

New study finds link between accessible transport and general health

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New research suggests that better transportation infrastructure can lead to better health for citizens.

The study, conducted by researchers with University College London in England, found that people who frequently travel about 24 kilometres or more outside of their neighbourhood report feeling healthier than those who remain closer to their home base.

The most significant reason, the study concludes, comes down to socialization.

“Those who travel to a wider variety of places are more likely to see friends and family,” a press release explained. “This increase in social participation is then linked to better [general] health.”

The university’s researchers maintain that the results define a larger need for investment into medium and long-distance transportation options – whether it’s in better services roads or increased accessibility to buses and trains.

Their findings, published in the journal *Transport & Health*, are rooted in transit trend data in northern England, a region that suffers from weak transportation access and which faces worse comparative health outcomes than the rest of England.

Researchers analyzed correlations between perceived travel limitations outside of a local area – such as insufficient public transit – and self-reported health statuses of survey participants. The research also evaluated the number of different places visited, distance covered, and frequency of travel.

The study’s lead author, Paulo Anciaes, a researcher with UCL Bartlett School of Environment, Energy and Resources said in the press release that perceptions of social engagement play a large role in an individual’s assessment of perceived health.

“We explored the links between constraints to travel more than (24 kilometres) from home, demographics and location and social participation in how residents perceived their own health, finding that the key variable is the number of different places people visit outside their local area. This links to more social participation and better health.”

The findings also suggested that age is a major factor in the benefits of travel and the perceived consequences of remaining close to home.

“Those aged over 55 are more likely to face other constraints to travel such as limited mobility,” Anciaes explained. “They are also more likely to suffer from loneliness.”

“The results of this study emphasise the need for public policies that reduce constraints to travel in the region, by providing better options for private and public transport that allows for more frequent and longer trips.”