

THE INFRASTRUCTURIST

AMERICA UNDER CONSTRUCTION

« Previous Entry

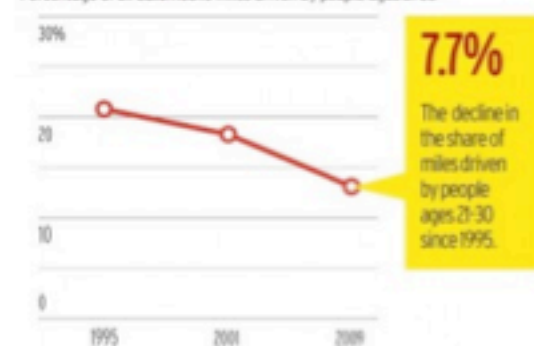
Next Entry »

COMMUTING
DRIVING BEHAVIOR
URBAN STUDIES

Is the Digital Age Changing Our Desire to Drive?

Posted on Friday November 5th by Eric Jaffe | 🔥 4,121

Percentage of all automobile miles driven by people ages 21-30



Anyone can miss Canada, all tucked away down there, but it would be a shame for lovers of walkable cities to overlook a new report by GWL Realty Advisors, a Canadian real estate advisory group. Having noticed an “increased interest in living in dense urban areas”—particularly in apartments or condominiums—GWL used census data and polls to examine why such a swing has occurred. Of the report’s many conclusions, the most interesting may be that younger generations simply aren’t smitten with driving to work:

Short commutes and proximity to transit are major factors attracting apartment dwellers to certain

properties. When polled by GWLRA and Harris/Decima, 36% of apartment dwellers (owners and renters) selected their building for its short commute and 48% for transit proximity.

The connection between lengthy commutes and low quality-of-life is nothing new around here. And the ease with which one gets from A to B is an obvious charm of the city. But the report goes on to suggest that this youthful disdain for commuting by car is as much about the car as it is about the commute:

In the United States, kilometers driven by 18–34 year olds is declining, and this is likely the case in Canada as well (Neff, 2010). Younger generations seem to have less interest in automotive use, making apartment living in dense, walkable and transit-oriented urban areas a more natural fit for their lifestyles.

The citation is an article from Advertising Age about the diminished importance of the automobile in the digital age. The piece points out that in 1995 people age 21 to 30 accounted for roughly 21 percent of automobile-miles driven in the United States. By 2001 that figure had dipped to 18 percent, and in 2009 it had fallen below 14 percent. All this while the proportion of people in this age group actually increased.

The reason for this change, according to some experts, is that technology is doing for today’s generation what the car did for previous ones—namely, providing a sense of freedom. For one thing, the Internet has made telecommuting more common. William Draves, co-author of *Nine Shift*, a book about working in the 21st century, believes the desire to work on the move will lead to more rail passengers—an idea we’ve mentioned before, as has Paul Krugman—and predicts a resurgence of housing near train stations.

It’s an interesting theory, if not a perfect one: after all, if technology really replaced cars, then texting while driving wouldn’t be such a problem. But hey, if it doesn’t prove correct, we can always blame Canada.

Image: LERN/Nine Shift Institute, via Advertising Age