

The commuter rebellion

Many former commuters seem to be singing "I don't want to go to work on a train in the rain" to adapt on old pop song parody. It seems increasingly clear that the COVID lockdowns have made something snap in many five day a week train commuters minds. They have discovered they can do much of their job from home.

They have saved serious money on not buying season tickets. Above all they have been spared the difficult local roads to the station, the fight for a car park place and ticket and the lottery of getting a seat on the train. All that strain and worry has gone out of life.

On that busy office day will the train come on time? On the morning when you need to meet the boss will your train be delayed by leaves on the line or the late arrival of the train in front? Will you get drenched walking from the station to the office? Going home might you have one of those nightmare journeys when you are stuck in a stationery train for too long, ringing home to apologise and say you haven't a clue when you will make it back.

Many commuters with all too many memories of late and cancelled trains, an absence of seats and a dearth of reliable information about what has gone wrong suddenly see the chance to duck out of many of those journeys and opt for a different working life. It looks as if many offices will be adapted for hybrid working with many more people logging in remotely. Employers who may prefer more to come and work in the office will decide that to keep some of the best talent they need to be flexible. They will decide to downsize their floor space to get a property saving out of the change.

All this will knock a big hole in railway revenues. I will look at what government should do with the trains in a later post. The commuter revolt is the result of poor and expensive services over many past years.