Effects of a trial passenger project on habitual car users' capacity to make a permanent travel mode shift towards public transport use

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Abstract
Recent research on the effects of travel management programs that are aiming to reduce car use by offering a period of free travel on the public transport services, has disclosed that there are positive immediate and short-term effects of such interventions, but that in the long term habitual car users eventually re-enter into their previously preferred travel mode, i.e. they switch back from using public transport to using the car again. Habit is explained to be the primary cause why such interventions do facilitate a short-term travel mode shift, but fail to produce long-term effects upon people's travel behavior. The present study is an investigation of the long-term effects of an individualized travel management program on habitual car users' capacity to establish a permanent shift in travel mode, i.e. from using the car to using public transport more often. A total of 106 habitual car users were recruited to the project, participating voluntarily to use public transport between their home and their work place during a full month. The frequent car users were recruited by means of the transportation authorities' general information campaign about the public transportation services in the area. The campaign consisted of information supplied to the companies in the area and to the homes of the citizens, and also through information spots on the local radio station. The target group was people who did not use public transportation frequently to and from work, i.e. car users, but who would objectively be able to use the services, i.e. there actually was a bus or train route operating between their home and their work place, with bus or train stops nearby to home and work. Those initially volunteering to participate in the test project were checked for high frequency of car use and low frequency of public transport use, and of the objective possibility of being able to use public transportation services, i.e. if a public transport service did in fact operate between their home and their work place. Thus, volunteers that were actually using a car as the primary transport mode between their home and work place were selected to participate in the project. Participants were guided and aided individually with respect to finding nearby lines and timetables as well as finding conjunctions with corresponding lines if this was necessary. In using a within-subjects design, we asked the participants to report current public transport use before the trial project started and then, in a one-year follow up after the project was terminated, we asked them to report their current public transport use once again. This enabled a measurement of behavioral changes with respect to the habitual car users establishing a permanent travel mode shift towards using public transport more often. Results from comparisons made between prior-to-project public transport use and one-year-after-project public transport use will be reported and possible explanations for these results will be discussed, e.g. characteristics of individualized travel management programs and their possible effects with respect to successful facilitations of a permanent travel mode shift for habitual car users, towards using public transport more often.