Abstract

The carhops and drive-ins of the 1950s are symbolic of the freedom that the automobile has granted Americans. What the general public has gained from the automobile, however, may come at the expense of independent mobility and choices for today’s adolescents, particularly those not yet old enough to drive or those from lower income families. Sprawl land use development patterns and limited transportation choices in most American cities often hold teenagers and their chauffeuring parents captive to the automobile. At the same time, information and communication technology is fast evolving and changing the ways in which teenagers live, interact, and communicate with others; easier transportation coordination is one potential outcome. This study seeks to examine teenagers’ travel behavior for their most common destination – going to and from school – and how the use of technology influences this behavior. Survey data from five high schools, three Northern California and two in Vermont, are used to identify the mode choice to and from school, socio-demographic characteristics, and technology use of the sampled teenagers. The built environment of the teenagers’ home surroundings is determined by data obtained from the 2010 Census. Logistic regression analysis is used to describe the most significant variables influencing both mode choice to and from school, and the factors associated with the use of technology. Based on the developed preliminary data analysis, findings show that having a driver’s license and access to a car, being an older adolescent, and traveling longer distances to school are factors that may positively correlate with driving to/from school. Conversely, living in higher density neighborhoods and closer to schools may be related to walking and biking to/from school. Interestingly, mode choice behavior does not significantly vary between high schoolers from Northern California and Vermont.