

Commuting has neglected benefits

It can be disheartening to recognize the amount of time we spend in transit. The average Londoner passes more than 40 minutes on each leg of their journey to work, for instance, BBC wrote.

That means we spend about as much time on the commute as we do socializing or practicing our hobbies. This may be the longest average journey time in Europe, but many other global cities have it even worse.

Who would not rather spend that time with their friends, at the gym — or simply vegging out in front of the TV? But a series

compound work-related stress.

A few moments thinking about the day in front of you can therefore ease the change of gears, reducing the stress once you arrive in the office, he said.

"The time period between leaving home and arriving at work is really a wonderful opportunity that people could use to transition between the two roles."

The evening commute, meanwhile, may be a good time to consolidate your memory of the things you have learnt throughout the day.

Slimming down

Your daily ordeal may also bring unexpected benefits to your physical health. A study of Taiwanese commuters, for instance, found that people who used public transport were about 15 percent less likely to be overweight compared to those who traveled to work in the car.

Crucially, the relationship holds even when you account for other potential factors like socioeconomic status that might also influence fitness.

OK, a bus or train journey does not carry the same physical demands as a Zumba class. But it typically does require a stroll to and from your station or bus stop, and the Taiwanese study suggested that these short bursts of activity can add up to a meaningful difference in fitness.

To find out more, Richard Patterson at Imperial College London analyzed detailed data from the English National Travel Survey, allowing him to determine exactly how much exercise the average commuter gleams from their daily journey.

He found that roughly a third of public transport commuters met the government's recommendations of 30-minutes exercise a day, through their commute alone.

Reframing

Patterson pointed out that governments could consider these benefits when they decide their funding for transport networks, since encouraging people to take up their cars and take a train or bus could end up having a real effect on public health.

In the UK, for instance, he calculates that a 10-percent increase in the use of public transport could result in 1.2 million more people reaching the recommended levels of physical activity.

Patterson certainly would not claim that your commute could replace regular visits to the gym but recognizing these gains could surely take some of the sting out of a frustrating journey.

After all, psychological research has repeatedly shown that the stress of an event is often highly dependent on the way we frame it. Two situations — which are ostensibly equal on every objective measure — may have subtly different effects depending on our own interpretation, such as whether it feels like we have autonomy, for instance, and whether it feels like it is contributing to a greater goal.

These changes are not just subjective: They are reflected in physiological measures, such as fluctuations in the stress hormone cortisol.

Recognizing and reappraising the commute's benefits, so that they no longer feel like "wasted" hours, could therefore have a real effect on your overall experience so that it no longer casts such a shadow over your day.



BBC

of studies published during the last couple of years suggest that commuting does have its upsides — particularly if you are taking public transport. And recognizing those advantages might just make that journey a little less grueling.

Accelerated learning

Consider the morning commute. There is no doubt that the stresses of a crowded bus or train can leave you feeling exhausted before you have even arrived at work, but some striking research by Jon Jachimowicz at Columbia Business School showed that you do not need to feel this drained.

He has found that people who engage in "work-related prospecting" — that is, thinking and planning about the day and week ahead and the steps you need to take to achieve your career goals — tend to weather the stresses of the journey better than people whose minds wander aimlessly. This translated to greater job satisfaction throughout the day.

Jachimowicz suspected that these benefits come from the fact that it eases the conflict we feel between our roles at home and our roles at work. After all, your behavior at home — as a flat mate, spouse or parent — will be very different from the ways you are expected to act at work. And some people do not switch between the roles very naturally, creating a sense of conflict that can

Francesca Gino at Harvard Business School asked trainee IT workers to spend 15 minutes of reflection at the end of each day. By the end of their course, they performed 20 percent better than people who had instead spent that period on additional active practice.

Gino's participants were, admittedly, reflecting on their work from the comfort of their office — but there is no reason why you cannot use your commute to quietly reflect on the day's lessons.

Many people prefer a more involved distraction, of course — and it is worth remembering just how productive those snatched moments can be in the long term. As BBC Capital recently revealed, someone who spends around six hours commuting each week could read (or listen to) a 100,000 word book in that time. Or you might decide to learn a language. Neuroscience shows that we often learn best when we study in spaced chunks — and the commute is an ideal time to put that principle into practice.

Even if you simply let your mind wander, you may find that yourself unexpectedly solving a knotty problem — with evidence that periods of mindless distraction can lead to momentary sparks of creativity.

You don't need to spend too long on any of these activities — in between checking your Instagram and Twitter feeds — but if you do devote a little time to reflection, your commute could help to enhance your sense of achievement and your productivity.

Cave captive

Police in Sulawesi, Indonesia said they freed a 28-year-old woman who was held captive in a cave for 15 years by an 83-year-old village shaman, who had allegedly kidnapped her when she was 13.

Despair as crippling drought hammers Australian farmers

A crippling drought is ravaging vast tracts of Australia's pastoral heartlands, decimating herds and putting desperate farmers under intense financial and emotional strain, with little relief in sight.

While the country is no stranger to 'big dries' and its people have long had a reputation as resilient, the extreme conditions across swathes of Australia's east are the worst in more than 50 years, AFP reported.

A smattering of rain earlier this week did little to ease one of the driest starts to the year on record, turning pastures to dust and destroying huge areas of grazing and crop lands.

With no feed, farmers have been forced to ship in grain or hay from other parts of the country to keep sheep and cattle alive, spending thousands of extra dollars a week just to stay afloat.

Some exhausted graziers spend hours each day hand-feeding their stock because the ground is too dry for grass to grow. Others have been forced to shoot starving cattle.

"They are shooting their stock because they don't want them to suffer. They are shooting them because they just can't afford to feed them anymore," Tash Johnston, co-founder of charity Drought Angels, told AFP.

Farmers have also had to ration water for their families and their herds because the dams on their properties are dry or nearly empty.

Many face the prospect of abandoning their homes altogether — some after being on the land for generations.

It is a scenario repeated across New South Wales state, where agriculture contributes more than AS15 billion (US\$11 billion) to the state's economy annually, employing more than 77,000 people.

Authorities on Wednesday officially declared the entire state in drought. Conditions are similarly dire in Queensland to the north, where the state government says nearly 60 percent of land is suffering drought conditions.

"This would be the first time in two generations, back to the 1930s, that we haven't got a crop up in the autumn or winter time," Greg Stones, who runs a small farm of cattle, sheep, grain and crops near drought-hit Gunnedah, a five-hour drive north of Sydney, told AFP.

"The land is too dry... We've put cattle on the highway (near the farm) for the first time in my life (so) they get a bit of rough grass."

With farmers facing ruin, the national government stepped in last weekend, pledging a Aus\$190-million package of immediate relief measures.

It includes two lump sum payments worth up to AS12,000 per household, and changes to an assets test to grant support to thousands more farmers.

There was also cash for counseling and mental health services, with drought-related stress and even suicide a mounting concern, compounded by the isolation many feel on their remote properties.

"We are the land of droughts and flooding rains. We recognize that. It's a very volatile and often capricious climate and Australian farmers are resilient, they plan for drought, they are good managers

but it can become really overwhelming," said Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

"They understand drought is part of the Australian climate and they manage for it, but this drought is longer and more widespread than any drought we've seen in over 50 years so that's why we've got to provide additional support."

Shocking to see

NSW Farmers' Association president James Jackson welcomed the government measures, but cautioned it was vital to ensure ongoing support, particularly to address mental health.

Others said it was too little, too late. "I think the only problem is it was probably a little bit late coming for some people. They didn't act fast enough," Col Barton, whose family has been on their farm east of Gunnedah since 1938, told AFP.

"All the climate gurus that know all about the weather still can't tell us when [the drought is] going to break. We've got no idea so we run blind. We've just got to plan and hope and pray that it rains."

Australia's weather bureau has warned there is no end in sight and the Red Cross has set up a relief appeal, while the Salvation Army is distributing food hampers.

It is not just farmers doing it tough, but also the towns that service them.

Murrumbidgee, some 300 kilometers (186 miles) north of Sydney, has received less than 170 millimeters of rain this year and could run out of drinking water within months.

Severe restrictions are in place, including three-minute showers and only two washing loads of



SAAEED KHAN/AFP

clothes a week, with fears the town may need to truck in supplies.

Grazier Mark Wylie has spent AS30,000 in the past six weeks boring for groundwater, to no avail. Even if he or Murrumbidgee authorities find a water source, he told local media: "It's a finite resource, it won't go on forever."

Water diver Glen Shepherd, who has lived in the town for more than three decades, said these were the driest conditions he had ever seen.

"It's shocking to see," he told AFP. "And the people in the city don't realize, or they are starting to realize now, everything does come off the land — the bread, the milk."

"If the drought doesn't break, it's going to happen," he added, referring to farms going out of business.

US police find body of boy at raided camp

The body of a four-year-old boy was found in a dilapidated camp in the US state of New Mexico where 11 children were rescued in appalling conditions, police said.

Two men were arrested in a raid on Friday as part of the operation connected to a months-long search for the child, according to New Mexico's Taos County Sheriff's office.

"We discovered the remains yesterday on Abdul's fourth birthday," Sheriff Jerry Hogrefe said Tuesday, appearing to fight back tears, AFP reported.

The investigation kicked off late last year on the opposite side of the country in Jonesboro, Georgia, where 39-year-old Siraj Wahhaj was accused of kidnapping his young son Abdul-Ghani.

The boy's mother told police her child, who she said suffered from seizures along with developmental and cognitive problems, went to a park with his father Wahhaj last December and never returned.

On August 2, Sheriff Hogrefe issued a search warrant describing "a makeshift compound surrounded by tires and an earthen berm" where Wahhaj along with adult Lucas Morten were thought to be in hiding.

The next day, a dozen officers kicked off the 'all day' operation, discovering hidden beneath New Mexico's scrubland the two men with an AR-15 rifle, five loaded 30-round magazines and four loaded pistols, including one in Wahhaj's pocket.

Morten was charged with harboring a fugitive and Wahhaj was booked without bond on his Georgia warrant for child abduction.

Three women thought to be parents of the children — aged one to 15 and all now in protective custody — were also detained for questioning. They were released pending further investigation.



TAOS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

In the first operation, Abdul was not found. But the officers returned to the site after questioning the suspects on Friday and Saturday, which led them to believe that the boy was still there.

"We had a good idea of a target location to look for the child," Hogrefe said.

Abdul's mother told the authorities that Siraj Wahhaj wanted to exorcise his son because he considered that his disability was due to a demon.

The other boys "are all safe and their needs are being met", Henry Varela, the communications director of the New Mexico Department of Children, Youth and Families, told AFP.

The rubbish-strewn camp had little by way of food or water, while its inhabitants did not have shoes and wore rags for clothes.

Czech unemployment rate rises, but so do job vacancies

The Czech unemployment rate rose slightly in July, an often-seen seasonal effect. But the labor market is still tight and job vacancies increased to new historical highs.

Unemployment is usually higher in July

The share of unemployed people in the Czech Republic increased from June's 2.9 percent to 3.1 percent in July, think.ing.com reported.

The increase is down to seasonal factors we often see at this time of year. As the holidays begin, some new graduates and school leavers are actively looking for work.

We also see slower recruitment during the holidays. A smaller increase in the unemployment is typical for July, and the market expected unemployment to grow to only 3.0 percent; the slightly higher figure was given by a small variation, as the exact rate of unemployment in June was 3.065 percent.

Job vacancies at new highs

That said, the labor market tightened further in July. Job vacancies once again reached a new high and increased to 310,000. Compared with a year ago, there are almost 122,000 more jobs in the domestic economy (more than 65 percent YoY) and 71,500 fewer unemployed, which is a 23.6-percent year-on-year decline.

As a consequence, the number of job vacancies has exceeded the number of unemployed people since April.



think.ing.com

Favorable too is the fact that long-term unemployment is decreasing: the number of applicants who are registered for more than five months fell by 57,500 (32.6 percent) year-on-year.

Room for further decline is limited

Unemployment is already at such a low rate that it is declining more slowly than in the past.

However, its development is still slightly above expectations. The CNB's new forecast expects the share of unemployed to decrease to 3.2 percent this year, the latest forecast from the Ministry of Finance is 3.3 percent.

Compared to the previous year of 4.2 percent, this is another noticeable decrease. For next year, a slightly smaller figure is expected because there's so little room left for further decline.