

What Will It Take to Make Non-Work Trips Sustainable?

A Feminist Analysis of Transitions in Transportation Policies and Practices

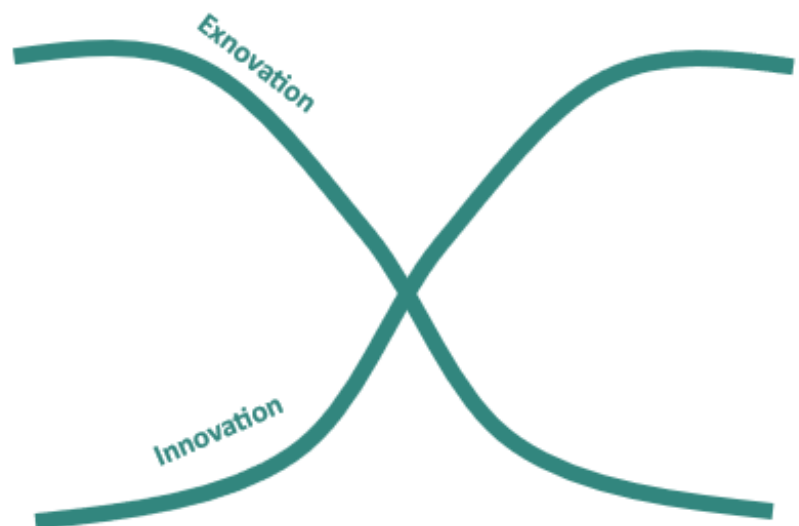
Executive Summary

Many cities appear to be on the precipice of extraordinary change to meet the growing and interconnected challenges of climate change, housing need, inadequate transportation networks and social inequality.

In this case study of Ottawa, Canada, the policies of the municipal government and responses from residents are examined to understand how they support or restrict transformative change to mobility, particularly with regard to non-work travel. The findings of this research suggest that to shift the ways people travel in the city, there is a need to generate momentum towards sustainable modes like walking, biking and transit and away from a car-centric environment and culture.

Sustainability Transitions and the x-curve

Sustainability transitions endeavours to understand how to make urgent transformative systems change in our complex and interrelated world. A key tool is the 'x-curve' that focuses on how change requires concerted effort in two different directions: increasing innovation towards a sustainable future and overcoming the path dependencies of the status quo to breakdown unsustainable ways of thinking and doing (also called exnovation).





In my research, I found signs of innovation (e.g., winter cycling network, 15-minute neighbourhoods) and small steps towards exnovation (e.g., parking changes, tentative steps towards restricting road widening projects).

However, in several key areas, this research suggests that the city of Ottawa is not yet taking a transformative approach to sustainable transportation for non-work trips. Because sustainability transitions suggests that a transition is inevitable (we can only manage how controlled or disruptive it will be), I call these trends ‘pre-transition patterns’.

Pre-transition Patterns in Ottawa’s policy approach to sustainable transportation for non-work trips



Lacking a bold collective goal	Policy and planning processes	Lack of political will and public support	Approach to public transit	Safety and vision zero	Financial decisions and priorities
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If You Build It Will They Come?

Some have critiqued sustainability transitions for overlooking the important, but complicated role, of individuals in making transformative change. Individuals must be part of the solution, but systemic changes must also support individuals. Feminist scholars emphasize that systemic issues can be recognized and challenged with a thorough understanding of the local everyday life and experiences.

To understand how individuals reacted to the implementation of sustainable transportation projects in Ottawa I interviewed residents in two neighbourhoods. In each of these locations a recent change that should have made it more possible for biking and walking for non-work trips.

Flora Footbridge (Old Ottawa East)



Interviewed residents already biked and walked for most local trips and their driving trips remained driving trips.

More than the footbridge: This neighbourhood has had several recent transportation improvements that residents emphasized made it possible for them to walk or bike. A key project was the Main Street complete street where vehicular lanes and speeds were reduced.

Ogilvie Multi-Use Path (Beacon Hill)



Interviewed residents rarely biked or walked for local trips. Walking and biking were used for recreation or for leaving the neighbourhood (commuting to work).

Just innovation: the multi-use path project added separated bike infrastructure, but there were no changes to the surrounding car-centric environment. This left residents feeling unsafe and unwelcome.

It's more complicated than 'if you build it, they will come'.

For **everyone** to come, you need to build **and unbuild enough** of it.

Non-Work Travel Practices

To understand how individuals travel in a nuanced and context-sensitive way, I look to literature about social practices. From this perspective, car driving as a behaviour is seen as an individual action made based on attitude or choice, while car driving as a practice is a cultural action that is continually reproduced by many people over time. Practices are composed of three categories of elements: materials (e.g., bike lanes, walkable destinations), skills (e.g., ability to carry groceries or kids by bike), and meaning (e.g., desire to walk or bike for health or environment).

Transitions in practice occur as people adopt new practices or defect from existing ones. Policymakers and other changemakers may want to focus on creating materials, skills, and meaning to support sustainable transportation and to delegitimize unsustainable transportation.

The residents I interviewed identified challenges that were specific to non-work trips which should be considered. These trips often required travelling with other people and with large loads. This was a major issue for families who had to coordinate many schedules, the transportation of children, and large sports equipment or groceries.

Conclusion

A sustainable transportation future for Ottawa will require addressing pre-transition patterns. There must be agreement that a new approach to transportation is possible and desirable.

Thinking in terms of innovation and exnovation can be useful to create meaningful sustainable change in policies and practices.

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