

Shop Ethically

Facts and Figures

Shoppers and How They Travel

Research on retail vitality conducted by Sustrans has found that pedestrians are positive news for local trade. 'Shoppers and how they travel', the first study of its kind to look at neighbourhood shopping areas, highlights the importance of catering for pedestrians and bus passengers at local shops as these customers are better for business. Almost half of the customers live within one mile of the shops.

Interestingly Sustrans' research found that retailers significantly overestimate how far their customers travel and the importance of the car, while underestimating how many shops each customer visits.

Retailers overestimated the importance of car-borne trade by almost 100%, believing that 41% of their customers arrived by car, whereas only 22% had done – actually over half of shoppers walked.

National research on number of trips taken by mode of transport show that 61% of all journeys were made by car and just 1.5% by bike. However Sustrans' research revealed that in making local shopping trips only 22% were by car and 10% by bike (over six times the national cycling average).

The results show that most customers are local. Retailers estimated that just 12% of customers lived within half a mile, and 40% more than two miles away. In reality, 42% had travelled less than half a mile and 86% had travelled less than two miles.

These customers usually don't just visit one shop. Traders believed that as many as one in four shoppers would make just one visit but this figure was actually only 13%. They thought less than one in ten would visit more than three shops, remarkably, almost 30% did so.

These findings have a real significance for business, land use and transport planning. It is traditional for retailers to focus on car access and parking, and to resist measures to promote walking, cycling and public transport use – although pedestrian shopping areas tend to be commercially most successful. Interviews with traders, shoppers and neighbours show that local people would like to see the impact of traffic reduced.

The picture is of local shoppers mainly walking to the shops, and visiting a number of stores. Interestingly, this is also the picture of healthy, physically active lifestyles and streets full of people. This is just the thing urban transport planners, public health specialists and community leaders want to see. We should do all we can to support and grow this active, community based local market.

Communities can use such facts to argue with the planners and others that they should be putting in place the small steps needed to support local shops as part of the economic regeneration of many areas, as well as campaigning against planning permission being granted to even more supermarkets.