

Mobile Methods

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Contents

First published 2011
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Typeset in Times by Wearset, Boldon, Tyne and Wear
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Anthony Rowe, Chippenham, Wiltshire

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Mobile Methods / edited by Monika Büscher, John Urry and Katian Witchger.
p.cm.

1. Social sciences – Research. 2. Social change. 3. Movement (Philosophy) I. Büscher, Monika, 1964– II. Urry, John, III. Witchger, Katian.

H62.M537 2010
330.72'2–dc22

2010002252

ISBN13: 978-0-415-49241-6 (hbk)
ISBN13: 978-0-415-49242-3 (pbk)
ISBN13: 978-0-203-87990-0 (ebk)

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Interventions into train lines and passenger times

Laura Watts and Glenn Lyons

As in life, what matters is not the final destination, but all the interesting things that occur along the way.

Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (2007: 170)

Decisions concerned with government investment in transport, whether a road is built or rails are laid, are informed by the cost versus economic benefit of such investment, calculated on the basis of appraising a model of the proposed transport system. Luggage-carrying, individual and embodied passengers waiting for a train are translated into economically modelled passengers, who are rational actors in a calculative transport system. In this chapter we explore substantive differences between this aggregated economic model of the passenger and a sensory, affective model of the embodied passenger arising from social research methods – such as ethnography, focus groups and interviews. How might ‘remedies’ for the affective qualities of a passenger’s train journey translate into benefits within the economically modelled version? At stake is a rethinking of what constitutes the *economically modelled passenger*, hence making it a potentially better model upon which transport appraisal and government investments might be made. It is through a novel *Travel Remedy Kit* that we propose our intervention, demonstrating how substantive improvements in the experience of individual journeys might also manifest as economic benefits in the aggregated, economically defined world of transport appraisal.

To set this chapter in context it is necessary to appreciate the orthodox thinking of transport appraisal, summarized (albeit rather simplistically) as follows. Travel is seen as a means to an end – a means of getting somewhere in order to do something at the destination. The ‘means to an end’ is an inconvenience – something to be minimized. It follows that quicker journeys are preferred to slower ones: less time spent on the inconvenience leads to more time to do something else. Travel time is seen as unproductive time, and any saved travel time is assumed to be reinvested in (economically) productive activity. This chapter stems from a three-year research project, concerned with ‘Travel-Time Use in the Information Age’, that has sought to challenge this orthodoxy by arguing that travel is more than just a ‘means to an end’ and, importantly for transport policy,

the experience of travel time can in fact be productive (Lyons and Urry 2005). For example, 55 per cent of passengers according to our questions in the 2004 *National Rail Passengers Survey* of 26,000 passengers claimed their travel time was of some use, and a further quarter (23 per cent) said the time spent on the train was very worthwhile. Travel is not a waste of time for most passengers (72 per cent), but is of use and perhaps economically productive.

Not only does this question the value attributed to saved travel time, but it also questions whether investment in quicker journeys is the only means of yielding benefits in a transport system; investment in enhancing passenger productivity on-the-move may also have benefits – economic and otherwise. Indeed, as we will go on to show, not only is there the possibility of getting ‘more’ out of the time spent travelling, but there is an opportunity to create an experience of ‘speeding up’ a journey that is in addition to, and distinct from, reducing the clock time taken through transport infrastructure improvement.

Economically modelled passengers in transport appraisal are created through a process of translating the messy socio-material world of the traveller and their baggage into a series of calculative relations; a body is flattened into a formula according to the following general tenets (see Lyons and Urry 2005):

- passengers experience a universal clock time;
- they take action on the basis that any time in motion is wasteful, and would be valuable if recovered;
- if they travel outside of work they do so in their own time which they can value – they have a willingness to trade time for money;
- when travelling in the course of work they do so in relation to time owned by their employer – time that is valued according to the wage they are paid;
- individual passengers do not matter in an economic appraisal – attention is paid to the overall population of model passengers, the aggregate.

To help make clear the distinctive features of this ‘appraised’ passenger experience, as distinct from the features of a sensory, social and situated passenger experience created through social research, we will highlight the differences in their spatiality – the differences in their contingent possibilities for movement.

Both versions of the passenger move from departure to destination, from A to B, along a line – their spatiality is more or less linear. Lines are not all the same, however, as Tim Ingold has recently explored (Ingold 2007). Ingold attends to the differences between a line as a planned series of joined dots from point A to point B, to a free-flowing line or trail that has no beginning or end, that passes through places A and B as it responds to circumstances en route.

Within the ‘flattened’ tenets of economic ‘transport appraisal’, individual passengers move from a point of departure to a point of arrival in the shortest possible time, and ideally that would be no time at all. It is a world constituted by clock time and money, creating a line that can be plotted on a graph. The line of the journey is essentially uniform, it has no particular characteristics or quality of experience, and ends when the passenger arrives at the destination. Such a

line moves over a largely unmarked world, racing from location to location in an attempt to achieve pure transportation: the quickest, straightest path (Ingold 2007: ch. 3). The passenger on such a line is static and unengaged with the world until the destination, the point of activity and re-entry back into the economic world. For the economically modelled passenger (travelling in the course of work) nothing happens en route, everything happens before and after. So there appears to be no possibility for valuable activity when travelling – or when waiting in the moments in between.

What now follows is an introduction to the design and implementation of the Travel Remedy Kit, which we will argue is a remedy kit for both improving individual embodied travel and, crucially, economically modelled travel in transport appraisal schemes.

Travel Remedy Kit

The Travel Remedy Kit is an intervention- and interview-based piece of empirical research, loosely based on the concept of personalized travel planning in transport studies, which seeks to encourage individuals to discuss and rethink their travel choices and behaviours with the prospect of some changes taking place to the benefit of the individual and society (Parker *et al.* 2007).

Through the national rail survey, a nationally based ethnography of bus and train travel-time use, six focus groups and interviews with industry stakeholders, we had gathered evidence for the extraordinary richness and importance of passenger activity on the move. For example, the national rail survey questions revealed that 13 per cent of passengers had planned ‘a lot’ for their journey, whereas 47 per cent had done so ‘not at all’, and passengers who considered their travel time to have been wasted were more than twice as likely to have done no advance planning (70 per cent) compared with those who considered their travel time to have been very worthwhile (31 per cent) (Lyons *et al.* 2007). Together with our other results this suggested that, through advantageous advanced planning, we could intervene in passenger travel time by providing particular artefacts and suggested interactions designed to positively affect the passenger and their travel environment.

We worked with six participants in the south-west and north-west of the UK who volunteered to have a familiar journey by train ‘remedied’. The journeys included commuter, leisure and business categories of travel. We also invite the reader to reflect on how the Travel Remedy Kit might reconfigure their own journeys by public transport.

The kit comprises two elements: a deck of 34 cards (see Figures 7.1 and 7.2), constituting the results of our national rail survey, focus groups, stakeholder interviews and ethnography; and a travel pack of personalized items designed, with use of the cards, for the specific passenger and journey. The complete deck of cards, which we do not have the space to present here, and instructions for use can be downloaded from www.built-environment.uwe.ac.uk/traveltimuse.

The Travel Remedy Kit method involves three stages: design of the kit, travelling with the kit and a final debrief and discussion of its effectiveness.

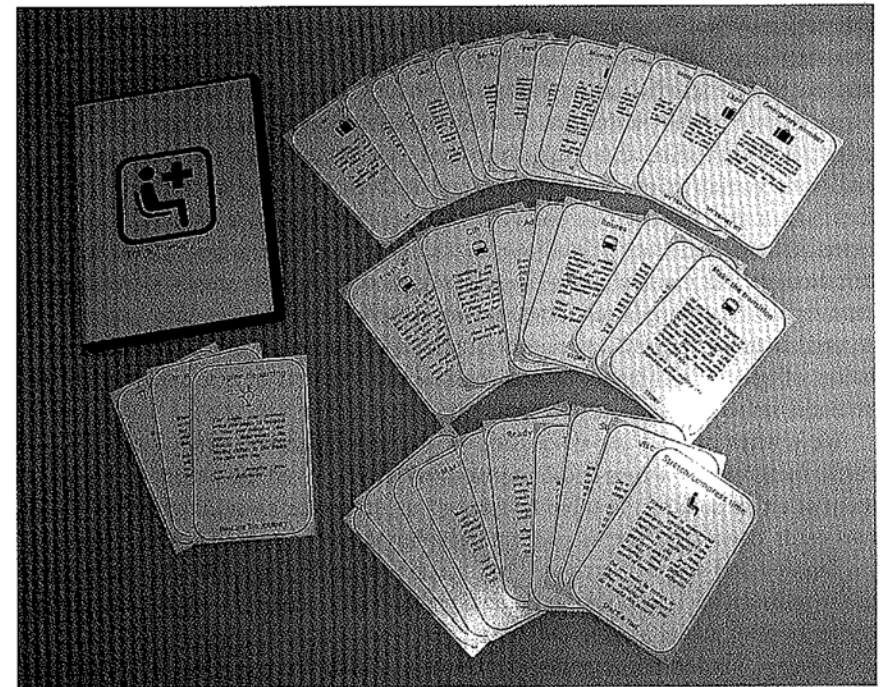


Figure 7.1 Deck of cards used to design and personalize the Travel Remedy Kit, with its container box.

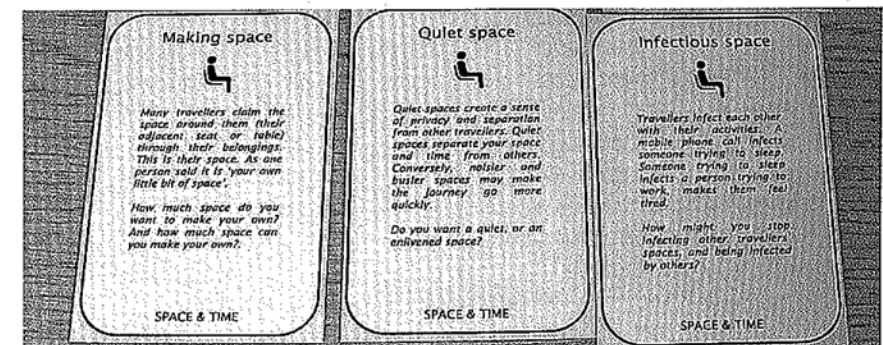


Figure 7.2 Three of the Travel Remedy Kit cards used to discuss and re-conceptualize the participant's journey.

Design your Travel Remedy Kit

We began by shuffling the deck of cards, which was divided into suits: the first two suits emphasized the story of the journey, the final suit constituted objects that could be included in the Travel Remedy Kit. Then we took one card at a time and invited the participant to reflect on the implications and significance of those ideas, activities and artefacts for the journey they wanted to remedy. If a card didn't seem relevant they discarded it. We asked the participant to place that card on the table in relation to all the other cards in order to build up a visual representation and story of the journey (see Figure 7.3). Card by card we began to articulate the mundane and everyday aspects of travel, which were deemed initially to be unimportant but became otherwise. Through this process we worked with participants to reconceptualize the journey, moving from an articulation of specific problems to a discussion of what would be ideal – and the potential remedies necessary to create that ideal.

We always opened our discussion of the participant's journey with the two cards: *Imagine Departure* and *Imagine Arrival*. We asked the participant to place them at either side of the table in front of us, to create an initial tableau. These two cards concerned the discontinuous moments of planning, expectations for the journey and sense of arrival. They made present to the participant how much of the journey, such as booking tickets, packing bags and planning a route occurs before or after actual arrival and departure (Watts 2008).

Then we invited participants to turn over a card from the shuffled deck and reflect on its significance for their journey.

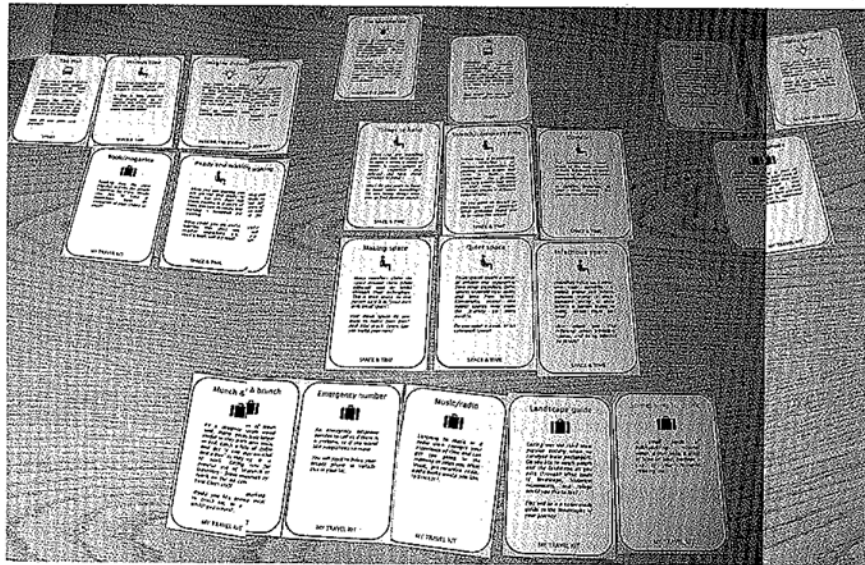


Figure 7.3 Photographic collage of Steve's tableaux of cards, as he laid them out during the initial interview.

Boredom

People travel with mobile phones, polystyrene cups of tea, suitcases, bicycles, newspapers, books, laptops and tickets. They walk and wait at stations and stops (Bissell 2007); sit in trains and buses, and imagine, plan, think, work and relax as they pass beneath flashes of storm and electricity pylons. Unlike the economically modelled passenger, the embodied newspaper and mobile-phone-carrying passenger is not static when travelling but highly active. Only a very small percentage of passengers (2 per cent) in our national rail survey spent most of their journey being bored – in direct contrast to an industry stakeholder who, when interviewed, perceived train travel as 'boring ... dead boring'. Boredom is considerably less likely when passengers have imagined and planned their journey; those who had done no advanced planning in our survey were more than twice as likely to be bored than those who had not.

Turn over a card...

Make the Transition

In transport appraisal, distance is an anathema, since time taken to transcend distance represents inactivity, a waste of time and a loss of money. The ultimate transport network would involve no time and hence no distance at all. It would act as a point-to-point, instantaneous translation between departure and destination, more commonly referred to as a teleport. Yet various commentators in transport studies have questioned teleport as a passenger ideal (Graham 1997; Mokhtarian and Salomon 2001). In our earlier focus groups we asked passengers if they would prefer to teleport to their destination and the responses were, after some consideration, quite negative (Jain and Lyons 2008; Watts and Urry 2008). Travel was important planning and 'sorting things out in your head' time:

Yeah, definitely, I like to have the time. I don't want to teleport, 'cause otherwise you end up going from meeting to meeting to meeting, and you've not had time to think about the next meeting, and you just go *ergh* [rolls eyes] like that. So, yeah, I like the time.

(Claire, business traveller, response to *Make the Transition*)

Typically, those in the focus groups wanted to spend at least 20–30 minutes travelling to and from work (with the range being from 10 to 60 minutes). Spatially, rather than a line that tends to zero length, as in the transport appraisal model, the ideal length of the commuting passenger's line is actually 20–30 minutes. From ethnographic work, what also matters is the sense of ongoing movement, without stopping, through the world. It is movement that creates the ambiguity of place, the liminality and a valued sense of creativity, possibility and transition. This 'transition time' was an important creative time for many (Jain and Lyons 2008).

Turn over a card...

Routes

I discovered another route, which is rather an adventure...

(Huw, commuter, response to *Routes*)

Participants spoke of finding sometimes longer but more scenic routes, detours to pass favourite landmarks, and how they took different paths depending on the season or weather. Passengers do not move as though joining the dots between origin and destination, they move in particular and selective ways through places (Ingold 2000; Massey 2005). Passengers are actively engaged with the world, and adapt with the weather, seasons, traffic and changing circumstance. Rather than moving point to point, passengers are 'wayfarers' who make a trail that is ongoing and defined by the movement itself (Ingold 2007: ch. 3). As wayfarers, passengers move in and through the world engaged in situated actions (Suchman 1987, 2007), planning and re-planning. They have to interact with the social and material world in order to travel, and unlike the transport appraisal model are not effortlessly carried from point to point by the transport system.

Turn over a card...

Stretch/Compress Time

The journey in the morning is really, really quick. The journey in the evening is really, really slow ... Sometimes [in the morning] I just sit and look out of the window, and think. And sometimes I want to do that plus I want to send a text, plus I want to do some reading, or all of those things ... And before you know where we are we're approaching [the station] and I've got to get my coat on...

(Huw, commuter, response to *Stretch/Compress Time*)

Time may tick slowly for a passenger standing in a vestibule, unable to sit on a crowded train. Whereas for a passenger sitting in the same carriage, on the same journey, thinking and looking out at the scenery, jotting down ideas in a notebook, time may tick fast. Travel time is made in travel-time use. The corollary of this is that the experience of travel time can be stretched or compressed, depending on the activity of the passenger. To create the experience of a journey passing more quickly, then, does not necessarily require a shorter clock time, but could involve compressing passenger time through the enactment of particular practices (Watts 2008). Generally, the more activities undertaken, the faster time passes. Travel time is compressed by intensive travel-time use (including looking out of the window and thinking) and stretched by inactivity. Making a journey 'speed up' (as part of an embodied sense of time) could be achieved through investment in supporting travel-time use, and not only through investment in reducing the clock time of the journey (although clock time still defines what can be 'fitted into a day').

Turn over a card...

Things to Hand

Phone and headphones, because that's my mp3 player. Book. And usually something to graze on, drink and eat. And ... my laptop ... usually put everything on the table. I quite like, you get to set out your little space in front of you, that's the whole thing ... And it's ... having those things at hand that allows stretching and compressing time...

(Steve, business traveller, response to *Things to Hand*)

Passengers are not simply bodies sitting in a seat but include their belongings distributed through space: their bags are on seats and under seats, feet are in aisles, smells permeate through a carriage and mobile phones connect passengers to places outside the train (Green 2002; Hulme and Truch 2005; Watts 2008). Passengers are always bodies plus their belongings. These 'distributed passengers' configure themselves in different ways: as packed passengers and unpacked passengers (Watts 2008). Packed passengers are equipped for waiting at the station or stop, with items such as newspapers and mobile phones to hand (Bissell 2007; Gasparini 1995). Unpacked passengers in a seat are a reconfiguration of those same artefacts suitable for travel-time use; they are able to conduct multiple activities on the move, such as read a book, drink some tea, gaze in thought at the changing landscape. The possibility for activity on the move not only reduces the potential for boredom (as we have discussed), but more



Figure 7.4 Some of the possible contents of the Travel Remedy Kit with its bag, including: instruction booklet, snack pack, inflatable pillow, eye cover, ear plugs, music and game player, book, notebook and pen, emergency number and landmark guide.

importantly unpacked passengers are configured to make time pass more quickly. As Steve says, all those things at hand allow you to compress your travel time.

Turn over a card...

Ultimately, the discussion of all 34 cards and their visual tableaux formed the first intervention into the participant's journey. By attending to the mundane, to the familiar, we altered how the journey was understood and imagined. The major form of intervention was the actual Travel Remedy Kit. This small shoulderbag contained a series of carefully selected, hand-crafted items designed for that particular person and their particular journey; an enticing, carefully orchestrated set of things to do, see, hear and taste, en route (see Figure 7.4).

Travel with your Travel Remedy Kit

The plan

The crucial part of each Travel Remedy Kit was the concertina set of step-by-step instructions. This small booklet opened up to guide the traveller during every moment of the journey from door to door, to remedy the whole experience and help create the participant's ideal journey. In the plan, we suggested a new route to walk to the train station, or a bus to catch, or a different route to drive there, always supported by a personalized map. When we suggested taking a bus we included a map to the bus-stop, the timetable and the cost of the ticket. We suggested where to park the car and the best way to pay for parking. Then we made suggestions for where to wait at the train station, where to buy a good cup of tea or coffee and perhaps where to stand on the platform to board the quiet coach of a train.

Once on board, we suggested activities suitable for different parts of the journey, tailoring what to do when they want to stretch or compress their travel time. We always suggested how to unpack the Travel Remedy Kit into a productive shape, given the space around them.

The plan opened up, finally, to directions for onward buses, a walk or some other transport to their destination. We still continued to suggest where to wait and what to do when en route, and always provided helpful hints (and even a telephone helpline) for the unexpected.

Munch and brunch

Each bag came with a specially made 'snack pack' with favourite morsels from baklava to chocolate-covered ginger biscuits. To remedy a participant's journey required a nuanced understanding of how they travelled and what their particular desires for an ideal journey were. However, perhaps surprisingly, the ideal journey for all our participants was not very different from their current experiences, and not unachievable by careful preparation or un-addressable by the transport sector – although we emphasize that transforming travel is non-trivial, and passengers and the industry must, together, be actors in such transformation.

Special things, special things for the journey ... you know, might have made something at home, or buy it from the nice sandwich shop.

(Claire, business traveller)

Writing

We explicitly asked each participant to describe or draw one thing they had never noticed on that journey before. Almost every participant talked about using a notebook as an extremely flexible device, able to support activities from diary-writing to drawing.

Apart from [starting] the diary ... also asking me to draw something, notice something ... And as I was drawing it, I could remember the details ... So this was precious, this particular exercise ... What I learned was that I shouldn't just do one thing, on the journey, that I could diversify my activities; that the journey is an opportunity to do a number of things.

(Maryam, commuter)

Music player

Listening to music was, perhaps not unsurprisingly, a crucial part of travel-time use for many of our participants. For others, a music player that also supported audiobooks and games provided an important diversity of activities.

I think I'll probably get a [music player] now, because I'm convinced that I'll use it ... I felt that it was more my journey. I guess that was because it was planned, you sort of planned it ... But it became less of a journey ... less of an ordeal ... And I sort of found if I was getting bored, there was something I could do. I could listen to something else. So that helped. And it made it go much more quickly. So it seemed a much quicker journey.

(Derek, business traveller)

Mobile office

Pertinent to the costs versus benefits approach of transport-scheme appraisal is the result from the national rail survey that 86 per cent of business travellers, a particularly influential group in economic appraisal due to the high value of their time, believe that, in terms of their paid employment, there is some work that can easily be undertaken on the train (Lyons *et al.* 2008).

My ideal office is on the train ... especially if I've got things to work out [and I'm] at that point when you're just getting creative with it. It's my most creative place to work because it's that, you get a bit stumped, and you get to look out of the window for half an hour ... see things...

(Steve, business traveller)

That passengers are potentially obtaining substantive economic benefit from what they do while travelling has the potential to affect the economic model of passengers, and hence the outcome of transport appraisal calculations upon which policy and investment decisions are made. Transport appraisal contests it is only concerned with the value of travel time *saved*, not with the value or nature of travel time *spent*; however, we suggest that the benefits of travel may be calculated only if both are considered. The economically modelled passenger needs to include some measure of activity while moving from A to B.

Debrief your Travel Remedy Kit

After participants had experienced their remedied journey, we conducted a post-journey interview a few days later to discuss how effective the kit was. The cards and their layout (reproduced in a photograph, such as Figure 7.3) were discussed in an unstructured interview, which we opened by asking the person to tell us the story of their remedied journey. We then explored particular artefacts or moments that arose as meaningful during the discussion.

The following are what appeared to be some of the most effective and important remedies for improving the passenger experience.

Landscape guide

Scenery was often crucial to the desire to stretch or compress time. When passing through places that held less meaning or interest participants wanted to move faster, whereas they wanted to savour other places and views through the window. As wayfarers constituting the line of their journey, rather than inactive passengers being carried along, they wanted to move more slowly and attentively through some places and inhabit them for longer. From the national rail survey, gazing through the window or people-watching was the second most undertaken activity across all passengers (18 per cent), alongside reading for leisure (34 per cent) and working and studying (13 per cent) (Lyons *et al.* 2007; Watts and Urry 2008).

We created a personalized landscape guide with photographs taken from the train and information on visible and often unusual landmarks by which the train passed.

But to be honest once I've looked for my landmarks, read my book, drawn some pictures, made a few notes, we're there! ... But it went very quickly. It was great. And I was there before I knew it. ... It was fun actually. It was quite fun. Other people were just sitting there, reading, or looking at their mobiles, and I've got plenty to do.

(Julia, leisure traveller)

Viscous time

Compressing travel time requires strategizing so that the right moments are compressed and stretched. From ethnography and discussions with participants, we noted that the early part of a journey is more easily compressed than the later part when passengers are tired. It is this later part of a longer journey that often needs the most 'remedy' and, moreover, could lead to the greatest benefit in terms of the embodied experience of an improved and potentially 'faster' journey.

Third hour, I was still very keen to listen to things [on the music player] ... I had a go at some of the games ... I got the pillow out for about the last hour, and I felt a bit self-conscious, but it was very comfortable, it was very good ... So I enjoyed it a lot, it was very good. It certainly made the journey seem quicker. I was sort of 'there' you know ...

(Derek, business traveller)

Adaptation

Through the use of the Travel Remedy Kit passengers became much more active participants in their journey. Rather than passively accepting their circumstances, the toolkit pointed to ways for them to manage their travel time, and in so doing make their journey pass more quickly or slowly (although not by the measure of clock time). In essence, the Travel Remedy Kit was a wayfarer's toolkit for making a train journey as a trail (following Tim Ingold's analogy discussed earlier). It comprised technologies for engaging in different ways with the world while moving; it transported and transformed participants from potentially bored and inactive passengers into equipped and alert wayfarers making a trail from A to B.

I was a bit more alert at the end of the journey ... because usually I'm in a bit of a daze at the end of the journey.

(Claire, business traveller)

The Travel Remedy Kit also seemed to affect passengers in the longer term. Although designed for one journey, it often shifted how they engaged with travelling more generally. Through the kit, participants were not only equipped for wayfaring, but became wayfarers (at least for a time afterwards). As one of the participants said:

Taking notice of it as a journey, as opposed to something that you just do ... If you see what I mean ... I wouldn't ever remember my bus journey as I go to and from work, because it's just always the same. Whereas this made it all different.

(Claire, business traveller)

Conclusions

The Travel Remedy Kit method was designed to create journeys that were more beneficial to passengers, and where travel time might be stretched or compressed. The kit equipped and transformed inactive passengers into wayfarers, providing a rich possibility for different interactions with the train-world, different activities and ways of making travel time variable. These benefits to the passenger in the form of increased pleasure, productivity and the sense of passing time came without the cost of infrastructure investment to speed up the journey. So what are the implications for transport appraisal and the economically modelled passenger?

First, the ideal length of a journey does not tend to zero. The line of movement from A to B has an ideal length and its duration can be an important place for valuable creative work or transition time, and often provides an opportunity for economically or personally productive activity. Travel time has some value to passengers and therefore should be valued. However, all these benefits are not currently included in the transport-appraisal-modelled passenger (travelling in the course of work). If these benefits were to be included, it might broaden notions of how transport investment can yield passenger, and thus economic, benefits. The model should not be confined to the presumption that these economic benefits can only occur through reducing journey times, but should recognize that they can also occur through enhancing the experience of passenger travel time.

Second, there can be an experience of 'saving' travel time, and of compressing the journey duration, when the passenger is considered as an active participant in making their travel time. They are not passively carried along but are participants in travel alongside the transport infrastructure. A different kind of time from clock time can be saved, but it is one that is not yet present in the world of the economically modelled passenger.

The role of transport economic appraisal is to adequately represent the cost versus benefit of a transport scheme. The benefit, and the cost, is rendered a monetary one through assumptions about travel time and how saved travel time is valued. The question is one of value and, of course, what is present in the model to be valued. As a reminder, transport appraisal is about assessing the cost of *changing* the transport system and passenger experience and the benefits that accrue from such change. We propose that when considering improvements there be a move away from a model of passengers as inactive during travel, to one where the passenger is active, and that the quality of that activity can be improved through investment. This move to include something of the material and embodied aspects of the passenger experience, albeit still through economic translation, is in order to accommodate the benefits of travel time that the Travel Remedy Kit demonstrates are possible. In other words, appraisal should allow for transport improvements, and their benefits, that are not confined to altering the operation of the transport service itself. The activities of passengers, their travel-time use, should be within scope for being changed and appraised. Such

use-modelled passengers would, we suggest, need to include certain tenets. They would:

- have an ideal duration for the journey rather than an assumed ideal of zero duration;
- value their travel time as a site of creativity and transition or preparation, which can be augmented through different activities; and
- conduct productive activities on the move that are dependent on the environmental qualities of the moving and waiting places in which they work.

In order to increase the productivity of passengers, both in terms of economically productive work and in terms of their travel-time use, the creation of an environment with the necessary *affect* is needed. As has been shown throughout our project, how people feel about, and engage with, the world around them is crucial to productive as well as pleasurable travel time. Improving travel time then becomes not only a matter of infrastructural investment to reduce clock time, it also becomes a matter of investing in ways to help passengers become wayfarers, supporting activities and affective environments where it is possible for passengers to unpack, become active and engaged, and so compress or stretch their travel time.

Simply, *use-modelled passengers* open up the possibility for affective (and effective) transport interventions and investments.

The current transport appraisal model of passengers as purely transported and inactive is ostensibly a view derived from very careful calculations and judiciously considered assumptions, and yet it is a view that seems removed from the richness of the travel experience. We contest that this removal strongly brings into question whether the current economically modelled passenger as a focus for transport economic appraisal is sufficiently 'fit for purpose'. The Travel Remedy Kit research method demonstrates not only how passengers can be, and often are, well equipped as wayfarers to make productive use of their time, but that it is possible to make interventions into travel time that are highly beneficial to passengers but of low cost to the industry. We propose a move to *affective transport appraisal*, where attention and ultimately investment in transport policy expands to include the *making* of travel time, as well as the simple *saving* of travel time.

Acknowledgements

We thank our colleagues on the 'Travel-Time Use in the Information Age' project: John Urry, Juliet Jain and David Holley. We would also like to thank all the participants throughout our research, whose voices made this account possible.

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