The issue of travel time in contemporary society
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Is travel time useful?

A rolling stock operator manager stated:

'Train journeys, certainly intercity train journeys, are boring. They are dead boring. And whether you realise it consciously or not everyone plans for the boredom. They either take work or they sleep or [buy] stuff they don't really want, because you can only look out of the window for about twenty minutes before you're bored in your head.'

This talk

- Considers the changing context of travel and especially the nature of networks

- Especially examines the 'teleportation' test

- Then sets out the research programme we conducted

- And summarises the national rail survey results

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND TRAVEL

The average distances between where people live within their networks have increased in most major European countries
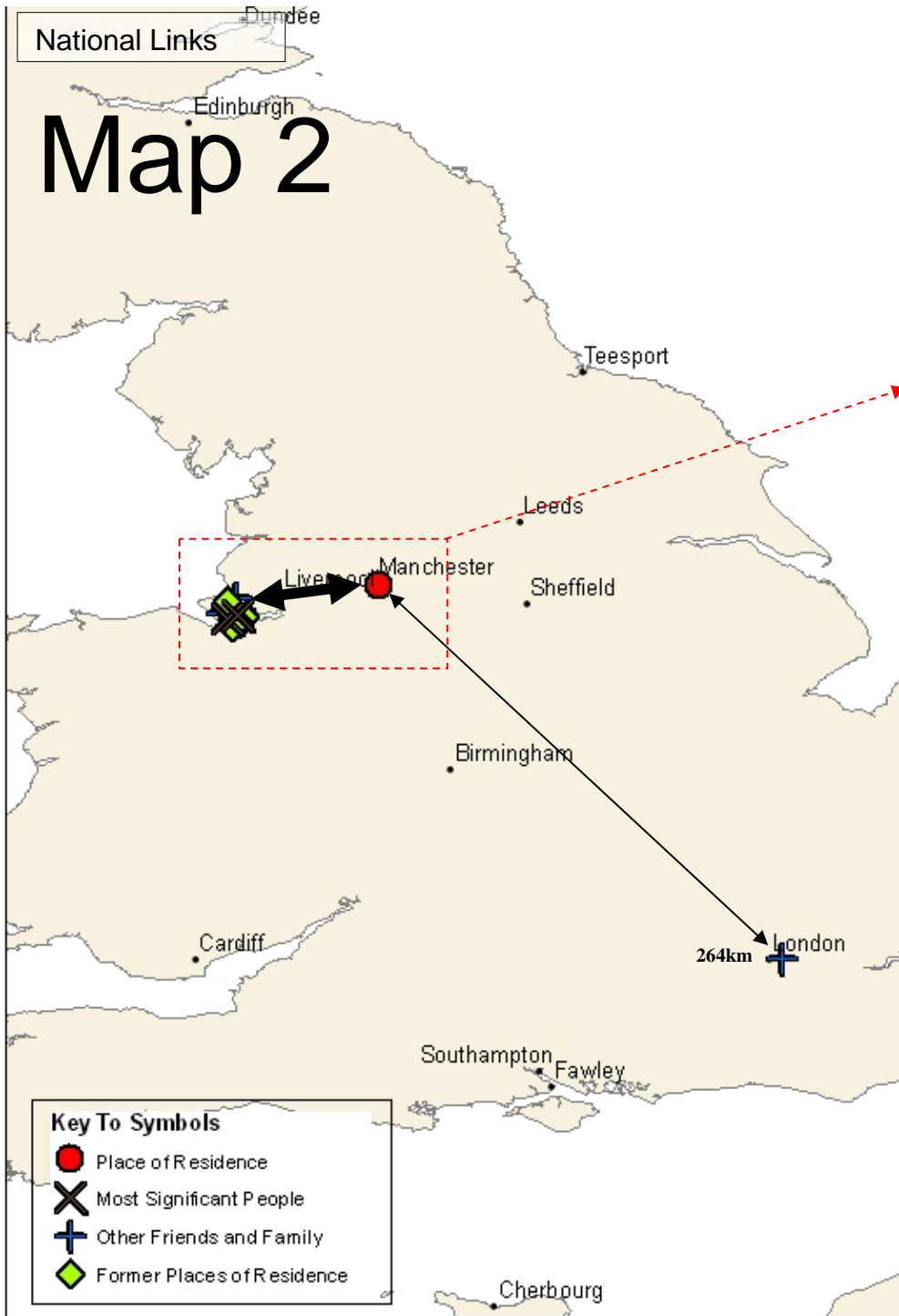
This results from motorization, suburbanization, airline deregulation, 'internet-ization' and mobile-ization'; people's residences and activities are more widely distributed

People's networks are less coherent with fewer overlapping affiliations - when people meet face-to-face this involves travel across longer distances

People may have a larger set of active contacts than in the past but an increasing time is spent in sustaining such far-flung contacts even while they are on the move
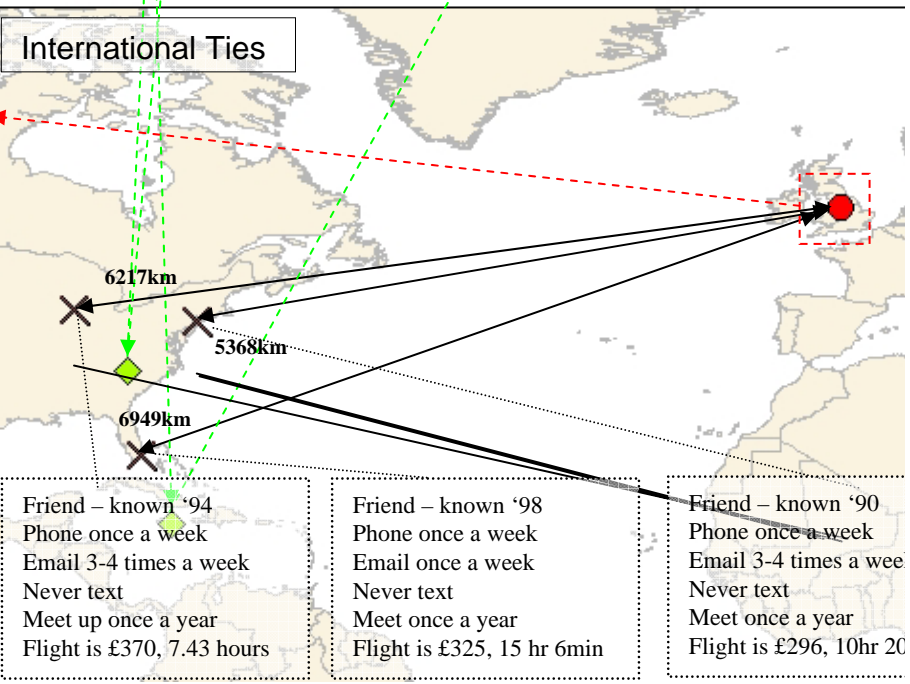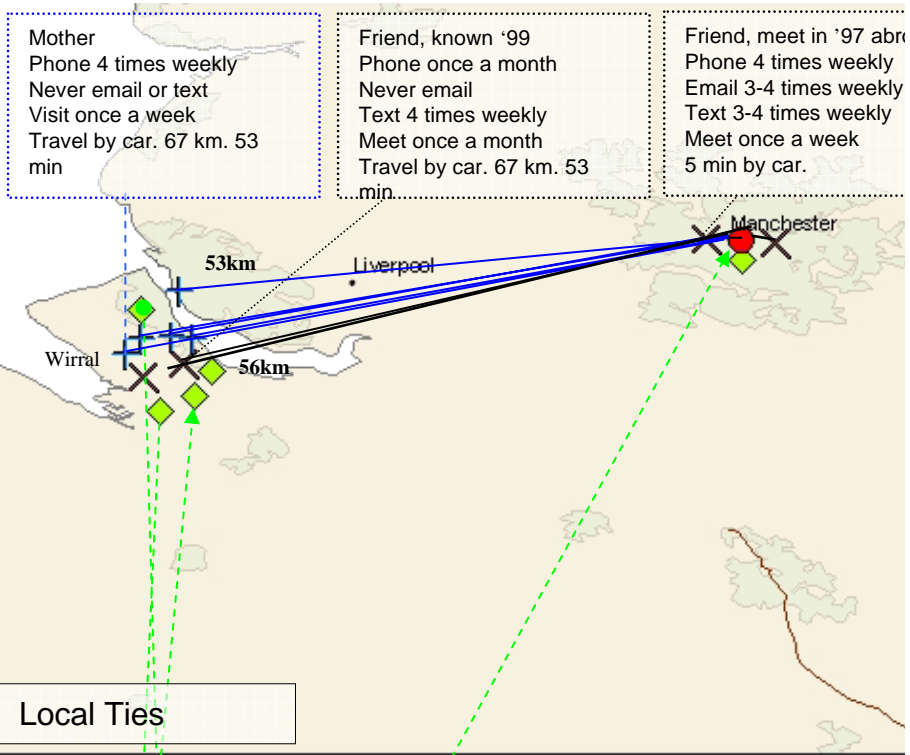
Map 2

National Links

Edinburgh
Dundee
Teesport
Leeds
Manchester
Liverpool
Sheffield
Birmingham
Cardiff
London
264km
Southampton
Fawley
Cherbourg

Key To Symbols
- 🔴 Place of Residence
- ✖ Most Significant People
- ➕ Other Friends and Family
- ◆ Former Places of Residence

Local Ties

Mother
Phone 4 times weekly
Never email or text
Visit once a week
Travel by car. 67 km. 53 min

Friend, known '99
Phone once a month
Never email
Text 4 times weekly
Meet once a month
Travel by car. 67 km. 53 min

Friend, meet in '97 abr[oad]
Phone 4 times weekly
Email 3-4 times weekly
Text 3-4 times weekly
Meet once a week
5 min by car.

Manchester
Liverpool
Wirral
53km
56km

International Ties

6217km
5368km
6949km

Friend – known '94
Phone once a week
Email 3-4 times a week
Never text
Meet up once a year
Flight is £370, 7.43 hours

Friend – known '98
Phone once a week
Email once a week
Never text
Meet once a year
Flight is £325, 15 hr 6min

Friend – known '90
Phone once a week
Email 3-4 times a wee[k]
Never text
Meet once a year
Flight is £296, 10hr 20[min]

Networking tools at work

The expansion of businesses into globally operating entities has been facilitated by new ICTs. These enable

- setting up and maintaining websites
- the receiving and sending of e-mails, texts, messages, photographs, software and so on
- the development of remotely accessible databases
- participating in audio/video conferences
- working remotely on shared documents/files

Thus virtual objects and especially 'screens' of computers, mobiles, blackberries, TVs and so on provide the backcloth to much corporate life in the office, sometimes at home, and often 'on the move'. Life is experienced through the screen

Blurring of times and spaces (1)

Thus distinctions between home, work and away becomes blurred since people can be said to dwell in part *within* mobilities and especially within various 'interspaces' (Hulme). Interspace is the space and time between two or more 'events'.

Travel time comes to be converted into activity time within 'interspace'. In turn, less of the individual's travel time is used, encouraging use of modes that enable activities to be undertaken en-route.

Specifically, many people are using travel (and waiting) time to keep in touch with one's 'personalized network', restoring trust, maintaining 'absent presence' and rearranging events.

Blurring of times and spaces (2)

Meetings shift from punctuality and specific spaces of movement to a more informal, fluid meeting-up culture. The sociabilities before, during, and after the travel are central to understanding contemporary life that is partly conducted on the move. The sociabilities of talk, meetings, guilt, emotions, and so on are central to how and why people are intermittently on the move and where their travel time seems to becomes part of their activity and networking time.

Trust and travel

The need for seeing face-to-face means that business travel is still growing risen in the UK - 32% since 1996/97 and forecasted to grow another 17% by 2015 (Barclaycard Business and Future Foundation 2006)

With information mobile there is more need to ensure that information comes from trustworthy sources. Trust has to be worked at and, so far, only face-to-face meetings seem to provide that guarantee.

Much business and professional life in a knowledge economy consists of putting together teams and working on short term projects. In teams, bonds formed through travelling and meeting for conferences, workshops and shared meals are necessary to enable the team to gel during the project. These involve developing and maintaining trust

Teleportation test (1)

Overall our research show that people would rarely substitute travel with instantaneous *teleportation* of themselves to the destination.

A San Francisco Bay Area survey conducted what was called a *teleportation test*: if travel time was undesired then passengers would prefer to teleport instantly to their destination. This survey by contrast found that 70% of respondents agreed that *travel is desired for its own sake* over travel as *undesired* or *neutral* - they mostly did not want to teleport.

Teleportation test (2)

Would you like to be able to teleport?

Amy: I'd use it. More time in bed…

Dawn:…If you're driving there [to work] it, sort of, gives you time for your brain to wake up and for your head to get into gear. I know I, sort of, start thinking about: I've got to do this, I've got to do that. So you've planning time and then, when you're coming home, it's like your de-stressing time. I know, speaking to quite a few people that I work with that commute further than what we do, …by the time they've got home they're quite chilled out… When the journey's too short they don't get that opportunity. They're all wound up when they get home.

Mary: If it's from one thing, bang, to the next thing, you don't have time to sort things out in your head, really, before you've got to go to the next appointment.

Amy: I never thought about that. Yes, you're right.

Teleportation test (3)

The immediate reaction to teleportation was often positive, particularly reflecting long haul flights or wanting more social time with friends and family. However, as discussion developed the notion of teleportation was challenged and a different response developed as with Amy.

There is something in the experience of travel and movement that generally renders travel time as something positively used and experienced, even when such travel involves predictable and tedious commuting. There are

- activities at the destination
- activities conducted while traveling including the 'anti-activity' of relaxing, thinking, shifting gears
- the pleasures of traveling itself, including the sensation of speed, of movement through and exposure to the environment, the beauty of a route and so on

Research programme (1)

- *Literature review* – A long multi-disciplinary literature review which developed various conclusions, such as the importance of 'equipped travelling' and of travel as 'performance', that fed into subsequent research.

- *Stakeholder interviews* – 10 one-to-one in-depth interviews with representatives of the private and public surface transport sectors, technology development, and passenger representatives groups, were undertaken.

- *Focus groups* – A series of 6 male and female only focus groups were conducted in London, Bristol and Cumbria. The aim was to probe in depth the experiences and desirability of travel; time constraints; preparation for journeys; activities conducted while travelling; and mobile technologies.

- *National Rail Passengers Survey* – With 26,221 responses this provided extensive data into how time is used on trains, how worthwhile such time is considered to be and the significance of various old and new technologies that may be taken onto the train.

Research programme (2)

- *Mobile ethnographies* –through participant-observation and/or shadowing a variety of long distance, commuter and airport train journeys, rural and urban bus journeys, coach journeys and tram journeys were researched 'on the move' (260 hours of travel)

- *Diary study* – this involved 13 business travellers with 2 interviews conducted with each and their keeping of time use diaries

- *Travel remedy kit* – this involved individuals experimenting with how to equip themselves mentally and in terms of various artefacts for a journey familiar to them so as to 'improve' the travel experience. 5 individuals underwent the exercise and were interviewed afterwards to assess the effectiveness of the kit.
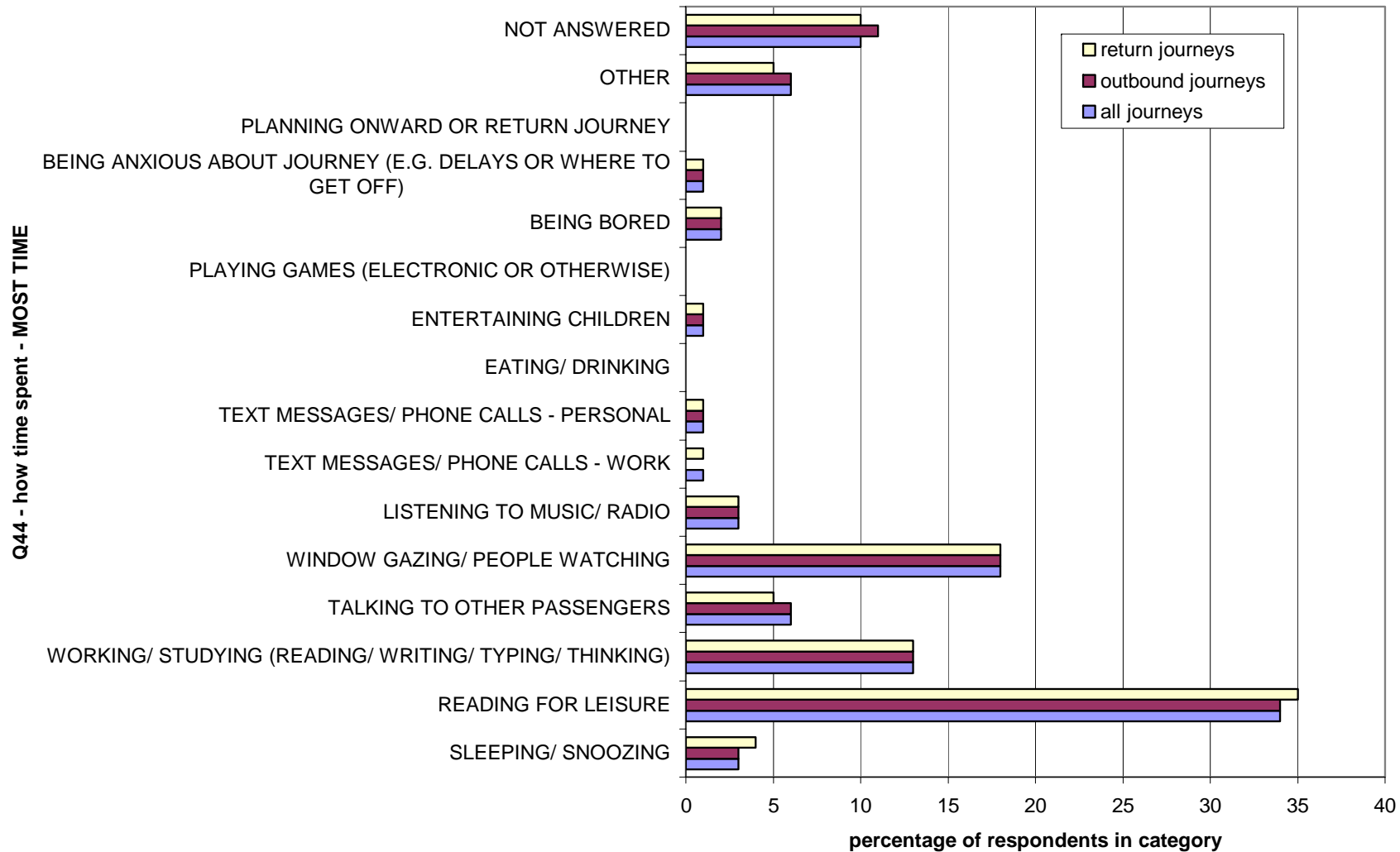
National Rail Passengers Survey (1)

- Most rail passengers make some use or very worthwhile use of their time travelling by train. Only 18% thought their time is wasted. Only 3% of passengers spend most of their time bored or anxious.
- The most popular activities are reading for leisure, window gazing/people watching, and working/study.
- Business travellers spend more time working/studying; commuters spend more time reading for leisure; and leisure travellers spend more time window gazing/people watching.
- Across journey purposes more than 1 in 10 passengers who spent most time window gazing / people watching considered their time very worthwhile – one should not infer use only from what people appear to be 'doing'.

National Rail Passengers Survey (2)

- Passengers who consider travel time as wasted time are more than twice as likely not to have planned in advance as to how to use their travel time (70%)
- Many people are well-equipped with (ICT) objects on their journey but do not necessarily use them
- A fifth of passengers carrying ICT devices consider that having such a device made the time a lot better. However, just under half of all passengers consider such devices did not made their time any better. Of those carrying such devices, 46% thought their time passed more quickly

per cent of all passengers in journey purpose category
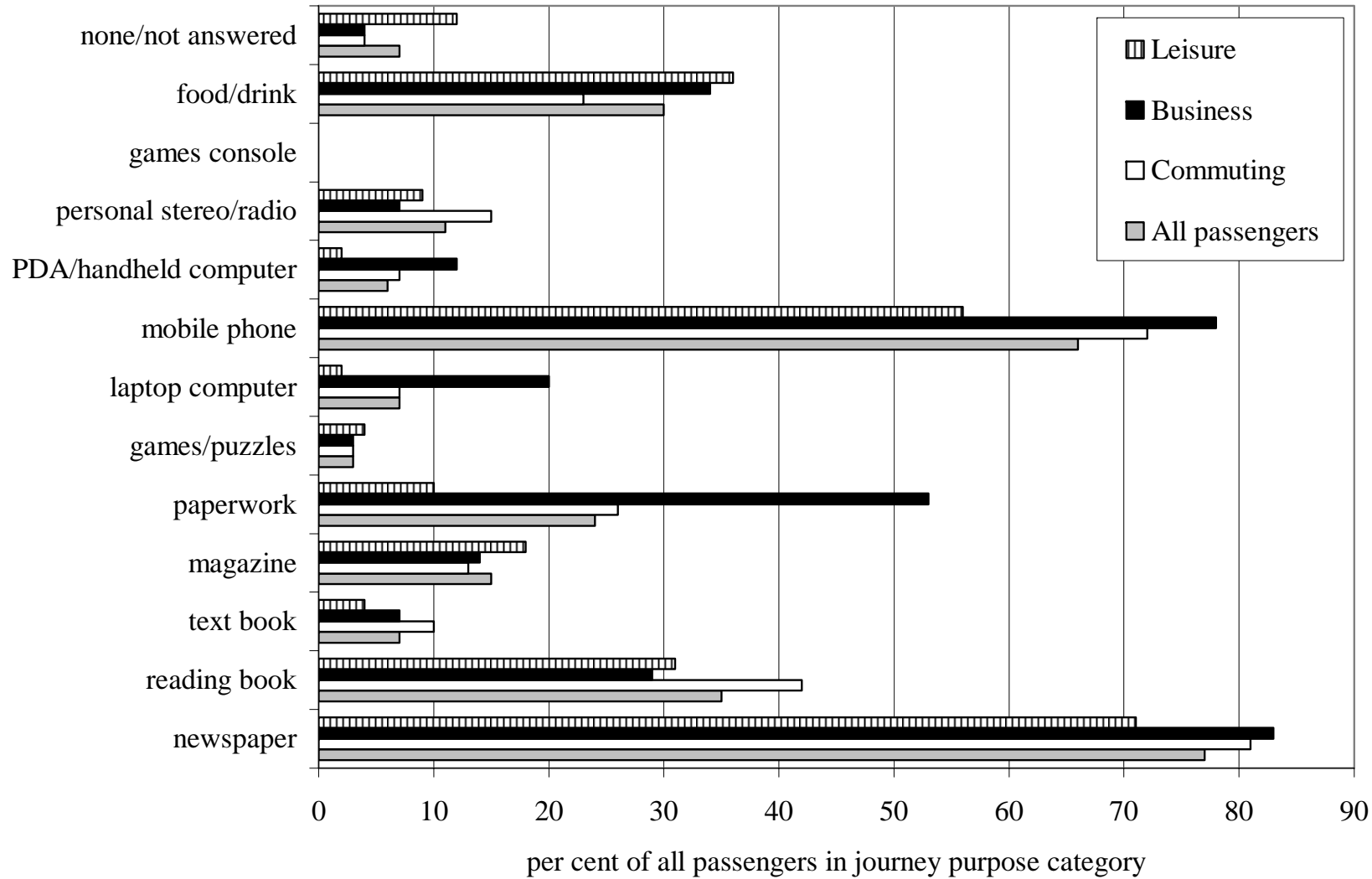
Items passengers have to hand when they travel by rail, grouped by the purpose of their journey

Categories of activities conducted while on the train, grouped by outward and return journeys

Chart: Q44 - how time spent - MOST TIME (vertical axis) vs percentage of respondents in category (horizontal axis, 0 to 40)

Legend:
- return journeys
- outbound journeys
- all journeys

Categories (top to bottom):
- NOT ANSWERED
- OTHER
- PLANNING ONWARD OR RETURN JOURNEY
- BEING ANXIOUS ABOUT JOURNEY (E.G. DELAYS OR WHERE TO GET OFF)
- BEING BORED
- PLAYING GAMES (ELECTRONIC OR OTHERWISE)
- ENTERTAINING CHILDREN
- EATING/ DRINKING
- TEXT MESSAGES/ PHONE CALLS - PERSONAL
- TEXT MESSAGES/ PHONE CALLS - WORK
- LISTENING TO MUSIC/ RADIO
- WINDOW GAZING/ PEOPLE WATCHING
- TALKING TO OTHER PASSENGERS
- WORKING/ STUDYING (READING/ WRITING/ TYPING/ THINKING)
- READING FOR LEISURE
- SLEEPING/ SNOOZING

Conclusions

- the travel time use 'passenger' and the transport appraisal 'passenger' may be different
- there is a great deal happening on the move that may have value
- passengers are we will see 'embodied and embaggaged' and not simply sitting or waiting or wasting time
- different methods produce different accounts of passengers
- multimodal approaches to research are important to gain a richer understanding of travel time use as we now show in more detail