

High Mileage Moms - The Report

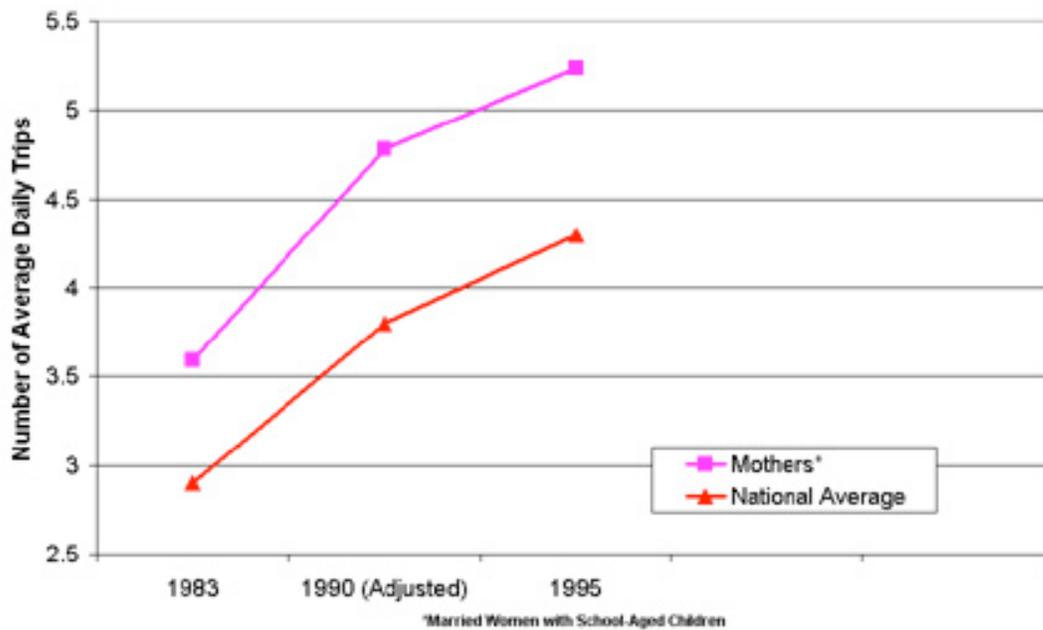
Mothers are spending more time behind the wheel than ever before, and this is leaving less time for the rest of their lives, for everything from playing with children to simply getting a good nights rest. On a typical day, the average mother spends more than an hour driving, traveling 29 miles and taking more than five trips. Many of the stops along the way are to run errands, or to pick up or drop off someone else. Research shows women are making more and more of these trips and are driving further to accomplish them. Part of the reason mothers drive so many places is that they are often the sole transportation provider for children and elderly parents, who cannot drive and have few other options. Women are called upon to make about two-thirds of the trips to pick up and drop off other people. They have become the bus drivers of the 1990s, providing transportation in places that are missing sidewalks, bikeways, nearby playgrounds or a convenient bus to the doctors office. Mothers are also finding themselves driving farther and farther to shop and run errands, because the stores have moved to the edge of town, far from home or work.

The growth in these types of trips is a reflection of the way our communities have grown. As sprawling subdivisions and so-called "big box" stores sprout up along brand new roads, the families living in the new homes find that driving is the only way to reach parks, shops, schools, and just about everything else. The increasing time consumed by all this running around is prompting a search for better choices. Some communities are finding that they can create neighborhoods where children can walk to school or bike to the park. Others are trying to bring the services women really need like day care centers and dry cleaners to the train station to make for a more convenient commute. With these types of changes, mothers may be able to take back some of their time for the things they would much rather do, such as spending time with their children.

Women, Especially Moms, Squeeze More Trips Into Their Day

Americans are driving more miles, taking more trips, and, consequently, spending more time in the car to take care of family needs than ever before. Overall, drivers spent 43 more hours per year in their cars in 1995 than they did in 1990 an 11 percent increase in just five years. This trend is undoubtedly continuing, as the average mileage Americans drive increases every year. However, while everyone is driving more, women particularly moms are the ones who squeeze more trips into their day than anyone else (See trip graph).

Mothers Take the Most Trips



From 1990 to 1995, the number of trips women took rose by 13 percent. Whether they work or not, married women with school-aged children now make more than five trips a day, 20 percent more than the average for all women, and 21 percent more than the average man. This reality is reflected in the popular image of the so-called soccer mom, who is defined less by her child's soccer game than by her car, and the amount she drives.

Taking more trips and driving more miles means women, especially mothers, are spending a lot of time in a car. According to the most recent available federal data, women overall spend 64 minutes per day in a car. Single mothers spend 75 minutes a day in the car. And married mothers with school-aged children spend 66 minutes a day driving that is almost 17 solid days in the car. This is more time than the average American spends in conversation or participating in sports. Mothers are now spending more time driving than the average parent spends on primary child care (NPTS and The Americans Use of Time Project.).

Women Pay the Price for Sprawl

Why do women, especially mothers of school-age children, make so many trips and spend so much time on the road? The answer lies in the way we've built our communities: places where children must be chauffeured everywhere, and where shops, schools, and home are so spread out that women must take numerous car trips just to get everything done. Two types of trips, chauffeur service and errand running, are making life especially hectic for women.

Women have become the bus drivers of the 1990s. Two-thirds of all trips to chauffeur people around driving kids to soccer games or taking an older parent to the doctor are made by women, especially moms. Women with their mini-vans and sport-utility vehicles are filling in the gaps, providing the transportation links that too many communities fail to provide: the buses, the sidewalks, the safe places to bicycle.

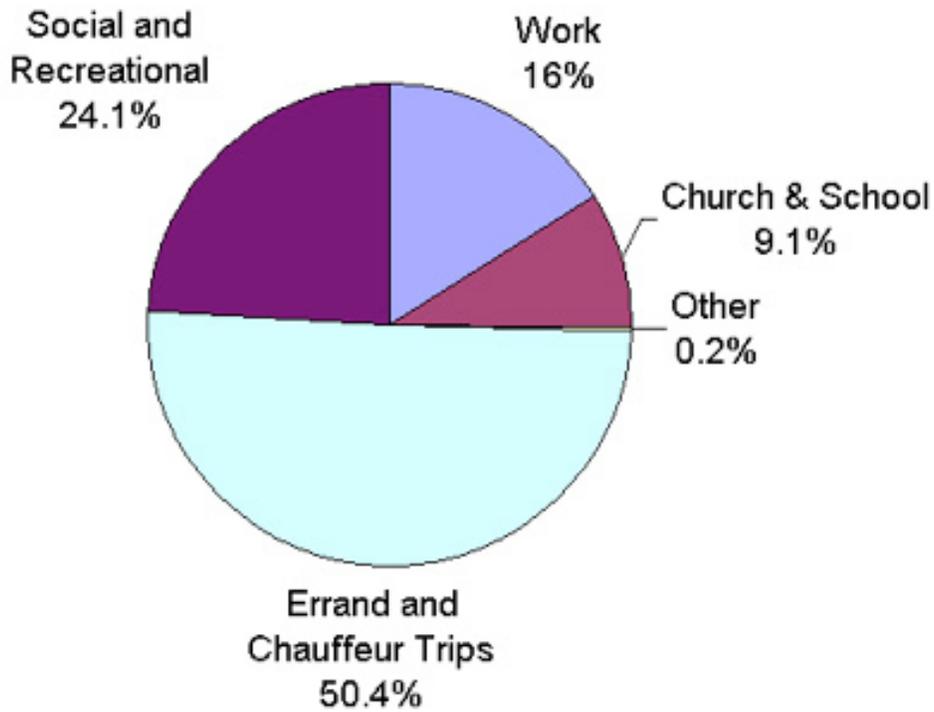
Children have become highly dependent on adults with cars, because the places where they learn or play often can't be reached by foot or by bicycle. As suburban schools consolidate into larger buildings and recreation centers are built far from residential areas, parents find themselves left with no choice but to drive their kids just about everywhere.

Part of the problem is that subdivisions and neighborhoods often have few sidewalks or safe places to bike. The number of trips children take by foot or bicycle has been declining steadily, from 15.8 percent of all trips in 1977 to 14.1 percent in 1990, and 9.9 percent in 1995 (Surface Transportation Policy Project. *Mean Streets: Children at Risk*. 1998). Indeed, as more and more kids are driven to school, the walk to school is fast disappearing. Almost 50 percent of five- to nine-year-olds get to school by car, and only 11 percent actually walk. Since 1990, the number of kids walking to school has gone down 23 percent, as car trips have continued to rise.

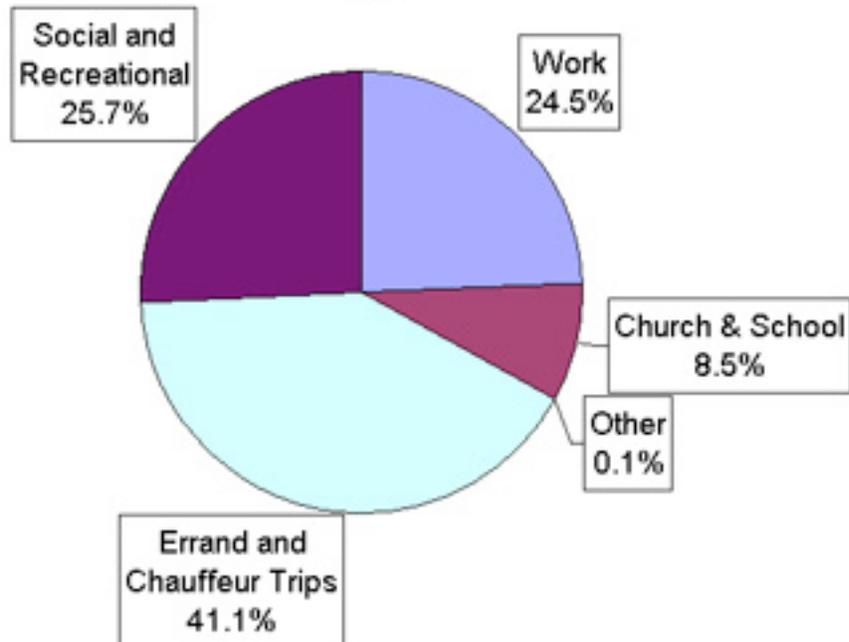
Three-quarters of elderly people now live in rural or suburban areas where they are dependent on others to help them get around (Final Report to the White House Conference on Aging. November, 1995). Studies show that the task of chauffeuring elderly people falls overwhelmingly on their families, and especially on the daughters in those families (Rosenbloom, Sandra. 1990 NPTS Demographic Special Reports). The burden is likely to get heavier: currently, 13 percent of the US population is 65 years or older, but by 2050, between 20 and 25 percent of the population is expected to be more than 65 years old (Cohen, Susan. "Generation Next," *The Washington Post Magazine*. June 1, 1997).

Never-ending errands. In addition to chauffeur service, women are spending a lot of their time on the road running errands. When women get in the car, it is often the beginning of a complex "chain" of trips, as they drive from home or work to the grocery store, the pharmacy, the dry cleaners, and the day care center. This pattern is changing the character of the daily commute. The majority of women, 61 percent, make at least one stop after work and almost 30 percent make two stops or more, whereas just under half of men (46 percent) stop on the way home. In fact, the commute to work is no longer the focal point of the day's travel. Going to work now accounts for only 18 percent of the average Americans trips, whereas shopping, chauffeuring, and conducting other errands accounts for 46 percent of trips (see chart below).

Women's Trip Making By Purpose 1995



Men's Trip Making By Purpose 1995



Examining trends over the past 30 years shows that these errand trips will continue to grow. Americans are now driving 88 percent farther than they did in 1969 to go shopping and an overwhelming 137 percent farther to accomplish family and personal errands. Much of this errand running is conducted by women, and it is taking place in areas where stores are widely scattered, and are often far from housing subdivisions or office parks. Because of this, women are making more trips and covering more miles. The way we've built our communities is literally giving mothers the run-around.

The increased reliance on the automobile, to chauffeur others and run errands, means that women are paying the price of sprawl with their personal and family time. Women are filling in the gaps: as bus drivers in communities with no other way to get around; and as delivery truck drivers in places where the essentials of daily life are far from home.

Sprawl drives out other activities. Most Americans have plenty of things they would rather do than sit in their cars, including playing with or reading to kids, going out to dinner, playing sports, and relaxing and talking with their families. According to the Americans Use of Time Project, driving for work or errands is a chore, not a pleasure; people put it on a par with things like getting dressed, or working a second job (The Americans Use of Time Project). But unfortunately, time spent in the car may be driving out other activities. And the overall time crunch many people feel is affecting the most basic activities: 40 percent of people say they cut back on sleep in order to obtain more time (National Sleep Foundation). One study shows women spend more time driving than eating.

Ways to Give Back Time to Mothers

The experience of women shows that our current road and transit system is wasting their time and energy. Roads, trains, and bus routes that aim for high-speed travel to downtown destinations simply don't work when errands have to be run, or when kids need to get to a soccer game. However there are concrete steps communities can take that start to rein in endless errand running so women can spend more time with their families. We should pursue some alternatives that will give mom what she really needs and deserves: more time. Here are three ways we can begin to make life easier for mothers and their families:

Give children sidewalks. We can start giving back time to women by providing children and others who cannot drive with more ways to get around on their own, as well as more playgrounds and other destinations that are close by. Well-lit sidewalks and bikeways connecting schools to residential neighborhoods, libraries, and recreation centers are needed so children can get around independently. This will help teach children a sense of responsibility for themselves and each other. While many parents cite safety as a reason for driving their children everywhere, we can make our neighborhood streets safer by building them with sidewalks and other measures that

slow down traffic and encourage walking. In addition, pedestrian traffic increases the number of eyes on the street, a clear contributor to safer communities.

Go beyond the rail line. Transit systems need to do far more than simply build new rail lines if they hope to serve mothers and other women. Rail and bus stops should be surrounded by the types of services women need: such as dry cleaners, food shops, and day care centers. A few places are already starting to recognize this need. The Metro rail system in the Washington, DC region has child care facilities at two of its train stops. At the Huntington station, about 75 percent of the customers at the Child Time center use Metro after dropping off their kids. In San Jose, California, the Tamien Child Care Center is located at a light rail stop and offers family dinners to go, dry cleaning, and hair cutting for the children.

Create livable neighborhoods. Building more subdivisions and strip malls at the far edges of our cities, and more roads between them, will just contribute to ever more driving and ever less time for mothers. Instead, we can start slowing down womens hectic lives by changing the character of new and existing neighborhoods so that they offer close-by places to play and run basic errands. For example, communities can retrofit cul-de-sacs with walkways that lead to nearby stores, and can creatively renovate shopping malls with service-oriented businesses, offices, and even places to live. New developments can be built with sidewalks, bike lanes, corner stores, playgrounds, and other amenities to ensure that they work for all residents, especially families. Such neighborhoods give everyone more independence and flexibility. This can help reduce the burden on mothers who now must step out the door, car keys in hand, far too often.

The trend is clear: women are making more trips, and spending more time driving. This time on the road is beginning to erode family quality of life. But communities that begin to create livable neighborhoods, provide better transit, and give children sidewalks may begin to give back some of the time and peace of mind that women have lost.

References

The figures in this report (unless otherwise noted) were extracted by STPP from the Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey (NPTS), with help from the NPTS staff. The survey is conducted by the Federal Highway Administration approximately every five years. The most recent survey was in 1995.

The Americans Use of Time Project is published as a book called Time for Life: The Surprising Ways Americans Use Their Time by John P. Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey. Published by The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.

Other articles that were used in the research of this report include:

Edmonson, Brad. "In the Drivers Seat," American Demographics. March, 1998.

Edmonson, Brad. "Alone in the Car," American Demographics. June, 1994.

The Alliance for Transportation Research, The Pennsylvania State University, the Surface Transportation Policy Project, Choices for Our Future: Finding Transportation Alternatives for An Aging Population. A Final Report to the White House Conference on Aging. November, 1995.

The Surface Transportation Policy Project is a nationwide network of more than 800 organizations, including planners, community development organizations, and advocacy groups, devoted to improving the nations transportation system.

Copyright 1996-2014, Surface Transportation Policy Project
1707 L St., NW Suite 1050, Washington, DC 20036
202-466-2636 (fax 202-466-2247)
stpp@transact.org - www.transact.org