

Gen Z is less likely to have a driver's license

Turning 16 and earning your driver's license is a major rite of passage for many young Americans. Though this milestone represents more freedom and access for teenagers, data shows that Generation Z no longer values driver's licenses the same way past generations did. Only one in 25 licensed drivers in the U.S. is 19 or younger - a decline from more than two decades prior, according to data from the Department of Transportation.

Increasing access to technology is one reason why young people are opting out of driving. Teenagers find community online and can connect with friends any time they please.

On top of increased online connectivity, ride share apps like Lyft and Uber are a common form of transportation, and some teenagers prefer public transportation or biking.

Teenagers are less likely to get a driver's license. Between 1983 and 2022, the number of 16-year-olds with driver's licenses declined from about half to a quarter, according to the Department of Transportation. At the same time, 18-year-olds with driver's licenses dropped from 80% to 60%.

Younger members of Generation Z (people born between 1997 and 2012) are either entirely opting out of getting their license or delaying the process. Since 2000, the number of 16-year-olds with driver's licenses decreased nearly 27%.

Millennials (people born between 1981 and 1996) and Generation X (people born between 1965 and 1980) represent about 25.9% and 28.2% of all licensed drivers, respectively.

Of the 21.4 million 15 to 19-year-olds in 2022, about 40% of them were licensed. In 2000, 48% of this age group was licensed, according to the Department of Transportation.

Why are less teenagers driving? Driving anxiety is another reason why young people are less motivated to get their license. Last year the Washington Post reported that incidents of road rage and aggressive driving were on the rise. Increased hostility on the road matched with a mental health crisis among teenagers can make this rite of passage an anxiety-ridden experience rather than an exciting one.