

Geneva's commuters embrace multimodal transport, survey reveals

October 9 2019, by Anne-Muriel Brouet

Why do some people cycle instead of taking the bus? Why do others drive rather than traveling by train? Two factors—price and journey time—have long determined how commuters choose to get to work. But much has changed in the past 25 years. According to an EPFL survey covering Greater Geneva, commuters are now more concerned about how they spend their travel time. The research provides detailed insights into the transport habits of the area's workers, breaking down the findings according to people's place of residence, age, educational attainment, and more.

Researchers at EPFL's Urban Sociology Laboratory (LASUR), working under the direction of Professor Vincent Kaufmann, commissioned a telephone survey of a representative sample of the working-age population of Greater Geneva—a sprawling conurbation of 209 municipalities with a population of one million people, around 50 percent of whom live in Geneva Canton itself, 40 percent in the neighboring French departments of Ain and Haute-Savoie, and 10 percent in the Nyon region (in Vaud Canton).

Driving falling further out of favor

The 2018 survey, which followed similar exercises in 1994 and 2011, sampled around 2,100 people living within 500 meters of a [public transport](#) stop or 800 meters of a train station. The findings point to declining attitudes towards driving over time. In 1994, just 12 percent of

respondents associated the car with negative adjectives such as "polluting" and "expensive"; in 2018, that number rose to 33 percent. Conversely, the image of public transportation is improving, albeit slowly: 50 percent of those surveyed in 2018 described it in positive terms (compared with 39 percent in 1994), while only 38 percent used negative descriptors (46 percent in 1994). Long journey times seem to be the main barrier to greater enthusiasm for public transportation, although the 15 December opening of the Léman Express—a commuter rail network with expected commercial speeds of around 50 km/h—should go some way to enhancing its image. Respondents were generally more effusive when asked about walking and cycling, although many urban commuters said that traveling by bike was dangerous.

A promising future for cycling

The 2018 survey produced a wealth of insights for the researchers—not least the fact that Greater Geneva's working-age population has embraced multimodal transport with open arms. Car, motorcycle and scooter owners are no longer wedded to their vehicles, with most reporting a willingness to use a different mode of transport instead. Indeed, the majority of commuters living across the border in France said they would be happy to leave their vehicle at home if viable alternatives were available.

The findings also highlighted the extent to which commuters—most of whom now have smartphones and other internet-enabled devices—are keen to make the most of their journey time. Other important considerations include convenience, efficiency and CO₂ emissions. According to the researchers, the priorities for transport planners are clear: pay special attention to transit hubs, make public transportation as convenient as possible, and introduce more attractive fare options for occasional users.

The latest survey was the first of its kind to include commuters living in France—and it underscored how a shortage of other options leaves them with little choice but to take the car. What's more, relatively abundant parking in Geneva city center and the inner suburbs provides yet more incentive for people to drive to work. The researchers recommend a series of measures to address this problem, including stepping up parking enforcement and restricting parking on [private land](#) in areas with good public transportation links.

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