

MIDLANDS ENGINE OBSERVATORY ACADEMIC INSIGHTS

Infrastructure: Connecting Places



Theme:

The importance and opportunities within our infrastructure networks have been made more obvious by the pandemic

Area of Focus:

A broad class of infrastructure, connecting communities to jobs, services and opportunities and businesses to customers, suppliers and employees

Key Findings:

- The pandemic has underscored the significance of both of blue and green infrastructure for health and wellbeing. Natural places such as parks, rivers, canals, and green urban spaces have provided a place for exercise, meditation and recreation during the worst of the pandemic.
- On top of this they have provided environmental benefits contributing to the fight against climate change, helping to cut air pollution, reduce flood risk and support natural biodiversity.
- Digital infrastructure has also been a key enabler of economic and social resilience during the pandemic.
- East Midlands Railway show the number of rail journeys decreased from 25.4m in the financial year of 2019/20 to 5.1m in the financial year 2020/21. This equates to a decrease of 80% (or only 20.1% of journeys from the previous year).
- Transport for West Midlands statistics show that rail and bus travel declined to very low levels in the early pandemic and were still approximately 60% and 30% below normal levels as of early September, 2021. Metro ridership was still down by around 20% during this period too.
- Car usage returned to near normal levels during summer 2020 and in the autumn was around its pre-pandemic level, but this is likely to have been impacted as a result of the Omicron winter wave.
- The percentage of people travelling to work by car by region in 2020 was 79% for the East Midlands compared to 81% in the West Midlands.



Midlands Engine Impact:

- Statistics from Zap-Map show that the West Midlands and East Midlands lags on public electric vehicle charging points, with just 6.6% of the UK share and yet 8.9% of the population for the West Midlands, with the East Midlands has having 5.5% share of charging points with a 7.2% population share,
- Green infrastructure is increasingly important to citizens as they value outdoor activities, including cycling, walking for not just commuting but pleasure.
- Good and reliable broadband across the region will be important to help stimulate growth and support firms in the transition to hybrid working.
- The West Midlands hosts the UK's first 5G test bed, providing businesses with access to experiment with the new technology. The region is ranked first for 5G coverage by Umlaut and agreements have been signed by Birmingham City.
- The East Midlands has 98.53% superfast and fiber coverage of Superfast (>24 Mbps) of 98.53% compared to 98.20% for the West Midlands.

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