

## **Planning transport for the needs of young carers**

Submitted to *Journal of Transport and Health*

**Anna Plyushteva**, Transport Studies Unit and School of Geography  
& the Environment, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK,  
[anna.plyushteva@ouce.ox.ac.uk](mailto:anna.plyushteva@ouce.ox.ac.uk) (*corresponding author*);  
**Freke Caset**, Ghent University, Belgium;  
**Lena van Bergen**, Ghent University, Belgium;  
**Raluca Popescu**, University of Bucharest, Romania.

Word count: 2,275 (excluding references)

**Declaration of interests**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

## 1 **1 Introduction**

2 Research has repeatedly demonstrated that the paradigmatic transport user is a male, adult, and non-  
3 disabled white-collar commuter (Sagaris and Baker, 2024). This figure has long dominated transport  
4 research and continues to feature as the key referent in many transport planning and policy contexts  
5 across the Global North and South. Despite long-standing critiques, and the challenge mounted to this  
6 archetype's dominance more recently by the Covid-19 pandemic (MASKED), transport planning and  
7 research continue to rely on it both explicitly and implicitly. In this brief commentary, we highlight  
8 how attending to the (im)mobility of young carers can inspire better understandings of diversity and  
9 exclusion in everyday travel. Young carers – people aged 18 and under who have significant care  
10 responsibilities – are likely to have complex and competing transport needs, reflecting not only their  
11 caring tasks, but also their education, leisure, and other needs. We suggest that taking the experience  
12 of this understudied group as a point of departure can have broader implications for more inclusive  
13 transport planning approaches.

14 In developing this proposition, we draw on our own research on inclusive transport planning, young  
15 carers, and care-related mobility (MASKED). Planning transport and mobility around 'the young carer'  
16 can seem far-fetched, not least because young carers may be a minority of young people (Goodger  
17 and Kennedy, 2024). Furthermore, young caring may be better understood as a set of practices rather  
18 than as a characteristic which defines an individual (see more on this below). Nonetheless, we argue  
19 that there is both scholarly and practical merit in such a thought experiment. This is because the  
20 proposed approach connects, and by connecting, advances, recent research on mobilities of care  
21 (Sanchez De Madariaga et al, 2019; Orjuela & Schwanen, 2023) and youth-centric mobility (Sharma et  
22 al, 2025). While both of these bodies of work have opened up promising avenues for researchers and  
23 practitioners alike, there have been few efforts so far to integrate them. For policy and practice in  
24 particular, such integration could mean substituting a more integrative understanding of everyday  
25 mobility over the life-course for current rigid categorisations of journey types.

26 In what follows, we briefly summarise key insights from mobilities of care and youth-centric mobility  
27 research, before introducing young carers and the limited existing knowledge on their (im)mobility.  
28 We then set out our challenge to planners and decision-makers: what might transport plans and  
29 policies look like if they were designed not for a 'generic' transport user, but for the young carer?

## 30 **2 Mobilities of children and young people**

31 A growing body of transport research focuses on the distinctive mobilities of children and young  
32 people (Whitley et al, 2025). Research on children's active travel, particularly to school, has highlighted  
33 the health and environmental benefits, as well as barriers, to children's active and 'independent'  
34 mobility (Aranda-Balboa et al., 2020; Ikeda et al., 2018). Yet, when research on the (im)mobility of  
35 children and young people emphasises independence, as opposed to interdependence, it risks  
36 reproducing the exclusive focus on autonomous, 'rational' and self-contained individuals which  
37 defines much transport policy (Mikkelsen & Christensen, 2009; Murray, 2015). More recently,  
38 mobilities scholarship have attended to the diverse constraints, meanings, and negotiations within  
39 children's everyday journeys. Here, understandings of children's everyday mobilities are complicated  
40 through relational approaches that focus on relationships (Murray and Cortes-Morales, 2019); bodies  
41 (Kullman and Palludan, 2011); affects (Joelsson, 2019); gender (Porter et al., 2017); and the impacts  
42 of parental modal choice (McLaren, 2016). In line with these developments, many scholars have called  
43 for an expanded understanding of children's mobilities. An intersectional understanding of social  
44 identities is thus highly relevant here, illuminating the diverse ways in which aspects of mobility apply  
45 differently to different geographies and sub-groups of children and young people (e.g. need for spaces

46 for play; increased vulnerability to traffic dangers; noise and air pollution; affordability; Waygood et  
47 al. 2019). Alongside gender, race, age group, disability, and class, attending to care responsibilities as  
48 an aspect of youth identity can help broaden the current focus of children’s mobilities research.

49

### 50 **3 Mobilities of care**

51 The last decade and a half has also seen a growing body of work dedicated to the mobilities of care.  
52 The concept of mobilities of care originates in the scholarship of Sanchez de Madariaga (2013; Sanchez  
53 de Madariaga & Zucchini, 2019), and challenges established understandings of journey purpose by  
54 focusing on everyday mobility undertaken for social reproduction tasks, including childcare, adult  
55 care, food provision, and healthcare. Traditionally, journeys have often been categorised into ‘work-  
56 related’ and ‘other,’ establishing the commute to work as ‘essential’ and other journeys as  
57 ‘discretionary.’ Accounting for mobilities of care is a crucial first step towards inclusive transport policy  
58 and planning, as it renders visible the high share of care-related journeys in total travel (Sanchez de  
59 Madariaga, 2013). Furthermore, a focus on mobilities of care illuminates the complex journeys and  
60 trip-chaining undertaken by carers (Ravensbergen et al, 2020). In addition, this body of work can  
61 highlight the ways in which work- and care-related trips enable each other, further challenging binary  
62 ‘essential’ vs. ‘discretionary’ categories (MASKED). Finally, a mobilities of care lens has more recently  
63 drawn attention to the significant role played by immobility in everyday care practices (Orjuela and  
64 Schwanen, 2023), a point which, our preliminary research indicates, is highly relevant to the  
65 experiences of many young carers.

66 Where mobilities of care research comes up against some limitations, however, is in the risk of  
67 conflating care-related journeys with an undifferentiated notion of women’s mobilities. This shortcut  
68 is justified in some circumstances, since women continue to carry out most domestic care labour and  
69 its associated journeys (Ravensbergen et al, 2020). Among young carers, too, the distribution of care  
70 responsibilities is often highly gendered, although evidence is mixed across different geographies  
71 (Boyle et al, 2023). Nevertheless, mobilities of care and women’s mobilities are neither homogenous,  
72 nor equivalent, requiring greater attention be given to the intersectional identities of both women  
73 and carers. Centring these can, for instance, spur researchers and planners to better understand those  
74 journeys which women make when not caring for others, including trips undertaken for self-care,  
75 community work, and leisure (von Benzon 2021). Similarly, knowledge on care-related mobilities  
76 would benefit from acknowledging that intersectionally defined groups within the broader ‘carer’  
77 category hold vastly unequal positions (for example, higher-income versus lower-income women;  
78 Mark and Heinrich, 2019). Young carers represent one such group.

### 79 **4 Young carers and their (im)mobility**

80 The most commonly used definition of young carers refers to children and young people under the  
81 age of 18 who provide care, assistance, or support to a family member, assuming a level of  
82 responsibility that would typically be associated with an adult (Becker, 2000, p. 378). The person  
83 receiving care is often a parent, but can be a sibling, grandparent or other relative who is disabled, has  
84 a chronic illness, mental health issue, or other condition associated with a greater need for care.  
85 School-based studies estimate a high prevalence of young carers: 12-22% of secondary school-aged  
86 children in Europe (Joseph et al., 2019; Untas et al., 2022) and 12% of primary school aged children in  
87 Scotland (Lloyd, 2013). However, accurate and comparable estimates are difficult to come by;  
88 definitions of ‘young carer’ vary across contexts and practices, and it is not clear-cut who should be  
89 included (Joseph et al., 2020). Becker (2007), for example, argues that all children worldwide are  
90 engaged in some form of caregiving. Furthermore, some young people take up extra tasks other than

91 health-related care, for example when children in transnational families act as language brokers for  
92 their parents (Suter et al., 2025). There is thus a continuum of caring on which all children can be  
93 located. Therefore, in many contexts, it may be more appropriate to speak of ‘young caring’ as a  
94 practice, rather than ‘young carers’ as a defining characteristic. Nevertheless, we opt for the term  
95 ‘young carer’ here, in order to highlight how such a view of the transport user can usher in more  
96 inclusive approaches to transport research and planning.

97 What kind of (im)mobility is brought into focus when imagining transport for and with young carers?  
98 Prior research on the topic is limited. Notable studies by Evans (2011) and Hill et al (2011) explore the  
99 (im)mobility challenges faced by young carers in the UK and Australia respectively. Overall, young  
100 carers are likely to be at home for extended periods, due to a combination of care responsibilities and  
101 economic and spatial barriers to their mobility (Somers, 2007). When they do travel, their destinations  
102 are likely to be diverse, including healthcare and social care facilities, but also education, work, and  
103 social life. Our preliminary discussions with young carers and organisations representing them hint at  
104 complex and on-going negotiations of trips, where shopping, picking up prescriptions, accompanying  
105 family members to medical appointments or other services including at banks and social agencies,  
106 takes place alongside the education, leisure, and sometimes work trips typically associated with  
107 adolescents and young people in transport research and planning. As not all young carers co-habit  
108 with those they care for, these journeys are often linked to trips to and from the home of the relative  
109 who is in need of care, where they may help with cooking, cleaning, or personal care, or provide  
110 emotional support. Combining such a wide range of journey purposes can be complex and subject to  
111 multiple spatial, temporal, economic, and other barriers (e.g. negotiating feelings of fatigue, stress,  
112 and social isolation, but also limited access to private transport modes; Brolin et al, 2024). Thus, young  
113 carers’ (im)mobility is defined by interdependence with the (im)mobility of the people they care for,  
114 and of those who care for them. This highlights not only the need to coordinate journeys that are  
115 undertaken together, but also entanglements which are not based on physical co-presence, yet still  
116 entail coordination (e.g. keeping in touch via messages and phone calls). Young carers can be expected  
117 to rely on trip-chaining; continuously mix ‘discretionary’ and ‘essential’ journeys; and have to change  
118 plans at very short notice, thus bearing time and economic penalties. In giving these examples, we  
119 want to highlight that the challenges faced by young carers in terms of their (im)mobility are distinctive  
120 but not unique, making their experiences an excellent starting point for imagining inclusive transport  
121 plans and policies which serve diverse needs and competing responsibilities. During 2026-2028, we  
122 will further develop the case for this approach, documenting young carers’ transport needs as part of  
123 an international ‘research and practice’ team, with funding from the Driving Urban Transitions  
124 partnership.<sup>1</sup>

## 125 **5 Planning mobility for young carers**

126 In this brief commentary, we have invited transport researchers and planners to join us in imagining  
127 transport systems and policies organised around the needs of young people who have caring  
128 responsibilities. While acknowledging the limitations of focusing on the figure of the young carer  
129 rather than a more nuanced approach centred on practices of young caring, we have aimed to  
130 demonstrate how such a thought experiment may advance current efforts towards more inclusive

---

<sup>1</sup> This project, named ‘CAMINUP: Caring and Youth-centric Mobilities for Inclusive Urban Proximity,’ is a partnership of the University of Oxford (UK), University of Plovdiv (Bulgaria), Ghent University (Belgium), University of Bucharest (Romania), and Sofia University (Bulgaria), with London Borough of Hounslow (UK), Bucharest Municipality (Romania), Ghent Municipality (Belgium), National Rehabilitation Centre for the Blind (Bulgaria), Centre for Independent Living Association (Bulgaria), Eurocarers (Belgium), Lejo (Belgium), and ZoJong! (Belgium).

131 transport research, policy, and planning. By positioning young carers at the interface of mobilities of  
132 care frameworks and research centred on children and young people's mobilities, we have invited  
133 greater focus on an intersectionally defined transport user with multiple competing priorities and  
134 complex transport needs (Landby, 2024).

135 Engaging with the mobilities and immobilities of young carers centres the multifaceted nature of  
136 gendered care-related mobilities, and the ways in which the journeys of people of different genders  
137 are shaped simultaneously by other aspects of identity, including age and care responsibilities,  
138 alongside race/ethnicity, class, disability, and sexuality (Lubitow et al, 2020). A focus on young carers  
139 highlights the need to account for the mobilities of care of people who are not women; as well as the  
140 non-care related mobilities of women (Grant-Smith et al, 2017). As attention to mobilities of care is  
141 expanding, a focus on young carers can remind researchers, decision-makers, and planners, that  
142 carers (should be able to) also travel for work, education, and leisure.

143 In practical terms, we put forward a number of propositions. First, while trip chaining has long been  
144 construed as a women's prerogative, exploring it in relation to young carers' mobilities and  
145 immobilities delivers renewed urgency to centring trip-chains in transport planning, particularly in  
146 relation to micromobility and public transport provision, and their integration. This requires a deeper  
147 engagement with the minute details which are invisibilised in accounts of 'average' transport users  
148 and 'typical' journeys. For instance, compared to other – much more commonly planned for – trip  
149 purposes such as commuting, young carers' trip chains may be less predictable and more sensitive to  
150 constraints. Second, drawing on insights from both children's mobilities research and disability  
151 studies, a focus on young carers highlights the impossibility of planning for the needs of care givers  
152 without accounting for the needs of care-receivers, and vice versa. The ways in which quantitative  
153 transport data in particular is collected and analysed should evolve to better capture these  
154 interdependencies. Third, the proposed approach 'flattens' arbitrary hierarchies in which journey  
155 purposes are ranked for relative importance, as it is surely impossible to argue for such a hierarchy in  
156 the education-, leisure-, and care-related journeys of young carers. Thus, the relational, multi-  
157 purpose, and collective nature of everyday journeys, whether accomplished or foregone, comes into  
158 view when the young carer is adopted as the paradigmatic transport user.

159

## 160 **REFERENCES**

161 Aranda-Balboa, M.J., Huertas-Delgado, F.J., Herrador-Colmenero, M. *et al.*, (2020). Parental barriers to active  
162 transport to school: a systematic review. *International Journal of Public Health* 65, 87–98. [https://doi.org/](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-019-01313-1)  
163 [10.1007/s00038-019-01313-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-019-01313-1)

164 Becker, S., (2000). Young Carers. In Davies, M., (Ed.) *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Work*. Blackwell, pp.  
165 378.

166 Becker, S., (2007). Global perspectives on children's unpaid caregiving in the family: Research and policy on  
167 'young carers' in the UK, Australia, the USA and Sub-Saharan Africa. *Global Social Policy* 7(1), 23-50.  
168 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468018107073892>

169 Boyle, G., Constantinou, G., & Garcia, R. (2023). Does gender influence children's and young people's caring? A  
170 qualitative, systematic review and meta-ethnography. *Children & Society*, 37(2), 404-423.

171 Brolin, R., Hanson, E., Magnusson, L., Lewis, F., Parkhouse, T., Hlebec, V., ... & Becker, S. (2024). Adolescent  
172 young carers who provide care to siblings. *Healthcare*, Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 316.

173 Goodger, S., & A Kennedy, (2024). *The situation of young carers in Europe*. Brussels: European Parliament.

- 174 Evans, R. (2011). Young caregiving and HIV in the UK: Caring relationships and mobilities in African migrant  
175 families. *Population, Space and Place*, 17, 338-360. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.583>
- 176 Grant-Smith, D., Osborne, N., & Johnson, L., (2017). Managing the challenges of combining mobilities of care  
177 and commuting: an Australian perspective. *Community, Work & Family* 20(2), 201-210.  
178 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2016.1202194>
- 179 Hill, T., Thomson, C. & Cass, B., (2011). Young carers: Location, education and employment disadvantage.  
180 *Australian Journal of Labour Economics* 14(2), 173-198.  
181 [https://www.ajle.org/index.php/ajle\\_home/article/view/239](https://www.ajle.org/index.php/ajle_home/article/view/239)
- 182 Joelsson, T. (2019). 'So that we don't spoil them': understanding children's everyday mobility through parents'  
183 affective practices. *Children's Geographies*, 17(5), 591-602.
- 184 Kullman, K., & Palludan, C. (2011). Rhythmanalytical sketches: agencies, school journeys,  
185 temporalities. *Children's Geographies*, 9(3-4), 347-359.
- 186 Ikeda, E., Hinckson, E., Witten, K., & Smith, M. (2018). Associations of children's active school travel with  
187 perceptions of the physical environment and characteristics of the social environment: a systematic  
188 review. *Health & Place*, 54, 118-131.
- 189 Joseph, S., Kendall, C., Toher, D., Sempik, J., Holland, J., & Becker, S., (2019). Young carers in England: Findings  
190 from the 2018 BBC survey on the prevalence and nature of caring among young people. *Child: Care, Health and*  
191 *Development* 45, 606-612. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12674>
- 192 Joseph, S., Sempik, J., Leu, A., & Becker, S., (2020). Young carers research, practice and policy: An overview and  
193 critical perspective on possible future directions. *Adolescent Research Review* 5, 77-89.  
194 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-019-00119-9>
- 195 Landby, E., (2024). A family perspective on daily (im)mobilities and gender-disability intersectionality in Sweden.  
196 *Gender, Place and Culture* 31(5), 614-631. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2023.2249249>
- 197 Lloyd, K. (2013). Happiness and well-being of young carers: Extent, nature and correlates of caring among 10  
198 and 11 year old school children. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14, 67-80.
- 199 Lubitow, A., Abelson, M.J., Carpenter, E., (2020). Transforming mobility justice: gendered harassment and  
200 violence on transit. *Journal of Transport Geography* 82, 102601.  
201 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2019.102601>
- 202 Mark, L., & Heinrichs, D. (2019). More than time and money-Influences on mobility of low-income women in the  
203 Villa 20 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. *Journal of Transport & Health*, 15, 100652.
- 204 McLaren, A. T. (2016). Families and transportation: Moving towards multimodality and altermobility?. *Journal*  
205 *of Transport Geography*, 51, 218-225.
- 206 Mikkelsen, M. R., & Christensen, P. (2009). Is children's independent mobility really independent? A study of  
207 children's mobility combining ethnography and GPS/mobile phone technologies. *Mobilities*, 4(1), 37-58.
- 208 Murray, L. (2015). Age-friendly mobilities: A transdisciplinary and intergenerational perspective. *Journal of*  
209 *Transport & Health*, 2(2), 302-307.
- 210 Murray, L., & Cortés-Morales, S. (2019). *Children's mobilities: Interdependent, imagined, relational*. London:  
211 Palgrave Macmillan.
- 212 Orjuela, J.P., & Schwanen, T., 2023. Reconsidering mobility of care: learning from the experiences of low-income  
213 women during the COVID-19 lockdown in Itagüí, Colombia. *Habitat International* 142, 102965.  
214 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2023.102965>

- 215 Porter, G., Hampshire, K., Abane, A., Munthali, A., Robson, E., Mashiri, M., & Lives, M. Y. (2017). Young people's  
216 daily mobilities in sub-Saharan Africa. *Moving Young Lives. Palgrave Macmillan, London.*
- 217 Ravensbergen, L., Buliung, R., & Sersli, S., (2020). Velomobilities of care in a low-cycling city. *Transportation*  
218 *Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 134, 336-347. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2020.02.014>
- 219 Sagaris, L., & Baker, L., (2024). New challenges arise from consolidation of gender, health and transport research.  
220 *Journal of Transport & Health*, 39, 101902. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2024.101902>
- 221 Sanchez de Madariaga, I., (2013). Mobility of care: Introducing new concepts in urban transport. In Sanchez de  
222 Madariaga, I. & Roberts, M., (Eds.), *Fair shared cities: The Impact of Gender Planning in Europe*. Routledge, pp.  
223 33-48.
- 224 Sanchez de Madariaga, I. & Zucchini, E. (2019). Measuring mobilities of care, a challenge for transport agendas.  
225 In Lindkvist Scholten, C. et al. (Eds.), *Integrating Gender into Transport Planning: from one to many tracks*.  
226 Springer, pp. 145-173.
- 227 Sharma, A., Chandi, A., & Winters, M., (2025). An investigation of 15-minute neighbourhoods in Surrey, British  
228 Columbia: A community-informed social equity analysis for a fast-growing, diverse, Canadian city. *Journal of*  
229 *Transport & Health* 42, 102021. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2025.102021>
- 230 Somers, V. (2007). Schizophrenia: The impact of parental illness on children. *British Journal of Social Work*, 37,  
231 1319-1334. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcl083>
- 232 Suter, B., Evans, R., Mas Giral, R., & Mozetič, K., (2025). Special issue young people's caring practices in  
233 transnational families in Sweden and the UK: Care ethics and wellbeing. *Population, Space and Place* 31, Article  
234 e70002. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.70002>
- 235 Untas, A., Jarrige, E., Vioulac, C., & Dorard, G. (2022). Prevalence and characteristics of adolescent young carers  
236 in France: The challenge of identification. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 78(8), 2367-2382.
- 237 von Benzon, N., (2021). Unschooling Motherhood: Caring and Belonging in Mothers' Time-Space. *Gender, Place*  
238 *& Culture*, 28 (8), 1084–1105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2020.1784100>
- 239 Waygood, O., Friman, M., Olsson, L., & Mitra, R. (Eds.). (2019). *Transport and children's wellbeing*. Elsevier.
- 240 Whitley, H., Timperio, A., Sahlqvist, S., Calder-Dawe, O., & Veitch, J., (2025). 'It's a good start to the day': Urban  
241 Australian children's understandings of active mobility and place. *Children's Geographies*, 1-15.  
242 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2025.2464006>