

Travel mode choice in Reykjavík, Iceland: the theory of planned behavior applied to public transportation use

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There is often a low correspondence between measures of attitude and observed or self-reported behavior. In a city with minimal public transport use and heavy automobile dependence, understanding the drivers that lead individuals to certain travel behaviors is essential for car use reduction and for the facilitation of more sustainable alternatives. In the current study, the theory of planned behavior is used as a conceptual framework to identify the antecedents to using the bus as a travel mode and to draw an empirical association between individuals' attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control and intentions to use public transportation.

The study focuses on individual reasoning for using public transportation in Reykjavík, Iceland. The research combines the theory of planned behavior with measures of attitude toward the bus, attitude toward the car, and the symbolic and instrumental value of the car. This provides insight as to how attitudes and social norms interact with facilitators and constraints to influence travel mode choices. Determining which of the measures associate with intention to use the bus will be useful in adjusting the city transportation system to lessen automobile dependence. By combining the aforementioned variables with the theory of planned behavior, an extended model of the theory can be created and applied to transportation planning.

The concentration of the research is bus use in the context of the work and school commute on weekdays. In Reykjavík, a

questionnaire was distributed to residents. Questionnaire items measured bus use intention, behavior, perceived behavioral control, social norms, and attitudes, as well as attitudes toward and symbolism of the car as a means of transport. The survey aimed to explore the extent to which the present level of bus use reflects attitudes, social norms, or low perceived behavioral control regarding the bus system, or is reflective of the symbolic and instrumental value of the car.

Results indicate a significant gender split in perceived behavioral control as a predictor of intention to use the bus. Additionally, participants' responses indicated an attachment to the car not only for its functional value, but also for its symbolic value. The results provide a deeper understanding of modal choices and shed some light on target groups and techniques for increasing the proportion of the population that uses the bus, or increasing the proportion of trips that the individual takes by bus. There are a lot of car users in Reykjavík, but many are potentially bus users. By examining attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control associated with the bus—the only form of public transportation in the city—alongside attitudes about using the car—the most popular modal choice—the research provides a useful comparison of perceptions of the city's two main vehicular transport modes. Implications for policy intervention aimed at influencing the modal split in the direction of bus transport are described.