

IC SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

Trends and Statistics from the National Household Travel Survey

*have long-term consequences for our future generations. Sustainable mobility has grown in*The

word “sustainable” is tossed around with increasing frequency, however most only have a vague

understanding of what sustainability really means, and how the lack of same can popularity in

recent years and in particular, this was one of the silver linings of the COVID-19 pandemic. The

question remains whether as restrictions lift people will carry on the good practices that emerged

and therefore sustain the green recovery, writes Laura Sue Mallia, Director Risk Management,

Policy and EU Affairs, Transport Malta.

The preliminary analysis and results of NHTS 2021 were presented during the Sustainable Transport: Together towards Cleaner Solutions conference held on the 24th of February this year. Further analysis and fine-tuning of survey data is now being undertaken by Transport Malta (TM) and NSO to produce an invaluable dataset for sustainable household members about their use of private vehicles as well as transport planning in Malta. Of note is the fact that although the supply travel patterns and trip characteristics. Other questions included and demand for mobility as a service, collective transport

The National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) which is carried out by Transport Malta every 10 years in collaboration with the National Statistics Office (NSO) attempted to capture the emerging trends and questioned household members about their use of private vehicles as well as transport planning in Malta. Of note is the fact that although the supply travel patterns and trip characteristics. Other questions included and demand for mobility as a service, collective transport

and shared participants' views on sustainable travel modes and the impact that COVID-19 has had on their travel patterns. In total, 5,076 households private participated, with a total of 12,028 trips being recorded on Travel Day (17th November 2021).

mobility has been increasing, uptake is still not at an optimum level which encourages us to reflect more on whether the public and

sector can increase efforts to further support this transition both in terms of provision of services and for employees.



Going back to the NHTS, in terms of vehicle access we find that 87.2% of households in Malta have a car with, 25% of households having more than 3 cars. Only 6.1% of participants have access to a motorcycle. Interestingly to note, 17.4% of participating households from the Southern Harbour said they do not have access to a car, followed by 15.7% of participating households from the Northern Harbour. The time where we find most of the cars on the road, considered as the start of all trips and including morning peak hours, is between 08:00hrs and 09:00hrs. Afternoon peak hours tend to be between 17:00hrs and 18:00hrs.

In comparison to the previous NHTS carried out in 2010, we find the peak has spread out more in the afternoon. A detailed analysis of trip length and trip duration will be carried out at a later stage using the National Transport Model. Although an in-depth analysis of these numbers is still underway, one cannot help but notice that our roads were significantly less congested, even during peak hours during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and remote working and shopping may have had something to do with this.

For many, the pandemic effectively changed the nature in which we conducted our work, the way in which education was provided, and the way in which we purchased goods. This in many cases implied more work-life balance, reduced traffic, less travel stress and commuting time, and a decrease in air pollution particularly in urban and densely populated areas. Of course, without proper planning, remote activity can also result in feelings of isolation, burnout and unhealthy weight gain, and therefore the question we need to ask ourselves is what more can be done for our employees and the population at large.

Moving on, the uptake of bus use to travel to places of education

Walking has increased to 7.7% in 2021 and, cycling has almost doubled its modal share since 2010. Photography William Jones.

In comparison to previous NHTS results, in the 2021 survey we find the percentage of the modal share of car drivers has increased from 59.4% in 2010 to 75.7%. Car passengers decreased from 15.2% in 2010 to 8.2% in 2021. These changes can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a large impact on public and collective transport. On a positive note, though, walking has increased to 7.7% in 2021 and, cycling has almost doubled its modal share since 2010. This result is rather interesting because in comparison to driving a car, walking, and cycling provide additional health benefits and significantly lower running costs. Therefore, shifting the approach to transport is a common objective of all transport policies with the aim of altering the thinking paradigm, behaviour, and habits. It is anticipated that rapid progress in technology and the Sustainable Urban Development Plans and Sustainable Urban Logistics Plans which we shall be working on through 2022 will support this evolution.

In particular, the establishment of the Single Access Point, as defined under the Intelligent Transport Systems Legal Framework of the European Union with regards to the provision of EU-wide multimodal travel information services will enhance our engagement with a wide community of transport and mobility stakeholders, since the scope of the Regulation applies to the entire transport network, while aiming to make accessible, both, static travel and traffic data and historic traffic data of different transport modes, including data updates.

This data which shall be available on the Malta National Access Point Platform will be a collation of information provided by Government Authorities, transport operators, infrastructure managers, transport on-demand service providers and other mobility players. In anticipation of this platform, we are embarking on the first initial step which is reaching out to stakeholders, for awareness-raising purposes and to explain the expected shared benefits and requirements of the same. Specifically, in this regard we invite interested service providers to reach out should they wish further information.

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has increased to 22.5% compared to the results in 2010. This can be attributed to the free public transport service available to certain demographic cohorts and, will undoubtedly be further improved through the provision of free public transport for all which the Government has committed to. Indeed, 58.9% of participants who were students and/or persons having an unpaid work experience noted that they make use of public transport. Both regular and nonregular users of public transport were also asked about which factors they considered as barriers to using the bus service, with punctuality and length of journey being the most cited issues.

Similarly, barriers to using walking as a mode of transport included the duration of the trip followed by having no interest in walking. Barriers for cycling also included the necessity for increased road considerations although, an interesting result to note was that 20% of participants said that they cannot ride a bicycle and a further 7.2% did not feel confident riding a bicycle. These issues pertained mainly to Maltese respondents as a high proportion of expatriates' respondents to the survey both knew how to cycle and felt comfortable cycling.

The study also delved into the effects of COVID-19 on trip purpose. The largest decreases in frequency of travel were in retail trips and work trips where respective decreases of 58.2% and 38.1% were recorded. Unsurprisingly, countryside and seaside trips saw a large increase at 22.8%. The frequency of trips to supermarkets, groceries, and pharmacies remained largely unchanged during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The preliminary results of the NHTS discussed herein provide an important first impression of the travel behavior of the inhabitants of Malta and Gozo. More detailed analysis of the survey data shall be carried out in the coming weeks by TM and NSO. The information collected from the NHTS will be one of the main sources of data inputted into the National Transport Model. This model will allow us to test the impact of new transport policies, projects, and measures. This will pave the way for the review and updating of the Transport Master Plan 2025 and, its extension to 2030. ■



Transport Malta