



# Moving Beyond the Car

## Families and transportation in Vancouver, BC

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## SUMMARY

THE METRO VANCOUVER TRANSPORTATION and transit plebiscite has brought transportation to the forefront of public conversation. This study provides some insight into how parents of young children travel within Vancouver—and how they would like to see their experience improve.

Parents with young children have many reasons to prefer cars to other forms of transportation. Tired, impatient children; strollers, diaper bags or sports equipment; and concerns about safety or weather can make it challenging to walk, cycle or take public transit. In spite of this, many of the parents we interviewed were trying to reduce their car use. Others did not have access to a car at all. Most parents wanted more and better options for other modes of transportation.

We interviewed 52 parents of young children in four main areas of Vancouver—Downtown, Grandview-Woodland, Dunbar-Southlands and Sunset—and gathered these key findings:

### Parents were trying to reduce their car use, in spite of the challenge this poses with young children

- Most of the parents we interviewed were multi-modal—that is, they used their car as one option among many, often walking, cycling or taking public transit with their children.
- Parents were generally well aware that over-reliance on cars contributes to problems like traffic congestion and climate change, and that their children’s health would benefit from choosing cycling or walking instead.

### Many parents did not own a car

- A few parents had chosen to live without a car and preferred other ways of getting around.
- Many parents could not afford to own a car at all.

### Parents’ options vary depending on where they live and how much money they have

- Parents living in the low-density communities were more car-dependent than those living in the high-density and mixed-use communities.
- Those with high incomes were more car-dependent than those with low incomes.
- Parents who were car-dependent were often frustrated by their lack of options and wanted better access to other forms of transportation.
- Lower-income parents lived in areas with more dangerous traffic for walking and cycling with children. These areas generally had greater public transit availability, but the service was often not adequate, child-friendly or affordable.
- Higher-income parents lived in areas with traffic that was less dangerous but had less available transit. They often found that it was just as affordable to drive as to pay for transit tickets.

Many of the parents we interviewed were trying to reduce their car use.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Develop complete communities

- Gradually increase density across the city and create more “complete communities”—that is, communities with commercial, school, employment and transit services in close proximity to residential areas.
- Extend Vancouver’s Social Development Plan (SDP) to include consideration of inequality and social justice issues in transportation policies.

### Reduce car use and encourage other modes of transportation

- Designate a City staff member for developing consultations with parents and children on appropriate transportation and land use strategies.



- Monitor the effects of car dependency on parents and children (e.g. health, safety, social relationships) and develop plans to reduce negative impacts.
- Instead of focusing transportation planning on car use, develop multi-modal transport planning, which prioritizes various modes of travel and their connections.
- Expand the availability of car-sharing programs to provide more flexibility and choice for parents' mobility options.
- Minimize children's exposure to traffic (e.g. separated sidewalks and bicycle paths, traffic calming, car-free zones).
- Create child-friendly transportation options throughout the city, prioritizing cycling and walking.

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### Improve public transit

- Address key problems like unreliable services, crowded buses, poorly designed routes that require changing buses, limited routes or scheduling that do not correspond to most people's daily or nightly routines, and inadequate accommodation of items like strollers, walkers and large shopping bags.
- Increase general tax revenue funding for public transit and decrease it for cars to help make transit better and more affordable relative to car use.
- Introduce more affordable ways for families to use public transit (e.g. subsidized transit passes, free transit).

Given parents' interest in finding alternatives to driving, we believe that policy makers would be wise to capitalize on this interest and make strategic investments to improve options for public transit, cycling and walking. The City of Vancouver has laid the foundations of sustainability in its land use and transportation policies, and its promotion of sustainability. But the City, in conjunction with other levels of government, needs to do much more to accommodate families with children.

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