



What Can You Save From Reduced Driving?

Victoria Transport Policy Institute



Henry David Thoreau's book, *Walden*, celebrates the simple life. In one passage Thoreau argues that, "the swiftest traveller is he that goes afoot." He illustrates this with an example comparing his walking trip with a friend's train trip to the nearby town of Fitchburg:

"I start now on foot, and get there before night. You will in the meanwhile have earned your fare, and arrive there some time tomorrow, or possibly this evening, if you are lucky enough to get a job in season. Instead of going to Fitchburg, you will be working here the greater part of the day. And so, if the railroad reached round the world, I think that I should keep ahead of you; and as for seeing the country and getting experience of that kind, I should have to cut your acquaintance altogether.

...This spending of the best part of one's life earning money in order to enjoy a questionable liberty during the least valuable part of it reminds me of the Englishman who went to India to make a fortune first, in order that he might return to England and live the life of a poet. He should have gone up garret at once."

Many people face the same trade-off today. You can spend a good portion of your life earning money for a fancy car, or you can use slower but less expensive travel modes. Average motorists devote nearly 20% of their household budget on their automobiles, representing about 1.5 hours per working day. Combining this with the amount of time spent driving represents an overall speed of about 15 miles per hour per working day.

Most people can organize their lives to depend less on automobiles, and save money as a result. For starters, you can set a goal for reducing your automobile use by 10-20%. Just because you own a car doesn't mean that you must use it for every trip. Leave your car at home, and bicycle, walk, carpool, or ride the bus when possible. Shop locally rather than at the big-box stores across town. Explore recreation activities nearby.

Once you've proven you can do it, consider "shedding" a car. If your household owns two cars, cut back to one. If you own one car, become car-free altogether. For suggestions on how to accomplish this see [Individual Actions to Reduce Driving](#).