



**BTA** | BUSINESS TRAVEL  
ASSOCIATION

# Beyond the Boardroom

The Real Faces and Economic Value  
of Travelling for Work in the UK



# Foreword

Business has always been about people and the powerful connections we forge in person.

It's the moment you sit down with a potential client to truly understand their vision and their culture. It's the spark of learning that comes from hands-on training and time spent with experts in the field. It's about showing up in person – be it at the site, on the shop floor, on in the room – to solve problems, build relationships, deliver work, and win it again next time.

All of these connections and people-centred moments are vital for business development, for personal growth, and for the stability of our economy.

And the enabler of this? Travel.

Travelling for work isn't a luxury – it's a necessity. Many organisations simply couldn't operate without it, and our economy relies on it.

This report is a deep dive into business travel – or what we will now be referring to as 'travel for work' – and its future needs, outlining where we need national investment and support to create a greener and more efficient travel system – and covering vital issues from reliability to accessibility.

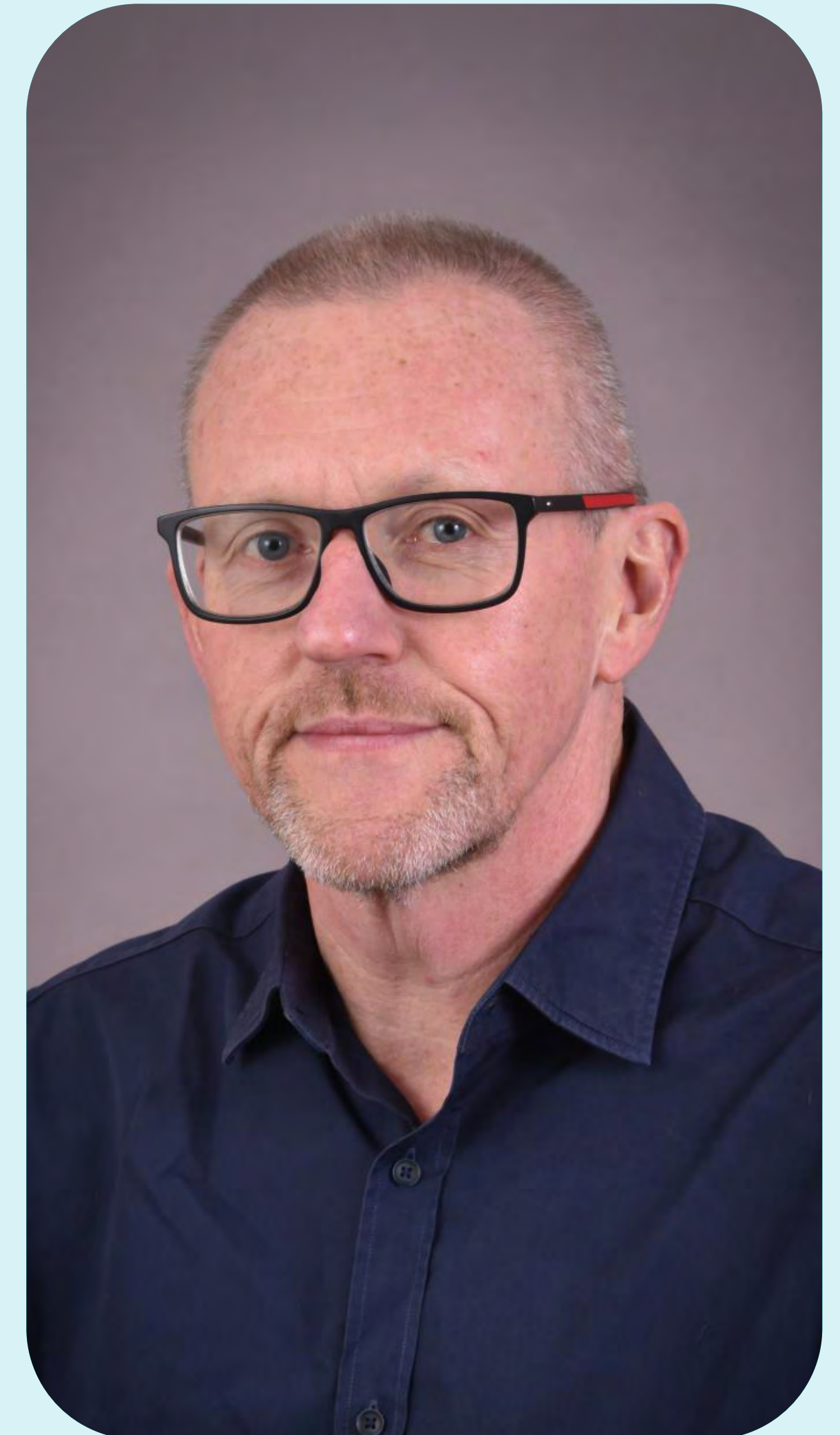
At the BTA, we represent the UK business travel industry and Travel Management Companies (TMCs),

accounting for over 90% of corporate travel booked in the UK. We champion the needs of everyone who travels for work, actively lobbying Government for the infrastructural improvements required to create a more sustainable, inclusive, and future-ready travel ecosystem. We are the authoritative voice of the UK's business travel sector, representing its interests on a national and policymaking level.

We exist to help British businesses navigate travel with confidence and to safeguard the future of the British travel industry, ensuring our travel system works for all enterprises well into the future.

The issues and findings in this report offer real, practical insight not only for our members, but for the public, policymakers and everyone shaping the future of travel. It challenges outdated perceptions of business travel and highlights the essential, everyday journeys that keep our economy moving. Whether it's the growing demand for better domestic, multi-modal solutions or the increasing importance of accessibility, this report provides clear evidence to guide client conversations, influence strategic planning, and strengthen the case for innovation and investment across the sector. Above all, it calls for a national shift in how we value and support the people who travel for work.

**Clive Wratten**  
**CEO of the Business Travel Association (BTA)**





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# Executive Summary

The Beyond the Boardroom report highlights the true diversity of work-related travel – a reality that goes far beyond the cliché of business class lounges and CEOs in suits. In today’s world, travelling for work encompasses a broad spectrum of professions and purposes – whether it’s a nurse heading to a home visit, a plumber enroute to a job, a consultant travelling to a project site, or a caterer preparing for an event – travel for work is as varied as the workforce itself.

Crucially, it’s not just about international trips or corporate air travel either. One of the main findings of this report is that the vast majority of work-related journeys are domestic, short-haul, and regional, essential for delivering services, building relationships, and driving local economies.

However, our current transport infrastructure is failing to meet the demands of this modern, mobile workforce. Our research has shown that we remain heavily reliant on travelling by car –

a solitary, inefficient, and environmentally unsustainable solution. But do businesses have a viable alternative?

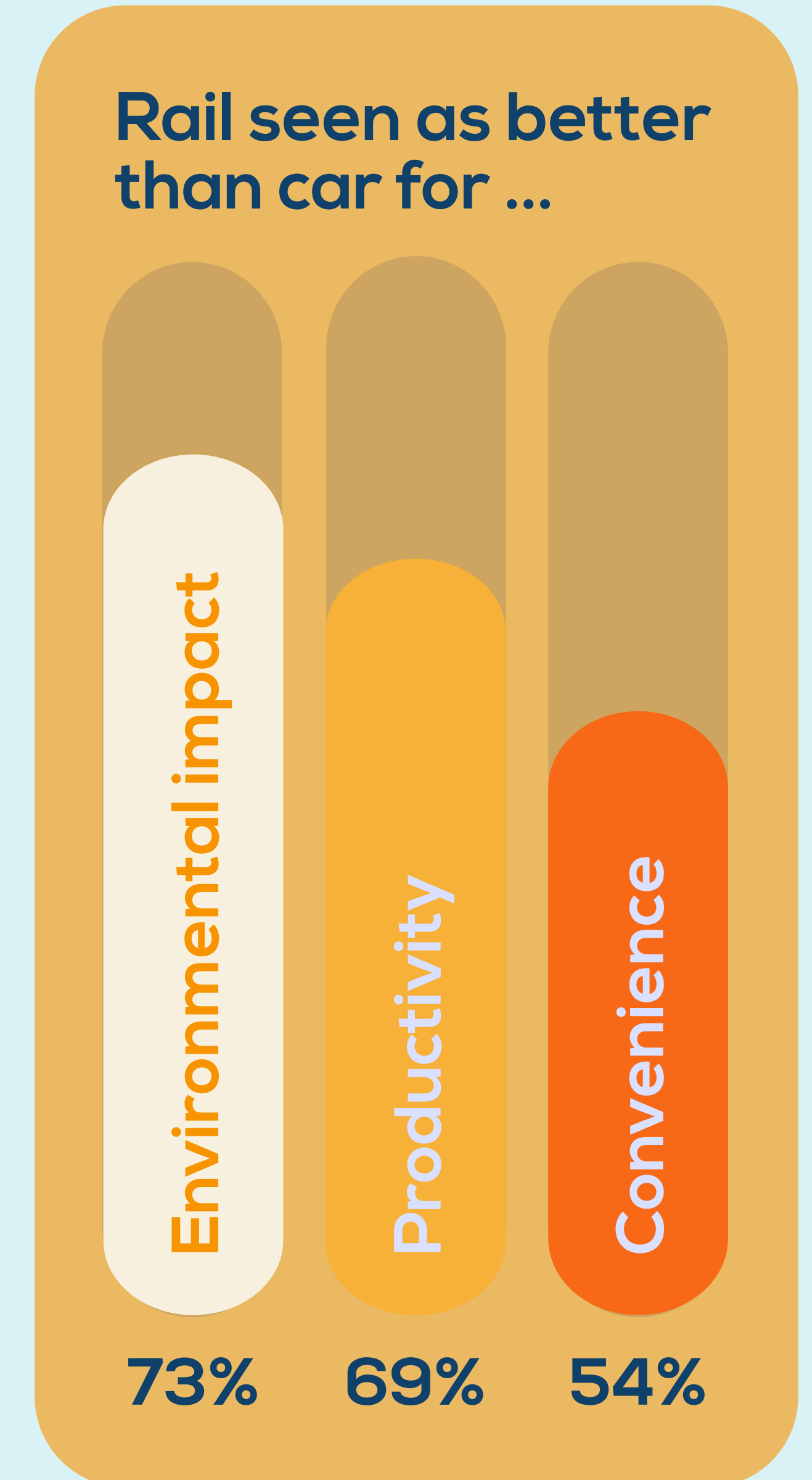
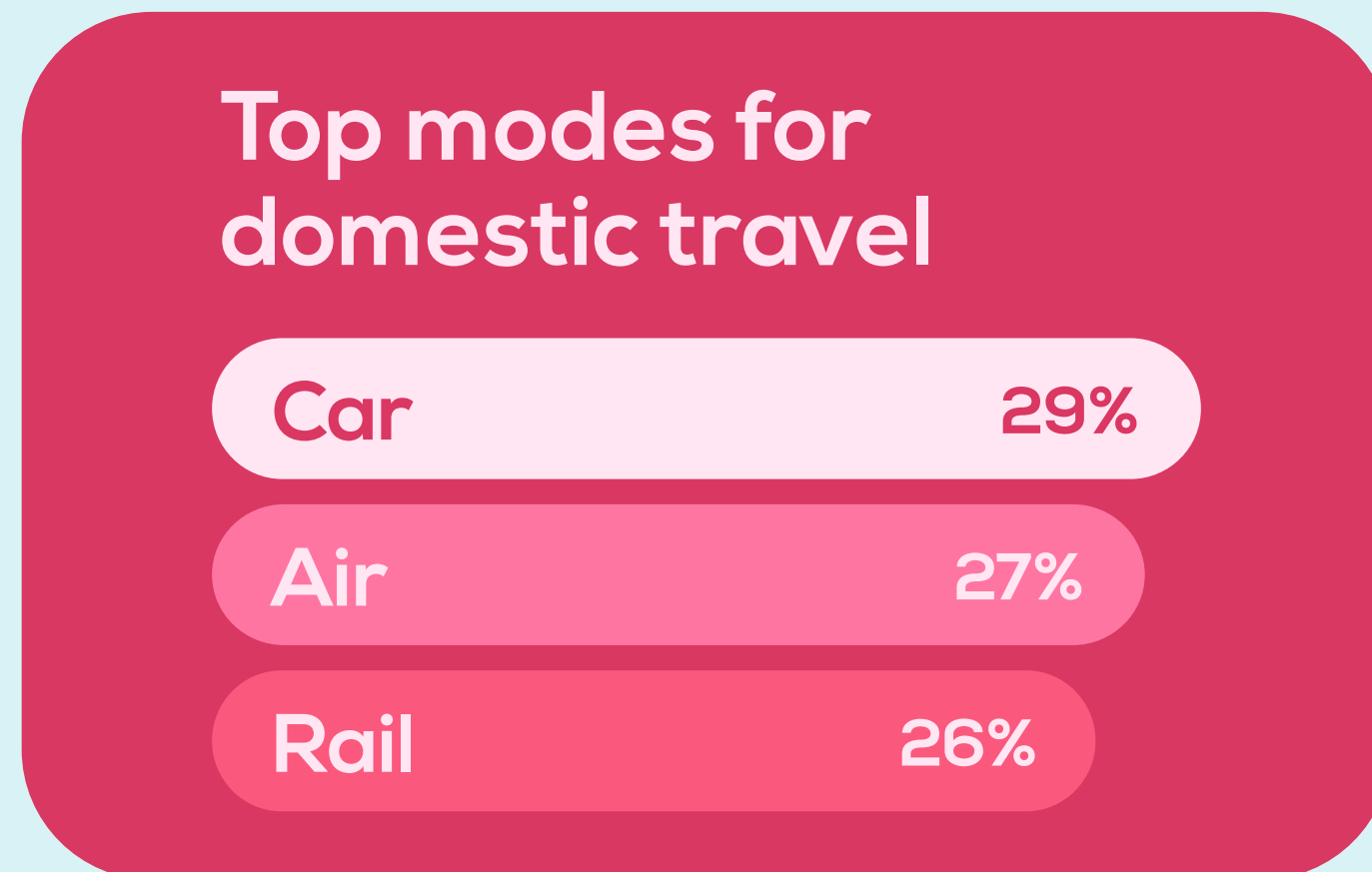
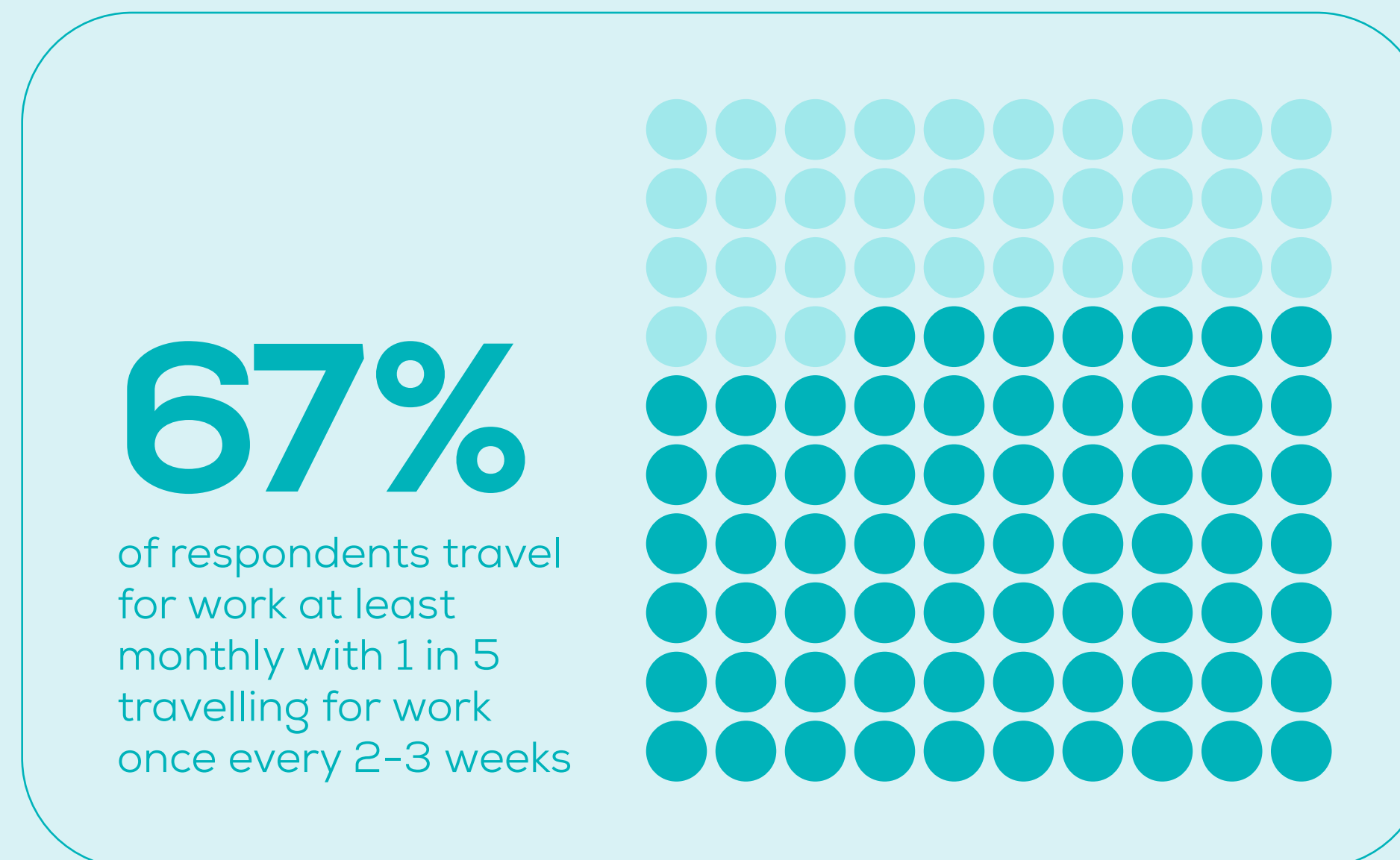
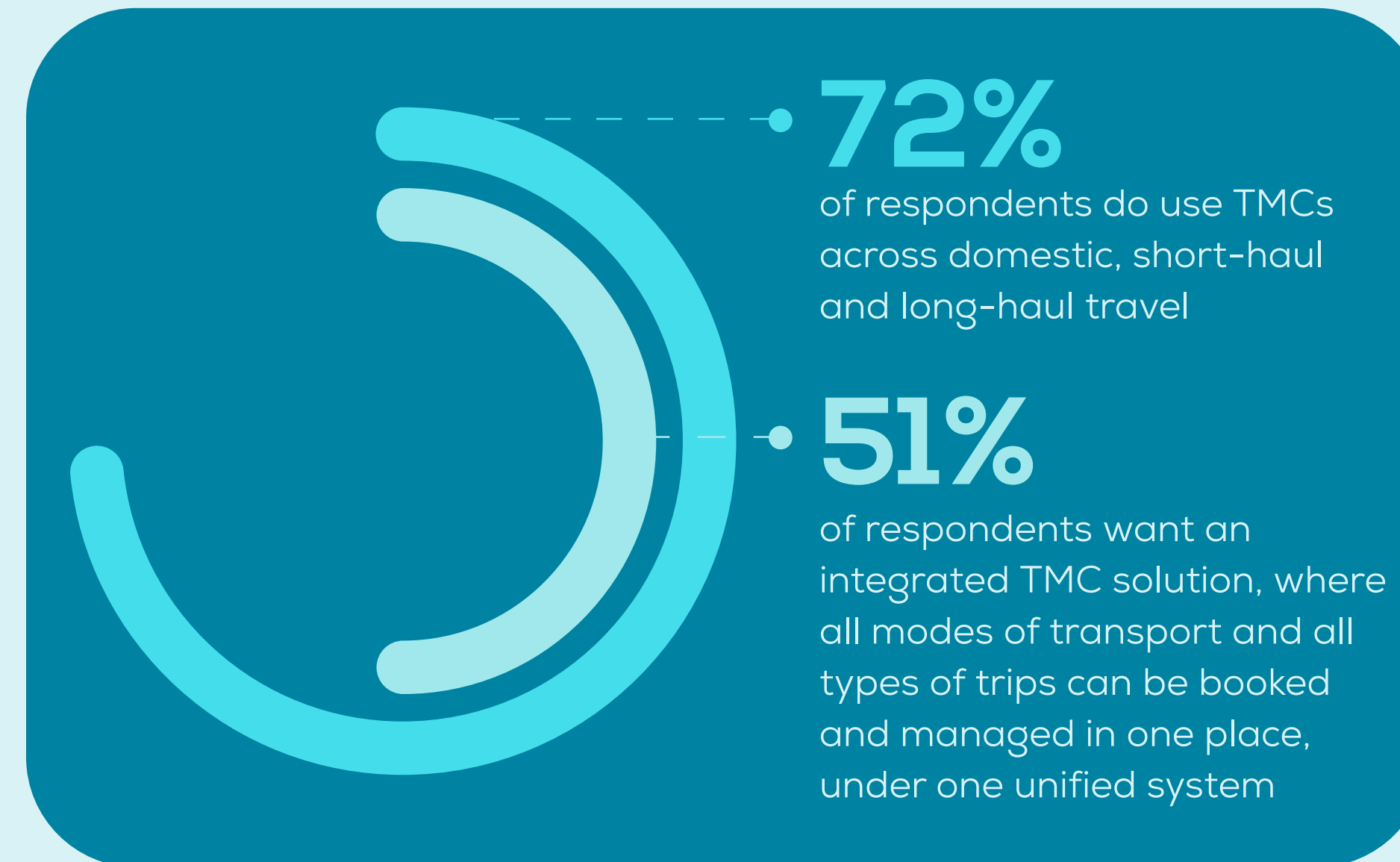
What’s needed is greater investment in our transport infrastructure, particularly rail, to make sustainable and efficient modes of transport more accessible, reliable, and fit for purpose. And this is the end goal we are working towards.

This report also acknowledges the critical role that Travel Management Companies (TMCs) play in helping organisations navigate a sometimes frustrating and challenging travel landscape. TMCs offer smarter, greener, and more integrated travel solutions for many businesses – making travel for work safer and seamless.





# Key Results:



# Who Really Travels for Work?

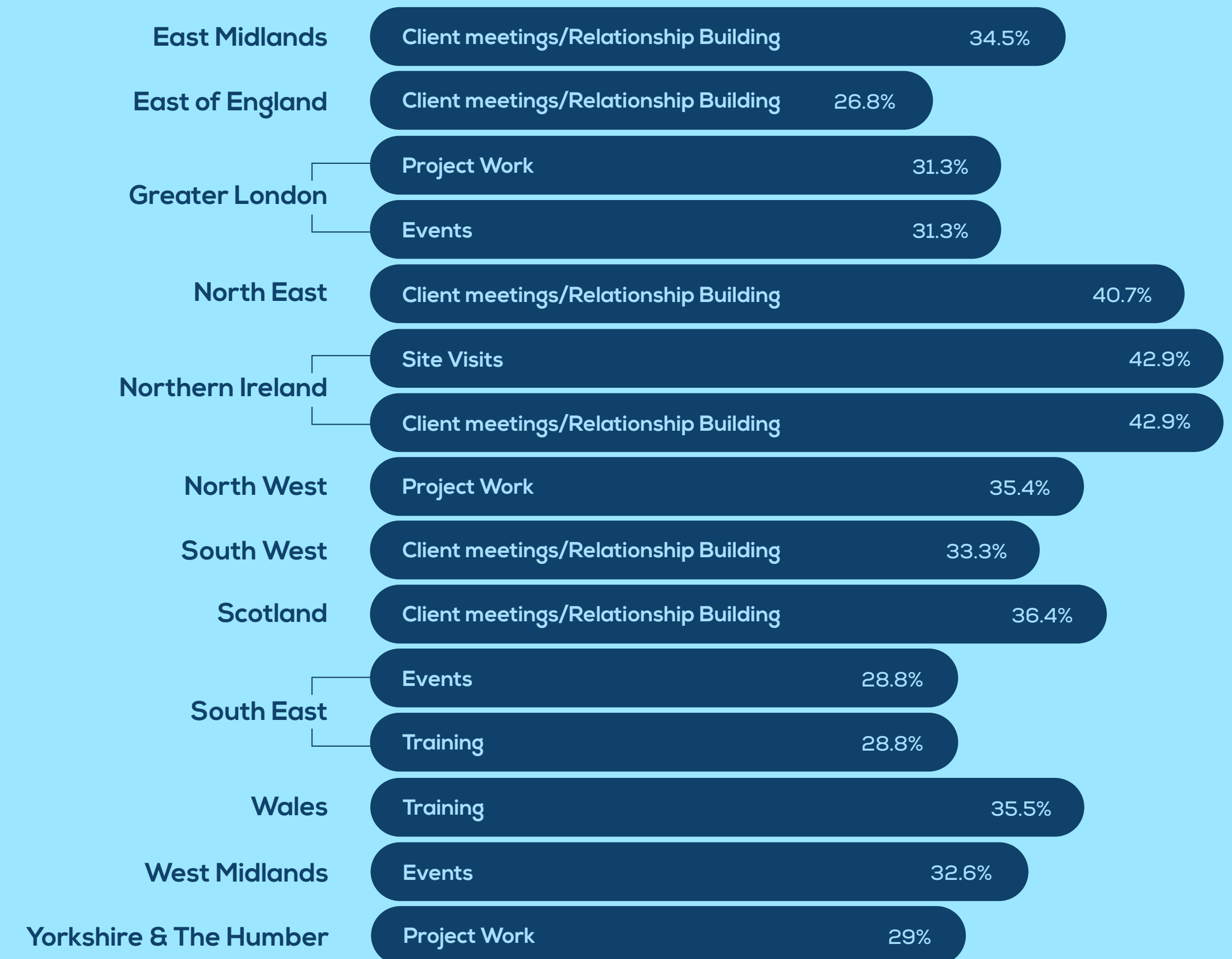
When we picture someone travelling for work, many may conjure up an image in their minds of a suited middle-aged man, briefcase in hand, sipping champagne in the business lounge before a long-haul flight to New York. But in reality, the face of work travel looks very different – and is often far less glamorous.

Today, professionals across a wide range of industries travel for work, not just corporates in finance and professional services. In fact, the research showed that those respondents working in automotive and those who are skilled tradespeople travel the most frequently for work, making multiple trips per week (34% and 30% respectively). In comparison only 8% of those surveyed who work in finance travel multiple times per week for work purposes.

The most popular reason for traveling for work amongst respondents is networking and client meetings (30%) while the other top reasons include:

- **Project work (28%)** – particularly common amongst those who work in the finance, marine, and R&D sectors.
- **Events and conferences (28%)** – with hospitality and entertainment professionals frequently on the move.
- **Site visits (27%)** – especially in offshore and gas industries, where over 50% of surveyed workers travel for this reason.

## Top reasons for travel in each region





# Travel frequency by generation and trip type

(domestic vs. international) on average  
– calculated using mean.



Work-related travel also plays a major role in training and upskilling. Despite the rise of online learning post-COVID, those working in education still travel for training – 52% to be exact – proving that many skills are best learned face-to-face.

And how old are these travelling professionals? And are they all just senior chiefs and executives? While those surveyed aged over 55 travel the most frequently (5 times per month on average), their trips are more likely to be domestic (78% of trips compared to

17% for international). It’s actually Gen Z – 41% of respondents in this group being in middle and senior management roles – leading the charge for international travel (35% of trips). This generation is engaging in meaningful and purpose-led trips, with 58% of Gen Z respondents specifically traveling for project-work, site visits or research and fieldwork.

The bottom line? Travelling for work isn’t about boardrooms and luxury perks – it’s a practical, sometimes gritty, and essential part of getting the job done.





"We had to reschedule a surgeon's travel on very short notice due to the strikes in France. Thanks to our TMC team at Take2Eton, they delivered a last-minute solution which meant that the surgeon could perform a very difficult surgery on a young cancer patient.

That wouldn't have been possible without their attentive, proactive and flexible support. Our patient who is a mother of two children will now have a fast recovery and major quality of life improvement as a result of the surgery going ahead on time, with minimal disruption."

***Clinical Sales Representative,  
Medical & Pharmaceutical Company***



## Education industry case study from Diversity Travel:

With three colleges, 12 schools and over 2,500 staff within its academic profile, the University of Salford needed to increase its policy compliance and reduce travel spend. Without TMC support, the University struggled with fragmented spending, rapidly decreasing budgets, disorganisation and out of policy bookings. With a dedicated account management team at Diversity Travel, the University now has the means to understand its travel trends and benefit from tangible costs savings due to access to thousands of academic fares and negotiated rates.



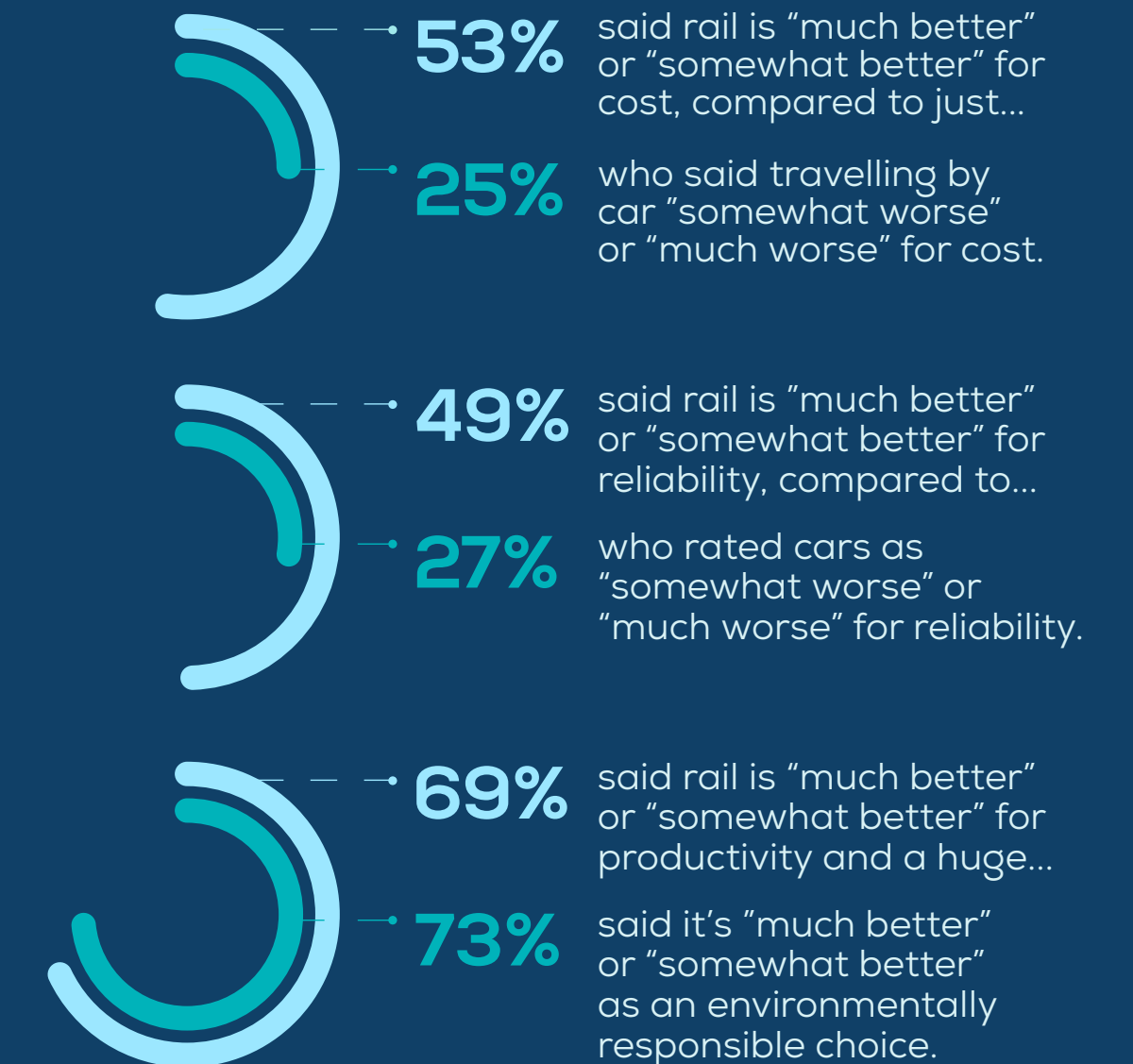
# The Domestic Travel Reality

Remember the suited businessman mentioned earlier? Chances are, you pictured him at an airport. But that's another common stereotype, because most travel for work doesn't involve leaving the country.

**In fact, 62% of business trips for work happen domestically, and often not by air.**

Respondents travel mostly by car when travelling for work domestically (30%), followed by rail (21%), then by air (20%). However, when asked what their preferences were, rail concerningly came last. Cars are the preferred mode of transport, with 29% of professionals surveyed preferring to drive, followed by air travel (27%) and then rail (26%).

Contradictorily, however, when asked to compare car and rail against a number of key factors – cost, convenience, reliability and sustainability – rail came out ahead of car:



If this is the case, why are people still resorting to using their cars more and preferring to use them? Of course, some shorter journeys (or multi-leg journeys) might inevitably always be better suited to driving, but train travel often isn't a viable, or possible, option outside of well-connected cities.

For instance, the East Midlands (17%), North-East (20%) and South-West (19%) regions report the lowest preference for rail while cities with better connections like London (28%) and in the North-West (35%) (for example Manchester and Liverpool) have the highest preference for rail. Driving is therefore the viable – or in many cases the only – option.



# Regional Disparities



Air travel continues to have its place as a fast, and relatively reliable option for those travelling for work. 1 in 5 of those surveyed reported traveling by air for domestic business trips, rising to 34% in Greater London. This figure drops off outside of this region, with air as the least favoured in the Yorkshire and The Humber (15%).

When spotlighting the largest city in Yorkshire, Leeds, the most preferred mode of transport amongst respondents is car (37%), followed by rail (26%), then air (17%) even though Leeds has a large train station and nearby airport, Leeds Bradford. Respondents in Leeds also travelled frequently for work (20% traveling multiple times a week compared to the national average of 15%). This suggests that improvements across both rail and air could allow people to move away from car travel.

**Projects such as Northern Powerhouse Rail and Leeds Bradford Airport's 'Vision 2030' strategy are signs of welcome infrastructure investment, signalling positive intent, however the issue isn't just about mass rail and terminal programs.**

It's about the availability of localised services: reliable routes, greater commitment from rail operators and airlines, and better integration with local ground transport to strengthen connections, enhance regional mobility and economic integration. As one of Leeds' primary rail operators, TransPennine Express saw a cancellation rate of 4.8% for the rail year April 2023 to March 2024, down from 6.6% in the previous year. Despite this marginal recovery, this is still above the national average for rail cancellations and a sign of continued disruption for those travelling for work.

If these issues persist, these cities and regions risk being held back by both under-served and unreliable transport links, limiting not just travel options but also economic opportunities. Strategic investment in routes and service frequency – particularly for growing business hubs like Yorkshire – is what will truly unlock value, drive growth, and support businesses of all sizes.

**At the BTA, we'll continue to lobby for major infrastructure and service improvements – to ensure that travel isn't a privilege for city-dwellers, but a practical option for all. We must offer a range of options to ensure businesses can grow as they need to.**



# Mode of domestic transport usage across the UK:

The regional split reveals that workers are kept behind the wheel as our transport infrastructure fails to move the dial



Car



Plane

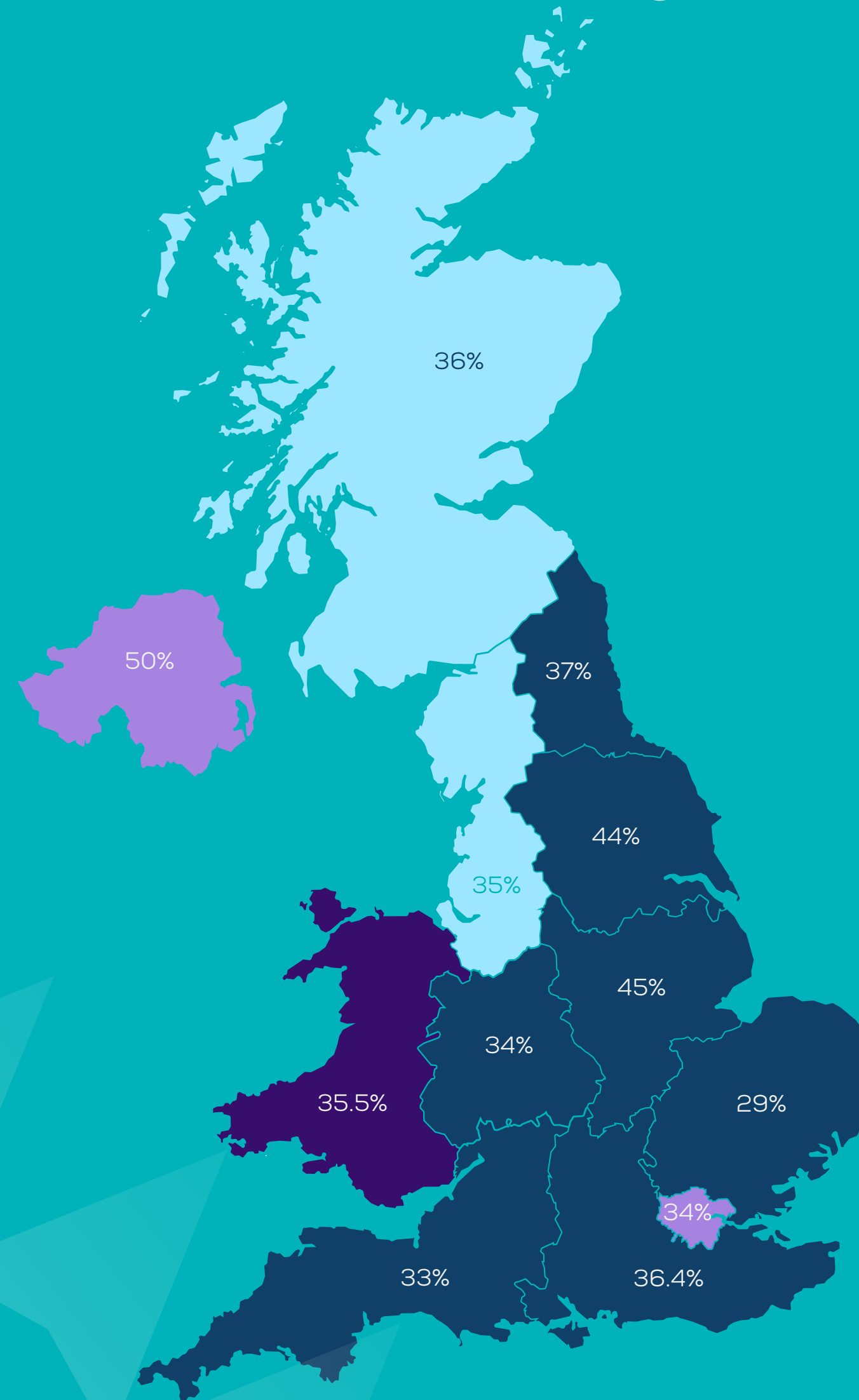


Train

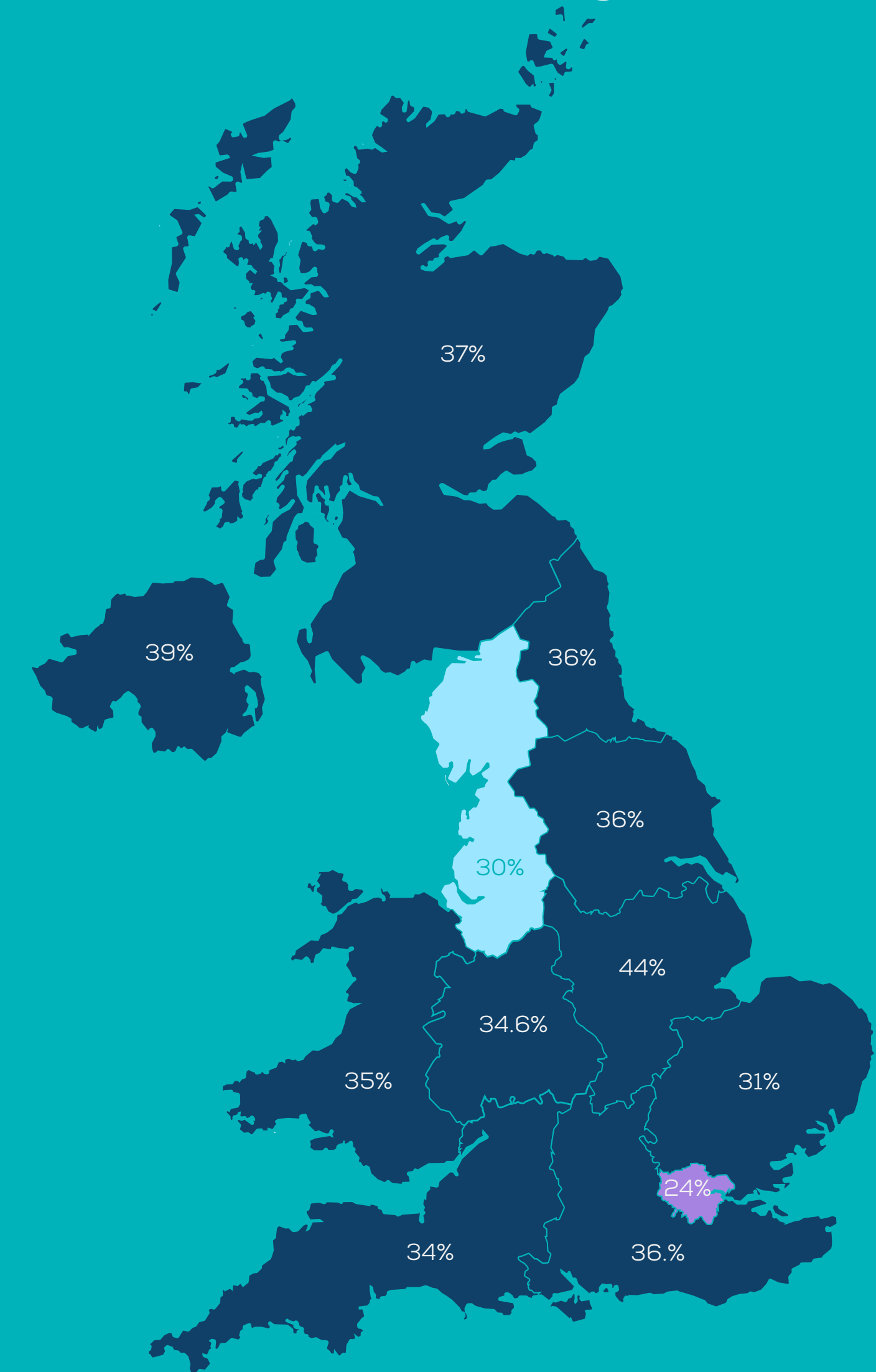


Car/Plane

## Preferred usage



## Actual usage





# The Rail Conundrum

Rail has the potential to be the core of efficient and sustainable domestic travel. So why aren't more people travelling for work opting for it?

The simple answer: it's not good enough yet.

Unreliable services, high costs, and a lack of direct business routes mean trains still lag behind on people's list of preferred travel methods – respondents said that better reliability (54%) and cost (51%) would encourage their businesses to shift to rail when travelling for work. A historic lack of investment into regional transport means for many it's simply not an option. Rail is often seen as an expensive gamble – recent data shows that cancellation rates are higher for rail (3.4%) than for air (2.4%)<sup>1</sup>.

Network Rail confirmed there were 6,718 train cancellations across the UK in 2024, a 15% rise with trains running a total of 187,475 minutes late, equivalent to 130 days worth of delays<sup>2</sup>. It highlights the growing fragility of the UK rail network and underscores the urgent need for greater operational resilience, and passenger trust.

Many also face another obstacle: the booking process.

If this challenge were resolved, it would be a different story:

**9 in 10 travellers surveyed say a unified booking system for rail plus onward connections would significantly boost the appeal of travelling by train.**

More direct links to business hubs would provide a real incentive to travellers to choose rail as a green option 37% of all respondents rated connectivity as the top factor to encourage this shift.

<sup>1</sup> CAA data on UK airport cancellations for 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Rail and Road (ORR), Train Operating Company (TOC) key statistics report, April 2023 to March 2024.







# The Onboard Experience

Even when travellers do overcome these hesitations and make it onboard, 47% of respondents report that on-board facilities would encourage them to shift to more sustainable business travel modes. From a lack of Wi-Fi and power outlets to cramped seating, the onboard experience often falls short of allowing professionals to work while in transit – a core requirement for those who need to remain productive while on the move.

While there are generational differences in what people prioritise – the report showing that 31% of Gen Z respondents wanting strong digital connectivity, and 58% of Gen X prioritising affordability – the truth is that trains are currently failing to meet any group's needs.

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That's why, to truly compete with other forms of transport, rail must become more cost-effective, accessible, reliable, and practical. Only then can it fulfil its promise as the default choice for sustainable work-related travel. Of course, this will require an investment in strategic infrastructure, which can take time for the benefits to be seen.

**There's an ownable opportunity for TMCs to step in and help make rail be seen as attractive an option for people travelling for work. By managing multi-leg journeys, offering support with bookings, and handling the complexities of planning, they can help bridge the gap and seamlessly facilitate complex trips.**



# No Traveller Left Behind: Why Accessibility Matters

As we've established, travelling for work is a necessity across respondents in all sectors, age groups, and levels of seniority. But for some, it's a necessity that's extremely difficult to navigate – particularly those surveyed travelling for work who have disabilities.

In fact, 38% of disabled professionals surveyed travel for work once a week or more, making them significant users of transport for work purposes. Yet, on top of the universal frustrations around cost, reliability, and connectivity, they face an added – and often overlooked – layer of difficulty. Transport's accessibility.

Only 13% of respondents who identify as disabled said that accessibility doesn't impact their ability to travel for work. This means that the overwhelming majority face barriers, with the challenge especially acute on the railways where

step-free access remains inconsistent, stations are frequently under-staffed, and many trains can't adequately accommodate mobility aids. What should be a simple journey often becomes a logistical and emotional nightmare. This is simply not good enough.

This issue creates a clear call to action for TMCs and the wider industry to champion accessible travel solutions and help organisations build inclusive travel policies, so that they can ensure no one is left behind.

Because this isn't just about logistics – it's about equity and dignity; it's about designing a travel system that works for everyone. And when we build systems that support the most marginalised, we build systems that benefit us all.



"Modern technology such as the Passenger Assist app has made it so much easier to let rail station staff know my exact access needs in advance but also update them with any changes to my plans in real-time as I travel in wheelchair. However, I have had instances coming back from London where staff have refused me on a train as it was leaving within five minutes and I've had to wait another hour for the next train – it leaves you feeling rather helpless.

I've also faced issues when going through passport control once I've arrived back in the UK from abroad and have been lumped in the assistance queue with non-British citizens undergoing visa checks. There's clearly an effort to provide help, but a different approach would make the experience smoother for passengers like me."

**Joanna McNicol,**  
**Senior Business Travel Consultant, BCD Travel**



# Sports Case Study:

As a parasport team, British Wheelchair Basketball (the UK's National Governing Body) faces complex logistical and accessibility challenges when travelling. Sports chairs, wheel bags, and physio equipment must be securely transported, and athletes are often barred from using personal wheelchairs during layovers, undermining their independence and dignity.

Assistance teams at airports are sometimes delayed or unaware of arrangements, causing long waits to board or disembark. With 24/7 access to a specialised TMC via APTI, the team secured early boarding, dedicated check-in, and expedited security where possible. Routes were carefully chosen to allow ample time for assistance, avoiding tight connections. By anticipating issues and responding in real time, the TMC removed much of the burden from athletes and staff, allowing them to focus on the team's performance rather than logistics.





# The Business Case for Change

The bottom line is businesses need to travel for work.



But, while travelling for work remains essential, how we travel must evolve: cars and planes can't remain the default forever – not if we're serious about building a sustainable future.

Rail presents a clear path forward for domestic travel: it's greener,

often more productive, and increasingly preferred – but it's not currently living up to its potential. To deliver on the promise of sustainable work-related travel, rail must be supported by the right infrastructure, reliable services, and a seamless booking experience.

That's where TMCs can make a critical difference. With 51% of respondents who travel for business wanting TMCs to handle integrated bookings – including train travel and onward connections – there's a clear demand for door-to-door, multi-modal solutions that take the friction out of choosing rail.

The future of travelling for work is about the journey as much as the destination – and now is the time to act to ensure a future of work-related travel that is efficient, seamless and inclusive.

**This is a pivotal moment. A collective opportunity:**

## For national government:

To work with devolved and mayoral administrations to invest in upgraded rail infrastructure, expanded direct routes, and accessible stations.

## For rail operators:

To simplify ticketing and fix persistent issues around reliability, pricing, and on-board facilities that currently deter people from using it for work-related travel, particularly as we move towards having a single, national body, bringing track and train together and reversing years of fragmentation: Great British Railways.

## For devolved leaders and mayors:

To work with national government to improve connections within and between regions, building inter-regional rail and tram links and linking these to the national rail network and major transport hubs like regional airports.

## For businesses:

To adopt rail-first policies and support greener travel behaviours across their workforce.

## For TMCs:

To lead the charge in simplifying and promoting rail as the smarter, more sustainable choice.





The BTA is the authority on business travel. Working collaboratively across the industry and with the government to promote the integral role of business travel and events to the wider economy.

Originally founded in 1967, the BTA has a diverse membership and roster of industry partners. It's TMC membership accounts for over 90% of UK expenditure on managed business travel, delivering value for money and great service to business travellers in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. The BTA focuses on delivering practical solutions to challenges and market changes, as well as supporting best practice, sustainability and the well-being of travellers.

### Research Partner:

**CENSUSWIDE**  
THE RESEARCH CONSULTANTS

The research was commissioned by the BTA and conducted by Censuswide, among a sample of 1,000 UK employees who travel for work and whose business pays for their travel. The respondents include employees working at businesses from a range of sizes, from small companies of less than nine staff up to large multinationals with over 500 workers. The research also includes a cross-section of industries, from charity, healthcare and the public sector, to marine, oil and gas, and construction.

The data was collected between 13th May 2025 and 20th May 2025. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct and ESOMAR principles. Censuswide is also a member of the British Polling Council.

For more information on BTA  
please visit: [www.thebta.org.uk](http://www.thebta.org.uk)  
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