

ANALYSIS BRIEF

MANDATORY TRAVEL DURING PEAK PERIOD



Nancy McGuckin
www.travelbehavior.us

Understanding peak period travel is vital for potential finance initiatives, congestion mitigation programs, air quality policies, and other important measures and planning programs. One question that is difficult to answer is: how much of peak travel is mandatory?

About half of all vehicle travel in the combined morning and evening peak periods is not related to work—but non-work travel is not always discretionary. Some non-work trips may be constrained by the traveler’s schedule, the schedule of special events or, in the case of medical trips, the doctor’s schedule. Trips to drop someone or pick someone up may be constrained by auto availability and the schedule and purpose of the passenger, such as dropping children at school. Whether trips to the doctor, the gym, or the store for milk during the morning peak are “mandatory,” is subjective and based on the traveler’s perception.

But simply dividing the purpose of vehicle travel into clearly ‘mandatory’ (work, school, and dropping a passenger at work or school) and all other purposes (‘flexible’) can be illuminating.

The first thing to note is that the weekday morning peak, between 6 and 9 am, and the weekday evening peak, between 4 and 7 pm, have very different characteristics. The morning peak is dominated by mandatory travel while the evening peak is composed of more flexible travel, such as shopping, getting a meal, and social activities.

Mandatory travel accounts for nearly four out of five vehicle trips during the morning peak period (79.0 percent), including:

- Trips directly to work (home-based work trips are 36.7 percent of am peak vehicle trips);
- Commutes with at least one incidental stop (18.2 percent);
- Students driving to school (4.0 percent);
- Other work-related travel (4.6 percent); and
- Driving a passenger to work or school (15.5 percent).

The remainder of the morning peak vehicle trips (21.1 percent) is for all other purposes, including personal business such as medical and dental and shopping.

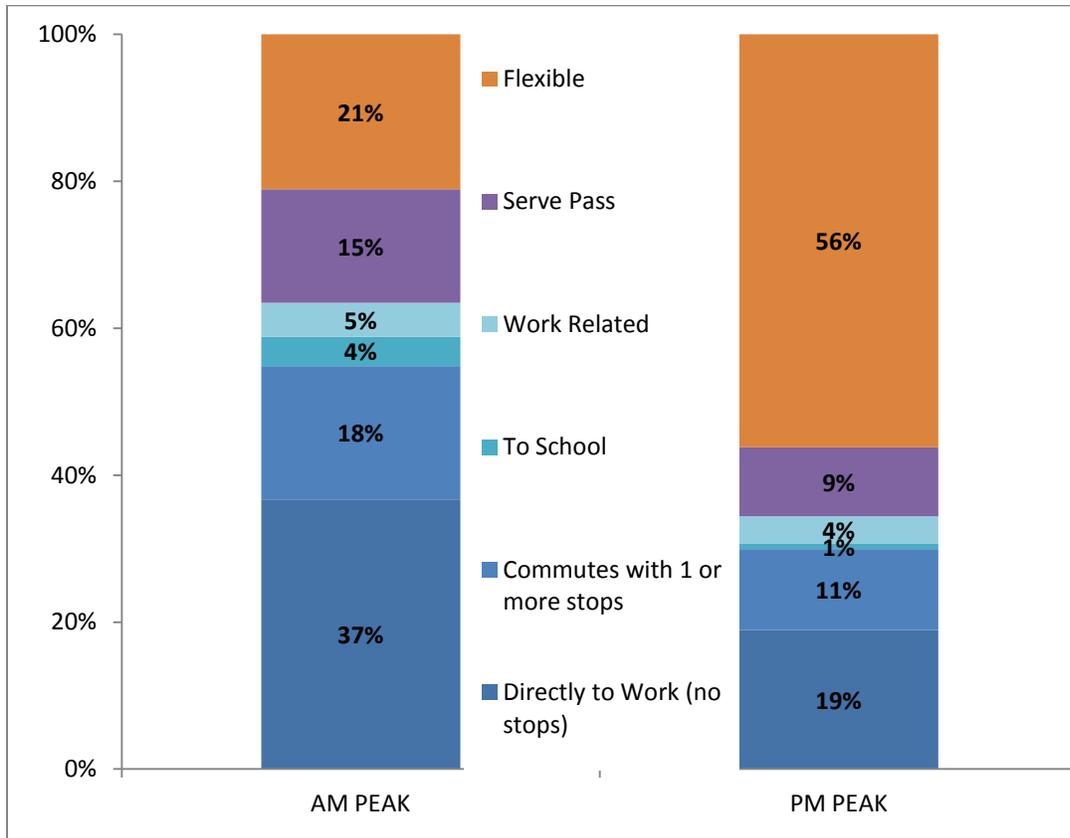
In contrast, in the evening peak mandatory travel makes up just over a third (35 percent) of all vehicle trips. In the evening peak vehicle travel is composed of:

- Trips directly to or from work (19.0 percent)
- Commutes with one or more incidental stops (11.0 percent)

- Students driving home from school and other work-related travel (0.8 and 3.7 percent)
- Serving a passenger (9.4 percent)

The remainder--56.2 percent of all vehicle trips during the evening peak--is travel for more flexible purposes, such as stopping at the store and meeting friends for dinner.

VEHICLE TRAVEL IN AM AND PM PEAK PERIOD



Source: Author's analysis of the 2009 National Household Travel Survey

The data presented here are for the nation as a whole. Individual metro areas, areas that are rural or densely urban, areas near special attractors (such as universities or large malls or special events venues) will show unique patterns. These data use the trip chain file, which combines work travel into tours that can include intermediary stops for any purpose, such as getting coffee.

Nancy McGuckin, Travel Behavior Analyst
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