



Spatial Economics Research Centre

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Spatial Inequalities in Commuting Times

[Posted by Prof Henry G. Overman]

My bus journey in to work this morning took 90 minutes for 5 miles (due to arrangements for the Queen's Speech). Usually it takes around an hour on a bus. I can run it in 40 minutes and ride it in 25 (my preferred modes of transport).

My reasons for mentioning this is that it got me thinking about my comments yesterday on [transport spending across different areas](#). Towards the end of that piece I wrote as follows: "Why do we care about the balance of infrastructure expenditure per se? Surely we care about the provision of transport services, broadly defined. Is it fair to invest in areas with low congestion at the expense of investment in areas with high congestion just to ensure that expenditure is equal? Why should we invest equally in places with no or slow population growth at the expense of places that are seeing high and continued growth in population? Why do we need as much investment per head in towns with a population of 100,000 as we do in cities with populations of millions?"

Inspired by my journey to work this morning, I went and took a look at the [National Travel Survey](#) to find out just how large is the variation in travel to work times by region. I've copied and pasted them below (where I've also added times for the average business trip). The variations across regions are pretty striking. The average Londoner spends around 41 minutes commuting compared to 23 minutes in the North East. Assuming 252 business days and 30 days annual leave that equates to a difference of 7992 hours (or 5.5 days) per year. These numbers aren't perfect (I'd like to see them income adjusted for example) but they point to huge variations in journey times. I am not in any way suggesting that these figures are 'unfair' but they paint a very different (and arguably more informative) picture than that coming from the figures on transport expenditure per capita.

	Commuting	Business
Region of residence:		
North East	23	37
North West	25	35
Yorkshire and The Humber	25	38
East Midlands	23	35
West Midlands	25	40
East of England	29	43
London	41	44
South East	30	41
South West	23	37

Posted by Prof Henry G. Overman on [Wednesday, June 04, 2014](#)

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