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TRANSPORT FINDINGS

How do Municipal Employees Travel for Work Errands? Evidence from Athens, Greece

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Findings

Employer-led mobility research says little about trips public bodies assign to staff during working hours. We asked Municipality of Athens employees how they would travel for work errands at three distances. None would drive for the shortest errand and 10% for the longest, although a third drive or are driven to work. Walking and public transport carry these work errands, and the moped is the only commuting mode still used on them. Among private vehicle commuters, a shorter working day and a subsidised transport pass were the favoured incentives, and combining them would extend the benefit beyond work travel.

1. Questions

Employer-led mobility management research and practice focuses almost entirely on the commute, and its instruments are designed to move employees out of the private vehicles they use daily (Chen and Yang 2023; Roaf et al. 2024). Work-related trips undertaken for a public authority within the city differ in kind, since the employer sets the destination but rarely the mode. Such trips remain poorly documented. Research on work-related travel concentrates on long-distance business journeys (Jittrapirom et al. 2025), and studies that classify such travel by spatial scale find local trips within a city the least examined (Hislop 2016). National travel surveys that do record professional travel separately still pool it with commuting in analysis (Hogeweij et al. 2026).

Athens, a compact and heterogeneous historic European city, is well suited to studying such trips. The municipality covers 38 sq. km, served by three metro lines, a tram and a dense bus network. Its municipal buildings stand close together, a median of about 300 m apart, with 78% of all pairs under 4 km and six in ten within 500 m of a metro or tram stop (Figure 1). Not every directorate has a vehicle.

The survey asked how far employees will walk before changing mode, and whether conventional workplace mobility management has anything left to act upon. Earlier research places the acceptable walking distance between 400 and 800 metres, although recent evidence indicates that people walk further (Merlin et al. 2021; Taylor and Somenahalli 2024; Yang and Diez-Roux 2012).

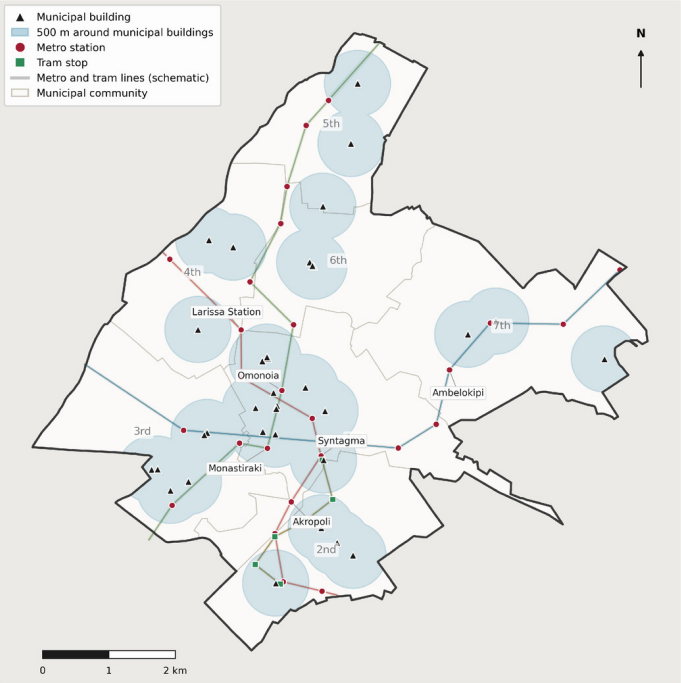


Figure 1. The Municipality of Athens, its seven municipal communities, its main municipal buildings and the metro and tram network, with lines drawn schematically between stations.

2. Methods

An anonymous questionnaire ran from 23 November to 28 December 2023 within the Walkable Athens programme (https://walkable.cityofathens.gr). It was sent to 34 service mailboxes in five directorates whose staff work in the field, each reaching five to ten people, so roughly 170 to 340 employees were addressed directly. Sixty-five replied, and the 62 who answered all three distance items form the analytic sample. Thirty-six belong to the directorates addressed directly, an indicative response rate of 11% to 21%. The remaining 26, from other departments, received the link from colleagues, so their response rate is unknown.

Respondents reported how often they are sent out, whether they carry heavy objects and how they would travel at 500 to 800 metres, 800 to 1,500 metres and 1.5 to 4 kilometres, giving their two main reasons from a list including time, load, terrain, weather and health. The bands start within the usual 400 to 800 metre walking threshold, since the survey asked how far employees will walk before changing mode. The three mode items (Q12, Q14, Q16) listed all modes and allowed multiple answers, but only the commuting item (Q6) added that several modes may be ticked “where they are of roughly equal weight in the trip”. A short walk to the metro may therefore have gone unticked, and the shares walking at all are a lower bound. Only one respondent chose cycling for errands, as Athens has no continuous cycle network or public bicycle scheme. Cochran’s Q tests whether the share of a mode changes across the three distances, McNemar’s test compares

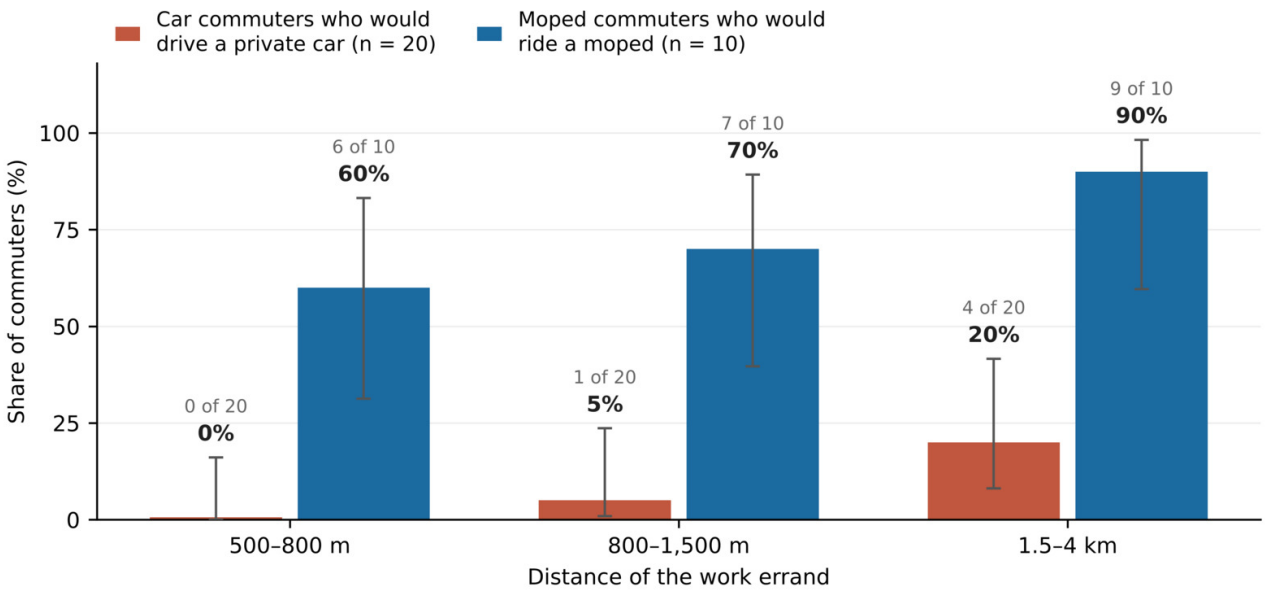


Figure 2. Car and moped commuters who would use the same mode for work errands at three distances. Bars give the percentage, whiskers the 95% Wilson interval, and labels the number of respondents.

commuting with errand modes, and Fisher's exact test compares two groups of respondents. Shares carry 95% Wilson confidence intervals, which remain reliable for small samples and near-zero shares.

3. Findings

No respondent would use a private car at 500 to 800 metres, 3% would at 800 to 1,500 metres and 10% beyond 1.5 kilometres (95% interval 5% to 20%), although 20 of the same respondents (32%) drive or are driven to work. Of these 20, none would take the car for the shortest errand and four for the longest (Figure 2, McNemar's test, $p < 0.01$ in every band). Instead, most would walk or take public transport. Moped commuters behave differently. Of the ten who ride a moped to work, six, seven and nine would also use a moped for errands at the three distances, and none would use public transport.

Walking and public transport carry these errands (Figure 3). Walking the whole way falls from 68% in the shortest band to 37% and then 6% (Cochran's $Q = 55.5$, $p < 0.001$). Walking at all declines more gently, from 87% to 60% and 34%, while public transport rises from 15% to 34% and 53%, so walking partly becomes the way to reach public transport rather than disappearing.

This decline holds in every subgroup of at least eight respondents (Table 1). Walkers cite time saving no more often than others, 66% against 75% in the shortest band and 57% against 69% in the middle one (Fisher's exact test, p

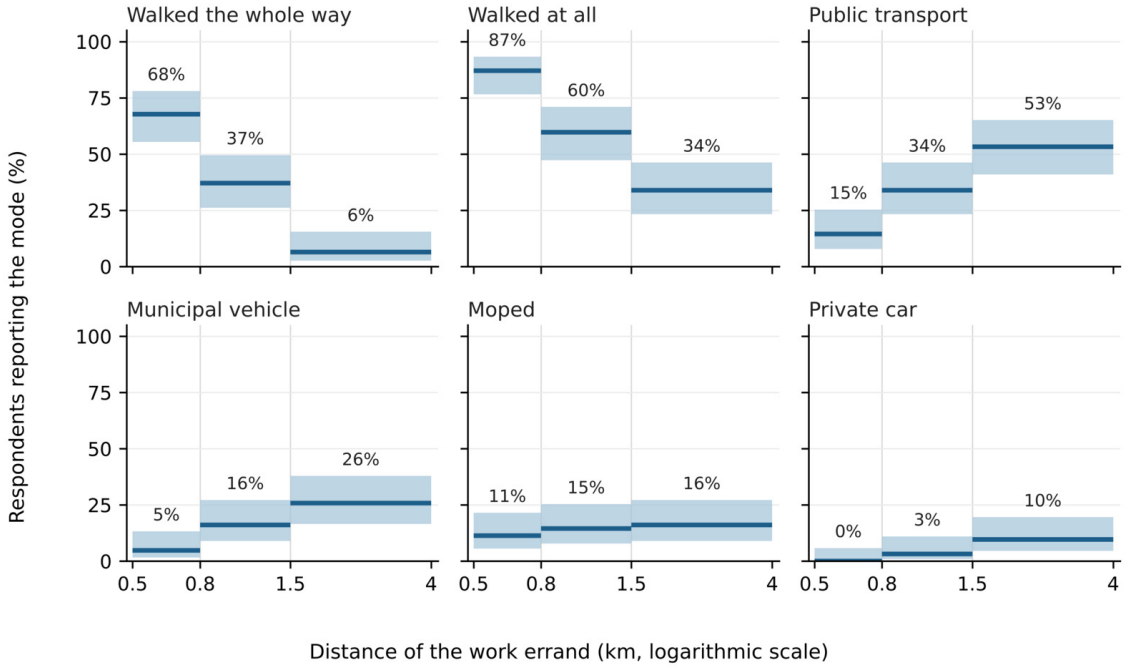


Figure 3. Modes reported for work errands at three distances (n = 62). Each bar spans its distance band on a logarithmic scale and gives the percentage of respondents, and the shaded box shows the 95% Wilson interval. Respondents could report more than one mode, so the shares do not sum to 100%, and walking at all covers walking alone or together with another mode.

= 0.563 and 0.411). At short range, a municipal vehicle was chosen only by employees who carry heavy objects, three of 15 against none of the other 46 (p = 0.013), while terrain and weather were rarely cited (3% and 7%).

Car-reduction policy therefore has little to act upon, and the better measures support the walking and public transport already carrying these errands. Rewarding those who walk or use public transport draws broad support (median 10 out of 10, Table 2). The incentive item, addressed to the 29

Table 1. Walking the whole way falls with distance in every subgroup. Cells give the percentage of each subgroup who reported walking as their only mode, and the last column gives the p value of Cochran's Q test comparing the three distances within the same people. Subgroups of fewer than eight respondents are not reported. Invited directly denotes respondents belonging to the five directorates that received the invitation, and reached by forwarding all remaining respondents. The two values of 0.050 come from subgroups of eight and should be read as borderline.

Subgroup	n	Walked the whole way (% of subgroup)			
		500–800 m	800–1,500 m	1.5–4 km	p
All respondents	**62**	**68**	**37**	**6**	**<0.001**
Municipal police	15	67	33	7	0.002
Revenue	9	89	67	11	0.004
Building control	8	50	25	0	0.050
Technical services	8	62	38	12	0.050
Invited directly	36	61	36	6	<0.001
Reached by forwarding	26	77	38	8	<0.001
Goes out weekly or more	22	59	27	9	<0.001
Goes out less often	40	72	42	5	<0.001

employees who reach work by car or moped, was answered by 25. A shorter working day (36%) and a subsidised annual transport pass (32%) were chosen about equally often, ahead of a municipal shuttle bus and extra annual leave (16% each). Combining a one-hour shorter working day with such a subsidy would offset both the time and cost of commuting by public transport and act as a commuting benefit (Roaf et al. 2024).

Table 2. Questionnaire items used in this paper and the full distribution of responses. Percentages are of the respondents answering each item, with the base n given beside the item number. For Q12 to Q17 the three figures correspond to the three distance bands in the order shown. Multiple answers were allowed for Q6, for the mode items and for the reason items, so these do not sum to 100%. Q20 was conditional on reaching work by a private motorised vehicle and is therefore reported for the 25 of those 29 employees who answered it, while the answers returned by respondents outside that group are retained in the deposited dataset and excluded here.

Item	Questionnaire item	Response option	% (n)
Q1 (n = 62)	Directorate (grouped)	Municipal police	24% (15)
		Revenue	15% (9)
		Building control	13% (8)
		Technical services	13% (8)
		Green spaces	8% (5)
		Cleansing	6% (4)
		Urban planning	6% (4)
		Administration	2% (1)
		Other or unspecified	13% (8)
Q2 (n = 62)	Sex	Man	52% (32)
		Woman	48% (30)
Q3 (n = 62)	Age band	Under 40	11% (7)
		40–49	44% (27)
		50–59	32% (20)
		60 and over	13% (8)
Q6 (n = 62)	Main mode(s) from home to work (multiple allowed)	Public transport	55% (34)
		Walking	31% (19)
		Private car, driver	29% (18)
		Moped	16% (10)
		Bicycle	6% (4)
		Private car, passenger	3% (2)
Q10 (n = 62)	How often are you sent out on a work errand?	Rarely	35% (22)
		A few times a month	29% (18)
		Almost daily	21% (13)
		2–3 times a week	15% (9)
Q11 (n = 61)	Do you carry heavy objects on a work errand?	Never or rarely	75% (46)
		Sometimes	20% (12)
		Almost always	5% (3)
Q12, Q14, Q16 (n = 62)	Mode(s) used for an errand at 500–800 m / 800–1,500 m / 1.5–4 km (multiple allowed)	Walking, as the only mode	68% (42) / 37% (23) / 6% (4)
		Walking, alone or combined	87% (54) / 60% (37) / 34% (21)
		Public transport	15% (9) / 34% (21) / 53% (33)

		Municipal vehicle	5% (3) / 16% (10) / 26% (16)
		Moped	11% (7) / 15% (9) / 16% (10)
		Private car	0% (0) / 3% (2) / 10% (6)
		Taxi	0% (0) / 0% (0) / 3% (2)
		Bicycle	2% (1) / 2% (1) / 2% (1)
Q13, Q15, Q17 (n = 61–62)	Two main reasons for the mode chosen, at 500–800 m / 800–1,500 m / 1.5–4 km	Time saving	69% (42) / 65% (40) / 73% (45)
		Personal health or fitness	34% (21) / 31% (19) / 21% (13)
		Long distance	2% (1) / 21% (13) / 39% (24)
		Unattractive walking route	13% (8) / 21% (13) / 10% (6)
		Inadequate transit infrastructure or frequency	20% (12) / 8% (5) / 8% (5)
		Protection from adverse weather	7% (4) / 6% (4) / 16% (10)
		Steep terrain	3% (2) / 3% (2) / 3% (2)
		Carrying equipment	2% (1) / 2% (1) / 2% (1)
		No other mode available	2% (1) / 2% (1) / 2% (1)
		Difficult to book a municipal vehicle	2% (1) / 2% (1) / 2% (1)
		Cheapest option for the service	2% (1) / 2% (1) / 2% (1)
Q19 (n = 61)	Support for rewarding employees who walk or use public transport on a work errand (1–10)	8–10, high support	74% (45)
		4–7, moderate	15% (9)
		1–3, low	11% (7)
		Median=10, Mean=8.0	
Q20 (n = 25)	Incentive that would encourage a shift away from a motorised vehicle for commuting, addressed to employees who reach work by private car or moped	Shorter working hours	36% (9)
		Annual public transport pass subsidy	32% (8)
		Municipal shuttle bus	16% (4)
		Extra days of annual leave	16% (4)

Four limitations apply. The sample is small and not random. Comparing each respondent with their own answers rules out differences between people as the source of the decline in walking with distance, but not bias in who replied. If employees who already walk or use public transport were more willing to reply, car use for errands would be understated. Respondents described single errands at fixed distances in ascending order, without origin, destination, extra stops or personal tasks, and none under 500 metres, so these thresholds are perceived rather than observed. The fieldwork ran in

late autumn, and although work-related travel resists heat better than other purposes (Hogeweij et al. 2026), Athenian summers are far hotter. Future work should follow actual errands with GPS or travel diaries across seasons, including short trips, extra stops and the vehicles municipalities provide.

Acknowledgments

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