

Coping with Commuting – How to commute the healthy way

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One of today's biggest challenges on the way to a healthier environment is the reduction of private car use, which is at the heart of environmental problems like global warming and increasing pollution. One measure in order to achieve this aim is the promotion of public transport and other forms of sustainable mobility. An essential portion of individual mobility behavior is dedicated to commuting. Official statistics show that commuters rather choose to travel by car, than to use public transport. Despite the efforts to promote public transport the percentage of car users among commuters is steadily rising. Even in cities like Vienna with a well-developed public transport system and good connections with the environs, more than half of the commuters choose to travel to work by car.

Commuting behavior becomes particularly interesting if one considers it to consolidate mobility behavior choices, which may spill over into other facets of daily mobility. A substantial number of studies have addressed commuters and their daily experiences, mostly concentrating on causes of stress and determinants of travel mode choices.

Stressful effects of commuting by public transport were reported repeatedly. These findings are not in favour of promoting sustainable mobility. Especially if travelling by car is found to be more pleasant. There is no doubt that these negative effects exist but little effort has been made to see where the benefits of commuting with public transport lie.

It seems that current research sees commuting stress as a reaction and mainly concentrates on potentially stressful contextual variables. This approach lacks the study of possibly attenuating effects of coping strategies. Therefore a look at the influence of potential coping strategies and how certain means of transport may allow for those strategies to be utilized and others do not, appears to be apposite.

Our goal is to investigate possible advantages of commuting with means of public transport, whilst still giving a comprehensive overlook of positive and negative effects of commuting with various means of transport. We re-examine the role of variables such as length of the commute, controllability and predictability of the commute, number of changes on the commute, etc., all of which were found to be crucial to describe the relationship between commuting and stress in previous papers. We also introduce new factors such as information seeking and amount of activities during the commute in order to attain a broader comprehension of the above-mentioned relationship. Not only do we look at the immediate stress outcome of commuting, using a scale developed by Evans & Wener (2002), but we also examine possible effects on the quality of life using the german version of the WHOQoL questionnaire. Data will be analyzed using multiple regression. Based on calculations with G-Power our sample size must be higher than 130.

We will report effects of the above-mentioned variables on commuting stress and quality of life. Furthermore, we will present the effects of information seeking and the amount of activities during commuting on commuting stress. Finally, we will clarify the relationship between commuting stress and quality of life.