

POINT OF VIEW

CONTEMPORARY PATTERNS OF MOBILITY IN RELATION TO THE WELLBEING ISSUE

How can quality of life be enhanced in the transport context?

From the Transdev/Ipsos wellbeing and mobility survey. A study carried out in June 2009 with a representative national sample of 7,000 individuals aged 15 and over in seven countries: Germany, Spain, France, United Kingdom, Italy, United States and Japan (1,000 individuals questioned on line in each countries).



How can the wellbeing of our contemporaries be enhanced? This question has become a central one in our developed societies: the development of stress, the cult of speed, the economic slow-down, the ecological crisis, etc. Both governments and enterprises need to respond to these new issues. Question: where does mobility fit into this context? Or to be more precise: how is transport perceived when assessed by the yardstick of quality of life? And what are the possible avenues for development to enhance the wellbeing of transport users?

We look below at a highly topical issue.

/ Wellbeing: an issue back in the spotlight of economic debate and policy

For some ten years now, there have been increasing numbers of studies and research programmes focused on the economic and social topicality of the issue of individual wellbeing. The economic crisis that began in 2008 has revived interest in such questions. How can economic development be reconciled with personal wellbeing? How can the concrete effects of economic decisions on the comfort and quality of life of citizens be measured other than by a financial yardstick alone?

The common denominator of all this research and all these initiatives is to be found in the desire to build objective indicators for quality of life. It is indeed necessary, if we are to be sure of making real progress on wellbeing for a given population, to be able to measure the outward expression of that wellbeing as objectively as possible. Numerous proposals have been put forward with this in mind. Among them are, for example, the efforts of the commission chaired by Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen (which the media call the "Stiglitz Commission"). This work was made public in September 2009. The two Nobel laureates propose the introduction, alongside indicators of economic production (GDP, household income, assets, etc.), of subjective indicators for the evaluation by individuals themselves of their own circumstances (levels of satisfaction, positive emotions, individual evaluations of happiness, negative emotions, and so on) and 'physical' indicators for evaluation of the impact of economic development on the environment (measurement of greenhouse gases, ecological footprint, etc.).

In the same vein, the OECD's recommendations have for several years been moving in the direction of a new balance between measurement of economic performance and measurement of individual wellbeing. This is a significant change in focus for an organisation that has hitherto tended to be dominated by exclusively economic considerations. The times are changing ...

It is also necessary to observe that the years 2000-2009 were a period rich in psychological research on the measurement of wellbeing and happiness. This research field, officially recognised by American universities since 1998, has been particularly lively. The popularity of a Harvard professor such as Tal Ben-Shahar, author of the best-seller *Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*, testifies to that liveliness. Generally speaking, people are increasingly aware that part of the solution to the malaise they feel lies within themselves. The very large number of personal development theories and methods reflects genuine demand in this area.

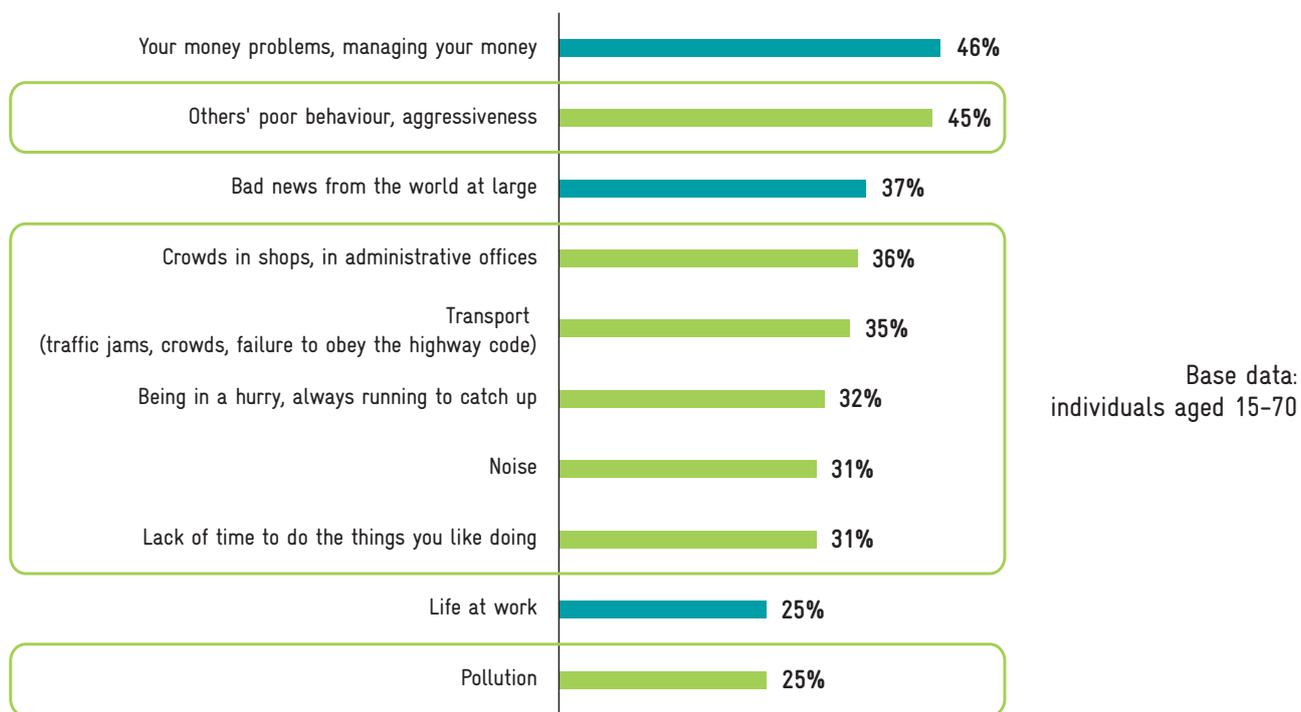
For all these reasons, it is now difficult to avoid the issue of wellbeing. Because, looking forward to the near future, all the indications are that such research will continue, gaining an ever expanding audience in the years to come. And in fact, today it concerns all actors and leaders in the economy. Governments, enterprises – both public and private – will have to face up to such issues and take appropriate policies forward. What will happen to transport in this context? The link between mobility and wellbeing is in fact an aspect to which research has hitherto paid very little attention. Nevertheless, immediately one looks closely at the domains in which a high level of demand for wellbeing and quality of life is being expressed, the transport sector can be seen to be in the firing line ...

/ Expectations with regard to wellbeing are particularly strong in the area of transport

As our international wellbeing survey shows, the issue of wellbeing is of particular concern for the transport sector.

Today, mobility is a source of stress

It is a fact. Problems connected with transport (traffic jams, breaches of the highway code, crowding in public transport, etc.) are now a source of stress for a large percentage of transport users. This can be said because although money problems continue to be the main source of anxiety for our contemporaries – especially in this period of economic crisis – the sources of annoyance experienced whenever one travels by car or public transport affect individuals significantly. For example, 35% of respondents state that this is a source of stress in their personal lives. In some countries, this percentage even exceeds 40%: in France for example (43%), Italy (44%) and Spain (42%). When ranking the reasons for dissatisfaction in daily life, these problems come fifth out of twenty-three. In



SOURCE: IPSOS, june 2009.

FIGURE 1. Regular causes of difficulties or stress in the personal life of questioned individuals

other words, they play a dominant part in the litany of daily irritations and make a major contribution to the diminution of feelings of individual wellbeing.

When the survey data are studied in detail, it is apparent that feelings of annoyance or discomfort when using transport are experienced by all age groups, and tend to worsen with age. Indeed, from the age of 45 upwards the percentage of those who state that they suffer from such problems rises to 38%. Given this, the ageing of the population is likely to worsen these already poor statistics in the future. And indeed, it is possible to see here one of the major challenges for tomorrow's transport: how can satisfactory mobility be provided for the oldest among us?

The difficulties encountered when using transport thus testify to a high level of demand for wellbeing which is being expressed in devel-

oped societies today. Furthermore, it testifies to the strategic position of transport in the catalogue of measures that need to be taken as a priority if the quality of life for today's citizens is to be improved. Those measures are numerous. They relate not only to the humanisation of the conditions in which transport is used, but also to the mitigation of problems of traffic congestion, improvements to passenger information on traffic conditions, and so on.

Managing feelings of urgency: the central role of transport in the management of personal schedules

If one goes further in analysing the sources of dissatisfaction in daily life, the central issue of the management of personal schedules needs also to be particularly highlighted. This is an issue that is highly dependent on the means of transport. Here again, the figures are expressive of significant levels of frustration. On average, one third of respondents stated that they felt stress due to lack of time. This was a difficulty felt particularly strongly by women and those under 35. And the last ten years have been marked by the increasing prevalence of a feeling of lack of time to do everything the individual wants to do. In France, it is estimated that one third of the population describe themselves as “constantly running to catch up”.

In the area of transport, such feelings of frustration reflect major needs for wellbeing connected with the optimisation of journey times. Anything that provides better information on

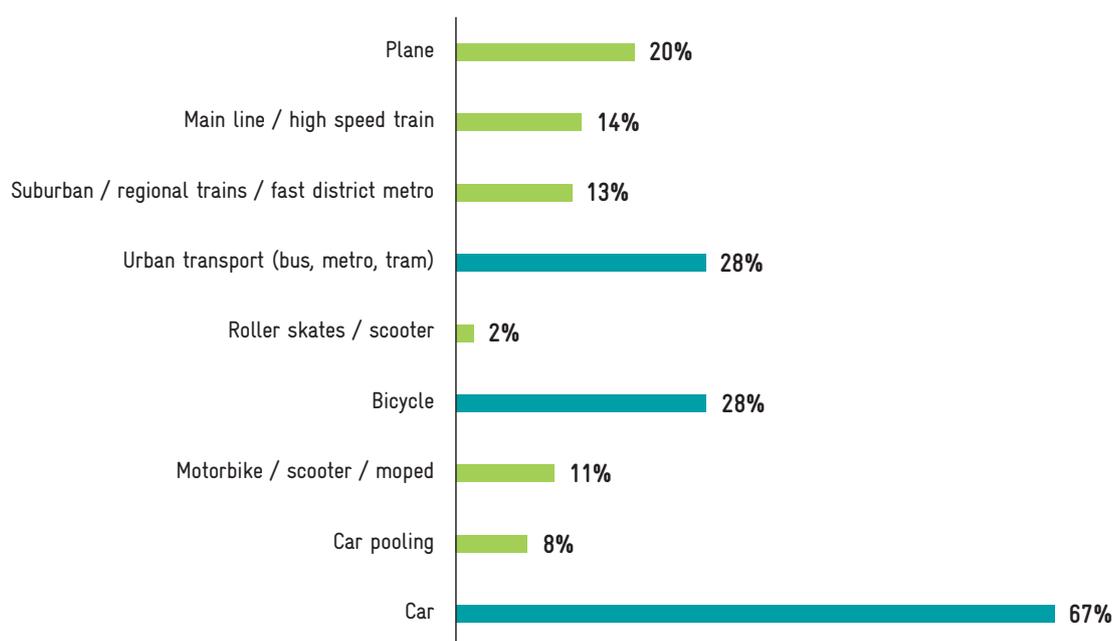
transport parameters (timetables, weather conditions, traffic congestion, the shortest routes, etc.) will enhance passenger wellbeing. Similarly, an improvement in the synchronisation of different transport modes will directly contribute to personal wellbeing.

Increased use of new technologies (GPS, mobile information systems, and the like) should make it possible in the future to reduce dissatisfaction in this area.

Growing ecological awareness

Another growing source of dissatisfaction: feelings of discomfort due to pollution, not only that generated by cars, but also by transport vehicles generally. Of those questioned, 25% said that they experienced discomfort in their personal lives due to pollution issues. This was also true of 38% of Italians and 32% of French respondents.

Should we see in this the reason for the current attractiveness of the bicycle? In any event, one is forced to observe that when people are asked



SOURCE:
IPSOS, june 2009.

FIGURE 2. Means of transport the questioned population envisage using more in the years to come.

what means of transport they intend to use as their preferred modes in the years to come, the bicycle ties for second place (28%) with public transport (tram, bus, metro, etc.).

In general, a growing awareness can be seen that may in some cases even reach the point of feelings of guilt. Although this does usually come up against the harsh realities of life: the car thus continues to be by far the most attractive mode of transport for the future. Those car owners that admit to having reduced their use of it are in a minority. Among car owners, only 24% say they use it less for short journeys. It is in Germany (35%) and Japan (29%) that such reduction is the most widespread. And the most assiduous in this regard are women and seniors. It has to be admitted that the car is particularly well suited to the mind-set of individuals today. As such, it provides a bubble that confers a feeling of security in which the individual has the feeling of being independent of space and time in a way. In every country except Japan, it is also a symbol of luxury, proof that the car has succeeded in embodying a particularly aspirational side of present-day consumer society.

The reduction in sources of pollution and the movement towards sustainable modes of transport protective of the environment are responses to this concern. The automotive market, hard hit by the crisis, is in the process of redeploying its forces in this direction. Urban public transport, and rail, have in principle a major advantage over cars since they help reduce pollution. But the spread of these modes comes up against barriers not only in terms of economic feasibility, but also, as we have seen, with regard to the issue of wellbeing ...

/ The solutions: satisfying the demand for mobility

Mobility continues to have very positive value today

Although transport users express a high level of demand for greater wellbeing in the transport context, mobility as such continues to have high value as a major source of personal fulfilment in modern societies.

The attractiveness of travel is a striking illustration of this. Today, 64% of respondents state that travelling, the discovery of other cultures, is something that gives them great personal satisfaction: on a 'scale of wellbeing' from 1 to 10, they grade travelling at 7 or more. Travelling can thus be seen to be a major source of feelings of wellbeing for most individuals, even if it does not have the same fundamental importance as health, family, friends or freedom of personal expression. That attractiveness is not really dependent on age and continues to be high at all stages in life, although it tends to reach particularly high levels in the 60-70 age group (68%). In addition, it is more marked in Latin countries (i.e. France, Italy, Spain).

Value is not attached to mobility only in high levels of interest in travelling: it also has a place of choice among personal preferences in the lives of respondents. For example, the key factors for feelings of wellbeing as experienced in daily life include social relationships (family, marital partnerships, friends), situations of relaxation and rest (sleeping, doing nothing, showering), along with rambling and strolling. Mobility, in one of its concrete embodiments, can in this way be seen as a major factor in the self-fulfilment of individuals in daily life. To sum up, it might almost be said that no day can ever be 'ideal' without some mobility.

Additionally, the data gathered in recent years tends to show that people are continuing to travel despite the crisis. Year in, year out, the

percentage of those stating the intention to go on holiday in the short or medium term remains unchanged over time – in the region of 60–65%. In actual fact, while the choices made necessary by the crisis and the fear of what will come tomorrow has led some to change the way they see their holiday (more careful budgeting, shorter trips or trips to nearer destinations, etc.), the principle of the holiday journey is itself firmly rooted among personal priorities and seems not to have been sacrificed on the altar of the problems caused by the economic climate.

And lastly, if we look forward on the basis of individuals' longer-term aspirations, they will continue to express strong demand for travelling and mobility. Although ranked far below the car, the plane is among the means of transport that people most want to use in the future (20% on average, or even as high as 24% for seniors). This score can be seen to be all the more important when it is compared with the current actual level of air travel, which remains very occasional for the majority of the population, or even totally non-existent for a not insignificant segment of it.

This is another way of saying that travelling is still among the core aspirations of individuals. And indeed, it is the French, the Italians and the Spanish, the very people who assign travelling the highest level of importance as a source of wellbeing, who want to travel by air most in the future. In this way, a context characterised by economic crisis and a rising tide of ecological concerns has not undermined the fundamental desire for mobility and travel that drive the majority of people.

And it would not seem to be the case that this positive value attached to mobility is likely to be undermined any time soon. This can be asserted because one of the major lessons to be drawn from this study is that seniors form the population segment that attaches the most positive value to mobility. Compared with the population as a whole, this is the segment that travels most, that wishes to travel by air most

in the future, and the one most willing to describe travelling as a source of wellbeing. There is a degree of logic to this given that in Western societies, the newly retired are those that have most time and money for travel, making them an increasingly highly prized customer base for travel agents.

Over the years to come, it may well be the case that the ageing of the population will not bring this desire for mobility down from its pedestal – quite the contrary.

Five key indicators for “mobile wellbeing” or “wellbeing while mobile”

Given all the above, the issue that arises now for mobility is how to define its specific criteria for wellbeing. Just as economists are endeavouring to redraw the boundaries of economic measurement, including new criteria, transport industry professionals are also obliged to build a classification of quality-of-life indicators applicable to their own field.

The results of our survey enable us to lay the foundations of what could be an evaluation of quality of life in transport that is as precise as possible. Naturally, the list that follows is not exhaustive:

- **Enhanced safety and security:** this is a demand observed in all countries, and especially in the United Kingdom and United States. Security is a key factor for personal wellbeing.
- **Enhanced information systems:** this is a need linked to increasingly fragmented individual lifestyles. The solutions need to involve not only improvements in the clarity and reliability of the information, but also the synchronisation of the different information systems, both fixed and mobile, and more intensive use of the possibilities for interactivity.
- **Promotion of modes of transport more protective of the environment:** taking care of one's own wellbeing is increasingly associated with care for one's environment, both near and far.

- **Technology-based accessibility:** technology is increasingly widespread and the possibility of using technology anywhere and anytime is increasingly a condition to be met for perceived quality in any location or mode of transport.
 - **Physical comfort:** there are many quite concrete avenues to be explored for enhancing individual wellbeing: noise-free spaces, noise being a major source of discomfort today (31% indicate that it is a major source of stress); spaces reserved for children; heated waiting areas; accessibility adapted to meet the needs of seniors, among others. ■
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ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS



- **Marie-Catherine Beaudoux**
Innovation & Business Strategy Director, Veolia Transdev
marie-catherine.beaudoux@veoliatransdev.com



- **Sandrine De-Boras**
Marketing Expert, Veolia Transdev
PhD Student, Transportation Economics Laboratory
sandrine.deboras@veoliatransdev.com



- **Rémy Oudghiri**
Trends and Insights department Director, IPSOS
remy.oudghiri@ipsos.com



FOR SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE MOBILITY

The Mobility LAB observes and analyses trends relating to mobility in a large number of countries. As a locus for encounters and exchanges between research work and field experiences, it takes into account expectations of the public and local government authorities in order to build solutions to propose to them.

Contact: Marie-Catherine Beaudoux (+33) 1 41 09 24 90 / mobilitylab@veoliatransdev.com
Mobility LAB, Innovation & Sustainable Development Dept.
9, rue Maurice Mallet – 92445 Issy-Les-Moulineaux Cedex • www.veoliatransdevlab.com



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