ANALYSIS BRIEF

PEAK PERIOD VEHICLE TRAVEL IN SELECTED METRO AREAS

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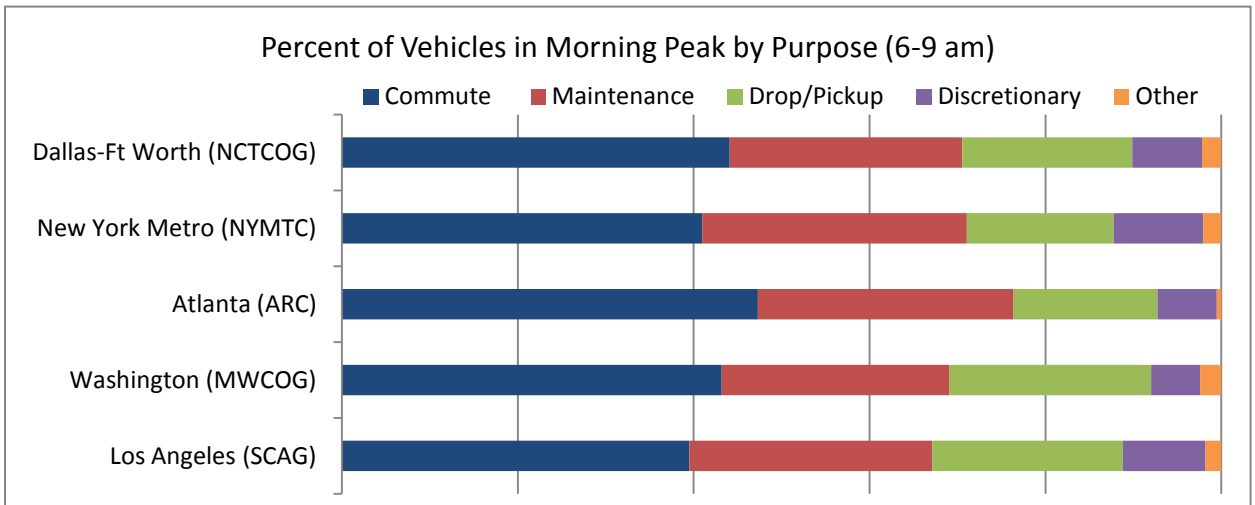
Individual metro areas have unique characteristics in travel behavior. For example, the percent of vehicle trips conducted during peak period, and the percent of those that are for commutes, maintenance activity (such as shopping or stopping for a meal) or discretionary activities (including going to the gym, meeting friends, and entertainment) differs by area. This brief explores the difference in the purpose of vehicle trips for a small select set of metro areas, using the 2009 National Household Travel Survey Data.

Figures 1 and 2 show the distribution of vehicles on the roadway by purpose in the selected metro areas. Not surprisingly, vehicle trips carrying commuters to work are the most common in the morning peak. Of the selected metro areas, Atlanta has the highest proportion of vehicle trips that are commuting (47.3) while Los Angeles has the lowest proportion of commutes (39.5 of all morning peak vehicle trips). Both Los Angeles and Washington DC have a high proportion of vehicle trips to drop-off someone, for instance a child at school or a worker at work (21.7 and 23.0 percent respectively). Los Angeles and New York have the highest proportion of discretionary vehicle trips during the morning peak period, for instance going to the gym or visiting a friend (9.4 and 10.2 percent of vehicle trips respectively).

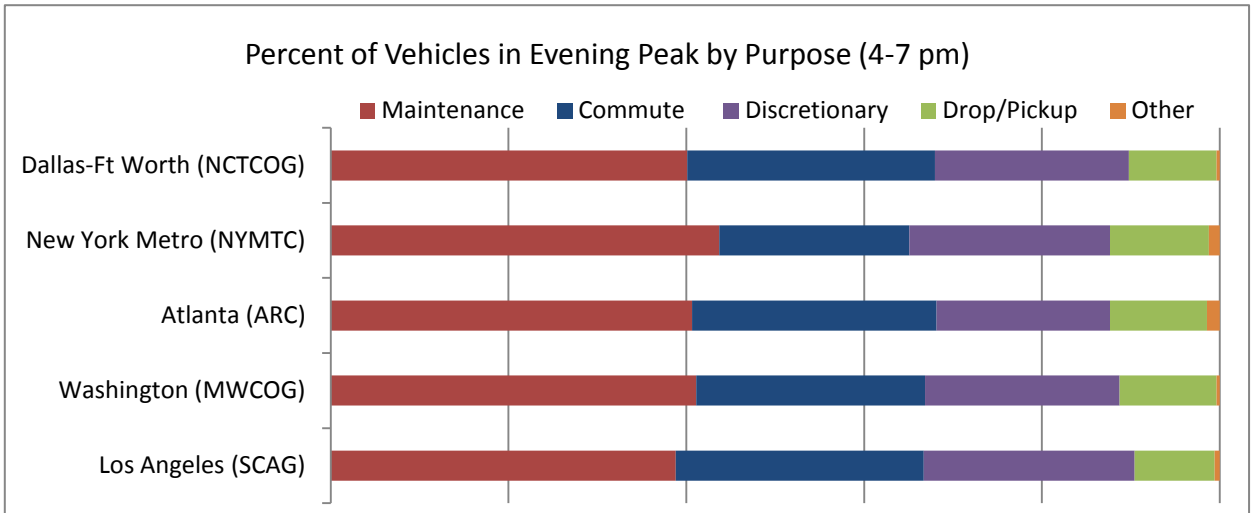
Figure 1 – Percent of Vehicle Trips by Purpose in Morning Peak, Selected Metro Areas



	Los Angeles (SCAG)	Washington (MWCOG)	Atlanta (ARC)	New York Metro (NYMTC)	Dallas-Ft Worth (NCTCOG)
Commute	39.5	43.2	47.3	41.0	44.1
Maintenance	27.6	25.9	29.1	30.1	26.5
Drop/Pickup	21.7	23.0	16.4	16.7	19.3
Discretionary	9.4	5.6	6.7	10.2	7.9
Other	1.8	2.4	0.5	2.1	2.2

The characteristics of the evening peak period are quite different, as shown in Figure 2. Maintenance travel is the most common purpose of vehicle travel in the afternoon and evening. New York Metro and Washington DC have the highest proportion of vehicle trips traveling for household maintenance, such as grocery shopping or picking up a meal (43.7 and 41.1 percent respectively). Commuting is the second most common reason for vehicle travel in the pm peak period, ranging from a high of 27.9 percent of vehicle trips in Los Angeles to a low of 21.4 percent in the New York metro area. Discretionary vehicle travel is much more common in the evening compared to the morning period and Los Angeles has the highest proportion of vehicle trips that are for social and recreational purposes in the evening peak.

Figure 2 – Percent of Vehicle Trips by Purpose in Evening Peak, Selected Metro Areas



	Los Angeles (SCAG)	Washington (MWCOG)	Atlanta (ARC)	New York Metro (NYMTC)	Dallas-Ft Worth (NCTCOG)
Maintenance	38.8	41.1	40.6	43.7	40.1
Commute	27.9	25.8	27.5	21.4	27.8
Discretionary	23.7	21.9	19.5	22.5	21.8
Drop/Pickup	9.0	10.9	10.9	11.1	9.9
Other	0.6	0.4	1.5	1.2	0.4

Understanding the purpose of travel in the peak periods is critical to policies related to congestion pricing, tolling, and travel demand management. Areas that are rural or densely urban, areas near special attractors (such as universities or large malls or special events venues) require more detailed data. But the National Household Travel Survey along with its add-on partners allows analysis of the purpose of vehicle travel during the peak periods in large metro areas.

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