

Student Essay for Behavioral Change Project

Environmental Studies 303: Human Ecology and Sustainability

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For my behavioral change project, I chose to decrease the amount of trips and mileage I drive in my car as a single occupancy driver. Alternatively, I hoped to increase the mileage and trips I spent riding the public transit or walking.

This behavior change is important to me because I have become increasingly dependent on my car, in a way that is both damaging to my physical and emotional self as well as the larger world around me. To put this into perspective, I'm employed by the Western Recycle Center which is located 2.1 miles from my house. While many of my coworkers bike, bus, or walk to work, I always drive to and from work. Up until I was prompted to question my actions, I frequently drove to and from my boyfriend's apartment, which is .4 miles away. These are ridiculous numbers, and the instant this assignment was assigned I knew that decreasing the number of trips I drive as a single occupancy driver would be my focus.

Decreasing the trips I drive as a single occupancy driver is critically embedded in the larger concept of sustainability. According to Emilio Moran's book, *People and Nature*, fossil fuel burning releases emissions that alter the atmosphere and lower the productivity of earthly vegetation (Moran 27). The Journal of Energy and Power Engineering estimates that up to 65 percent of the additional carbon dioxide present in the atmosphere is due to emissions from fossil fuels. The study goes on to state that fossil fuel burning releases about 21 billion tons of carbon dioxide per year, leaving an excess of almost 11 billion tons of atmospheric carbon dioxide not absorbed back into the ecosystem (Károly 545). This excess of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere leads to higher temperatures that threaten polar ice caps, and the intensification of natural hazards (Shiva 1). Shiva suggests that climate change demands a drastic adjustment regarding how fossil fuels are consumed, requiring a decentralized and decreasing approach to energy use (Shiva 4).

Baseline Behavior

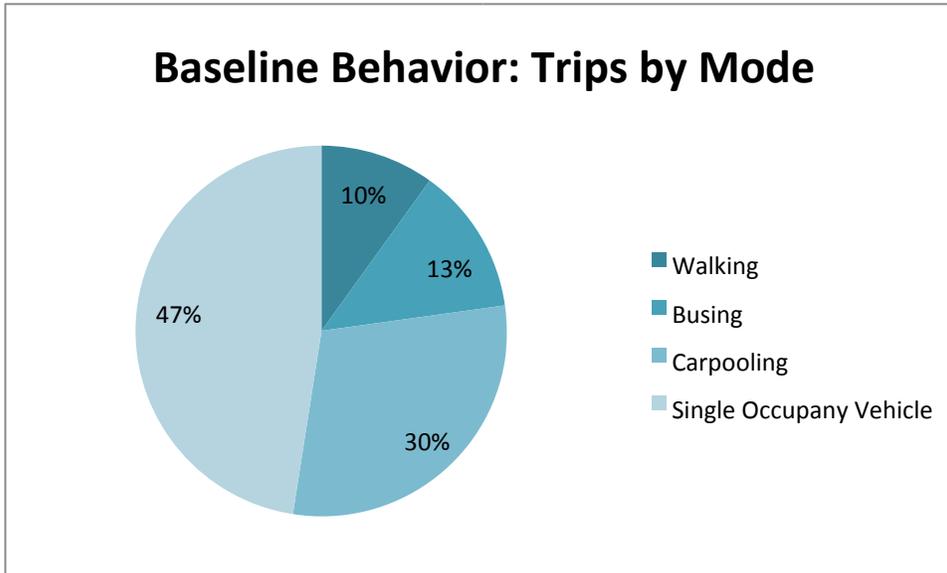


Figure 1: This pie chart reflects my baseline behavior in regards to transportation modes.

Regarding my baseline behavior, I measured where I was traveling, how far, and my mode of transportation. I tracked my baseline behavior from January 11 to January 20. During this time I found that for nearly half of my transportation trips, I traveled as a single occupancy driver, as seen in Figure 1. Alternatively, I walked only 3.2 miles, or 10 percent (not counting the distance between buildings on campus). During the testing period, I traveled 269 miles, 210.2 of which were miles spent driving alone. It's important to note that 193.2 of those miles were spent driving to and from Issaquah, where I met my sister and mom for an impromptu shopping trip. This behavior is not typical, and without these travel miles I spent only 17 miles driving alone. However, those 17 miles accounted for 11 separate trips to work or my boyfriend's apartment.

There were many factors which triggered such behavior. Many of these factors were personal or, as I've realized, lazy. Driving my personal vehicle to and from work allowed me the luxury of sleeping in a bit longer, and slipping out of the work environment quicker at the end of a shift. Similarly, driving to and from my boyfriend's apartment sheltered me from the rain and allowed me to avoid Laurel Park's daunting darkness. Social factors that shaped my behavior may have been a desire to isolate myself from other travelers. Economic factors, such as the \$20 I spent on gas during this trial, didn't have much effect on my desire to continue driving my single occupancy vehicle.

I've interpreted this baseline as a sign of how reliant I am on my personal vehicle. It showed the rut that I've gotten in regarding the way I drive my car very short distances to travel places I could easily walk.

Attempted Changed Behavior

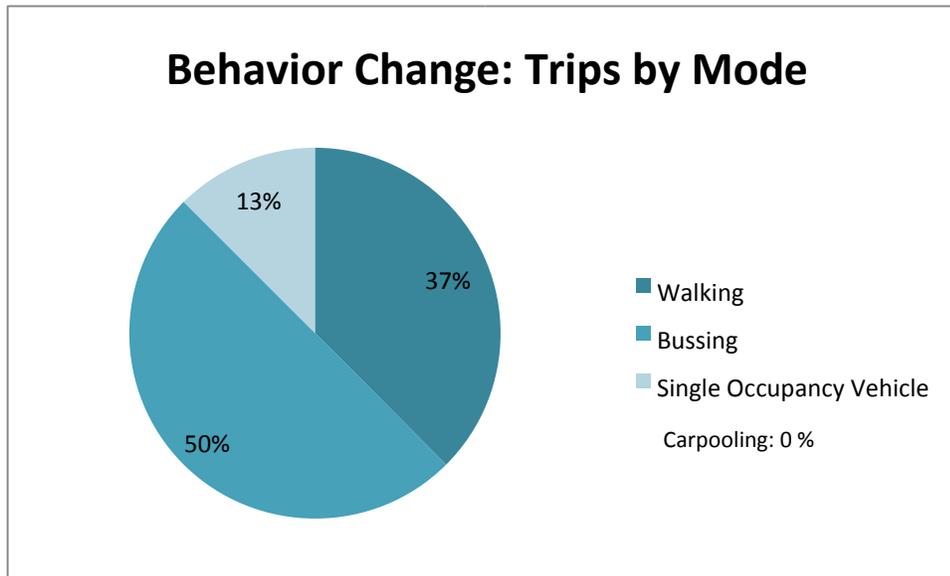


Figure 2: This is a pie chart that illustrates my changed behavior.

Following the change, I worked diligently to decrease the amount of trips I traveled as a single occupancy driver and instead focus these trips on walking or busing, as shown in Figure 2. It was not necessarily intentional, but I did not make any carpool trips during this change. During the observation time, January 21-30, I drove four trips alone, compared to 19. Similarly, I bused 16 trips, compared to five; I walked 12 trips, compared to four. This number signifies a change from traveling largely as a single occupancy driver, to traveling on public transit or walking. However, during the time in which I was to change I did drive a long distance similar to the shopping trip mentioned earlier. I drove to and from Bothell, Wash. to visit some friends for the weekend on Jan. 26-27. This reflects 154.2 of the 166.6 miles I drove in my car during the behavior change time. In these 166.6 miles, I made two 'there-and-back' trips. One of these was the trip to Bothell and the other was to travel to an arranged interview for a journalism class. However, walking and busing as modes of transportation made up 87 percent of my trips during the behavior change period.

Reflection

In my eyes, my change was successful. I drastically reduced the number of trips in my vehicle as a single occupant. More importantly, I set the foundation for a change that I'd like to further incorporate into my life.

This change was very successful in terms of personal factors. I'm a person who often doesn't enjoy change. I like to get into a routine or system, and swaying from that system often gives me slight anxiety or worry. This is partially why I typically drive to work. I like knowing that I can get to work on time, park, and then return to my car later with enough time to get back to my house and get ready for school. While it might seem silly, this project gave me the motivation to get out of my car and test out bus routes. I learned which routes got me to work on time and now I can rely on them. Similarly, this partial anxiety is why I drove nearly 10 miles to

get to my journalism interview on time. This is the only other trip I drove during the behavior change period other than the trip to Bothell. In the future I'd like to try taking the bus more places I need to go, I was simply hesitant because I didn't want to miss my interview due to my awful public transit navigational skills.

Economic factors certainly play a role in my behavior change. My school fees pay for an unlimited bus pass; I'll certainly take that over filling my car with gas to go unnecessarily short distances.

In terms of social and community aspects, my behavior change made me realize that isolating myself in a car to travel alone is incredibly damaging. I found that I really enjoyed walking. It gave me the opportunity to notice all these little things around me that I normally wouldn't such as, a tabby cat sitting on someone's porch or silly tidbits of conversation. I was pondering it one walk and I realized that as a student majoring in journalism and minoring in environmental studies it's practically my obligation to be tuned in and closely connected with the world around me. Shutting myself up in a car all alone greatly damages the curiosity and responsibility I have as a journalist and as someone concerned for the future of our ecosystem. This change implies to me a desire continue searching for alternative ways to travel more sustainably. It also implies that such a change would be easy to implement in many people's lives if they were just willing to try.

Works Cited

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