



# The Car and the Commute

## The journey to work in England and Wales

Philip Gomm and Ivo Wengraf  
December 2013



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RAC Foundation  
89–91 Pall Mall  
London  
SW1Y 5HS

Tel no: 020 7747 3445  
[www.racfoundation.org](http://www.racfoundation.org)

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# Foreword

One of the priorities for the coalition government has been to get Britain working. No one would deny that this is a worthy ambition, but it does raise an important question: how do you get Britain **to** work? Of all the barriers to employment, travel to and from a place of work is one of the most significant.<sup>1</sup> Either the physical means to allow the journey to be completed in a reasonable time do not exist, or the cost of the journey is prohibitive.



Yet as with so many other aspects of life – in fact nearly all of them: education, healthcare, shops, services, leisure – these barriers have to be overcome. Without access to transport, the economic, social, physical and mental welfare of the populace is at real risk.

This is why so many households are prepared to pay so much money for the privilege of getting about. There really is no other choice, for transport is the gateway to the world we live in. The RAC Foundation's own research shows that the poorest 10% of car-owning households in the UK are deep in transport poverty spending more than a quarter of their disposable income on buying and running a vehicle. More broadly, the 2011 Living Costs and Food Survey<sup>2</sup> shows that when averaged out across the UK, transport is the single largest category of household expenditure bar none.

The greatest illumination on the daily commute is provided by the ten-yearly UK Census. The latest survey, carried out in 2011, reveals how each person with a job gets to work. But what analysis of the Census output by the Office for National Statistics does not reveal is how reliance on the car changes depending on what type of area you live in. This is the gap which this paper tries to fill. The RAC Foundation can now show just how important the car is for journeys to work – not merely in the case of rural inhabitants, but equally for city-dwellers.

Professor Stephen Glaister

*S. Glaister*

Director of the RAC Foundation

# 1. Reliance on the Car for Travelling to Work

## Headline Findings



There are **26.5 million** working people aged 16–74 in England and Wales



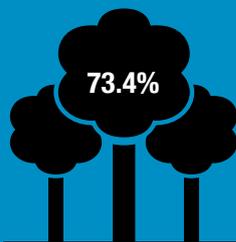
**16.7 million** of these workers rely on the car to get to work as a driver or passenger



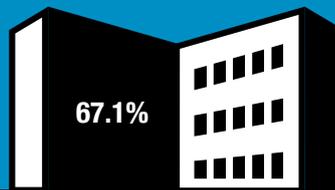
**15.3 million** drive themselves



**1.4 million** catch a lift



In rural areas, **73.4%** of workers travel by car (whether as driver or passenger)



In urban areas outside London, **67.1%** of workers get to work by car (whether as driver or passenger)



Even amongst Londoners the car is the most popular single mode of travel, used by **29.8%** of workers



## The Overall Picture across England and Wales

Despite a decade of rising fuel prices and the recent recession, cars remain the predominant means of getting to work for more than 6 out of 10 commuters.

In many respects the results of our analysis are no surprise. Given that cars, vans and taxis (as of 2010) make up 84% of the passenger miles undertaken by all motorised modes (which include bus, rail and plane), it was always going to be likely that a significant number of journeys to work are carried out in the same way.<sup>3</sup>

Even so, the crucial role of the car is underlined when you consider the fact that after comparing all modes of travel (and this now includes walking), 57.5% of the employed population of England and Wales aged between 16 and 74 drive to work – and a further 5.1% travel in a car as a passenger.

The full modal breakdown of travel to work is shown in Table 1, but it is clear that for the majority of people most of the time the car continues to effectively be ‘public’ transport. As for walking, this accounts for only 10.7% of journeys to and from work. The number of people working at or from home amounts to 5.4% of the labour force currently in employment.



**Table 1: Modal split of journey to work, 16- to 74-year-olds in work, England and Wales**

Mode	Total	% of employed workforce
Work mainly at or from home	1,422,708	5.4%
Underground, metro, light rail, tram	1,028,800	3.9%
Train	1,371,025	5.2%
Bus, minibus or coach	1,949,442	7.3%
Taxi	137,988	0.5%
Motorcycle, scooter or moped	214,244	0.8%
Driving a car or van	15,264,527	57.5%
Passenger in a car or van	1,357,280	5.1%
Bicycle	762,334	2.9%
On foot	2,846,588	10.7%
Other method of travel to work	171,400	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,526,336</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Office for National Statistics<sup>4</sup>

Note: The 2011 Census asked people “How do you usually travel to work? Tick the box for the longest part, by distance, of your usual journey to work”.

## Urban vs Rural

How does travel to work vary with the area you live in – urban or rural? By classifying neighbourhoods into the same categories as those used by government<sup>5</sup>, we see (Figure 1, Table 2) that:

**68.7%** of rural workers drive a car to get to their place of employment

**4.7%** of rural workers get a lift

**61.1%** of urban workers (outside London) drive a car to get to their place of employment

**6.0%** of urban workers (outside London) get a lift

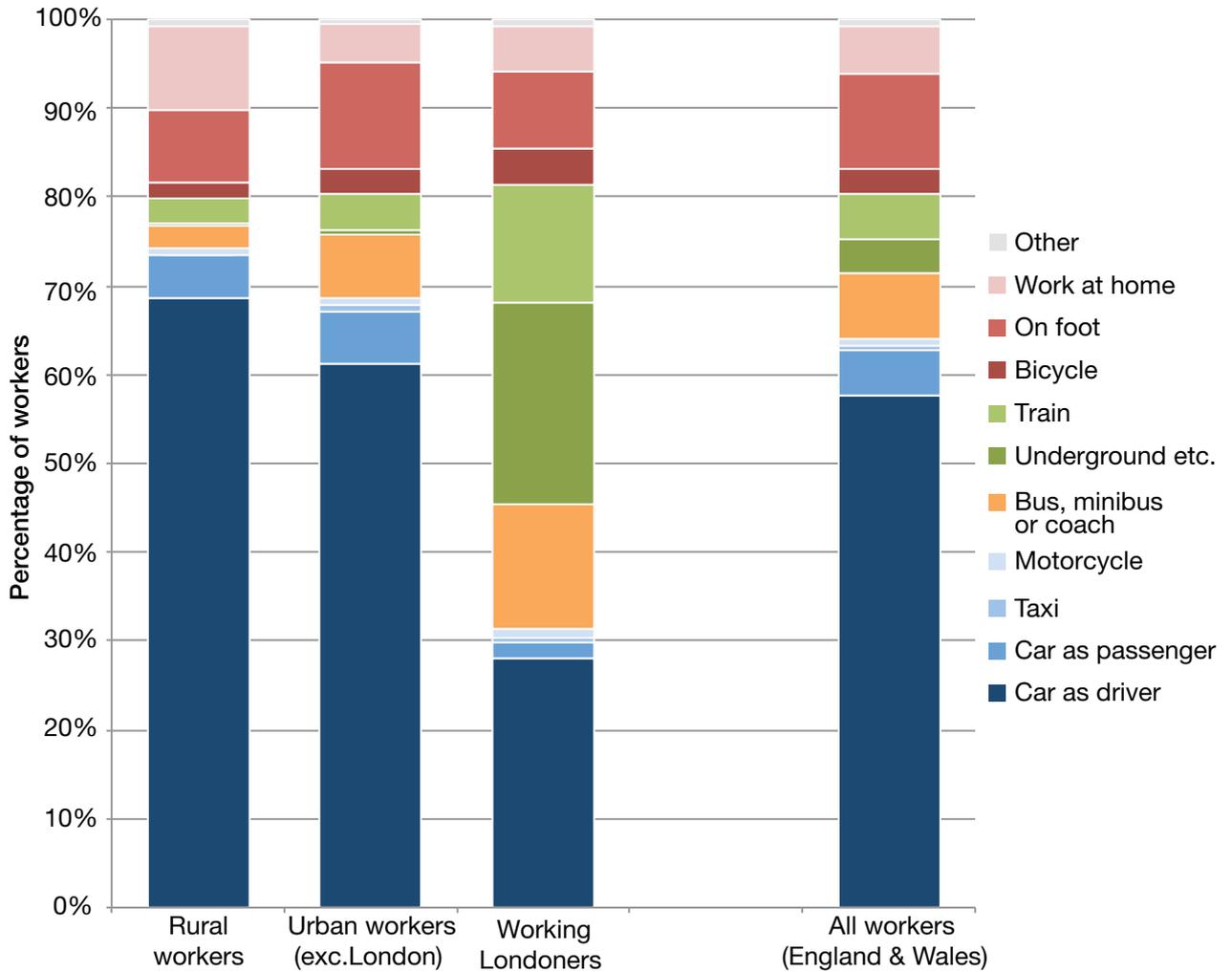
**28.0%** of Londoners in work drive a car to get to their place of employment

**1.7%** of employed Londoners get a lift

The conclusion is that London is unique; certainly it is distinct, even from other urban areas. The reason is that it provides travellers with a real choice. Although the car transports more people to work than any other mode its lead in the capital over the others is slim, followed closely as it is by the underground, bus, train and foot. The bicycle is used by 161,000 Londoners to get to work, but that represents less than one in twenty (4%) of employees living in the capital.



**Figure 1: Modal split by area type of journey to work, 16- to 74-year-olds in work, England and Wales**



Source: Office for National Statistics<sup>6</sup>



**Table 2: Modal split by area type of journey to work, 16- to 74-year-olds in work, England and Wales**

Mode	Rural workers	% of employed rural workforce	Urban workers (excluding London)	% of employed urban workforce(excluding London)	Working Londoners	% of working Londoners	All workers (England and Wales)	% of employed workforce
Work mainly at or from home	460,653	9.4%	759,782	4.3%	202,679	5.1%	1,422,708	5.4%
Underground, metro, light rail, tram	12,518	0.3%	114,291	0.6%	902,263	22.6%	1,028,800	3.9%
Train	141,261	2.9%	697,447	4.0%	532,720	13.3%	1,371,025	5.2%
Bus, minibus or coach	118,862	2.4%	1,269,295	7.2%	561,605	14.0%	1,949,442	7.3%
Taxi	9,999	0.2%	107,703	0.6%	20,314	0.5%	137,988	0.5%
Motorcycle, scooter or moped	35,384	0.7%	132,946	0.8%	45,976	1.1%	214,244	0.8%
Driving a car or van	3,361,048	68.7%	10,786,361	61.1%	1,120,826	28.0%	15,264,527	57.5%
Passenger in a car or van	227,470	4.7%	1,060,361	6.0%	69,659	1.7%	1,357,280	5.1%
Bicycle	80,659	1.6%	520,054	2.9%	161,705	4.0%	762,334	2.9%
On foot	406,681	8.3%	2,087,823	11.8%	352,612	8.8%	2,846,588	10.7%
Other method of travel to work	36,210	0.7%	106,681	0.6%	28,538	0.7%	171,400	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,890,745</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>17,642,744</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>3,998,897</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>26,526,336</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Office for National Statistics<sup>7</sup>

## Income Deprivation

It is clear from the previous section that there are marked differences in travel patterns from one land use type to another. But what impact do levels of income deprivation have on modal choice for the journey to work? While car ownership has long ceased to be the preserve of the relatively wealthy<sup>8</sup>, how has this widespread access to personal motorised transport translated into car use when it comes to accessing employment opportunities?

By considering an area in terms of the proportion of its residents who are claiming certain benefits - including income support, jobseekers' allowance and child tax credit - indices of income deprivation have been created by the English and Welsh governments.<sup>9</sup>

Using such indices as a proxy for wealth Table 3 shows that even in the most income-deprived English areas just over half of those in employment use a car to get to work (whether as driver or passenger). The proportion rises steadily as you move up through the deprivation quintiles to the least deprived neighbourhoods; however, the trend for bus (and minibus and coach) travel is in the opposite direction.



**Table 3: Modal split of journey to work by income-deprivation quintiles, England (from Index of Multiple Deprivation)**

Mode	1 <sup>st</sup> (most deprived)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup> (least deprived)
Work mainly at or from home	2.8%	3.8%	5.3%	6.8%	7.7%
Underground, metro, light rail, tram	7.1%	5.7%	3.5%	2.3%	2.2%
Train	4.7%	5.3%	5.0%	5.1%	6.3%
Bus, minibus or coach	15.5%	9.6%	6.3%	4.4%	3.4%
Taxi	1.0%	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%	0.3%
Motorcycle, scooter or moped	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%	0.8%	0.7%
Driving a car or van	44.4%	52.3%	58.9%	63.5%	64.2%
Passenger in a car or van	6.2%	5.6%	5.1%	4.5%	4.1%
Bicycle	3.3%	3.3%	3.0%	2.6%	2.6%
On foot	13.4%	12.3%	10.9%	9.0%	7.8%
Other method of travel to work	0.7%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government & Office for National Statistics<sup>10</sup>

Note: The table only shows those Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) that were part of both the 2011 Census and the most recent IMD.



In Wales – see Table 4 – car dependency amongst workers, across all levels of income deprivation, is even more pronounced. This may be due to the more rural nature of the country or perhaps to a scarcity of bus and rail services, and the slowness of journeys even where public transport is available.

**Table 4: Modal split of journey to work by income-deprivation quintiles, Wales (from Index of Multiple Deprivation)**

Mode	1 <sup>st</sup> (most deprived)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup> (least deprived)
Work mainly at or from home	2.3%	3.1%	5.5%	7.5%	7.3%
Underground, metro, light rail, tram	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Train	2.1%	2.2%	1.8%	1.7%	2.2%
Bus, minibus or coach	8.6%	5.2%	3.9%	3.5%	2.8%
Taxi	0.9%	0.6%	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%
Motorcycle, scooter or moped	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%
Driving a car or van	59.4%	66.4%	67.9%	69.3%	72.8%
Passenger in a car or van	9.4%	8.1%	6.8%	5.8%	4.9%
Bicycle	1.7%	1.3%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%
On foot	14.2%	11.9%	11.0%	9.2%	7.2%
Other method of travel to work	0.6%	0.6%	0.7%	0.6%	0.6%

Source: Office for National Statistics & Welsh Government<sup>11</sup>

Note: The table only shows those LSOAs that were part of both the 2011 Census *and* the most recent IMD.

When the broader Indices of Multiple Deprivation (which incorporate extra factors such as employment, living environment and health) are used, the picture remains very much the same.

## Changes from 2001 to 2011

Since the 2001 Census the profile of the general population has altered significantly, and in England and Wales the number of people in work has risen over the ten years to 2011 from a combined total of 23.6 million to 26.5 million. Direct comparisons between the two years (Table 5) are made difficult because of changes in the way the journey to work question was structured in 2011. That is why, using the official method of comparison which makes allowances for these changes in the questionnaire, the numbers in Table 5 are at odds

with the other figures used in this report. However, the table does illustrate the change in modal share over time.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 5: Comparison of 2001 and 2011 modal splits of journey to work, England and Wales**

Mode	England and Wales		England		Wales	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
Work mainly at or from home	9.2%	10.3%	9.2%	10.3%	9.7%	10.4%
Underground, metro, light rail, tram	3.0%	3.8%	3.2%	4.0%	0.1%	0.1%
Train	4.1%	5.0%	4.2%	5.2%	1.2%	1.9%
Bus, minibus or coach	7.4%	7.2%	7.5%	7.3%	5.3%	4.5%
Motorcycle, scooter or moped	1.1%	0.8%	1.1%	0.8%	0.7%	0.6%
Taxi or minicab	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%
Driving a car or van	55.2%	54.5%	54.9%	54.0%	61.2%	64.0%
Passenger in a car or van	6.3%	5.0%	6.1%	4.9%	9.0%	6.6%
Bicycle	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	2.9%	1.4%	1.4%
On foot	10.0%	9.8%	10.0%	9.8%	10.3%	9.5%
Other method of travel to work	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%

Source: Office for National Statistics<sup>13</sup>



## Length of Car Journeys to Work

Unfortunately, the data on distance of journey to work from the 2011 Census has not yet been released. However, the annual National Travel Survey gives some indication of the lengths of these journeys. Data comes from two main sources: “face-to-face interviews with people in their homes and a seven-day travel diary, allowing travel patterns to be linked with individual characteristics”.<sup>14</sup> The average distances of commuting journeys by car/van for the regions of England, and for Wales, are shown in Table 6.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 6: Commuting trip length by car/van, by English region and in Wales**

Region of residence	Commuting miles	Unweighted sample size (individuals)
North East	9.2	1,787
North West	8.9	4,484
Yorkshire and The Humber	9.8	2,958
East Midlands	10.5	2,736
West Midlands	9.8	3,561
East of England	10.8	3,811
London	8.6	4,773
South East	11.2	5,085
South West	8.7	3,205
<b>England</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>32,400</b>
<b>Wales</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>1,758</b>

Source: Department for Transport<sup>16</sup>

## Data by Local Authority

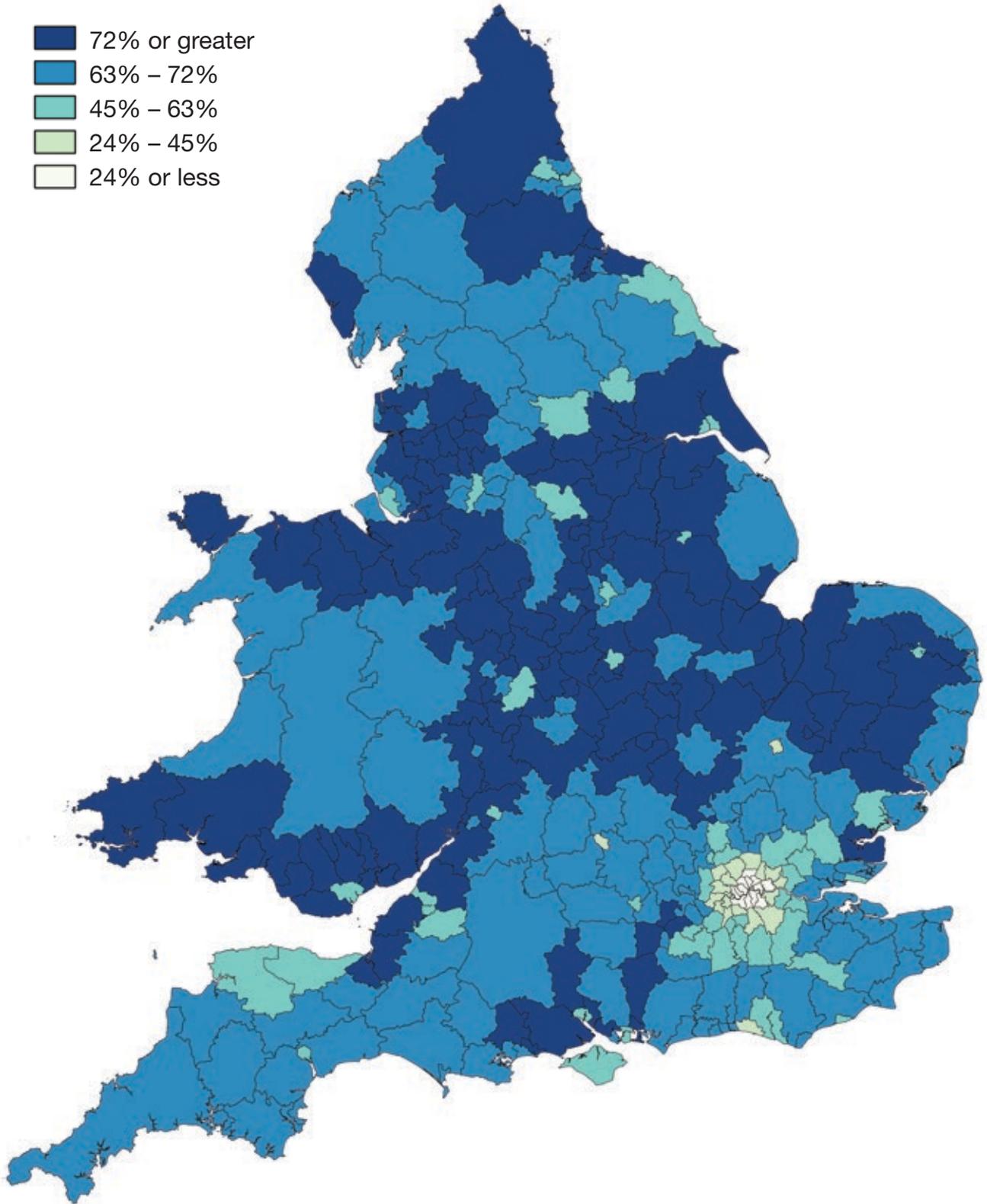
Tables 7 and 8 show which of the 348 local authorities in England and Wales rank highest and lowest in terms of the percentage of workers using a car to get to work. Table 9 ranks London authorities by percentage of journeys to work that are undertaken by car/van.



**Figure 2: English and Welsh local authorities by percentage of 16- to 74-year-olds in work travelling to work by car/van**

**Legend**

- 72% or greater
- 63% – 72%
- 45% – 63%
- 24% – 45%
- 24% or less



Web map available at: [www.racfoundation.org/research/mobility/the-car-and-the-commute](http://www.racfoundation.org/research/mobility/the-car-and-the-commute)

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**Table 7: Top ten English and Welsh local authorities ranked by percentage of 16- to 74-year-olds in work travelling to work by car/van**

Rank	Local authority	By car/van
1	Blaenau Gwent	82.2%
2	Cannock Chase	80.8%
3	South Derbyshire	80.6%
4	South Staffordshire	80.6%
5	Neath Port Talbot	80.5%
6	Torfaen	80.3%
7	North Warwickshire	79.9%
8	North West Leicestershire	79.9%
9	Bridgend	79.8%
10	Caerphilly	79.5%

**Table 8: Bottom ten English and Welsh local authorities ranked by percentage of 16- to 74-year-olds in work travelling to work by car/van**

Rank	Local authority	By car/van
339	Kensington and Chelsea	13.8%
340	Southwark	13.2%
341	Lambeth	13.0%
342	Hammersmith and Fulham	12.8%
343	Hackney	12.1%
344	Tower Hamlets	12.0%
345	Camden	10.7%
346	Westminster	10.2%
347	Islington	9.9%
348	City of London	3.3%



**Table 9: London Boroughs ranked by percentage of 16- to 74-year-olds in work travelling to work by car/van**

Rank	Local authority	By car/van
1	Hillingdon	56.0%
2	Havering	51.4%
3	Bexley	50.3%
4	Sutton	49.9%
5	Enfield	45.0%
6	Harrow	44.7%
7	Bromley	42.5%
8	Hounslow	42.3%
9	Barking and Dagenham	41.1%
10	Kingston upon Thames	40.3%
11	Redbridge	40.0%
12	Croydon	39.1%
13	Barnet	38.6%
14	Ealing	35.3%
15	Richmond upon Thames	33.9%
16	Waltham Forest	30.3%
17	Greenwich	29.6%
18	Brent	29.6%
19	Merton	29.1%
20	Lewisham	23.2%
21	Newham	21.9%
22	Haringey	19.6%
23	Wandsworth	15.1%
24	Kensington and Chelsea	13.8%
25	Southwark	13.2%
26	Lambeth	13.0%
27	Hammersmith and Fulham	12.8%
28	Hackney	12.1%
29	Tower Hamlets	12.0%
30	Camden	10.7%
31	Westminster	10.2%
32	Islington	9.9%
33	City of London	3.3%
	<b>All London</b>	<b>29.8%</b>

## 2. Conclusion

Between October 2003 and October 2013 the cost of living, as measured by the RPI, rose by **38.0%**.<sup>17</sup> Over the same period the price of fuel and motor oil rose at well above twice that rate – by **75.5%**<sup>18</sup> – and this despite the fact that there has not been a rise in fuel duty since 1 January 2011.





Other car running costs – insurance and maintenance chief amongst them – also rose at above the rate of inflation.<sup>19</sup>

For those in work (not to mention those struggling to find it), the cost of getting to and from their place of employment risks becoming prohibitive – which is hardly surprising, given not only the soaring cost of transport but also the decline in real wages in recent years.

So far, however, people have not turned their backs on the car. What other option do they have? The coverage of the rail and bus networks is patchy – and even where services do exist, passengers will know that here, too, fares have gone up faster than the general cost of living.<sup>20</sup> Nor has home-working taking off to the extent one might expect given the huge technological strides made over the past decade.

This is why almost two out of three of those in employment use the car to get to work, amounting to some 16.7 million people in total. On average, each commuter trip by car is ten miles long (or a twenty mile round trip). And that figure has been rising too: in rural areas it is up 13% over the past decade.<sup>21</sup>

In November 2013 the Office for National Statistics reported record numbers of people in work.<sup>22</sup> But the cost of mobility – not to mention congestion and the poor physical state of the road network – is bearing down on millions of workers, meaning that still more households face the prospect of sinking into ‘transport poverty’.<sup>23</sup>

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- <sup>5</sup> This is the Office of National Statistics' 'Rural/Urban' classification at the 'Lower Super Output Area' (LSOA) level – see [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/geography/products/area-classifications/rural-urban-definition-and-la-rural-urban-definition—england-and-wales-/index.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/geography/products/area-classifications/rural-urban-definition-and-la-rural-urban-definition—england-and-wales-/index.html).
- <sup>6</sup> Office for National Statistics (2013). *Official Labour Market Statistics*. Retrieved 8 November 2013 from [www.nomisweb.co.uk](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk).
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- <sup>9</sup> See <http://census.ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/related/deprivation.aspx>.
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<sup>12</sup> According to the notes to the 2011 Census: “In 2001, people who recorded their place of work as working mainly at or from home were considered to have their mode of travel to work as working mainly at or from home. In 2011, people working mainly at or from home could record, for example, that they travelled to work as a driver in a car or van, despite being based at home. Therefore, where comparisons are made to the 2001 Census, this article uses CT0015EW – a 2011 Census method of travel to work table that was generated by deriving home workers using the responses to the workplace address question (as reflected in 2001).” See [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/method-of-travel-to-work-in-england-and-wales/art-method-of-travel-to-work.html#tab-2001-vs-2011-data](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/method-of-travel-to-work-in-england-and-wales/art-method-of-travel-to-work.html#tab-2001-vs-2011-data).

<sup>13</sup> Office for National Statistics (2013). *Official Labour Market Statistics*. Tables S119 and CT0015EW. Retrieved 8 November 2013 from [www.nomisweb.co.uk](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk).

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<sup>19</sup> See note 17.

<sup>20</sup> See note 17.

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RAC Foundation  
89–91 Pall Mall  
London  
SW1Y 5HS

Tel no: 020 7747 3445  
[www.racfoundation.org](http://www.racfoundation.org)

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