

Podcast 151 – How Australians Get to Work

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 151 – How Australians Get to Work

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(This podcast is 14 minutes and 49 seconds long.)

Hi,

How you get to work, and how long it takes, can have a big effect on your daily life. This is especially true in Australia, as around 72% of us live in the big cities where traffic flows can sometimes be slow and tedious. In this podcast, I would like to talk a little about how Australians get to work every day, including how many of us are now working from home.

The information I am using comes from our last national Census taken in 2021, during the second year of the pandemic, and our 2016 Census. I wrote about the Census in Podcast Number 140 (see [Podcast 140](#)).

The first point of interest from the 2021 Census data is that 21% of employed Australians actually worked from home. In other words, they didn't need to travel to work – they were already there! By comparison, in the 2016 Census, only around 5% of people worked from home. This large change was primarily caused by the pandemic, when many people were told that, if they could, they must work from home. However, this change would seem to be an ongoing feature of our post-pandemic workplace. Now that pandemic work restrictions no longer apply, many workers are keen to have the option of

working from home, at least for some percentage of their work time.



Working at home.

Image by Lukas Bieri from Pixabay

I was able to observe this change first hand for my wife. She found herself in a situation where she had to work from home from early 2020. Perhaps surprisingly, it didn't stop her from doing her university job effectively. Online meetings were used and communication between worker, boss and colleagues continued effectively. Things got done. I think it is fair to say that, for many occupations, working from home is now an option which many workers and their employers will choose in the future. Of course, one of the biggest advantages is that you don't need to travel. You save the travel time, you save the petrol and you avoid the stress of driving in traffic. In addition, there is no more wear and tear on your car. Reduced travel is also good for the environment. As well, you can organise your workday more

effectively so that you have a better work-life balance. For example, you can take a longer lunch break in order to attend a dentist appointment, and then make up the time by working longer into the early evening, or by starting work earlier in the day.

While there are advantages in working from home, there are also disadvantages. For example, the interaction between team members is reduced. This interaction, depending on the work you are doing, can spark creativity or innovation, or improved team work. These things can make the workplace more productive. Home based workers lose that interaction to some extent. People also can feel somewhat isolated, missing the face-to-face contact with others which we all need and enjoy.

I guess that's why many home-based employees will still attend at the office or the workplace for part of their work week, to ensure that they can feel part of the team and build relationships between team members.

According to the 2021 Census, those workers in the Information Technology fields (IT) were the most likely to be working from home, along with those working in sales, marketing and public relations.

Of course, there are many, many jobs where you must be at the workplace in order for the job to be done at all. Examples include factory workers, medical professionals, builders, car mechanics, electricians, carpenters, painters, bus and train staff, warehouse workers, shop workers – these are just a few examples. Their journey to work, if it is a long one, can have a major impact on their day. In 2021, 71% of workers still travelled to their workplace every day.



Traffic in the centre of Melbourne. The trams run down the centre of the street.

Image by Adrian Malec from Pixabay

The next point of interest from the Census is what form of transport these workers used. Not unexpectedly, the most popular form of transport was driving your own car, used by 53.1% of employed Australians. Another 3.9% travelled as a passenger in a car. 2.5% of workers walked to work. Another 2.5% travelled by train and 1.8% by bus. The 2016 Census showed a slightly different pre-pandemic picture. In 2016, with no pandemic, 62% drove their own car, 4.6% travelled by car as a passenger, 3.5% walked, 7.2% travelled by train and 3.5% travelled by bus. The effects of the pandemic can be seen in the differences between the two years' numbers.

However, the biggest surprise for me in all these numbers is the relatively low number of workers using public transport, in particular trains and buses. In 2021, only around 3.3% of workers, and in 2016, only around 10.7% of workers were using public transport to get to work. The reason I am surprised is

because of the additional cost of using a car to get to work, compared to public transport.



Public Transport – the train in Brisbane, Australia.

Image by Andy Leung from Pixabay

Let's compare the cost of a car versus public transport. For a car, there's the monthly cost of a loan to buy the car, the petrol, the regular maintenance, replacing the tyres and the car insurance. The RACV, Victoria's motoring organisation, estimates in 2023 that the total of all these costs for a medium sized car is \$13,440 per year. This does not include the cost of parking, which in a commercial carpark in the centre of Melbourne can cost you around \$3,600 per year. That's a total of around \$17,000 per year. Compare this to the cost of buying a yearly ticket to catch public transport in Melbourne, train or bus, which is around \$2,000 per year, with no parking fees to pay. The difference is a massive \$15,000 per year. In fact, that is around 20% of the average after-tax wage in Australia. By comparison, public transport

costs per year are around 3% of the average after-tax wage. Of course, many people love the freedom and convenience which a car gives. You decide when to travel and you sit in the comfort of your own car while you travel. Also, it is usually a little quicker in a car compared to public transport, so you do save some time there. In addition, and this is probably a major factor, most people want to own a car anyway, so that they can get around outside work hours. Therefore, they are happy to pay the extra cost of using their car to get to work.

My own experience throughout my career is an interesting example. When I lived in Sydney, I used public transport. I had to travel 15 minutes by bus to the railway station, followed by a 50 minute train journey to the city, finishing with a 10 minute walk to my workplace. That makes a 75 minute journey, both in the morning and in the evening. All up, that was 2 and a half hours per day sitting on the bus and train, and walking. I used the time to my benefit by doing the weekly readings for my Masters degree. Earlier in my career, when I was a teacher in Perth, Western Australia, I used my car to get to work, as I was able to teach at a school around 15 minutes by car from home. I guess that is the ideal situation. However, in Australia's big cities, that can be difficult due to the high cost of housing in most areas. In my last few months of working, before I retired, I rode my motorbike to work in the city centre. It was quicker, cheaper and I was able to easily find a free parking spot. Now, as a retired person on my early morning walks, I look at the busy roads each morning and I realise I am happy to be no longer travelling to work.

If you have a question or comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take

a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 151 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

[Start quiz](#)

Vocabulary

- ☐ Play after-tax wage = the wage or pay or salary to get after you have paid all your tax
- ☐ Play all up = when all the parts are added up
- ☐ Play apply = (here) in place, to be followed
- ☐ Play appointment = a time and date when you will meet with somebody
- ☐ Play average = the middle number in a range of numbers.
- ☐ Play avoid = when you don't have to do something which you don't like
- ☐ Play benefit = when something is valuable to you
- ☐ Play by comparison = compared to, when you look at the differences between 2 things
- ☐ Play Census = Australia's day when everyone is counted, once every 5 years
- ☐ Play colleagues = people you work with

- Play commercial = when something is a business, where you must pay for services and goods
- Play communication = to exchange ideas or information with another person
- Play convenience = when something is made easy
- Play due to = caused by
- Play effectively = correctly, when you do something the right way
- Play employers = the person or company which gives you a job and pays you
- Play ensure = to make sure something happens
- Play environment = the natural world, or a part of it, in which we live
- Play estimates = (here) makes a good guess about something which hard to find out
- Play extent = (here) amount
- Play feature = characteristic
- Play first hand = seen with your own eyes
- Play form = (here) type
- Play ideal situation = the best situation you can get
- Play including = when something is a part of something else
- Play innovation = new ideas, new ways of doing things
- Play interaction = when you talk with other people
- Play isolated = when you are alone
- Play journey = when you go from one place to another

- Play keen = very interested, excited about
- Play loan = when the bank gives you money so you can buy something, but you must pay it back
- Play maintenance = to keep things in good order and good condition
- Play major factor = one of the most important things
- Play major impact = a big effect
- Play make up the time = to work extra hours to pay back some time you had away from work
- Play massive = very, very large
- Play Masters = a university degree which comes after the Bachelors Degree
- Play medical professionals = doctors, nurses and other who look after sick people
- Play medium = not small, not large, but in between these two
- Play observe = to see, to notice
- Play occupations = the different types of jobs that people can do
- Play option = when something is possible, an alternative, a choice you can make
- Play pandemic = when a sickness is caught by many, many people
- Play petrol = used in cars, trucks and motorcycles to give power
- Play post-pandemic = after the pandemic
- Play pre-pandemic = before the pandemic

- Play primarily = mostly
- Play productive = when you are doing good things in your job
- Play public transport = buses, trains and ferries which carry people from one place to another
- Play realise = when you understand something for the first time
- Play reduced = becomes smaller or less
- Play relationships = when you know other people and communicate with them
- Play restrictions = when you are not allowed to do some things
- Play spark = (here) to start, like a match can spark a fire
- Play tedious = boring, too slow, dull, too long
- Play traffic flows = the movement of cars, trucks, buses and motorcycles along the road
- Play transport = all types of vehicles which move people and things around. Eg. Cars, buses, etc
- Play travelled = to go from one place to another
- Play unexpectedly = when something was not expected to happen
- Play warehouse = a large building where things are stored
- Play wear and tear = when things are used a lot, they start to break
- Play work-life balance = a balance between working time and leisure (non-working) time