

## Transport and Children's Wellbeing (Book Review)

Paulo Rui Anciaes  
UCL (University College London)  
p.anciaes@ucl.ac.uk

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*Transport and Children's Wellbeing (1<sup>st</sup> edition). Edited by E O D Waygood, M Friman, L E Olsson, R Mitra. Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2020, 381 pp; ISBN: 978-0-12-814694-1.*

Transport is related to children's wellbeing in many ways, including the possibility of accessing destinations and activities, experiences during travel, and the negative effects of travel by others. *Transport and Children's Wellbeing* is an edited book offering a broad view on this topic, covering physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and economic aspects of children's wellbeing. It is a much-needed addition to the transport and health literature since previous book-length treatments of the subject (e.g., Larouche 2018, Ergler *et al.* 2017) had a much narrower focus, while more general books on transport and health (Meyer and Elraham 2019, Nieuwenhuijsen and Khreis 2020) did not talk much about children. In fact, transport planning and research have focused mostly on the travel needs of adults.

Part 1 of the book reviews the relationships between travel and wellbeing among children. All chapters show the benefits of walking and cycling: they are physical activities (Chapter 2); improve mood, independence, confidence, and subjective wellbeing (Chapter 3), and foster children's relationships with peers and the community (Chapter 4). Bus travel delivers some of these benefits. In contrast, car travel restricts the freedom that comes with independent mobility. In addition, as covered in Part 2, car traffic has negative effects on children's physical wellbeing, including traffic injuries (Chapter 6) and emissions (Chapter 7).

Part 3 is about travel-related solutions to improve children's wellbeing, including public policies (Chapter 9), urban and street design (Chapters 12-13), and engagement of children in planning and research (Chapters 11 and 15). Chapter 12 is one of the few that explores how mobility is experienced differently by children and adults. For example, children use streets and public spaces not only to travel but also to play and exploration. This means that neighbourhoods with cul-de-sacs, usually regarded as hindering active travel by adults, may provide places for children's play (p.220). Features that are regarded as obstacles to movement by adults may also be useful wayfinding elements for children.

Part 4 gives examples of how children travel in a few countries. Japan and Netherland have managed to improve conditions for walking and cycling, respectively, which translates into more independent mobility and social interaction for children. The opposite is happening in China, where motorisation is increasing rapidly. The chapter on Japan is fascinating in its description of how a combination of schools located in central areas, narrow roads, parking restrictions, neighbourhood social capital, and a tradition of "walking buses" since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century all contribute to children's walking. It is also interesting to notice that, while there are few USA-based studies in the book, this country is nonetheless used throughout the book as the baseline for most comparisons, due to the automobile culture and low densities, in

contrast with Japan, the Netherlands, and Scandinavian countries (p.89-90, 132, 188, 298, 318).

There are many reviews in this book - only six of the 19 chapters are case studies. However, these reviews provide the reader with an overview on how the Transport and Health field has approached this topic. It is emphasized that research results have been consistent. The main message of the book is the trend towards children being driven to school and having less independent mobility. This is mentioned in almost all chapters, even feeling a bit repetitive, with the famous Policy Studies Institute studies (Hillman 1990, Shaw 2015) cited many times.

Some chapters (5, 14) provide some explanation why children are walking and cycling less and are losing independent mobility, using frameworks that relate travel outcomes with the characteristics and attitudes of the child, household, and the built and social environment. Gender and socio-spatial aspects are also mentioned in several chapters, with some also emphasizing age differences (p.53, 94, 227).

There is also an implicit normative message throughout the book that interventions to improve children's active travel require restricting car travel. It is emphasized early on (p.3) that most daily trips made by children are local and could be done by active mode – but roads and traffic are barriers to those modes. The loss of independent mobility is a vicious circle: walking is dangerous because of too many cars, so the solution is to drive children to school, increasing the number of cars, and making walking even more dangerous.

Solving this problem requires revising policy processes and decision-support methods, which are usually biased towards travel by adults (and travel by motorised modes). A strength of this book is providing some solutions for these practical issues. For example, Chapter 8 presents guidelines for conducting health impact assessments focusing on transport and children. Chapter 10 discusses economic appraisal methods, based on the idea that improving active travel brings benefits that can be expressed in terms of money. These benefits include not only physical activity but also the reduced financial and time costs of the trip (compared to car travel). However, there are still no solid estimates of some of these benefits.

The book also stresses that the focus of research has been the trip to school, with less evidence on travel to other destinations, and on play and interaction. Some chapters also identify understudied wellbeing aspects such as exposure to transport noise (p.30-31) and cognitive aspects, i.e., relationships between active travel to school, academic achievement, and cognitive abilities (p.50-52). Other relevant aspects are left mostly untouched in this book, such as ethical issues in research involving children. Nevertheless, the main reason preventing me to call this book a comprehensive overview of the topic is that it is a book about transport and children's wellbeing in the Global North only (especially Canada and other English-speaking countries). A different context is missing from the book. Children in the Global South face different challenges: most go to school alone and the road and traffic conditions are generally even more adverse than in the Global North.

Despite this gap, *Transport and Children's Wellbeing* is still a useful resource to understand how children are affected by travel, providing an extensive review of existing knowledge and suggesting solutions to use transport policies to improve children's wellbeing.

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