

Commuting Clashes: 66% of professionals want help with cost of getting to work

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Two-thirds of UK professionals think commuting expenses are the most crucial cost to have subsidised by employers.

Only recently Lloyds Bank plc confirmed it would be reviewing office attendance as part of performance-based bonuses for its most senior bankers. Joining a roster of major companies announcing return-to-office mandates – from Amazon and JPMorgan Chase to retail giants Boots and ASOS.

[Robert Walters](#)’ recent poll of 2,000 white-collar UK professionals has now revealed the slew of Return to Office (RTO) mandates may be creating a ‘travel rift’ between employers and professionals, as many workers face inflated costs.

Habiba Khatoon, Director of Robert Walters Midlands comments: “Calls for a return to office have only gotten louder this year, as leaders increasingly view them as being key to enhancing productivity and workplace culture.

“However, as the pandemic gave rise to hybrid working as a standard, RTO mandates could leave many professionals with longer, more expensive journeys into the office.”

Major factor in new job roles

When asked about the most crucial workplace cost to get subsidised by their employer – two thirds (66%) of professionals prioritised commuting expenses over tech equipment, food and health/wellness options.

Indeed – half (52%) of UK professionals claim commuting distances are a major factor when considering a

new job role.

However, 84% of UK professionals say they currently don't receive any support from their employer when it comes to commuting costs.

Habiba comments: "We're already noticing how an increasingly high cost-of-living, along with professionals being faced with longer commutes and travel disruptions are influencing what they expect and value in employer offerings.

"Yet with tightened budgets, rises in minimum wage and employer tax expected in April – many employers will struggle to give them exactly what they want."

Micro-or super commutes?

The number of 'super commuters' (professionals travelling at least 90 minutes to get to work) rose during and immediately after the pandemic as hybrid working arrangements meant professionals could move out of major cities.

However, Robert Walters data shows that less than a fifth (18%) of professionals are now willing to spend up to 2 hours travelling into the office – with even less (6%) spending any time above that.

In fact, many (39%) stated they'd commute for up to an hour, whilst over a third (37%) wouldn't travel for any longer than 45 minutes.

Habiba adds: "With delays and cancellations adding extra minutes and sometimes hours onto commutes, those who moved out of cities initially may be coming to regret their decisions – now faced with either having to seek new positions closer to home or take longer journeys to work for an increasing number of days each week."

Salaries taking a hit

Pre-pandemic, commuting costs averaged between 6-10% of professional's salaries. Currently, UK professionals spend an average of between 1-5% of their monthly salary on commuting.

More days in the office could cause commuting prices to edge closer to pre-pandemic levels and considering inflation and cost of living hikes – could result in an even bigger chunk being taken out of professionals' salaries.

How much are professionals forking out?

According to data from Robert Walters, a third of professionals in London already spend over £200 commuting to work each month – as do a quarter of those in based in the Midlands.

Driving or taking public transport into the office are the two most popular [modes of transport](#) in the UK – with fuel prices still high and rail fares expected to go up by over 4% this March, prices aren't expected to get any more affordable.

Habiba comments: "Rather than firms engaging in traditional salary wars – this year, we could see companies compete by ramping up travel subsidies, flexibility or allowing staff to commute in during off-peak periods to help combat rising costs."

Hushed hybrid to become the norm

Work-life balance remains a top priority for many professionals, additional Robert Walters research found that 60% were willing to stick to a lower-paying job if it offered greater flexibility, rather than switching jobs solely for better pay.

Not only that, but [200](#) companies in the UK have signed up to make a permanent move to the four-day working week.

Indeed, despite the official word from many leaders being to boost office attendance, two fifths (41%) of UK managers admit they'll look at implementing 'hushed hybrid' – allowing their staff to quietly work from home, to still allow flexibility.

Habiba concludes: "Hybrid-working has been a key working arrangement for many professionals since 2019 and whilst some will be determined to maintain this, others may be more willing (and able) to make a full-time move back to the office.

"Employers will no doubt need to re-evaluate their attraction and retention strategies – figuring out what a 'good employment offer' means this year – especially to professionals with increasingly diverse needs."