

Anti-COVID measures considerably reduced travel demand in Germany

January 31 2022



Credit: Manuel Balzer, KIT

Measures introduced to slow down the COVID-19 pandemic considerably reduced travel demand in Germany. Researchers of the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) established this in a study on

behalf of the Federal Ministry of Transport, in which they examined the impacts of the different phases of the pandemic on the travel behavior in Germany. According to their results, transport performance in the fall of 2020 was almost 20 percent below that of the previous year. In general, people were staying more at home: The number of people leaving their house once per day decreased.

"Due to the restrictions in reaction to the pandemic, the [transport](#) performance consisting of the distances covered by all people was below the previous year's performance, as much as 18 percent in October 2020 and even 54 percent in the winter of 2020/21," Dr. Bastian Chlond of the KIT Institute for Transport Studies (IfV) states. According to the expert, a likely reason for this is the elimination of a large part of long-distance travel like vacation and weekend trips. "Another indicator is the share of trip makers, meaning the number of people taking at least one trip and therefore leaving the house at all, which decreased from 89 percent in 2019 to 81 percent in the following year.

Car traffic relatively stable, bicycle and pedestrian traffic increased

The utilization of transport modes also saw some changes: While the percentage of car trips stayed roughly the same with 51 percent in the winter of 2020/21 compared to 54 percent in the previous year, the total amount of traffic decreased significantly. "At the same time, bicycles played a relatively big part in the fall of 2020, especially in leisure traffic," Chlond says. "In the winter, the use of modes shifted towards walking, likely due to the weather conditions." In fact, Germans walked to their destinations in 34 percent of all cases during that period. A year earlier, that number was only at 21 percent. "This development was most likely caused by the reduced leisure options because of the pandemic-related closures," Chlond adds. The percentage of leisure trips in the

winter of 2020/21 was five percentage points lower than in the fall of 2020 and six points below the previous year's level. "People inevitably stayed closer to their homes. Going for a walk was becoming more and more popular in the course of the pandemic as people wanted to get at least some form of fresh air."

Decline for public transport

The use of public transport, however, saw a significant drop. "Moving various activities to the virtual space by working from home or home-schooling as a result of closed schools led to a substantial reduction" Lisa Ecke of the IfV explains. In 2019, eleven percent of all trips used the typical means of transport for commuting: Buses, trams, and trains. In the following winter, this was reduced to six percent and eight percent in fall. Between fall and winter, we see differences in how transport took place for commuting and business trips. "The workplaces of office workers, whose jobs are easily done from home, are predominantly placed in city centers and are well connected to public transport. Consequently, public transport use experienced a particularly sharp drop because people worked from home."

Everyday activities move to digital spaces

There is an increasing general shift towards digital spaces that also affects traffic volumes: In 2020, only 45 percent of the workers stated no possibility to work from home while in 2019, this number was 67 percent. Similar tendencies can be observed for leisure activities and the use of digital services like delivery services, online shopping, or online banking.

Positive impulses for a shift towards sustainable transport

The researchers believe the current developments to present an opportunity for climate protection: "In view of the desired shift towards sustainable transport we can hope for a long-term reduction of physical traffic, supported by virtual tools and formats. Our society has the responsibility to drive this process forward," Chlond says. "During the pandemic, it became clear that we cannot only reduce mobility with restrictive measures but that we are also able to change it and shape it differently."

About the German Mobility Panel

Since 1995, the Institute for Transport Studies has been analyzing and evaluating the German Mobility Panel (MOP) on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Transport by studying the travel behavior of the German population. This research assignment will be continued under the new government for at least two more years.

More information: More information on the pandemic's impacts on mobility (in German): [mobilitaetspanel.ifv.kit.edu/d ...
ericht_MOP_20_21.pdf](https://mobilitaetspanel.ifv.kit.edu/d...ericht_MOP_20_21.pdf)

Provided by Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

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