Household travel time by mode of transport

This report presents information from the Ministry of Transport's Household Travel Survey about the time New Zealanders spend travelling using different forms of transport.

Key facts

- In 2023/24, 81.2% of all annual travel time was spent in private motor vehicles. A further 12.4% was spent using active transport, while 5.4% was spent on public transport.
- Those aged under 15 years and 76 years and older spent more of their travel time each year using active transport than other age groups. People aged less than 30 years also spent more time using public transport.
- The Wellington region had the highest percentage of time of all regions spent using public transport (9.8%) and walking (18.6%). The Nelson Marlborough region had the highest percentage of travel time spent cycling (4.4%).

Active transport and public transport have benefits for environmental health

A variety of transport modes can be used for household travel, including private motorised transport (such as cars, vans and motorcycles), active transport (such as walking and cycling), and public transport (buses, trains and ferries).

Using active transport has beneficial effects for both health and the environment. These modes of travel increase physical activity and reduce traffic injuries, while also reducing air and noise pollution, as well as greenhouse gas emissions (WHO 2011). Studies have shown that active commuting (such as walking or cycling to work) is associated with a reduction in cardiovascular risk (Celis-Morales et al 2017; Patterson et al 2020).

Use of public transport also increases physical activity, reduces air pollution (by not taking a private vehicle), is safer than travelling by private vehicle (Frith et al 2015), and can improve mental health (Martin et al 2014; Mytton et al 2016).

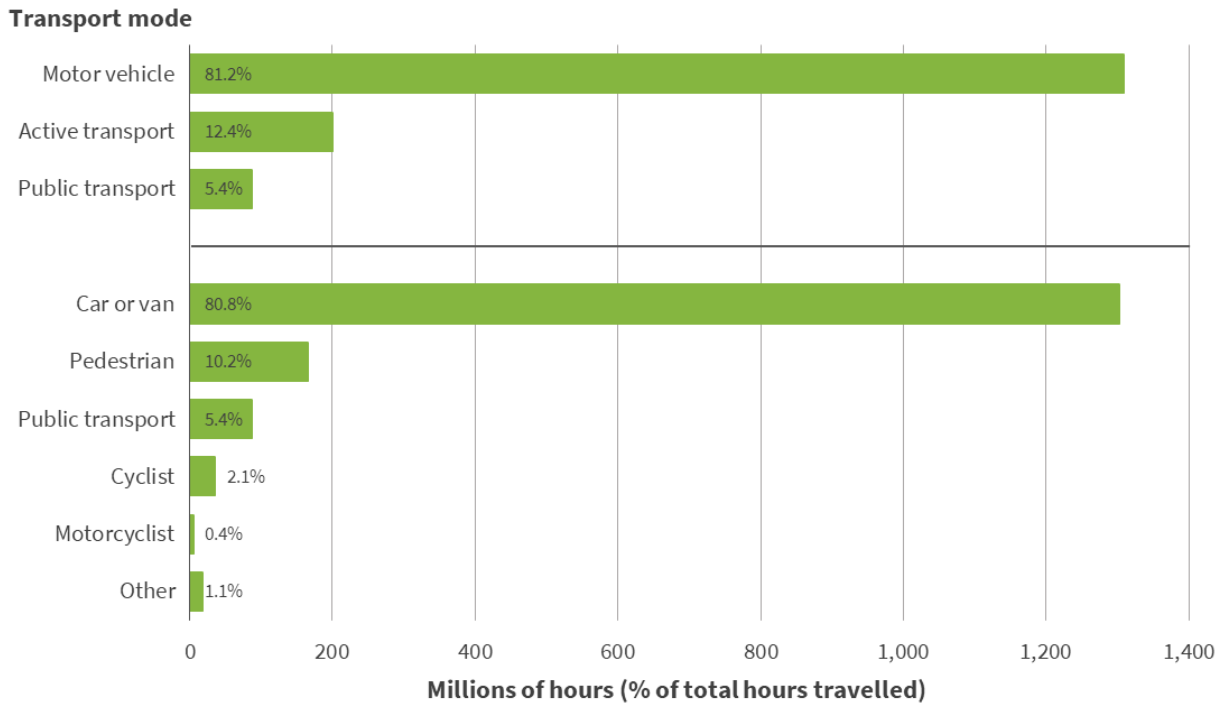
Private motor vehicles were the dominant form of transport

In 2023/24, New Zealanders spent an average of 1,308 million hours each year travelling by private motor vehicles. This represents 81.2% of the total time (1,612 million hours annually) spent travelling by any means (Figure 1).

Overall, 12.4% of all travelling time was spent using an active form of transport (walking or cycling) and a further 5.4% was spent on public transport (public bus, train or ferry).

The remaining 1.1% of travel time was spent using ‘other’ transport modes, including travel by aircraft and boat, as well as less conventional forms like horse-riding. Skateboarders, joggers and other ‘on-foot’ forms of transport are counted as walkers, as are mobility scooters (Ministry of Transport, 2023).

Figure 1: Hours spent travelling by transport mode each year, 2023/24



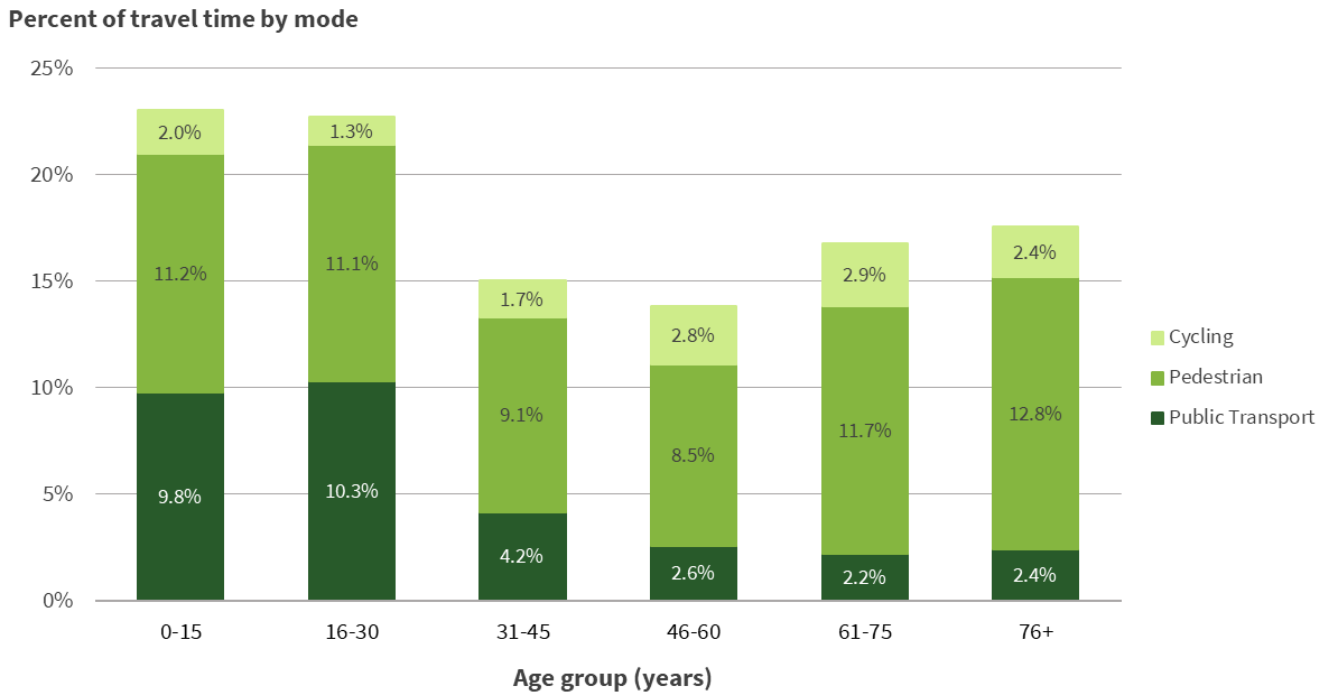
Notes: ‘Active transport’ includes pedestrian travel and cycling. ‘Public transport’ includes travel by bus, train or ferry. ‘Motor vehicle’ includes car/van drivers and motorcycle riders.
Source: Household Travel Survey (Ministry of Transport 2025)

Young people spent the most time travelling by public transport, older people were the biggest users of active transport

In 2023/24, the percentage of travel time spent on public transport was highest for younger age groups. People aged under 30 years were the greatest users of public transport at just under 10% of travel time for both 0–15 and 16–30 year-olds. These groups were also high users of active transport at 13% and 12% of travel time, respectively (Figure 2).

Time spent using active transport was highest for people aged 61–75 years and 76 years and above (15% for both). Most of the increase for these age groups, compared to 31–45 year-olds and 46–60 year-olds, was due to a rise in time spent walking. This could partly be due to mobility scooters being counted as ‘walking’ by the survey.

Figure 2: Use of active and public transport as a percentage of total travel time, by age group, 2023/24



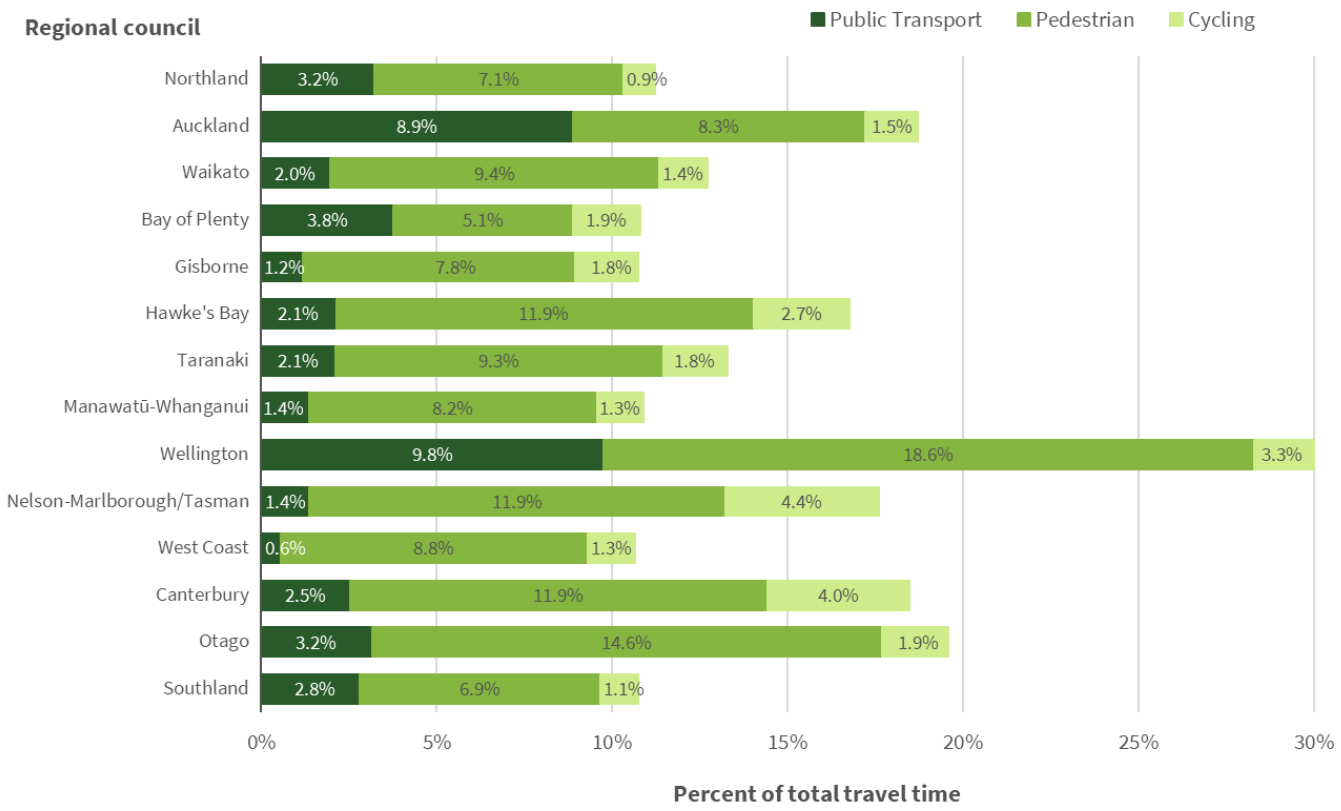
Note: 'Public transport' includes travel by bus, train or ferry.
Source: Household Travel Survey (Ministry of Transport 2025)

There were large regional differences in active and public transport use

The use of active transport and public transport can be limited by several barriers, including concerns about road safety, a lack of safe places to travel and poor urban design. In smaller towns and rural areas, public transport is often not available, and in all areas, usage can be affected by perceptions of unreliability.

In 2023/24, public and active transport made up a particularly high percentage of travel time for people in the Wellington region (31.6%) (Figure 3). Wellington people were the highest users of both public transport (9.8%) and walking (18.6%). People in the Auckland region were also high users of public transport (8.9%), while the Otago region was highest for walking (14.6%). The region with the highest percentage of travel time spent cycling was Nelson Marlborough (4.4%) followed by Canterbury (4.0%).

Figure 3: Use of active and public transport, by regional council area, 2023/24



Notes: The Ministry of Transport reports Nelson Marlborough and Tasman as a single region).
Source: Household Travel Survey (Ministry of Transport 2025)

Data for this indicator

This indicator presents the share of household travel time by mode of transport, from the New Zealand Household Travel Survey for the period from July 2023 to June 2024. 'Household travel' excludes professional driver trips - journeys to transport goods or people for commercial purposes. In this surveillance report, 'motor vehicles' includes driving or being a passenger in a car, van or motorbike, 'active transport' includes walking and cycling, and 'public transport' includes travel by bus, train or ferry.

Survey methodology has changed over time, limiting time series comparisons. In the latest survey, sample sizes were increased approximately four-fold, with just under 7,500 households (17,448 people) participating. This expansion has enabled results to be calculated for a single-year period (July 2023 to June 2024), instead of the overlapping periods used previously. This will allow better comparisons across time in future reports.

Confidence intervals (to take into account the uncertainty due to being a sample) are not available for this data, so care should be taken in assessing differences between values.

For additional information, see the Metadata sheet.

References

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Citation

Environmental Health Intelligence. 2025. *Household travel time by mode of transport* [Surveillance Report]. Wellington: Environmental Health Intelligence NZ, Massey University.

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