

theguardian

The end of motoring

Young people today would rather have the latest smartphone than a flashy car. And the number of them who can drive is plummeting. Is Britain's love-affair with the car really over?

Alex Raynerguardian.co.uk, Sunday 25 September 2011 20.00 BST



Are we approaching a post-motoring world? Photograph: Philippe Desmazes/AFP/Getty Images

Liz Parle can't drive. "I did try to learn," says the 24-year-old, Birmingham-born cafe owner, "but I failed my test a few times." Then she moved to London, where running a car can be a nightmare. Instead she cycles everywhere. "It's cheap, keeps me fit, and is of course better for the environment."

Parle is by no means atypical. In Britain, the percentage of 17- to 20-year-olds with driving licences fell from 48% in the early 1990s to 35% last year. The number of miles travelled by all forms of domestic transport, per capita per year, has flatlined for years. Meanwhile, road traffic figures for cars and taxis, having risen more or less every year since 1949, have continued to fall since 2007. Motoring groups put it down to oil prices and the economy. Others offer a more fundamental explanation: the golden age of motoring is over.

"The way we run cars is changing fast," says Tim Pollard, associate editor at CAR magazine, "Car manufacturers are worried that younger people in particular don't aspire to own cars like we used to in the 70s, 80s, or even the 90s. Designers commonly say that teenagers today aspire to own the latest smartphone more than a car. Even car enthusiasts realise we've reached a tipping point."

As hi-tech research and development budgets source to keep pace with the iPhone generation, Pollard says carmakers are also coming to terms with less possessive buyers. "Towards the end of the 20th century, manufacturers cottoned on to the fact that we were owning things for shorter periods."

This has led to a proliferation of different ownership and rental schemes such as Streetcar, Zipcar and Whipcar. In response, the latest deals from the big carmakers are very unlike your usual forecourt deal.

"Peugeot, for instance, has launched a European project called Mu," says Pollard. "You become a member and can then rent whichever Peugeot best suits your mobility needs that day. So you can borrow a van to move house at the weekend. Then get into a 308 for the school run, Monday to Friday. Then hop into an electric car to scoot silently around town. Then borrow a Peugeot bicycle to cycle to the pub in the evening. It's an attempt to second-guess how we'll run cars in future, and a pilot scheme at present, but you can do this today in London. Other car manufacturers are studying similar ideas."

Stefan Liske helps shape these ideas. The German entrepreneur once worked as a car designer and mechanical engineer, but now runs PCH, a company that models and plans new developments for companies entering choppy waters – their clients include Mini, Audi, Volkswagen and Daimler. Liske presents a picture of an industry that is being forced to confront major changes at every level: batteries that are so heavy the rest of the car must become lighter and use new materials; environmental pressures that mean current models, in which only 10% of a car is made from natural material, will be junked in favour of parts and interiors using "rattan, coconut wool, bamboo, recycled plastics".

The most radical change is that "in big societies, there is a huge status shift happening, where we are losing the idea that you use a car to define your status. So the industry needs more flexible leasing, financing and car-sharing models. And second, they have to find new revenue streams."

The near future that Liske describes echoes the computer industry's earlier shift from a business model based on hardware to one based on software. "Audi and Toyota have just invested \$1bn in wind energy. If you're leasing a car from them, they can sell you the energy – or they go in a different direction like BMW, who just invested \$100m in start-up companies offering transport-related mobile services."

Underpinning all these innovations and ideas is what Liske sees as a major behavioural shift among the generation of "digital natives". "They don't care about owning things. Possession is a burden, and a car is a big investment for most people – not just the vehicle, but the permits, the parking space."

He points to BMW, which in mid-July announced its investment in parkatmyhouse.com, a UK-based online parking marketplace that matches local drivers with homeowners who have empty garages and driveways. "Really," Liske says, "it was obvious a long time ago that something had to happen."

Crucially, these ideas aren't forming in the ether of maybe/if science fiction, but are based on proven technology that is ready to be rolled out.

"Cities such as London will, in 10 years, [have these vehicles] going along autonomously and you can hop in and out of them," he says.

A vehicle such as the one Liske describes is operating on the edge of the capital. The ULTra system consists of 21 electric vehicles running on a 4km elevated guideway from Heathrow's Terminal 5 to two stations in the business parking lot. It replaces shuttle buses, which still serve the airport's other parking lots. Passengers first boarded the ULTra pods in April, but it was officially launched last week. It's the first commercial Personal Rapid Transport (PRT) system anywhere in the world, and, as it drifts off from its bay in the terminal, it brings to mind both the Docklands Light Railway in London and Legoland's Sky Rider train.

"I think it's terrific," says David Metz, visiting professor in UCL's Centre for Transport Studies, as we glide to the parking bays. "It's obvious. Really, it should be here. Though

the big question is what are the long-run costs and what is the feasibility of putting it on to other environments."

BAA, which helped develop the system and now owns a 70% stake in the company, says it cost £30m, which was spent over six years. While the ULTra cars themselves are simple – using the same tyres and wheels as a Ford Ka – the control-and-command system represents the most costly. This is housed in a single-storey building in the car park's compound and staffed by ex-Network Rail employees, erstwhile RAF air traffic controllers, as well as a mechanic from the Australian navy.

Though the operation is small, Mark Griffiths, its head, says it is ready for expansion at Heathrow; it is tendering for a project at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India, and have had interest from the local councils in Bristol and Bath. So could a set-up like ULTra slip into an ancient spa town? "As long as there are planning regulations," says Griffiths. He outlines a number of scenarios that are currently within their reach: if, for example, a newly arrived passenger wanted to hire a car or book into a hotel, ULTra could present travellers with options on a touch screen, make reservations, and drive them straight into the lobby, where their room key will be waiting. "Zero emissions, you see."

Metz's account of underlying transport trends is simple: ultimately, we don't want to travel more. "Look at the [Department for Transport's] [National Travel Survey](#), an annual poll of 20,000 people, dating back to the early 70s. The average travel time has not changed over that period. The number of journeys that people make in a year hasn't altered. It's about 1,000 journeys a year, and about an hour's travel per day."

This figure for daily travel is remarkably consistent. Look at Tanzanian villagers in 1986 or Britons today, and we all seem to travel, on average, for about 66 minutes a day. What did rise, in Britain at least from the 70s through to the 90s, was the distance people covered. "In the early 70s, it's about 4,500 miles per person per year, which includes all modes of travel except international travel by air, which is a different story," says Metz. "It rose to about 7,000 miles per year by the mid 1990s, and it stayed steady at about that level since."

Metz also thinks a general satisfaction with the number of places people can go has led to this levelling-off; he calls this the saturation of demand.

"What is the benefit of travel?" he asks. "It's about getting more choices of places to go – the choice we have of jobs, doctors, hospitals, schools for our kids. My hypothesis is that the growth of daily travel has come to an end because now we have quite good choice."

Other analysts agree. "There are these models used by international agencies, and oil companies and the like," says [Adam Millard-Ball](#), assistant professor at the department of geography of McGill University, Montreal. "They say as we get richer, we'll want to travel more. There's no limit. Our hunch was that this might not be the case."

Working with the late Lee Schipper, a senior research engineer at Stanford University, Millard-Ball examined travel figures dating back to the 70s, from as many industrialised countries as possible. "The data that we have shows fairly clearly that the growth in travel demand has stopped in every industrialised country that we looked at," he says. Schipper and Millard-Ball published their work last November in the paper [Are We Reaching Peak Travel? Trends in Passenger Transport in Eight Industrialized Countries](#), adding to a growing body of work, all drawing similar conclusions. If these trends continue, it is possibly foresee a decline in car travel and a stagnation in total travel per capita.

Though he doesn't have any firm evidence to back it up, Millard-Ball thinks infrastructure plays a big part. "During the 70s and 80s we were building a lot more roads, allowing people to go further and faster. That era has come to an end, especially in Britain and America."

He also suggests that a general satisfaction with travel options also plays a role. "Once there's a set of places you can get to, it's less useful to get to any more. If there's a Sainsbury's two miles from your house, are you really going to go to the Sainsbury's four miles away?"

Break down the figures further, and other tendencies arise. Metz says the proportion of men in their 30s who drive has remained steady, while twentysomethings appear to be putting off getting behind the wheel until it's absolutely necessary. "It's partly the cost of ownership, the cost of insurance," he says. "Other factors that are more speculative are that there are more people in higher education, which typically takes place in urban centres where the car isn't part of the mix. Then people stay on in these urban centres."

He also says retirees often give up driving once they begin to suffer from minor disabilities.

"If you retire to a place with high population density, then mobility scooters come into their own." These electric vehicles haven't been thoroughly researched, and mass production hasn't quite brought automobile-industry standards. Yet he believes they could become a viable transport option for many people, even if they can only do 8mph, "and that's a bit fast for pavements".

Not everyone shares these rosy transport visions. Paul Watters, head of public affairs and roads policy for the AA, cautions against calling time on the car. "We are a small island with a very old road network, and a fairly complicated rail network. We haven't invested enough in transport for generations. People driving less is good for the environment, but not good for the economy, and we've got to find a way to make the economy keep going."

Though he is willing to admit that the AA might be "late to the party" on more progressive trends such as online car sharing or new hire schemes, Watters says car ownership still matters to its members. He also doubts whether major technological changes will make much difference within the next decade. "We might see bigger penetration of electric and hybrid cars, but it won't be a shattering change by 2020," he says.

He also cautions against abandoning the road network. "It's going to be very hard to maintain the road network over the next few years. As the economy picks up, we could see horrible growth in traffic and horrible congestion."

Neither the blue-sky visions of ULTra nor the jam tomorrow predictions of Watters are inevitable. Social trends can lead to change, but our travel habits are shaped by government policy too: by road, rail and airport building, most obviously, but also by planning regulations. Greenfield development, or the construction of housing on undeveloped land, is favoured by developers because it's cheaper to build and easier to sell. Yet this is often low-density, suburban-style housing that is poorly suited to public transport and more or less requires homeowners to drive. Brownfield building, though less profitable and less popular, often raises population density, making public transport more viable.

Metz is unimpressed by the new [National Planning Policy Framework](#), which makes little reference to transport issues, while removing the national priority for brownfield

development. There's nothing wrong with wanting a little house in the country, and a car to get you to and from it. Yet there is something reckless in restricting new buildings to a particular form of transport, especially if that form of transport shows signs of decline.

"There's this idea of a green metropolis, where land values are high so there's less space to heat, and where electric vehicles are viable, because the trips taken are shorter. If we're living in a world that is urbanising globally, this is worth considering."

It remains a compelling idea, though not everyone agrees its time has come. The car could be reaching the end of the road, or it could idle on for some time to come.

Additional reporting by Justin Quirk

Ads by Google

Buy France Toll Tags

Save Time on Your Holiday in France & Pay In £ When Your Get Home!

www.saneftolling.co.uk

Solar Panel Comparision

Get Our Free Chart & Compare Panels + Money Saving Quotes on PV Systems

www.TrustedSolarPrices.co.uk

Train Travel - Save Today

Save Up to 80% Off Trains Tickets. Buy Online Now. No Booking Fees.

www.redspottedhanky.com/Save

Comments in chronological order (Total 175 comments)

Post a comment

 Staff

 Contributor



[WarrenEllis](#)

25 September 2011 8:29PM

Even car enthusiasts realise we've reached a tipping point.

Good

Recommend? (128)

[Report abuse](#)

 Clip

| [Link](#)



[mcyigra3](#)

25 September 2011 11:45PM

Or it maybe the:

High levels of youth unemployment this and the last gov want by design

High price in Petrol Prices

High cost of insurance

High level of crime in certain areas making it impossible to insure a car for less than the actual value of the car

High levels of profit being made by the gov, insurance and oils companies,

High numbers of oil wars being planned and executed in this world

High price and low quality of public transport

And many many many more factors that are needed to divide the rich from the none rich.

Recommend? (236)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[tankerton](#)

25 September 2011 11:48PM

Bringing a car into a city is selfish, because if everyone did it the economy of the city would suffer very badly.

Selfish behaviour should be treated by any rational government with massive taxes.

Recommend? (72)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[Itgoes](#)

25 September 2011 11:50PM

Motoring groups put it down to oil prices and the economy. Others offer a more fundamental explanation: the golden age of motoring is over.

Er, young people don't drive because they can't afford to spend thousands of pounds a year on car insurance.

Recommend? (328)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[Menotti](#)

25 September 2011 11:59PM

Why would anyone buy a car if they lived in a large city? It's the only thing you own that decreases in value year on year on year. Plus, You have to sink a fortune into it in road tax, insurance, parking, petrol, and if you live in London the C-Charge.

It's a money pit.

buy a bicycle and spend the money you save on cravats, loose women, and ham.

A really, really nice ham mind you.

Recommend? (468)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[TeaJunkie](#)

25 September 2011 11:59PM

Paul Watters, head of public affairs and roads policy for the AA ... "People driving less is good for the environment, but not good for the economy, and we've got to find a way to make the economy keep going."

So sod the environment, along with its clean air and all that rubbish, as long as we make sure the economy is doing OK.

Recommend? (105)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[mistamura](#)

26 September 2011 12:10AM

.....and about bloody time!

Some how equating car ownership with individual freedom is totally beyond my comprehension.

All I see is an insane preoccupation with greed and selfishness.

Recommend? (71)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[panpies](#)

26 September 2011 12:14AM

Why would anyone buy a car if they lived in a large city? It's the only thing you own that decreases in value year on year on year. Plus, You have to sink a fortune into it in road tax, insurance, parking, petrol, and if you live in London the C-Charge.

It's a money pit.

buy a bicycle and spend the money you save on cravats, loose women, and ham.

You try shifting three young kids between multiple birthday parties on a Sunday together with a weekly shop for 5 people by bike.

Recommend? (118)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[CliffordChallenger](#)

26 September 2011 12:21AM

Itgoes has made the obvious point - young people face massive bills for insurance, and insurance companies now charge the same rates for the much safer young women claiming that they can't discriminate. In fact insurance is pricing many people out of car ownership. (and may I add before people go on what a good thing I only run a car because my job demands it.).

Recommend? (19)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)[banzaibee](#)

26 September 2011 12:27AM

You try shifting three young kids between multiple birthday parties on a Sunday together with a weekly shop for 5 people by bike.

Tried?

Recommend? (60)

[Report abuse](#)

Clip

| [Link](#)[cyanidebunny](#)

26 September 2011 12:27AM

these car share deals are great and all, but all i really want is to take a bus service that will get me from Heathrow airport to Portsmouth in less than four hours.

Recommend? (30)

[Report abuse](#)

Clip

| [Link](#)[insertfunnyusername](#)

26 September 2011 12:27AM

"Not everyone shares these rosy transport visions. Paul Watters, head of public affairs and roads policy for the AA, cautions against calling time on the car. "We are a small island with a very old road network, and a fairly complicated rail network. We haven't invested enough in transport for generations. People driving less is good for the environment, but not good for the economy, and we've got to find a way to make the economy keep going."

I am shocked, shocked I tell you that a representative of the AA has issues with the death of car ownership.

And I am also shocked that that representative of the AA would conflate transport with the car, and the economy with the car.

WTF must investing in transport mean investing in the car?

"and airport building, most obviously, but also by planning regulations. Greenfield development, or the construction of housing on undeveloped land, is favoured by developers because it's cheaper to build and easier to sell. Yet this is often low-density, suburban-style housing that is poorly suited to public transport and more or less requires homeowners to drive. Brownfield building, though less profitable and less popular, often raises population density, making public transport more viable."

Depends. I know buses are not glamorous like a rail system, but they are also public transport. IN areas with lower population density, buses, especially smaller buses can work fine as public transport.

Recommend? (37)

[Report abuse](#)

Clip

| [Link](#)[insertfunnyusername](#)

26 September 2011 12:30AM

"Why would anyone buy a car if they lived in a large city? It's the only thing you own that decreases in value year on year on year. Plus, You have to sink a fortune into it in road tax, insurance, parking, petrol, and if you live in London the C-Charge."

buy a bicycle and spend the money you save on cravats, loose women, and ham.

--menotti

Computers. Hand phones. TVs. Pretty much an electronic or electric appliance. All of these also decline year on year.

And yes, bicycles also decline in value year on year, especially if you use the bike everyday.

Recommend? (27)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[LePendu](#)

26 September 2011 12:44AM

Then borrow a Peugeot bicycle to cycle to the pub in the evening. It's an attempt to second-guess how we'll run cars in future, and a pilot scheme at present, but you can do this today in London. Other car manufacturers are studying similar ideas

Does one drive to the hire centre, load the bike into the care or van, drive home and then cycle to the pub? What a numbnuts concept. If you want to cycle to the pub, buy a damn bike. Just get your head around the idea that it will be stolen at some point, so take taxi fare too.

Recommend? (16)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[LePendu](#)

26 September 2011 12:45AM

Oh bugger - car, not care FFS!

Recommend? (2)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[bartelbe](#)

26 September 2011 12:45AM

Insurance, that is the reason why young people don't own cars or drive. If this country had a public transport system, that wouldn't be a problem, but outside London there isn't one. Useless, dirty, expensive, unreliable buses, and trains which are almost as unaffordable as cars. Young people can't afford uni, they will never be able to get a job, buy a house, and now they can't go anywhere.

Recommend? (86)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[princesschipchops](#)

26 September 2011 12:46AM

Well it will only be good for them when the oil price over the next ten years gets so damned high that no one but the very wealthy can afford to drive. It will come as a right shock to most of my generation when they can't afford to run a car and heat their homes and eat.

Recommend? (36)

[Report abuse](#)

Clip

| [Link](#)



[MikeRichards](#)

26 September 2011 1:16AM

These PRT schemes all sound wonderful, but entirely impractical. No city is going to grub up its streets to lay the guided tracks they need, and then there are the economics - you'd be talking about hundreds of millions of Pounds which is going to be recouped exactly how? Either by massive public subsidy or fares so high that you might as well call a limo to do the shopping.

Not to mention all the problems of what if one goes wrong, or is vandalised en route, or if the previous person leaves a pool of sick on the seat.

It's a solution looking for a problem. If you want a transport solution for big cities that doesn't mean cars, it's called a decent bus network.

Recommend? (18)

[Report abuse](#)

Clip

| [Link](#)



[icurahuman2](#)

26 September 2011 1:18AM

Her's a question: how many of them are aware of peak-oil? Of all those who will be certainly effected by the end of industrial civilisation the youth of today will certainly be stuck with the ramifications. Old farts might be lucky enough to die before it all goes belly-up, maybe not, especially with the crunch now expected by many of the previous deniers somewhere between 2012 and 2015. A lot of uni students will find their qualifications useless unless they doing agriculture, which won't be as scientifically applied, like today, when the time comes. No more herbicides, pesticides or oil-derived fertilisers to keep the food coming. A driver's license will be as useful as tits on a bull once it all crumbles.

Recommend? (25)

[Report abuse](#)

Clip

| [Link](#)



[Unionised](#)

26 September 2011 1:32AM

I am 23 and live in central London, and I don't have a driving licence and have no desire to get one. I just don't see the point of having a car, certainly not in London. It would be such a headache.

Plus, driving lessons are expensive. I can't afford it.

Recommend? (77)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[Unionised](#)

26 September 2011 1:35AM

@bartelbe

""Young people can't afford uni, they will never be able to get a job, buy a house, and now they can't go anywhere.""

Lighten up.

Recommend? (20)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[aquinus](#)

26 September 2011 1:52AM

Jah, for Xmas give us a decent drumkit in every venue, so I'll carry just the sticks around , thanx...

Recommend? (23)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[sandgrinder](#)

26 September 2011 2:00AM

Hurrah!

At last.

I feel younger already.

Recommend? (12)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[verrochio](#)

26 September 2011 2:01AM

panpies

You try shifting three young kids between multiple birthday parties on a Sunday together with a weekly shop for 5 people by bike.

On a Sunday, most young people <cough!> are more likely to be far too preoccupied with their smart phones and laptops or recovering from the previous night's escapades than with three young kids to be fair.

Recommend? (19)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)

[artistadavide](#)

26 September 2011 2:03AM

Article is just too long for my patience.

Recommend? (22)

[Report abuse](#)

Clip

| [Link](#)

[EastFinchleyite](#)

26 September 2011 2:05AM

We have changed from a car driving society to a car parking society. No bad thing. The convenience of having a car is, to me, still paramount. But the necessity for a car drops every year. In London, public transport has improved massively and continues to get better. Last year I drove little over two thousand miles. Even as a teen in the 70s I did more than twice that. If I ever get a "Freedom Pass" for the buses and tubes it will go down even more.

Modern cars don't rust. They wear out slowly and if you don't drive a lot they just sit there and wait for you. Mine is 14 years old, done 124K and looks like new if I can be arsed to polish it on its birthday. I bought a bike (human powered pedal variety) I reckon I do more journeys on that than I do in a car although the mileage is a lot lower. Hint: you are much less likely to get busted for drink driving on a pedal cycle than behind the wheel of a car.

I would hate not to have a car, but the number of times it is critical becomes fewer each year. The smart move for the younger generations is to get your license and then hire when needed.

Recommend? (33)

[Report abuse](#)

Clip

| [Link](#)

[Menotti](#)

26 September 2011 2:08AM

Why would anyone buy a car if they lived in a large city? It's the only thing you own that decreases in value year on year on year. Plus, You have to sink a fortune into it in road tax, insurance, parking, petrol, and if you live in London the C-Charge.

It's a money pit.

buy a bicycle and spend the money you save on cravats, loose women, and ham.

You try shifting three young kids between multiple birthday parties on a Sunday together with a weekly shop for 5 people by bike.

That's what keeps you chained to the automobile? Children's Parties?

At least you could pretend to be a vet in rural Cumbria or something.

Recommend? (198)

[Report abuse](#)

Clip

| [Link](#)

[OldGreyWhistleTest](#)

26 September 2011 2:16AM

Although in defence of the car, they do say the princes quite enjoy motoring through the countryside

Recommend? (8)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[blackdog66](#)

26 September 2011 3:14AM

Decreasing car ownership in big cities is no surprise, but fewer driving licences is - when I was a teenager, passing one's driving test was a rite of passage that everyone undertook. Even if you couldn't afford to own a car, you sometimes needed to rent one, especially if you ever travelled - how do you explore the backroads of Cornwall, the highlands of Scotland or the Yorkshire Dales without a car? Not to mention overseas travel - the great American roadtrip on an Amtrak train? No, thanks.

Recommend? (18)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[davknigh](#)

26 September 2011 3:17AM

Well, at least the UK is moving in the right direction. Here in Sunny Southern Ontario we have politicians saying things like "the war on the car is over" instead of putting up funds for improved public transit. The economy trumps the environment besides, who needs air anyway... oh wait..

Recommend? (18)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[franklinokeef](#)

26 September 2011 4:38AM

NO more paradise by the dashboard light?

Recommend? (9)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[rmassart](#)

26 September 2011 4:43AM

You try shifting three young kids between multiple birthday parties on a Sunday together with a weekly shop for 5 people by bike.

Taxis and Tesco's online perhaps? If you didn't own a car you'd be able to afford a few taxi rides in a week.

Or, alternatively, if everybody else didn't own a car either, this situation wouldn't arise because things would be more local. I'm not advocating not owning a car, but the problems you highlight are hardly insurmountable.

Recommend? (107)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)[Link](#)[SpangleJ](#)

26 September 2011 4:46AM

I was born in the 60s and I've never had a car. I live in central London and travel all over the UK and it's never really come up as an issue. I don't have kids, I can imagine that could change the picture. I lived in Canada for sometime and life without a car was untenable. Outside cyclable distance I was truly stuck. We really need to celebrate the UK public transport system and how embedded it was before cars ever came along (unlike the States and Canada). Now I haven't been out of the UK for three years and have no desire to. It feels great to have not inhaled plane air and not eaten plane food, or been force fed advertising in a cattle car for all that time. I would happily never get on a plane again for all sorts of reasons. Travel as status. I agree, it's time is over.

Recommend? (38)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)[Link](#)[piersplowman](#)

26 September 2011 5:31AM

Free bus passes for everyone, not just old gits like me. Autonomous self-driving buses to make up for the fewer cars. Chop the legs off anyone who shoves their disgusting hooves up on the seats. OK can't do it yet and the Tesco Shopping Airship idea didn't work so well in high winds but we have plans I tell you, plans.

Recommend? (15)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)[Link](#)[robinr22](#)

26 September 2011 5:40AM

I can't drive and so have never owned a car. The reason? Simple. There is just no need. I've lived in Brighton and London since I was 18. I walked past at least five supermarkets on my way home and probably another ten within ten minutes travel. If I need milk I go to the corner shop. If I need to go to Leeds or wherever, I go on the train. On the rare occasion I need transport for heavy stuff I can either get a cab or a man with a van.

Why would I spend a lot of time and money on learning to drive, buying a car, insuring it, taxing it, filling it up with petrol when I would use it, at most, once a month? I don't own a space shuttle either for the same reasons.

It would be different if I lived in the country or had kids but the ever increasing drive convenience has reached its goal. If I need something odds are I don't have to go very far to get it.

Trains are still far too expensive though. £4,500 a year to commute to London is absurd.

Recommend? (61)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)[robinr22](#)

26 September 2011 5:43AM

Article is just too long for my patience

Yes, god forbid we should be give *too much* information. In fairness, some of the words were probably a bit too long as well.

Recommend? (73)

[Report abuse](#)

Clip

| [Link](#)[GraemeHarrison](#)

26 September 2011 5:46AM

The challenge for policy-makers the world over is to balance the costs of car usage versus public transport costs over the same trip distance.

People don't give up driving when public transport is not good (reasonable schedules, clean-ish and not too expensive). The argument is always that the public transport is not there, or is overcrowded. So we need to get more money into public transport. But simpletons in high public office assume that this means putting up the cost of tickets. In fact it means levying drivers for use of scarce road-space to pay for public transport. But car ownership is not the problem - car usage at peak hour is the problem. So instead of having high 'fixed' costs for car ownership (registration, insurance, finance costs, parking), we need to turn as much of the cost into 'variable costs'. So registration, insurance etc should all be recouped **ONLY** from charges for being on major roads 'at the wrong time'.

Instead of the distortions arising from a single congestion charge for one-zone, we need to implement 'micro-billing' whereby overhead gantries every few kilometres collect the ID numbers of electronic tags of vehicles moving beneath. Each should have an LCD display of the c20p cost at that busy time of day, dropping down to 1p at midnight-5am period. Any detecting of your car near the start of your journey and later (near the end of your journey) should 'infer' the whole trip distance, to avoid incentives for cheapskates to duck off busy roads ('rat-running') to avoid particular gantries.

So the cost to own a car and drive only at night or on weekends in the countryside would be far lower than at present. And the cost to drive on busy main roads at peak hour might double current total car ownership costs over a year.

All of that extra public revenue should go into public transport provision. Otherwise, we leave 'transport consumers' comparing just the variable cost of using their car on a trip (petrol+parking) with ticket price of public transport. But public transport ticket prices try to recoup the total cost of the network, plus replacement of rolling stock and buses. It is presently an unfair comparison. Public transport will never be as direct, quick or convenient as private car, so it needs to be priced well under the variable costs of using a car. And the best way to do that is to increase the variable cost of car usage, while also keeping public transport ticket costs low. The best way is 'tax car usage' is a gradual roll-out to all major cities of a time-of-day based variable billing system (by say electronic tags on vehicles).

The gantries and 'system' are cheap compared to new roads. The added benefit is that tradespeople, doctors and others who need to be on the road will get places faster. All goods deliveries will be cheaper (as less congestion). National fuel bills will reduce. Foreign oil payments will decrease. The environment will improve. Quality of life will

improve.

People cannot make policy in this area until they realise there are only TWO ways to pay for use of a scarce resource like any busy road at peak hour. You can pay by time (queuing) OR you can pay by money (tolling). There are no other answers, unless you subscribe to a Soviet-era type system, where the Secretariat decides who has entitlements, based on political connections or bribery.

Queuing (the current system of increasing traffic congestion till people give up on that route) values an hour of a student or retiree as the same as a doctor or plumber. By putting a nominal cost per kilometre at just peak hour, you encourage the student and retiree to travel in non-peak hours, or use public transport, while allowing professionals, tradespeople and delivery trucks to move more quickly from meeting to meeting, supplier to job, etc.

And as a quid-pro-quo for the student, allow electric bicycles to have up to 1000-1200 watts of 'assistive power' while still qualifying as a bicycle. The EU limit of 250 watts is all about preserving vehicle registration income, and NOT promoting bicycle use. With 1200w, one can get up a hill, or travel a reasonable distance without becoming sweaty before work or university. We WANT our cities to look more like Chinese or Italian cities, with small two-wheeled transport encouraged, not discouraged. Importantly, with 1200w, bicycles then keep up with car traffic, rather than slowing down the leftmost lane.

Then, as a final measure, allow locals who live in an area, to apply for special police vetting, and use their existing private car to operate low-cost 'local taxi' services from train station to areas served by that train station, to overcome limitations in formal public transport providing 'feeder services' to such transport hubs. Pricing could be simple rings of 2km, 5km or 10km from the railway station. Vetted pensioners may just love the extra revenue, and it will save many from buying a car.

Recommend? (21)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)



[kieran216](#)

26 September 2011 5:54AM

How I would love to be able to ditch the car! Sadly, the city I live in is pretty useless in terms of public transport, and a 20minute commute to work would be easily quadrupled if I were to take the bus. THIS is also in Sunny Southern Ontario, where a huge amount of public planning seems to have taken the car-only route.

Davenigh, Rob Ford's (mayor of Toronto for all you back home) decision to "end the war on the car" is one of the most shortsighted political decisions I have ever heard. Has the man ever driven through Mississauga (fair enough a different city) of been stuck on the Gardiner? There simply isn't the space in Toronto to for all the car owners that insist on driving down town. Taking the financial hit and expanding the subway system to something comparable with London, NYC is in my opinion the only option to end the gridlock. It has to reach out to the suburbs too, as these are where most of the cars originate from - most folk I know who live right downtown bike or take TTC to work. Suburbs will be death of human society one day!

Recommend? (10)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)

[grumpyoldbear](#)

26 September 2011 6:38AM

Hmm. Here in the Czech Republic, learning to drive forms a part of the school curriculum, from cars to HGVs. Insurance is unlinked to age - or at least in the large part - and third party is the only obligation. Fuel is proportionally 40 to 55% more expensive than the UK, when earnings taken into account, but a large black market exists. Policing is patchy and focuses on on-the-spot fines than education. And you are twice as likely as in the UK to be involved in a fatal accident, though, of course, this is always put down to the quality of roads. Think yourselves lucky if the trend towards fewer drivers is indeed actual.

Recommend? (11)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)| [Link](#)[ElQuixote](#)

26 September 2011 6:49AM

Thank God. Now let's start using less cement, producing less trash, making less industrial noise, and above all producing less people. There may be a chance yet to put a human face on this buzzing, grinding cyborg planet.

Recommend? (32)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)| [Link](#)[ElQuixote](#)

26 September 2011 6:53AM

-- So sod the environment, along with its clean air and all that rubbish, as long as we make sure the economy is doing OK. --

This is the same argument as let's not outlaw drugs because it would put a lot of growers and dealers out of work. (There may be an argument for the legalisation of drugs, but that's not it.) Or let's encourage war because it increases production. Greed and ecology, greed and health, simply do not go hand in hand.

Recommend? (11)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)| [Link](#)[ElQuixote](#)

26 September 2011 6:56AM

-- You try shifting three young kids between multiple birthday parties on a Sunday together with a weekly shop for 5 people by bike. ---

It's not about eliminating cars, it's about reducing their number, size and changing their fuel. It's also about reducing the number of people that procreate beyond the number needed to govern the planet, far less than the present 8 billion, not to mention the 12 billion some are handling for the near future.

Recommend? (22)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)[| Link](#)[ElQuixote](#)

26 September 2011 7:02AM

-- In fairness, some of the words were probably a bit too long as well. ---

What long words? "Twentysomethings"? If your comment was sarcastic, well you know what they say about sarcasm, and it isn't long either.

Recommend? (1)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)[| Link](#)[ElQuixote](#)

26 September 2011 7:06AM

Let's eliminate all cheap cars (not to mention motorbikes) and tax the hell out of the expensive ones. That should clear the air a bit. Let's go, at least just this once, for quality instead of quantity. It's criminal to keep increasing cheap methods of polluting the planet. By making them more expensive, at least you reduce their number. In the end, it's mostly numbers that are killing the planet.

Recommend? (9)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)[| Link](#)[Kaitain](#)

26 September 2011 7:18AM

Within twenty years most of us will be using automated driverless cars anyway. There will essentially be a swarm of them operating in most major cities on demand (door to door transit with <5 min waiting time for the price of a bus journey), and most people won't need to own their own cars.

You read it here first.

Recommend? (6)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)[| Link](#)[Podfunk](#)

26 September 2011 7:27AM

"You try shifting three young kids between multiple birthday parties on a Sunday together with a weekly shop for 5 people by bike."

Well this comment seems to be getting a lot of attention and I guess it's really the key here, getting 3-kid families to abandon the old jam jar. Supermarket runs are increasingly being replaced with deliveries and a bike with a good set of panniers can hold a fair amount of shopping. As for the kids, well when they're under a certain age I guess there are few alternatives to a car. Tough one, until those door to door automatic pilot jobbies come in.

Recommend? (3)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)[Link](#)[whatithink](#)

26 September 2011 7:28AM

how many of them are aware of peak-oil?

Probably slightly more than realise that it's an utterly fictitious idea. Oil is cheap and plentiful. The high price of petrol is because of the ridiculous amounts of tax put on it. And the reason why fewer young people drive is the cost of the insurance. If our politicians were any good they'd stop feather bedding the grasping insurance companies and do something about it.

Recommend? (14)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)[Link](#)[halfmanhalfslug](#)

26 September 2011 7:30AM

I'm 42, never learned to drive, and never missed it. I have feet.

Recommend? (29)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)[Link](#)[ajchm](#)

26 September 2011 7:38AM

this is getting so annoying, this article is all about londoners AGAIN. Here taking lessons on your 17th birthday is still the norm - go past our local 6th form at 3.30 and the instructors cars are lined up, often 15 - 20 of them (college has 300 students from 16-18). all the young people in our choir also drive their mums cars, and 2 received (old) cars as a level gifts / 18th birthday.

without a car you cannot leave town on a sunday at all (no public transport) and have be home by 7pm. as buses are run by several companies, a bus pass is virtually useless (i'd need 2 separate ones, each at £16 a week to get to work) and parking is provided free or cheaply most places of work, and apart from the city centre (mon - sat) shops also have free parking. there is no bus to where the bowling alley and one of the cinemas is - young people rely heavily on their parents for lifts so parents are VERY keen for them to drive not surprisingly. I'm sure you'll find examples of non car owning individuals here but based on the crazy parking situation on most streets, its not a case of 1 car per family, more like 2 or 3, (next door to me has 4 plus a motorbike)

Recommend? (70)

[Report abuse](#)[Clip](#)[Link](#)[yellowmothfly](#)

26 September 2011 8:03AM

@ajchm has it. Outside of the London/Brighton transport bubble, if you want to operate with any sort of independence in life, you need a car. I grew up on Tyneside,

and whilst public transport there was better than many other places, if you wanted or needed to go off the beaten tracks into the CBDs, you needed to drive. My first car was a real heap - an old Datsun with an AM radio - and the insurance was still astronomical even in the 90s but I sucked it up because it was worth it.

The alternative is being unable to take jobs, or spending half your day on a bus, should the local commercial operator deem it worth their while to run one where you need to go.

Our financial system is evermore reliant on people's flexibility and willingness to work harder to work, which includes being mobile. Metropolitan oiks who don't see a need to drive at all aren't representative of the problem at large. And I say that as someone who now lives in the commuter belt (and owns a car - quite a nice one at that, and very efficient).

Recommend? (43)

[Report abuse](#)

[Clip](#)

| [Link](#)

In order to post a comment you need to be registered and signed in.

[Sign in to comment](#)

© 2011 Guardian News and Media Limited or its affiliated companies. All rights reserved.