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Car-less or Car-free? Socioeconomic and Mobility Differences Among Zero-Car Households

Anne E. Brown (2017)

Brief by: Ryan Yowell

RESEARCH TOPIC

Zero-car households are increasingly viewed by transportation planners and policymakers as a benchmark for a new generation of travelers. The presumption is that these travelers are liberated from the hassles of car ownership and often guided by environmental concerns. But what if the lack of a personal car represents not a chosen freedom but a mobility burden?

Using data from the 2012 California Household Travel Survey, UCLA scholar Anne E. Brown explored the motivations between those who do not own a car due to choice (car-free) or constraint (car-less). She then compared car-free and car-less households in terms of both their socioeconomic characteristics and their relative share of total zero-car households. Brown's findings provide policymakers and planners with important considerations for how to prioritize transportation spending in order to reach those most in need.

MAIN FINDINGS

The majority (79%) of zero-car households are car-less. Most zero-car households do not own a car because of economic or physical constraints, not by choice.

Households with higher incomes are more likely to be car-free.

Car-less households mirror the captive transit population. They have lower household incomes, lower educational attainments, and are disproportionately non-white compared to car-free households.

Car-free households travel more per day than car-less households. However, carshare memberships increase trips and miles traveled for all zero-car households.

STUDY APPROACH

Using travel diary data from the 2012 California Household Travel Survey, Brown categorized zero-car households into two groups: Those who chose to be car-free, and those who were car-less due to economic or other constraints. Brown then used descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression models to compare mobility between these groups.

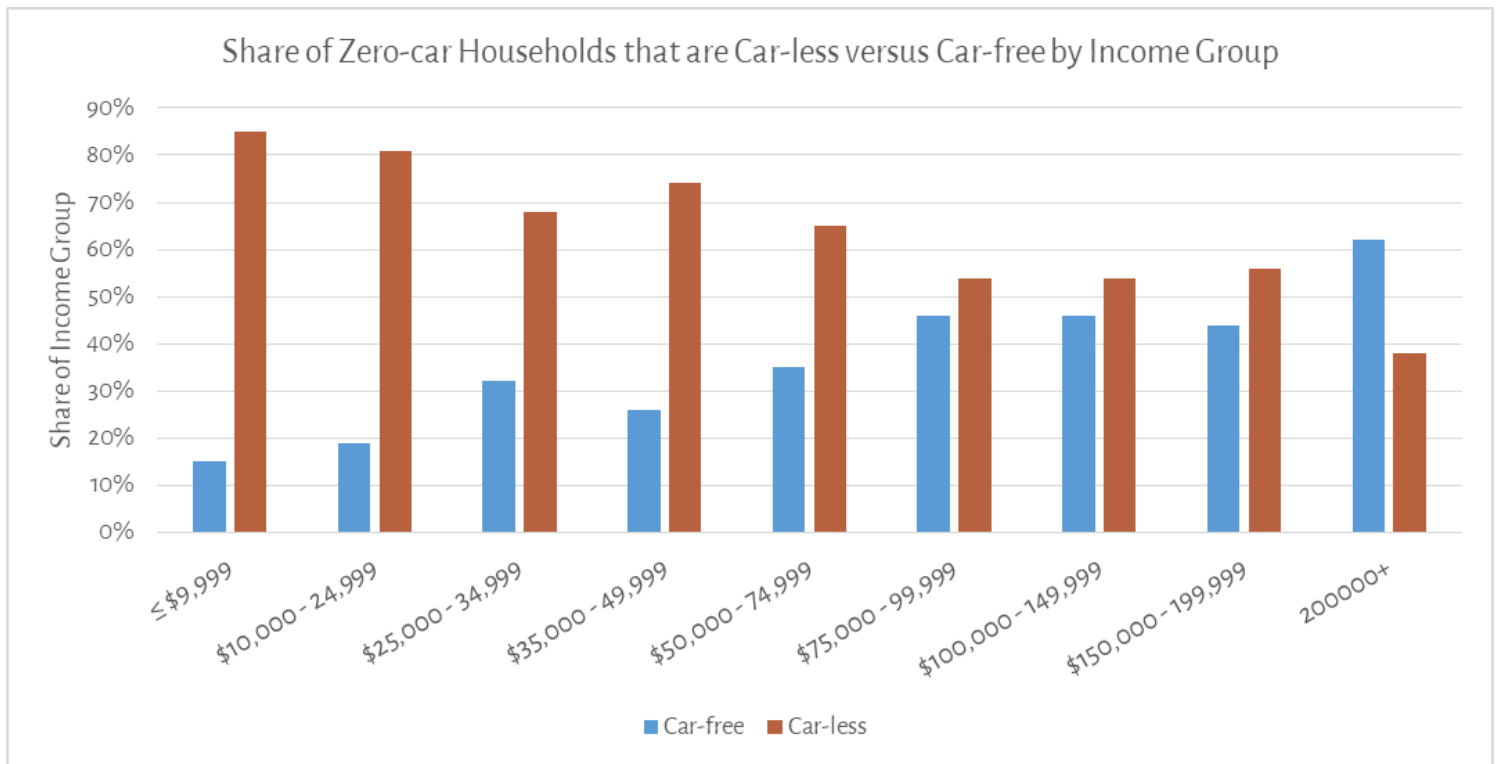


Figure: Distribution of car-free and car-less households across income

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policymakers should extend access to carshare services. Carshare benefits all zero-car households, and membership fees could be waived for low-income households to enable greater access to cars without the high costs of ownership.

Planners should improve bicycle infrastructure to increase bike use. Zero-car households would benefit greatly. Bicycle advocates can offer bike classes to familiarize new riders with rules of the road.