

Press Release
2 April 2007

National Rail Challenge to Business Make Your Business Travel Time Productive

National Rail is issuing a challenge to businesses to consider rail for business travel as recent research indicates the train provides the best environment for productivity.

The joint research project conducted by the University of the West of England, Bristol and Lancaster University, challenges the perceptions of business travellers who opt for the fastest mode of travel, viewing travel time as unproductive time.

Instead Professor Lyons, who led the research, suggests: “The challenge is now about employers and employees ensuring the best mode of travel is chosen to facilitate the best use of their travel time. It is no longer just about the quickest, cheapest or most convenient option but about the one which also provides the best environment for productivity.”

The research project identified that 86% of current rail business travellers have work that could easily be undertaken on the train, and of those who work or study on the train, 96% feel their time was worthwhile.

National Rail has launched a direct mail campaign to businesses across Great Britain highlighting the benefits of taking the train for business travel as supported by the recent research project.

“For some the train is actually the preferred working environment, as it is acknowledged for providing greater opportunity for de-stressing, strategic thinking and planning, and perhaps even helping to generate a higher quality work”, says Richard Flindell, National Rail Marketing Manager. “Virgin Trains’ recent ‘Be

Inspired by Time’ advertising campaign reminds travellers that great ideas happen when you have time to think.”

Enhanced on-board working environments have also been achieved through portable technologies and Wi-Fi. The recent research project found that 1 in 5 rail passengers carry a laptop with them while travelling, which is in line with an expected average annual growth rate of 15% over the next 5 years in European notebook sales, compared with desktops at a mere 1.2% growth (IDC PC Market Forecast, June 06). This rapid growth highlights demand for mobile connectivity and productivity tools for ‘working on the move’. GNER now operates the world’s biggest fleet of wireless internet equipped train carriages, with their ‘Mobile Office’ initiative keeping passengers connected on the move and in First Class Lounges at stations.

While the impetus is on employers being urged to review short haul flights and vehicle journeys for business travel because of the environmental impact, it is also important for businesses to review what transport options can reduce an employees ‘downtime’ and minimise the economic cost of business travel.

For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

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Notes to Editors:

1. The joint research was conducted by the Centre for Transport & Society, University of the West of England, Bristol and the Centre for Mobilities Research, Lancaster University.
2. Professor Glenn Lyons and Professor John Urry are leading a joint 3-year study entitled ‘Travel-Time Use in the Information Age’. For further details see; <http://www.traveltimeuse.org>
3. The following article was passed to the Association of Train Operating Companies by Professor Lyons.

Productive Travel Time

By

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Business travel has widely been seen as a cost to employers and hence to the economy. Less time spent travelling is seen to mean more time available for productive work. This is borne out by how the UK government considers its investment decisions in transport which are often based largely on the travel time saved by a new scheme or service improvement. For example, saving the time spent by people travelling by rail on business is officially valued at £30.57 per hour per person. This is based on an assumption that every saved hour of travel will convert non-productive time into productive time. The value relates to the average wage of someone travelling by rail on business.

Many or most people who travel for business by train will be information or knowledge workers. The question then arises – can these people who create, manage and exchange information really be rendered ‘unproductive’ when they leave the office to travel on business? Do they switch off until their destinations are reached? Most would readily argue the answer is ‘no’.

In a survey of 26,221 rail passengers in Great Britain questions were included on time use as part of the ‘Travel Time Use in the Information Age’ project¹. Approximately a third of business travellers said the activity they spent most time on during the journey was working/studying. This compares to about a quarter who spent most time reading for leisure. Over 1 in 10 business travellers spent most time window gazing/people watching. So do rail business travellers consider their travel time to be unproductive? Only 2% of those whose main activity on the journey is working/studying considered it wasted time. 54% judged the time as of some use and 42% felt their time use on the train was very worthwhile. For business travellers who opt to read for leisure, the rail journey can also be a positive experience – about a quarter find this time use very worthwhile. Even those business travellers who are window gazing/people watching may not be wasting their time – 70% of those who do this as their main activity during a rail journey consider their travel time use very worthwhile or of some use.

The message from the above appears to be clear – employers whose staff use the train to travel on business need not necessarily see travel as time which is unproductive – it could be time well-spent. Of course this is not to suggest that those who use the car

¹ A 3-year study being jointly undertaken by the Centre for Transport & Society at the University of the West of England, Bristol, and the Centre for Mobilities Research at Lancaster University - see <http://www.transport.uwe.ac.uk/research/projects/travel-time-use.asp> for further details.

for their business travel are unable to productively use their time. However, their options are likely to be more limited – the blue-tooth mobile phone call and some quality thinking time may be at their disposal (or the opportunity to converse with passengers when applicable) but unlike their rail travelling counterparts, they are unlikely to have the prospect of reading or writing documents, readily managing their diaries, closing their eyes for a period of relaxation or contemplative thought or buying a coffee from a passing trolley!

It would seem that the railway carriage does provide the vast majority of business travellers with an office on the move - 86% of rail business travellers answered 'yes' to the question 'in terms of your paid employment is there some work that could easily be undertaken on the train?'. The information age has enhanced the ability for the business traveller to take their office with them – nearly 80% of rail business travellers have a mobile phone to hand, 1 in 5 have a laptop computer and over 1 in 10 have a PDA/handheld computer. It is not just a paperless office however – nearly 85% have a newspaper with them and over half have paperwork to hand.

In some instances, the mobile office may prove to be a poor second to the fixed but in others it will be the *preferred* environment as our qualitative research has shown. Take for example the retail store manager who considers one of the most important parts of his job to be strategic planning, yet spends the majority of his day dealing with customer and employee problems as and when they arise - away from these constant interruptions, time in the car provides one of the few opportunity for such a task. Other examples include the individuals that keep a constantly updated pile of reading material for business journeys (as passengers rather than drivers) and those that enjoy, and often rely upon, the uninterrupted thinking time to prepare for or reflect upon the event that necessitated the business travel.

The industrial revolution has now seen the arrival of the IT revolution and the emergence of the knowledge economy. For many knowledge workers their productivity is not measurable purely by time input but by the quality of the tasks they complete – the knowledge they create and exchange. Productivity is about individuals having the working environment they need to suit the tasks they wish to perform. Selfishly reading for leisure on the train back to base (away from the watchful eye of office colleagues) to de-stress after a crucial business meeting may be as important to their overall productivity as sitting with colleagues on the train going to another meeting when discussion can take place and the Powerpoint presentation can be finalised before arrival.

In a business world in which it is less and less about where you are but what you are doing, travel time for the knowledge worker cannot be accepted as, or assumed to be, unproductive. The challenge is now about employers and employees ensuring that the best mode of travel is chosen to facilitate the best use of their travel time. The rules of the game are changed – it is no longer just about the quickest, cheapest or most convenient option but about the one which also provides the best environment for productivity.