



NZTA research summary

September 2024

Establishing the household costs of essential transport

Affording essential transport

Can all Kiwis afford to get to the supermarket, work, school and medical appointments?

The researchers in this study wanted to:

- define essential transport needs and costs for vulnerable households
- measure these costs
- find out how they affect people's access to essential services and opportunities
- inform transport planning and investment decisions about changing transport costs so that they're fair.

Literature review and defining 'essential transport'

The researchers reviewed the literature to learn how others have defined the term 'essential transport', and to make sure they measured it consistently. They found the term is rarely used in the literature. It's also hard to define and depends on context, so they used related concepts instead, such as 'transport poverty' and 'transport disadvantage'. They suggest defining essential transport as 'transport that provides access to things that people need to do'.

Data analysis

The researchers analysed NZTA Journey Monitor data on 14,369 New Zealand drivers aged 15 and older. Of these, 22% did not take a journey in the last week that would have been beneficial. Of those who did not take a beneficial journey, 15% (equating to 3.2% of the total sample surveyed) reported the reason as the cost of the journey itself. Of those that missed a journey for any reason:

- 78% said the missed journey affected them/their family.
- 25% said it affected them a lot.
- The most common effects were emotional (14%), financial (14%) and missing out on groceries, shopping or food (13%).
- 2% said their most recent journey (of any type) was barely affordable.

Interviews with agency staff

The researchers interviewed eight members of staff from agencies working with different groups of people, to:

- learn the key issues
- learn who is most likely to be affected
- gather more data.

They found that essential transport depends on context and is different:

- to different people
- to the same people on different days
- depending on who you are with (eg, children needing a school run).

There are also bigger life issues affected by a missed journey, such as not accepting a job or emergency house due to transport costs.

Interviews with people affected by the cost of essential transport

The researchers did 10 one-hour interviews with people affected by the cost of essential transport. This confirmed their definition of essential transport and the related financial costs in New Zealanders' lives. Interviewees could usually define essential transport for themselves, which related to their wellbeing in education, employment, medical care and getting food.

The researchers also found that being unable to afford essential transport often has an immediate effect on someone, which can lead to further negative outcomes.

However, it was difficult for interviewees to calculate the costs of essential transport because a journey is often complex, and because they may not know the cost of a single journey (especially by car).

Planning and investment for fair access to essential transport

The results will help inform planning and investment decisions about the effects of changing transport costs, and help planners to make those decisions fair for vulnerable households and travellers.



RR 723: *Establishing the household costs of essential transport*. NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi research report. Available at www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/research/reports/723