



Is the average commuter still with us?

Beneath the headline results of the rail National Passenger Survey (NPS) lies a wealth of data says **Anthony Smith**

In our latest report (<http://ow.ly/nIvyy>) we look at the average commuter – does he or she exist?

There is a tendency still to think of commuters as besuited, middle-aged professionals travelling to the city from a leafy suburb where they religiously board the 08.16 every Monday to Friday. What is the reality?

To help get a better understanding of these passengers and their behaviour – including weekend commuting – we undertook additional analysis of NPS data as well as specific research into commuting habits, looking at the demographic profile of commuters, the work they do, when they travel, and the tickets they use.

Some other recent research into passengers' festive-period travel experiences (<http://ow.ly/nIvQo>) had showed that up to 20 per cent of passengers at the weekends over the Christmas and New Year 2012/13 festive period were commuters.

The commuter research has interesting results. The weekday 'nine to five' commuter is still very much alive; 97 per cent of commuting journeys are made on weekdays. However, even the three per cent commuting at weekends represents 29 million journeys per year.

Most (83 per cent) commute to an office – with 40 per cent being professional/senior management and 23 per cent middle management. More than eight out of 10 weekday commuters travel in peak hours (from 8 to 10am and from 4 to 7pm).

Not everyone conforms to the stereotype. Of those who commute only on weekdays, just 57 per cent did so for all five days. Only 59 per cent had a season ticket – 29 per cent had a peak Single/Return. Much of the commuting at weekends is by people who also travel in the week rather than just at weekends.

Almost a quarter of week-round commuters worked six (17 per cent) or seven (7 per cent) days a week. There are fewer managerial workers at weekends and a higher proportion of retail/transport and hospitality workers. Only 68 per cent travel to an office.

Week-round commuters spend a higher proportion of their net income on commuting than do weekday commuters. On Saturdays, 31 per cent of commuters occasionally or regularly catch the first train; on Sunday it is 62 per cent. Week-round commuters are more reliant (than weekday-only commuters) on other forms of public transport as a part of their commute.

Not everyone travels enough to justify a season ticket. Seasons are less attractive for those travelling at weekends or working at different sites on different days of the week. Those travelling a few days each week are particularly interested in Carnet tickets. Among weekday commuters there is an indication some might adjust their working/travelling hours

if appropriate ticket offers made this financially attractive. Frequency is also important. There is a clear desire for earlier first and later last trains, especially at weekends.

In an industry where relatively little is known about passengers, these data give a clear indication that travel patterns are shifting. Ticket structures need to alter to reflect these changes, not least to recognise the fact that more part-time commuters are women. They currently pay more per journey than their predominantly male annual season-ticket counterparts. Does this seem fair? •

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