

DON'T BE IN THE DARK THIS WINTER, COMMUTE SMART!

Commute Smart Week Sunday 26th October – Saturday 1st November

The Challenge

Commuting for long periods of time has become a part of the UK's working culture. In the case of London and the South East commuters travel on average 8 hours per week or an extra working day!

Not only is the amount of time commuting impacting both on the quality of life and productivity. The 9 to 5 culture with its peak travel times generates congestion on the rail, underground and road networks. According to the RAC Foundation, road congestion alone costs the UK economy some £20 billion per year.

Londoners are suffering particularly with over 1.3 million workers now travelling for longer than an hour each day, but journeys are increasing significantly all around the UK. The number of commuters spending an hour or more travelling to work has risen by 22.5 per cent since 1996.



Safety

The clocks going back contributes an additional danger to car and other road users, of adapting to driving in the dark at the end of a tiring day. Analysis of the Government statistics - 'Road Casualties Great Britain 2007' - reveals that whilst the overall figures are lower compared to last year (1211 in October 2006 & 1340 in November 2006), there was an increase in the number of car users killed or seriously injured, from 1006 in October to 1157 in November - a 15 per cent increase.

The number of car users killed rose from 122 in October to 142 in November, an increase of 16%. This is compared to a increase in 2006 of 9% over those two months. The overall casualty rate* also increased over these two months in 2007 from 46 to 52 compared to an increase from 52 to 56 in 2006.

If the average number of pedestrians killed over the six months covering the summer period -(March to End of September) is compared to the 6 months from October to February over the winter period an increase from 274 to 372 or nearly 36 per cent overall can also be observed. This is compared to the increase in 2006 from 339 to 404 over those two months (only 20%).

Smarter Working for Smarter Commuting

One solution is to reduce the amount of time commuting through smarter working practices such as allowing flexible working hours, including staggered working, and home working.

The benefits of smarter working for smarter commuting have been measured by a number of companies. These include British Telecom, which on the introduction of smarter working practices reported productivity gains worth £10 million per year and recruitment and sickness absence savings of £7 million, while the RAC had productivity increases of 8% subsequent to the introduction of flexible hours.

Against this background, Work Wise UK has set up a practical guide for employers with tips on how to implement smarter working practices for smarter commuting.

Flexible Working Hours

Introducing flexible working hours for employees is an effective route to smarter commuting, allowing journeys either to be made outside peak periods or reducing the number of journeys all together. There are several ways this can be achieved which are simple to implement.

- Flexitime - Flexibility can be introduced on how the employee works his or her weekly or annual hours.
- Flexihours - By allowing employees to leave early or later in the day, enables staggered commuting outside peak periods.
- Condensed Working - The number of commuting journeys can be reduced through the practice of condensed hours, where the employee works the required weekly hours in just four days, taking the fifth day off. Alternatively, staff could take a half hour lunch break each day and then be allowed to leave at 3.00pm on Friday, before the evening peak journey home.

Home Working

Technological advances, particularly broadband have allowed the option of home working for many employees. However, some employers are understandably reluctant to implement it fearing a reduction in productivity. This can be tackled by focusing on employee output and results rather than an attendance and time.

Allowing staff to work from home, for example on a Friday, will result in a small reduction in the number of people travelling, significantly impacting on congestion and overcrowding.

Planning

Careful planning and agreement beforehand will ensure success of a smart working for smart commuting scheme. One of the key areas to consider is consultation to make sure any scheme is valued and workable. It is also a good idea to have a trial period or pilot group first.

To introduce a scheme among the things to consider are:

- An employee survey – find out what employees would appreciate and value.
- Manage expectations – Only offer flexible working practices and or home working where it is practical to operate – for example where production requirements may not allow such practices.
- Talk to managers – find out what jobs are open to flexible working practices, for example some support staff such as IT and reception staff may be limited in their degree of flexibility.
- Smart working practices may involve a change in organisational culture. To help in the promotion of such a policy as a good example let senior managers work flexibly.
- Health and safety implications need to be examined such as longer office opening hours and people working alone.

- Impact on clients and suppliers – many managers are worried about the thought of employees not being there at core times in case a client rings. However, this can be covered for and the benefits of smart working in terms of retention of valuable staff and other gains will enable a better service to clients.
- Timing meetings to include everyone who needs to be there.
- For home working, decide what level of staff, how much work may be done at home and the technological requirements – are the necessary files and data accessible and have security implications been considered?
- Some method needs to be decided on to measure the success – is productivity up or staff turnover down etc?
- On making a decision regarding smart working make sure it is fed back to employees. Additionally, when the scheme is up and running have an open door policy to discuss and resolve any possible problems that may arise.

Ten Top Tips for Smarter Commuting

Work Wise UK and the RAC Foundation have developed ten top tips for commuting smarter:

1. Travel at a different time - while the majority of rush hour commuting happens between 7:30am and 8:30am, peak commuter hours get earlier as the week progresses - we get up earlier but also leave work earlier with the weekend on the horizon.

According to the RAC Foundation, even if just a few motorists can make their journeys out of peak hours, it will make a big difference to congestion. (Source: RAC Foundation/Trafficmaster Congestion Report May 2007
<http://www.racfoundation.org/files/CongestionIndex.pdf>)

2. Telecommute - Work from Home: nine million UK households now have broadband, while new mobile systems such as wi-fi make it possible to securely access business networks from almost anywhere. If all commuters could work just one day a week at home, commuter numbers would fall 20 per cent. This would reduce road congestion and public transport over-crowding significantly.

3. Teleconference - Use on-line tools to replace conferences and meetings, to cut back on travel during the business day. Tools include Online Communities of Practice - on-line groups where people exchange ideas and best practice; wikis - collaborative web pages that allow people to brainstorm ideas without meeting face-to-face; and video conferencing through affordable web-cams rather than expensive video suites.

4. Take a detour - The RAC Foundation/Trafficmaster Congestion Index found that using less obvious routes to get from A to B can save commuters hours simply by avoiding congestion on their habitual route. (Source: RAC Foundation/Trafficmaster Congestion Report May 2007
<http://www.racfoundation.org/files/CongestionIndex.pdf>)

5. Try two wheels instead of four - commuters could shave up to three hours off their weekly commutes by switching from four wheels to two, according to the RAC Foundation's analysis of government statistics* which shows that in almost every region of the UK, motorcycle and scooter commuters are spending less time travelling to and from work than workers travelling by car, bus or coach, with the

biggest savings available in Central London and the East of England. (Source: Labour Force Survey Statistics 2007)

6. Try peddle power instead - millions of people spend hours at the gym either before or after work. Why not combine exercise with commuting? Not only will it make you fitter, it could save you money both in travelling and gym subscriptions. The average commute is 8.7miles - most people could cycle this distance in less than half an hour.

7. Make sure your car is up to the job - Next week will see millions of people travelling home from work in the dark for the first time in seven months and many of them will be ill prepared. While huge investment in research and development by lighting manufacturers means that lights on modern vehicles are more effective and efficient than ever, they are useless if drivers don't use them, check them and maintain them. In 2005, over one million cars failed the annual MoT test because of lighting defects.

8. Get physical - instead of gnashing teeth at the red light, take the opportunity to do a few stretches or a shoulder-shake to get rid of tension and aggression.

9. Do random acts of kindness - drop the "thousand yard stare" and let someone out in front of you. Doing good for others creates an enormous sense of wellbeing and reduces commuting stress.

10. Give someone a lift - overcome "NIMFS" (Not in My Front Seat) and share the journey to work with a friend. Having someone to vent the stress of the day's work on means less road rage, while car-sharing cuts congestion.

Further details about Work Wise UK can be found on the website (www.workwiseuk.org). There is also a dedicated pressroom available through the website or directly at www.workwiseuk.pressrooms.net.

For more information visit www.workwiseuk.org

Overall, success is achieved by working with staff on smart working. In many areas of perceived challenges in implementing it, the staff themselves if consulted will often come up with a solution, particularly if the benefits are highlighted.

For further information contact Work Wise UK enquiries@workwiseuk.org