Department for Transport | Commute Zero

Full report | May 2023

Contents

Executive summary

Background

The Department for Transport commissioned Thinks Insight and Strategy to conduct research with businesses in England exploring barriers, drivers and incentives to them offering sustainable commuting and business travel initiatives to their staff (such as the Cycle to Work scheme, lift sharing or decarbonising vehicle fleets). The research also explored the support businesses would like to successfully implement such initiatives.

The research comprised qualitative interviews with a sample of 30 businesses in England, including 10 businesses that had already taken up sustainable commuting and business travel initiatives and 20 businesses that had not. The sample provided a spread of business size, location, rurality, and sector. The interviews lasted 60 minutes each and were conducted online via Zoom. Fieldwork took place between February 9th and March 10th, 2023.

Context

Participants noted that changes to working patterns during the Covid-19 pandemic had reduced the volume of commuting and business travel in their organisations, leading to sustainability benefits. However, it was felt that these changes were driven by the pandemic context rather than a conscious environmentally-motivated effort amongst their businesses or employees. There was widespread recognition that working patterns were still shifting post-pandemic, which meant that commuting and business travel behaviours were yet to stabilise.

Initiatives

In the sample of businesses that had taken up commuting and business travel initiatives, the most common offers were: the Cycle to Work scheme, decarbonising company vehicle fleets, and facilitating lift sharing schemes. There was limited awareness amongst participants in these businesses of the other initiatives available. This was particularly true for non-adopters for whom lacking awareness of initiatives and their benefits, along with costs and organisational culture, was a major barrier.

Company size

Company size was a key factor influencing whether and how businesses introduced sustainable travel initiatives. Participants in larger businesses were more likely to have HR teams with a remit for organising employee business travel and commuting and were more likely to search for and introduce initiatives on behalf of their staff. Smaller businesses were more likely to rely on word of mouth (both business to business and between employees) and employee initiative to identify and roll out the schemes. Amongst large companies who were non-adopters of initiatives, take-up was less likely to be

inhibited by lack of awareness (due to HR departments often being familiar with such schemes), and more likely to be due to other restraints such as cost or organisational culture.

Businesses that had adopted sustainable travel initiatives commonly identified difficulties in monitoring uptake and measuring the effectiveness of initiatives. Participants in these businesses described using sign-up rates and surveys to measure the effectiveness of an initiative, but there was recognition that data gathered was often unreliable (e.g., it was often based on self-reporting surveys which weren't consistently filled in by employees) and that monitoring initiatives was time intensive.

Drivers for adoption

Decisions about whether or not to adopt commuting and business travel initiatives were primarily driven by the perceived benefits they would bring to the organisation. Participants described conducting cost-benefit analyses where they would weigh-up the benefits of initiatives to the organisation against the cost and time implications associated with their adoption. This was reported across both adopters and non-adopters, but more frequently by adopters who were more likely to be aware of the potential benefits to their organisations.

Participants identified a range of business benefits, namely:

- Enhancing the image of the business;
- Benefitting employees (e.g., providing/subsidising equipment such as a bike or an electric vehicle);
- Strengthening the business strategy (e.g. strengthening their socially responsible credentials/reputation);
- To a lesser extent, protecting the environment.

However, participants felt that the benefits associated with adopting initiatives were often unclear, difficult to measure and intangible. This view was particularly prevalent amongst non-adopters, with some of the adopters being already sold on the potential benefits.

Barriers preventing adoption

The main barriers to uptake were the cost and time to introduce and maintain the initiatives, including the one off cost of providing infrastructure like bike sheds/showers or the ongoing administrative costs of monitoring and implementing the initiatives. Other barriers identified by participants included low awareness and understanding of the initiatives that are available to businesses and how to introduce them. Businesses also identified concerns about the administrative and logistical challenges in adopting and maintaining travel initiatives, concerns about the extent to which employees would buy in and use the initiatives, and whether the infrastructure at the business premises allows for the initiative to be introduced (e.g. charging points and public transport infrastructure).

Incentives that could encourage adoption

Businesses identified a range of incentives that would encourage initiative adoption and help overcome the barriers, with these broadly falling into four key areas:

- Providing financial incentives such as tax credits, grants or subsidies;
- Offering support in identifying the most appropriate initiatives for their business as well as guidance on how to adopt them;
- Developing current infrastructure such as the public transport system to feasibly encourage replacing private vehicle commutes and business travel with public transport travel;
- Increasing awareness of such initiatives so they become high salience topics.

The general assumption was the government (either local or central) would be the organisation providing these, though some did mention that perhaps charities could play a role.

On prompting, the idea of an accreditation (such as a badge or logo to include on business communications) was generally well-received and could act as an incentive for businesses to introduce (further) sustainable travel initiatives. Businesses believed that an accreditation would have positive impacts both for individual businesses and for the environment and economy in general. It was seen as a way to reward businesses already pursuing sustainability, while incentivizing others to follow suit. Although there were no businesses who actively opposed the notion of an accreditation, there were some who believed it runs the risk of being meaningless if it didn't require businesses to enact genuine behaviour change.

Differences between adopters/ non-adopters

Businesses who had already introduced sustainability initiatives relating to commuting and business travel (adopters) were less restrained by awareness barriers and were more inclined to understand and acknowledge the potential benefits provided by such initiatives. These businesses were more likely to be inhibited by cost/financial constraints and rarely by motivation (having already overcome this barrier). They often commented on the administrative costs and lack of robust ways of monitoring success of schemes as the major barriers. Overall, they were supportive and positive toward the prospect of introducing more initiatives and were willing to invest in order to do so.

Non-adopters were more likely to be constrained by awareness barriers, as well as lacking understanding of the potential benefits of schemes. These businesses frequently noted how they were unaware of what schemes would entail and which benefits they may provide. These businesses were also more likely to be constrained by restrictive organisational cultures that were not open to the prospect of implementing such changes (which were in turn also exacerbated by

their inability to succinctly express their potential benefits). Despite this, they were still often supportive in principle to taking up initiatives.

Introduction

In January 2023, Thinks Insight and Strategy (formerly BritainThinks) was commissioned by the Department for Transport (DfT) to conduct qualitative research with businesses in England. The focus of this research was understanding the barriers, drivers, and incentives to involvement in sustainable commuting initiatives (such as the Cycle to Work scheme, lift sharing or decarbonising vehicle fleets) as well as the support they would like in order to successfully implement such schemes. This report sets out the findings from the research, which consisted of 30 in-depth interviews with business participants.

Background

As the UK continues its journey towards net zero, the decarbonisation of transport will play a key role in reducing emissions. Commuting and business travel using cars and vans accounts for a significant proportion of mileage clocked up by drivers. Therefore, effective interventions which help to reduce the use of cars and vans for commuting and business travel could make a positive impact.

The Department for Transport is exploring options to support employers to take action to reduce the emissions associated with their workforce's commuting and travel behaviour. Primary research with businesses was needed to inform the development of the campaign.

This research builds on an initial scoping review commissioned by DfT and delivered by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) between November 2022 – January 2023[1]. The NatCen review comprised a literature review and fifteen interviews with large employers that had taken up low carbon travel initiatives for staff, employer membership organisations, and local authorities to explore current uptake of initiatives and the main barriers and incentives to take up.

Some of the findings from the NatCen review have been incorporated into this report where they provide additional insight.

Research methodology and objectives

The research comprised 30 x 60-minute qualitative interviews conducted over Zoom with businesses in England to explore the barriers, drivers, and incentives to their involvement in sustainable commuting initiatives, as well as the support needed to successfully implement such schemes. The findings from this research will be used by the DfT to inform an upcoming campaign.

The research explored the following topics:

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[1] NatCen. "Commute Zero – A Scoping Review." (2022).

- For businesses who *have not yet* undertaken sustainable commuting initiatives:
  - Exploring barriers, drivers and incentives for involvement;
  - Understanding support needs to successfully implement schemes.
- For businesses who *have already* undertaken sustainable commuting initiatives
  - Explore experience of barriers and how those barriers were overcome;
  - Explore enablers, drivers and incentives that encouraged involvement;
  - Understand what support was helpful;
  - Understand what businesses would recommend central/local government implement in the future to encourage businesses to take up schemes.

A qualitative approach was adopted to fully explore and understand the responses of each participant to the nuanced and complex issues covered during the research. The methodology gave participants the time and space to deeply consider the barriers and motivations to sustainable travel initiative adoption, as well as the type of support that would be helpful in adopting initiatives.

Recruitment approach and sample

The sample comprised 30 participants, recruited from a selection of England-based businesses, including 10 businesses that had already taken up sustainable commuting and business travel initiatives and 20 businesses that had not. The sample included businesses from a range of sectors, size (calculated by number of employees), locations, rurality and sustainable travel initiative offering.

To be eligible to take part, participants needed to be responsible for making decisions about sustainable commuting and business travel initiatives within their organisation. The sample included a range of job titles, including founders, chief officers, and HR managers, depending on individual companies' structures and level of adoption of sustainable initiatives. Participants could also have either HQ roles, where decisions might be ultimately made to regional, local, or specific site responsibility where decisions might also be made and will be put into practice.

The achieved sample of businesses that took part in the research is summarised in the tables below:

Table 1 Sample breakdown

Category	Sub-category	Total	Initiative Adopters	Non-adopters
Business size	Small (10-49 employees)	7	2	5

Business size	Medium (50-249 employees)	12	3	9
Business size	Large (250+ employees)	11	5	6
Sustainable travel initiative offering	Initiative adopters	10	10	0
Sustainable travel initiative offering	Non-adopters	20	0	20
Company rurality	Urban	11	5	6
Company rurality	Suburban	16	5	11
Company rurality	Rural	5	0	5
Company location	South East and Greater London (outside M25)	5	0	5
Company location	Midlands	6	1	5
Company location	East of England	1	0	1
Company location	North West	12	4	8
Company location	South West	4	3	1
Company location	North East	2	2	0
Sector	Manufacturing	7	1	6
Sector	Construction and engineering	3	1	2
Sector	Healthcare	2	1	1
Sector	Property and housing	3	1	2
Sector	Retail and wholesale	5	1	4
Sector	Professional services	8	4	4
Sector	Other	3	1	2

The range of travel initiatives offered by the 10 adopters in the sample include:

- 10 employers providing cycle schemes;
- 4 employers decarbonising their vehicle fleets;
- 3 employers who have introduced sustainable travel infrastructure, including EV charging points and secure bike racks;
- 2 employers with centrally managed lift sharing services; and,
- 1 employer subsidising public transport costs.

Of the 20 sustainable travel non-adopters in the sample, 7 had not considered introducing sustainable travel measures, 3 had considered introducing such initiatives but decided not to, 8 were actively considering introducing commuting and business travel initiatives, and 2 intended to introduce such initiatives.

A note on the analysis and report

As is the nature of qualitative research, the findings in this report are reflective of what individual participants in the sample said. The businesses recruited to take part in the research were not a statistically representative cross-section of

all businesses that engaged in sustainable commuting and business travel initiatives. Consequently, the findings are illustrative and not generalisable to the whole population of businesses in UK/England.

Sub-group differences have been highlighted in this report where a particular view was expressed by most participants in a given sub-group, and this was either different from, or a development of, the general business view. While the sample size allowed some indicative, comparative analysis by business size, sector or sustainable initiative offering, it was not large enough to permit comparative analysis on a combination of these variables.

Context

> **Key findings:**
> - The Covid-19 pandemic had reduced the volume of commuting and business travel in organisations, leading to sustainability benefits. These changes were driven by the pandemic context rather than a conscious environmentally-motivated effort.
> - Working patterns were still felt to be shifting post-pandemic, meaning commuting and business travel behaviours were yet to stabilise.
> - There were high levels of recognition that commuting and business travel accounted for a significant proportion of a business's carbon emissions.
> - While many businesses believed that corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability were becoming increasing driving forces for business decisions, such factors were often regarded as subordinate to cost and logistics, particularly in the context of an economic downturn.

Changing commuting and business travel behaviours in response to Covid-19

Participants noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had significantly decreased the frequency at which many employees commuted. This was due to changing working habits meaning many employees had moved to remote or part-remote working patterns. Some also referenced changing the location and size of their office due to the pandemic, or reducing the number of premises they operated in, meaning commuting behaviours and journeys looked markedly different to how they did pre-pandemic.

"We've changed a lot of our processes. We used to have 9 offices pre-pandemic, but post-pandemic the organisation decided to go down to 3."

(Large business, not offering travel initiatives, housing)

A reduction in commuting was more likely to be the case for employees with desk-based roles which allow for remote or hybrid working. There were a minority of businesses, however, who had made business decisions mandating office working 5 days a week (despite the type of work allowing for remote working), on the basis that senior decision-makers felt office working was more productive and efficient.

"We now rely a hybrid working model and that saves us costs on office space. Once a week is the minimum people need to do in the office, and I'd say two days a week is the average [...] People have really embraced the WFH culture – I don't think we could feasibly go back to fully in office without losing staff."

(Large business, offering travel initiatives, manufacturing)

"I could tell people to work from home, but it wouldn't benefit the business. The only thing that would make a marked difference [to our travel emissions] would be reducing the amount we travel and doing meetings on Zoom, but I don't believe there is a substitute for being face to face and having an in-person coffee. I actively discourage clients that prefer Zoom – I recognise its more cost and time effective, but I don't think it's better."

(Medium business, not offering travel initiatives, professional services)

Those working in manual jobs (for example, those working in manufacturing or construction) were more likely to commute more regularly due to the nature of their role. As such, the frequency at which they commuted had returned to pre-pandemic levels.

The Covid-19 pandemic and remote/hybrid working enabling people to relocate had also resulted in an increased number of employees conducting longer-distance commutes and business journeys, though these tended to be infrequent. With these commutes happening between once a week and once a month, employees were more likely to accept the journey length and absorb the travel cost.

"We have people based all over the UK. I live 90 miles away from my nearest office for example […] I relocated during Covid, and I'm happy to make the 90-minute commute once or twice a month."

(Large business, offering travel initiatives, telecommunications)

The Covid-19 pandemic had a similar effect on business travel with a much larger reliance on hybrid meetings, with staff only travelling for meetings in special circumstances (such as quarterly meetings). Many businesses were encouraging employees to take meetings online to save on time and money, and, in a minority of cases, to keep their carbon emissions low. Where employees were being encouraged to conduct meetings in person (for example, sales representatives meeting potential new clients), this was often dictated by the senior management team (rather than from employees themselves) who saw it as a more effective and traditional way of operating.

"Pre-Covid we were out of office 3 times a week on average – going to Preston or Birmingham, or even the South coast for the day for a meeting […] It's far less travel now – we don't travel to meetings, just for events. That travel is down to once a week."

(Small business, offering travel initiatives, professional services)

Other factors influencing commuting and business travel behaviours

Commuting behaviours were largely dependent on the location of the office. Employees with an office located in an urban location were more likely to commute via public transport, while employees whose office was based in suburban and rural locations were heavily reliant on commuting in their own car. More often than not, this was seen as the only feasible option available to them without significantly increasing the time spent commuting.

"The two main offices are in pretty rural locations. As there is no public transport, most of these 100 employees drive to work."

(Large business, not offering travel initiatives, healthcare)

"I was responsible for choosing the office. I drew two concentric circle between Piccadilly and Victoria train station, and the office was selected for that reason. I also liked that it had a really good bike and showering facilities. In terms of bus travel, it's also really well-connected."

(Small business, offering travel initiatives, professional services)

With the wider trend of remote and hybrid working, some businesses reported placing limits on the frequency at which employees could commute into the office or travel as part of business. While this had environmental benefits, in most instances this was due to the logistical constraints such as limiting office space, or for cost savings.

"We now have a certain set of criteria that staff stick to meaning they do not have to go out to customers at any request. [This means] they're more available and its more cost-effective."

(Large business, offering travel initiatives, manufacturing)

Whilst the pandemic's shift in employees' working patterns was seen as a long-term impact, a few businesses reported continuing to trial and shift working behaviours to find what worked best for them and their employees. This meant commuting and business travel behaviours were not fixed and would likely change over the coming years.

While some predicted that commuting and business travel may increase as working patterns continue to evolve following the pandemic, no businesses felt these would go back to pre-pandemic levels where solely office working was the norm.

Employer perspectives on sustainability in commuting and business travel

There were high levels of recognition that commuting and business travel accounted for a significant proportion of a business's carbon emissions, especially for businesses in professional services. However, only a minority of

businesses in the sample were consistently monitoring and measuring their commuting and business travel emissions, often as part of the company's wider carbon emissions. Carbon emission measuring was primarily done by businesses who offered sustainable travel initiatives and pledged that sustainability was a core business priority, with these tending to be professional services businesses. This accounted for a small minority of the research sample.

"We have an objective to half our carbon emissions – we've seen them fall by more than 50% since pre-Covid, but we know those have been creeping up. Travel and commuting accounted for the majority of our emissions."

(Small business, offering travel initiatives, professional services)

Overall, business travel and commuting were seen by businesses to be more sustainable than they were pre-pandemic. This was primarily due to changes to working patterns during the Covid-19 pandemic, rather than from any consciously environment-motivated efforts.

"[Pre-pandemic] around 70% of staff drove to work 5 days a week [...] Since Covid, the company has a hybrid working policy. By default, we have reduced our emissions."

(Large business, offering travel initiatives, manufacturing)

Businesses however saw the reduction in commuting and business travel as a positive consequence of the pandemic on their carbon emissions, and one they would like to maintain in the long-term.

Nonetheless, many businesses believed that corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability were becoming increasing driving forces for business decisions. However, such factors were often regarded as subordinate to cost and logistics. This was particularly the case in the context of the cost-of-living crisis where profit margins were being squeezed and non-essential business costs were deprioritised.

"Our parent company have a slogan that is all about sustainability. It's their number 1 goal. They have big targets, and that is passed down to us in the UK. They want us to sell products that are 'green' or sustainable, and we have targets for the proportion of products that are green […] I have other priorities at the moment though and can't find the time to introduce [commuting or business travel] initiatives."

(Large business, not offering travel initiatives, wholesale)

The NatCen Commute Zero Scoping Review found that, historically, employers have taken little interest in encouraging employees to reduce their workplace travel emissions. However, evidence from the most recent literature and the interviews with employers indicated that business attitudes to workplace travel may have shifted in recent years, with employers taking greater responsibility for their staff's workplace travel. This was due to the increased public profile of

environmental issues since COP26 in 2021 and the Government recommendation to report Scope 3 emissions as of April 2019[2]. In addition, employees' increasingly pro-environmental attitudes, and their preferences for sustainable commuting and flexible working patterns, had made sustainable travel a key recruitment and retention issue for employers[3].

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[2] Reporting these emissions is required of 'quoted' businesses and larger unquoted businesses and is encouraged for all other businesses.
[3] NatCen. "Commute Zero – A Scoping Review." (2022)

Commuting and business travel initiatives offered

Key findings:

- In the sample of businesses that had taken up initiatives, the most common offers were: encouraging cycling via the Cycle to Work scheme, decarbonising company vehicles, and lift sharing. There was limited awareness of other initiatives available.
- The Cycle to Work scheme was the most commonly offered commuting and business travel initiative, and had the highest levels of recognition overall. While it was regarded easy to introduce and was seen as an employee benefit, factors such as office facilities, cycling infrastructure and the weather limited the success and widespread adoption of the initiative.
- Decarbonising company vehicles was more likely to be introduced by larger companies with extensive fleets. Vehicle leasing partners were the most common way for businesses to find out about the tax benefits of having electric and hybrid company vehicles.
- Lift sharing schemes were more commonly driven informally by staff who arranged journeys themselves, as it was seen as a cheaper way of travelling. However, hybrid and flexible working patterns had reduced the use and success of this initiative.
- While most businesses offering sustainability initiatives monitored and measured these, businesses often reported difficulties in doing so. The most common measurements used included sign-up rates and/or employee surveys. While these were seen as relatively straightforward to do, businesses raised concerns about the reliability of that data.

Initiatives offered

Cycle to Work scheme

Amongst businesses in the research, the Cycle to Work scheme was by far the most commonly offered commuting and business travel initiative. Many businesses in the sample (and in recruiting for this research) offered the Cycle to Work scheme, often as the only travel initiative offered. It was the travel initiative with highest levels of recognition, including amongst those who currently do not offer initiatives.

It was considered easy to introduce, both from a cost perspective and logistically. It was also seen as a simple yet effective employee benefit. The Cycle to Work scheme was regarded as a 'quick win' for businesses to demonstrate environmental consciousness and employee care.

"The Cycle to Work scheme has been really successful – there are probably 5 or so employees that cycle. It has encouraged more people to cycle into the office."

(Small business, offering travel initiatives, professional services)

"We might look at [introducing] the Cycle to Work scheme. I don't know that much about it, but it would be a good thing to add to our benefits package."

(Medium business, not offering travel initiatives, professional services)

Despite these benefits, businesses did raise some concerns about the range of bicycles available through the scheme being limited and out of budget for many employees, particularly in a cost-of-living crisis. As such, some found low employee take-up of the scheme.

Some of the businesses who did not currently offer travel initiatives had considered the Cycle to Work scheme but decided not to offer it due to the location of the business premises being remote and inaccessible by bike, meaning there would be a low employee take-up.

"There are initiatives like the Cycle to Work scheme that we're looking to introduce [...] I'm not sure it would be practical for all our sites however as some are very rural and inaccessible by bike."

(Large business, not offering travel initiatives, retail and wholesale)

As part of introducing the Cycle to Work scheme, some businesses referenced key infrastructure needed as part of this initiative, for example secure bike storage. However, a minority of businesses also raised concerns about their office premises not catering for cyclists, by not having showers or secure cycling storage facilities. As some were leasing office premises, they were unable to install such infrastructure, limiting how much employees cycled in, or took up the Cycle to Work scheme.

Other external factors such as the weather and local cycling infrastructure strongly impacted the extent to which employees cycled into work, thus undermining the success of the initiative.

"These [Cycle to Work] schemes are never as successful as you think – the reality is it rains, its windy and intentions change."

(Large business, offering travel initiatives, manufacturing)

Businesses also found difficulties measuring the success of the initiative beyond sign-up rates, though these were seen as unreliable measures given the inconsistency at which employees choose to cycle into work.

Decarbonising company vehicles

Decarbonising the company car fleet by replacing current vehicles or introducing hybrid and electric vehicles was a common initiative offered by businesses. This was more likely to be undertaken at larger companies with extensive fleets, though a minority of smaller businesses also introduced hybrid and electric company vehicles paid through a salary sacrifice scheme.

"One employee has taken an electric car on a salary sacrifice scheme, meaning it's technically a company car. He asked me for this specifically, so I did it for him as a favour. I wish I hadn't said yes though as it was extremely complicated and time consuming to do."

(Medium business, not offering travel initiatives, professional services)

There were three key benefits driving the shift to emission-reducing vehicles: environmental, reputational and tax. On prompting, businesses highlighted the environmental benefits of replacing combustion engine vehicles with electric and hybrid vehicles in their fleet. However, businesses also raised the reputational benefits of being seen to have emission-reducing vehicles as part of their fleet, as well as the tax benefits associated with electric vehicles being key drivers.

Most of the businesses in our sample with electric vehicles installed charging points in the office car park (if they were not already installed) to act as an incentive for electric car use. From an optics perspective, it was also seen as a marker of their environmental efforts.

The way in which this initiative had been introduced varied from business to business. For those with extensive fleets, decarbonising the fleet had often been driven by their vehicle leasing partners who explained to the business the tax benefits, and provided a range of options. In a minority of cases, employees themselves asked for an electric or hybrid vehicle and businesses had enabled this through a salary sacrifice scheme.

"When [vehicle] leases come to an end, we go for hybrid or electric vehicles to replace them […] We use a leasing partner who sits down with us and our staff to explain the tax benefits of electric vehicles. We've also installed EV charging points in the car park."

(Large business, offering travel initiatives, manufacturing)

"We chose EVs because it seemed like the right thing to do, everything is moving that way. We didn't want to spend money purchasing a new vehicle that is diesel and at that time there were diesel shortages and prices were high which also pushed us to EVs."

(Small business, offering travel initiatives, construction)

In instances where a company themselves have driven the decarbonisation of the fleet, many reported coming up against employee resistance. This resistance related to practical concerns about electric vehicle ownership such as range anxiety and charging difficulties. While employees had requested personal charging stations to be fitted at their homes, businesses had often refused the request given the high installation cost and the temporary nature of employment. As such, businesses had encountered challenges from employees in decarbonising the fleet.

"There was a bit of employee pushback due to concerns about the EVs and their range. Ultimately, it is employees who choose their cars, so we can only encourage them to go for EVs."

(Large business, offering travel initiatives, manufacturing)

Lift sharing schemes

Lift sharing (also known as carpooling) schemes tended to be more popular amongst businesses with premises in suburban and rural locations, and with manual workers who were unable to work remotely and are on lower wages. By sharing the fuel costs, it was seen as a cheaper way to commute and travel.

In most instances, lift sharing schemes were informally managed by employees who will arrange the journeys themselves. In a small number of cases, lift sharing schemes were centrally managed by HR who identified the most efficient and cost-effective routes to reduce travel time and fuel/energy costs. This was more commonly seen in larger businesses with designated HR teams.

"Car-sharing is done more at a production level where salaries tend to be lower. It is arranged informally amongst the staff."

(Medium business, not offering travel initiatives, manufacturing)

Example of successful lift sharing scheme (Large business, offering travel initiatives, telecommunications)

An example in which the lift sharing scheme worked particularly well for business travel is a business that covered fuel costs for its employees when travelling to meetings. In this instance, the business had a multiplier it uses to calculate the fuel price per mile it offers an employee based on the number of employees they take with them. The multiplier worked out to a higher amount than if all employees made that journey individually in their own cars. This served as an effective financial incentive to lift-share for journeys.

"[Carpooling] has been around for at least 3 years. We have a unique employee number where when we claim our expenses, they'll cross-reference that when they sign it off with the days you come it. You get paid x amount per mile if you drive on your own, but double if you take someone else. People get on well, so it works. From a value for money perspective, it makes sense."

While social benefits to lift sharing schemes were raised by businesses, concerns about privacy, convenience and awkwardness at times surmounted these social benefits. HR managers who centrally managed the carpooling system in particular expressed challenges in encouraging employees to car share for these reasons.

The impact of the pandemic on working patterns and hybrid working presented a new challenge for lift sharing schemes. HR managers referenced the increased

difficulty in managing this scheme given the misaligned working days and increased working flexibility. As such, many reported lift sharing schemes becoming much less popular and effective than they were pre-pandemic.

"We have car-sharing which has been running for some time which we manage through a spreadsheet. It has become much more difficult with the hybrid model. Those who don't have a car would just jump in with someone who doesn't have a car, and they would sort out the petrol payments themselves. Sometimes it would only work one-way. We had a decent uptake, a good 25 people car-sharing, but it's made it really difficult with the hybrid working. Now you have to factor in that people might work from home."

(Large business, offering travel initiatives, manufacturing)

Awareness of other travel initiatives

Commuting and business travel initiatives were regarded low salience topics and there were generally low levels of awareness of the types of initiatives available to businesses (beyond the Cycle to Work scheme) across all businesses in the sample. After being probed, commuting initiatives in particular were seen as non-essential business matters and only minorities in the research sample regularly conducted research to identify potential new initiatives to introduce.

"There aren't other initiatives of note that I could put my finger on - there may be things that I'm unaware of, and I wouldn't say I'm very close to the day in day out of the sustainability initiatives."

(Medium business, not offering travel initiatives, professional services)

Building on this, a few businesses wished for initiatives to help subsidise public transport commutes but were left disappointed to find no centrally managed initiatives run by Government or local public transport providers that offered financial benefits. Specifically, businesses hoped for public transport grants (i.e. discounted rail season tickets for journeys) to encourage the shift away from private vehicles to public transport.

Identifying and introducing travel initiatives

Very few employers had proactively searched for commuting and business travel initiatives that could be introduced into the business. Conversely, businesses were largely reliant on word of mouth, past experience, and employee suggestions to learn about potential initiatives they could introduce.

"I'm aware of some [initiatives] through other businesses, for example carpooling, preferential rates on electric cars, but we're 18 months young and we've been focusing on the core business functions."

(Small business, not offering travel initiatives, retail and wholesale)

The manner in which these initiatives were introduced also depended on a range of factors, including business size and business/employee engagement in sustainability.

Larger businesses tended to have HR departments where sustainability and organising commuting and business travel fell within their remit and were therefore responsible for introducing and monitoring these initiatives. As such, larger businesses were more likely to have higher levels of knowledge of the types of initiatives that were available to businesses.

Smaller businesses and those that were more socially- and environmentally-driven were more likely to rely on word of mouth (including discussion with other businesses) and its employees to suggest the initiatives, as well as aid in rolling the initiatives out.

An important and widespread challenge in the introduction of commuting and business travel initiatives was the difficulty in getting business decision-makers to sign off on such initiatives. This challenge was more common amongst businesses who did not offer initiatives. In large part, this was driven by a lack of clarity on the benefits of such initiatives to the business to justify the perceived costs of introducing and maintaining the initiatives. Businesses raised concerns around many of the benefits from the initiatives being intangible and immeasurable, making it complicated for those responsible for sourcing and introducing the initiatives to make the case for them to boards and executive committees. A minority of businesses also alluded to senior decision-makers being less environmentally-driven due to being older in age.

"You need the majority of the Heads of and the Board to agree with it to roll it out, which is hard. You need buy-in from the company. Also, each location has its own challenges and needs, but initiatives are always companywide so its inclusive and equal."

(Large business, offering travel initiatives, professional services)

Monitoring and measuring initiatives

Most businesses offering sustainability initiatives monitored and measured these, but businesses often reported difficulties in doing so.

The most common measurements used included sign-up rates and/or employee surveys. While these were seen as relatively straightforward to do, businesses raised concerns about the reliability of that data. For example, sign-up rates not factoring in day-to-day initiative usage, and surveys being subject to overestimation and overconfidence bias.

A minority of sustainability-conscious businesses in the sample had recently started calculating the business's carbon footprint, and measured commuting and business travel as part of that calculation. Those measuring the business's carbon footprint reported this being complicated and time-consuming. It was felt

that public transport system organisations could be doing more to aid organisations who were trying to measure their emissions. For example, by providing the carbon emissions of a train journey when booking a ticket.

"Annoyingly, the trainline don't give you the carbon emissions of your travel – they should give you that information as we're currently having to figure it out ourselves."

(Small business, offering travel initiatives, professional services)

Businesses also referenced difficulties benchmarking and understanding what 'good' looks like when it comes to encouraging and measuring commuting and business travel initiatives. There was little understanding of what targets businesses should aim for in their sustainability initiatives, for example, what a good Cycle to Work scheme sign-up rate is.

The NatCen Scoping Review identified that employers tended to be at the early stages of working out how to set emissions reduction targets and monitor progress against them.

While the employers interviewed felt that setting targets and monitoring progress were the right thing to do, they felt it was important to minimise the complexity and administrative burden. When asked to consider how monitoring and measuring the effectiveness of initiatives could be improved in future, two approaches were suggested by the employers:

- An employer survey using a standard methodology feeding information at the organisational level to Government using online platforms; or
- A nationally representative survey of the public (to be conducted by Government) that monitored the use of individual commuting and workplace travel modes over time.

An employer membership organisation interviewed in the NatCen review felt that membership organisations could have a key role to play in future in developing and disseminating guidance on how employers could survey their employees' commuting patterns.

Drivers for adopting commuting and business travel initiatives

> **Key findings:**
> - Decisions about whether to adopt initiatives were primarily driven by the perceived benefits they would bring to the organisation, with environmental benefits generally seen as a positive outcome rather than a key driver.
> - However, participants felt that the business benefits were often unclear, difficult to measure and intangible which made it difficult to make the case for introducing initiatives.
> - The key business benefits identified by participants were:
>   - Associating the organisation's image and reputation with sustainability, which incurred benefits such as retaining existing contracts and clients, attracting new clients, or being able to increase their costs on the basis that they are a sustainable and progressive partner of the business.
>   - Adding to the employee benefits package and therefore aiding recruitment and retention.
>   - Strengthening the business strategy, e.g. strengthening their socially responsible credentials.
>   - To a lesser extent protecting the environment – this was a primary driver for a small number of businesses in the sample that had strong societal and environmental values and were willing to forgo some financial profit to realise their values.

Decisions about whether or not to adopt commuting and business travel initiatives were primarily driven by the perceived benefits they would bring to the organisation. Participants described conducting cost-benefit analyses where they would weigh-up the benefits of initiatives to the organisation against the

There were a range of benefits that would drive businesses to adopt commuting and business travel initiatives, namely:

- benefiting the business;
- enhancing its business image;
- benefitting its employees; and,
- to a lesser extent, protecting the environment.

Benefiting the business

Businesses benefitting from the adoption of the commuting and business travel initiative was the core driver for adopting such initiatives. This was regularly

seen from a financial perspective, where businesses would look for evidence that introducing such initiatives would benefit the business. This was followed by an evaluation on the impact it will have on the business and the rate at which it will be used by its employees.

"There could be tax benefits and cost benefits [to introducing initiatives]. It could also be of benefit in making a company stand out against its competitors."

(Medium business, not offering travel initiatives, retail and wholesale)

Businesses said they will often conduct a cost-benefit analysis when considering whether to introduce an initiative. The cost-benefit analyses would range in robustness, with a minority of businesses forecasting the additional income and/or tax benefits gained against the cost of introducing the initiative, while most businesses would compare the cost of introducing the initiative versus the potential business benefit gained from its introduction (for example, the ability to tender for new contracts).

Ultimately – to adopt an initiative – businesses said they must consider the benefits that the initiative brings to the organisation outweigh the cost and time implications associated with its adoption. This was more likely to be felt by non-adopters.

However, non-adopters were less likely to identify potential business benefits and they generally felt the benefits associated with travel initiative adoption were unclear, difficult to measure and intangible causing difficulties in obtaining senior decision-makers in the business to see the value and 'sign-off' on the initiatives.

Enhancing business image

A key benefit of introducing sustainability-minded commuting and business travel initiatives such as low/no-carbon vehicles was associating the organisation's image and reputation with sustainability.

"If we do demonstrate this [intention to reduce emissions], it means we are a more sustainable organisation and can attract more people. It can also widen the customer pool as well, that's probably more on the marketing side of things."

(Medium business, not offering travel initiatives, professional services)

Participants reported that being environmentally-conscious and having sustainability targets are increasingly seen as hygiene factors where those who do not engage in sustainability activities will suffer competitive disadvantages. However, at present, it was still seen as an area where businesses can gain a competitive edge.

While immeasurable and hard to accurately forecast, introducing sustainable travel initiatives was seen to incur benefits such as retaining existing contracts and clients, attracting new clients, or being able to increase the cost of their service offering on the basis that they are a sustainable and progressive partner. A minority referenced a necessity to have sustainability initiatives due to the specific tender stipulations for Government contracts, and therefore offer commuting and business travel initiatives within that.

> *"There are hidden costs of not [introducing travel initiatives]. Because we hold a lot of Government contracts and are high profile business, we are open to scrutiny on a lot. We're increasingly being asked about of a lot of things, for example if we have an anti-slavery policy."*

(Medium business, offering travel initiatives, professional services)

Non-adopters recognised this as being a primary driver for adopting a commuting and business travel initiative, though most felt that this alone was not a sufficient driver to surmount the cost and time implications associated with its adoption.

Benefitting employees

Businesses reported an increased importance placed by employees on the benefits packages offered by businesses, a finding that is supported in external literature and research.[4] An element of the benefits package offered by businesses is commuting and business travel initiatives, such as the Cycle to Work scheme.

> *"Having worked in HR, the more appreciated employees feel, the more they give to the business. People might not use their bike to work every day, but even if they use it twice a week that's better and cheaper for them. It's about retaining staff. It's an extra benefit they get."*

(Large business, not offering travel initiatives, retail and wholesale)

Businesses in the sample stressed the importance of a benefits package in retaining and attracting talent. Retaining and attracting talent was felt to be increasingly challenging, meaning businesses decision-makers and HR teams were live to options they could add to that benefits package.

Introducing sustainable travel initiatives was seen to have an additional benefit of increasing the value of an employer from the perspective of current and

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[4] Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. "Health and wellbeing at work 2022: Survey report." (2022)
Aon. "The UK Benefits and Trends Survey." (2022)

potential employees by being more progressive and environmentally-friendly, providing further intangible benefits.

From a business perspective, offering sustainable travel initiatives and an improved benefits package was seen as having financial benefits such as spending less on recruitment due to lower employee churn, or on employee salaries.

There was also a sentiment that such schemes could create greater internal cohesion and a healthy communal atmosphere in an organisation if the schemes involved travelling together.

> *"I think people like a bit of a get together, not talking about a huge, incentivised cash payment or anything like that – the more that we can car share, bike ride and reduce our emissions and become more sustainable, some kind of incentivization that might be good."*
>
> (Large business, offering travel initiatives, manufacturing)

These findings are supported by the NatCen Commute Zero Scoping Review which found that employees' increasingly pro-environmental attitudes, and their preferences for sustainable commuting and flexible working patterns, had made sustainable travel a key recruitment and retention issue for employers.

Protecting the environment

Businesses also felt motivated to introduce sustainable travel initiatives to fulfil a moral responsibility to play their part in protecting the environment and fighting climate change, as well as contributing to the UK's target of reaching net zero by 2050.

> *"I do think that it's the employer's role because one of the things they need to be mindful of is if they're involved in UK economy then they have an innate responsibility to do good, for example keeping to the clean air zones."*
>
> (Large business, not offering travel initiatives, housing)

Protecting the environment was a primary driver for a small number of businesses in the sample that had strong societal and environmental values. This small minority of businesses were willing to forgo some financial profit to realize their values.

The impact of the introduction of sustainable travel initiatives on the environment was seen as a positive outcome of their introduction for the majority of the sample, rather than the key motivator. The core driver for introducing sustainable and business travel was the business or employee

benefit, and the positive impact on the environment was a latent rather than manifest benefit of sustainable travel schemes.

Barriers to adopting sustainable commuting and business initiatives

> **Key findings:**
>
> - Businesses perceived cost and time as the main barriers to adopting sustainable commuting and business initiatives, especially in the current difficult economic climate. This was considered in the context of potentially expensive initiatives such as electric vehicle fleets, but also in the research and administrative work that was assumed to be necessary to introduce them.
> - Lack of awareness about available initiatives and their benefits was another key barrier, particularly with non-adopters who were simply not aware of the possible options that are available. For such businesses this can be overcome through advertising campaigns and exposure to other businesses' initiatives.
> - Businesses that had already adopted travel initiatives tended to view the investment as worthwhile, with this understanding of the benefits being key to doing so. Non-adopters, however, often struggled to commit resources due to a perception that the benefits were not clear and obvious.
> - Clear information and research on benefits (for the business and employees, but also for the economy and environment in general) both tangible and intangible, would help overcome these barriers.

As well as benefits which drive businesses to adopt sustainability initiatives related to commuting and business travel, there were key barriers that businesses perceived to dissuade or impede adoption of such schemes. It is important to note that these are from the perspective of businesses and may not necessarily reflect objective barriers. These are listed in approximate order in terms of severity of impact as well as frequency of mention.

Cost and time

Individuals often perceived these initiatives as potentially expensive and time-consuming to implement. The resources required were thought to vary depending on the specifics of each scheme, with businesses highlighting expensive elements such as the price of electric vehicles and/or installing infrastructure (such as charging points and bike sheds), as well as the administrative time burden of monitoring and organising such initiatives (e.g., organising a carpooling scheme and monitoring take up of a Cycle to Work scheme). This was of particular concern in the current economic climate, in which many businesses were feeling mounting pressures of the cost-of-living crisis as well as lingering impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic.

*"The challenge we have now is people's economic situation –
sales have dropped off significantly. We're slowly climbing back
from Covid, so we're not giving significant pay rises. When you're
looking at things like the Cycle to Work scheme, being able to
make those payments is a challenge, and we can't fully take that
on. I want to support them as an HR manager, but we're not in a
position to do that as a business. It's not something the business
can commit to – I struggle telling people to apply when they
can't afford it."*

(Large, initiative offered, Manufacturing)

Depending on the scheme, businesses anticipated one off costs (such as the purchase of an electric vehicle fleet) or ongoing costs (from the monitoring of schemes) both of which could make the introduction of schemes unattractive. Businesses said they have struggled/ would struggle to justify these costs with senior management teams, who may not feel the business can afford it now and/or who cannot see there being a return on this investment in the future.

*"I think the difficulty will be price and squaring that cost with our
managing director… if we were to roll something like this out and
it cost £50 per employee, that is a significant cost."*

(Large business, not offering travel initiatives, retail)

As well as the cost required to implement the schemes, businesses emphasised that research is needed to understand which initiatives are available and are suitable for their business, which could incur a financial and time commitment they may not have resource for.

*"We've found [introducing such schemes] difficult. We're an
organisation who wants to do a lot of research… but it can be a
large business cost. It's something that businesses would like to
do but can't because of time and cost."*

(Small business, not offering travel initiatives, Professional
Services)

Cost and time were considered to be a barrier by all businesses in the research sample, regardless of if they had adopted sustainability initiatives or not. Businesses who had already adopted travel initiatives however tended to view them as generally surmountable and considered the investment to be worthwhile, whereas businesses who were yet to adopt initiatives often said the large resource commitment was preventing them committing to any such investment.

Awareness of initiatives

Another key barrier businesses said they face is a lack of awareness of schemes/ initiatives, with many businesses supporting the principle of reducing commuting and travel emissions through initiatives but being unaware of what is available. This was particularly the case for businesses who had yet to introduce any initiatives, with lack of awareness and knowledge being felt as especially prohibitive. Businesses felt this stems from a lack of available information in this space and lacking an understanding of where to go to access this information. Of those who were aware of some initiatives, it was often limited knowledge confined generally to the more well-known initiatives such as the Cycle to Work scheme.

> *"I don't know any [travel or commuting initiatives] that I could put my finger on - there may be things that I'm unaware of. These could be successful because we have an interest in this area, but don't know what we could introduce."*

(Medium business, no initiatives offered, Professional Services)

Understanding benefits of initiatives

Individuals in the research sample emphasised that strategic business decisions are often guided by the clear value they can bring, while a lack of clarity on the tangible benefits of sustainable travel and commuting initiatives is considered a barrier. Some individuals stated that due to some benefits being long-term and not immediately evident (such as building up positive CSR reputation or positively affecting employee physical/mental health), some may struggle to fully comprehend the full benefits.

As such, businesses questioned if the schemes are necessarily a good strategic decision with some assuming that the cost of adjustment might be a risky investment as they do not know the benefit to be received. Businesses often suggested that research or clearly available information outlining the specific benefits would be useful to overcome this. This was particularly the case for those who had not yet adopted any initiative, with those who had already being generally more aware of the benefits they bring, and as such willing to commit time and money to introducing them.

> *"A major barrier can be not knowing what these schemes can bring. You need to highlight the benefits to them both the short and long term physical, financial and environmental. Oh, and benefits in mental health."*

(Large business, no initiatives offered, Healthcare)

Furthermore, businesses emphasised a general lack of awareness regarding the environmental impact of commuting and travel, and the potential for

sustainability initiatives to reduce that impact. This was another area in which more clearly demonstrated benefits could reduce a barrier.

> **Example of overcoming benefit barrier** (Medium business, no initiative offered, manufacturing)
>
> Of note, one business in the research sample managed to overcome this barrier through the implementation of an internal system, accessible to all employees, which kept a log of available sustainability initiatives, advertised their specific benefits and gave details on how to access and use them for employees (such as the Cycle to Work scheme). This system had a dedicated manager who maintained the server, and regularly embarked on research to identify schemes that could be incorporated. This system ensured employees understood the benefits of such schemes, and clearly emphasised their advantages for the business.
>
> *"I don't think we've done enough analysis on whether the cost of doing that decreases your emissions to make it worth it."*

The NatCen Scoping Review also found that limited employer awareness of the business benefits of sustainable travel initiatives acted as a barrier to take up. The review identified a range of benefits that could strengthen the 'business case' for the adoption of initiatives, including:

- Improved business performance by minimising loss of employee time caused by local road congestion.
- Improved employee wellbeing and productivity by reducing difficult or unreliable commuting journeys which are thought to increase employee stress, lower morale, and reduce productivity.
- Reduced financial costs of business travel, for example through remote meetings.
- Making profit from electric vehicle charging points installed at workplaces by making them available (for a fee) to customers or the public, including making retail and hospitality businesses charging destinations.
- Improved and more profitable land use – for instance, the value of car parking space repurposed for housing, offices, last mile deliveries, etc.
- Improved recruitment and retention by offering staff different ways get to work, which could make commuting easier, lower the cost of commuting, and contribute to employees' wellbeing and environmental goals.

Administrative and logistical concerns

In addition to the concerns about the cost of administrative resource to implement and monitor initiatives (outlined above), businesses felt there are also related logistical concerns around contracts, financing, payroll, monitoring

schemes, and applying for any support from the government - all of which they believed would come with further resourcing costs as well.

These concerns were seen as particularly problematic in the more difficult and complex initiatives such as decarbonising fleets which involve multiple aspects to be introduced, such as including electric chargers, replacing old cars and providing dedicated parking spaces (conversely schemes such as Cycle to Work were viewed positively as they have a smaller administrative burden).

"Time and cost are big…but actually the administration and logistics of getting this up and running could cause problems too. Do employees have to sign a contract? How does it work with the finance team and income?"

(Large business, no initiative offered, Retail)

Employee buy-in and engagement

Low employee buy-in and engagement is another barrier that may impede the successful adoption of sustainability travel schemes. Businesses questioned if the demand for these schemes actually exists amongst employees and emphasised the difficulty of introducing initiatives to an unmotivated employee base. Businesses anticipated factors that may dissuade employees from being engaged include perceptions that schemes may be costly for the employee (e.g., having to buy a bike), time-consuming (e.g. additional time taken to commute) or logistically challenging (such as taking multiple trains instead of a flight for business travel). This aspect was seen as a barrier to adoption in the first instance, but also the continued success and continuation of schemes with fears that they would have little impact (at high perceived cost) if they are not actually used by employees.

Businesses were also sceptical about mandatory changes for their employees, with some trusting their employees to make their own decisions (particularly with commuting). Furthermore, though some employers perceived encouraging such changes to be part of a company's responsibility, some businesses suggested they don't feel personal decisions of employees fall within their remit. As such, if initiatives were imposed upon individuals there could be broader impacts on staff morale and productivity.

"An obstacle could be that staff are reluctant… it could result in a loss of freedom for who need freedom if they have to change their commuting or travelling habits."

(Small business, no initiative offered, Retail)

"I feel some staff have or would change their habits, but they can't be forced. You can't force people not to drive for instance, that would go down very poorly."

(Medium business, initiative offered, Education)

This was a consistent barrier across both businesses with and without sustainability initiatives, with all businesses anticipating that lack of employee engagement could be a problem. For businesses who had already introduced initiatives which they considered having poor employee buy-in, this barrier was seen as particularly challenging. If the initiative wasn't being used by their employees, businesses lose incentive to introduce further such initiatives. An example of this was one business in the research sample who pushed hard for the company to adopt the Cycle to Work scheme (and provide bike sheds for those who may want to cycle) as they believed it would benefit the business and employees. However, after convincing the senior team and getting sign off, only one employee took up the offer. As a consequence, this business felt disincentivised to pursue further such schemes as it wasn't felt as a worthwhile time commitment.

Example of overcoming employee buy-in barrier (Medium business, initiative offered, professional services)

One business interviewed overcame this barrier of employee buy-in of their Cycle to Work scheme by including mention of it in their weekly bulletin. By communicating the company's sustainability aspirations and the benefits of adopting eco-friendly travel practices to their employees in a consistent and engaging manner, they were able to raise awareness and generate interest in the programme. The bulletin provided regular updates on the company's progress towards its sustainability targets, showcased success stories, and highlighted the environmental impact of eco-friendly travel choices. In doing so, this particular business believed they had an increase in employee adoption, which encouraged them to adopt more schemes in the future.

Organisational culture

Organisational culture was also identified as a barrier to adoption. Some businesses appeared to be resistant to change with an inflexible mindset, where they felt that they had always done things a certain way and saw no need to change. Businesses felt this was most commonly prevalent amongst the senior management teams (across all sizes of businesses) and did not necessarily reflect the sentiment of the rest of the company. This was further compounded by a perception of lack of 'young blood' in senior teams who may be more open to change.

"The leadership team is a barrier within the company as is getting them to view 'Cycle to Work' as a long-term investment. They're all over 55 and interested in max profits and dividends as it's not long until they retire. I think young blood is needed."

(Medium business, no initiative offered, Manufacturing)

This barrier was felt mainly by businesses who had yet to introduce initiatives, as businesses who had managed to adopt such schemes either did not face this issue or were able to overcome it. For those who were able to overcome it, this success was driven by passionate directors who understood the value of such initiatives proactively demonstrating the benefits to the senior leadership teams. Through this process some businesses in the research sample recounted how they were able to change the opinion of senior teams and introduce sustainability initiatives.

Geographical/infrastructural constraints

Geographical and infrastructural constraints were also perceived as barriers to adoption. Businesses in areas with limited active and public transport infrastructure felt they had little opportunity to take up schemes aimed at encouraging employees out of their cars. As such, certain businesses struggled to see the purpose of implementing these initiatives if there aren't alternatives available. If the infrastructure is not available, it was considered a potential waste of time and money to implement a change (such as introducing bike sheds for offices that are inaccessible via bike).

"Another problem is we can't rely on public transport – it's too unreliable. The infrastructure is not adequate enough to be fully reliant on it."

(Medium business, no initiative offered, Engineering)

Incentives to encourage initiative adoption

Key findings:

- Particularly for businesses yet to adopt initiatives, advertising schemes and their benefits was considered a major driver for adoption of sustainability initiatives. Businesses suggested this would be best achieved through national advertising campaigns and increased communication on this topic. This was due to a belief more businesses would adopt schemes if the topic was on their radar.
- Offering tangible support in the form of advice or expert audit services would incentivise all businesses to adopt initiatives (this was considered particularly effective for encouraging uptake amongst non-adopters, but also the speed at which current adopters make progress).
- Some non-adopters felt constrained by inadequate infrastructure such as lacking cycle lanes. As such, they believed schemes that rely on robust infrastructure that they do not have access to would be irrelevant to them. Some suggested this be tied into the campaigns to demonstrate the government is proactively trying to help businesses adopt these schemes, and thus further encouraging conversations on this topic.

Businesses identified a range of potential incentives to overcome the barriers and motivate businesses to adopt sustainable commuting and business travel initiatives. These broadly fell into four areas:

Increasing awareness

The lack of awareness regarding feasible and appropriate initiatives was perceived to constitute a primary barrier to adoption for businesses, and support in this area could encourage business adoption. To overcome this, businesses recommended that national campaigns be launched, and communication on this topic be increased, thereby encouraging businesses to consider adopting these initiatives. Understanding the benefits, such as return on investment, should be communicated with a wide audience, including employers and the general public, to ensure that employees are not caught off guard when initiatives are announced. Industry associations and networks can also play a crucial role in disseminating information and increasing awareness about the benefits of adopting these initiatives.

Furthermore, businesses suggested it is essential to obtain the input and support of employees in any initiatives undertaken by businesses. As part of this, some businesses stated that targeting employees directly through advertising campaigns could encourage bottom-up development which was perceived as an effective way for introducing change in this area.

"We would 100% get employees' opinions on this matter – if you get your employees onboard with the opinions, it will yield a favourable outcome."

(Small business, no initiative offered, Manufacturing)

While businesses generally identified increasing awareness as a key incentive for encouraging the adoption of sustainable commuting and business travel initiatives, the specific strategies that work best vary depending on if the businesses are adopters or non-adopters. For instance, adopters were more receptive to industry association and network communications and employee engagement initiatives, as they had already demonstrated a commitment to sustainability and don't require as much persuasion. On the other hand, non-adopters felt they needed more targeted and persuasive campaigns, such as case studies and testimonials from similar businesses that have successfully implemented sustainable travel initiatives. In addition, non-adopters felt they needed more practical guidance and support to overcome the challenges of implementing new policies, particularly if they are smaller businesses, whereas adopters and larger businesses were more responsive to return on investment calculations and cost-benefit analyses.

Providing financial incentives

Perhaps unsurprisingly, providing financial incentives such as tax credits, grants or subsidies was felt to play a significant role in motivating businesses and employees to adopt sustainable commuting and business travel initiatives. Many businesses perceived that such incentives can reduce the upfront costs of implementation and make them more affordable for businesses. Particularly during the cost-of-living crisis and a perception of a struggling economy, individuals stated that help in this regard would allow them to be more flexible in allocating resources. This was considered as an effective incentive by both adopters (who believed they would be able to implement more initiatives with the cost burden alleviated) and non-adopters (for whom it would prompt them to pursue such initiatives in the first place).

This was also considered in regard to encouraging employees to adopt and make use of sustainability initiatives if they were to be introduced. As some anticipated initiatives (such as EV cars and bikes) come with a personal cost for employees, offsetting this for individuals was considered vital for success of such initiatives.

"One of the big things is all about what's the least amount of impact it's going to have to their pay packet, offsetting that… during the Cost-of-Living crisis this is really important."

(Large business, no initiatives offered, Housing)

The NatCen Scoping Review found examples of employers encouraging sustainable commuting through promotion of tax concessions to help employees

buy electric cars, provision of bicycles and rider facilities (e.g. bike sheds, showers), or the adoption of hybrid models of working with associated allowances for the costs of working from home.

Offering support

A number of businesses expressed advice and hands-on support would be an effective incentive so businesses can understand what initiatives are available and how precisely they could be adopted, this was particularly related to businesses who were motivated to introduce schemes but are unsure on how. For this group of businesses this involved resources such as an online database or guidebook of all available incentives (especially if this was linked to an accreditation).

Some businesses suggested a 'diagnostic' audit service that could help identify specific initiatives suited to their business which would be provided by an expert who could evaluate the current sustainability practices and recommend actions that could improve them. Businesses suggested this would be helpful in overcoming barriers related to lack of awareness and logistical capability and encourage them to adopt initiatives. As part of this, some businesses also suggested assistance with monitoring and measuring the success of the initiatives would be helpful, as many were unsure on how to go about this.

"Apart from the obvious thing of finance towards helping us with the purchasing or the products we require, probably assistance in the form of a contact or someone you could speak to about it."

(Small business, no initiative offered, Manufacturing)

Employee training and engagement programs were also seen as important for the successful adoption of sustainability initiatives. Many businesses recognised that without the support of their employees, it would be difficult to implement new initiatives and make meaningful changes. Giving businesses advice on how to internally provide employees with training and education on sustainability practices, as well as engaging them in the process of decision-making, were viewed as important ways to gain their support and commitment to these initiatives.

Finally, partnerships with other organisations that share a commitment to sustainability were also perceived as important. Many businesses recognised that by working with others, they could achieve greater impact and make more significant changes. Partnering with local government, community organisations, and/or other businesses in their industry could provide opportunities for sharing best practices, resources, and knowledge.

"Collaborating with a leasing partner who could help with the chargers and selling them to customers could make a big difference."

Support such as these were considered as helpful by both adopters and non-adopters, though more likely to be mentioned by non-adopters who more frequently cited lack of awareness or capability as being a key barrier (which they felt such support could alleviate).

The NatCen Scoping Review found that employers were in favour of further government information on how to reduce workplace travel emissions. They wanted information on the full range of sustainable travel options available to them, the most effective options given their geographical location, size and sector, and the optimal ways to measure workplace travel emissions proportionate to their resources.

Research participants in the scoping review suggested that better collaboration between businesses in local areas could help facilitate sharing of knowledge on what works well and less well in their area and enable businesses to organise employee transport together rather than doing it by themselves. An employer membership organisation interviewee suggested that regional forums or online webinars were good ways to share information.

Developing current infrastructure

Businesses perceived that a key support measure could be to develop existing travel related infrastructure to make the adoption of schemes more pragmatic. For businesses in the research sample who had yet to adopt any sustainability initiative, though they may wish to introduce some of these initiatives, lacking infrastructure can make this seem pointless. As such, any attempts to develop existing transport infrastructure (such as creating more cycle lanes, EV charging points or public transport options) would, according to businesses, make them more likely to adopt such initiatives. This was important both in terms of facilitating use of any scheme that could be introduced, but also bringing such matters onto businesses' radar, which is also considered as a vital encouragement for adoption.

"There is a major lack of public transport, the closest station is a 20-minute drive, I know this because when I joined in the organisation from London – it's very hard to commute as remote office is very hard."

(Medium business, no initiative offered, Finance)

The NatCen Scoping Review identified opportunities for more engagement between employers and local decision-makers on local planning decisions. A study looking into effective interventions to reduce car use in European cities found that collaborations between different stakeholders, such as government, private sector, and civil society, were important for the planning and decision-

making of most city-level interventions to reduce car use in Europe[5]. Employers interviewed also said that it would help to know who was responsible for local travel infrastructure and delivery to make planning of public and active travel options easier, as well as providing private shuttle buses or car sharing options to out of town or business/ retail park sites.

Case studies

Below are included some illustrative case studies which are based on the anonymised findings of real participants. Though the stories are real, names and details have been changed to allow participants to stay anonymous. These are included to provide a portrayal of businesses with no initiatives offered, and those with initiatives offered.

Case study Sandro* (Medium, no initiative offered, Manufacturing)

Sandro is the chair of a manufacturing company based in England. Though he understands the theoretical importance of reducing commuting and business travel emissions, for Sandro the barriers are just too large (and the incentives not large enough) to consider introducing them in his business. Sandro is a self-described 'traditional' businessman who focusses on profit and success of his business. He considers such sustainability initiatives as unrealistic due to their likely cost burden for the business, as well as the heavy time commitment.

Sandro suggests that perhaps his company isn't as flexible as others in adapting to social changes, but he believes that ultimately, he has created a successful company by using his current profit-focussed approach and is reluctant to divert from this style.

He does however believe his employees would appreciate such initiatives and claims he would be open to support either financially or through advice, and would be open to them if the resource commitment was lowered.

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[5] Kuss., P. & Nicholas, K. A., 2022. A dozen effective interventions to reduce car use in European cities: Lessons learned from a meta-analysis and transition management. *Case Studies on Transport Policy,* 10(3), pp. 1494-1513.

Case study Anthony* (Medium, initiatives offered, Professional Services)

Anthony works for a professional services charity which provides affordable professional training. As part of their remit as an ethical employer, Anthony understands the importance of business image and as such thinks sustainability initiatives as a vital part of their business plan.

Anthony is keenly aware of the benefits introducing sustainability initiatives relating to commuting and business travel can create, and has been proactive in pushing his company to pursue these. To organise the process, he oversaw the introduction of the 'sustainability hub' which is in his words: "a hub where staff can go to learn about sustainability on internal website that's used by all internal staff. The hub shows what initiatives are available from a variety of places including external and internal providers". Through the hub Andrew's company has introduced a Cycle to Work scheme, electric vehicle charging and carpooling – and looking at introducing more in the future. Run by the 'sustainability hub programme executive' Anthony believes this programme has been a success and has allowed his business to actively demonstrate their sustainability credentials and attract new contracts as a result.

Anthony firmly believes all businesses could benefit from dedicating resource and time to creating such initiatives and that the reputational and strategic benefits outweigh the potential costs. He believes that by highlighting these benefits and clearly advertising what initiatives available, other businesses should be able to also introduce such initiatives.

Views on accreditations

Key findings:

- The notion of an accreditation involving some sort of logo or badge to include on business communications was well received by businesses across the sample, with the majority being receptive to the idea.
- There were mixed perceptions on what criteria must be achieved to receive the accreditation, though most believed it must involve a substantial and proven commitment to reducing business travel emissions.

Businesses were generally favourable to the concept of some kind of accreditation for businesses investing in sustainable business travel initiatives. Businesses believed that an accreditation could have potentially positive impacts both for individual businesses and the environment/economy in general. It was seen as a way to encourage businesses to pursue sustainable practices and reward those who already do.

Businesses identified several perceived benefits of such an accreditation. Firstly, it would allow for good publicity for progressive businesses, which could attract customers and demonstrate their commitment to sustainability. Businesses also thought it could provide a means to create constructive conversation, 'hype,' and competitiveness surrounding sustainability schemes. This could encourage businesses to continually improve their sustainability practices and lead to a culture of sustainability within their industry. Finally, it was seen to create a way to reward businesses already pursuing sustainability, which could help to incentivise others to follow suit.

> *"Having a logo or accreditation that the business could advertise, like the living wage employer, could be great."*

(Medium business, have initiatives offered, professional services)

However, some businesses expressed concern that the accreditation must be genuinely meaningful and given to businesses who can demonstrate positive changes in their business relating to business travel and commuting. Businesses suggested that there exists many accreditations ranging from good practice (B-Corp was given as an example due to its criteria and a perception that adhering to its conditions demonstrated a genuine commitment) to bad practice (Cyber Essentials was given as an example due to its lack of criteria and a perception it was easy to 'tack on' without a genuine commitment), and that the sustainable travel accreditation should be based on the former. They believed that without a genuine commitment to tangible business behaviours, the accreditation could be perceived as a mere symbol rather than a true reflection of sustainable practices.

"I think it's a nice to have, but it depends how vigorously that's audited…. E.g., something like cyber essentials is not externally audited, effectively you're asking organisations to police themselves in order to display a badge which isn't very helpful. So therefore, badge doesn't really mean anything... it would have to be a meaningful metric driven badge that is externally validated."

(Medium business, no initiative offered, Professional services)

On the other hand, other businesses felt that it would be sufficient for the accreditation to demonstrate their intention to be more sustainable (this was generally a view held by non-adopters who felt somehow unable to implement such initiatives), rather than only acknowledging firm results. Though there was a mix of responses of what is more appealing in terms of an accreditation, there was a widely accepted view that in order to have a genuine impact on the environment (and not seen as an easy 'add-on' for businesses to adopt without changing anything within their business) having certain criteria that must be clearly met and actively demonstrated is a must. An important caveat to note is that, though almost all participants positively received the idea of this accreditation, participants rarely say no to something that is free and has a small commitment. As such, some may be less inclined to pursue the accreditation if it required any cost or commitment.

"It might give the level / tiers on how much you've actually saved, how much sustainability you're giving. There could be different grades, we get audited and accredited and different grades for how well the factory is adhering to the initiatives and how well the company has been doing."

(Small business, no initiative offered, Fashion)

In the NatCen scoping review no existing officially recognised benchmarking or accreditation schemes for monitoring commuting emissions were found in the UK or international literature.

However, the organisations interviewed in the scoping review broadly welcomed the idea of benchmarking as a 'recognition' of an employer's efforts and achievements in reducing carbon emissions, and as an 'incentive' towards achieving them.

There were some concerns that businesses would not necessarily be competing on an even playing field, and that several factors needed to be considered for benchmarking of commuting and workplace travel to be fair. These were:

- Location. Especially the availability of more sustainable public and active travel alternatives in the area, and whether the organisation was in a city or town-centre, on the urban fringe, or in a rural area.

- Sector and amount of necessary on-site work. For instance, interviewees noted that certain sectors, such as manufacturing, warehouse distribution, and healthcare often had little option but to travel to site to work, whereas other sectors had more ability to adapt to hybrid or remote working.
- Size of employer and resources available. An employer membership organisation noted that SMEs were less likely to be able to have a dedicated person to develop a workplace travel plan and investigate or commit to more sustainable travel options. However, employer interviewees also observed that it would be easier for smaller or micro-organisations to know their staff commuting patterns, whereas larger employers may have multiple sites with different issues on providing sustainable travel alternatives across each one.

It was also noted that any accreditation should be implemented in a supportive rather than punitive way, to identify where organisations need help and provide guidance to move forward.

Implications: COM-B: a deep dive on behaviour

> **Key findings:**
>
> - We recommend financial incentives and tailored business advice in order to help businesses overcome the key capability barriers.
> - Making initiatives easy to adopt by keeping them streamlined, as well as improving existing transport infrastructure, is key to overcoming opportunity barriers.
> - We recommend advertising the benefits clearly of initiatives through outreach, advertising and active business engagement to overcome motivation barriers. Introducing a specific accreditation would also help with this.

To help understand what would increase businesses' likelihood to adopt and commit to sustainability initiatives relating to commuting and business travel, this research has drawn upon the 'Capability Opportunity Motivation – Behaviour' model (COM-B model), a key behavioural change model. According to *'The Behaviour Change Wheel: A Guide to Designing Interventions'* (Susan Michie, Lou Atkins & Robert West, 2014, p. 59-60), the COM-B model dictates that for any behaviour to occur:

1. There must be **capability**; this can be either 'physical' (e.g., physical skills, strength or stamina) or 'psychological' (having the cognitive skills, strength or stamina as well as knowledge) to perform the behaviour.
2. There must be **opportunity**; this can be 'physical' (e.g., physically accessible) or 'social' (including cultural norms, interpersonal influences, and social cues).
3. There must be sufficient **motivation**; this can be 'reflective' (involving self-conscious planning and beliefs about what is good or bad), or 'automatic' (processes involving wants and needs, desire, impulses and reflex responses).
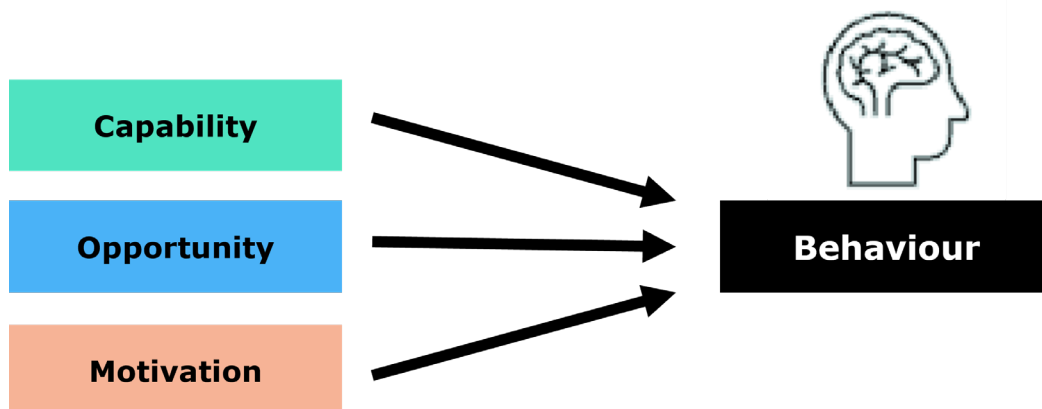
Implications for capability

An inability to implement the scheme due to **lacking either the logistical or administrative capability are capability barriers.** Due to insufficient internal knowledge or capacity, some businesses regardless of intention felt they are unable to introduce some of these initiatives

There was also a sense that **low awareness is a capability barrier for many businesses** who are simply unaware of the array of initiatives and schemes that are available. For many businesses even when engaging with the idea, they were unable to conceptualise which schemes may work for their business and thus incapable of implementing them.

Interventions that would improve capability include:

- Advertising campaigns and information on available schemes
- Specialist advice and business audits (a service provided by an expert who could evaluate the current sustainability practices and recommend actions that could improve them)

Implications for opportunity

In terms of having opportunity, **time was a major factor that dissuades businesses from adopting initiatives.** Many businesses emphasised that the current financial and economic climate is difficult and thus many are time poor.

A minority of businesses stated that **infrastructure (either of their business, or society more generally) poses an opportunity barrier** in that due to lacking charging points, cycle lanes or bike sheds, they simply are unable to offer employees the opportunity to pursue alternative commuting styles.

Opportunity interventions that would motivate businesses include:

- Streamlined initiatives that are easy to implement
- Developing transport infrastructure to provide more commuting options

Implications for motivation

Costs were also a motivational barrier, in the fact that many businesses felt they ultimately must be pursuing financial success and profit. As such, sustainability initiatives need to clearly provide strategic or financial benefit, and for some it isn't clear how such initiatives would achieve this.

Lacking belief in the benefits of initiatives also prevents businesses from being motivated to adopt sustainable travel or commuting schemes. Though there was an appreciation for the potential of benefits to the business, employees and environment/economy more broadly, some businesses were put off by the lack of clarity on precise return on investment.

Organisational culture also provides a motivational barrier, as due to a feeling of apathy in senior management teams, some businesses feel unmotivated due to lack of executive buy-in.

Interventions that would improve motivation include:

- Develop an advertising campaign aimed at businesses that clearly outlines the benefits such schemes provide
- Provide role models in the business community on sustainable commuting (from the government or wider public sector)
- Actively engage with businesses on this issue and foster a community of business champions for sustainable commuting
- Introducing accreditation to provide clear benefits to initiatives