



Gender differentials in travel pattern – The case of a mid-sized city, Rajkot, India



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ABSTRACT

This paper is at the conjunction of arguments for gender equity in transport services on one hand and need to move towards low carbon transport on the other in a developing country city. The case study city, Rajkot, a mid-sized Indian city with mixed land use and limited public transport at the time of this study, has short trip lengths and low trip rates. But, even in this city there is gender disparity in travel pattern. Thus, trip rates and trip lengths of women in the city in each of the income group are lower than that of their male counterparts. With the increase in income, both, the trip rates and lengths increase, but, the increase is higher for men than for women. While the large proportions of women in each income group walk, that among the lowest income group walking is the predominant mode, as they are 'no-choice' or 'forced' walkers. With the increase in household income, women tend to shift to para-transit and men to personal motorized transport. If sustainability arguments or climate policies are to target retaining the current low ecological footprint of the women as one of the strategies, it needs to cater to expansion of their mobility while improving infrastructure to support the same.

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Introduction

This paper is at the conjunction of arguments for gender equity in transport services on one hand and need to move towards low carbon transport on the other in a developing country city. The current demand for transport services is very low on account of low-incomes resulting in 'no-choice' or 'forced' walkers or users of Non-Motorized Transport (NMT), what [Tiwari \(1999\)](#) calls captive NMT users. For example, in India, 28% of those who undertake a trip walk and another 11% cycle, i.e. 39% use NMT and 27% use public transport ([Wilbur Smith Associates and MoUD, 2008](#)). That mobility is still there in such a situation is attributed to mixed land uses and heterogeneous population resulting from presence of large informal sector in these cities ([Mahadevia et al., 2012](#)). Thus, environmental footprints of the low-income commuters in the developing country cities, including in India, are low. This is more so in the context of the mid-sized cities, where the trip lengths are lower than the metropolitan cities.¹ In the context of the developed countries, it is argued that women have smaller ecological footprint than men ([Johnsson-Latham, 2007](#)). This is also true for the cities in the developing countries as the literature and data presented in this paper show and more than men, women are 'forced' or 'no-choice' walkers.

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¹ See data for India in [Wilbur Smith Associates and India, Ministry of Urban Development \(2008\)](#) that has data on trip lengths for different size classes of cities.

Transport is a derived demand (Banister, 2008) and given low Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPR) of women (at 50.3% as compared to 76.5% in case of men at the global level² and 16% as compared to 56% in case of men in urban India³) and restrictions on women's mobility imposed by cultural factors (Secor, 2002; World Bank, 2002), demand for transport services is expected to be low. Is it true also for the developing countries' cities in general and Indian cities in particular that women have low transport demand? Literature presented in 'Gender and transport – a two way relationship' does present the case in the context of other countries. We do not have such data for any Indian city as a whole, though some studies are available for parts of the city (Anand and Tiwari, 2006; Astrop et al., 1996). This is where the relevance of this paper is.

Using data from a mid-sized city of Rajkot, this paper makes the following arguments: (i) current mobility levels among the women in the developing country cities are low, (ii) mobility is largely through walking and use of para-transit, (iii) but these sustainability situations are arising from low-incomes and not a deliberate choice and (iv) lastly, even if the household incomes increase, women's mobility patterns do not change much. This paper attempts to draw some common inferences on the travel behaviour of women in comparison to the men of the same economic class and within the case study city. The paper attempts to assert that mobility patterns of the women in an Indian city confirm the behaviour observed globally.

Gender perspectives on development, including urban development recognize that women are burdened with multiple roles. On account of them being reproducers, they are assigned the tasks of domestic/household work and also as primary care givers in the family that results in their limited engagement in the labour market, explaining their lower than male's labour force participation rates as seen earlier. There is thus gender division of labour, with women largely holding the responsibility of domestic sphere while the men engaged in earning for the family. But, women also engage partially as producers. They therefore are burdened with performing triple role of producers (workers), reproducers (giving birth and nurturing children and in general, undertaking household maintenance tasks) and also as community organisers (Moser, 1993) in certain contexts. They are thus permanently multi-tasking, therefore, tending to juggle the home and off-home, paid and unpaid work responsibilities that call for proximity of their home and workplace. This is also true for urban contexts and more so in the developing countries where women still spent large amounts of time performing household work reducing time available to them for productive work (Hirway, 2010: 25). Situation of 'no choice walkers' increase their time poverty (Anand and Tiwari, 2006).

Multiple roles also reduce women's mobility, physical as well as economic. Women therefore have diverse and complex needs than their male counterparts. Molyneux (1985) has classified these as practical or strategic. Practical gender needs address immediate concerns and necessities. As their name suggests, they are practical in nature and aim to improve inadequacies in living and working conditions for women. Strategic gender needs, on the other hand, address systematic and structural conditions that contribute to women's subordinate position in society. Transport and mobility have an important role to play not only in helping to meet women's practical needs such as access to maternal healthcare, but also in contributing to the strategic empowerment of women through promoting access to employment and socio-political upliftment (Venter et al., 2007: 654).

Women's mobility has enhanced globally and distances travelled by women in per capita terms has also enhanced in the last 20 years, particularly in developed countries and some fast growing economies, as they have come out of traditional moulds of life into the workforce and public domain, while still remaining constrained by their social roles within the families (Root et al., 2000). But, the increase in women's mobility implies a relook at the transport policies to suit women's travel behaviour and needs. Rosenbloom (1978) has pointed out that women's travel needs were different than men, followed by Guiliano's (1979) work on women's need in public transport and Law's (1999) work on gender differences in mobility within urban space. In developing countries, the gender differences in mobility needs are very different requiring gender-sensitive policy responses.

The following section lays down theoretical arguments. The third section introduces the city and presents the methodology. The fourth section presents the major findings followed by a concluding section that reflects on the policy implications of the Rajkot city study.

Gender and transport – a two way relationship

Mobility reduces gender inequality

While, there has been progress in women's mobility over time, it still forms an important aspect of 'Woman's Quest for Freedom', as desired by Willard in a book she wrote in 1895 titled *A Wheel within a Wheel* (Hanson, 2010: 5), wherein she sees ability to ride bicycle (which she learnt at the age of 53), as a symbol of mobility and freedom, one that allowed for long distance travel on her own, gave a sense of exhilarating feeling of confidence and accomplishment, a sense of expanded possibilities, aspirations and personal growth, and also riddance from wearing 'womanly dresses' (Hanson, 2010: 6).

Hanson (2010) argues that gender roles shape mobility and mobility shapes gender roles, that is, there is a two-way relationship between gender and mobility. Large number of studies describes how gender roles shape mobility, which is

² Based on the data from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), *Estimates and Projections of the Economically Active Population (EAPEP)*, 2013 Edition, Source: http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_234879/lang-en/index.htm, accessed on September 2, 2014.

³ National Sample Survey Organisation (2014).

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