

Travel-Time Use in the Information Age

Workshop January 2006



Research Summary 4: Rail Survey

Panel of questions on Autumn 2004 National Rail Passenger Survey with 26,000 responses. Results are aggregated for all routes. The paper 'The use of travel time by rail passengers in Great Britain' (in this pack) contains a detailed discussion of the key findings presented below.

Utility of travel time

The majority of rail passengers either make some use or very worthwhile use of their time travelling by train, suggesting that rail travel has some positive utility for a large proportion of travellers. Only 18% of all passengers agreed with the statement that their time was wasted time. Business travellers feel they make slightly more use of their time than other passengers; 58% make some use, 27% made very worthwhile use of their time, and only 13% viewed it as wasted time. 22% of commuters considered their train journey time to be wasted.

Activities

Knowing how people use their time is important to understanding why the journey might have some positive utility, and relates to the type of objects passengers carry on journeys, journey purpose, and journey duration.

The most popular activities are reading for leisure, window gazing/people watching, and working/study. Business travellers spend more time working/studying (55% on outbound and 48% on return journeys some of the time) than commuters and leisure travellers; commuters spend more time reading for leisure (62% each way some of the time); and leisure travellers spend more time window gazing/people watching (66% outbound and 68% return some of the time).

While first class travellers are more likely to spend time working than standard class passengers, the majority of first class passengers do not use most of their journey time working. More travellers work or study when the train journey is more than 15 minutes long.

Planning activities

A large proportion of travellers do not plan activities in advance for the journey (47%). People travelling for business, first class, or on longer journeys plan the most. We have assumed that commuters do not plan as much because they are entrenched in a routine, and have a permanently packed bag, which is not viewed as planning in advance. Passengers who consider travel time as wasted time are more than twice as likely not to have planned in advance how to use their travel time (70%) than those who consider their travel time to have been very worth while (31%).

Equipped travel

Objects (e.g. documents, phones, laptops, books) carried by passengers can equip them to use their time productively. However, while not all carried objects are used, and may be carried instead for use at the end destination, they provide the flexibility of choice over a number of activities. Most rail travellers carry a newspaper (77%) and a mobile phone (66%), but only a small percentage read the paper or make calls during the journey. About half of those passengers carrying a book read it. While more business travellers carry paperwork (53%) and laptop computers (20%) compared to other travellers, they are more likely to use the paperwork (32%) than the laptop (7%).

The ICT effect

A fifth of passengers carrying ICTs (i.e. laptops, phones, and PDAs) indicated that having such a device on the train made the time on the train a lot better. However, just under half of all passengers considered such devices had not made their time any better. Of those carrying such devices, 46% thought their time had passed more quickly than otherwise, 32% did not think time had passed more quickly and 22% did not know or have an opinion.

Age

Age affects the planning of activities, activities undertaken, and ICT use. Younger people are more likely to be bored and ill prepared to do anything on the train. Yet they are more likely to carry mobile phones and other electronic devices. Fewer people in the 65+ group carry or use a mobile phone.

Gender

In general there are few differences between male and female passengers at an aggregate level. More women talk to other passengers and make personal calls on their mobile phones than men. However, more men carry (12%) and use (4%) laptop computers than women (3% to hand, 1% used). In particular, 9% of male business travellers used a computer compared to 3% of female business travellers. Nearly 15% fewer women read the newspaper on train than men, while about 10% more of female commuters read a book than male commuters. Perhaps it is not surprising that male travellers were slightly more interested in improvements to rail services that affected use of electronic technologies such as power supplies and unbroken phone signals, and it is likely that the desire for a smoother ride might be in relation to the viability of computer use during the journey.