Informal workers and travel choices: the case of Jua Kali workers in Kamukunji Metalwork cluster, Nairobi

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Abstract:

The informal sector is a fast growing phenomenon in Kenya. More than five million people were engaged in the informal sector by the year 2002 and this number has been on the increase. The growth of the informal sector especially in the urban areas has an impact on travel patterns and transport use in the Kenyan urban setting. The travel needs of the informal workers in Kenya like in many African cities however, remain largely unexplored. This study interrogates the travel patterns and choices of the jua kali workers in Kamukunji metalwork cluster in Nairobi. The study argues that informal workers have unique travel patterns which remain largely unknown and therefore marginalized in transport and city restructuring efforts. The study employed a field survey, key informant interviews and travel diaries in examining the travel needs and patterns of travel of the jua kali workers. The study found that jua kali workers in Kamukunji metalwork cluster have diverse travel needs ranging from commuting to work, sourcing raw material stocks, supply of finished products to travel for personal and discretionary needs. The travel modes used by the jua kali workers to meet these needs were found to be specific to the travel needs or purpose. Demographic and socioeconomic factors such as gender, income and area of residence were found to influence the travel mode choice of the jua kali workers in Kamukunji. The study concludes that the travel patterns of jua kali workers and the informal sector at large have an impact on travel and transport use in Nairobi. The trips made by jua kali workers to work and in carrying out other activities such as sourcing raw materials and supplying finished goods contribute significantly to the bulk of trips made in Nairobi. The study recommends that plans for city restructuring should consider the effect of informality on the travel patterns in Nairobi. It also recommends that city restructuring plans should consider to a great extent redistribution of jua kali clusters in Nairobi to help reduce the costs incurred (in terms of distance, time and money) by the jua kali workers in the quest to meet their travel needs.