

Serving passengers – Are you being served?
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Serve passenger trips comprised 17% of all trips made by Sydney residents on an average weekday in 2006. In terms of distance travelled, these trips also made up a substantial 13% of all trips. Of these trips, an overwhelming majority (89%) were made in a private vehicle.

‘Serve passenger’ trips can broadly be defined as ‘dropping off / picking up someone’ or ‘accompanying someone’. Serve passenger car trips are often undertaken within the context of a given household, and they differ from car-pooling trips and other vehicle sharing trips. In Sydney in 2006, households engaged in vehicle sharing car trips in a variety of ways. In the greatest number of instances (39%), the driver served a household passenger.

Aside from constituting the largest portion of shared household car trips, this paper focused on serve passenger *car* trips because they have a concerning impact on the environment; their VKT (vehicle kilometres travelled) are potentially doubled in cases where the serve passenger car trip is a dedicated trip followed by a return journey home. Indeed, the data showed that of all serve passenger car trips, over a third were associated with another trip back home.

In Sydney, serve passenger car trips alone equated to an estimated 15 million VKT on an average weekday and 11.2 million VKT on an average weekend day in 2006. In a year, this accounted for 5.1 billion VKT or approximately 1.2 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of serve passenger trips and their associated VKT grew faster than the population. On an average weekday, the serve passenger car trips grew faster than all car driver trips.

Serve passenger car trips also affect our society in other ways. As later discussion will show, many trips are to drive children to school. This growing trend since the 1970s has other implications; school children are switching from healthy and sustainable modes, such as walking, to being car passengers. This impacts children’s general health and well-being as well as safety in school zones.

Broad analysis showed that there were marked differences on the average number of serve passenger car driver trips across various socio-demographic characteristics. The main findings are:

- Women made statistically more serve passenger car trips than men on weekdays. This figure equalised on weekends.
- On weekdays, unemployed persons, those keeping house and part-time/voluntary/ casual workers (those who have more discretionary time than full-time workers in particular) made statistically more serve passenger car trips than full-time workers, pensioners, and students. On weekends, the differences are slight.
- Households with children made statistically more serve passenger car trips than those without children. This finding is particularly pronounced on weekdays.

Detailed analysis showed that on an average weekday, serve passenger trips account for more than a quarter of all car driver trips in the morning peak. Over a third of all serve household passenger trips are to drive children to school, a growing trend in recent years.