

ECDC Rail Commuter Survey 2007

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Abstract:

One of the key objectives of East Cambridgeshire District Council's (ECDC) economic development strategy is to promote the district of East Cambridgeshire as a business location. Presently 50% of the East Cambridgeshire working population (about 18,000 people) travel to work outside of the district every day. So early this year the economic development team at ECDC arranged for rail commuters to answer a short questionnaire on board early morning One and First Capital Connect services travelling via Ely to Cambridge and London. This questionnaire was devised in collaboration with an Ely based venture analysis company, Yuno Ltd. The results of this survey are analysed by Yuno to give a clearer picture of the types of work that commuters are doing, and suggestions are then made on how their skills and experience can be utilised to the mutual benefit of themselves and the local economy.

The survey confirms that there are a large number of well-qualified people commuting by train out of East Cambridgeshire every day to jobs in the cities of Cambridge and London. They are also reasonably active judging from the fact that almost 50% walk or cycle to their local station. On the other hand about one third use a car to reach the station hardly anyone using a bus.

Around 80% of the train commuters were aged 25-54 with almost 60% having a degree and 26% having postgraduate qualifications. The numbers commuting to London are about 80% of the total number of people whose final destination is Cambridge. An overwhelmingly 86% of commuters are employed in the services sector in predominately full-time professional positions with relatively few in hi-tech manufacturing.

It has to be stressed that train commuters are a subset of the total number of East Cambridgeshire residents that commute out of the district. For Cambridge commuters in particular it is likely that a large number of residents are travelling by car to hi-tech businesses located on the periphery of the city and perhaps also via park and ride to Cambridge centre business.

In London the jobs East Cambridgeshire residents commute to tend to be in financial services, complemented by public administration, whereas in Cambridge education and training dominates along side health and social work. Workers also commute to both cities for jobs in legal services and creative and software services.

The overwhelming majority (82%) of commuters would prefer to work locally and felt that more and better-paid local employment opportunities would be the way to achieve this goal. This would primarily be achieved by attracting business to the region, as there are not a lot of budding entrepreneurs amongst the commuters. Only 6% overall want help with starting a new business and these potential entrepreneurs are mainly concentrated in the 35-44 age group.

Lack of affordable housing in Cambridge is an important reason for people with jobs in Cambridge to live in East Cambridgeshire, particularly for the 25-34 age group. Whereas it was found that higher salaries are a big attraction for commuters to London.

One of the attractions of East Cambridgeshire for most commuters is its rural nature. So this character should be retained even if local leisure and retail facilities are enhanced to ensure that commuters spend more of their earnings locally. All commuters would welcome better local public transport and infrastructure as well as reducing overcrowding on trains by encouraging home working, with local satellite offices providing professional meeting rooms and virtual office facilities. Appropriate service sector jobs could be increased by for example attracting substantial educational facilities to Ely and ECDC and its associated agencies having a favourable procurement policy towards local service sector companies to encourage them to create more jobs. Finally an "attractive" technology sector appropriate for Ely should be identified to complement Newmarket's equine sector. Further actions could include such things as raising an East Cambridgeshire focussed venture fund and establishing links with other regional incubators to attract jobs and businesses to the region.