

Executive Summary

Millennials have been observed to be utilizing sustainable modes of transportation more than their preceding generations as they enter adulthood (McDonald, 2015). The comparably lower rates of automobility among Millennials – those born between 1980 and 2000 – is cited as a positive development in context of general goals of environmental sustainability and traffic reduction. However, research has been conducted that attributes some (or all) of the unique travel behaviour of Millennials to the Great Recession that commenced in 2008. The claim that is central to this reasoning is that Millennials were disproportionately affected by this event; their employment rates are substantially lower than what was exhibited by preceding generations at similar ages. This leaves them with less ability to afford automobiles and gives them less reasons to make automobile trips.

This theory is tested in this report using the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) as a case study. Descriptive statistics are analyzed to assess if there is an association between employment status and the reduced automobility of Millennials. Data is examined from three cross-sections of the Transportation Tomorrow Survey – surveys were conducted in 2001, 2006, and 2011 – and extensive focus is centred on the changes in travel behaviour observed during the study period. Three automobility indicators are utilized to assess this behaviour including auto mode share, daily auto trips, and daily vehicle kilometres travelled (VKT). Another indicator – transit mode share – is included to assess concurrent trends in the growth of public transit in the GTHA. Each of these indicators are measured first for the entire GTHA and then separately for the City of Toronto and the remaining suburban municipalities. This tactic was utilized to compare Millennial travel behaviour in these areas that can be characterized by the vast differences of their built environment.

The data confirm that there is an association between employment status and travel behaviour. The proportion of people in the GTHA that drive automobiles is substantially higher for people with full-time employment than it is for those without it. Declines in daily auto trips and auto mode share are also much greater for individuals with full-time employment in comparison to those without it. However, automobility indicators among people with full-time employment were not completely stable, suggesting that the Great Recession and the economic conditions that it fostered are not wholly responsible for the unique automobility of Millennials. Noticeable decline in auto mode share and daily auto trips was observed among people with full-time employment and the decline in daily VKT was consistent for all age groups and people with all employment statuses.

The data revealed a significant difference in automobility trends between Millennials and their preceding generation, Generation X. Much of the observed declines in automobility measures observed among the latter group happened between 2001 and 2006, rather than after, suggesting that the Great Recession did not impact their travel behaviour in the GTHA. In contrast, Millennial automobility continuously declined throughout the study period; this result appears to confirm the impact that the Great Recession had on the automobility of Millennials.

These results indicate that when Millennials experience improved employment fortunes, and as their travel requirements increase because of their advanced lifecycle stage, their collective automobility can be expected to increase. However, it is unlikely that they will reach levels observed among their preceding generations. In fact, that the trajectory of Millennial travel behaviour is unclear implies that this is a critical period for

policymakers including planners and transportation demand management professionals. Action can be taken at each level of government in the GTHA that can exert significant influence on the travel behaviour of Millennials and future generations. The recommendations contained within this report have been compiled with the goal of ensuring that Millennial travel behaviour remains different from the behaviour of their preceding generations.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Facilitate a reduction in automobile use; do not attempt to eliminate automobile use.

More Millennials will encounter life events (ie. having children) that will require more on-demand trips that automobiles are better equipped to handle. Incorporating ridesharing, carsharing, and ride-hailing services as part of a larger multi-modal strategy allows flexibility and eliminates the need to own a vehicle.

RECOMMENDATION #2: Embrace employer-based transportation demand management (TDM) programs as a method of changing commuting behaviour.

The results of this research report suggest that most automobile trips made by individuals with full-time employment are commute trips. Many employers have made efforts to influence the travel behaviour of their employees and local policymakers should embrace and facilitate these efforts.

RECOMMENDATION #3: Prioritize compact and mixed-use development in the suburbs as part of a larger effort to facilitate the use of alternative modes of transportation.

While a variety of research has concluded that compact developments alone are not enough to detract people from driving, they are likely a requirement in efforts to reduced

automobility. Combined with efforts to reduce the convenience of using automobiles, compact developments should be prioritized to allow for the implementation of better alternative transportation infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATION #4: Foster further increase in transit ridership of Millennials in the GTHA by improving marketing efforts and educating youth about this transportation mode.

Public transit ridership showed considerable gains, specifically among Millennials, in the GTHA and to ensure that new transit users do not transition to automobile usage, efforts should be focused on continuing to increase ridership. This includes the education of the next generation; public transit should be thoroughly marketed in schools as it is in Western Europe.