Households on the Move – Experiences of a New Approach to Voluntary Travel Behaviour Change

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1 Introduction

It has long been suggested that approaching households following a significant event or change is an ideal time to talk to households about their travel and the options available to them before their new travel habits are formed. In a pilot project in Canberra, households who were in the process of moving were targeted - including households who had recently completed moving as well as households who had rented or purchased property but not yet moved location. The pilot project was carried out in the Belconnen and Gungahlin areas of Canberra.

Selecting only households who were in the process of moving presented a number of issues that are not applicable when carrying out a voluntary behaviour change project over a suburb or within a community. In this paper we explore these issues and discuss recommendations on how they can be overcome.

Evaluation is an important element of any pilot project. While evaluation of voluntary travel behaviour change is never easy, there are some very specific issues that arise with households that are moving or have just moved. We describe the issues relating to evaluation and then describe the procedures that have been tried in the Canberra case to overcome the problems.

2 Voluntary behaviour change in Canberra - Background

Over the years a number of approaches have been used to bring about change that reduces the negative impacts of the private car. It was traditional (up until the 1990s) to solve transport problems with supply management solutions (usually building infrastructure). The voluntary behaviour change approach is now seen as a vital addition to Travel Demand Management measures due to the sustainable changes that are made (e.g. Government of SA, 2005).

Voluntary travel behaviour change occurs when individuals make choices for personal reward without a top-down mechanism, without regulation of any sort, and without a feeling of external compulsion (Ampt, 2003).

In the past 3-4 years in several countries around the world, governments, planners and other decision makers have shown a clear preference for a voluntary approach vis-à-vis an infrastructure or regulatory approach. This approach to changing travel behaviour has proven to be successful — even when applied to large groups of people (e.g. www.travelsmart.vic.gov.au or www.dpi.wa.gov.au/travelsmart). Outcomes have included significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and an improvement in the quality of life of the community.

In Canberra, there has been a focus on workplace travel behaviour change through the TravelSmart Workplaces program. Other TravelSmart programs that have been or are being run in the ACT are the TravelSmart Schools and 'Way to Go' (a household-based) project.

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2.1 Households on the Move

In late 2003, the ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) commissioned a team consisting of Steer Davies Gleave and the Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies (ITLS) at the University of Sydney to carry out a project to 'develop, apply and prove an effective approach to influencing the travel behaviour of "households on the move", which has the potential to be applied at a larger scale.

The approach to voluntary travel behaviour change used in this project was to understand how a person travels, what they think and feel about the way they travel, and what they dislike about it. This was done through a conversation. Once a TravelSmart team member developed a comprehensive understanding of a potential participant's travel behaviour they work with that person to identify what changes to travel behaviour can improve the person's life.

At the crux of such a voluntary behaviour change approach is that it is not a prescriptive approach (how can we get more people to use buses), but more a facilitative approach (what changes to your car use will make your life better).

The pilot project described in this paper aimed to test the hypothesis that householders will be more susceptible to changing their transport mode and/or patterns of mobility if they are in the process of moving or they have recently undertaken a household move. The process used incorporated many elements of the behaviour theories and was designed to be relevant and useful to a large proportion of the population and to ensure the changes are sustainable. These are elaborated in the next sections.

2.1.1 'Change moments' and 'life events'

There have been examples in psychological literature that a 'life event' or 'change moment' such as moving house, workplace, and birth of a child for example have a significant impact on people's behaviour, especially travel. A life event or change moment can be described as a single event or an event that occurs with very low frequency that also interferes with routine behaviour.

The subject of voluntary behaviour change and changes in habitual travel behaviour at the time of life events, particularly relocating, is increasingly becoming recognised as a point where travel habits are broken and sustainable behaviour change is achieved.

Life events play a large role in influencing behaviour change (Robinson, 2001) and hence in breaking current travelling habits. Relocating, changing place of study or work, birth of a child, gaining a driver's licence and buying a car are life events identified as having the most significant impact on people's choice of travel mode and behaviour. Travel habits differ for men and women depending on the life event and need to be looked at independently.

Councils in the United Kingdom and the United States, some major insurance agencies as well as some local governments in Australia have all recognised the need to provide information to people that specifically targets significant events in people lives. As an example, the New South Wales Government has a Life Events page on its website (NSW Government, 2005) that links to information needed when moving house — property, hospitals, education, electoral office, postal services, local councils, immigration and local public transport information. Similar examples can also be found in the UK (Westminster City Council, 2005) and Canada (Government of Ontario, 2005).

This could provide some interesting opportunities for future voluntary behaviour change projects since, although some of the above websites had information on public transport options or local activities, none of them had this information packaged as an opportunity to reduce the frustrations of getting around – the approached used in the current project.

2.1.2 Other studies

Although at present, there has not been a large component of research specifically focussed on people's behaviour at these 'life events', since the project began we have found several other similar studies being carried out in Europe. Further research in this area is currently being done by Stanbridge from Bristol University in the UK who is undertaking a PhD study on how residential relocation may affect travel behaviour without intervention (Stanbridge, 2004).

Klockner (Klockner, 2004) is also currently researching how single events change travel mode choice over a life span. Preliminary findings in Klockner's research show that these events prompt people's reconsideration of travel options, including mode choice. In the case of moving house, mode choice is considered at three main stages — when searching for a house, selection of a house, and post move. Not surprisingly, Klockner reports that car ownership plays a considerable role in the time at which mode choice is first considered. In some cases the move may be prompted by a desire to change mode or reduce travel times.

3 Approaching households

The initial challenge in offering behavioural change options to households who had recently moved, or who were just about to move was to understand what would be their key issues, and how to find the actual households to be targeted and over what area these should be targeted.

3.1 Focus group

Given the lack of knowledge of the actual relationships between moving and travel behaviour, meeting and listening to the 'people on the move' in the Canberra community was a vital first step - even though it was a pilot study. We held one focus group comprising people who were about to move and those who had just moved – with a mixture of owners and renters. The aim was threefold:

- to understand and hear the types and diversity of issues (particularly relating to mobility and accessibility) that are important for "people on the move";
- to understand who are the key people or groups of influence for "people on the move" so they can be used as levers or inspirers, and
- to begin gathering other resources needed for the project.

The group was made up of homeowners and renters – both male and female. They were moving or had moved for different reasons, ranging from wanting to be closer to work to moving so they could afford to purchase property. Most people associated a level of stress as well as excitement over moving. In trying to understand how we could ensure that our approach used words that would alleviate some of the stresses in moving (and in life) we asked people what would make moving easier.

The answer to this question was almost unanimously to know more about the available activities in the area, and access to these activities. Activities for this group of people included gym, doctor, dentist, solicitor, grandchildren's activities, places to eat out, information on things on the way to the seniors clubs, needs for animals, clubs, and opportunities for volunteering. It is interesting to note that these types of activities are much more specific than those that usually appear in Council or community information packs for movers. The need for information is clearly a travel-related concern, even though not directly perceived in this way by the movers. Hence, providing specific local information is likely to be one way to reduce travel at the point of moving.

The focus group was also used to explore how people obtained information because this could influence the way we found people to participate in this project. Self-discovery was one important method as were local newsletters, though these were not easy to find. Occasionally the departing tenants had left information and there was a suggestion that 'it would be good if neighbourhoods had some kind of brochure when people moved into the area', again reinforcing the importance of specific local information.

We also asked the participants how we could have found them when they moved. While there was a suggestion of putting an advertisement in the paper, most people agreed that they would not have responded to this alone. Another idea was that real estate agents could have told them about local information. Discussion suggested that they would have been happy to know of a third party that gave information.

In summary, the focus group gave some important insights for the intervention phase of the Households on the Move:

- Moving itself can be a stressful time and anything to reduce stresses before and after would be helpful;
- People felt strongly that they were lacking information at the time of moving;
- Many people were not sure where to get that information;
- Word of mouth was a preferred method of receiving information; and
- People felt that they would not mind giving their phone numbers to a real estate agent to have a TravelSmart person phone them.

3.2 Finding 'households on the move'

Since a program of this type was new, one of the objectives of the project was to document a way of finding households that were about to move or had recently moved. In establishing the project, we had researched various methods and suggested a method of doing this. In actually carrying out the project, the task proved to be quite complicated.

At the initial stage of the project we had identified 4 different types of households. The categories were:

- Owners about to move;
- Renters about to move;
- Owners recently moved; and
- · Renters recently moved.

We had imagined that our focus would be contacting people before they moved as any changes they identified during discussion could be made as people moved, so that habits in the new residence were not formed. We also felt that it would be relatively easy to find people before they moved, particularly due to early discussions with real estate agents and utility authorities.

For example, it was believed that addresses of recent electricity connections would be available from the Australian Capital Territory electricity supplier (ActewAGL). However, following an initial meeting it became clear that we would not be able to contact post move households from their lists.

We also began discussions with Real Estate agents to contact pre move households, and while they were enthusiastic, there were many reasons that they were not an ideal source of movers..

Shown in Figure 1 is the approach that we ended up taking in the project.

As described below, the complexity of finding households meant that we could not adhere to even segmentation. In fact, almost all households participating in the project were owners who had recently moved.

3.2.1 Real estate agents

We first met with the manager of a real estate office who expressed extreme interest in the project and in being the first partner in the project. A process was developed where she would tell people of Households on the Move at the point where the clients were interested (this could include at time of renting, signing the contract or even at open houses). Together we devised a process in which each agent would have a sheet of paper on which the interested person could write down their name, phone number and an appropriate time to call. In this sense they would be giving permission for a conversationalist to call. Having gained the enthusiasm and participation of one agent, we then engaged other real estate companies in the area.

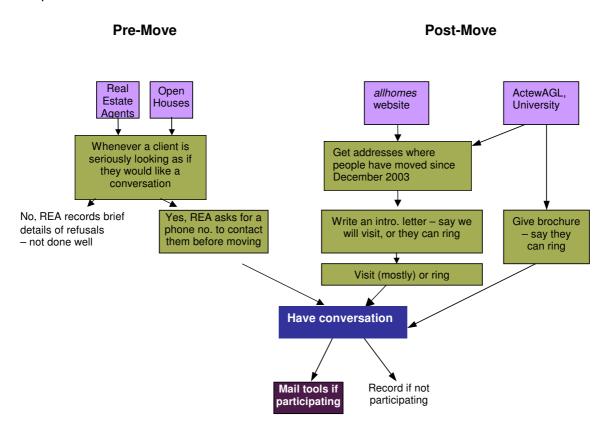


Figure 1 Approach used in Households on the Move Pilot Project

Although the Real Estate agents were initially keen (since it was seen as a bonus that they could offer their customers), it was very difficult to operationalise. In-depth conversations suggested that there were two main reasons for this. Firstly they were not being offered this over their competitors. Secondly, but more importantly, when someone is discussing a property with a prospective buyer, if they are interested it is possible they might remember to offer the Households on the Move service but were more concerned with closing the sale. The paper work and instructions were easy. The alternative was for us to attend open homes and actually having the conversations ourselves with potential buyers. This was somewhat successful, although a large proportion of people visiting open homes that are for sale are not looking to purchase.

Despite Real Estate Agents not being a very successful way of reaching people with the number of referrals from Real Estate Agents being very small, most (83%) of those movers who expressed interest did take up tools for change after discussion with a conversationalist.

3.2.2 Allhomes.com – home and flat sale/rental website

In trying to find a replacement for the utility company addresses, we realised that the allhomes.com.au website provided addresses of all houses that had recently been settled (sold) and rented for those agents that belong to the website (ostensibly 90% of all agents).

For this reason we decided to test this as a source of post-move households using a face-to-face method (since no phone numbers were available and address matching using the electronic white pages only resulted in a 7% successful match). In fact, this approach proved to be one of the most successful in reaching households that had recently moved. Even then, it was only possible to contact 64% of listings. The remainder were vacant dwellings, not recently moved (e.g. house had been sold but tenants stayed on) or commercial. The participation rate of those contacted was 47%.

3.2.3 ActewAGL Utility Company

ActewAGL agreed to send a letter to all households 1 week after they have the power turned on at all residential properties. This included a lot of information about ActewAGL's services, but they also include other information on occasions. Although we feared very low response rates, it the pilot nature of the project made it worthy of investigation. In fact, only 3 people contacted us after receiving information as part of more than a thousand information packs to people connecting to power over the period.

3.2.4 Defence Housing Department

Offering the project to a large-scale mover of personnel like the Defence Housing Department seemed an excellent possibility and there was much enthusiasm from the Department. However, of the 700 personnel that move to Canberra each year, about 90% move in January and February. In other words, since the project only began early in the year, it was too late for the 2004 move. This type of institution remains a recommended option for targeting household in future projects.

3.2.5 Visitor and Migration centres

We learned that people occasionally enquired at the Visitor's Centre on first arriving in Canberra from interstate. The Centre was very willing to make simple brochures available to anyone enquiring and we placed these there. One household contacted us through these brochures.

We also enquired with the Migration Centre to see if they were housing people in Canberra but their clients only come to them about 6 months arrival in Canberra.

3.2.6 Centra Care

Centra Care, a Catholic welfare agency, has the contract with DIMIA to settle refugees in Canberra and potentially would be very interested in using a Households on the Move program. However, during the time of the project, the settlement process was not in process. Again, this type of agency would be recommended for future projects.

3.2.7 Universities

The Australian National University did not have anyone who looked after off-campus housing. At the time, the university did own some properties that they rent out to students but none of these properties were in our target area.

At Canberra University there was a Housing Manager responsible for assisting students to find housing in the Belconnen area. She was very keen to offer the Households on the Move service to students. In the event, she was very busy and often overlooked doing so, although we were able to contact 9 students in this way. For future initiatives it would be important to make arrangements with these types of agencies well in advance of the commencement of university term.

3.2.8 Contacting Removalists

Another option we pursued was removalists, whose main business is to deal with people 'on the move'. It was discovered that their source of addresses is what they term the ABC method. When they see a house for sale, they send information to that house (people about to move), i.e. they work on 'for sale' lists. This works for them because they are not interested in the move-destination while for this pilot project we were only interested in a Belconnen move. The sale method may work better for a project over a larger area.

3.2.9 Door-to-door visits in newly established areas

A final method that was tested was sending initial letters to batches of streets in an area which in which people were moving in on almost a daily basis. We chose an area of Gungahlin for this part of the pilot. This approach became one of the most successful of the project with 74% of all households visited being eligible. Of these eligible households, 74% participated.

3.3 The area

As this was a pilot study, the intervention area was limited to a manageable size. Manageable meant that it needed to be able to be reached relatively easily by the Project Manager for face-to-face interviewing and the local services were common to the area.

We were able to get figures from ActewAGL on areas where most connections occurred in Canberra on the assumption that many of the connections would be associated with a household moving to the area. The data however, was not obtained in the time allowed. Hence we used figures from the *allhomes* website that lists available rentals and sales at any point in time.

The following suburbs in the Belconnen area were chosen as the key target areas: Aranda, Belconnen, Cook, Florey, Hawker, Macquarie, Page, Scullin, and Weetangera.

4 Materials and information delivery

There are two kinds of changes that can occur when a household is on the move:

- For the people who have not yet moved there could be changes because of a new location (i.e. a different route, different times of travel) and because of a change in emphasis from the way they travelled before.
- For the people who have already moved, although new patterns will have been established, it might be possible to assist in bringing about change because they are still in a state of transition (i.e. still in the state of being amenable to change that occurs at a 'change moment' in this case moving house).

We designed 'tools' that would be of assistance to people who had just moved into the Belconnen area as well as those households who were moving within the area.

4.1 Engagement

The first step of an engagement process is an introduction to the project, often through an initial contact letter. In this case, for pre-movers we planned a letter – though occasionally used a phone call. For those who have already moved, we planned and used a letter contact most of the time. However, in Gungahlin where we did some door-to-door visiting, we did not send a letter in advance, although we had one if someone wanted to see authorisation.

Next there was the true two-way communication in the form of a conversation. Engagement conversations mostly occurred face-to-face but occasionally by telephone. Whether or not they had moved, during the conversation people were asked to think about the way they travel around Canberra. They were then asked to think about any aspects that are currently frustrating them.

The introduction to the conversation varied slightly depending on context, but the essential components were:

- to encourage people to articulate 'what bothers them most about travelling around',
- to (together with them) identify a tool that may help them to address this problem before or after they moved, and
- to gain a voluntary commitment to try this tool as a way of achieving their goal of alleviating the irritation expressed above.

The dialogue between conversationalist and individual was aimed to find ways to resolve these issues – either before they moved, or since they had moved. We had a tool-kit of materials to help people do this.

4.2 Materials offered to households

A conversation was held with all the moving households. In the conversation the householder was prompted to think about their travel habits, what frustrated them about travelling and were encouraged to think of what they could do to solve the problem. The conversation is one of the most effective parts of the 'tools' that are delivered to the household and in some cases the householder comes up with solutions to their problems through the conversation alone. Other tools that were offered to households included:

- Journey Plans for walking, cycling or public transport;
- Local Activities Guides for either the Belconnen or Gungahlin area;
- Specific Information on saving time, money, increasing fitness, gaining independence;
- Kilometre Monitor to keep track of kilometres driven;
- Kids Pages activity sheets for children; and
- Ideas Letter confirmation of the householders' verbal commitment to try a travel change, which was discussed during the conversation.

5 Evaluation

While the intervention and the evaluation were done as independently as possible so that the results of one had minimum influence on the results of the other, it is important to understand the sequence in which events occurred. This is shown in Figure 2 below.

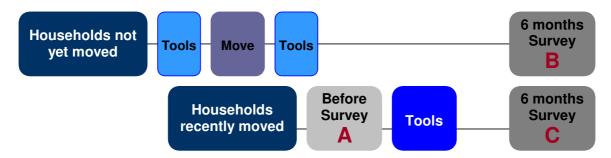


Figure 2: Juxtaposition of Intervention and Evaluation

When pre-move households were contacted they were offered the tools before the move — which seemed the logical time to receive them to make most change. However, if requested, we also provided the tools immediately after moving ('so they don't get lost in the move'). This explains the 2 options for receiving tools in Figure 2. Pre-move households only carried out the 'after' survey. Post-move households were recruited, but only received their tools after they had completed the 'before' survey.

Recruitment of households for the evaluation survey was done by the conversationalist when the household was contacted initially, and after the household had already indicated an interest in receiving tools. In addition, households that expressed no interest in receiving tools were asked if they would be willing to do the survey. This latter group was intended to provide a control group of similar households, from which it would be possible to determine the extent of the changes in travel behaviour that would have been likely to occur for households that accepted tools, had those households not had the opportunity to participate.

Two possible problems arose with this method of recruitment for the evaluation survey. First, households were clearly aware of the link between the TravelSmart intervention and the evaluation surveys. Had the evaluation relied exclusively on self-reporting travel diaries to measure changes in travel, this would be a serious problem, because people may have tried to show, by what they omitted from the diaries or added to the diaries, the types of behaviour that they believed were being looked for. Second, the conversationalist could not be trained also as the best possible recruiter for the survey. It was more important for the success of the project that this person should be trained to engage the household in the conversation that would lead to participation in the TravelSmart initiative, rather than that they should be trained to recruit households for a survey. These are two very different activities.

The evaluation survey also used a new method for evaluation, as described elsewhere (Stopher et al., 2004). This was to equip all members of the subject household with a GPS device (either an in-vehicle device for those who travelled predominantly by car or a wearable device for those who used public transport on a regular basis), which they were asked to use for a week. The conversationalist recruited the household for the survey and then sent the information about the household to ITLS, including the number of persons in the household for which GPS devices were needed and the type of GPS devices. The devices were then sent out by courier to each household, and collected 8 days later by courier.

6 Results and lessons

This section describes the lessons learned from the Households on the Move project. It does not give results from the evaluation process. The way in which the before and after surveys were analysed is described in detail in Stopher et al., 2004.

6.1 Summary of participation levels

Once people were reached and a conversation was held, just over half (54%) were interested, expressing a frustration with getting around Canberra (as part of the moving process) and getting tools to assist them to overcome these problems (Table 1).

The participation rates for the Gungahlin area (where the conversationalist went from door to door to visit households without knowing if they had recently moved) were much higher (74%) than in Belconnen (47%) where people were approached after we had obtained addresses of recently moved households from the *allhomes* website.

The number of 'usable' addresses (i.e. households where we were able to talk to someone who recently moved) was slightly higher in Belconnen (63%) using the *allhomes* lists than in Gungahlin (58%) using the door-to-door method.

However, the cost, time and emissions investment was significantly lower in Gungahlin (where the conversationalist went to the area, parked the car and walked from door to door) than in Belconnen (where the conversationalist drove from one suburb to the next, making up to 6 calls [i.e. often making multiple trips]). It is estimated that it took an average of about 3 hours per participating household in Belconnen, compared with about 1 hour in Gungahlin.

Table 1 Participation of Households on the Move

Households offered intervention face-to-face	171
Households participating in intervention from face to face	93
Overall participation rate (93/171)	54%
Face to face offers (171) + other offers/contacts (18)	189
Overall no. of participants	102

6.2 Offering Tools

It was found that the tools that were offered to the households were well received. Households in particular appreciated the Local Activities Guide as a means of minimising their travel during relocation. Journey Plans were also frequently requested to assist people reach destinations by bus, walking or cycling. However, the tools offered need careful consideration for future projects and could potentially include information on working from home and a 'Memory Jogger' tool that looks at a householder's travel after they moved and gives tips on travelling more efficiently.

6.3 Lessons in finding moving households

During the study, we found that it was essential to talk to people personally - ideally face-to-face. This impacted on the effectiveness of the means for finding people.

- Most effective in terms of time, cost and generation of emissions in the process, was the method of visiting households door-to-door in a newly settled area (Gungahlin in this case).
- The next most successful approach for *finding* people was visiting recently sold and rented houses. Although successful in finding people that had just moved, it required a huge number of (car) kilometres to be travelled and was not time efficient.
- The Real Estate Agents were enthusiastic and keen on the idea, but did not carry through with talking to interested people, as they were busy with sales or rentals.
- Similarly, University Housing Agents were in a busy period and did not gather information from clients when they came in to get housing information and advice.

- new households and assist with their relocation.
 We believe that a website include a 'moving' section, as is done for NSW, that incorporates a TravelSmart approach to moving to a new area, offering the tools used in this project would be an ideal step for future projects.
- 'Open house' inspections were somewhat effective, but again were not located near each other, many also had neighbours attending who were not looking at moving.
- Sending letters to all the households that had just connected electricity had an expected poor response rate.

From the experience of trying many methods of contacting households that were about to move, or had just moved, we would make the following recommendations for future projects which target households that have just moved.

- The approach will work well in newly settled areas by visiting door-to-door.
- The approach is likely to work well for people about to move into a new housing development, run in conjunction with a large developer.
- The project would probably work very well in conjunction with organisations associated with large groups of movers, e.g. the Defence and University housing offices during their peak periods. All moving households could be put in touch with a consultant who could talk to them about their new, or intended, travel patterns.
- The project needs to be run over the medium-long term. It is common for households not to move for a couple of months following the purchase of a house.
- Pre-move intervention is likely to bring about the greatest change. Our experience showed that the point of intervention is very important. The ideal point is probably at the start of the housing search. Too late (i.e. pre-move but after the house has been purchased/rented) can mean that people lose the behaviour change tools or begin forming patterns before change can occur.

6.4 Lessons learned in evaluation

The number of households that were willing to be recruited for the surveys was relatively low, although almost all households that were recruited for the before survey and could be contacted again afterwards also completed the after survey. Also, compliance with the study goal of using the GPS devices for a period of seven days was generally high. However, it became apparent that completing any type of survey was a low priority for households that had just moved or were about to move. As a result, it was sometimes quite difficult to obtain responses from recruited households, and a larger than usual number of households that were recruited never completed the surveys.

Second, as discussed elsewhere (Stopher, Greaves and FitzGerald, 2005), the design of the GPS device was itself a deterrent to use, particularly for the wearable version, which required the person to carry a shoulder bag, with the antenna/receiver mounted on the top of the shoulder strap, and the recording and power equipment being carried in the bag. This survey would most likely have been more readily accepted if the device had been less bulky and visible. New devices that have now been developed could be expected to have found much better acceptance.

Third, it is necessary that there is more separation between the TravelSmart intervention and the evaluation activities, so that it is less likely that some biasing in behaviour or reporting will occur as a result of awareness of the link. Future projects of this type should be conducted with the evaluators being under a separate contract, and with all contact with households from the evaluators being made completely distinctly from the TravelSmart intervention.

Fourth, evaluating this type of intervention is not likely to be particularly easy, under any circumstances. Identifying potential households ahead of the approach of the conversationalist, and recruiting them for a before and after survey, would be the ideal approach. However, because of the short time frames involved, and the focus of households on other matters relating to their move, such efforts may be self-defeating. A household that has already been approached to participate in a survey may be more likely to express no interest in the TravelSmart tools. Also, creating a satisfactory control group to assess likely changes in behaviour without tools will remain a problem.

6.5 Conclusion

The study in Canberra targeting Households on the Move had the following main conclusions:

- **Finding** households who are about to move or who have just moved was not as easy as expected, with the most obvious sources (e.g. Real Estate Agents and utility authority records) proving unsuccessful. The best sources were lists of households that were sold and targeting areas of new housing development. Even better is likely to be through agencies that are relocating large numbers of staff or clients. A longer timeframe is essential for this type of project.
- One people were found and contacted, the use of the conversation as a way of understanding the needs of new movers proved to be very successful with the **uptake of the TravelSmart tools** through a conversation at 54%.
- A longer time period for the intervention/evaluation is critical for achieving a successful evaluation in the future. However, it was shown people are willing to participate in the measurement of travel, despite the other distractions associated with moving. The use of GPS devices as a measurement tool meant that it was possible to gain data over a week long period an important strength for future similar projects.

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