London Luton Airport:

FTVG Ethnography findings

BARE ANALYSIS

THE ANSWERS YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS

Overall stats and stories

- 106 interviews with LLA staff / those who work at the airport
- 63% travel to LLA by car, (drive or dropped off)
- Only 1% car share with another colleague
- Habitual convenience and both a real and perceived a lack of alternatives make private car the default mode of travel for most staff journeys
- There are lots of ideas and a desire for change at LLA – a real opportunity

Some key themes

The driving trap

- We found that many staff felt trapped into owning a car and driving, due to the lack of other options available that are perceived as time efficient, cost efficient, safe and reliable.
- Once a staff member begins using a car to commute, we found staff felt it would be very difficult for them to change this behaviour.
- Part of this is the sunk cost of driving lessons, tests and the capital expense of the car itself, another aspect is the psychological barrier of breaking a driving routine, especially when parking on site is easy (the case for some staff).
- All these factors trap staff in their cars as the default mode of transport for LLA commuting.

Key quotes

‘A lot of people are looking at buying a car.’

‘I never needed to buy a car because I had options. It feels like a cultural push in this country.’

‘I feel bad as will be getting my licence soon and adding to the traffic.’

‘The cost of the train is no attractive alternative to driving.’

‘I've been pushed into driving from a poor bus experience. I've been pushed to buy a car because of this poor journey. I refused to get up any earlier.’

Perception is everything

- All staff interviewed from self-described rural areas who were currently driving, reported they believed there were no public transport or active travel options for them, though they had never checked this.
- Many staff who had not used public transport for a long time also had very negative perceptions about bus and train reliability.
- There was also a strong perception that lone travelling via public transport or active travel once dark would not be safe.
- When perceptions are highly negative, these become the reality and it becomes difficult to shift behaviours until these perceptions are shifted first.

Key quotes

'I wouldn't risk commitments to my family by being reliant on public transport connections.'

'I think it would be too much hassle, never looked into it.'

'I think there are about 2 buses a week from our village!'

'The cost and hassle mean it isn't worth it. I'd look for a new job if I couldn't park for free on site.'

Unintended incentives For unsustainable behaviours

- It was found that a significant minority of staff interviewed who lived within a 2 mile radius of LLA, were still choosing to drive, despite there being other alternatives.

- This was due to the unintended inceptives of providing free car parking for some staff, based in some buildings/in some job roles, independent of where they are based, rather than only for those with a home address a minimum distance away away.

- Other staff lived further away and were aware they still had good public transport options available. However, they were incentivised to drive by the perceived lower cost per journey, particularly for those only working on site for 2/3 days per week.

Key quotes

‘The big barrier is your own behaviours.’

‘I could get the train, but I get Exec parking, so why would I?’

‘Exec car park access means I don’t need to get the bus.’

Reliability is the Trump card

- Those staff who were taking or about to start taking driving lessons (the ‘soon to be lost’ cohort discussed in personas), spoke about reliability of the bus and train services being a cause of anxiety that they would be late for work, and a major contributor to the investment in a personal car for commuting purposes.
- When services are perceived as unreliable, and real experience confirms they are unreliable, this is the death knell for a service. This should be a significant concern to bus companies serving LLA and to Luton council, as it will continue to drive passengers away from buses and trains and into private vehicles, until reliability changes.
- Waiting at bus stops did indeed demonstrate that services were hit and miss in terms of their arrival times.
- People hate uncertainty above all else. By removing this, a service will win.

Key quotes

‘Travel is having an impact on staff well-being waking up in unsocial hours isn't easy.

People need to be able to plan their journeys and know they will get to work on time without stress.

Public transport is often cancelled or just doesn’t show up. Or buses are full.’

‘There’s not enough choice, so convenience wins,’

Safety is a key barrier for women

- Although safety did not emerge as a theme from the staff travel survey, the ethnographic interviews and observations found that the majority of women in this sample had safety concerns about walking by themselves in the dark from LLA to locations such as Luton Parkway train station, and would not feel comfortable traveling on public transport by themselves at night (buses were much more of an issue than trains).

- Women also cited feeling too tired to walk or cycle in uncomfortable shoes after a long shift, and that many buildings did not have changing/storage facilities, even if they did want to walk/cycle.

- A lack of lighting on walking routes into Luton/to the station, and lack of live information at shuttle bus stops, also meant some women said they always walked in groups, or called taxis for fairly short journeys, rather than risk walking/waiting alone.

Key quotes

'When I do a late shift, I get scared to take public transport.'

'I wouldn't feel safe walking anywhere on my own, I'd rather stay over at a hotel if there was no other option to get home.'

'A lot of women wouldn't want to get the bus. Only men I can think of walk to work. I wouldn't walk back to Luton at night (or in the day!)'

Cycling fear

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Key quotes

‘I’ve had 3 bikes stolen (leaving them at train stations while commuting) so this has put me off!’

‘For me, cycling would be a no-no at 3am without a proper cycling lane! I’d worry I’d hit a pothole and fall off.’

‘My wife wouldn't be happy about me cycling because of poor infrastructure.’

‘Are the bike sheds safe? I’m not so sure.’

‘It’s only a 20 min cycle but there are no shower facilities here. I wouldn’t want to put people off!’

The heart of DART

- There was mostly good knowledge of the DART service among the LLA staff we spoke to, but some did not know it was free of charge for them to use. Most did know this, but there were some staff based away from the main terminal building who were not using the DART when this could support a more joined up journey to the train station, rather than a taxi. This was due to the walk to the terminal putting them off.

- There is significant extra capacity within the DART station, which could be used for promotions of surface access initiatives, such as a new travel card, new incentive schemes, or bike scheme education.

- There was a lot of positive feeling and pride towards the DART from LLA staff, which contributed to a positive culture among staff working at the DART.

People want multi-modal incentives

- Many staff mentioned the desire for more choices when commuting, including more joined up journeys between different modes.

- There was lots of discussion of incentives that could entice staff out of their cars, such as cheaper bus tickets, or free bus with a train ticket. However it would need to be tested whether behaviours would follow this sentiment, if incentives were introduced (behaviours can be very sticky and usually require carrot and stick for change).

Reallocation of existing resources

- Several staff mentioned feeling frustrated seeing empty/near empty National Express buses/coaches at LLA. Many discussed whether these could be repurposed for a staff pick-up service instead, e.g. to the areas of Luton not well served by current commercial bus services, or to more disconnected areas further away from LLA.

Potential solutions

- Look at strategic car parking reductions, but only where viable alternatives exist
  - Increase/introduce car parking costs for salaried staff (not low paid or shift workers)
- Comms campaign to deal with Sustainable Transport perception problem: bike scheme and PT, staff travel card
- Create a lift sharing scheme – could an AI system help by matching postcodes? 30% of quant sample interested in this.
- Enhance 1st/last mile to the DART
- Explore a PoC trial – e.g. additional resource for a staff mini- bus for one unserved area
- Improving feelings of 'safety' between Luton Parkway station and airport – lighting, illuminated walkways, cycle path, signage, placemaking best practice