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Travel Time as Quality Time: Parental Attitudes to Long Distance Travel with Young Children

Studies into childhood mobility have demonstrated a need to increase public transport use amongst children; however little research has been undertaken looking at the views and attitudes of those making the mobility decisions, namely the parents and care givers with the responsibility for getting children 'from A to B'. This paper presents the results of 25 in-depth interviews which were undertaken with parents in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing mode choice, more specifically whether scope exists to achieve modal shift from car to rail for long distance journeys with young children. The key findings indicate that whilst mode choice is made predominantly for reasons relating to convenience, the way in which travel time is utilised and experienced during long distance journeys indicates considerable scope to attract more families to rail. This is however contingent on the employment of more family-focussed marketing and 'child friendly' initiatives on the part of the rail industry.

1. Introduction

The subject of children has received increasing attention in transport research over recent years, with both qualitative studies focussing on children's psycho-social perception of transport (Davison et al 2003; Ross 2007; Baslington 2009; Kopnina 2011; Lorenc et al 2008) and larger scale analysis looking at children's changing mobility patterns over time in relation to school and leisure trips undertaken (Pooley et al 2005; Mackett 2001; Mackett 2002; Dixey 1998). The message is clear with regards to how children perceive and utilise transport; we are 'socialising' our children to car use i.e. their travel behaviour is being determined by the influence of agents such as the family, school, the media and wider society (Baslington 2007). This increasing car dependency is cause for concern for a number of reasons. Firstly not only is increased car use amongst children linked to a reduction in their physical activity and health problems such as obesity (Cooper et al 2005), but children also miss out on the opportunity to develop road-based skills and independent mobility which has implications for cognitive and behavioural development (Mackett 2002; Rissotto and Tonucci 2002). Secondly, the need for change is not just current but generational. As Kopnina (2011 p573) asserts, car use is projected to dramatically increase in the coming decades "and the future drivers are sitting at the school desks now". Increased car use amongst this sub-set of the population will have significant negative impacts on future policies aimed at reducing car use (Mackett 2002) and unless action is taken to diversify children's travel patterns the challenge of modal shift will only intensify. Concentrating on the drivers of tomorrow whilst they are still in the process of forming opinions about their transport choices is vital if we are to hope to facilitate a shift to sustainable transport modes in coming years.

Despite growing awareness of the need to reverse this increasing car dependency, there has been little work undertaken looking at the attitudes of those responsible for influencing the travel behaviour of the next generation i.e. the parents, care givers and family members who are chiefly tasked with 'getting children from A to B'. Indeed, it is interesting that, in contrast with disciplines such as geography, sociology and psychology, in transport studies the family has generally not been conceptualised as a distinct social group in the same way as, for example, 'older people' or 'disabled people' have (see the mobility review by Smith et al 2006 for evidence of this). This seems surprising given the distinct mobility needs associated with the dimensions of care and responsibility involved when travelling with children and the fact that adults travelling with children are likely to experience significantly different issues related to accessibility than adults travelling alone.

Where studies have explored the attitudes of adults travelling with children it has been primarily in the context of local bus travel. For example Hine and Scott (2000) and Hamilton et al (2000) highlight accessibility issues and the practicalities of boarding and alighting public transport with children (especially when carrying shopping or luggage). Whilst such research enables a better understanding of the instrumental barriers faced by those travelling with children, they provide little insight into the affective and emotional motivators influencing the ways in which parents choose to travel with their children. Understanding these effective and emotional motivators of adults is, arguably, even more important than understanding those of children, given the role of adults as care givers and 'agents of socialisation'.

In addition, research regarding adults travelling with children needs to be extended beyond the context of local bus travel, given that approximately a third of the total distance travelled in Britain is comprised of long distance journeys (Independent Transport Commission, 2010), with four out of every five of these journeys being made by car (DfT 2009). Furthermore, whilst there are inherent difficulties in getting people to change their travel behaviour and shift to more sustainable modes, there is evidence to suggest long distance journeys may be more susceptible to mode shift than peak trips (Stradling et al 2000). This is due primarily to the fact that 70% of long distance journeys are undertaken for leisure purposes such as holidays or visiting friends and relatives (Dargay 2010 p5) and thus time pressure is likely to be lower. Rail is seen as the 'next best alternative mode' for such journeys (Lucas and Jones 2009 p84), suggesting that long distance mode shift from car to rail should be explored as a key intervention target.

Hence, the objective of this study was to address these important gaps in the research by identifying what factors shape the decisions parents make when making long distance journeys with children and how these translate into mode choice, and exploring whether scope

exists to achieve modal shift. Our focus on the family unit and on long distance travel (defined as journeys of 50 miles or longer (DfT, 2009)) makes this a novel and intriguing study. In the next section, we briefly outline our methodology and the characteristics of our sample, before going on to present and discuss our results in section 3 and setting out our conclusions in section 4.

2. Methodology

Given the subject matter has not been previously explored, it was necessary to employ a method of data collection which would provide detailed insights into the attitudes, perceptions and views of families towards making long distance journeys. This led us to selecting to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews. Having the flexible approach to the discussion which this methodology affords enabled the responses of participants to be probed in greater detail than a large-scale quantitative survey of attitudes or focus group-based study would have allowed.

The research focuses specifically on adults who have made a long distance journey with children aged 11 and under. This age group was chosen recognising that younger children are not in the same position to exercise independent mobility as older children; not only are younger children more reliant on adults for their transport provision but adults are also responsible for shaping their views and attitudes towards transport which dictate the kinds of travel decisions children will make as they get older (Baslington 2007). Given that the people who are likely to be making such trips with children of that age are parents or grandparents recruitment was focussed around primary schools and parent & toddler groups in an attempt to gain access to families with children of a broad range of ages. The study area chosen was the Roundhay/Moortown area of North East Leeds, two of the more affluent wards in the city with relatively low levels of deprivation (Leeds City Council 2010; Leeds City Council 2010a). Given that people from the wealthiest 20% of households are twice as likely to undertake long distance journeys than those from the poorest 20% of households (ONS 2010), it was expected that conducting research in an area with these socio-demographic characteristics would provide access to a greater number of potential participants. A variation of purposive sampling known as theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was employed.

The interview schedule consisted of three sections, and employed open ended questions, developed using guidance outlined in Foddy (1993), to allow participants to express themselves in their own words and enable themes to be explored in-depth. Section one asked participants about long distance journeys which they had made with children in the past twelve months, and for their opinions on the positive and negative aspects of the mode used to undertake these journeys. This was designed to gain information on what factors respondents consider when planning a long distance journey with children and provide insights into the barriers to rail use. **Section two explored participants' attitudes towards long distance travel, via their responses to 32 statements developed on a 5-point Likert scale (Oppenheim, 1992). The following eight themes were explored through the statements:**

- time;
- cost;
- convenience;
- comfort;
- flexibility;
- individualism;
- the experience of long distance travel; and
- children and long distance travel.

For certain statements, and in instances where participants strongly agreed or strongly disagreed with a statement, prompts were asked in order to explore responses in more detail. The quantitative results generated by the Likert statements were used to provide context to our qualitative findings and illustrate interconnections between themes rather than to generate statistically significant findings. Given the relatively small sample size it was felt scaling, weighting and totalling the scores of responses would have been inappropriate.

Section 3 was designed to obtain information on participants' awareness of different aspects of rail travel, i.e. how much was known about initiatives such as the Friends & Family Railcard, sources of train travel information and fares perceptions, and knowledge of rail provision from Leeds. The inclusion of this section reflects the literature on smarter choices (Cairns et al 2004) which suggests accurate knowledge of travel options and information is vital if people are to change their travel behaviour. Prior to the interview prompts were posted or emailed to participants for use during Sections 2 and 3 of the interview.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed at a later date. They ranged from 21 minutes to 41 minutes in duration with median interview length of 30 minutes. Once transcripts had been generated a process of data analysis known as 'theoretical coding' was undertaken, following guidelines outlined in Flick (2006) based on Strauss and Corbin (1998).

Twenty-one women and four men were interviewed, all of whom had either pre-school or primary school aged children; some also had older children. In total, 50 children were represented through the interviews, ranging in age from 2 months to 16 years. All participants interviewed owned one or more cars with the majority (n=19) owning two or more. Eight of the participants have been classed as 'rail users' (i.e. they had made a long distance journey by train in the past year) and the remaining eighteen as 'non-users'. However, there were no participants who had made long distance journeys solely by rail so the distinction between these groups is rather blurred, with rail users also having made long distance journeys by car.

A total of 48 destinations were discussed with respondents. Seven of the trips had been made by rail, one by a combined rail/car trip (train there, car back) and forty by car. All but two of the respondents had made more than one long distance journey with children in the past year and the most frequently visited destination was London. London was also the only destination in the UK to which trips by train had been undertaken. None of those interviewed or recruited had made any long distance journeys by plane within the UK. Nearly three quarters of the trips discussed were 'day trips' or 'short breaks' (i.e. three nights or less), which was reflective of the fact that journeys had been deliberately chosen for discussion which were deemed to have the most potential for mode shift.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Instrumental Factors Influencing Mode Choice

3.1.1 Convenience

The research demonstrated convenience to be the most important factor dictating mode choice amongst families making long distance journeys with children. In this respect two main strands emerged: firstly, the convenience of the car with its ability to provide a flexible door-to-door service, where the need to put effort into forward planning is minimised; and secondly, the convenience of travelling with children - in relation to the need to carry children and safeguard their whereabouts, particularly for toddlers or babies in buggies, and to the need to transport all the implements and equipment which children require, particularly for holidays or trips of a longer duration.

Where a journey had been undertaken by car, participants were asked whether they had considered taking the train for that journey and the reasons why they hadn't decided to go by train. The majority (n=14) cited the 'convenience of a car' as the reason for this which was conceptualised in various ways. The overarching categories which emerged through the analysis in relation to the convenience of car travel are as follows:

- flexibility to depart and arrive when desired;
- flexibility of being able to stop when desired and make multiple stops as part of the journey;
- no need to wait for or pay for public transport/taxi connections at origin and destination;
- no need to make a change during the rail journey;
- ability to take luggage and all the other equipment desired; and
- ability to travel round once at the destination.

'Convenience' was qualified in various ways by different participants, indicating the way in which convenience is conceptualised differs from person to person depending on what aspects they view as being most important. These important aspects often reflect the option which requires least effort. Travelling by car was seen by respondents as "easy" as one doesn't have to plan ahead, worry about the "hassle" of connections, stick to timetables or consider the logistics of getting all the luggage and equipment needed for the trip onto public transport.

Interestingly though, the term 'convenience' was also used by four of the eight rail users when asked what they felt were the positive things about using the train for the journey they had made. Here the concept was linked to the ease and speed of travelling to central London and the ease of getting round by public transport once there; driving was seen as the more inconvenient option in this respect. As one participant asserted:

"[in London] having the car is a hindrance more than anything else cos of the expense of parking and time consuming nature of travelling in that urban environment... a ticket on the tube is really efficient when compared to travelling by car" (father, children aged 11, 8 and 3, rail user)

So whilst the concept of convenience is generally associated with the private car, the findings indicate that perceptions of convenience are not coupled with a particular mode per se, rather the ability of the mode to provide the aspects of the journey which the passenger most values. The public transport provision available in London was seen, by all respondents who mentioned it as their destination, as serving to increase the convenience of rail as compared with car. Whilst London might be viewed as a 'unique case', it is probable that if rail is to attract car users for long distance journeys, useful lessons can be learned in how to close the gap between the convenience of rail and of car. For example, efforts to achieve mode shift might best focus on journeys to urban centres where a direct train service and high quality public transport provision can be provided; a finding supported by previous literature (Crockett and Hounsell xx; and Brons and Rietveld, 2009).

The concept of convenience was also linked by the majority of participants specifically to the experience of travelling with children. Being able to take luggage and all the other equipment desired when making long distance journeys was seen to be important, as evidenced through the fact that ten respondents cited this as a factor when asked to list the positive things about using the car to make their long distance journeys. Furthermore, nearly 70% of respondents (n=17) disagreed or strongly disagreed with Likert Statement 11 "It's easy to bring the things I need when making long distance journeys with children by train", and none of the parents with children under the age of 3 agreed with this statement. Respondents spoke of the various equipment which is necessary when making journeys with young children for example buggies, nappies, toys, bikes, clothes, eating equipment, highchair, travel cot and a car seat for car/taxi journeys at the other end. Making such journeys by train was thus seen as very difficult or completely infeasible for many participants travelling with young children, although a number of respondents with children under the age of 3 stated the intention to use trains more as their children grew up, as it was felt it would become easier.

3.1.2 Cost

The research revealed cost to be an important factor influencing how participants planned long distance journeys. 88% of respondents either agreed (n=10) or strongly agreed (n=12) with Statement 5 "Keeping the cost of travel down is important when undertaking long distance journeys". Respondents who strongly agreed were questioned as to whether they thought this was the most important factor for them when planning long distance journeys; all said it was a consideration but usually in the "top three". Travel decisions were generally made on the basis of a combination of factors including the length of time the journey took and convenience.

Where a journey had been undertaken by car, participants were asked whether they had considered taking the train for that trip. Both respondents who said they had considered it (n=2, both non-users) had decided not to take the train for reasons relating to the cost of train tickets. The vast majority had *not* considered the train for the journeys discussed, with 11 participants citing cost as a reason why not. This was linked not only to the cost of train fares relative to a tank of petrol/diesel but the cost of getting connections at either end i.e. expensive taxi fares. It is worth noting that of the participants who related the cost of train travel to car travel, only one mentioned the need to factor in the running/maintenance costs of the car; the cost of long distance car travel appeared to equate primarily to the expense of fuel in the responses.

In general respondents did seem receptive to the idea of modal shift to train for long distance journeys and related this primarily to cost. Cheaper train fares was the most frequently cited factor in response to the question "Is there anything that would make you more likely to use trains to make long distance journeys with your children?"; this was linked to the need to obtain cheap fares at times when families wanted to travel i.e. in the school holidays or at weekends. Related to this, 80% of participants agreed (n=11) or strongly agreed (n=9) with the statement "I would be more likely to use trains for long distance journeys if it were cheaper" but there was no clear consensus as to whether this would replace a journey which would otherwise have been made by car, or whether this would generate a journey which would otherwise not have been made. It is possible that cheaper fares alone may not be sufficient to ensure a shift to more sustainable modes or a marked reduction in the amount of traffic overall, and may even lead to less 'sustainable' travel patterns in this respect. In order to provide an optimum outcome from an environmental point of view, efforts need to be focussed not only on the long distance rail journey but ensuring public transport provision is available and utilised at both the origin and destination.

3.1.3 Views on Rail Provision

In general respondents didn't perceive rail travel to offer an experience which makes it easy or convenient for families to travel by train. Participants felt that train companies made no special provision for families travelling with children over and above the "bare minimum" which other passengers got. This related not only to factors such as lack of baby changing facilities, assistance with baggage, poor station infrastructure (for example ticket barriers being difficult to navigate with toddlers) and lack of luggage provision, but also lack of child-specific initiatives such as special food provision, entertainment and things to keep children occupied during the journey:

"I don't think there's such a thing as a family carriage or the kind of thing they have at restaurants, restaurants which cater for children where there's colouring books and pencils, I guess you can take that kind of thing yourself but I haven't seen trains offering that kind of thing which would be quite cheap and welcoming" (mother, child age 3 and 1, non-user)

As this indicates there are ways in which train companies could be responding better to the needs of families travelling with children. This relates not only to the convenience of travelling with luggage and children's equipment but also the need to keep children entertained during the journey and ensure the provisions which are important when making long distance journeys with children are available and accessible.

Various participants suggested it would be positive if more was provided for children on trains through initiatives such as free activity packs, dedicated family spaces within trains and on-board entertainment:

"I think on one of the long trains, a busy route, they could probably do with having a family carriage which'd be good for families and also good for business men. Business men don't want to be sat with screaming kids... I think it'd be good all round really. And then they could have games and... maybe kids programs and stuff" (mother, children aged 17 and 2, non-rail user)

Such initiatives were seen as particularly important from a behaviour point of view, as a number of participants expressed the worry of disturbing other passengers with their children. Knowing that there would be an area where parents could be with their children and the children are allowed to "giggle and play" and "just be kids", was seen as important and something which would encourage families to use trains more. Indeed, respondents mentioned their experiences of on-board entertainment on public transport in Mexico, Pakistan and the USA, and the provision of children's soft-play areas on trains in France. Airlines were mentioned by a number of participants who felt they'd like to see initiatives like the backpacks and activity packs many provided for children offered by train companies.

Whilst there was general agreement that child-friendly initiatives were a positive thing for younger children, and nearly half of respondents (n=12) stated that such initiatives would make them more likely to use trains for long distance journeys, it is difficult to ascertain in the scope of this research whether such intentions would transpire into modal shift in actuality. It is interesting to note that of the twelve respondents who answered yes, only two were rail users; the majority of the other respondents had spoken, at other points in the interview, of the need to travel by car with children for reasons of convenience relating to the factors discussed in 3.1.1. It is doubtful whether even if dedicated family carriages were provided they would, on their own, be able to surpass the convenience factor offered by the car. However, such findings do help to illustrate that families are receptive to taking alternative modes of transport, and that not enough is being done by train companies to attract families to rail. Although further work would need to be undertaken to ascertain the operational feasibility of implementing such initiatives, as highlighted offerings such as activity packs or colouring books would be relatively easy to implement and would make the long distance rail experience much more appealing to parents travelling with children.

Participants were asked to look at a leaflet/screenshot of the Family & Friends Railcard (Family & Friends Railcard 2011) and questioned whether they had heard of the initiative before. Some 64% (n=16) either hadn't heard of it or were unsure. When the concept was explained to these respondents and they were asked "would this card make you more likely to use trains to make long distance journeys?", 13 answered affirmatively. Some participants were very positive and spoke practically of including it into their travel plans

"I'm actually considering a train journey to Brighton in the school holidays and looking into it if it costs more than it would do to drive then I'm probably not going to do it. Bearing in mind I know it'll cost quite a lot in petrol to drive... If paying £28 would give me a significant reduction then yeah" (mother, children aged 7 and 5, rail user)

However, other respondents answered "yes possibly" or said they'd consider getting one but other factors would still take priority for example the ease of getting to the destination by train. The findings relating to awareness of the F&FRC are particularly significant given that a number of participants (n=5) who hadn't heard of the initiative spoke of making journeys by train for other purposes, for example business travel or leisure travel with other adults. One would expect these participants to have better knowledge of such initiatives than participants who never travelled by train. This indicates the need to raise awareness of such initiatives not only through the 'traditional' means but also through more diverse marketing channels. This is particularly important if families who would not normally consider travelling by train are to be attracted to rail for long distance journeys.

3.2 Affective Perceptions of Long Distance Travel

3.2.1 Travel Time

The experience of travel was overwhelmingly seen as an enjoyable and positive activity in its own right. 92% of respondents agreed (n=17) or strongly agreed (n=6) that travel should be an enjoyable part of the overall holiday/trip experience; as one participant asserted:

"I love travelling... as soon as I've stepped out the house I'm on my holidays, even if it's just for a daytrip... (it's) part of the experience for me" (mother, children aged 17 and 2, non-rail-user). Over three quarters of respondents disagreed (n=17) or strongly disagreed (n=2) with Likert Statement 25 "The only good thing about travelling is arriving at your destination".

Participants who answered in this respect were prompted with the question "what do you think it is about travel that makes it a positive experience?". This elicited a variety of responses relating to the way in which travel time was spent. For example if travelling alone, participants valued having the time to read, listen to music, engage with fellow passengers if travelling by train or just think. The majority of respondents (n=14) related the prompt to the experience of rail travel (including those who hadn't used the train to make a long distance journey with children. The train was viewed as a pleasant experience in and of itself and was seen to afford the opportunity to do things as a family such as chatting, playing games and snacking together. In this respect travel time was seen as a positive and stimulating time for the children as well as adults.

However these findings contrast markedly with the results of Statement 1 "When making long distance journeys I like to get from A to B as quickly as possible"; 84% of respondents agreed (n=8) or strongly agreed (n=13) with this. Participants who answered affirmatively were prompted with the question "are there any particular reasons you like to minimise the time you spend travelling". A variety of reasons was given for this, relating primarily to the view of travel time as a means to an end or "wasted time" when people could be doing other more productive things or spending time at the destination. Many of the responses related to the experience of travelling with children, both their attention span for travelling and the physical requirements of children which were seen to be unpredictable at times.

Interestingly 15 respondents who agreed (n=6) or strongly agreed (n=9) with Statement 1 disagreed with Statement 25. Table 1 contrasts the responses of a selection of participants in this regard:

Table 1. Contrast of responses to Statement 1 and Statement 25
Source: Own Work

Respondent	Likert Statement 1... "are there any particular reasons why you like to minimise the time you spend travelling?"	Likert Statement 25... "what do you think it is about travel that makes it a positive experience?"
Mother, child aged 8, rail user	"I think it's a waste of time, I could be getting on doing other things if I'm not travelling. I'm restricted in what I can do so it's just lost time I guess and lost opportunity"	"You can learn things as you go... if you're travelling on the train you get to take in the views, you might meet somebody on the train and chat to them, have a relaxing time to read a book you've wanted to read for ages, do some work. And if you're travelling by car then it's a family experience... you can take in the views, you can have a catch up, you can sing... there's loads of things that can be fun about travelling. It's what you make of it."
Mother, children aged 2 and 1, non-user	"I guess it's not particularly much fun, you know just being sat in one place, the boredom factor I suppose, you want to make it as quickly as possible"	"If you're going on holiday you should try and make it part of the holiday. Rather than 'right we're going from here to here and then we can enjoy ourselves' trying to enjoy yourself during the journey"
Father, child aged 2, non-user	"Because generally if you are travelling... say on a weekend or if you go and see family, the longer you travel the less time you've got to see people or relax"	"When you travel generally you get to see things, hear things and... take in what's happening around you. You can learn quite a lot. Certainly... that's one aspect of public transport that's quite good"
Mother, child aged 5, rail user	Where the journeys is just a means of getting to something else then yes... when we're within the UK it's just to get to friends or family"	"I think the train in itself is a pleasant experience, certainly I think children love being on the train"

Related to this, the majority of participants (80%) agreed (n=14) or strongly agreed (n=6) that time spent travelling as a family is quality time to be enjoyed by all. When prompted to explain this in greater detail respondents echoed the aforementioned sentiments and spoke of how they valued the opportunity to simply be in the company of their partner and children:

"It's quite nice to be actually forced to sit and all you can do is chat or play games together... when I'm at home it's like [the children] will be outside, they'll be upstairs, they'll be with their friends, they'll be watching something on TV. It's very hard, no matter how much you try to force a family to sit together... to spend time together" (mother, children aged 10, 9 and 9, non-rail-user)

These findings highlight an apparent contradiction in the attitudes of respondents. Although travel time is an important factor and one that respondents instinctively seek to minimise, the experience of travel time with children in a long distance leisure context is actually viewed in quite a positive light, particularly when undertaken by rail. Parents overwhelmingly value the time they get to spend as families when making long distance journeys both by train and by car; the time is used productively not only to undertake activities but also to engage and be with their children in ways they may not get chance to during the busy working/school week. The leisure trip doesn't just begin when the destination is reached, rather transport is an important and, for the majority of families travelling with children, an enjoyable part of the overall experience.

Our findings appear to support previous work demonstrating that travel time can be used productively and can even be desired for its own sake (Mokhtarian and Salomon 2001; Mokhtarian et al 2001; Lyons et al 2007; Jain and Lyons 2008; DfT 2009d; Dickinson et al 2011). The primacy which is traditionally placed in transport planning on minimising travel time appears to be failing to take into account the importance of affective factors associated with the journey experience. Our research demonstrates that these affective factors are evidently of great value to families travelling with children in a leisure context.

3.2.2 Views on Long Distance Train Travel

Participants were asked specific questions regarding their views on long distance train travel, particularly in relation to the experience of travelling with children. 72% of participants agreed (n=15) or strongly agreed (n=3) with Statement 15 "Going by train for long distances is more relaxing than going by car". When prompted as to why they thought this was the case most respondents cited the fact one doesn't have to concentrate on driving and stay alert to navigate traffic. The nature of travelling with children by car was highlighted by some participants as reasons why the train was less stressful:

"The fact you can get a snack, you can chat, you can play... you're not one adult trying to concentrate hard on the driving with a fractious child." (mother, child aged 5, rail user)

This contrasts markedly with participants' experiences of long distance car travel; when asked to cite the negative aspects of this mode the most common response (mentioned by thirteen participants) related to the difficulties tending to children and keeping them entertained or occupied, particularly when caught in traffic jams or heavy traffic. It appears that train travel has a significant advantage over car travel in this respect, particularly given the fact long distance driving is viewed by many as a stressful and tiring experience (mentioned by seven participants).

76% agreed (n=14) or strongly agreed (n=5) with Statement 29 "My children would enjoy travelling by train for long distance journeys". Of the six participants who felt their children wouldn't enjoy travelling by train for long distance journeys five had children under the age of 3 and qualified their responses by saying their children were too young to appreciate it or understand the experience. Parents who agreed felt their children would enjoy the freedom to move around, visit the buffet carriage, play games and read, and the fact the experience would be a novelty:

"They would love to travel by trains cos they don't do it very often... My eldest was very excited to [travel by train]... he found it really exciting and interesting the whole ticket thing, getting the tickets and putting them through the barriers... sitting and reading a magazine on the train and things, yeah he loved it." (mother, children aged 5 and 3, non-user[?])

This sentiment was reflected in some of the responses given by participants when asked "Have you made any other journeys by public transport with your children recently?". 80% of respondents (n=20) had done so and when prompted further their experiences were overwhelmingly positive. Respondents spoke of their children's enjoyment of using buses or local trains, again due to the novelty factor and the fact it's done infrequently:

"the children absolutely love it, it's really special for them... we don't do it often... occasionally we take the bus and it's as a treat for the children" (mother, children aged 8, 6, 3 and 8 months, non-user)

"When we went down south we parked up in Camden and took the underground, two different underground trains down to the Science Museum... the bit that (the children) remembered most of the whole day was the fact that they went on the underground and they got to go on two different trains, it was just very exciting stuff... yeah they loved it" (mother, children aged 4, 2 and 6 months, non-user)

The findings indicate that parents have an overwhelmingly positive view of rail with long distance train travel being seen as a relaxing experience which provides quality and enjoyable time both for adults and children. This contrasts with the view expressed by many participants that long distance car travel can be a difficult or stressful experience when made with children. In this respect there may be significant potential to market the long distance rail experience to families by drawing on such positive factors. Of course the aim of mode shift is to get people habitually using more sustainable transport and there is the possibility that if rail was used more the experience would stop being 'novel' and there may be less incentive to switch from the private car. However given the affective benefits of travelling by train, particularly in relation to travel time as explored in 3.2.1, rail has the potential to appeal to families through more than just this 'novelty value'.

4. Conclusions

Convenience emerges as the overwhelming factor influencing respondents' decision to travel by car for long distance journeys. For families, convenience is related not only to factors such as flexibility, door-to-door ease and ability to travel round at the destination, but also the ability to transport all the equipment and luggage needed when travelling with children with ease. In this respect, the 'convenience factor' is an even bigger barrier to rail use than it is for adults travelling alone or with older children. Whilst it was felt there is more train companies could do to improve the rail experience for families, given operational constraints it is doubtful that train could ever compete with the private car in this regard. Efforts to elicit sustainable modal shift will probably be most successful for the kind of journeys where the gap between the convenience of rail and of car is narrowest, such as journeys of a shorter duration (daytrips or short breaks) to urban centres where a direct train service and high quality public transport provision at the destination can be provided.

The cost of train travel was revealed to be another barrier to use. The nature of rail travel in Britain lends itself well to family leisure trips of the type explored in this study, i.e. tickets can be booked cheaply in advance (even more so if a F&FRC is used) with the guarantee of seats around a table. General lack of awareness of the F&FRC suggests that more needs to be done to promote awareness in this regard. Unless train travel is promoted in this way it is doubtful rail would be a cost effective option for many families travelling with children. In this respect increased marketing initiatives, aimed not only at adults already travelling by train but at parents more widely, would be of value.

At the same time, long distance train travel is overwhelmingly seen as a positive experience and there are many, primarily affective, benefits associated with the mode. Train travel was seen not only as a pleasant and relaxing experience for adults but an enjoyable experience for children. Whilst respondents instinctively seek to minimise travel time, the experience of long distance travel - both by rail and by car - is valued as an overwhelmingly positive 'quality time' experience when made with children. The potential exists to capitalise on this to instigate modal shift away from the car for particular types of long distance leisure travel, provided the experience is marketed in a way in which appeals to the factors which families most value. The notion of marketing is key here. However as Steg and Tertoolen (2004 p72) assert:

"in public transport professional marketing strategies are hardly being used. A main reason for this absence is lack of knowledge about the backgrounds and motives of various target groups"

This study has explored the motivations of a specific social group, clearly revealed scope for mode shift and provided useful pointers for marketing and policy. Whilst our sample is not attempting to be representative of the journey patterns and travel choices of the broader population of families with young children, the insights we offer provide a firm basis for further, perhaps more quantitative based, research. In particular, further work to identify the destinations or journey purposes with greatest potential for modal shift, and to quantify the degree of modal shift which could be achieved amongst families undertaking long distance journeys under different scenarios would be useful. The importance of attracting more children to use public transport would suggest there is certainly a requirement for further work in this respect.