is available. There is little variation by area in the average number of journeys for each age band. However, there is a clear gradient in the average distance travelled, with Londoners travelling the least distance, and rural dwellers the furthest. The pattern varies by age and sex. Men aged 70 and over living in rural areas travel more than a third further than Great Britain's overall average, but those aged 25-49 only travel a quarter further. Women aged 25-49 in rural areas travel 41 per cent further than Great Britain's average, but this reduces to 28 per cent for those aged 70 and over.

Table B.7 General travel characteristics by age and area type: 1996/98

							Number/miles
	London	Metropolitan built-up areas	Large urban (over 250k)	Medium urban (25 to 250k)	Small urban (3 to 25k)	Rural	Great Britain
Journeys per person per year							
Males							
25-49	1,153	1,191	1,178	1,229	1,207	1,194	1,199
50-59	1,124	1,170	1,164	1,291	1,214	1,229	1,216
60-69	993	1,011	1,052	1,156	1,106	1,087	1,086
70+	802	733	752	876	800	766	805
Females							
25-49	1,148	1,242	1,254	1,243	1,399	1,311	1,270
50-59	859	933	974	1,119	1,140	1,102	1,053
60-69	764	825	854	867	870	866	850
70+	562	583	660	602	614	542	599
Distance per person per year							
Males							
25-49	8,795	9,935	9,963	11,171	13,660	14,177	11,378
50-59	8,087	8,586	8,486	10,677	12,333	13,480	10,604
60-69	5,532	5,222	6,450	6,626	7,718	8,071	6,758
70+	2,426	3,167	3,585	3,554	4,133	4,955	3,643
Females							
25-49	5,751	5,813	6,325	6,699	9,323	10,331	7,303
50-59	5,143	5,312	5,115	6,195	7,599	8,842	6,490
60-69	3,772	4,435	4,526	4,687	5,364	6,135	4,882
70+	1,841	2,455	2,506	2,627	3,103	3,433	2,679

Why do older people travel?

Table B.8 and Chart B.3 show the major changes in purpose of travel as people grow older. The most obvious and significant is the reduction in work and education related trips. In 1996/98, these purposes accounted for more than one trip in three for men, and one in four for women aged 50-54, reducing to very small proportions for those aged 70 and over.

Escort trips decline in importance with age, but men made roughly twice as many escort trips as women in each age group from their late 50s.

The number of shopping and personal business trips made by men from their mid-50s was much higher than for younger men, peaking at nearly ten trips a week for

Chart B.3 Journeys by age, sex and purpose: 1996/98

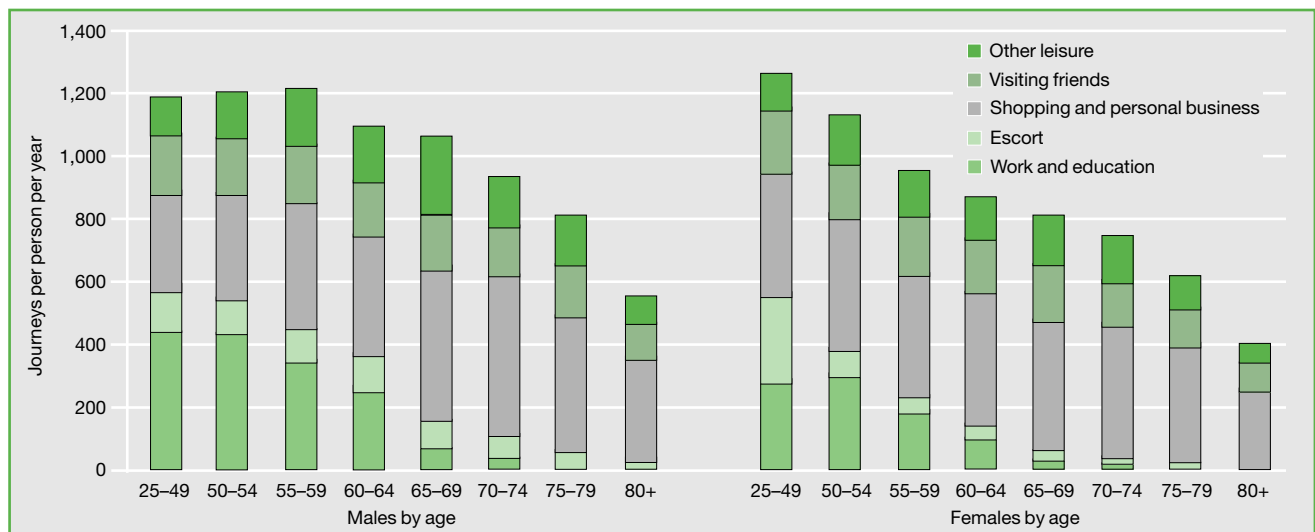


Table B.8 Travel purpose by age and sex: 1985/86 and 1996/98

	Journeys per person per year						Percentage of total journeys					
	Work and education	Escort	Shopping and personal business	Visiting friends	Other leisure	Total	Work and education	Escort	Shopping and personal business	Visiting friends	Other leisure	Total
1996/98												
Males												
25-49	448	118	309	187	136	1,199	37	10	26	16	11	100
50-54	435	105	340	178	153	1,210	36	9	28	15	13	100
55-59	343	105	400	187	188	1,223	28	9	33	15	15	100
60-64	245	110	388	173	186	1,102	22	10	35	16	17	100
65-69	70	84	489	178	251	1,071	7	8	46	17	23	100
70-74	36	69	517	154	160	936	4	7	55	16	17	100
75-79	..	49	438	159	164	810	..	6	54	20	20	100
80+	..	..	334	108	98	540	..	..	62	20	18	100
Females												
25-49	276	275	399	199	121	1,270	22	22	31	16	10	100
50-54	296	81	426	173	161	1,137	26	7	37	15	14	100
55-59	178	56	391	184	150	958	19	6	41	19	16	100
60-64	98	47	423	172	140	879	11	5	48	20	16	100
65-69	27	35	415	180	164	822	3	4	51	22	20	100
70-74	13	26	419	139	153	750	2	3	56	19	20	100
75-79	..	..	368	123	109	600	..	..	61	21	18	100
80+	..	..	243	94	65	403	..	..	60	23	16	100
1985/86												
Males												
25-49	478	106	288	218	143	1,232	39	9	23	18	12	100
50-54	454	95	288	165	138	1,139	40	8	25	14	12	100
55-59	414	87	310	182	145	1,138	36	8	27	16	13	100
60-64	246	66	354	183	158	1,006	24	7	35	18	16	100
65-69	61	72	464	181	209	986	6	7	47	18	21	100
70-74	29	52	399	151	148	779	4	7	51	19	19	100
75-79	..	..	379	143	135	657	..	..	58	22	21	100
80+	..	..	285	99	85	468	..	..	61	21	18	100
Females												
25-49	256	217	401	199	119	1,191	21	18	34	17	10	100
50-54	258	48	387	169	129	991	26	5	39	17	13	100
55-59	199	38	371	159	125	892	22	4	42	18	14	100
60-64	66	27	416	151	134	793	8	3	52	19	17	100
65-69	23	17	406	161	127	734	3	2	55	22	17	100
70-74	..	..	381	133	110	624	..	..	61	21	18	100
75-79	..	..	288	83	98	469	..	..	61	18	21	100
80+	..	..	171	54	53	278	..	..	62	19	19	100

men in their early 70s. Personal business trips include trips to the doctor or hospital, which increase with age, and also errands such as going to the bank or library. This increase was not evident for women, who made more shopping and personal business trips at younger ages. Men aged 65 and over made more trips for these purposes than women of the same age, reflecting changing household responsibilities around retirement age.

Shopping and personal business trips become proportionally more significant with age, accounting for more than half of all trips from the late 60s for women, and from the early 70s for men.

The number of trips made to visit friends remained roughly similar until their early 70s. Men and women also made similar numbers of trips up to this age, but the number of trips for this purpose declined more rapidly for women from their late 70s than for men. However, other leisure trips increased in importance, especially for men in their late 50s and 60s, peaking at about five trips a week for men aged 65-69 in 1996/98.

The patterns of travel by purpose were similar in 1985/86, although work related purposes accounted for a higher proportion of trips made by men in their 50s.

Concessionary fares

Nearly all people – 98 per cent – over pension age have some type of concessionary bus scheme available in their area. Schemes vary considerably, from those with a free pass allowing free travel, to passes which have to be paid for allowing only reduced rate travel.

Table B.9 Use of concessionary fare schemes: 1989/91 and 1995/96

	Percentage taking up available scheme			
	1989/91		1996/98	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
60–64	.	58	.	50
65–69	53	67	43	56
70–74	59	69	49	60
75–79	62	66	54	58
80+	55	50	51	49

Table B.9 shows the percentages of people who take up the schemes that are available. Take-up rates are generally higher for women, except for those aged 80 and over. These rates are highest for men in their late 70s, and women in their early 70s, who are likely to be still fairly mobile but no longer driving. Take up rates declined during the 1990s, as car access increased among older people.

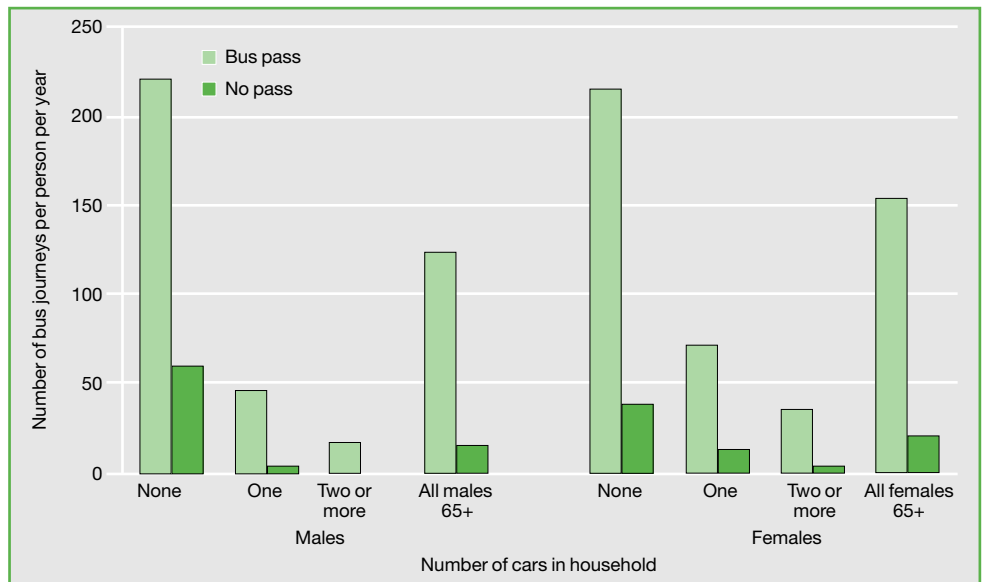
Bus travel

Table B.10 and Chart B.4 give details of bus passes and local bus use by household

Table B.10 Bus use by sex, car ownership and bus pass availability: 1996/98

	Number/percentage			
	Number of cars in household			All people
	None	One	Two or more	
Bus journeys per person per year				
Males age 65+				
Bus pass	223	46	18	126
No pass	59	5	–	16
All	165	22	5	68
Females age 60+				
Bus pass	217	72	36	155
No pass	39	14	5	21
All	156	40	15	93
Bus as percentage of all journeys				
Males age 65+				
Bus pass	30	4	2	14
No pass	11	–	–	2
All	25	2	–	8
Females age 60+				
Bus pass	32	8	4	21
No pass	10	2	1	3
All	27	5	2	13
Percentage with bus pass				
Males age 65+	65	41	26	47
Females age 60+	66	45	31	54

Chart B.4 Bus use by Sex, car ownership, bus use and bus pass availability: 1996/98



car ownership. Just under two thirds of people past retirement age in households without a car had a bus pass in 1996/98, compared with less than a third in households with two or more cars. Men were less likely to hold a bus pass than women.

Bus use varied considerably by car ownership. The average woman over the retirement age of 60 travelled 93 miles a year by bus in 1996/98, compared with 217 miles for women in households without a car who held a bus pass.

Mobility difficulties

The NTS asks ‘Do you have any physical disability or long standing health problem that makes it difficult for you to go out on foot?’, and also ‘... difficult for you to use buses or coaches?’.

Table B.11 shows the increasing levels of mobility difficulties with increasing age. For those aged 80 and over in 1992/98, nearly half of men, and more than two thirds of women had some form of mobility difficulty. In each age group, similar proportions of men and women were able to walk unassisted, although with difficulty. However, women in their late 70s and above were about twice as likely as men to have more severe problems, and one woman in six over the age of 80 was unable to go out on foot at all. These proportions are likely to be under estimates for the population as a whole, as people with the most severe mobility difficulties are more likely to be in residential homes, and so not included in the NTS.

The NTS also asks people who have difficulty using buses or going out on foot if they have given up driving, and why. Sample sizes are very small, but for those aged 55 and over, 77 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women in 1996/98 who had given up driving did so because of some disability. However, no details are available for other people who may have given up driving for a variety of reasons, but were still able to use buses and go out on foot.

Table B.11 Mobility difficulties by age and sex: 1985/86 and 1992/98

	Percentage of all people						
	All with a mobility difficulty	Difficulty with buses only	Difficulty walking:		Does not go out on foot:		Sample size with mobility difficulty
			Walks unassisted	Needs help or uses special aid	Could do with difficulty	Unable to go out on foot at all	
1992/98							
Males							
25-49	4	–	3	1	–	–	418
50-54	9	1	5	2	1	1	148
55-59	18	1	11	2	2	1	255
60-64	23	1	15	3	2	2	304
65-69	24	1	17	2	2	2	325
70-74	29	2	17	4	3	3	311
75-79	40	2	24	4	5	4	308
80+	49	1	24	6	9	8	320
Females							
25-49	5	1	3	1	–	–	551
50-54	12	1	6	2	1	1	195
55-59	18	1	10	4	1	1	273
60-64	21	2	12	3	2	1	306
65-69	28	2	17	4	3	3	403
70-74	34	2	18	6	4	4	480
75-79	47	3	24	8	6	5	501
80+	68	3	22	12	12	17	822
1985/86							
Males							
25-49	3	–	2	–	–	–	112
50-54	6	–	4	–	1	1	42
55-59	11	1	7	1	2	–	77
60-64	20	–	15	1	2	1	147
65-69	20	1	14	1	2	1	114
70-74	29	–	17	2	5	4	145
75-79	32	–	21	3	2	5	99
80+	53	2	29	4	7	10	126
Females							
25-49	3	–	2	–	–	–	149
50-54	12	–	7	2	2	1	87
55-59	14	1	9	2	1	1	108
60-64	20	1	13	2	2	2	162
65-69	26	1	16	3	4	1	175
70-74	35	3	18	5	4	5	231
75-79	47	2	24	8	6	7	219
80+	67	3	17	11	12	22	336

Driving licences

Table B.12 and Chart B.5 show changes in the proportion of people holding driving licences, by birth cohort. Each line represents a single cohort. The first three points on each line show licence holding recorded in the 1975/76, 1985/86 and 1995/97 surveys for each cohort. Later points, joined with a dotted line, show tentative projections to 2015. Details of the assumptions and model used are given in the last section below and in the Technical Box.

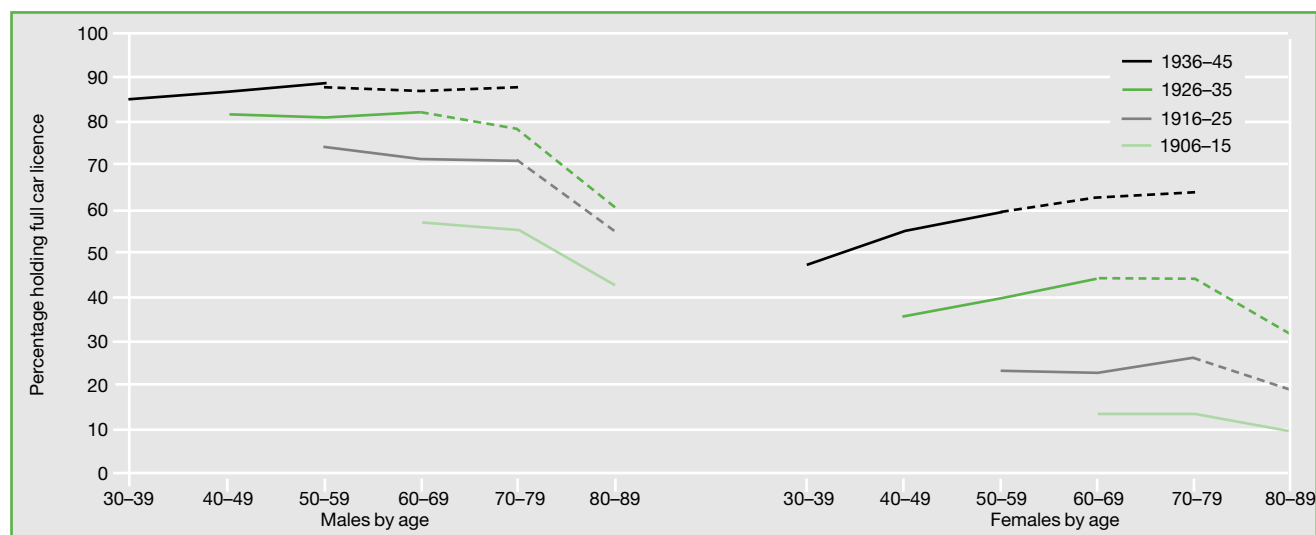
The most elderly cohort shown includes those born in 1906–1915, who were aged 60–69 in 1975/76, 70–79 in 1985/86 and 80–89 in 1995/97. For these people, driving licence holding fell a little as they moved from their 60s to their 70s, but then fell more strongly as they moved into their 80s. These falls were more

Table B.12 Holders of full driving licences by birth cohort¹

	Survey date/ projection		Survey date/ projection		Survey date/ projection		Survey date/ projection		Survey date/ projection		Percentage	
	1906–15	year	1916–25	year	1926–35	year	1936–45	year	1946–5	year	1956–65	year
Males												
20–29	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	79	1975/76	73	1985/86
30–39	.	.	.	.	.	.	85	1975/76	89	1985/86	89	1995/97
40–49	.	.	.	.	83	1975/76	87	1985/86	89	1995/97	90	2005
50–59	.	.	75	1975/76	81	1985/86	88	1995/97	89	2005	90	2015
60–69	58	1975/76	72	1985/86	83	1995/97	88	2005	89	2015	.	.
70–79	56	1985/86	72	1995/97	83	2005	89	2015	.	.	.	.
80–89	44	1995/97	56	2005	65	2015	.	.	.	.	.	.
Females												
20–29	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	67	1975/76	54	1985/86
30–39	.	.	.	.	.	.	48	1975/76	74	1985/86	74	1995/97
40–49	.	.	.	.	37	1975/76	56	1985/86	74	1995/97	78	2005
50–59	.	.	24	1975/76	41	1985/86	61	1995/97	75	2005	78	2015
60–69	15	1975/76	24	1985/86	46	1995/97	63	2005	75	2015	.	.
70–79	15	1985/86	27	1995/97	48	2005	65	2015	.	.	.	.
80–89	11	1995/97	20	2005	35	2015	.	.	.	.	.	.

1 Household population only.

Chart B.5 Driving licence holding by birth cohort: household population



Note: Projections shown by dotted lines

pronounced among men than women, but men still had very much higher levels of licence holding than women.

For those born between 1916 and 1925, levels of licence holding were higher at each age than for those born between 1906 and 1925, and these levels were higher again for those born between 1926 and 1935, and between 1935 and 1945. The gap between licence holding by men and women has been narrowing in each successive cohort.

The more recent cohorts show rather different change with age for men and women. Licence holding is relatively stable for men after the age of 30, but levels carry on increasing for women in their 40s and 50s. For example, when women born in 1926 to 1935 were in their 50s, 41 per cent held licences. This had increased to 46 per cent as women in this cohort reached their 60s. It is possible that some

women who had relied on their car-driving husbands at earlier ages learnt to drive when their husband (who is likely to be older) either gave up driving or died.

Accuracy of estimates of driving licence holders

The apparent increase in driving licence holding for women from their 60s to their 70s in the 1916–25 and 1926–35 birth cohorts is not likely to be real. Driving Standards Agency (DSA) figures show that very few people gain full licences after the age of 60. In 1998/99, the DSA recorded 480 men and 876 women aged 61–70 who passed a driving test. A total of only 147 people aged 71–80 passed.

The apparent increase could be the result of sampling variation, as sample sizes are small. For example, there were 1,046 female respondents aged 70–79 in 1995/97, and the central estimate of the proportion with a full driving licence (27 per cent) has a 95 per cent confidence interval of about 24–30%.

However, it is likely that women who die in their 60s and early 70s are likely to have already been ill, and perhaps less likely to be drivers than those who survive. It is also known that people from low income groups (who are also less likely to be drivers) have a shorter life expectancy. Thus the women who survive into their 70s are more likely to be drivers, giving an apparent increase in the proportion with a licence.

In addition, the NTS does not cover communal establishments. The least mobile women in a particular cohort will no longer be represented in the NTS statistics, so again, the remaining women in the household population appear to have higher levels of licence holding.

Detailed data on people living in communal establishments are not readily available, apart from in Census years. In 1991, 4 per cent of men and 7 per cent of women aged 75–84 no longer lived in private households (England and Wales). These proportions increased to 16 per cent and 27 per cent for men and women aged 85 and over. In 1996, about 240 thousand people in England (2.9 per cent of the population) aged 65 and over lived in staffed residential and nursing care homes.

For ages 65 and over, applying NTS proportions of licence holders to the whole population gives an overestimate of about 33 thousand (1.3 per cent) male driving licence holders, and 22 thousand (1.6 per cent) females in the number of licence holders.

Figures on the number of people holding driving licences are also available from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). These are not accurate below the age of 70, as the driving licences held by people who have died or left the country are rarely surrendered. After 70, re-applications are necessary at three yearly intervals (or more frequently), so DVLA licence holder data become more reliable. Renewal is subject to satisfactory completion of medical questions on the application form.

In January 1997, there were 228 thousand men aged 69 recorded as holding a licence (101 per cent of the estimated population of males in this age group), but only 164 thousand aged 70 (74 per cent). The corresponding figures for women were 107 thousand aged 69 (41 per cent) and 81 thousand aged 70 (31 per cent). These figures show clearly the inflation of DVLA data for people aged less than 70.

Table B.13 Comparison of NTS and administrative data on driving licence holders

	Licence holders (thousands)		Percentage holding full licence			
	DVLA January 1997		DVLA January 1997		NTS 1996/98	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
51–60	2,979	2,017	96	64	88	61
61–70	2,379	1,261	96	46	81	45
71–75	692	325	69	25	72	28
76–80	404	178	61	17	62	20
81–85	191	74	49	10	53	11

Table B.13 summarises unadjusted data from the DVLA and NTS on the proportions of people holding a driving licence.

Before the age of 70 the DVLA proportions are higher than the NTS, particularly for men, and the NTS proportions are more plausible. The DVLA data are consistent with the inflation effect described above, given that men have higher mortality rates in their 50s and 60s.

From the age of 71, the NTS figures are higher, as expected and the DVLA data give a more accurate picture.

Projections of numbers of driving licence holders

It is interesting to consider the impact of future trends in licence holding. Tentative figures are included in Tables B.12 and Tables B.14, and are based on NTS data without adjustment for the number of people in communal establishments, discussed above.

Evidence from previous cohorts suggests that it is likely that the levels of licence holding by people in their 70s will be similar to the levels in the same cohort in their 60s. As these people move into their 80s, licence holding is likely to fall. The projected figures assume, conservatively, that the fall is in proportion to the fall

Table B.14 Tentative¹ projections of full driving licence holders: 2005 and 2015

	Percentage/number								
	1995/97		2005			2015			
	Full driving licence holders (per cent)	Population (thous.)	Full driving licence holders (thous.)	Full driving licence holders (per cent)	Population ² (thous.)	Full driving licence holders (thous.)	Full driving licence holders (per cent)	Population ² (thous.)	Full driving licence holders (thous.)
Males									
50–59	88	3,156	2,791	89	3,720	3,330	90	4,285	3,857
60–69	83	2,538	2,106	88	2,756	2,434	89	3,388	3,032
70–79	72	1,760	1,268	83	1,853	1,546	89	2,151	1,906
80–89	44	644	282	56	769	429	65	926	599
Females									
50–59	61	3,195	1,936	75	3,759	2,819	78	4,218	3,287
60–69	46	2,753	1,267	63	2,903	1,840	75	3,528	2,646
70–79	27	2,380	651	48	2,264	1,091	65	2,470	1,607
80–89	11	1,336	143	20	1,353	270	35	1,369	481
Total									
50–59	74	6,350	4,727	82	7,479	6,149	84	8,503	7,144
60–69	64	5,291	3,373	76	5,659	4,274	82	6,916	5,678
70–79	46	4,140	1,919	64	4,116	2,638	76	4,621	3,512
80–89	21	1,979	424	33	2,122	699	47	2,295	1,080

1 These are not intended to be definitive projections, but to give a conservative indication of the increasing number of older drivers. See text for more details.

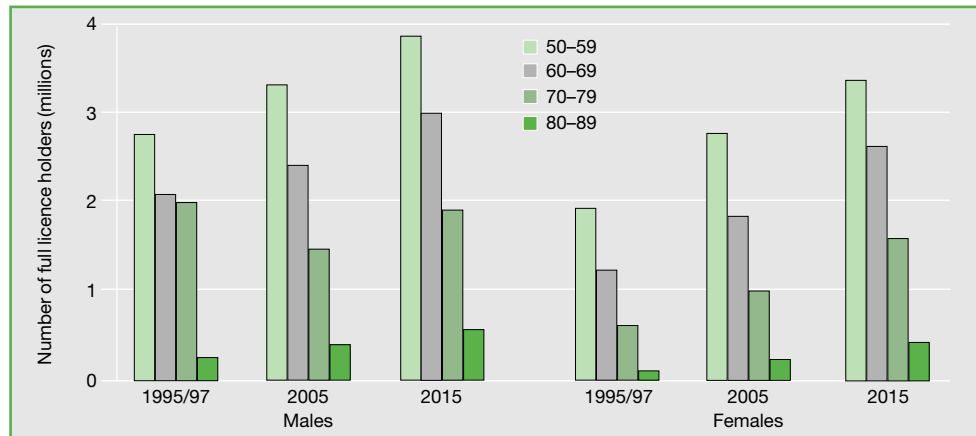
2 1998 based population projection.

experienced in the previous cohort when they were in their 80s.

However, it may be that as life expectation increases, healthy life expectancy may also increase further. In addition, older people tend to be more affluent than those in previous generations¹. Conversely, the proportions of people aged over 70 with licences, recorded by the NTS, is a slight over estimate.

Currently, there are over 2 million people aged 70 and over who hold a driving licence. Over the next 15 years, increasing licence holding, and an increasing population of older people could mean that this figure may double to about 4½ million people still holding a licence over the age of 70 (Chart B.6).

Chart B.6 Licence holders by age and sex: 1995/97 to 2005



National Travel Survey

- Data in this article are derived from the National Travel Survey (NTS), which is a household survey covering travel by residents within Great Britain. From 1965-1986, it was undertaken periodically, with the last ad-hoc survey in 1985/86. From mid-1988 it became a continuous survey, with any three years' data providing a representative sample for the whole of GB. The NTS is conducted by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions.
- The 1996/98 National Travel Survey consists of data provided by 21,980 individuals in 9,284 households, who completed a seven day travel diary, covering all travel over 50 yards in distance. Details included purpose and method of travel, time of day and length of journey. They also provided personal information, such as age, sex, working status, car access and driving licence holding.
- For simplicity of presentation, aggregated modes of transport are used in this article. 'Car' covers both driver and passenger trips and also includes personal travel in goods vehicles; 'Other' includes all rail, motorcycle, taxi, coach and private hire bus travel.
- The basic unit of travel is the journey (also referred to as a trip in this article). This is defined as a one-way course of travel with a single main purpose. Details of travel in this article are by 'main mode', that is the longest part of the journey by distance.
- Table 1 shows the number of people sampled by the NTS in each age group. The sample size is too small to split those aged 80 and over into five year age bands. It should be noted that the NTS only covers people living in private households. The amount of travel reported among the very elderly is likely to be an overestimate, as those living in communal establishments are excluded from the survey, and are likely to travel much less than people of the same age who are still living in private households.
- Since the NTS is not a panel survey, the cohorts referred to in the text are groups of people born in the same time period, not the same people.

Projections of licence holders

- Projections of licence holders are based on the model currently used in DETR, but using updated parameters.

The proportion of licence holders L after time t is given by

$$L = \frac{s}{1 + \exp(-(a+bt))}$$

where s is the assumed maximum level of licence holding in a particular cohort, and a, b are estimated parameters.

These parameters have been estimated using data from the 1975/76 and 1985/86 NTS, and 1995/97 has also been used to estimate the likely saturation values.

See article 1: 'Transport in an ageing society'