



More of this, please (courtesy
Bloomberg News)

[Last week I reported on the Caltrans survey findings](#) showing that Californians seem to be driving less. Too good to be true? Perhaps. My always-pessimistic colleague Brian Taylor suspects that this is more about the Great Recession than about real changes in driving habits.

Brian and his colleagues at the University of California Transportation Center [recently issued a report](#) closely connected with this issue, and sure enough, it finds that economic factors account for the lion's share of travel demand changes for young adults and youth. Technology use, which some thought might lead to more telecommuting, provide no answer: "despite the staggering increase in mobile phone and web access and use," they report, "the effects we were able to measure were both mild and tended to be associated with *increases* in travel."

But "lion's share" does not equal all:

Our quasi-cohort models suggest moderate generational effects on travel behavior. Despite (or perhaps because of) what appears to be youth's increasing reliance on the single-occupant vehicle for the journey to work and social trips, the youngest cohorts in our datasets are making somewhat fewer trips (-4%) and traveling considerably fewer miles (-18%) than was the case for previous generations at the same stage in their lives, all else equal.

Eighteen percent fewer miles *all other things being equal*? That seems to me to be pretty significant. I am going to have to dig into the study a little more deeply, but this seems like an unadulterated good.

The causal links should be investigated, in particular the cryptic phrase “despite (or perhaps because of)”. Maybe the more people depend upon cars, the more they figure out how to avoid making trips altogether. A transportation expert might not feel so great about that, because it means people are less mobile. But if you are worried about carbon emissions, you will take an 18% decrease in VMT no matter what. Keep hope alive!