



NHTS BRIEF

National Household Travel Survey

November 2006

Commuting for Life

All across the U.S. more and more workers, in large metro areas and in small towns, are spending an hour or more each way in their daily commute. Commuters who spent an hour or more traveling one-way to work made up one out of twelve U.S. workers in 2001 (5.3 million workers), compared to just one out of twenty in 1995 (3.4 million workers). In large cities, one out of ten workers spends an hour or more each way to get to work, traveling at an average speed of just 27 miles per hour (see Exhibit 1) to go a distance of less than 38 miles.

The number of hour-long commutes has skyrocketed, not because workers are taking jobs further from home, but because the same commutes are taking longer. Commutes of 25-30 miles one way took 5 minutes more each day in 2001 than in 1995, over a work year of 241 days adding up to 20 hours more commuting time.

The men and women who travel at least an hour one-way to work on average spend 2 hours and 48 minutes a day, or 14 hours per week, just traveling to and from work. This translates into significant time away from family, personal, community and recreational activities for these workers.

Urban Commutes

Commutes of all distances are taking significantly longer, but the number of workers in large cities who spend an hour or more for their commute is increasing at a faster rate than non-urban areas. As shown in Exhibit 2, the travel time for commutes of all distances increased between 1995 and 2001, and travel time for the longest trips, 55 miles and over, increased from 80 minutes in 1995 to just over 100 minutes in 2001.

However, the distribution of hour-long commutes by the distance traveled has changed dramatically, as shown in Exhibit 3. In 1995, only 18.4 percent of hour-long commutes were less than 35 miles, but by 2001 50.7 percent of commutes of an hour or more were less than 35 miles. At the same time, the proportion of hour-long commutes that are over 55 miles has shrunk from 47.3 to 19 percent.

Exhibit 1 – Percent of Workers with Hour-Long Commutes

Characteristics of Hour-Long Commutes (60 minutes or more one-way)		
	Small Cities	Large Cities
Percent of All Workers	4.3	9.9
Men	6.4	11.4
Women	1.8	8.0
Average Commute Length	52.2	37.7
Average Commute Speed	34.6 mph	26.9 mph

*Large Cities are Metropolitan Statistical Areas of 1 million in population or more; there are 49 of them in the U.S.

Exhibit 2 - Mean Travel Time to Work for All Commuters in Large Cities

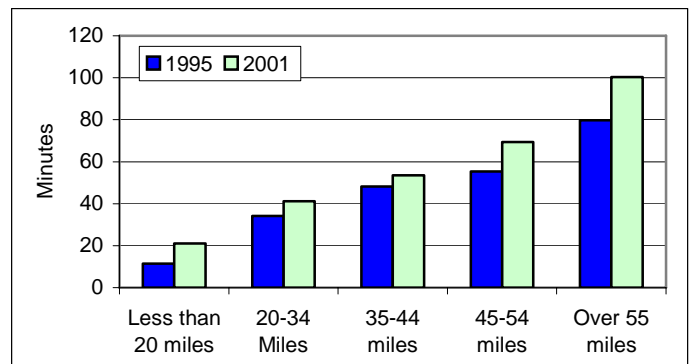
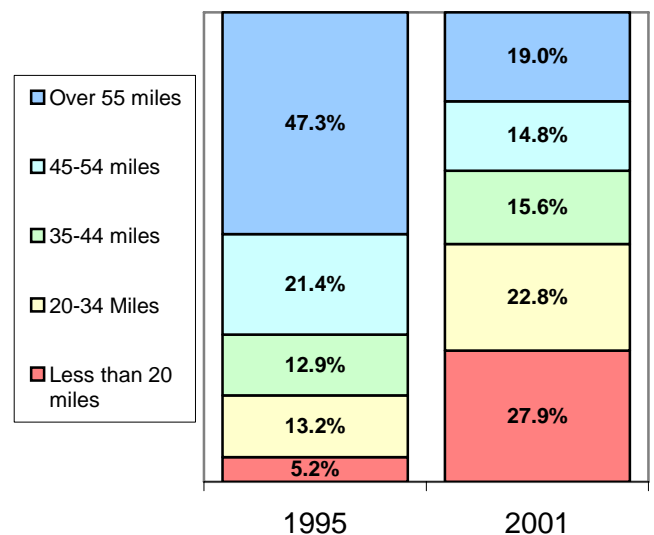


Exhibit 3 – Percent of Hour-long Commutes in Large Cities by Miles to Work



Who Are the Workers with Hour-long Commutes?

Workers with hour-long commutes are more likely to work in manufacturing (where mega-factories draw from a wide area for workers) or in professional and managerial occupations (see Exhibit 4). Workers spending an hour or more to get to work have higher incomes on average —perhaps they travel further for better pay, or need more money to balance out the time and expense of these very long commutes.

These workers are more likely to have children, especially young children. Suburban and rural homeowners are more likely to have hour-long commutes than urban homeowners. Workers with hour-long commutes also work at home more often than commuters who spend less time traveling for work.

The commuters who travel an hour or more one way leave earlier for work than other workers. More than one-quarter of these workers (24 and 28 percent in large cities and small towns, respectively), leave before 6 a.m. for their trip to work. In comparison, only 12 percent of workers with shorter commute times leave this early. Although hour-long commuters are more likely to be men, the departure times for men and women are equally skewed toward the very early morning.

Sixty percent of the commutes of less than 20 miles that take an hour or more are on transit, (total door-to-door time including walk, wait, and transfer times) but for trips over 20 miles the commutes are by far more likely to be in a private vehicle (see Exhibit 5).

How much time are workers losing to family and community life, let alone productive work time, due to increased travel times? One out of twelve commuters spends an average of 2 hours and 48 minutes a day traveling to and from work, in addition to the eight or more hours on the job. If congestion continues to worsen, more and more workers will be experiencing the strain of an hour-long commute.

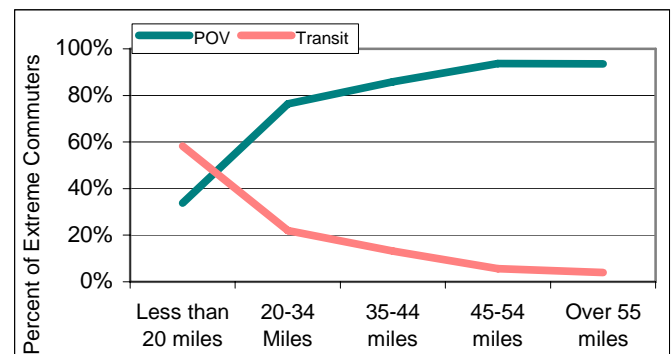
Sound congestion reduction strategies, such as those currently being implemented by the U.S. Department of Transportation, can make a real difference to the quality of life for millions of Americans. For example, one of the initiatives seeks expanded telecommuting options. If each of these workers could telecommute one day a week, in a year they could save over 145 hours, or the equivalent of three and a half week's work – more free time than most workers take for an annual vacation.

Exhibit 4 – Characteristics of Workers by Commute Time

Occupation	Workers with Average Commutes (<60 mins)	Workers with Commutes of 60 mins or more
Sales and Service	25.6	18.0
Clerical/Admin	13.3	10.8
Manufacturing	20.0	24.9
Professional/Managerial	40.2	43.9
Telecommuting		
Works at Home Often	3.0	4.1
Works at home Occasionally	3.6	6.0
Life Cycle		
No Children	46.3	40.7
Young Children	43.6	50.6
Teens	10.1	8.7
Income		
<\$50,000	46.9	43.5
\$50-100,000	28.0	29.3
\$100,000 or more	15.4	18.7
No Report	9.7	8.5

*Work at home 'often' is once a week or more where 'occasionally' means at least once in the last two months

Exhibit 5 – Mode Split of Hour-long Commutes



Website: <http://nhts.ornl.gov>

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