

## Travel-Time Use in the Information Age

Workshop January 2006



### Research Summary 2: Focus Groups

*Six focus groups. Male and female only groups in three locations: London, Bristol, and Cumbria.*

*Discussion covered:*

*Modes: car, train, bus, London Underground, air, walking and cycling. Journey duration: long and short i.e. local, regional, national and international journeys. Journey purpose: commuting, business and leisure. Key topics: experience and desirability of travel, time constraints, preparation for journeys, activities conducted while travelling, mobile technologies.*

#### Key finding

Travel time can be a gift. Travel is an obligation of participating in social networks. The ability to use travel time for personal or work purposes enables the 'free' time slot to be perceived as a gift rather than always burden.

#### Travel time as productive time

##### Opportunity

Train and car travel were identified for providing opportunities for using travel time for work. Long distance train journeys perceived as having the most potential for completing 'paper work', provided a table was available. Car journeys offered opportunity for making work-related telephone calls. Both seen as saving time back in the office. Many use train or car travel for preparing for meetings, either reading/writing documents or mentally preparing for meetings. Travelling by car with colleagues can provide an environment that coerces informal discussion and ideas generation.

##### Mobile technologies

The mobile phone plays a key role in people's work-related travel time use. Some participants found mobile phone calls intrusive and difficult to manage when driving (e.g. problem of navigating while talking). Few people used the laptop when travelling, although might be carrying one.

#### Travel time as personal time

##### Escape

Time to escape from work related tasks, e.g. watch DVD on laptop on way to/from business meetings. Time to escape from domestic responsibilities. Only 'me' time for a lot of women (e.g. to phone friends, read book, relax).

##### Transition

Time required to mentally prepare or unwind from work. Some participants travel further or take slower mode (e.g. walk) when needing to unwind after work. The need to sense distance between places was considered important by many.

##### Pleasure

Cumbrian participants, in particular, indicated that they drive alternative longer routes for a change of scene and the enjoyment of driving through the countryside. A couple of London women indicated they would drive a longer route past shops to 'window shop' or through more pleasant parts of the urban environment. Gazing out of the window as a passenger was considered pleasurable by most participants.

Mobile technologies	Many people use travel time to phone or text friends – some see this as an active window of opportunity, while others see it as passing the time.
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#### Travel time as wasted time

Lack of control	Lack of individual control over time management engaged a sense of wasted time, i.e. having to arrive too early for a meeting, or experiencing journey delays.
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Doing nothing	Journeys where people had nothing to do and felt bored were described as a waste of time. Air travel generates a sense of wasted time for many, and this may be exacerbated by the fact that there is nothing to look out at (e.g. passing scenery).
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Journey duration	In some instances very long journeys, especially long distance air travel, were perceived as a waste of time.
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Journey purpose	For some (mostly Londoners) the commute to work was perceived as a waste of time. However, the point below indicates that some transition time between home and work is desirable.
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Time savings	Travel time savings were considered desirable on long trips, such as air travel, many indicated that travel time had some value (see below).
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#### Scheduling and time management

Home-life balance	Effect of family responsibilities or timetabled leisure activities on scheduling, e.g. the need to pick up children on time and demands of escorting children to and from activities.
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Transport schedules	Timetables demand scheduling and punctuality, especially business travel.
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Mode and control	Cars perceived as offering greatest flexibility. Desirable sense of control over routes and arrival times, but responsibility of driver. Public transport the ability to control arrival is lost. Can cause sense of frustration and time being wasted, but benefits identified as the removal of personal responsibility. Mobile phones used to inform of transport delays so not to waste time of others.
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Ideal commute time	Range 10-60 minutes. Majority 20-30 minutes. No-one opted for zero. Problem identified of not having 'transition time' if working at home.
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#### Private and public space

Cars	Cars are often personalised spaces, and offer private space for personal chats with friends.
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Public transport	Public space is managed with phones, books, and magazines to create personal space as well as entertain. Can offer anonymity for making personal calls that is not available at home/work. Other people's calls/conversations are considered intrusive by many, but also as entertainment by others.
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