



Ministry of Infrastructure
and Water Management

Lin	Richting	Perron	Vertrek
320	via Muiden P+R	A5	
40	Muiderspoortstation	A4	4 min
37	Station Noord	A3	8 min
65	Station Zuid	B2	8 min
65	KNSM Eiland	B1	8 min
12	Centraal Station	C	9 min
322	via Muiden P+R	A6	11 min
62	Amstelstation	B1	12 min
62	Station Lelylaan	A2	15 min
65	Station Zuid	B2	15 min
320	via Muiden P+R	A5	15 min
12	Centraal Station	C	16 min

Going solo

On the effect of being single when it comes to mobility and accessibility

KiM Netherlands Institute for Transport Policy Analysis

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Summary

Singles have different travel options, different travel behaviour and different accessibility compared to people with similar characteristics who are not single.

The Netherlands is home to a high number of singles (here defined as single-person and single-parent households), and this group will continue to grow over the coming decades. In 2025, it concerns 4 million people, and by 2050, this figure will rise to approximately 4.8 million. In that year, around 1 in 2 households and 1 in every 4 people will be single-adult household.

Singles are a little less mobile than non-singles with comparable characteristics. The most relevant difference is the distance that they cover. On average, a single covers 16 kilometres outside the home each day, while a non-single covers 20 kilometres.

Singles use public transport (train, bus, tram, metro) more often than non-singles, and use cars less often. The number of journeys made on foot or by bicycle is more or less the same for both singles and non-singles.

The difference in car usage is related to access to a car. Singles have a car in their households far less often than comparable non-singles. In addition, driving licence ownership is lower amongst singles.

Singles generally live closer to amenities than comparable non-singles. On the other hand, the accessibility they experience and their travel speeds are less favourable. This means that accessibility for singles is (slightly) less favourable than for non-singles.

The number and proportion of single people will continue to rise over the coming decades. On the one hand, this offers opportunities for the environment and climate, for example. Since they travel more by public transport and less by car, the travel behaviour of singles is less harmful to the environment. On the other hand, this increased dependence on public transport also means that, for example, a reduction in services or an increase in fares for this mode of transport could increase the difference in accessibility between singles and non-singles. It is important to accurately reflect the diversity of household composition in forecasts.



1 Increasing number of singles

Developments over the past 30 years

Between 1995 and 2024, the population of the Netherlands grew by 16%, from 15.4 million to 18.0 million. Over the same period, the number of households grew nearly twice as quickly (+29%). This growth is mainly due to the sharp increase in the number of singles (single-person and single-parent households). The number of single-person households rose from 2.1 million to 3.3 million (+58%), and the number of single-parent households from 360,000 to 620,000 (+71%).

Together, single-person and single-parent households accounted for nearly 4 million of the 8.4 million households (47%) in 2024. In this study, we will be referring to this group as the singles.



3.3 million
single-person households



620,000
single-parent households

Characteristics

Around a quarter of people aged between 35 and 70 can be categorised as single. For people aged between 25 and 35, this proportion is a little higher at around 30%. Above the age of 70, the proportion rises rapidly: around 30% amongst 75-year-olds, around 40% amongst 80-year-olds and above 50% amongst those aged 85 and older. People below the age of 18 are out of scope in this research.

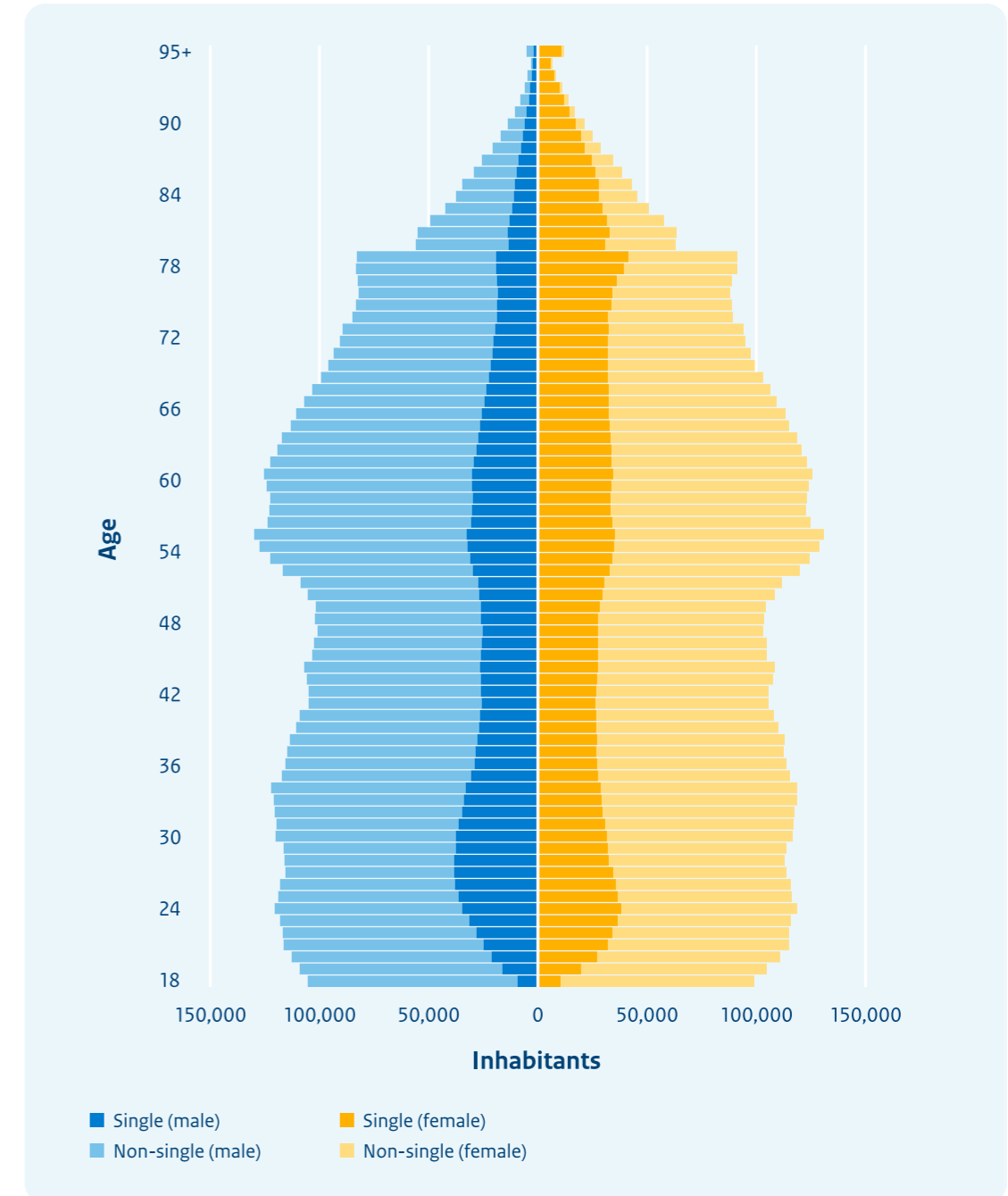
Single men could primarily be found in the group aged between 25 and 35. Around 20% of single men could be found in this age group, compared to less than 14% of all men.

Single women are primarily found in the over-65 age group. Over 36% of all single women are aged 65 or older, compared to just 21% of all women. This is partly related to the life expectancy of women, which is higher than that of men.

The majority of singles form one-person households (84%). A much smaller proportion are single-parent households, i.e. households consisting of one adult and one or more underage (<18 y) children (16%).

The fact that someone lives alone, or with underage children only, does not mean that they are not in a relationship. An estimated 0.8 to 1.0 million people living alone are in a relationship but do not share their home with their partner. We do not have sufficient insight into these relationships to be able to distinguish between single people who are in or not in a relationship.

Singles in the Netherlands



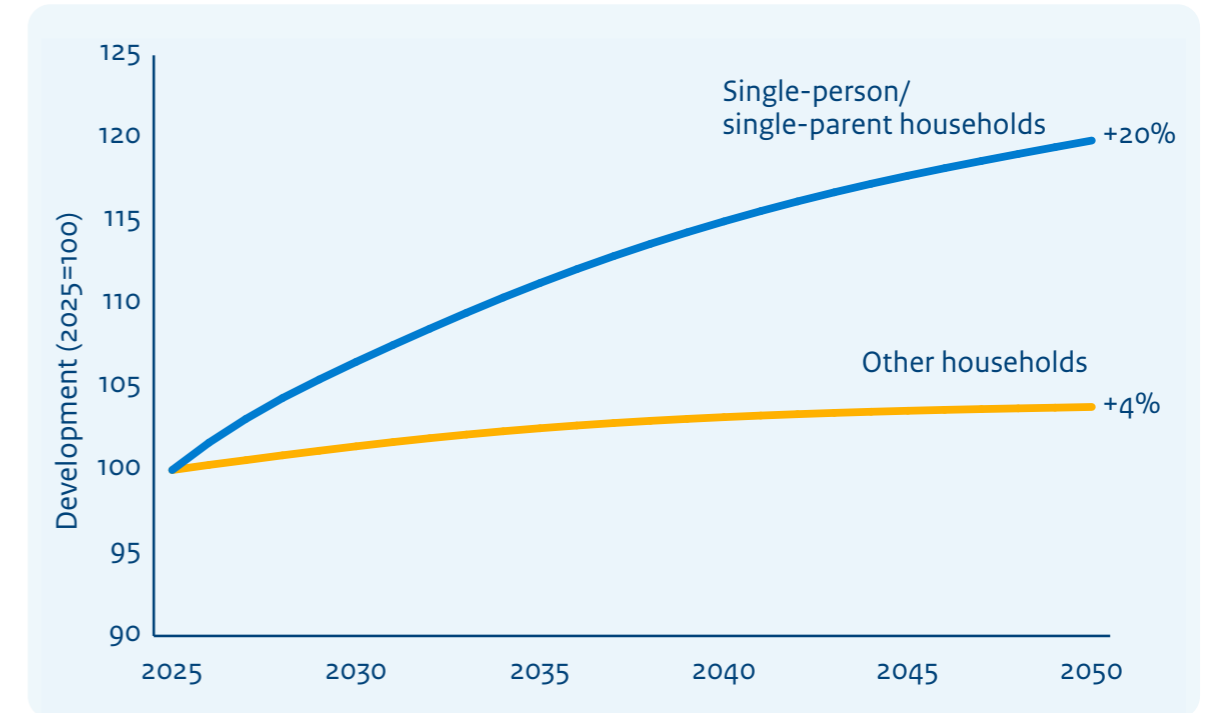
Future projections

The number and proportion of singles is expected to continue to rise over the coming years. Statistics Netherlands (CBS) anticipates that by 2050, there will be around 4.8 million single-parent and single-person households. The share of these households will then grow from 47% in 2025 to over 51% in 2050, because the other types of households are growing far less rapidly. Approximately 1 in 4 people will be classified as single by 2050.

What if?

The consequences of living alone (not living with other adults) when it comes to mobility and accessibility lie at the heart of this study. These consequences are derived from a counterfactual situation in which the single person is no longer single. Of course, we do not know this situation. We are therefore extracting this information from other people with the same relevant characteristics who are not currently single. The difference between the two situations is the impact of being single. The relevant characteristics include age, sex, level of education and migration background.

Development of households





2 General mobility

On the move

Singles travel on foot slightly less often compared with when they are not single. The probability of someone not leaving the house on a given day is 21% for a single and 20% for a non-single. Expressed in terms of the estimated number of days per year, this amounts to 288 and 292 days respectively that a person leaves the house.

Singles make an average of 3.3 trips when they leave the house on any given day of the year. Non-singles make an average of 3.5 trips.

Taking all days together (days when someone does and does not leave the house), this amounts to an average of 2.6 trips per day for singles and 2.8 trips per day for non-singles. In other words, on average, the number of journeys made by singles is 8% lower than for non-singles.

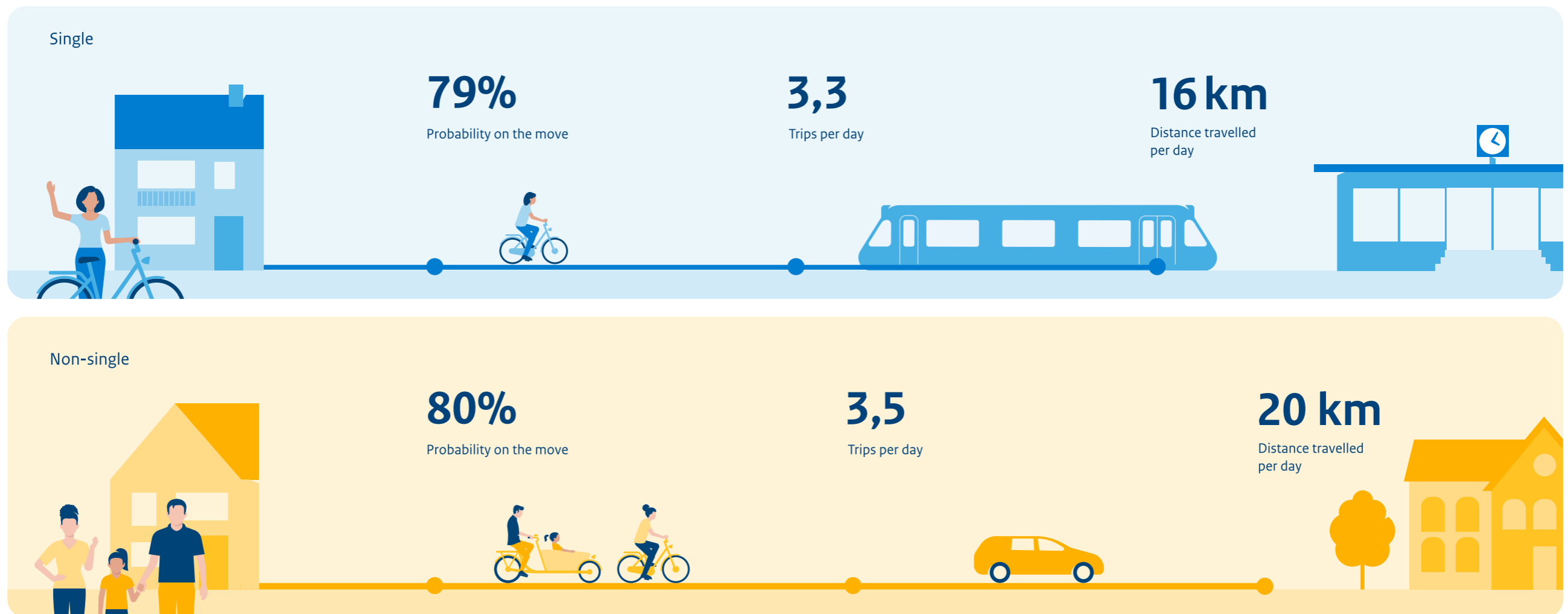
Distances

If we look at the distances travelled, for those on the move, the differences are more pronounced. Singles, on average, travel shorter distances than non-singles. The daily average for singles is 16 km, and for non-singles it is 20 km (20% higher).

Less mobile

The combination of going out less often and a significantly shorter travel distance leads to the conclusion that a single person is less mobile than if they were not single.

General mobility





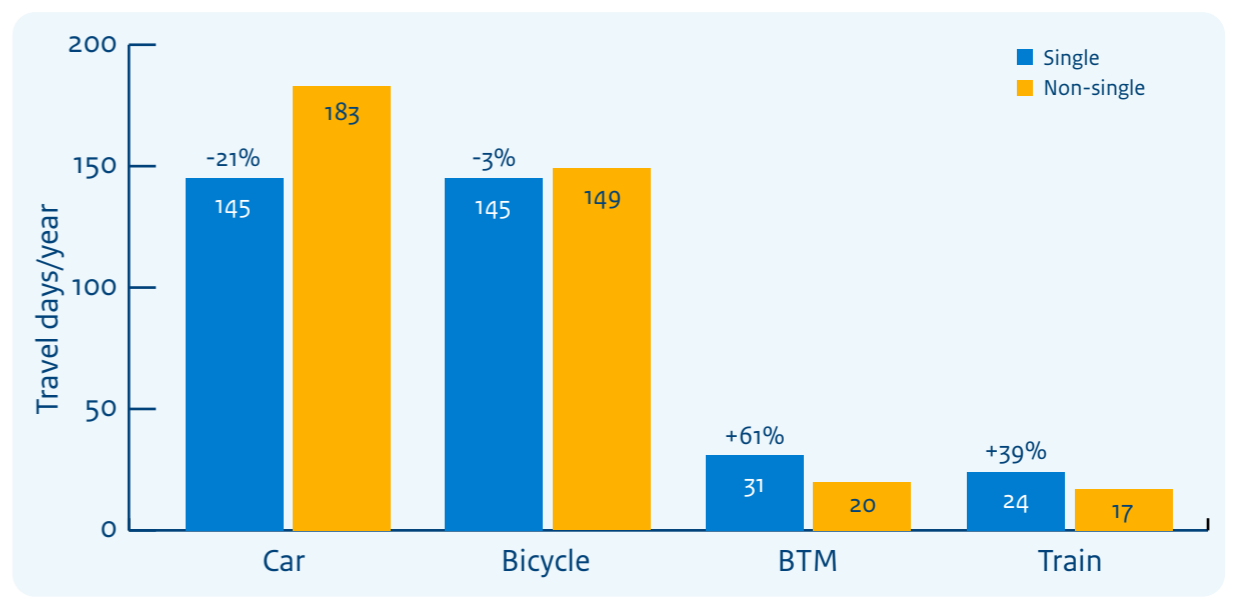
3 Mode of transport

Clear differences

There are differences between singles and non-singles when it comes to the modes of transport used. Singles travel significantly more often by public transport than non-singles, and less often by car. In absolute terms, the difference in car use is the most pronounced, at 38 days fewer per year. In relative terms and for differences in use of public transport: singles use the bus, train or metro (BTM) around 60% more often than non-singles and the train around 40% more often.

For the active modes of transport, walking and cycling, the differences between singles and non-singles are small. On average, singles travel a little less often by bike or on foot.

Mode of transport used



Reasoning behind increased use of public transport

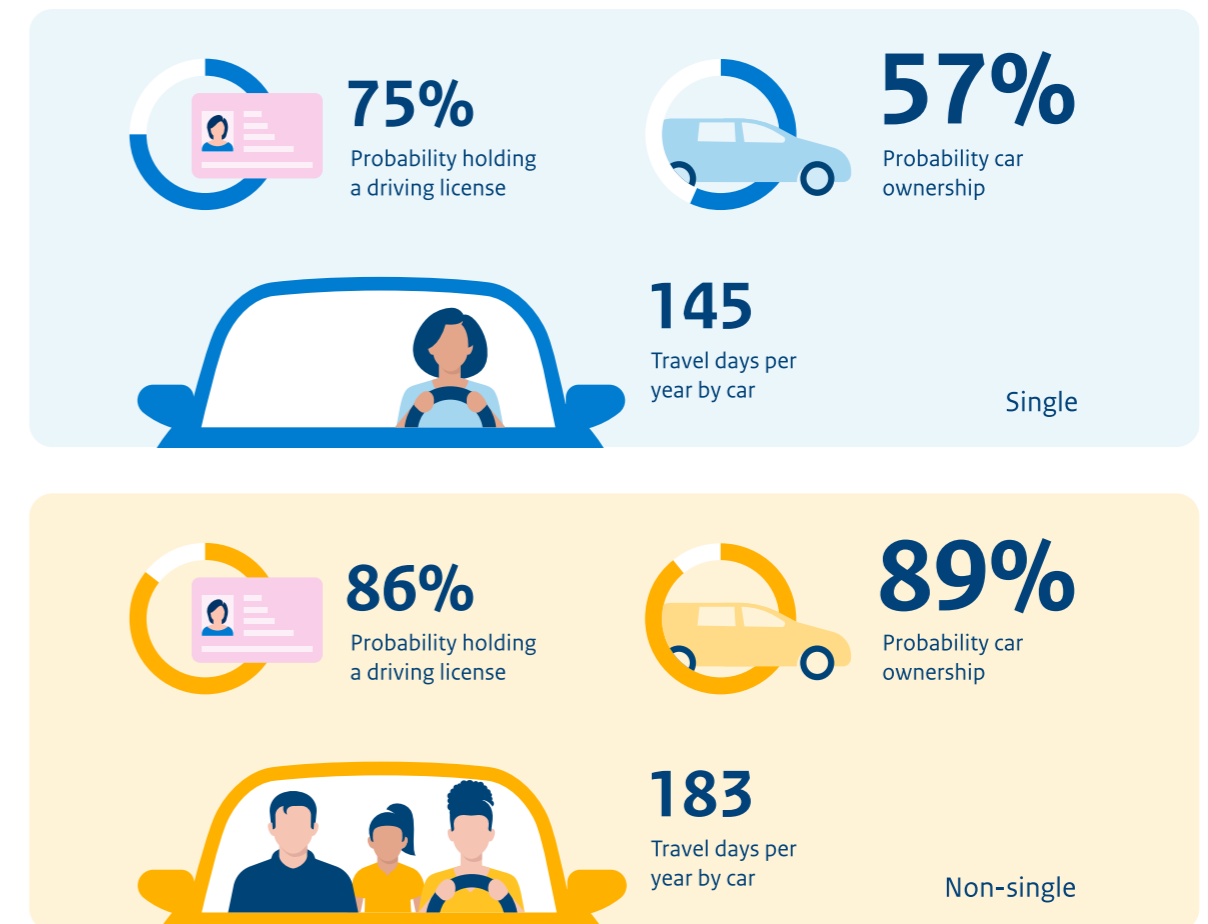
Why is the difference between singles and non-singles in the use of public transport so pronounced? An initial important explanation for this is the travel group. It can be expected that singles travel alone slightly more often, meaning that public transport costs are relatively low. For larger travel groups – and especially when these include more people aged 12 and above – these costs can quickly add up. A second explanation is the living environment. Singles more often live in an environment that is slightly more urban than the environment in which non-singles live. This is the result of the differences in living preferences between the two groups. In more urban environments, public transport is generally better organised than elsewhere. We can see a third explanation in the differences in access to a car.

Reasoning behind lower levels of car ownership and use

Singles therefore use cars far less often than non-singles. This is partly related to driving licence and car ownership within this group. Firstly, the probability of holding a valid driving licence amongst singles is approximately 11 percentage points lower than amongst non-singles. Secondly, it is less probable that a single person would have a personal car in their household. The probability is 57%, compared with 89% of households with more than 1 adult (non-singles). The difference of 32 percentage points is partly due to the fact that in a single-person household, the number of potential car users is lower, and therefore the financial burden of purchasing a car is relatively higher. Possession and use are closely intertwined. This means that single people are much less likely to get behind the wheel or in the passenger seat.

However, if singles have both a driving licence and a car, they actually use their car more than comparable non-singles with a driving licence and car in the household. This is likely related to wanting to maximise the return on investment and the high fixed costs associated with owning a car. Once the financial hurdle of car ownership has been overcome, the variable costs of using the car are manageable. By definition, there are also no other persons in the household using the vehicle.

Car mobility





4 Accessibility

More experienced accessibility challenges

Singles have to contend slightly more often with challenges when it comes to the accessibility of facilities compared with non-singles. To a great extent, this relates to reduced access to a car. In addition, singles rate accessibility slightly less positively than non-singles, and indicate less often that they can always or generally properly access a destination.

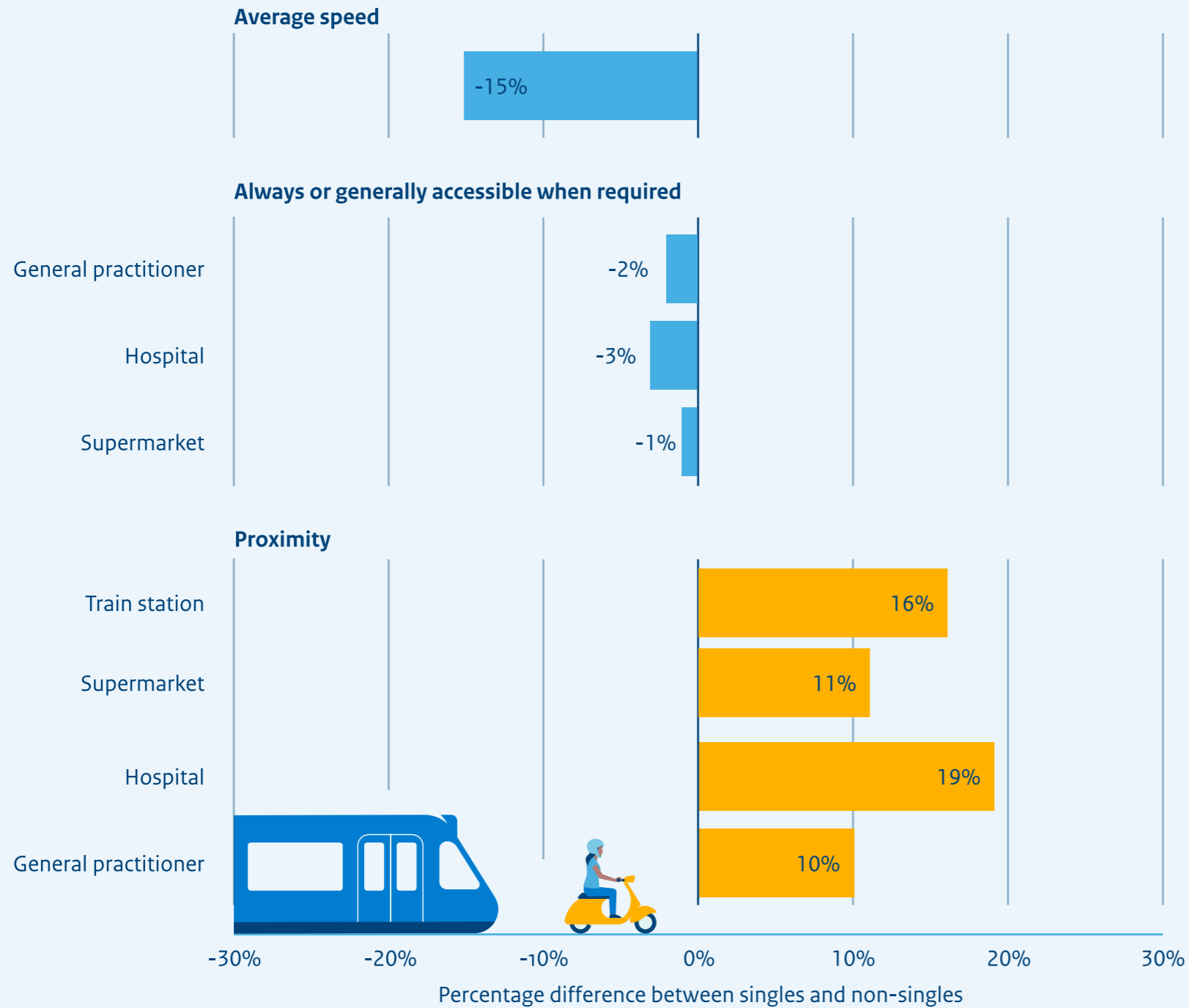
Shorter distances to facilities

Because singles value proximity more and tend to live in more urban areas than non-singles, the average distances to potentially relevant amenities are shorter for this group than for non-singles. For example, the distance to the nearest supermarket is approximately 800 metres for non-singles, compared to 700 metres for singles. When it comes to this aspect of accessibility, singles score a little bit better than non-singles.

Longer travel times

On the other hand, travel times for singles are lower than those for non-singles. Despite the advantage of proximity that singles have, differences in travel speed and perceptions of accessibility mean that accessibility for singles is slightly less favourable than for non-singles.

Differences in accessibility aspects






5 Subgroups

A diverse group

Singles form a large, diverse group in the Netherlands. Comparing averages, as we have done in the previous chapters, therefore provides an incomplete picture. Despite this, the pattern remains informative. When we state that single people are less likely to have a driving licence, this applies to all subgroups of singles (young and old, male and female, regardless of origin), provided we compare them with non-singles from the same subgroups. And when we conclude that the proximity of amenities is slightly better for singles than for non-singles, this also applies to all subgroups (to a greater or lesser extent; this depends in part on the degree of rounding). There are only a couple of exceptions to this rule.

Single-person households versus single-parent households

A range of differences exist within the group of singles between single-person and single-parent households. Having a underage child ensures that in a limited number of cases, the impact of being single is reversed. In this case, the difference between single-person and comparable single-parent households is also significantly greater than the difference between singles and non-singles. If a single has a underage child, for example, this has a clearly stimulating impact on their general mobility as opposed to a single without a underage child. This can be explained by the fact that singles cannot share their care responsibilities with other members of the household, and in all likelihood need to travel more for these care responsibilities. For singles with a underage child, it is also the case that they travel slightly more, also specifically by car, than comparable non-singles with a underage child. In terms of other mobility and accessibility aspects, having a underage



child has a less significant impact. However, it does often mean that the differences between comparable singles and non-singles decrease.

Young versus old

Across the full range of aspects of mobility and accessibility that we examined here, there are differences between age groups. Accordingly, young adults travel differently from adults, and elderly people travel differently again from these adults and young adults. But that in no way detracts from the fact that the differences found between singles and non-singles remain unchanged. In all age groups, it is the case that singles travel less than non-singles, as long as we compare the same age groups with one another. The same applies to the distance covered, whether they hold a driving license, whether they own a car, and all other aspects. The only significant exception here is cycling frequency: young singles cycle more than young non-singles, while older singles cycle less than older non-singles.

Practical versus theoretical education

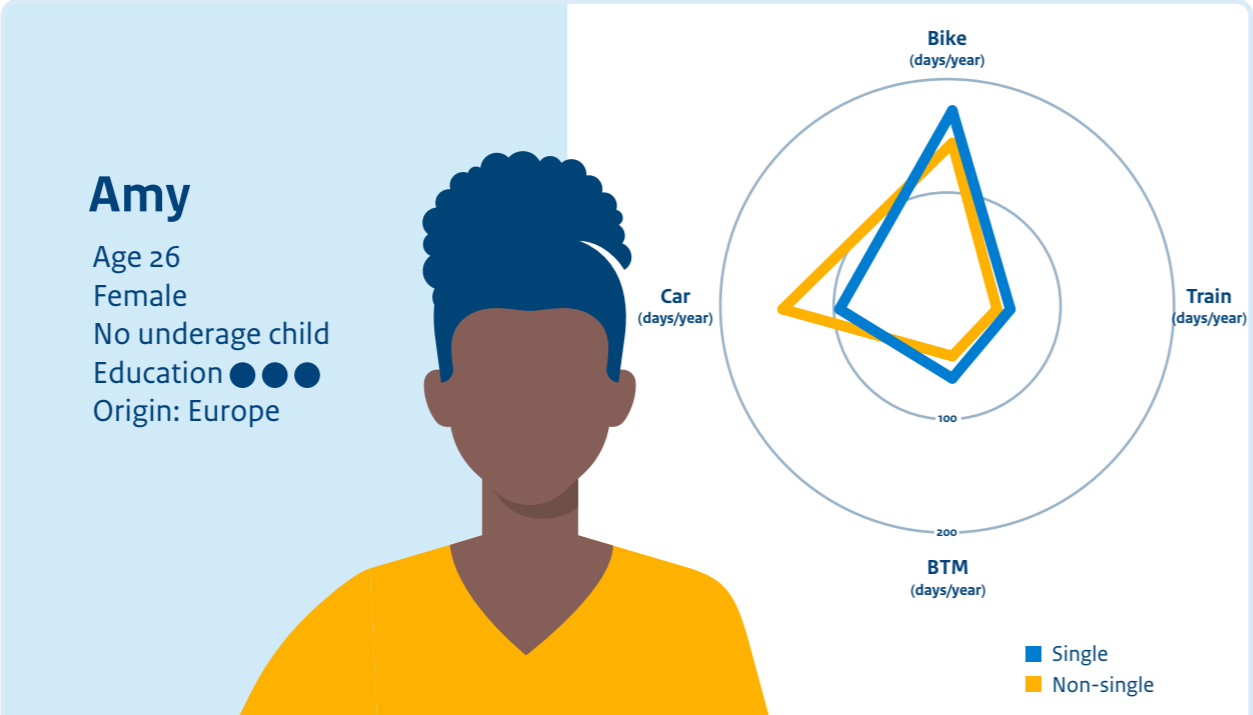
People with a more practical education are, on average, less mobile than people with a more theoretical education. The pattern can be seen more strongly in singles. Having a more practical education increases the disparity between singles and non-singles that would be comparable by other characteristics. Singles with a more practical education travel even less, hold a driving license and own a car less often, and travel less by car than those singles with a more theoretical education.

Other characteristics

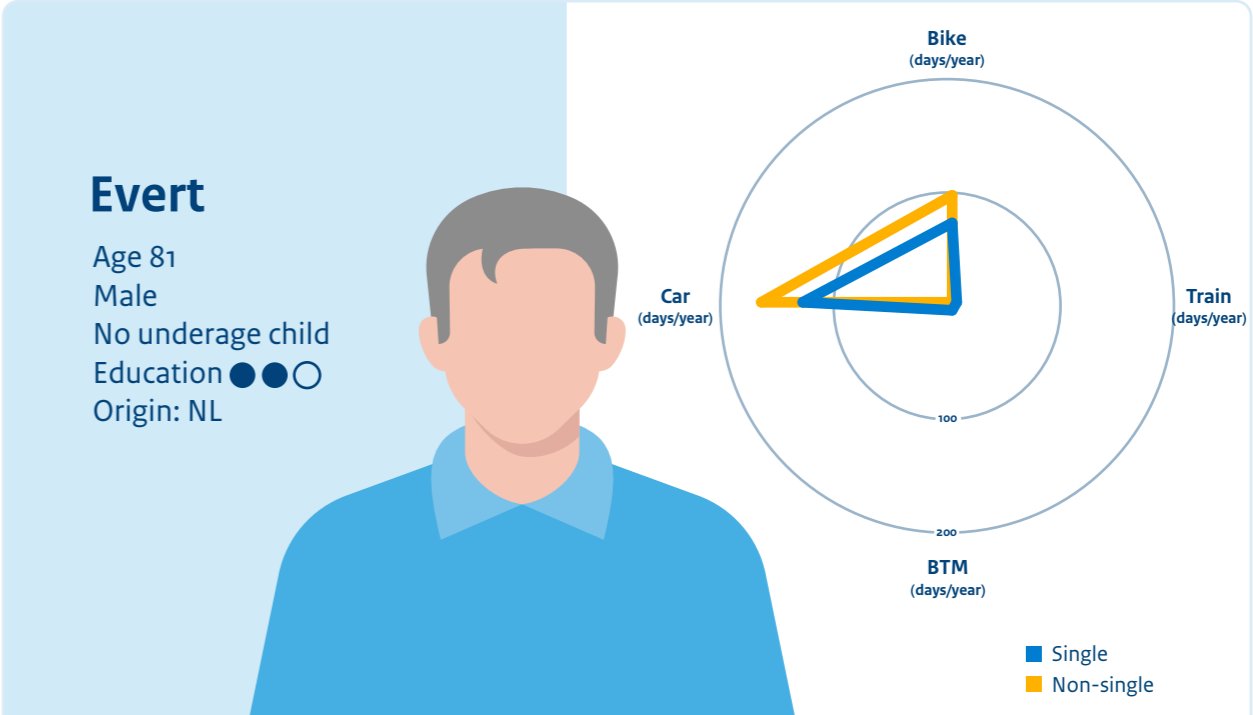
In terms of other characteristics, these have a less clear pattern in terms of their impact on the differences between singles and non-singles. An example of this type of characteristic is having a migration background. The (negative) impact of being single on holding a driving license and owning a car is greater for those of non-Dutch origin than for people of Dutch origin. Gender also has an impact on the effect of being single when it comes to mobility. Accordingly, the differences between non-single women and single women for holding a driving license and using a car are smaller than for men. And when it comes to owning a car, the differences between single and non-single women are greater again.

Illustrations

Using a number of fictional characters, we can illustrate how the effect of being single differs with different personal characteristics. For example, in the case of Amy, a young woman without children, we can see that the probability of her having a driving licence differs if she is single compared to if she is not single. That difference is much greater than for Babet, a woman with a child. Age group also makes a difference, as shown by the example of Amy compared to our senior citizen Evert. Amy generally has more travel days than Evert for all modes of transport except the car. Amy cycles more often during the year when she is single than when she is not single, while the opposite is true for Evert.



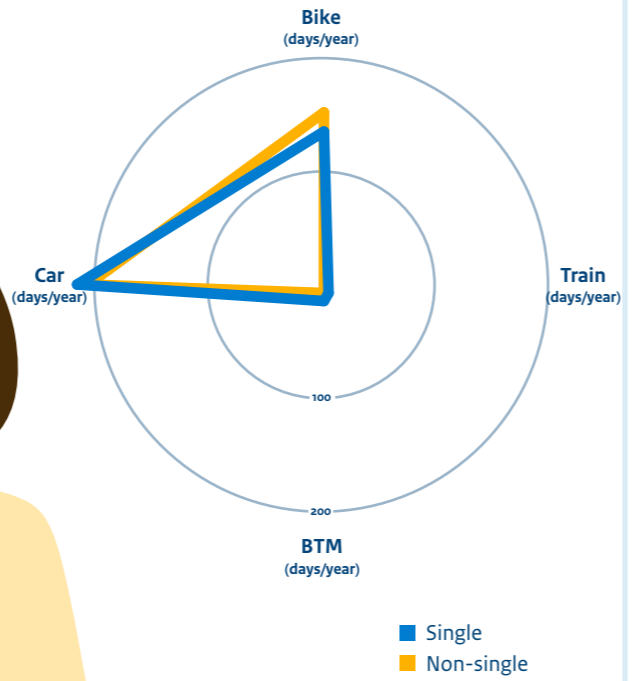
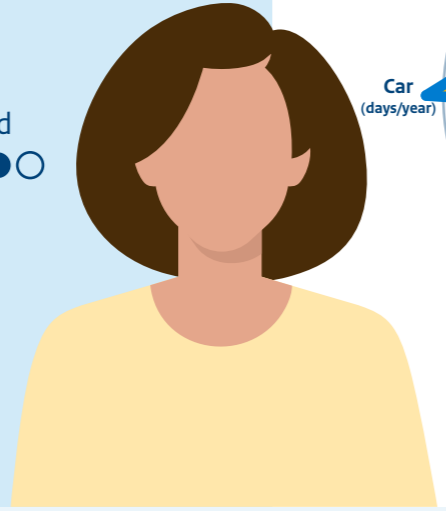
	Single	Non-single
Distance (km/day)	16	17
Holding a driving license (probability %)	43%	61%
Car ownership (probability %)	33%	73%
Average speed (km/h)	16	19
Proximity to supermarket (km)	0.6	0.6
Experienced reduced access to supermarket (probability %)	5%	3%



	Single	Non-single
Distance (km/day)	10	14
Holding a driving license (probability %)	63%	77%
Car ownership (probability %)	58%	85%
Average speed (km/h)	15	18
Proximity to supermarket (km)	0.7	0.7
Experienced reduced access to supermarket (probability %)	7%	2%

Babet

Age 37
 Female
 Underage child
 Education ●●○
 Origin: NL



	Single	Non-single
Distance (km/day)	19	19
Holding a driving license (probability %)	90%	92%
Car ownership (probability %)	79%	98%
Average speed (km/h)	20	22
Proximity to supermarket (km)	0.7	0.8
Experienced reduced access to supermarket (probability %)	2%	2%




6 Implications for policy

Housing market and public transport

Because singles travel by public transport more often and by car less often, and in total, cover fewer kilometres, their travel behaviour has less impact on the environment and the climate than that of non-singles. If the government considers this important, it is advisable to perpetuate this behaviour amongst singles. The increased dependence by singles on public transport also means that a reduction in services or an increase in fares for this mode of transport has a relatively significant impact on this group. To avoid further increasing the differences in accessibility between singles and non-singles, this is also an important factor to take into account. Policy makers can respond to this through spatial planning and the housing market, the number of facilities and their locations, and the transport system.

Singles, on average, live in a more urban environment compared with non-singles. Singles also attach greater importance to proximity to amenities and activity locations. This means that the differences in accessibility between singles and non-singles are modest. For these singles, it must be possible to live in these more urban areas, in smaller, affordable homes, without being obliged to contribute to the cost of parking facilities if they do not own a car.



A specific example of what is possible in the housing market is the 2023 government initiative to make more mortgage capacity available to singles for making their homes sustainable.

Good, accessible and affordable public transport is another route towards more environmentally friendly travel behaviour to facilitate and motivate singles. In addition, this route can help minimise inequality in the accessibility of singles and non-singles.

Too large a group to ignore

Singles in the Netherlands form a large group, a group that will continue to grow over the coming decades. It is striking, therefore, that little research exists with a focus on this group. With this research, we would like to bridge some of this gap. At the same time, we have not covered all aspects of mobility and accessibility here. Supplementary research can focus on more specific aspects, such as the distance that singles and non-singles cover for different activities with different modes of transport.

Due to the differences in travel behaviour, it is important to properly incorporate the distinction between singles and non-singles into the transport models. What is appropriate will have to be considered on a model-by-model basis.

Shared interests of singles

While singles form a large and diverse group, there are clear common interests. These are due in part to the nature of the group, but certainly also to mobility and accessibility. Nevertheless, we must be careful not to lump all the people in this group together. This study showed that single-parent households in particular are not always easy to compare with single-person households.

On the other hand, it may be more informative to allow other demographic characteristics to guide policy analyses. Both singles and elderly people with partners can, for example, be assisted with proper accessibility and an inclusive public space design. Age and health are more important here than household status.



Acknowledgements

Approach

All estimates in this study were obtained through regression analyses with a fixed set of control variables. The set has been obtained from a causal diagram. In this way, we can discuss a causal effect, provided the assumptions in the causal diagram hold true. The research has been carried out using recent data from the Dutch National Travel Survey by Statistics Netherlands (ODiN 2023 and/or 2024).

Background report

For more information on the method used and the results, consult the background report (in Dutch) that can be downloaded via the website www.kimnet.nl.

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