



NHTS BRIEF

August 2008

National Household Travel Survey

Vacation Travel

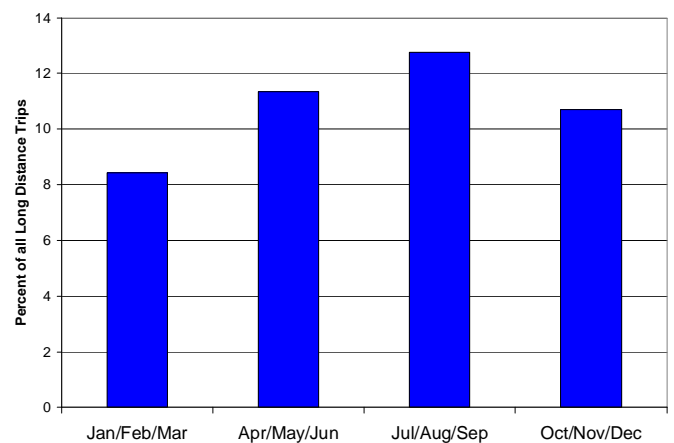
Summer is traditionally the time for road trips. According to the 2001 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS), 2.5 billion vehicle miles of travel (VMT) are for trips over 50 miles from home, and 43 percent of these trips are for visiting friends and family, sightseeing or outdoor recreation, or simply rest and relaxation (including combined business and pleasure).

These kinds of trips peak in the summer months, when children are out of school and vacations are planned (see Exhibit 1). Long-distance vacation trips by car (includes trips to visit family, friends, and for rest and relaxation) are much longer than trips for other purposes, an average of 314 miles one-way compared to 212 for all other long-distance vehicles trips.

Over half of the vacation vehicle trips are made by households with young children, as shown in Exhibit 2. That may account for the higher travel party size--an average of 3.2 people compared to 2.4 for long-distance vehicle trips for other purposes. More households with very young children report incomes of less than \$40,000 than any other group except retired, so the cost of travel may be a factor in deciding to drive.

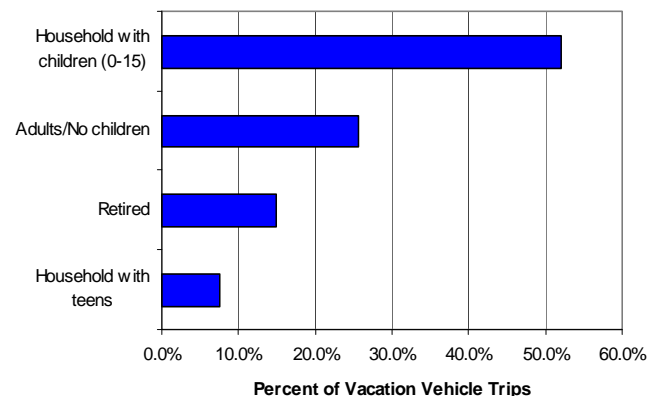
A greater proportion of recreational vehicle and motorcycle trips are for longer distances (8.3 million), however the bulk of all trips, including long-distance, are made by car, van, pick-up truck, or SUV (over 416 million). The vehicle of choice for the families with young children is a passenger car (49.2 percent of trips) followed by a van (20.3 percent) or a SUV (17.1 percent). Surprisingly, 13.2 percent of long-distance vacation trips taken by families with small children are in pick-up trucks.

Exhibit 1
Vehicle Vacation Trips by Season
(Trips of 50 miles or more)



Source: 2001 NHTS Long-Distance File

Exhibit 2
Percent of Vehicle Trips for Vacation by Life
Cycle of the Household
(Trips of 50 miles or more)



Source: 2001 NHTS Long-Distance File

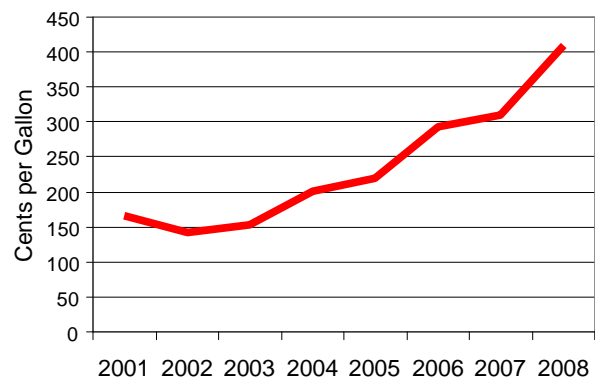
One of the questions of the day is: *How have gas prices have affected summer travel?* The most recent information on the characteristics of long-distance travel is from the 2001 NHTS, when gas prices in June nationwide averaged \$1.64 a gallon (see Exhibit 3). The nationwide average for a gallon of gasoline in June 2008 was \$4.07 according to the Energy Information Agency.

A family traveling in a passenger car, with an average of 22.4 miles per gallon and an average round-trip of just over 600 miles, would have paid \$43.93 in gas cost in 2001. In 2008 the same trip in the same vehicle would cost \$109.02. Exhibit 4 shows the estimated fuel cost for vacation trips in 2001 and 2008, based on average mpg and round-trip distances by vehicle type. The combination of longer average trip distances and lower fuel efficiency pushed the cost of gas for an SUV to \$162.01 in 2008, up from \$51.66 in 2001.

The latest data on vehicle miles of travel, provided by The Federal Highway Administration's "Traffic Volume Trends" report shows that vehicle travel on all public roads in the United States has dropped since 2006. In fact, since last November, Americans have driven 53.2 billion miles less than they did over the same period a year earlier. This is greater than the 49.3 billion mile decline seen during the energy and oil crisis of the 1970's.

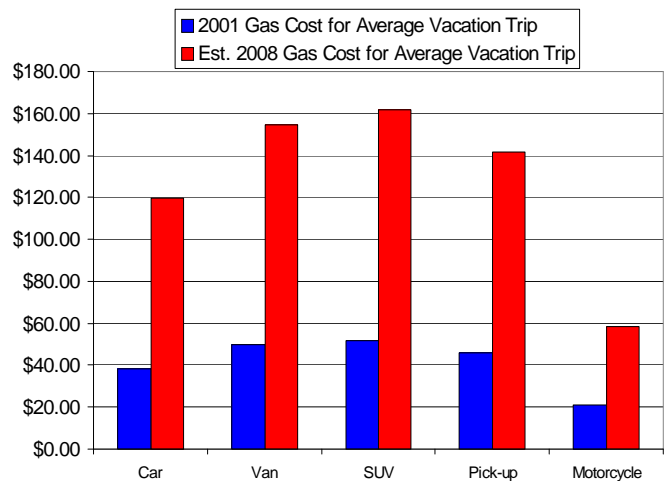
The 2008 NHTS is currently collecting data, and we look forward to having detailed information about how the rise in fuel prices has affected everyday travel.

Exhibit 3
Average Cost per Gallon of Gas in June, 2001 to 2008



Source: Energy Information Agency historic tables
<http://tonot.eia.doe.gov> US All Grades All Formulations

Exhibit 4
Fuel Cost for Average Vacation Round Trip, 2001 – 2008



Data and Publications at your fingertips:

Website: <http://nhts.ornl.gov>

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- "Is Congestion Slowing us Down?"
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