

Commuting and wellbeing at work

Why it matters and what
can be done



What is wellbeing at work?

“Wellbeing is a simple, people centred way of looking at how organisations and individuals can improve productivity, quality of life and satisfaction at work. Because it’s based on an understanding of what makes us human, wellbeing is a powerful way of making a real difference in the workplace”

Investors in People (2017)

Why worry about commuting and wellbeing at work?

Research shows that the journey to work affects how people feel about their jobs, leisure time and lives overall. Stressful commutes can also be harmful to physical and mental health.

Helping people to achieve ‘comfortable commutes’ can therefore be an important means of promoting employee wellbeing and improving staff productivity and retention.

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How does the journey to work affect wellbeing?

1. During the journey:

- Research shows that **mood is generally worse during the journey to work**, compared to the mood experienced during other daily activities.
- People are **most satisfied with their commute** when they **walk or cycle to work** and are **least satisfied with their commute** when they use **public transport**.
- This is partly because **people value the commute** when they can **make good use of the journey time**, through relaxing, working or exercising for example.
- A **lack of control** over the journey makes people **feel stressed**.
- **Crowding and congestion reduce commute satisfaction**, while **interacting with other travellers increases commute satisfaction**.

Happy commutes

Are characterised by:

- Shorter journey times
- Physical activity
- Flexibility and control
- Social interaction
- Allowing beneficial uses of journey time (work, relax, exercise)



Stressful commutes

Are characterised by:

- Longer journey times
- Inactivity and inflexibility
- A lack of control
- Crowded / congested conditions
- Journey time being viewed as wasted time



2. After the journey (at work & home):

A bad journey experience 'spills over' into how people feel and perform at work and home:

- **Lower commute satisfaction** is linked to **lower satisfaction with work activities** and also with **reduced performance at work**.
- The **more time people spend commuting**, the **less satisfied they are with their jobs** and the **less satisfied they are with their leisure time**.
- **Longer commute times** are also linked to **less sleep** during the working week, and **less time spent on physical and social activities**.
- By contrast, **walking to work reduces stress** and **improves satisfaction with leisure time**.
- Being able to **work from home** has also been shown to **improve job satisfaction**.



3. Over the long term:

- **Longer commute times** result in **higher levels of strain in daily life**, **poorer mental health** and **lower satisfaction with physical health**.
- **People with longer commute times** are also (25%) **more likely to change jobs**.

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7 things employers can do:

1. Develop and monitor a 'wellbeing at work' policy
 - Have a designated staff member responsible for delivering the policy
2. Support the 'wellbeing at work' policy with a 'Travel Plan' which enables (happy and healthy) commuting
 - Use staff surveys to monitor commuting patterns, commute satisfaction and different aspects of wellbeing
3. Help staff to reduce the time they spend commuting
 - Make staff aware of journey times from different locations
 - For new staff, and staff considering moving house, encourage them to consider living in locations with shorter journey times to work
 - When expanding or moving premises, identify locations that are easy to access for staff
4. Enable flexible working, where this is feasible
 - Allow part and full day home working
 - Provide IT systems that enable effective remote working
 - Enable flexible start and leave times
5. Establish ongoing relationships with local highway authorities, transport operators and neighbouring employers. Aim to provide staff with a variety of options for the journey to work:
 - Ensure that transport benefits (like season tickets/parking permits) are flexible and apply to users of different transport modes
 - Ensure non-car alternatives (particularly bus) are comfortable, reliable and enable beneficial uses of travel time
6. Facilitate active commuting (walking and cycling to work)
 - Communicate the benefits of active commuting, even when it is occasional, and offer rewards
 - Encourage staff to try walking and cycling with peer support
 - Provide secure and sheltered storage for bicycles and pool bikes/e-bikes for use during the working day
 - Provide showers, changing rooms and bicycle maintenance help
 - Provide and advertise a cycle to work scheme
 - Provide maps to indicate walking and cycling routes to work
7. Facilitate 'stress free' car commutes and car access at work
 - Set up a car share arrangement with priority parking
 - Provide pool cars/electric cars for use during the working day