

Car possession as problematic

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1. Introduction, aims & approach

A taboo against policy attention towards car ownership may be eroding, shaken by research on issues such as commitment and by emerging alternatives to having a car (OECD, 1997).

This study draws on such efforts and focuses on the effects of car possession on travel behaviour. By rethinking certain assumptions such effects are revealed in more detail and reframed as problematic.

A qualitative examination of these, informed by the literature, reveals a rich set of effects in two main categories. It is argued that this perspective offers policy opportunities and promise for further research.

2. Excellent mobility without car possession as a useful benchmark

Common assumptions that mobility without having a car is inferior deflect attention from the effects of car possession. Plentiful car use by those who have one thus seems natural. Excessive usage is seen as problematic but possession is rarely investigated.

By contrast, the effects of car possession are revealed more richly in comparison with the (hypothetical) possibility of excellent mobility, rivalling that enjoyed by people with cars, yet without car possession.

Imagining such an idealised possibility has become easier recently. Some European cities (such as Hannover) have sought to create 'mobility packages' that tightly link quality public transport with car-sharing service, taxis, car-rental, bicycle services and deliveries.

An example of an integrated mobility package

HANNOVERmobil

(for €6.95 more than usual annual public transport pass)

Public Transport

Annual Pass included
Timetable + Transit-Map
for free

Public Car

Carsharing-access included
Car-Rental discount rates

Taxi

20 % discounted tariff,
cashless-payment

Long Distance Rail

Bahn Card 25 (German Rail
discount card) included

Integrated mobility bill for all basic costs,
carsharing and taxi-trips

Source: <http://www.gvh.de/hannovermobil.html?&L=1>



Mobility packages put services together in unexpected ways. Bremen's transport planners liken this to the mythical "eierlegendewollmilchsau", or egg-laying wool-milk sow.

The travel behaviour literature allows reasonable assumptions to be made about likely consumer responses to an idealised mobility package.

Contrasting these with the travel behaviour of people who have cars helps reveal car possession as the source of 'rigidities' that inhibit active travel choices and entrench the overuse of (often inappropriate) cars.

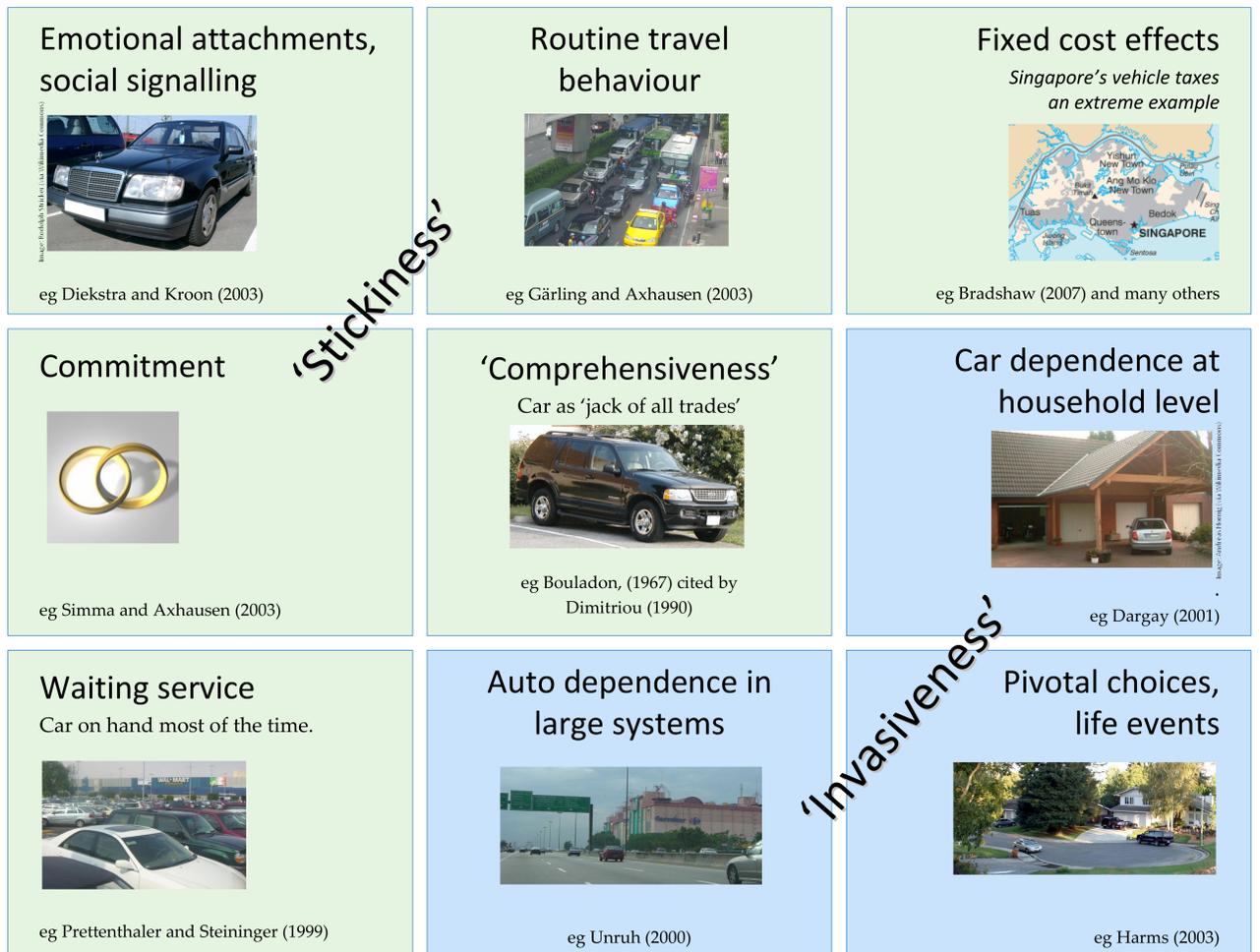
Making such comparisons in a qualitative way led to the following framework for 'possession-related rigidities'.

3. Possession-related rigidities: 'stickiness' and 'invasiveness'

It is useful to group possession-related rigidities according to ease of reversibility.

'Stickiness' refers to effects of possession that are reversible. Their impact evaporates if the vehicle is no longer possessed.

'Invasiveness' involves difficult-to-reverse effects. There is some reshaping of the context which 'locks in' overuse and continued possession.

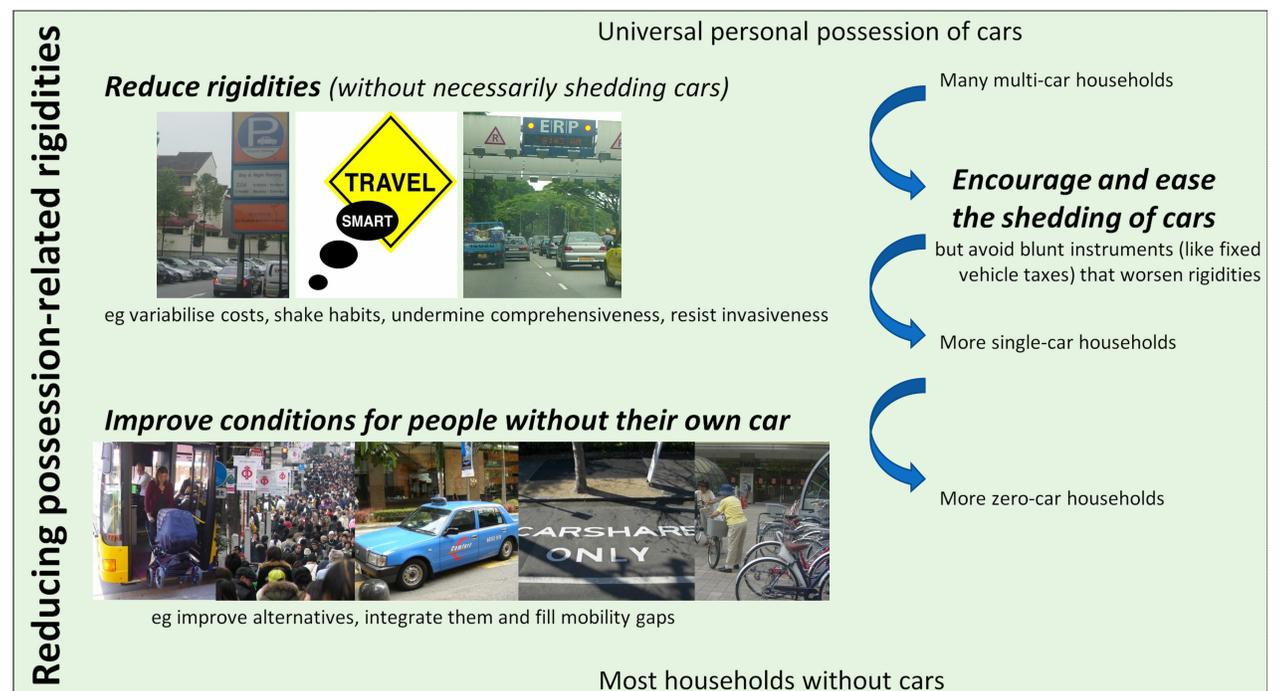


4. Policy implications

Such 'possession-related rigidities' are usually viewed as an inevitable and normal corollary of ownership. However, comparing with an idealised benchmark 'mobility package' allows us to frame them as problems. This ideal does not need to be a major policy objective. It helped reveal problematic rigidities but these can then be attacked in incremental ways. A positive way to describe such efforts is as making relationships with cars more provisional, or perhaps 'provisionalisation'.

5. Conclusion

This study highlighted car possession as a source of problematic travel market rigidities by reframing assumptions about the contrast between having and not having a car. A qualitative examination grouped these effects of possession according to ease of reversibility. The rigidities are arguably worthy of policy interest. Reducing them incrementally should enhance the effectiveness of other TDM tools. Policy possibilities address both sides of the car possession divide.



For more information

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6. References

Please refer to the full paper for details on sources.