

**Business Report** The Chronicle with Bloomberg

**Autos losing allure for young adults, study shows**

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Brant Ward / The Chronicle  
Many teens and young adults would rather ride mass transit like Muni buses than drive these days.

Car culture and the romance of the open road are losing their allure among young Americans, according to a report released Thursday by a public interest group.

Teens and young adults drive substantially fewer miles per year than their predecessors did, and many don't even bother to get a driver's license. They increasingly rely on their feet, their bikes or mass

transit, according to the "Transportation and the New Generation" report.

It's a profound shift in a country where getting a driver's license was long seen as a major milestone on the path to adulthood. The shift is one of several reasons U.S. gasoline use has fallen since 2006, after rising relentlessly for decades. It also suggests that government should spend less on building new roads and more on offering alternatives, according to the

California Public Interest Research Group Education Fund (CalPIRG), which issued the report.

"It calls into question the wisdom of our current transportation investment priorities," said Benjamin Davis, one of the report's authors and an analyst with the Frontier Group consulting firm.

### A growing trend

The report isn't the first to note a drop in driving among young people, a trend spotted several years ago. Analysts cite multiple explanations: rising gas prices, high youth unemployment rates, concern about global warming and social media technologies that let people hang out with friends even if they aren't in the same place.

The CalPIRG report pulls together data, much of it from the Federal Highway Administration, to illustrate the trend.

-- From 2001 through 2009, the average number of miles driven each year by people ages 16 to 34 fell 23 percent on a per capita basis.

-- During that period, people in the same age range increased the number of miles they rode on mass transit by 40 percent.

-- The portion of people ages 14 to 34 without a driver's license increased five percentage points between 2000 and 2010, from 21 percent to 26 percent.

### No driver's license

"I know how to drive - I just haven't gotten my license, and I don't really feel a need to," said Paula Venegas, 20, a UC Berkeley student not connected to the CalPIRG study.

Her attitude is all the more remarkable considering her hometown - sprawling, decentralized Los Angeles. Venegas relied on rides from her parents and friends while living at home. Now she uses public transportation to navigate the Bay Area.

"I do love using mass transit," Venegas said. "I love using buses. That's just how I know how to get around a city, even in Los Angeles."

While young people living in rural areas often have little choice about driving, those in urban areas do have alternatives.

### Prefers mass transit

Sofie Karasek grew up in the Boston area, her home a five-minute walk from a subway station. She tried driving once. She didn't like it.

Now Karasek, 18, is a student at Berkeley and an intern with CalPIRG. Even after graduation, she plans to live in metropolitan areas with mass transit. Those also tend to be the places with the most job opportunities and interesting things to do, she said.

"I really want to be in an area where I don't have to drive," Karasek said. "Not only do I find driving a little bit scary - because of all the accidents that can happen - it costs a lot of money, it takes a lot of time and I really prefer to walk places or bike places."

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