The gift of travel time

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Abstract

The interpretation of travel time in economic terms has played a fundamental part in shaping our transport systems. The time consumed in order to travel to a destination has been seen as the price paid for fulfilling the purpose of reaching that destination. By interpreting travel time as a disutility or burden, transport policy has been driven by the goal of quicker journeys. Drawing upon multidisciplinary literature and new qualitative research, this paper articulates an alternative perspective. It suggests that travel time, at least for the individual, can (sometimes) be perceived and experienced as a gift rather than a burden. This is examined in the context of (co-present) participation in social networks and in terms of two forms of travel time experience from which positive utility can be derived: transition time and time out – both facilitated or supported by a third notion, namely equipped time.

Keywords: gift relationships, travel time use, co-presence, value of time

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1. Introduction

Travel and communication networks are essential to facilitating participation in social networks and for the generation of social capital (Larsen et al, 2006). This paper considers the perceptions of travel time by the individual traveller in the context of producing and maintaining social networks. The need to spend time travelling is an inevitable consequence of co-present (face-to-face) obligations that are embedded in social practice (e.g. business, social or legal events) (Urry, 2002, 2003). This paper considers the effect of obligations of participating in social networks on the way travel time is perceived.

It draws on sociological and anthropological debates of 'gift relationships' to argue that *time is an inherent and unavoidable gift to co-presence* from which we expect some reciprocation through the benefits associated with belonging to, and participating in, a social network.

The gift relationship usually focuses on the exchange of *material* objects. In contrast, time is ephemeral and is not easily gift-wrapped in the same way. Time is organically inscribed through action and into objects, but often forgotten, ignored, or under valued (see Adam 1990, 1995). In this paper, therefore, we explore how the positive experiences of *travel time,* which benefit both traveller and other members of their social networks, can develop the metaphor of 'the gift' in a temporal context.

The backdrop against which this paper is set is an orthodoxy in transport studies and policy that interprets travel time (or strictly speaking travel time savings) in seemingly much more narrow economic terms. In considering investment in transport schemes, policymakers have historically given greatest attention to the economic appraisal of such schemes – examining whether the monetary benefits outweigh the monetary costs. The principal benefits are assumed to arise from the savings in travel time (ascribed a monetary value) achieved by a scheme (as a result of quicker journeys). Underlying this is an apparent assumption that travel time is unproductive time. This applies especially to travel during the course of the working day for which time savings are converted to monetary terms based upon the wage rates of the individuals in question. For travel outside of the working day valuation of time is based upon individuals' willingness to trade time for money. Economists are not ignorant of the subtle realities of time and its use in a travel context but nevertheless the basic premise in transport studies persists – travel time is a cost and thus travel time saving is a benefit. (For further details concerning the treatment of travel time in economic appraisal see Mackie et al (2003) and for additional critical examination of this orthodoxy see Lyons and Urry (2005).) The purpose of this paper is not to directly challenge this orthodox thinking. Its intention is to examine travel time through a different lens in such a way that, as one consequence, some critical re-examination of the orthodoxy might be called for.

The concept of travel time as a gift has emerged from qualitative research conducted as part of a UK research study funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council entitled 'Travel Time Use in the Information Age' (see also Lyons and Urry, 2005, Lyons

et al., 2007). Specifically, six gender-defined focus groups conducted in London, Bristol and Cumbria provide a set of discourses from which the concept of travel time as a gift is developed. The selection of focus group participants aimed to represent a cross section of age, social class, and travel mode use (car and public transport users), and to include some people who take mobile information and communication technologies (ICTs) with them on journeys.

The paper outlines key theoretical debates to consider the importance of travel and travel time to co-presence, and how travel time can be conceptualised as a gift in producing and maintaining social relationships. It considers the qualitative aspects of travelling and 'crafting' journeys to present an alternative to the economic values of travel time. The paper then moves on to examine focus group narratives to see how different experiences of travel time are articulated. From this, two categories of travel time emerge - 'transition time' and 'time out' - which encapsulate how the gift of travel time benefits the individual and others within their social network.

2.   Travel time in social networks and gift relationships

The concepts of a 'networked society' and the 'gift relationship' are well established in the social sciences. Both concepts concern how individuals and social groups create ties into (other) social groups for economic, social, and cultural reasons. The notion of a networked society is largely framed around economic exchange and participation in employment networks, with the move towards looser and more flexible global networks (see Castells,

1996). In contrast to the economic basis of the networked society, the concept of the gift

relationship originated in anthropological studies of societies based on *non-economic*

exchange where the exchange of gifts creates the social ties and obligations through

specific cultural rituals. Specifically, the giving of a gift expects or *obligates* a reciprocal

act that binds the relationship, but reciprocation can be a burden when an equivalent or

greater gift has to be returned (Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1990; Strathern, 1988; see Figure

1). However, not all gifts are directly reciprocated, and some commentators argue that the

only 'true gift' is one that is given anonymously without expectation of exchange (although

the giver may achieve some personal sense of reward) (Titmuss, 1970; Mauss, 1990;

Derrida, 1992; Chan, 2005; see Figure 2).

Figures 1 & 2 inserted here.

The coming together of people at specific locations (co-presence) is often an obligation of

the social relationship (economic or kinship) and place (e.g. law courts) (Urry 2002, 2003),

which facilitates a different level of interaction than that offered by phone calls, letters or

emails (Boden, 1994; Boden and Moloch, 1994). Time - co-present time and travel time -

is an inherent part of maintaining relationships that are enacted across geographic space.

We are concerned with how travel time interconnects with co-present relationships and how

the experience of travel time is perceived by travellers.

An ethnographic account of social networks in a post-perestroika Russian city by Busse(2001) is illustrative of the specific issue of giving up personal time for travel and co-presence. Here social networks are shaped by gift-exchange due to economic deprivation and an inability to exchange material goods of equal value; time is often all people can offer to maintain a place in the network. Specifically, she notes that the act of hosting and attending kinship events (e.g. birthday celebrations) has a raised status over the exchange of material gifts, even though this often demands long and unpredictable public transport journeys across the city. The time given to the social network encompasses an extended travel time, as well as time at the event, yet no direct analysis of this travel time is included in the account.

Time is rarely *overtly* discussed in the wider anthropological studies of gift relationships, but it is embedded in the social practices of producing and exchanging gifts. The production of gifts (e.g. crafting objects or raising animals) illustrates how time is invested into the social relationship beyond the moment of exchange, and this investment in time expresses greater value than giving money or a bought object (see Strathern 1988, Cheal 1996; Komter 1996). In contrast, Adam (1990, 1995) argues that, in economic (commodity) exchange systems, the speed of mass production has undermined the true value of labour intensive hand-crafted objects.

As discussed in the introduction, transport economics has focused on facilitating greater time for destination activities, in its assumption that there is no intrinsic value gained by the

individual when travelling (i.e. time is quantifiably measured in monetary units). For example Jara-Días (2000: 303) states:

> 'The day has 24 hours, and travel time usually consumes a substantial proportion of the truly uncommitted time. In general, individuals would rather be doing something else, either at home at work, or somewhere else, than riding in a bus or driving a car.'

An alternative perspective is to consider the qualitative (and multiple) experiences of time (see Adam 1990): firstly how travel time is 'crafted' and incorporated into the social practices of travelling; and secondly how 'activity' is not determined by a fixed location or economic output. Thus, taking a qualitative approach to the analysis of time, moves the travel time debate away from the strictures of transport economics, and enables the journey to be re-considered as an important time-space that affords opportunities such as relaxing, leisure reading, working, making phone calls, etc, which may benefit both the traveller and others within the network (in terms of how the traveller 'crafts' herself during the journey in readiness to be co-presented).

One of the problems (perhaps) is how we conceptualise the ease of travelling in the twenty-first century. Latour (1997) argues the relationship between journey and destination is made evident through the embodiment of heterogeneous agents. He compares the physical hardship of slowly hacking a path through a jungle with the speed of travelling first class in an air conditioned TGV train. The first class traveller is distanced from the multiple agents

that maintain and stabilise the route, unless they fail, and therefore the experience of travelling and destination activity become disconnected. Yet the boundary between the two travellers is less distinct than Latour argues.

Watts (2005) illustrates that the experience of a train journey goes beyond the provision of the system. The narrative she presents is of the 'art and craft of train travel', where the journey experience emerges through the shaping of the travel space by heterogeneous and mobile objects, fellow travellers, train staff, and sensory factors. Likewise, Laurier (2004) demonstrates how the car becomes an office, and the mundane motorway journey is re-enacted as a place of business interaction. As not all journeys are in the quiet comfort of first class train carriage, the crafting of the journey may also be a response to 'distress'. For example, recreating the office and getting on with some work would be impossible on an overcrowed underground train, so the traveller might actively use it as time to listen to music on a Walkman (or iPod/MP3) (see Bull 2000). However, this scenario suggests knowledge or experience about how to respond and deal with the travel system and use the time effectively.

Where the travel time has some benefit to the individual (whether it be pleasure or conducting work related tasks to reduce the infringement of work time on personal time) this enables us to extend the metaphor of travel time as a gift to network participation. It may be, as this paper goes on to explore, that the individual traveller gains something from the experience of travelling and from being in a mobile space away from other fixed location activities (or people) - something that would not otherwise have occurred. This

suggests that the burden of travel time can translate into becoming a gift for the individual traveller.

In this respect, the economic imperative of journey time reduction might not always apply (or be so fully applicable). People may, in some instances, seek out longer routes or accept longer journey times so that they have enough time to listen to music, relax or consider a work issue (see for example Bull 2000, Salomon and Mokhtarian, 1997, Redmond and Mokhtarian, 2001). The notion that travel time is a gift may present interesting possibilities for travel behaviour and notably the choice of how to travel – a slower mode which allows the gift experience to 'linger' might sometimes be preferred to the faster mode.

Travel time as a gift might be framed in the context of sustainability and modal choice, as Hjorthol (2001) highlights. Hjorthol argues that women are more likely to use public transport than men in order to benefit future generations, even though public transport journey times are often longer than those by car. Thus, the time burden of everyday travel is set in relation to a future world and society. Here the gift is in connection to a future generation, to whom the gift will be anonymous. Hjorthol's gift perspective adds another layer to the gift metaphor.

To summarise, in this section we have positioned co-presence as an essential part of producing and maintain social networks, and stated co-presence obligates travel and the giving of travel time. We expect some benefit in return from the social network (e.g. hospitality, sharing of ideas or knowledge, or social capital in wider context), thus there is

some return on the giving of time. However, in terms of the gift debates, while time is not overtly discussed it plays an important role, and understanding travel time within this metaphor foregrounds the idea that such time is qualitative and 'crafted' and directly relates to the fixed locations where co-presence occurs. Positive benefits gained from travel time use by the individual may also contribute a positive effect on co-present encounters at destinations (e.g. work, home, social event, conference, business meeting, etc). Thus, we see travel time as not just as a gift of time to network relationships, but suggest that the 'positive utility' of travel time has another layer of gifting to the traveller and significant others. These theoretical issues are developed in the next section through the discourses from the focus groups.

3.   Gifts in travel time discourse

Discourses of travel time use within the focus groups revealed multiple perceptions and experiences of travel time – some positive and others negative. Those which were negative indicate that travel can be a burden to the *individual*, but still a necessary gift of time for network participation. The positive discourses revealed journey experiences that confirmed that individuals often gain personal benefit from the travel time. This supports our earlier assertion that within the metaphor of the gift there is an added layer of gift of 'opportunity' for the traveller, which may in turn benefit those significant others (e.g. family members or business colleagues) at the destination. This section focuses mainly in developing an understanding of this additional layer of the gift.

The focus group participants were requested to record details about a recent journey. Such journeys were then the focus of initial discussion in the groups. Participants were prompted to discuss the nature of their travel experiences in terms of whether they were exciting, pleasurable, wasteful of time etc. The pros and cons of a 'teleportation' scenario were also examined where the prospect of being able to reduce travel time to zero was put to them (a concept previous employed by Mokhtarian and Salomon (2001)). Participants reflected upon how they planned in advance to use their travel time and the types of items that they would take on a journey including ICTs. The discourses (which could be categorised either as burden or gift) varied within each group and between groups, although common themes emerged. In some instances participants shifted their position in response to alternative perspectives offered by others, particularly in re-evaluating the benefits gained from travelling and travel time.

In this section of the paper we now juxtapose the discourses of the burden of travelling against the discourses of travel time as gift. By unwrapping the potential of travel time as a gift we can begin to understand how the positive utility of travel time plays an important role in social and economic relationships.

3.1   *The burden of travelling*

The focus groups generated two distinct depictions of 'burden' which correspond with established discussions in transport studies. The first related to physical access, i.e. the ratio of time for travelling and time at destinations. The second addressed the economic perspective of travel time, i.e. the notion that travel time is wasted time, through the ways

in which the journeys are experienced, especially on journeys that are regularly repeated (e.g. commuting) or along particular routes (e.g. motorway driving).

The spatial distribution of social networks, availability of a car and amount of free time, all constrain opportunities for co-present meetings with friends and family. Thus, the scenario of 'teleportation' for some individuals pointed towards a potential increase in opportunities to have more co-present encounters. Travel time budgets can also be under pressure in relation to more spatially compact social networking where access to or provision of public transport is limited as this rural dwelling student illustrates:

Rich   I'd pick the teleporter because the bus service doesn't run after 6 o'clock. If you go out with friends, or anything, you've got to walk. It's 5 miles between each village, and I live a mile out. So it takes hours just to go and visit people. (Cumbria)

As Schwanen and Dijst (2002) indicate, the amount of time spent travelling in relation to the time spent at the activity influences people's travel behaviour and social and economic opportunities.

Where participants associated the burden of travel with the journey *experience* as distinct from the loss of time for engagement in social activities, this was often associated with the London commute, driving along motorways, or on long-haul flights.

Dave   I agree. I mean commuting can be hideously, tediously boring, you're

doing the same journey every day. Like a mantra you know. ….. Just

commuting is just really boring. (London)

Dave's boredom suggests there could be an alternative: something exciting, interesting or even fantastical; although boring might facilitate time for thinking or relaxing. (In another part of the focus group discussion Dave fantasises a night club scene which would have transformed his routine Eurostar journey into 'exciting'.)

In shifting the perception of the journey, even the routine can move away from the boring, or at least start to re-conceptualise alternatives to the notion of 'wasted time'. (For example, if Rich were to re-conceptualise his country walk to the pub as a 'tourist' experience then the journey could become as important as the destination.) In the next section, therefore, we unwrap the potential for travel time to emerge not only as a gift to participating in the social network, but to enabling us to gain something on the way.

3.2   Unwrapping the gift

Central to developing the argument that travel time is a gift is the move in transport studies to understanding the utility of travel beyond providing access to destination activities. The literature summarised below assisted in the categorisation of travel time as a gift, and the need to understand the interaction between the travel infrastructure, mobile object and traveller in the 'crafting' of the journey experience.

Research by Mokhtarian (with others) proposes that the activities undertaken while travelling (e.g. making phone calls, preparing for the day ahead) and the experience of travelling itself (e.g. the psychological and physiological attributes of driving) indicate that travel time has a positive utility, which may connect with a personal travel time budget (see Salomon and Mokhtarian, 1997; Mokhtarian and Salomon, 2001; Mokhtarian et al., 2001; Mokhtarian and Chen, 2004; Redmond and Mokhtarian; 2001).

The opportunity to use travel time, and the pleasurable experience of travelling, especially driving, is supported by debates in the social sciences. For example, commentators on the experience of driving view driving as often a liminal time-space in several respects. Firstly, the driver can mentally prepare for the destination activity/meeting, be it work or relatives, where the passage through space and time focuses liminality (Davies, 2001; Pearce, 2000). Notably, women utilize this time to shed the burdens of work and prepare for the demands of home life (Pazy et al., 1996; Richter, 1990). Secondly, the ability to visually connect with the passing landscape accompanied by the car stereo enables travellers to explore their own memories about the route and destination, if a repeated journey, and play out alternative life scenarios (Bull, 2004; Edensor, 2003, 2004; Pearce, 2000).

Yet time use while waiting or travelling is often framed through the traveller being able to regain control of *wasted* time with activity (the practical rather than emotional). For instance Zerubavel talks about 'killing time':

'Many people today are becoming specialists in the fairly sophisticated art of 'killing time', which involves 'filling' otherwise 'empty' unaccounted-for time

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such as riding on the subways or waiting in the lobby – with newspapers,

crossword puzzles and even business letters' (Zerubavel, 1981: 58)

Likewise, Lefebvre considers activities that fill what he terms 'constrained time' (see Ross, 1995:143; Shields, 1999: 95). More specifically Gasparini (1995) focuses on waiting time to examine how technology and activities can 'equip' time more productively (see also Jain, 2004).

With the rapid social uptake of mobile phones and development in other mobile technologies (e.g. PDA, BlackBerry, WiFi) there are increasing opportunities for equipping travel time on different modes, which especially enable the use of small slivers of time (Lyons and Urry, 2005). Salomon and Mokhtarian (1997) suggest that using cellular (mobile) phones and listening to the radio are two ways of 'equipping' travel time in the car to overcome the problem of delays in congested road systems, and an alternative response to congestion by accepting its existence with a strategic individual response. Equipping for congestion resonates with Gasparini's (1995) discussion of rail travellers equipped for delay and waiting. The economic or personal burden of an extended time in the transport system is translated into an opportunity to multitask – wait and deal with phone calls, or wait and read documents, by being equipped (see Kenyon and Lyons, 2007). Yet, in some instances, ICTs only substitute for paper-based activities previously used for productive time use, whether for work or entertainment (Lyons and Urry 2005).

However, reading books, newspapers and magazines, and latterly listening to personal stereos, iPods and MP3 players, should not be seen as just killing or filling time. While

these activities have all enabled travellers to manage a semblance of personal space in the public transport environment since the Victorian era (Du Guy et al, 1997; Ross, 1995; Schivelbusch, 1981, Murtagh, 2000), the travel space may afford the *only* opportunity in an otherwise busy schedule to undertake such activities. For example, Bull (2000) indicates travel time can be the only time for listening to music of your personal choice and may affect an individual's choice of mode and journey duration.

Such insights from the literature highlight the seemingly subtle distinction between travel time being a burden to be lessened or accommodated and being a welcome parcel of time. Thus, the pleasure or usefulness of activities conducted while travelling, which is supported by the focus group evidence, enlivens the debate of what might constitute 'the gift of travel time'.   The characteristics of travel time outlined in the above literature support our two categories of travel time, where the traveller actively gains some positive benefit from the journey, which then may subsequently benefit others within the network (e.g. family members). The two categories are:

1. *transition time* - a need for experiencing distance and the opportunity for gearing up to the destination's demands; and

2. *time out* - escape from the obligations created through co-presence or fixed space that enable *time for* a 'back-stage' time to be oneself or a specific activity (e.g. reading).

It is evident from the focus group discourses that the ability to *equip time* by bringing objects such as mobile technologies, work related documents, or leisure reading, (or even thoughts and ideas), into the travel space in combination with infrastructure design or facilities (e.g. wifi, tables, etc) can be an important or essential enabler for transition and

time out. We now consider these two categories and then examine ways in which people equip travel time.

3.3   Transition time

Transition time particularly articulates the liminal process of travelling; the potential to adjust and alter between places, such as work and home. Time and place of departure and destination become blurred, with the journey becoming a nebulous boundary. Transition time is a gift to the traveller that directly feeds into relationships with other members of the social network.

The focus group participants articulated transition time in two ways. Firstly, it was described as the need to physically experience crossing space in time to achieve the sense of distance and difference; the physical geographical markers along routes, or the practices of cabin crew when flying, helping this perception of spatial and temporal change. Secondly, transition time provides the temporal opportunity to translate, adjust or prepare oneself for a different social setting and social identity at the destination, (as identified in the literature in the previous section).

The idea that travel offered a transitional time emerged with the discussion of the hypothetical scenario of teleportation. The majority of people who rejected the opportunity of zero travel time used the argument of transition time to articulate why they liked their commute or other journeys, and subsequently some of those participants who had initially

espoused the idea of teleportation reviewed their position to agree that the transition time was a benefit that they too enjoyed.

Experiencing the transition between places to provide a sense of scale dominated in the Cumbrian male focus group. However, the notion of travel time as a gift is more strongly evident in circumstances where the traveller is afforded a time use opportunity less likely to occur elsewhere (e.g. within the office or home). For instance, as per Davies (2001), travel time can provide a unique opportunity where moving through time and space orientates the individual to the demands of the activity or encounter at the destination. Travel time clearly emerges here as adding to the anonymous gift to the network through enabling preparation, whether in terms of translation of identity (see Pazy et al., 1996; Pearce, 2000) or focusing on a future task.

The focus group discussions confirmed that travelling on business, for some people, provides an opportunity to prepare for the impending meeting, sales pitch, or presentation (something which has not gone unrecognised in the economics literature on the valuation of travel time (e.g. Fowkes, 2001)). In particular, Calum's comment below draws on the concept that physically moving though time-space orientates travellers towards destination activities.

> Calum I find if I'm with work colleagues you can prepare for the meeting, and often I rely on that someone being in the car with me to actually prepare for that meeting. So we're having a pre-meeting in the car and

that's valuable. In a way you feel as you're drawing closer to your

destination. You're mentally tuned into that meeting. (Bristol)

Calum also agreed that he would travel a longer route if more discussion time was required.

The car, in Calum's discussion, extends the boundary of the office out into the road, and the

car as a space affords the collective transitional use of time.

The need for transition is usually expressed in relation to more mundane travel, i.e. the

commute between home and work, as identified earlier (see Davies, 2001; Pazy et al.,

1996; Richter, 1990). In this respect the focus groups support the claim by Redmond and

Mokhtarian (2001) that people desire, on average, a 15-20 minute commute to enact the

transition between work and home roles. The commute into work was described as time to

think and prepare for the activities ahead, while for the return journey it was about

unwinding and shedding the stresses of the day to ensure that negative moods were not

taken home and a clean break between each day is made.

Dawn describes the liminal process that occurs on the journey into and from work, where

the segmented roles attached to the spaces of home and work are left and picked up once

more.

Dawn   If you're driving there…it sort of gives you time for your brain to

wake up and for your head to get into gear. I sort of start thinking

about I've got to do this, I've got to do that. So you're planning time.

And then when you're coming home it's like your de-stressing time.

She continues (below) in suggesting journey length is also attributable to this process of reforming one's identity. The commute has to provide *enough* time.

> Dawn I know speaking to quite a few people that I work with that commute
>   further than what we do, that's their time. By the time they've got
>   home they're quite chilled out, they're fine. Where the journey's too
>   short they don't get that opportunity they're all wound up when they
>   get home. (Cumbria)

The need to unwind on the way home seems particularly important, and some participants (male and female) identified that they would (and do) make a longer than 'necessary' return journey to give enough time to move out of work-stressed mode. Extending the journey time enables re-entry into the social relationships at home, thus benefiting significant others as well as the traveller. It is evident that the journey home is much more flexible (unless picking up children or travelling on rural bus routes) for incorporating such a time-extension than the journey into work.

Time out

Travel can protect and cocoon the traveller and legitimises 'time out'. Thus, the gift of travel time is directed at the traveller. For a long time the car, train, and bus have been impermeable 'protected' spaces, as Ross describes:

> "A clothing salesman . . . . to the filmmaker's question "When are you free?"
> he responds, "On my way to work" – the only place where he is protected from
> being yelled at by his wife or boss. The commute … has become a respite, a
> retreat.' (Ross 1995: 55)

However, various forms of mobile communications devices have revoked this escape. The mobile phone, email via the 'BlackBerry' and 'WiFi' place increasing pressure on some individuals to be available even while travelling, and work-related paper documents have always been available to travel with the employee and seek attention. Despite this change to the travel space, travelling with the mobile phone does not exclude the opportunity to perceive travel time as 'time out', as our focus group discussion shows below.

For many travel needs to be a place of retreat, as Ross (1995) describes. Ray from Bristol particularly emphasised his need to do nothing while travelling, arguing against the majority who saw it as a time out to do something (see below). Likewise Jenny and Charlie also sought this time out for solitude and doing nothing:

Jenny   If I'm on a long journey . . . on the train or the coach I do prefer to be on my own. Not because I'm anti-social but I just use the time not to have to do anything. I enjoy spending time with my friends and if it's a short journey to city centre or something that's different. But if it's a long journey, it's all being on my own, and *doing nothing* is all part of the journey itself. (Cumbria, emphasis added)

Charlie   When I travel I don't really plan to do anything. To me it's time to myself. You know, just to think about life in general, just chilling out. (London)

There is a contrast then between the idea of productivity in terms of doing something like work and the less measurable personal gain from doing 'nothing'. Thus, as Mokhtarian et al. (2001) suggest, 'anti-activity' (e.g. resting, daydreaming) is important to the utility of travel time.

Thus time out, as a time and space away from the obligations of work and home, can also mean time for. Nora, from Bristol, was adamant that she wanted her bus journey to read her book, and any time savings would be engulfed by domestic chores. While Lucy also valued it as reading time, she also enjoys the opportunity to phone her friends and family. Ironically, although it is a very public space, it is the only space that provides her with privacy:

> Lucy   I never, ever, ever have time on my own, the minute I wake up in the morning my boyfriend's like yelling in my ear, the kids are doing it, so travel is the <u>only</u> time I have on my own. …… actually I wouldn't want that taken away. Because I wouldn't get a moment to read the magazines I want to read, or have the chat with my mum, my sister [on the mobile phone]. That's me time as well. (London, participant's emphasis)

Susan, also from London, rarely uses public transport and sees driving as her private time, where she can catch up on social phone calls.

However, while Lucy enjoys having her phone conversations on public transport, Susan and other focus group participants neither like making calls in public or like listening to other peoples. 'My time' for Lucy, may indeed be wrecking the 'my time' of other people who want to sit quietly. For example, some participants stated they actively sought the 'Quiet Coach' on trains, whereas other shunned it precisely because they want to make calls during their journeys.

'Time for' can overlap the transitional process described earlier. Travel for business can be a window of opportunity to escape the demands of office life and focus on a particular task allocated for the trip. A study of mobile workers identified planning strategies that allocate work tasks suited to travelling and the quiet time this provided, for example reading long documents on international flights (Brown and O'Hara, 2003; Perry et al., 2001). One of our participants, Simon, discussed this window of opportunity on a train journey to London – a mode he rarely uses, as time out of the pressures of the office to complete a specific task:

> Simon   Going up was good because I was going for a meeting about the work
> magazine. I'm on the committee so it actually gave me two hours to
> read the magazine - the latest edition. So I could <u>actually be ready</u> for
> the meeting because I've always been too busy at work to find two
> hours to sit and read the magazine. (Bristol, participant's emphasis)

The travel space combined with the timeframe of the journey provides escape from the pressures of the various fixed location activities with which we are involved on a daily basis. Time out is articulated is multiple ways, but is obviously enjoyed and desired.

Equipping that time, to which we now turn, is an essential part of crafting the journey experience.

Equipped time

The travel spaces, and related infrastructures (e.g. wifi), and the objects that accompany the traveller equip *transition time* and *time out*. As discussed earlier, the printed word, portable music, and mobile communications have become central to the art of equipping travel time and managing the public space of rail and bus travel. In this research we were particularly interested in how mobile technologies such as the mobile phone, PDA, BlackBerry, and laptop computer expand the opportunities for equipping travel time use.

The mobile phone has a ubiquitous presence, at least amongst the younger generations. It is a constant companion and takes a leading role in equipping time (see Lyons et al 2007). For instance, in discussing their selected recent journeys, a quarter of all the focus group participants described their travel time as time for making contact with people using the mobile phone. Sam indicates how the mobile phone enabled him to redefine travel time on his train journey into a social time:

> Sam   I suppose the time on the journey was I would describe it overall as a
> time for making contact with my friends, phoning them up. I actually
> put 'a waste of time' but it wasn't, so I changed my mind. (Cumbria)

It was not surprising therefore when given an exercise of packing a bag for a traveller in a given imaginary scenario everyone in the focus groups selected the mobile phone as the 'must have' object.

While the mobile phone equipped some of the participants with an opportunity for conducting work, most people used it for personal calls and text messaging. In particular some male participants indicated how the mobile phone enabled them to play games, search the Internet, listen to music and watch videos. Such entertainment features are used on the London underground where there is limited signal reception. However, one participant described how he used the time to write text messages and save them for when a signal was available again. Similar tactics were described with business travellers using email on the move by Perry et al. (2001).

Few of the focus group participants travelled with a laptop computer or other mobile technologies, and no-one had used WiFi while travelling. Where laptops did feature they were taken to use at the destination rather than use while travelling. Laptop use is often constrained by the travel space, especially on aeroplanes, buses and coaches, and the train seemed the preferred place for using a laptop amongst focus group participants. Jamie's description of taking the laptop on the train is indicative of the interplay between work and play while travelling:

Jamie   Yes I had to take the laptop. I was doing a bit of work and I thought
            well I've done a bit of work. I took something like Peter Kay [DVD]

it's just something you can turn on and laugh at, … rather than reading

a magazine. . . . . …. I might never turn my computer on but it depends

if I've got some work that's needing to be done urgently then I might

work all the way there so it just depends on the circumstances at the

time. (Cumbria)

While the laptop enables and coerces work while travelling, it also affords the type of entertainment that was previously spatially fixed within the home or cinema.   However, as Jamie indicates, the use of technologies are context dependent and this may include journey duration as well as work obligations (see also Lyons et al, 2007).

The consideration above of *transition time, time out,* and *equipped time* demonstrates the multifaceted experiences of travelling. People are giving up time to be at work, attend meetings, visit relatives, etc. but the travel time itself is often perceived as beneficial by the traveller. The time and space of travelling can afford opportunities for the mental transition of 'self' between places and also for activities (or anti-activity) that are squeezed out by the demands of the office or home. How people equip their travel time is evolving with developments in mobile technologies, as well as in transport infrastructures, and these often combine work and pleasure/social in one journey. Finally, when a traveller is able to actively 'craft' the journey so that it is a positive and desired experience, it may have a direct impact on his/her social interactions at home or at a business meeting, or by managing the pressures of work. Thus, the positive journey experience can enhance the gift of time to the network, as well benefiting the traveller.

4.   Conclusion

The discussion above demonstrates travel time is enacted and experienced in multiple ways and is context driven; therefore, not easily reducible to an economic value. It is also clear that travel time is a desirable time for many people in many instances, and is actively incorporated into the organization of everyday activities and work-related tasks.

In pursuing the concept that 'travel time is a gift', we have argued that time has to be given up, whether considered wasted or not, to network participation. In some instances, this giving up of time goes unrecognised. However, we suggest that experience of travelling through the way in which the journey is 'crafted' between the traveller, accompanied objects, and travel space can extend the concept of the gift of travel time. Shaping travel time to have a positive utility therefore benefits the traveller *and* those s/he interact with at the destination. Rather than seeing place of departure, journey and destination as discrete, the boundaries are blurred, either through the liminal process of reshaping identity, or having a specific time to prepare work for a meeting. Thus, transition, time out and equipping time coalesce in affording the traveller opportunities, which may positively impart on destination relationships or activities.

Arguing that travel time has an intrinsic value to individual travellers presents some challenges and opportunities to the study of transport, as well as for transport providers. By arguing that travel time can be a gift rather than a burden, suggests there is an opportunity to explore how a positive experience of travelling may take away or reduce a desire for a

speedier journey and time savings. It may also indicate that travelling longer distances may be increasingly acceptable as travel environments become more equipped or equippable for working or socialising through mobile ICTs. Yet it needs to be recognised that the ratio between travel time and other time consuming activities (work or personal) is context driven.

Some transport providers are developing an understanding of the impact of the positive utility of travel time in relation to the marketing of their 'products' and thus commodifying attributes of the journey that benefit the journey experience (e.g. entertainment systems, wifi, business class). Exploiting the concept that travel time can be a gift is an opportunity for them to consider how the travel environment promotes or limits the opportunity for activities and anti-activities. While this concept could benefit the targeting of public transport investment and marketing, the car industry can increasingly compete with tradition notions that working while travelling is the preserve of rail travel. Travel time as a gift is a multi-modal phenomenon.

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Figure 1. A simple gift relationship
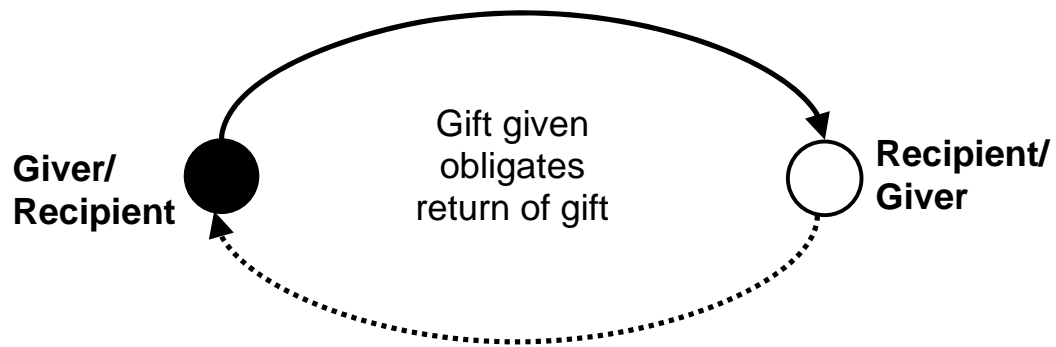

**Giver/
Recipient**

Gift given
obligates
return of gift

**Recipient/
Giver**

Figure 2. The anonymous (true) gift

Gift given (anonymously)
No obligation to return gift

Giver

Recipient