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Time and Costs of Community Participation in Transport Decision-Making: Transport Action Groups

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Abstract

Participation by the community in a wide range of government decision-making, including transport planning, is increasingly being recognised as important and is supported by the public sector. However, little is known about the costs of such participation from the perspective of community groups. The paper introduces the issue of the time and costs of community participation in transport decision-making from the perspective of transport action groups lobbying for change. Firstly it discusses community participation in the decision-making process including the need to develop a greater understanding of the time and resource costs of community participation in transport and environmental decision-making. Theory and evidence on the time and costs of community participation is reviewed. The paper then provides insights into the time and costs of transport lobbying, based on a survey of transport action groups and transport activists in Sydney. The results indicate that time is a more significant limit to participation than money costs. But additional resources may allow time commitments to be reduced and the effectiveness of participation increased.

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Introduction

Participation by the community in a wide range of government decision-making is increasingly being recognised as important and supported by the public sector. Community consultation on urban environment issues, including transport, is increasing. But little is known about the costs of participation from the perspective of community groups. This paper focuses on the time and costs of participation through the lobbying efforts of transport action groups and their members.

This paper has two broad aims: firstly to review the issue of time and costs of community participation in transport and environment issues, and secondly, to present insights on time and costs from responses to a survey of transport groups and transport activists. The paper provides a brief overview of participation in the decision-making process including government recognition of the costs of participation, reasons for focusing on time and costs, and a review of theory and evidence of costs and benefits. The paper then presents insights from a survey of groups and individuals on the constraints on community participation.

Community participation in decision-making: the government perspective

The NSW state government has a strong commitment to community participation in decision-making. The introduction to a recent Discussion Paper prepared for the Cabinet Office, titled *Participation and the NSW Policy Process* (Byrne and Davis 1998), refers to the NSW Social Justice Directions Statement released in October 1996. The social justice strategy has four interrelated principles of equity, access, participation and rights. It includes a commitment to ensure that people have better opportunities for genuine participation and consultation about decisions affecting their lives.

There are many different types of community participation and involvement in the decision-making process. The Discussion Paper argues that "participation" has competing definitions. In a spectrum of meaning, key types of participation include participation as consultation, as partnership, as standing and as customer choice (Byrne and Davis 1998). The current participation practices of different NSW government agencies are outlined in an Appendix to the Discussion Paper. For instance, the NSW Department of Transport has several Ministerial Advisory Councils including the Public Transport Authority with government and industry representatives, the Public Transport Advisory Council, with a range of community representatives, and the Transport Safety Advisory Committee. The Department also conducts a range of ad hoc consultation activities to liaise with communities on specific projects and issues. The NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) is also noted as having a number of advisory councils, including the Roads and Traffic Advisory Council, a peak stakeholder group.

Community consultation is an increasingly common element of transport planning. Hannaford and Cole-Edelstein (1998) discuss examples of involving local communities in the planning and operation of transport projects including bicycle plans, RTA road projects, the upgrading of Coffs Harbour airport, the Parramatta ferry service, and strategic land use plans. The RTA has recently released an internal manual to provide guidance to staff on the practice of community involvement (RTA 1998).

Government recognition of costs of participation

While there is general reference to the costs of participation in the Cabinet Office Discussion Paper (Byrne and Davis 1998), there is less recognition of how costs can affect or limit effective participation. References to costs include:

Participation can be resource intensive for both government and non-government participants (p. 8)

Non-government organisations also contribute substantially from their own resources – time, expertise, work foregone in another area and direct outlays for attendance and transport (p. 45)

There is also recognition that resources affect the nature of participation:

People who are struggling to make ends meet or who face disadvantages of race, language or disability find it difficult to participate fully in community life without some special effort to involve them (p. 11)

The technique of relying on written submissions... favours the articulate and those with sufficient resources to prepare detailed analysis and documentation (p. 24)

Public hearings favour those with the resources and expertise to make a case (p. 24)

Government recognition of the costs of participation can be seen through funding of peak groups, individual agency initiatives, funding for representation, and through legislative limits on costs of information. The NSW government provides some support through grants to volunteer community groups, usually to peak groups representing other groups with community and environmental interests. The federal government provides similar grants. The State Rail Authority also funds commuter associations to represent the views of commuters, and provide advice on planning and operational issues. Local councils may also provide support to local groups.

The NSW Premier's Department has a policy on remuneration for participation on boards, advisory bodies and committees, based on a four-tier structure of groups, which may include travelling and/or sitting fees. The lowest tier, Group 4, includes advisory bodies such as the Department of Transport's Public Transport Advisory Council whose community representatives would be entitled to fees. However, entitlements to fees are not always well-publicised to representatives, and the ease of claiming sitting and travelling fees can vary by agency. Some agencies also have informal policies on paying costs to assist participation. The RIA may pay travel and other costs to assist participation in committees other than the high level committees which are covered under the Premier's remuneration structure.

The cost of information can affect participation, and there are legislative limits to ensure affordable access to information such as Environmental Impact Statements. The NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act states that copies of an Environmental Impact Statement may be sold by a consent authority to any member of the public for not more than \$25 per copy, to ensure accessibility. But this may be eroded by the production and sale of numerous working papers and supporting documents which provide important detail.

New technology is being used to ensure distribution and access to material. For instance, the Public Transport Advisory Council's Light Rail Strategic Plan was available on the NSW Department of Transport's web site. However, the effectiveness of this is questionable, as it is difficult to read documents on screen, and it can be expensive and

difficult to print out documents. Connection and on-line costs to the Internet, particularly for home users, are likely to be more expensive than accessing the printed and conveniently bound versions of the documents

Calling for submissions is a common element of participation. The government does not reimburse the public for the costs of making submissions. The NSW Department of Transport's Call for Alternative Transport Suggestions to the Parramatta Rail Link in September 1998 (NSW DoT 1998) specifically states that "persons making submissions as part of the process do so at their own cost and the Government has no obligation to negotiate, deal with any persons or pay any costs to any person in relation to submissions".

Focusing on time and costs

There are several reasons for developing a greater understanding of the time and resource costs of community participation in transport and environmental decision-making. These include:

- To examine whether costs constrain participation, and limit effective involvement
- To provide directions so the government can adequately support participation
- To extend existing methods for valuing urban environmental amenity.

Constraints on participation

It has been assumed that the main constraint on participation has been the community's access to information or lack of knowledge. Many consultation exercises have focused on providing information in a range of formats and media to reach the community, as discussed in Hannaford and Cole-Edelstein (1998). However, it may be that the most significant constraint on participation is not knowledge, but rather the time and resources required for participation. These constraints are inter-related: for instance, time and costs are incurred in attending a public meeting to access information. These constraints may be the most effective barriers to participation.

Directions for government action

The government has a commitment to increased participation, but there is a question as to how to most effectively support groups and individuals. As noted in the Discussion Paper, although there is recognition of limits to participation, there is little understanding of how these limits can be overcome. Information on the relative impacts of time and costs, both money and non-monetary costs, on participation will enable the government to provide more efficient assistance to groups and individuals to support their participation.

The Cabinet Office Discussion Paper (Byrne and Davis 1998) provides some suggestions on government support for community participation, particularly the need for funding:

Without additional funding, [voluntary sector] organisations cannot put together submissions with the professionalism and depth the topic deserves (p. 36)

Many [community groups represented on advisory boards or other policy mechanisms] however, find the burden of contributing to a range of consultation processes very high and seek government resources to increase their capacity for participation (p. 37)

It takes time to consult effectively with smaller groups. . . may indicate a need to fund participation by voluntary groups and to be realistic when setting timelines for discussion (p. 44)

Decision-makers may need to fund representation [of public interest groups and other community representatives] and preparation for public hearings (p. 24)

Extending valuation methods

Environmental valuation is an increasingly important component of environmental decision-making and resource management. However, monetary valuation of urban environmental amenity is under-researched, particularly compared to valuation of natural environments. A number of methods can be used to value natural and urban environments or changes in environmental amenity including market-based methods, revealed preference methods and hypothetical market methods.

In revealed preference methods, people's preferences for environmental quality are revealed through their observed behaviour in existing markets. Revealed preference methods include the hedonic price method which uses house prices to calculate the implicit value of levels of environmental amenity, and the travel cost method which uses travel costs and time to value natural and urban recreational resources. Lockwood and Tracy (1995) used the travel cost method to value Centennial Park in Sydney, and tested various assumptions about the value of travel time.

A related revealed preference approach suggested by Carson and Martin (1991) as a measure of the value of environmental amenity is to use the value of time and contributions to community lobbying efforts to protect the environment. For instance, Carson and Martin (1991) cite the millions of dollars in fees and voluntary contributions paid by members of environmental groups and the time volunteered by environmental activists to lobby for environmental legislation as evidence for the reality of existence values for wilderness amenities.

There are several issues in the use of time as a means of environmental valuation. In travel cost applications, there is controversy over the value of travel time including whether people derive positive or negative utility from travel, and whether travel time would otherwise be work time or leisure time. There are similar difficulties and issues to resolve in using time as suggested by Carson and Martin (1991).

Review of individual costs and benefits of participation: theory and evidence

There is much literature on participation in voluntary community organisations including factors determining firstly the decision to participate, and then the degree or extent of participation. Factors discussed include socio-demographic characteristics such as age, sex, income, education and household structure. Other factors include knowledge and personal incentives.

Benefits of participation

Prestby et al. (1990) note that the "bulk of the research examining benefits and costs of voluntary organisation participation has focused on the types of benefits received" A typology of benefits developed by Clark and Wilson (1961, cited in Prestby et al. 1990) includes:

- *Material* benefits which refer to tangible rewards which can be translated into monetary value and include wages, increased property value and information,
- *Solidary* benefits which are largely derived from social interactions and include socialising, status, group identification and recognition, and
- *Purposive* benefits which are derived from suprapersonal goals of the organisation and include bettering the community, doing one's civic duty and fulfilling a sense of responsibility.

Costs of participation

Prestby et al. (1990) note that "despite their importance in the social exchange/political economy model, only a few studies have examined the costs of voluntary organisation participation and no studies have constructed a typology of costs similar to Clark and Wilson's incentive model". Prestby et al. (1990) summarise research on costs as follows:

- *Material/personal* costs such as time, effort and giving up personal/family matters; skills and knowledge, and financial sacrifices,
- *Solidary* costs such as interpersonal conflict, lack of social support, and lack of others' participation or interest in the organisation, and
- *Purposive and organisational* costs such as lack of organisational progress, disagreement with organisational goals/activities, and scheduling and communication failures.

Relationship between costs and benefits

The costs of participation in community groups may be high for individuals, but so are the potential benefits. Hedonic price studies reveal the impact of different levels of environmental amenity and changes in amenity on property prices. Residential property prices reflect the level of amenity of a location, which can be affected by the location of urban infrastructure such as transport (roads, airports) and waste disposal facilities, and urban services such as housing for disadvantaged groups

Hedonic price studies reveal the impact of transport infrastructure such as roads and airports on property prices (Nelson 1980, Nelson 1982). However, the impact of transport infrastructure on property prices can be both positive and negative. Analysis of impacts must distinguish between the negative impacts of noise and pollution, and the positive impacts of accessibility. In the case of an airport, closeness provides accessibility to employment opportunities.

Prestby et al. (1990) note that in the only study that directly assessed the ratio of participants' benefits and costs, Friedmann et al. (1988) reported that the most active participants (leaders) viewed benefits as equal to costs and less active participants (members) perceived benefits as higher than the costs.

Empirical evidence of time and costs of community participation

While there has been much discussion and recognition of the costs of participation, there have been few empirical studies quantifying time and resource costs. The Australian Bureau of Statistics survey on volunteer work conducted in 1995 (ABS 1996) provides some indication of the time and costs of community participation. The survey quantified time inputs, but not money costs. The survey found that 19% of Australians (aged 15 years and over) provided some form of voluntary work through an organisation during the 12 months ended June 1995. Less than 4% of the volunteers worked in the field of protecting the environment/animal welfare (grouped together by ABS). The median hours worked by individual volunteers in this field was 42 hours per year. In terms of activity, 8% of all volunteers were involved in lobbying/advocacy/policy research and less than 6% were involved in protecting the environment.

The ABS survey sought volunteers' concerns about aspects of their voluntary work by type of activity. Of volunteers working in the activity of lobbying/advocacy/policy research, 32% had concerns about the amount of time required (the highest proportion from amongst 19 activities), and 22% had concerns about costs, again the highest proportion of any activity. Of volunteers working in the activity of protecting the environment, 23% had concerns about the amount of time required, and 20% had concerns about costs.

Phone calls and travel costs were the expenses most often cited by all volunteers, each incurred by 44% of all volunteers. Only 22% of these volunteers had reimbursement of phone calls available, and 15% had reimbursement of travel costs available. Postage was the next most frequently cited expense, incurred by 18% of volunteers. Actual expenses incurred were not sought in the survey.

Another indicator of voluntary support for the environment is an ABS survey conducted in 1992 (ABS 1993) which found that 28% of people had donated time or money to an activity that helps protect the environment and 6% of people belonged to a group whose main activity was protection of the environment, of whom 82% had made a donation.

Little is reported on the resource costs of community participation. In discussing the legal costs of challenging developments through the legal system based on a case study in the Blue Mountains, Tonkin (1995) notes that the legal system "potentially disadvantages groups lacking the appropriate economic and cultural resources for legal action, especially when community action groups cannot obtain legal aid". Even if groups can afford their own legal costs, they may have to provide a guarantee that they can meet the opposing side's costs, if costs were awarded against them, before the case can proceed.

Community action groups and transport conflict

Recent Australian research on community groups includes a study of the nature, number and distribution of resident action groups in Sydney (Costello and Dunn 1994), and a study of the nature of locational conflict or conflict between land uses in Sydney and Melbourne (Humphreys and Walmsley 1991). These studies did not focus on the inputs to community groups in terms of time and resources

Costello and Dunn (1994) surveyed local councils in 1991 to establish the number of resident action groups (RAGs) in each LGA throughout Sydney. The survey revealed that there had been at least 431 RAGs throughout metropolitan Sydney prior to mid 1991. Key findings were that RAGs have become more widespread during the 1980s, that there appears to have been rapid growth in community activism in western Sydney with between 6 and 18 RAGs forming in most western and south-western Sydney LGAs since 1988 alone, and that the issues around which RAGs form differ according to location. Of the 431 known RAGs, 33 were formed around traffic concerns including 25 in Inner Sydney, 7 in Middle Sydney and 1 in Outer Sydney. Costello and Dunn (1994) report that their findings support those of Humphreys and Walmsley (1991) that locational conflict is less socially and spatially limited than the literature suggests.

Empirical study: transport action groups and activists

To gather information on the time and costs of community participation and lobbying in transport decision-making, a survey of transport groups and transport activists was undertaken.

Defining the sample

The first stage of the research was defining the sample of transport action groups. A transport action group was defined as a community-based, volunteer group whose main purpose is lobbying on transport issues, with no paid employees. Key contacts from peak or umbrella groups were first used to generate the names and phone numbers of other contacts and groups, in a snowball technique. There were several difficulties in identifying the total number of groups including: groups no longer active or in existence, overlapping groups, and groups in which transport was not the main focus of interest, but transport issues were relevant such as bushland and conservation societies and progress associations.

Three types of transport groups involved in lobbying for transport change were surveyed:

1. Transport action groups, including location-specific and single-issue groups. These were mostly contacted by phone to seek participation before mailing out a survey.
2. Bicycle user groups. The names and phone numbers of bicycle user groups were available from Bicycle NSW's web site. Surveys were mailed out to those bicycle

groups whose name and number could be matched with an address using the White Pages On-line, which was about half of those listed on the web site.

3. Commuter associations. A mailing list was provided by the NSW Commuter Council of members in commuter associations and delegates to community forums. However, the list did not identify group names, and may have included several individuals from the same group.

Methodology

If the group agreed by phone to participate in the research, a survey package was mailed to one contact in each group. Packages were also mailed to other groups such as bicycle groups and commuter associations, although phone contact had not been made.

The package consisted of:

- A cover letter on University of NSW letterhead, referring to the phone conversation where appropriate
- Survey of transport groups (4 pages)
- Survey of transport activists (6 pages, including one page for comments)
- Reply paid envelope in which to return the surveys
- Extra copies (usually three or four) of the survey of transport activists with instructions to distribute them to other active members of the group, with a reply paid envelope stapled to each survey.

Both the surveys of groups and activists were designed to be completed quickly, but also provided space to write more detailed comments where appropriate. The survey of transport groups sought information on: group formation, structure and membership; and group operations including income sources, major expenses, reimbursement of expenses, community support, and bank accounts.

The survey of transport activists sought information on: individual involvement in transport issues and groups, time, financial costs, resources (use of technology), other non-money costs, the impact of time and costs on paid work and transport work representing the group, and socio-demographic characteristics. There was also an opportunity to be kept informed about the project and space to write further comments.

Responses are shown in Table 1. Response rates were affected by limited follow-up and the timing of the survey in December.

Table 1 Summary of responses

Type of group	Group survey	Individual survey
Transport group	14	39
Bicycle group	5	10
Commuter group	7	13
Total	26	62

Survey limitations

Survey limitations relate to the sample including identifying the relevant sample of transport groups, and targeting of office-bearers. By targeting active members such as office-bearers, time and costs will be at the higher end of the range. To understand how costs limit participation, it would also be necessary to sample non-participants. It is difficult to predict the direction of bias in time and cost averages arising from non-response. Busy people may be too busy to respond, or alternatively full-time activists may be more likely to respond because they do have the time. Transport activists who do not work through a group are not represented, since all individual surveys were distributed through a group contact. There may also be a tendency for people to overstate time and costs to demonstrate their commitment to transport work.

The benefits and pitfalls of research with community organisations are discussed by Perkins and Wandersman (1990) based on experiences with working with block associations in New York as part of the Block Booster project. Due to the experiences of some activists with government authorities, there is some wariness about revealing information. Therefore this may have affected responses.

Transport action groups: time and costs

Characteristics of transport groups

Of the 26 groups, only four groups (all general groups) were incorporated as an association, while the others reported no formal legal structure, although some had links to umbrella groups such as Bicycle NSW or the NSW Commuter Council, and 16 groups had a bank account in the group name. While a quarter had been in existence for over 20 years, five groups were formed as recently as 1997. Membership ranged in size from less than 10 to over 100 members. As might be expected, the smaller the group, the higher the proportion of active members. Two-thirds of the groups had an interest in a specific region of Sydney, while the others had interests across Sydney or a wider area.

Income and expenses

Of the 26 groups, a quarter reported no income (mostly commuter groups), half reported income under \$1,000 and a quarter reported income of more than \$1,000. Of the groups with income, the number of sources of income ranged from one to four. The most frequently cited source of income was donations from members (14 groups), with other sources including membership fees (9 groups) and fund-raising (7 groups). Annual membership fees for an individual ranged from \$2 to \$15. In terms of income relative to expenses, 11 groups reported that expenses were the same as income, and 8 groups that expenses were less than income.

Groups were asked to indicate their five most significant costs. The most frequently cited broad category of costs was communication expenses such as stationery, printing, phone, postage and photocopying, making up half of the 83 responses. Other costs included hire of equipment and transport (9 responses), programs and activities (7 responses), insurance, and advertising and promotions. In the past year, 11 groups had spent money on research and information, and 8 on holding public meetings. Only one

group had made a Freedom of Information request in the past year. In terms of groups reimbursing members for expenses incurred on group business, the most frequently cited were communication expenses such as postage (14 groups), photocopying (10 groups), and phone calls (9 groups). Other expenses reimbursed included buying reports or data, and travel costs to meetings.

Groups are able to minimise costs through support from the local community. Sixteen groups indicated they used equipment and facilities available in community centres, local government, local MPs, or other community organisations to undertake group work, and in a separate question, 20 groups indicated some support from local organisations (such as community centres, local government or local business). This support included use of community facilities such as halls, parks, auditoriums or centres as meeting venues and use of photocopying facilities at reduced rates or if the group supplied their own paper.

Limits to work

When asked to choose the most significant limit to group work from a given list, 16 groups cited limited time from members, and only four cited lack of money and resources (with a further four citing both time and money). Time as a constraint covers both the time of existing members, and lack of members. One group expressed their frustration at the lack of time of members: "we know what needs to be done and we have successful strategies, but no time to pursue them all". It can be difficult for groups to attract enough members to share the workload. For commuter groups, many potential members spend much time travelling, reducing the time available to be an active member. For some groups, low membership indicates the group is achieving its aims, with membership increasing only if there is a problem with transport services in the area.

Although groups were asked to choose the most significant limit on their work, time and cost are closely related, with extra money or resources helping to overcome problems arising from lack of members. For instance, a group citing lack of money as a limitation noted that increased funding would allow hard-hitting paid advertisements in the media which are not otherwise available in free news item stories. This would raise awareness of issues and result in increased membership. Increased use of the Internet, both within a group and between the group and other parties, could reduce both time and costs in terms of travelling to meetings and disseminating information.

Transport activists: time and costs

Characteristics of transport activists

Of the respondents, about half (28 out of 62) were either President or Secretary of their group, while a further third had other positions or were committee members. There were few young activists, with 80% of respondents aged 35 to 64 years. Three-quarters of respondents were male. Half the respondents had a Bachelors or higher degree. Just under half (27 out of 62) were in full-time employment, while 18 were retired from work. Of those in employment, about half were self-employed (12 of 27) and a third (14) reported that their employment was related to transport. Over 40% reported their

household income as being low income, less than half as middle income and 10% as high income. Two-thirds owned their own home outright. 30% of respondents had children under 18 years living in the household.

Time

Over half the respondents were very aware of the time they spend in their transport work, with over a third having some idea of the time (Table 2). The median total time spent in transport work was 19 hours per month. Even excluding two extreme outliers, the mean time at 33 hours was considerably higher than the median, reflecting eight respondents working more than 90 hours a month. There was marked variation in mean time by group type, with respondents in bicycle and commuter groups spending less time than respondents in other groups (Table 3).

Table 2 Respondents' awareness of time and costs of their transport work

Degree of awareness	Time		Costs	
	Number	%	Number	%
Very aware	33	53%	19	31%
Some idea	24	39%	30	48%
No idea	5	8%	12	19%
Total respondents	62	100%	62	100%

Table 3 Mean time and costs by group membership

Group membership of activists	Time in transport work*		Costs of transport work**	
	Mean hrs	N	Mean \$	N
General group	43 hrs	38	\$96	34
Bicycle group	10 hrs	9	\$95	10
Commuter group	22 hrs	12	\$42	12
Total	33 hrs	59	\$84	56
Median	19 hrs	61	\$26	57

*Mean time excludes highest outlier from bicycle and commuter groups

**Mean costs excludes one outlier from general group

The activities undertaken by respondents are shown in Table 4. For most activities, the median time spent in each activity was approximately 2 to 3 hours per month.

Table 4 Activities of respondents

Activity	Respondents reporting time in the activity	
	Number	%
Attending own group meetings	55	89%
Writing letters and submissions	51	82%
Contacting people	50	81%
Attending other group meetings	45	73%
Doing research	43	69%
Internal group business	34	55%
Total respondents	62	100%

Costs

Respondents were more aware of the time spent in their transport work compared to the costs (Table 2). There was greater variability across respondents in costs than for time. The median cost of transport work was \$26 per month (Table 3). Even excluding one outlier, this was much lower than the mean of over \$80 per month, which was influenced by seven respondents reporting very high costs of over \$200 per month. Respondents in commuter groups reported lower costs, possibly due to State Rail support for these groups. The type of costs incurred by respondents are reported in Table 5. In groups with no formal income, individual members are likely to bear a greater burden. For self-employed people, income foregone by spending time on transport activities instead of work can be a major cost.

Table 5 Type of costs incurred by respondents

Type of cost	Respondents incurring the cost	
	Number	%
Telephone calls	36	58%
Travel costs to meetings	31	50%
Stationery and office supplies	29	47%
Postage	23	37%
Photocopying	22	35%
Research and information	10	16%
Internet access and email	7	11%
Other costs (advertising, lost work time)	4	6%
Total respondents	62	100%

Availability and use of resources at home, as shown in Table 6, is another indicator of costs.

Table 6 Use of resources at home for transport work

Resource	Use at home for transport work	
	Number	%
Computer	44	71%
Printer	40	65%
Fax	25	40%
Internet/email use	17	27%
Photocopier	12	19%
Scanner	4	6%
Total respondents	62	100%

Limits on work

When asked to indicate the most significant limit on their transport work, two-thirds of respondents agreed that time was a significant limitation, with only a quarter agreeing that costs were a significant limitation (see Table 7).

Table 7 Respondents reporting time and costs as significant limitations

Limitations on transport work	Costs are significant	Costs are not significant	Total
Time is significant	6	36	42
Time is not significant	10	9	19
Total	16	45	62*

*includes one no response

As would be expected, there were variations by employment status and household income. Almost all those in full-time employment (25 out of 27) agreed that time was a significant limitation compared to only a third of those retired from work (6 of 18). Half of the low income respondents reported that costs were a significant limitation compared to less than one in ten of the middle or high income earners. Apart from time and cost, other limitations on transport work cited by respondents included lack of community participation, lack of information and access to information and no previous experience.

The importance of time as a constraint on participation was also shown by responses to the five most significant non-money costs of transport work. Over half of all responses referred to time, either time in general, work time or social time. The next most frequently cited non-monetary costs were family stress and personal stress. Other costs included energy, group conflict, travelling, and professional risks to people employed in transport.

Impact on paid employment is another measure of the costs of participation. Of the respondents in full-time and part-time paid employment, over 40% reported that their transport work had affected their paid employment, ranging from affecting their work performance, taking leave to do transport work, impact on their self-employed earnings, and demotion or loss of position.

One third of respondents agreed that with more money, they could reduce the time they spent in their transport work (Table 8). However for others, extra money would enable them to achieve more in the time they allocate to transport work. Half of the respondents agreed that extra resources would improve the effectiveness of their transport work. Extra resources could be used to pay specialists such as lobbyists, researchers, and consultants, and also clerical staff. Other uses include paying for a media monitor service, attending seminars and conferences, advertising, membership drives, and provision of shared offices and facilities. Extra resources would also allow less time to be spent in fundraising. There were some opposing views on the value of extra resources, with respondents commenting that they are paid enough to do transport work voluntarily, and that transport activists need to be more efficient, and know how to use their time wisely.

The quarter of respondents in Table 8 who indicated that extra resources would not help may be due to the significant role of other factors in determining the outcomes of transport work noted by respondents such as community apathy, media interest, the attitude of politicians and bureaucrats, and the nature of the planning processes including environmental impact assessment.

Table 8 Impact of extra resources on time and effectiveness of transport work

Would money reduce transport work time?	Would extra resources improve effectiveness?			
	Yes	No	No response	Total
Yes	14	1	4	19
No	17	14	8	39
No response	1		3	4
Total	32	15	15	62

One concern raised about time in a detailed response from one group was the "dispersion of representation avenues", referring to the number of groups, committees, and forums that now exist, particularly in public transport. While this reflects an increased interest in public transport, it also raises the question of efficient use of community representatives' time. Dispersion of representation avenues is indicated by looking at the number of other groups respondents are involved in, and their representation duties. For instance, two-thirds of respondents were also members of other groups involved in transport issues, and over three-quarters of respondents represented their group or transport interests as a member or delegate to a coalition group, state or local government committee, or a one-off specific issue committee.

Transport work as a measure of concern for the environment

To use time and costs of volunteer work as a measure of concern for the environment, and a potential valuation method, it is important to know whether transport work is a substitute for paid work, "leisure" time or a combination. In response to a question on what they would most likely be doing if they were not doing transport work, over a quarter of respondents mentioned multiple pursuits (excluding paid work) and another quarter of respondents mentioned more time on paid work, either singly or with other pursuits. Other respondents cited more time with family, and social or recreational activities alone. Over 10% of respondents said they would do other community-based work.

Conclusions

The survey of both transport groups and transport activists provides insights into the time and costs of lobbying for transport change. Not unexpectedly, a significant issue is time. Transport groups reported that time is the most significant limit to their transport work, rather than financial costs. It was also clear from the survey of activists that time was the most significant limit to individuals' work. Activists face a heavy burden in terms of time and costs in participating in transport decision-making through their lobbying work. Strategies to support and increase participation may need to focus on time constraints, rather than reducing costs, while recognising the two are closely related. Additional resources may allow time commitments to be reduced, and the effectiveness of participation increased. The public sector needs to recognise the time burdens of community representation in multiple forums.

There are several directions for further research including extending the sample to groups with broader environmental interests, surveying non-participants, relating inputs to outcomes of transport work such as success in lobbying, surveying costs for groups and individuals in non-urban areas where transport and communication costs are likely to be greater, and developing methods to confirm reported time and costs and obtain more detailed information on finances and time, perhaps through the use of time diaries. However it may be difficult to gain the required degree of co-operation from groups, especially given that some activists may not want to be reminded of how much time and money they do spend on transport activism.

Further research will be of interest to a range of public sector organisations which seek community participation by providing greater understanding of the limitations on participation, and assisting development of policy to support community involvement, as well as investigating an extension of existing monetary valuation methods in order to value urban environmental amenity.

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