



Better for business

How train companies can better meet the needs of those travelling for work

WE'VE all been there - seeing your train suddenly cancelled and realising you'll miss that dinner, birthday, or film. Now imagine that it's an important work commitment you're now late for.

Even so, rail travel offers undeniable advantages. In fact, recent research from the Business Travel Association (BTA) reveals that rail is considered better than car travel for environmental impact (73%), productivity (69%), and convenience (54%).

While rail (26%) is currently behind car (29%) and air (27%) for business travel preference, this highlights a clear opportunity. By enhancing reliability, affordability and convenience, rail can better meet the needs of individuals travelling for work, and become a preferred choice.

So, what changes can make rail a more practical option for business travellers? The encouraging news is that there's a lot of potential for positive change.

Travelling for business requires reliability, fewer cancellations and delays, and better timetabling. More than half (54%) of BTA research respondents said improved reliability would encourage their business to shift to rail for work travel.

Currently, timetabling can still feel like a postcode lottery, with those outside city centres often facing limited services. Increasing frequency and connectivity would go a long way to making rail the go-to choice for professionals, particularly as Gen Z places the greatest value on speed and convenience of travel.

By contrast, Baby Boomers and Gen X cited affordability as the most important factor that would encourage their business to move to rail. This highlights the need for the rail industry to strengthen its cost competitiveness over other transport modes.

In addition to making trains become more reliable, frequent and affordable, passengers also want to see more from the on-board experience.

Nearly half (47%) of respondents said that better on-board facilities would encourage them to switch to more sustainable travel options. Rail operators need to look at where their trains can be more workable - with suitable workspaces, reliable WiFi, and power outlets - to help travellers stay productive on the move.

Beyond the journey itself, technology has a key role to play in making the process smoother for business travellers.

Integrated booking systems, where flights, hotels, rail, and car hire are connected and managed in one platform, would eliminate the need to juggle multiple systems, removing friction and saving time for busy professionals.

Technology's benefits must also extend to accessibility.

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Among disabled professionals surveyed, 38% travel for work once a week or more, yet only 13% said accessibility doesn't impact their ability to do so. That makes a strong case for enhanced accessibility across travel and booking systems.

Public transport can be a lifeline, but only if it meets individual needs. Booking apps should enable users to input their accessibility requirements and automatically arrange the necessary assistance to ensure a smooth, dignified travel experience.


Regardless of the current hurdles faced by those travelling for business, travel management companies (TMCs) are there to step in and make the process as smooth as possible. This includes tasks such as reorganising routes or transport modes due to cancellations, finding the best prices, ensuring all travel is integrated, and managing expenses.

TMCs can also provide specialist assistance. For example, British Wheelchair Basketball faces complex challenges, having to secure specialised equipment and address the loss of athlete independence when personal wheelchairs are restricted during layovers - an issue worsened by inconsistent airport assistance causing delays.

With the help of a 24/7 TMC via ATPI, the team secured early boarding, dedicated check-in, expedited security, and carefully planned routes to allow for ample connection time. With this support in place, the logistical burden for the team was removed, helping them overcome the usual hurdles they face.

With rail already moving towards nationalisation, changes are under way. It's important, however, that improvements not only focus on infrastructure and operations, but also keep the passenger experience at the heart of planning, ensuring that rail remains accessible and convenient for business travellers.

By making rail journeys more appealing, we can establish rail as a strong and preferred option for people travelling for work, enabling workers to be more productive, to experience fewer delays, and to want to use a more suitable form of transport.

Achieving this requires close collaboration between rail operators and travel management companies to ensure that infrastructure, services and planning work together to deliver the best possible travel experience. 

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW? Email: rail@bauermedia.co.uk

Different generations have different priorities for business travel.