

TRAVEL IN NEW URBANIST AND TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES: A Case Study of Downtown Orlando

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In recent years, a group of architects, planners, developers, environmentalists, and policy makers have advocated a return to traditional neighborhood development (TND) with higher densities, mixed uses, pedestrian amenities, and transit service to reduce automobile dependence for work, shopping, and other trips. The critics of the so-called New Urbanism have countered that proximity only partly explains destination and mode choice; however, they draw evidence for their claims from auto-dominated locations, not traditional or New Urbanist ones.

Therefore, this research considers the travel behaviors of medium- to high-income residents in the downtown Orlando neighborhoods who also work in the downtown. Downtown Orlando was selected as a case study because it has many characteristics that are believed to support non-automobile travel, such as (1) a grid street network, (2) widely available transit service, (3) a large and expanding job market, (4) several neighborhoods within close proximity to downtown employment, and (5) city programs that support a high quality of life in neighborhoods, encourage TND in existing neighborhoods, promote new development, improve the bicycle and pedestrian environment, and increase the number of downtown housing units.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this research is to understand the travel patterns of residents of downtown Orlando neighborhoods, especially travel to and from work during peak travel periods. A secondary objective is to determine if residents living in these traditional neighborhoods walk, ride bicycles or use transit where the amenities and the facilities are provided to facilitate the use of alternative modes of transportation for non-work travel.

The research was conducted through a variety of research techniques including (1) review of transportation and land use planning documents; (2) interviews of planning officials involved in Orlando; (3) attendance at relevant meetings; (4) selection of case study

neighborhoods, (5) observations of pedestrians and users of Lymmo, (6) a telephone survey comprised of two samples--downtown residents who also work downtown and downtown residents who either are not employed or who work elsewhere, and (7) focus groups and surveys of downtown neighborhood associations.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

After studying work and non-work travel in downtown Orlando TND, it is estimated that between 5% and 10% of downtown residents who also work downtown walk as a primary mode to employment. This is comparable to the 1990 Census but with a population that is wealthier and more likely to own an automobile. These walkers show a diversity of choice in their mode of transportation to work. Forty-two of 59, or just over 70%, of all users of multiple modes use walking as one of the modes, and 42 of 45, or 93%, of all walkers combine walking with other modes for work trips. Walkers choose their mode of travel to work based upon convenience, the need for an automobile, and for exercise or as a part of a healthy lifestyle. By contrast, non-walkers, most of whom primarily drive, do so for convenience and because of the travel time. This suggests that while some people may choose to live downtown and work downtown, they never really consider the alternatives to driving to work, especially when parking is generally available at relatively little or no cost. Among downtown residents who also work downtown, 62% made stops on their way to work during the previous month and 85% made stops on their way home from work.

For non-work trips in the neighborhood, downtown residents appear to walk in higher percentages for some destinations than they do for work trips, with greater than 10% of all groups of respondents walking to parks and recreation areas, neighborhood convenience stores, community events, fitness centers, and restaurants. Among specific groups, greater than 10% walk to visit family and friends, to go to the bank or the credit union, and to go to their child/children's schools. Downtown workers who walk to work are more likely to walk to a greater variety of destinations in their neighborhood and in the downtown during the workday than their non-walking neighbors.

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