

A new commuting model?

Many companies are saying they are looking at more staff working some days at home and some in an office in the centre of a city. One of the issues that arises is how will people travel to and from the office, and what will that cost? Will the nationalised railways respond with attractive new tickets and offers which allows people flexible choices of when to travel, with a suitable discount for being regular users?

I started researching this article by going onto one of the big well known rail ticket sites. They ask the right questions there, and offer a cost comparison for people wanting to commute for fewer than 5 days a week. They of course can only compare costs against the background of the present ticketing offers. They show that the railway has not yet bothered to think through what a part week commuter might like.

The worked example I was offered showed this for the daily costs of travel:

3 day commuting Anytime day return £48.90

Weekly season £39.53

Annual season £33.83

Traditional 5 day commuting

Anytime Day return £48.90

Weekly season £23.70

Annual season £20.24

As these figures reveal, there is a substantial discount offered on high ticket prices for daily commuting 5 days a week. If someone now wants to commute three days a week they still have to buy the full 5 day a week season ticket, but get a much smaller effective discount on the daily fare. I guess these figures do not allow for holidays which means the actual daily cost on the season ticket is higher.

The railway needs to do better than this. People may now be flexible not only about which days they go into the office, but also which times. There may be a willingness by employers, particularly all the time social distancing applies, to allow or support staggered hours. The railway has always claimed commuter fares even on season tickets have to be so high because it is all peak travel. This imposes high peak costs on the railway which needs high capacity for just a few hours a day. This new pattern of reduced days and a wider range of times allows the railway to flatten the peak, which should lead to economies to pass on to users.

If the railway wants it business back it needs to do better by commuters. One of the main reasons people do not want to return to five days a week in the

office is the high cost rail service which often let them down.