

Modal shift amongst young adults and the potential safety benefits: A synthesis of evidence

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Abstract

Young adults in Australia are driving less now than young adults did twenty years ago. Victoria and New South Wales, (as opposed to other states), have shown the fastest changes, with the percentage of young adults with a driving license declining around 1% per year. This trend indicates a possible modal shift from passenger car to other alternative modes, including public transport and other active transports amongst young adults. Again, young drivers in Australia are one of the most vulnerable groups when it comes to safety. Around 25% of the drivers who lost their lives in road collisions in Victoria, Australia over the past 10 years, belong to the 18-25 age group. This paper discusses potential safety benefits as a result of this modal shift amongst young adults. Also, the paper proposes that an enhanced understanding of a young adult's decision-making process when choosing a travel mode is required, to ensure the vision of 'Towards Zero' is achieved.

Background

Passenger cars provide great mobility benefits; however they also have potentially undesirable implications - including road collisions. There is the window of opportunity however, as recent research indicates that young people are less likely to get a car license and, even if driving, they drive less (Kuhnimhof, Buehler & Dargay, 2011, Raimond & Milthorpe, 2010 and Sivak & Schoettle, 2011, 2012a, 2012b). Australia is one of the developed countries currently experiencing this decline in youth licensing. Victoria and New South Wales, among other states, have shown the fastest rate of change, with the percent of young adults having a driving license declining at a rate of approximately 1% per year (Delbosc & Currie, 2013). There is a growing focus on research aimed at informing the understanding behind this reduction in the rate of driver licensing among young adults.

It is essential to understand the mode choice/modal shift among young adults particularly if we are to assess the impacts on road collisions (deaths and injuries). Around 25% of the drivers who lost their lives as a result of road collisions in Victoria, Australia over the past 10 years, belong to the age group 18-25, whereas only 10% of Victorian license holders represent this age group (Transport Accident Commission, 2018). Figure 1 illustrates that, despite enormous effort and policy intervention, a significant number of young drivers are still losing their lives, with the rate even higher during the last 3-4 years.

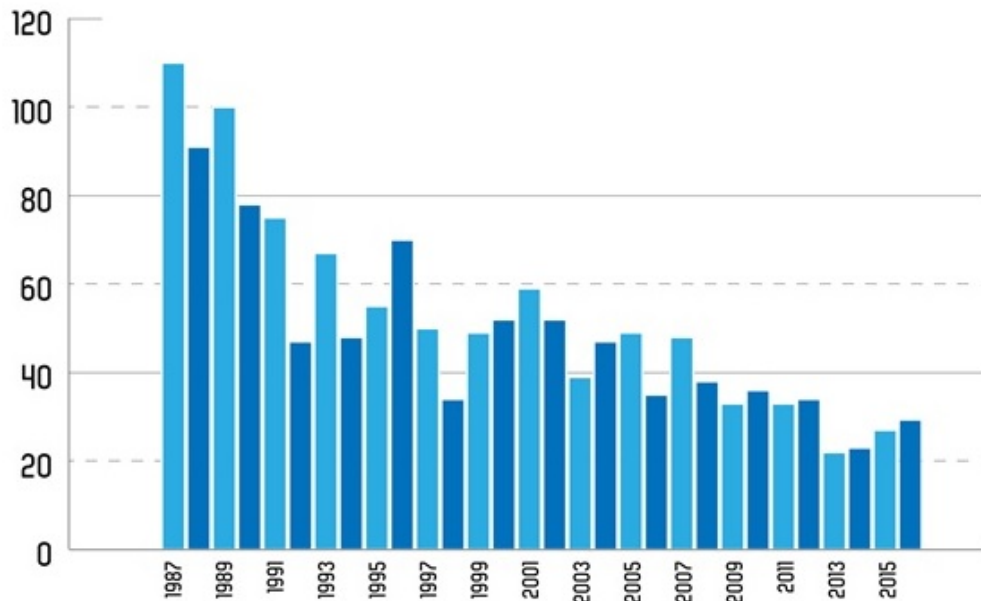


Figure 1: Young driver lives lost *Source: Transport Accident Commission, 2018*

Trend indicates a possible modal shift from passenger cars to other alternative modes, including public transport and other active modes of transport, amongst young adults. Research confirms that transit is associated with much lower crash rate, compared with passenger car (Litman, 2017). Therefore, potential safety benefits could be interpreted as a result of the apparent modal shift amongst young adults in Australia.

Research indicates that the choice of travel mode amongst young people may be attributable not just to transport issues, but may be largely impacted by their socio-economic situation (Chatterjee et al., 2018). Thus, this paper proposes that an enhanced understanding of young adult's decision-making process when choosing a travel mode is required, to ensure the vision of 'Towards Zero' is achieved.

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