

# Beyond prohibition: policy options for pets on public transport

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## Abstract

Well behaved dogs in cities are good for society and good for individual health. Responsible dog ownership, however, generates trips. If these trips cannot be accommodated on foot or by public transport modes, they will likely be accomplished by car, contributing to the perpetuation of private car use as the dominate mode of transport in cities around the world.

Many cities recognise that accommodating dogs on public transport is part of the provision of a functional, useful and popular, sustainable transport system. Others, however, maintain strong restrictions on the carriage dogs, indicating hesitancy. Sydney, Australia, is one such hesitant jurisdiction, and the city been the subject of a number of surveys examining the barriers to a dog friendly policy for travel on its public transport network. This paper reviews, in detail, policies for five cities around the world that permit dogs to use the public transport system. Using the understanding of barriers to policy change developed for the Sydney case, the paper seeks to generate ideas that can be used by Sydney and other cities seeking to open public transport up to a wider and more diverse range of trips. The paper looks to ‘dogs smell and so I don’t want to travel near them’; ‘dogs create mess which needs cleaning’; ‘dogs can attack people’ and finally, how to deal with allowing dogs onto a system, where previously they are banned, when the system is capacity constrained. Specific policy approaches are provided and the paper concludes with reflections on barriers to potential policy change.

## 1. Introduction

Transition away from the private car use and towards more sustainable and healthier transport modes is a widely articulated goal for transport policy (Legacy et al. 2017). Yet wide-spread reliance on the private car for travel remains, with the system of automobility proving to be particularly obdurate and resilient in many cities (Mattioli et al 2020; Savacool and Axsen 2018). Challenges to car-dependency require more nuanced understandings of barriers to the uptake of alternative transport modes, including public transport (Watson 2012, Freudendal-Pedersen et al. 2016). These barriers may be major, such as the absence of a reliable public transport option, or they may be a collection of minor, seemingly peripheral inconsistencies between the needs of the user and the operation of the system. To date, transport research generally concentrates on the major barriers – intent to focus on utilitarian notions such as

financial and time cost (Hensher et al. 2016), system reliability (Brownstone and Small 2005, Carrion and Levinson 2012) and comfort (Kent 2014). Less explored are barriers that may appear minor to the operation of the system yet incredibly real to the public transport user. In cities desperate to encourage public transport use, these barriers need to be identified, and removed where feasible. Finding ways to increase public transport demand has never been more important as public transport systems worldwide look to recover from the collapse of patronage caused by interventions to control the COVID 19 pandemic. This paper contributes to such investigations by providing a comprehensive examination of strategies to overcome one very particular barrier to public transport use – the restriction of dogs on public transport.

The paper is informed by previous research which indicated a strong link between dog ownership and private car use in a city that prohibits dogs on public transport (Kent and Mulley 2017) – Sydney, Australia. It progresses to review dogs on public transport policies from five cities around the world that are less restrictive than Sydney, and provides recommendations for policy alternatives. Each alternative could be feasibly implemented in Sydney and responds specifically to barriers to a policy of dogs on public transport in that city (Kent and Mulley 2021). The result is a series of recommendations for how policy change might be implemented to bring Sydney and other Australian urban transport systems ‘up to speed’ in their treatment of companion animals, so that they better accommodate lives less dependent on the private car for transport. The paper concludes with reflections on the importance of investigating the smaller ways public transport policy might be able to encourage transition away from private car use.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 The role of transport in responsible dog ownership**

Dogs are the world’s most popular pet, with over a third of the global population estimated to live with at least one dog (GfK 2016). While people from different cultures, cities and even households will have different reasons for owning a dog; a compelling body of empirical research demonstrates objectively that dogs are good for human health (Wood et al. 2005). Dog ownership is associated with reduced risk of heart attacks (Arhant-Sudhir et al. 2011), decreased blood pressure (Wheeler & Faulkner 2015), increased physical activity (Cutt et al. 2008) and an increased sense of physical and psychological wellbeing (Wells 2009). Further research explores the way dogs also generate broader social sustainability (for example, social interactions, perceptions of neighbourhood friendliness, and sense of community), which has benefits not only for individual dog owners but also extends to the wider community (Wood et al. 2007). In short, responsible dog ownership can benefit individuals and society and as such is a practice that should be supported rather than hindered by the transport system.

To fulfill their potential as facilitators of community connection, dogs need to be out and about with their owners in the public realm (Stanley and Stanley 2021). And responsible dog ownership demands the need to leave home with the dog from time to time, both for basic care (such as trips to the vet) and for exercise. Dog ownership thus generates trips, and if these trips cannot be accommodated on foot or by public transport modes, they will likely be accomplished by private car.

## **2.2 Pets travelling sustainably**

Despite the increasing popularity of dog ownership, and the recognised benefits of dogs accompanying their owners on trips outside of the home, very little research has been done on the way people travel with dogs. Most research to date on the mobility practices of dogs has its focus on dog walking as a health promoting activity for humans. Christian et al. (2013) for example, identified 29 peer-reviewed studies examining the relationship between dog ownership and physical activity through walking. This and similar reviews and empirical studies informed a Scientific Statement from the American Heart Association (Levine et al. 2013) which concludes that dog ownership is associated with reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. While most studies conclude that dog ownership does increase walking, very little attention is paid to the geography of dog walking beyond the home neighbourhood environment, including whether or not it is incorporated into the daily transport task or whether it becomes a trip generating activity, for example when the dog is taken to a favourite walking route or park.

## **2.3 Dogs and public transport: research to date**

Recognising a research gap, in 2015 the authors conducted a study of the way over 1,200 dog owners in Sydney, Australia travel with their dogs. Sydney has a population of 4.7 million. It is Australia's largest city and an aspiring global city situated within a coastal strip exceeding a total population of 5 million people. By global standards, Sydney is a low-density city (Newman and Kenworthy 2006) home to 430 persons per km<sup>2</sup> (City of Sydney 2020). Detached dwellings dominate the residential landscape (Randolph and Freestone 2012), employment opportunities are dispersed (Searle and Pritchard 2005) and private-vehicle use characterises the transport mode for all journeys, including the journey to work (ABS 2016). In terms of dog ownership, over 39% of households in Sydney's host state of NSW has one or more dogs (Animal Medicines Australia, 2016).

Of the 1,200 respondents to our survey, over 95% reported travelling with their dogs at least once a week, generating over 9,500 trips per week. Almost half of these trips started in a private car, with each household surveyed making, on average, 3.8 dog related trips by private car per week (Kent & Mulley 2017). This is reflective of the dispersed geography and long distances which characterise travel in Sydney. It also reflects, in part, the fact that in Sydney, dogs are generally prohibited from accompanying their owners on public transport (Kent et al. 2021).

Sydney's public transport network consists primarily of heavy rail and bus services, which are complemented by some ferry and light rail offerings. Dogs, with the exception of service dogs, are entirely prohibited from travelling on the rail system. Dogs are permitted to use bus services if they are in a dog carrier, however this is at the discretion of the bus driver, who can legally refuse access to a passenger with a dog. The need for a carrier and ability for the driver to refuse access ensures the restrictions of dogs on buses become a prohibition. It prevents transport of dogs too large for a dog carrier and erodes the certainty of travel required for the service to be considered reliable from the perspective of the user. In short, it is difficult for dog owners to plan and execute journeys which depend on public transport in Sydney.

Motivated by an interest in the provision of a more open and responsive public transport system reflective of global trends, the authors proceeded to explore some of the potential user barriers

to overcoming these restrictions in Sydney. To do this they conducted a second survey of both dog and non-dog owners in Sydney (n = 1091) which included questions on whether the respondent approved of the implementation of a more permissive pets on public transport policy in Sydney and, for those disapproving of such a change, reasons for disapproval. In this survey (the methods and comprehensive results of which are published elsewhere (Kent, Mulley and Stevens 2020)), 20.3% of respondents indicated they would not support the proposed change. The most often cited reason for disapproval was concern over mess or smell, which was followed by apprehensions related to dog attacks and the belief that the public transport system in Sydney was too crowded to accommodate dogs.

Next, responses to a piece published in the academic press ‘The Conversation’ on pets on public transport were explored through a discourse analysis to provide insights on reasons why some people might disapprove of a dogs on public transport policy. In total, 163 comments were analysed, about 40% of which expressed negative sentiments about dogs on public transport. Many of the negative comments included simple statements about the smell of dogs. Others referenced more complex concerns such as hygiene and disease and several focused on the impact on people with allergies to dogs. Some comments referred specifically to concerns about the operation of the transport system. They raised issues such as the increased cleaning workload for facilities, the need to replace upholstery more regularly, as well as concern about who would pay the costs of accommodating dogs on public transport. There were several passionate comments about dog attacks. Statements that dogs are dirty and dangerous often either implicitly or explicitly referenced the notion that dog owners cannot be trusted to control, or minimise the impact of, their dog, with some saying that many dog owners do not know the basics of responsible dog ownership. Many of these issues were also identified by the second survey, discussed above.

This led to a consideration of how, outside of Sydney, approaches varied to the carriage of companion animals by 130 public transport services operating in 48 different cities across Europe, the United Kingdom and Australia. Almost two thirds of the transport services reviewed allowed dogs to travel with few restrictions and only one of these services was in Australia (Melbourne). All but three of the services entirely prohibiting dogs on public transport were in Australia. For those jurisdictions where dogs (with their owners) are accommodated by the public transport system we analysed aspects of commonality between societies with less restrictive policies, with a particular focus on the determinant of national culture (Kent et al. 2021).

These former research endeavours have led to the research presented here which hones in on five cities to unpack, and describe in detail, how dogs on public transport can and are regulated in a way that both opens the system to travel with dogs, while not compromising its appeal to the general public. The purpose is to identify how the negative responses to dogs on public transport articulated by Australians (discussed above) could be addressed by a dogs on public transport policy.

## **3. Policy Review**

### **3.1 Method**

This section takes five case study cities and describes the operation of the dogs on public transport policies in those cities. These cities were selected based on three criteria. First, they are all cities where dogs are permitted with relative ease to use the public transport system. Second, they are cities in countries where public transport use is dominant in that it is in high demand and its use is on an upwards trajectory. To inform this, we used the International Association of Public Transport's (UITP) Statistics Brief "Urban Public Transport in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" which contains a comprehensive synthesis of data on public transport trends in 39 countries from different regions around the world. All cities included in this review are located in countries deemed as having higher demand for public transport relative to those collectively included in the UITP report. Further, all cities considered in this paper are in countries that experienced growth in public transport ridership between the years 2000 and 2015. Third, cities were selected for review based on the nature of their dogs on public transport policies with the aim of providing an overview of policy options that are innovative yet characteristic of the general regulatory approach.

### **3.2 Policy Review - Results**

#### ***3.2.1 Zurich, Switzerland***

Zurich is the largest city in Switzerland, home to 415,000 people, with a population density of 4,723.84 people per km<sup>2</sup>. Approximately 50% of all trips in Zurich are undertaken by sustainable transport modes (walking, cycling and public transport (UITP 2015)). Public transport in Zurich is managed by a central organisation known as the ZVV. Established in 1990 to herald the development of a comprehensive city wide rail system, the ZVV brings together bus and light rail providers with the heavy rail network to coordinate ticketing and timetabling across services.

Dogs are allowed on all public transport in Zurich, including all trains, buses and boats. Small dogs up to 30 centimetres in height may travel free of charge in a basket or bag. Larger dogs require a reduced 2nd class ticket. An annual dog pass can be purchased which is loaded on to the travel card that can be used throughout Switzerland (the SwissPass). This allows a person to take a dog with them anywhere in Switzerland for one year. The pass is not issued to a dog, but to a person. In addition, for Zurich specifically, dog owners can purchase a ZVV-NetzPass. This pass is issued to the dog and is therefore linked to the dog and not to a person. The dog can therefore be accompanied by any person with a valid ticket. This travel card is available at the sales outlets and is issued in paper format.

While Zurich's very open and comprehensive acceptance of dogs on all forms of public transport places their policy at the forefront of those considered dog-friendly, it is the way dogs are incorporated into the ticketing system that provides a point of difference. This provides both the system user with an easy way to pay for their dog and the system with a mechanism

by which to reclaim any costs, such as cleaning, associated with opening up the system to travel with dogs.

### ***3.2.2 London, United Kingdom (UK)***

The population of London is nine million, and the UK's capital has a population density of 5,701 people per km<sup>2</sup>. Approximately 60% of all trips in London are undertaken by either walking, cycling or public transport. The city is well serviced by the famed London Underground rail network, buses, heavy rail, tram, light rail and river buses. Dogs on a lead are permitted to travel for free on all services (although in the past, there have been periods where dogs were charged a child fare), with the only restriction being that dogs are not permitted to ride on escalators. Transport for London also has a fleet dominated by double decker vehicles: whilst not a requirement, it is a convention that dogs will travel on the upper deck of these vehicles. The website for Transport for London also states clearly that staff can refuse entry to dogs that are deemed to be misbehaving and on buses, the driver gives permission which can be refused if there is already a dog on board. Dogs do not generally require a ticket.

Transport for London manages one of the most complex and busiest public transport systems in the world, yet still has an extraordinarily open policy when it comes to travel with dogs. Exclusion of dogs from the use of escalators is a point of difference. While the exclusion is in force to protect the dog, it does demonstrate that nuance can be incorporated into what is otherwise a relatively blanket embrace of dogs with their owners.

### ***3.2.3 Berlin, Germany***

Berlin, the capital of Germany, has a population of just over 3.5 million and a population density of 4,118 people per km<sup>2</sup>. Just under 70% of all trips undertaken in Berlin are made by sustainable modes (walking, cycling and public transport). The city's comprehensive public transport system consists of both underground and aboveground rail, buses and trams. It is run by the Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe or BVG, apart from the S-Bahn (above ground rail) which is run by the national rail company – Deutsches Bahn. A single ticket can be used across all modes.

The entire system is open to those travelling with dogs. The service provider's website states that the preference is for dogs to be confined to a carrier. Larger dogs can travel, however, provided they are on a lead and wear a muzzle on all modes and in stations. If the dog is not in a box or carrier, they require a single, discount, ticket. Travellers with a day season ticket can take dogs free of charge. Animals are not allowed on seats and can be excluded from certain services from time to time, with exclusions announced in the online timetable. The transport provider's website also states that "In general, animals brought along must not compromise the safety of the operation or bother any passengers. In case of doubt, our staff will decide whether to allow or refuse travel to an animal."

Again, the unrestricted access provided to dogs with their owners ensures the system is dog-friendly. Of relevance to providers considering allowing dogs on public transport is the way the system provides options to manage situations where dogs are viewed as creating a problem. First is the explicit caveat that staff are able to decide whether to allow or refuse an animal to

travel. Second, there is the option for the provider to deem certain services closed to dogs from time to time, for example if a particular line or route is experiencing crowding at a particular time, it could be closed to the carriage of dogs.

### ***3.2.4 Vienna, Austria***

Vienna is the capital of Austria, with a population of just under two million and a population density of 4,607 people per km<sup>2</sup>. Of all trips undertaken in Vienna, 74% are made by sustainable transport modes. The public transport system consists of underground and aboveground trains, trams and buses all run by the central authority known as Wiener Linien which is part of the Verkehrsverbund Ost-Region VOR (transport association for Austria's eastern regions). Validated tickets can be used across all modes.

The entire public transport system in Vienna is open to dogs provided they are on a lead and wear a muzzle. A discounted ticket must be purchased for dogs that are not in a container. Of note is that Vienna maintains a program known as the Wiener Hundeführschein, or the Vienna Dog Licence. Not all dogs in Vienna are required to obtain the licence however the exam is required for dogs to be taken in public if you own a "Listenhund". This term refers to an official list of dog breeds originally used for fighting or similar purposes, and thus considered more dangerous or difficult to handle. Importantly, the exam contains questions for the dog owner, as well as assesses the dogs abilities and aptitude – this ensures the owner is aware of the responsibilities of dog ownership.

### ***3.2.5 Oslo, Norway***

The population of Greater Oslo is just over one million, with a population density of 3,840 people per km<sup>2</sup>. Half of all trips in Oslo are undertaken by sustainable transport modes, with the public transport network consisting of heavy and light rail as well as bus services. All the public transport in Oslo and the surrounding county Akershus is part of the same ticket and price system, operated by administrator Ruter. Ruter tickets are valid for buses, trams, subways, ferries and local trains.

Dogs can travel for free on all Ruter services. They must be kept on a leash and must not obstruct free passage of others. The website states clearly that the dog's owner is responsible for ensuring the dog does not inconvenience or harm other passengers. Dogs are not permitted on seats and must travel either on the floor or in the passenger's lap. Dogs are also permitted on VY (previously known as NSB) services. VY operates heavy rail which has services both in Oslo and beyond. These services allow all dogs to travel however a half price ticket must be purchased for dogs higher than 40cm. Dogs can only travel in certain areas of the train, with some carriages designated as animal free zones.

## **4. Discussion**

In summary, this review presents the details of policies that not only allow but manage the carriage of dogs on public transport in five cities where public transport is both popular and on an upward trajectory. The review demonstrates that it is possible to address many of the concerns raised by those that are hesitant to allow dogs on public transport.

Previous work (Mulley and Kent 2021) revealed that many respondents to a questionnaire were concerned about the smell of dogs, and did not want to travel in close proximity to this smell. This concern could be allayed by reserving only certain carriages of a train or areas of a bus for dogs to travel, as demonstrated by Oslo's 'animal free zones' on the VY rail network. These mechanisms would also help to reassure those with dog allergies, who would ultimately be accommodated by implementation of a Berlin-style provision for staff to refuse entry to a dog if it is causing distress to a fellow passenger and for this to be publicised using real-time timetable apps and online.

Another concern raised relates to impacts on the cleanliness of the system, with some disturbed about the need to employ additional cleaning services. Zurich's comprehensive ticketing system for the carriage of dogs provides an example of a pricing mechanism that could be used to recover any costs incurred by allowing dogs on public transport, should the need arise. The regional rail originating from London also provides an example of how cleaning costs can be attributed to the dog owner, rather than carried by the wider travelling public, with those travelling with a dog overnight charged a deep cleaning fee for both the human and the dog. Of course, this is an operational issue and dependent on the public transport service provider to manage. It may be more difficult in jurisdictions where so-called 'public' transport is actually a private enterprise.

In regards to apprehensions about potential dog attacks, and dog owners who do not know their responsibilities when bringing a dog into the public realm, Vienna's innovative dog license program, which is obligatory for certain breeds of dog and provides education for both the dog and its owner, could provide reassurance and has potential to raise a sense of mutual respect between the preferences of those who don't own dogs and those who choose to live life with a hound.

The final concern raised by those against implementation of a dogs on public transport policy relates to the fact the public transport system in the case study city of Sydney was, pre-COVID-19 pandemic, too crowded to support additional trips. The system was perceived as at capacity, even outside of peak times, and as such objections were raised to the facilitation of trips many deem as nonessential, or somehow superfluous. The nature of this objection indicates that Sydney's public transport system is struggling through lack of capacity, and therefore failing to accommodate the "messiness" of modern life. Trips with dogs – such as to a dog park, or to visit a friend - may be considered by some as 'discretionary'. Yet if the public transport system is limited only to trips considered essential to function in society, then aspirations for a truly sustainable city will be limited.

## **5. Conclusion**

The key to the normalisation of public transport use, and de-prioritisation of the private car, is to uncover unintended penalties on those willing and able to use the car less, and adjust the transport system to remove such penalties. The transport of dogs is used here as one example of the way the public transport system in a relatively car dependent city currently limits a car-free, or car-less lifestyle. The analysis presented provides tangible policy options, based on real-world examples, for how this limit can be addressed. As cities around the world awake from the slumber of the Covid 19 pandemic, and seek to resurrect public transport systems derailed by lock down and fear, we have both a new opportunity and responsibility to take



stock of how public transport is positioned. In doing so, the ability to function, thrive and embrace the diversity of opportunities presented by cities must be the goal.

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