

Academic research reveals that commuting by rail helps set you up for the workday by cutting through 'brain fog'

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The rail industry and UCL Professors have revealed that commuting by train and escaping the work from home routine can have a positive impact on cognitive performance, wellbeing, productivity and motivation.

It comes after last week saw seasonal and peak train journeys increase by 30% since August, with the industry's latest research revealing over three quarters (77%) of hybrid* workers are planning to return to their workplace.

WFH DISTRACTIONS AFFECT OUR WELLBEING

The research, which was conducted as part of the rail industry's 'Let's get back on track' campaign, found that improved mental health (48%), work/life balance (46%), productivity (46%), motivation (47%) and fitness levels (51%) are some of the positive effects these workers are expecting to experience as they head back to their workplace more regularly.

At the start of the pandemic, those who began working from home indulged in snacking more (50%), working with the TV on (33%) or spending more time on social media (26%). But now, nearly half of these workers from home say they now find these things a hinderance to productivity. In line with this, 43% of hybrid workers admit to facing more distractions when working from home (WFH) compared to just 29% in the workplace. The biggest distractions were cited as household admin (35%), cooking meals and taking food breaks (30%) and home deliveries (29%).

When delving deeper into the neuroscience of train travel, UCL Professors Joseph Devlin and Daniel Richardson found that the distractions and additional tasks created as a result of working from home made it hard for people to focus, impaired their ability to learn and lowered their wellbeing.

EMPLOYEES CRAVE PHYSICAL FACE TIME WITH COLLEAGUES

Conversely, 46% of those polled agreed that the office environment puts them in better mindset for work, rising to 55% of 18-34-year-olds. Respondents felt that they are likely to be more productive when in the workplace as they can ask colleagues in person rather than scheduling a call (45%) and are able to bounce ideas off colleagues more easily (40%).

As more commuters return to the office this week over half of workers (55%) feel that the biggest benefit of travelling by train is the scenery out of the window, and a further quarter (24%) say the movement of the train brings a sense of calm. The neuroscientists confirmed that *'the daily train commute has potential psychological benefits for both wellbeing and brain function'*.

Prof Joseph Devlin from UCL commented: "The commute delineates boundaries between home and work-life and can be used to switch one off and transition to the other, which can have a positive impact on cognitive performance, wellbeing and productivity. Being able to escape the humdrum of the same environment gives your brain a wake-up call. Just going to work generates more diverse experiences than working from home, especially through interactions with other people. This greater novelty helps generate new memories, making each day more unique, sharpening recollection and reducing this 'brain fog' so commonly experienced during lockdown."

FREE AND EXCLUSIVE OFFICES TO HELP COMMUTERS MAKE THE MOST OF 'ME-TIME'

With nearly a quarter of hybrid workers citing 'me time' (23%) as one of the biggest benefits of their commute, and wanting to help people make the most of their trip to the work place, the rail industry is offering commuters a range of free and exclusive discounts including hot drinks and tastecard memberships, with even more offers coming soon at nationalrail.co.uk/commuter

Seb Gordon, Director of External Communications for the Rail Delivery Group and spokesperson for the rail industry comments: "We know the last 18 months have been really tough on people working from home. The latest research shows some of the challenges people have faced, from distractions and the formation of lockdown habits to the blurred lines between home life and work life.

"We've worked with government to introduce the new Flexi Season ticket, giving commuters the freedom and flexibility to divide their time between home and the office, and are pleased to have a range of offers

to help customers make the most of their ‘me time’ on the train and the days they commute.”

In addition to these great rewards for people who are commuting by train, the rail industry is helping people travel and book with confidence by providing better journey information about busier trains and alternative routes, boosting cleaning, ensuring carriages are well ventilated and helping them change a booked journey fee free should their circumstances change.

For more information visit www.nationalrail.co.uk/commuter

Photo credit: Rail Delivery Group