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The five-day-a-week commute could be over – yet more drivers than ever say they'd struggle without a car

The typical Monday-to-Friday commute may be gone for good as a result of the pandemic with motorists expecting to drive to workplaces on average three days a week as hybrid and home working become the norm, [new RAC research](#) has found.*

The striking findings from the latest [RAC Report on Motoring](#) – the most comprehensive study of drivers' views in the UK – show that while 49% of

drivers commuted five days a week before the pandemic, just 32% expect to do so in the future. In addition, three-in-10 drivers (30%) now expect to commute between one and four days a week with the average number of commuting days in the future standing at three per week, down from four before Covid-19 hit.

What's more, a fifth of drivers (19%) expect to give up the commute by car altogether by switching to permanent home working; in contrast, just 7% of drivers said they worked from home prior to the pandemic. Meanwhile an identical 12% of drivers who used to commute via other means – bus, train, tube, walk or bike – before the pandemic say they'll continue to do so in the future.

Yet while the pandemic looks likely to cause major, long-term shifts in commuting patterns, the importance drivers place on having access to a car combined with the unappealing nature of public transport mean that the role of the car looks likely to rise still further, as the country finds ways of living with the coronavirus.

An enormous 82% of drivers this year said they would struggle without a car, the highest proportion recorded by the RAC since 2006, up from 79% last year and 74% in 2019. Drivers in rural areas are much more likely to say they are car-dependent (87% of drivers, compared to a still significant 77% of town and city dwellers). Regional differences are also pronounced with drivers in the West Midlands, Yorkshire and the North East of England more likely than average to say they depend on their vehicles.^{**} What's more, one-in-five drivers (20%) expect to use their cars more as a result of the pandemic with the bulk (87%) expecting to do so for leisure purposes.

The RAC's figures also suggest that negative attitudes towards public transport among drivers might be hardening. For the second year running fewer than half of drivers (46%) said they would use their cars less even if public transport was improved (compared to 59% just three years ago), while an almost identical proportion (45%) said they expect to use public transport less in the future as a direct result of the pandemic. And just a fifth (22%) say they see public transport as an attractive alternative to taking the car.

Covid aside, the RAC Report on Motoring's findings also confirm just why the car remains the mode of choice for so many drivers over any alternatives. For example, when it comes to visiting or caring for friends and family, 68% said

the distance they have to travel is too far to go on foot or by bike, 57% said the car is quicker and over half (53%) said there are no feasible public transport options for them. For those grocery shopping, 78% said they had too much to carry and so relied on a car, half (49%) said the distance to reach the shops was too far to walk or cycle while four-in-10 said there was no realistic public transport option.

RAC data insight spokesman Rod Dennis said:

“These figures paint a picture of how car use is likely to change as a direct result of the pandemic, with a reduction in the number of days a week drivers commute by car being one of the most striking findings. Many drivers clearly expect that ‘hybrid working’ will become the norm which could have a profound effect on the overall volume of vehicles on the roads during the week – although whether it signals an end to congestion during peak hours is another matter.

“It’s also clear just how important the car is to so many people, a relationship that appears to have strengthened due to Covid-19. A greater proportion of drivers than ever say they’d find it hard to live without one, and when looking at the reasons why people drive over walking, cycling or taking public transport, it’s perhaps obvious why. In so many cases, the car is faster, more reliable and is really the only feasible option for the sorts of distances people travel, whether that’s to the local supermarket a few miles away or to see friends and family on the other side of the country.

“But perhaps what is one of the starker findings from our report is around attitudes towards public transport. If the challenge faced by policymakers in getting drivers out of their cars before the pandemic was akin to trekking up a steep hill, our research suggests they now have a veritable mountain to climb. Just a fifth of drivers see public transport as an attractive alternative to driving and less than half say they would use their cars less even if public transport was improved. What’s more, most drivers say the pandemic has made them more wary of using public transport in the future.”

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Explore this topic further on the [RAC Report on Motoring 2021 website](#).

* The [RAC Report on Motoring 2021](#) is based on a large-scale online survey carried out by Online95 on behalf of the RAC. In total, Online95 interviewed 2,652 UK motorists (i.e. those who hold a full, current UK driving licence, drive at least once a month and have a motor vehicle in their household). Figures are nationally representative. The survey was conducted from 3-23 May 2021, with the questionnaire taking around 30 minutes to complete.

** 2021 figures – average 82%; West Midlands 87%; Yorkshire and Humber 86%; North East England 86%

*** Figures rebased, so percentages are only of those who ever transport children

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The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to 13 million UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. As well as its premium nationwide breakdown assistance service – with an expert branded patrol workforce attending more than two million breakdowns every year – it offers a wide range of market-leading products across insurance, legal services, vehicle inspections and service, maintenance and repair. The RAC is also at the forefront in helping drivers make the switch to electric vehicles and leads in the development of new solutions for businesses and OEMs, partnering with the best in the motoring and mobility space.

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