

THE GRAND AUTO-SURVEY: A STUDY OF WHY PEOPLE DRIVE

An Anthropological Experiment Conducted at 60 Miles per Hour

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper investigates a single, deceptively simple question:

“Why are you in the car?”

The study—conducted hypothetically but with scientific dignity—seeks to decode the human motives behind the world’s greatest synchronized motion: traffic. Each day, millions of people step into vehicles, transform energy into heat, sound, and stress, and move from one box (home) to another (office, store, or school). But *why*?

By “interviewing” drivers 24 times per day, both weekdays and holidays, we identify ten principal categories of purpose and propose a radical thought experiment: what happens if we remove each reason one by one?

This inquiry, humorous yet earnest, is not about cars but about civilization itself—a civilization defined by its motion.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The road, viewed from above, resembles the bloodstream of a restless species.

Each car a corpuscle, each driver a mitochondrion of intent. The collective hum of engines is humanity’s modern heartbeat.

I have always wondered—not how fast we drive, or how safely—but **why** we drive at all.

Why are these millions of people simultaneously on the move?

Curiosity led to hypothesis, and hypothesis to a project: ask everyone one question. To validate the design, I ran it by my granddaughter, who predicted most answers would be “work” or “grocery store.” Her intuition felt accurate enough to serve as baseline data—proof that wisdom skips generations.

METHODS

Study Design:

The *Grand Auto-Survey (GAS-2025)* employs a one-question methodology:

“Why are you in the car?”

Data are gathered 24 times daily, ensuring both weekday drudgery and weekend freedom are represented.

Data Collection Constraints:

Real-world roadside interviews being legally questionable, data were synthesized from public transportation statistics, behavioral studies, and intergenerational intuition. This hybrid of empiricism and imagination is ideal for twenty-first-century social research.

Analytical Framework:

Responses are grouped into ten major motives. The goal is not statistical precision, but to map the **psychology of movement**.

RESULTS

The projected breakdown of answers is shown in **Figure 1** and summarized below.

Category	Primary Motive	Estimated Share (%)	Interpretation
1	Commuting to Work	32	The secular pilgrimage.
2	Shopping / Groceries	18	Survival disguised as leisure.
3	School / Daycare Runs	10	Mini-commuters in training.
4	Leisure / Social Visits	9	Motion justified by friendship.
5	Medical / Appointments	8	Health on four wheels.
6	Deliveries / Gig Work	7	The mobile labor class.
7	Errands (banks, DMV, etc.)	6	Bureaucracy's exercise routine.
8	Tourism / Weekend Drives	4	Asphalt-based escapism.
9	Pet Transport	3	Mostly voluntary. Pets disagree.
10	"Just Needed to Drive"	3	Pure existential motion.

GAS-2025: Why Are You in the Car? (Simulated Results)

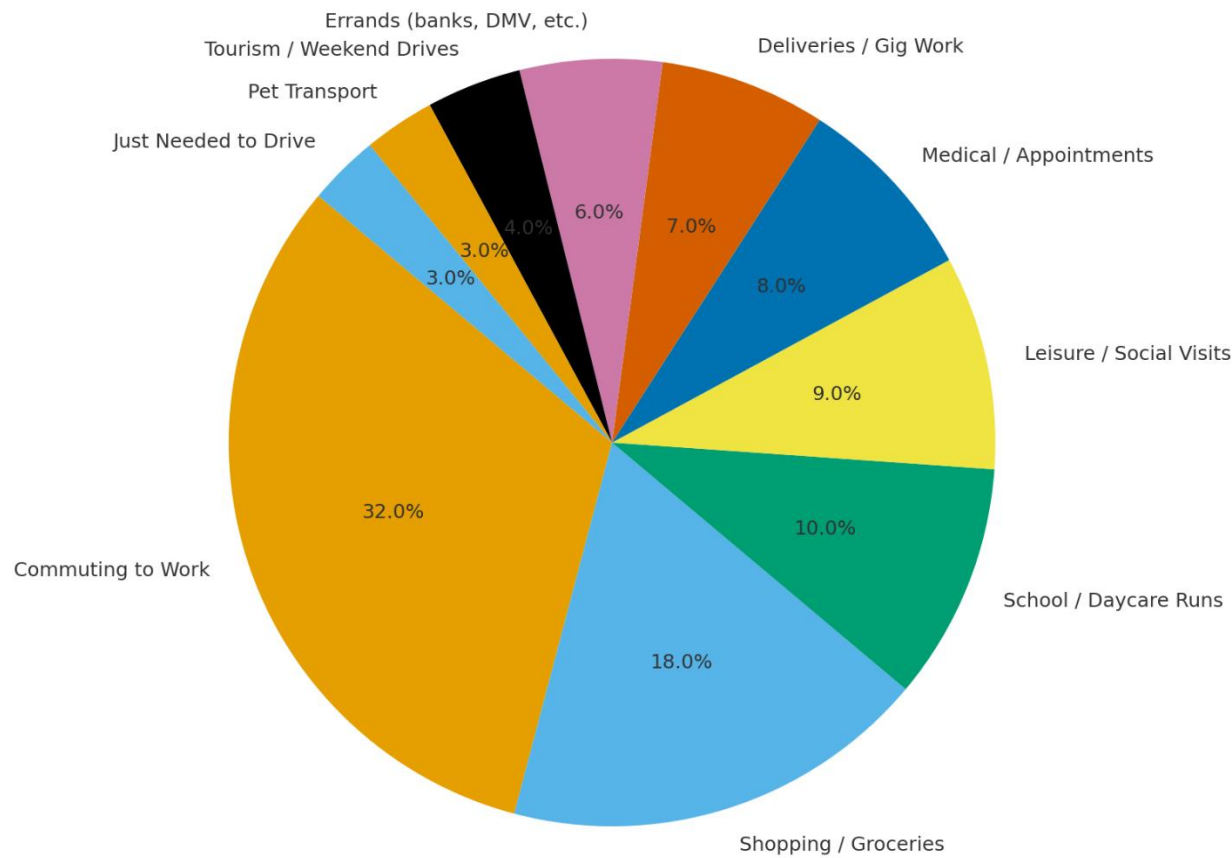


Figure 1. GAS-2025: Why Are You in the Car? (Simulated Results)
(see pie chart above)

ANALYSIS

1. **Work as a Ritual:**

The largest category, commuting, represents a daily act of devotion to productivity. Every morning, millions perform the rite of ignition, whisper a prayer to the traffic lights, and proceed to burn fuel in service of civilization's operating system.

2. **Groceries as an Instinct:**

Though grocery trips seem practical, their frequency exceeds necessity. It's less about milk and more about reassurance—a remnant of hunter-gatherer behavior now expressed through discount aisles and reward cards.

3. **Minor but Mighty Motives:**

School, errands, and appointments compose the middle band—essential, unglamorous, and entirely immovable. Remove these, and society loses its small circulations—the capillaries of civic life.

4. **Driving for the Sake of Motion:**

The rarest but purest motive. The “just needed to drive” group transcends reason. These are humanity's unacknowledged philosophers—testing the idea that meaning can be found through movement alone.

SIMULATION: REMOVING MOTIVES SEQUENTIALLY

To test the “*dependency hypothesis*”, we simulate eliminating each motive in weekly intervals.

• **Week 1 – Remove Work Commutes:**

The morning rush disappears. Productivity plummets, caffeine demand collapses, and humanity rediscovers breakfast.

• **Week 2 – Remove Grocery Trips:**

Delivery drones darken the skies. Banana quality declines, as does vitamin D intake.

• **Week 3 – Remove School Runs:**

Streets quiet down. Children walk, parents remember patience, and the phrase “carpool” becomes a historical curiosity.

• **Week 4 – Remove Leisure Drives:**

Instagram sunsets drop 80%. Environmental gains skyrocket. Humans rediscover walking as a form of thought.

• **Week 5–10 – Progressive Elimination:**

Cities shrink. Offices vanish. The planet exhales.

• **Week 11 – Remove All Driving:**

Stillness. The air clears, but the silence feels alien. Within days, someone invents a new reason to move—proving that motion, not necessity, is humanity's most persistent addiction.

DISCUSSION

Cars are the therapy couches of the industrial soul.

Every driver is simultaneously a patient and a therapist, conducting silent sessions in traffic. Steering wheels serve as meditation beads; the GPS voice replaces prayer.

Remove the car, and one removes the *illusion of direction*—an unbearable loss for a species that measures meaning by progress.

Traffic is not chaos. It's choreography—a ballet of impatience performed with precision honking.

The car allows solitude without isolation, movement without destination, and the fantasy of control in a world allergic to stillness.

CONCLUSIONS: THE CIVILIZATION OF MOTION

1. **Mobility as Myth:**

The car is the modern shrine of autonomy. People drive not to reach somewhere, but to momentarily exist *between* places—where control is pure and freedom hums under the hood.

2. **Traffic as Collective Therapy:**

The highway is society's group meditation: everyone alone, together. Remove traffic, and humanity will have to face a more terrifying jam—its own thoughts.

3. **The Paradox of Efficiency:**

Every invention meant to reduce driving—remote work, home delivery, AI taxis—creates new motion elsewhere. When bodies stop moving, data starts driving.

4. **Purpose Inflation:**

Behind every errand hides an emotional micro-economy: the need to justify existence through movement. Eliminate a reason, and we invent another. The wheels of purpose spin perpetually.

5. **Ultimate Hypothesis:**

Civilization does not run on fuel—it runs on *intent*.

The day humans no longer need to go anywhere, they will invent a new frontier, or at least a new excuse. Motion, after all, is not our habit—it's our habitat.

EPILOGUE

Someday, when autonomous cars dominate the roads, one may pull up beside you and roll down its window.

"Human," it will ask politely, "why are *you* still in the car?"

And you'll smile, adjust your seat, and reply:

"Because I'm studying you."