

Rethinking habits and their role in behaviour change: The case of low-carbon mobility

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Abstract

With the emergence of behaviour change on political and intellectual agendas in passenger transport, the question of how to understand and intervene in habitual carbon-intensive travel practices has become crucially important. Building primarily on the philosophies of Félix Ravaisson and John Dewey, I will outline an approach to travel habits that is more affirmative than prevailing psychological perspectives. Rather than as the automatically cued, repetitive behaviour of individuals, habit is understood here as a generative and propulsive capacity brought about through repetition and belonging to body-mind-world assemblages that exceed the human individual as conventionally understood. I will explore the implications of the proposed conceptualisation of habits for behaviour change and argue that widespread, durable behaviour change is unlikely to result from the displacement of automaticity by reasoned action alone but instead demands changes in collective customs. Additionally, a narrow focus on breaking carbon-intensive travel habits should be avoided. Not only should the formation of low-carbon habits and associated forms of embodied intelligence be stimulated; it is also important to capitalise on the potential for subtle change immanent to carbon-intensive travel habits in situations where individualised vehicular travel is the only realistic transport option.



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Tim Schwanen is a Research Fellow at the Transport Studies Unit which is part of the School of Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford. He obtained his PhD from the Department of Human Geography and Planning of Utrecht University, The Netherlands in 2003 (*cum laude*), after which he worked as a post-doctoral researcher and lecturer in urban geography at the same university. He joined the TSU in March 2009. Tim currently serves on the editorial advisory board of the journals *Transportation* and *Journal of Transport Geography*.

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