

South Yorkshire Weekly Policy Briefing

25th February 2022

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This week's policy takeaways

- ❑ The return of workers to offices is revealing some interesting trends. Workers in London are returning at a lower rate than in the 'core cities'. And those that do return seem to prefer Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays according to transport data, although local footfall data challenges that trend.
- ❑ We've been covering the recent decades-high inflation rate facing consumers. But the headline inflation rate (5.4%) has been criticised as not reflecting prices as experienced by people shopping for basics like food. ONS and others are on a mission to adapt survey methods to better meet this need.
- ❑ Is Sheffield the hardest-working city? According to a poll reported in the *Mirror*, yes, as people are more likely to work beyond their contracted hours.

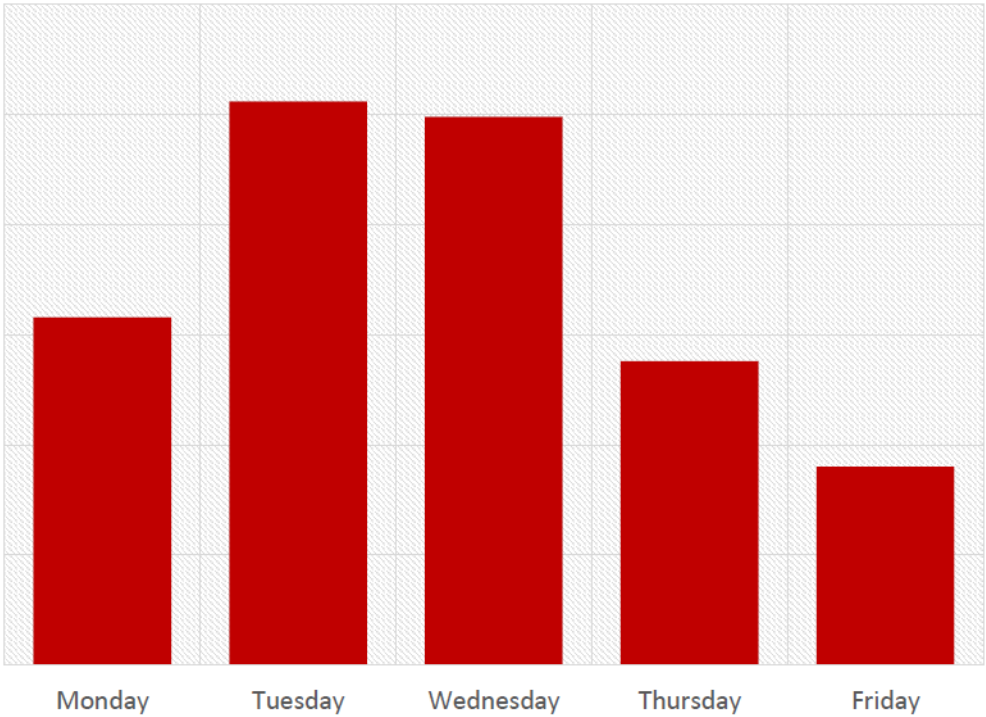
**Tuesday, Wednesday, And Thursday
(T.W.A.T)**

A new term?

In January 2019, The Spectator termed the expression “T.W.A.T days” for those people who wanted to work in the office on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday and then work from home on Monday and Friday.

We reported on this in our Christmas edition, highlighting that desks booked at SYMCA’s office were most popular on a Tuesday and Wednesday (but less so on Monday and Thursday).

Desks Booked at Broad Street West by Day of Week (Sample)



Source: SYMCA... Y axis removed for confidentiality

Back to the office?

Centre for Cities has been monitoring commuting trends since the start of the pandemic. The ebbs and flows reflect the various lockdowns and easing of restrictions.

A recent [update blog](#) shows that footfall in city centres has been on an upward trend. Yet still absolute levels of footfall are below where they were in the Autumn. It may be that many employers will follow the most recent guidance lifting restrictions from *next* month.

‘London’s strength is its weakness’ because such a wide commuter catchment area no doubt helps explain why it is behind: people living furthest away are most reluctant to return to the office.

Graph on the next slide



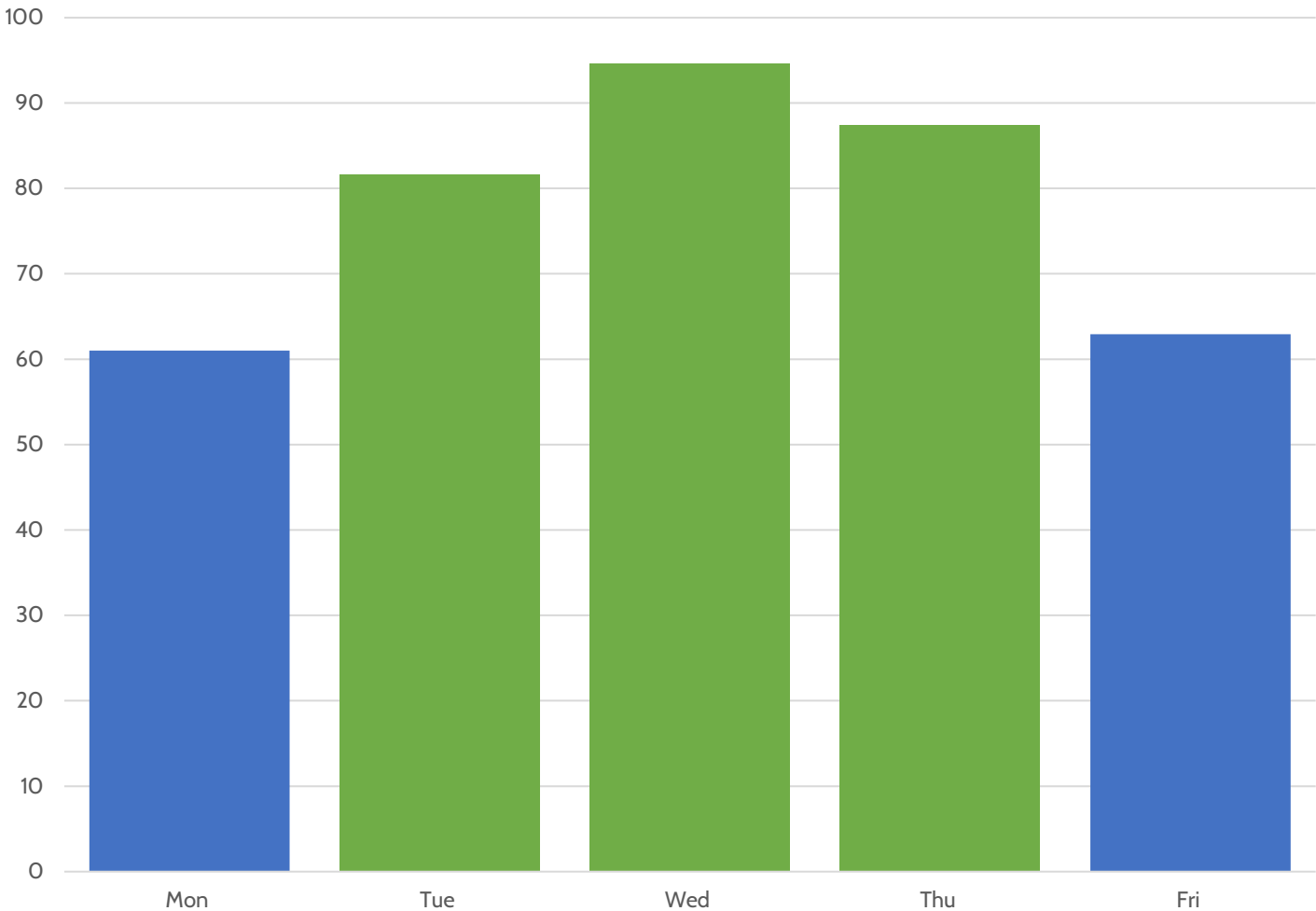


Wokingham T.W.A.T

The data to the right shows parked car counts for the week day between July and October last year in Wokingham (!) which shows that the T.W.A.T travel profile is happening across the country.

The travel patterns of commuters will have implications for transport, urban centres and service delivery.

Average number of cars in the Wokingham Station car parks (July-October)



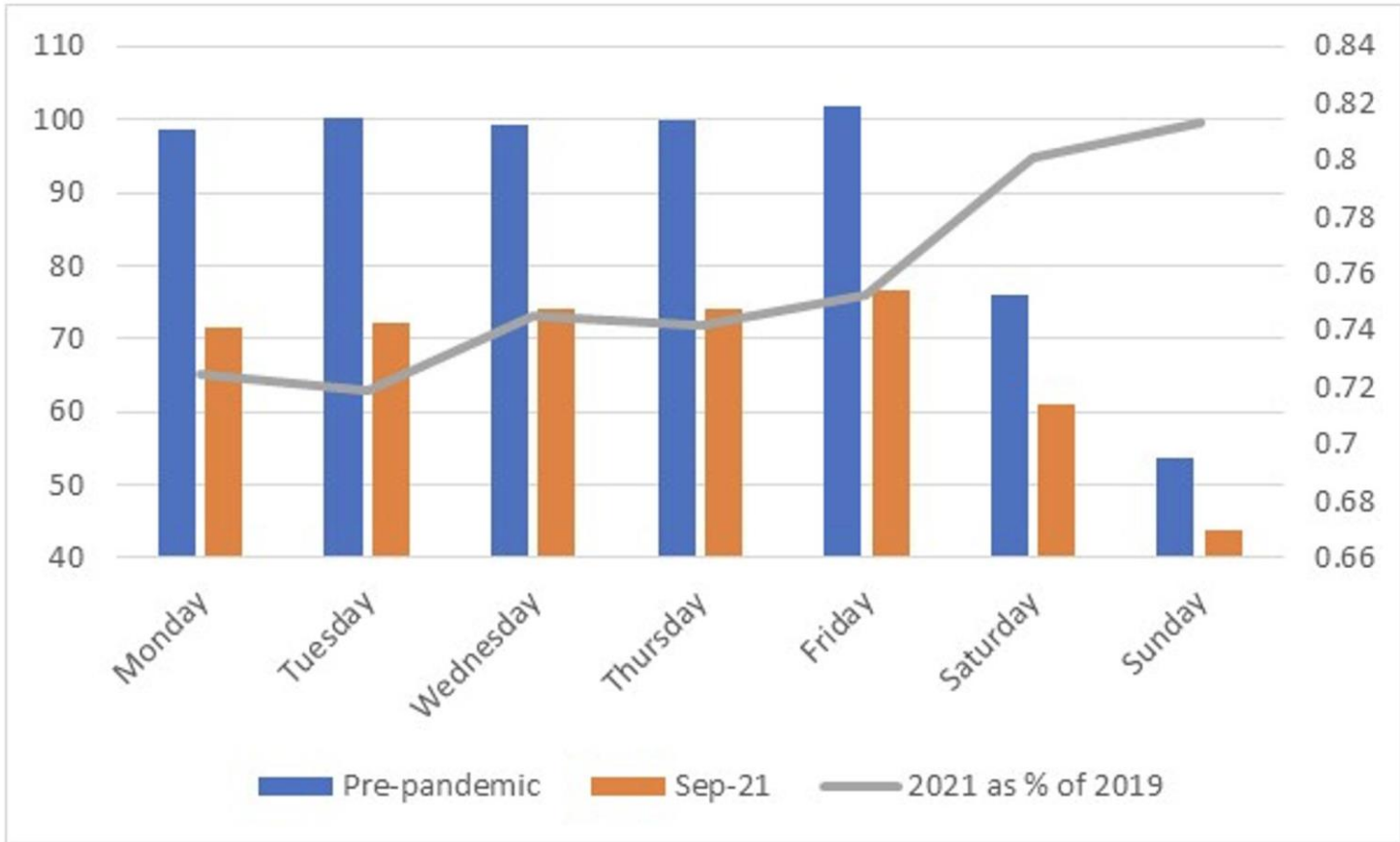
Source: Great First Western Message Board (!!!)

London T.W.A.T

It is reported by CITY AM that commuter numbers are 20% higher on a Tuesday compared to a Monday in the City of London, and 35% higher by Thursday.

However not all data is showing such a clear cut division with some daily bus use data from London slightly higher on Wednesdays but also Fridays.

Daily bus use in London: average weekday use pre-pandemic =100. Source: TfL



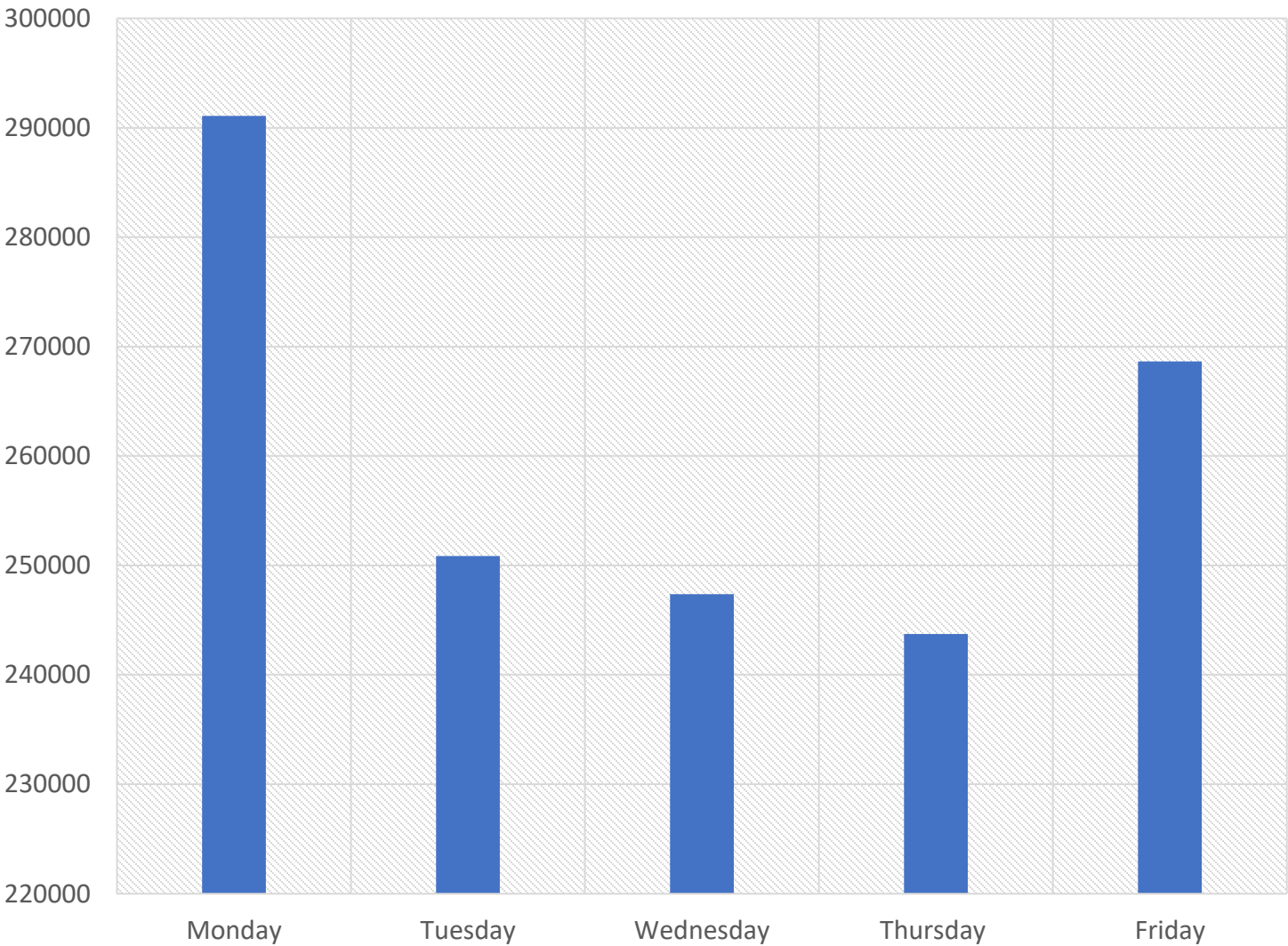
South Yorkshire

Some data in South Yorkshire supports the T.W.A.T hypothesis but some transport data does not. Furthermore, footfall data shows the opposite.

The data to the right shows the people counters for our major urban areas in South Yorkshire. This highlights that “busy” can mean different things as Friday and Monday are busier (in footfall terms).

Sheffield has many more offices than the other South Yorkshire urban centres but the data also shows a similar pattern (although less distinct). This suggests that T.W.A.T and other pandemic-related movement phenomena are still evolving and require monitoring.

Days of the Week by Footfall (January to February)



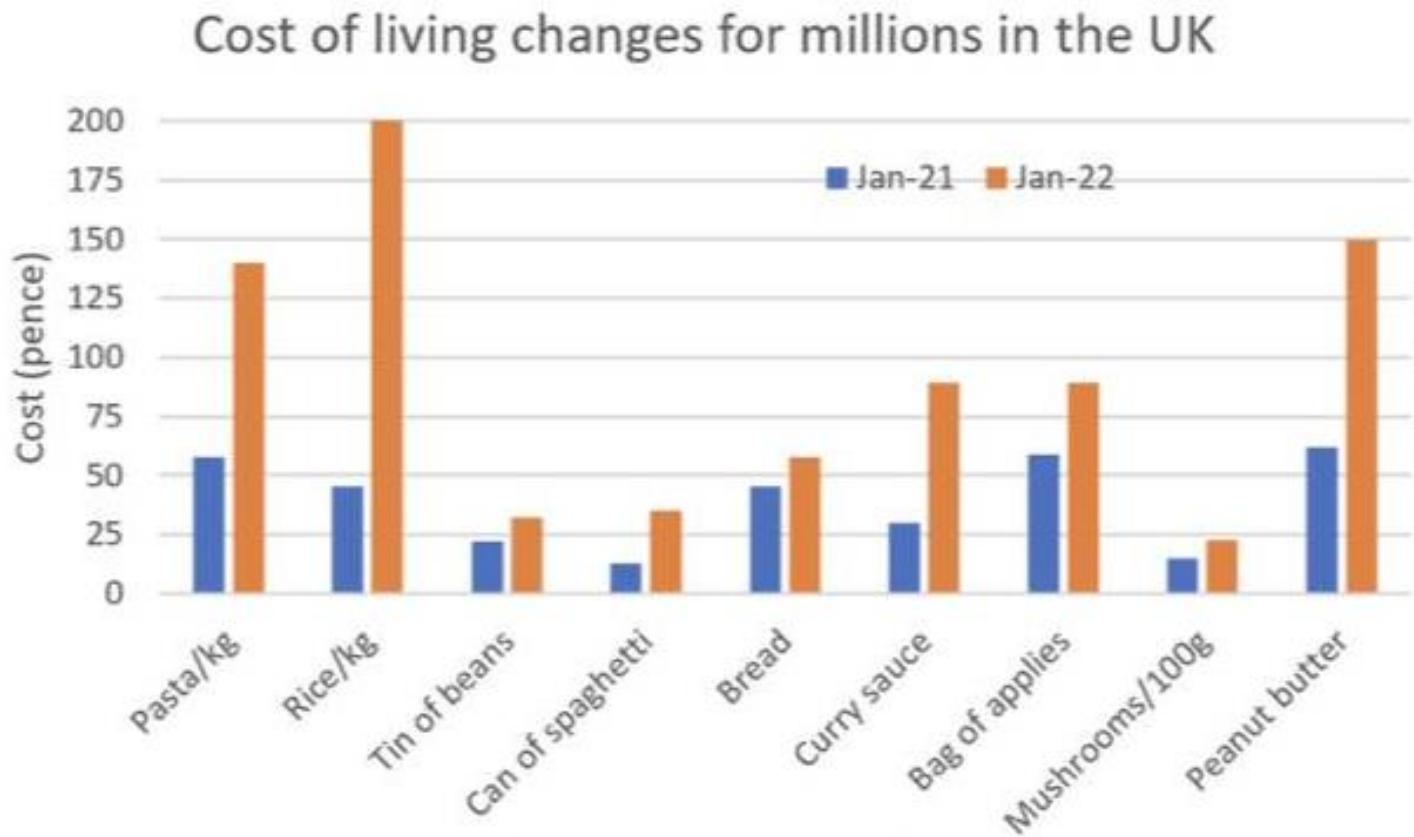
Source: SYMCA Footfall data

Food prices rises

Cost of food – an alternate take

Jack Monroe, a food writer and anti-poverty campaigner, in a viral Twitter thread recently week showed how the biggest price hikes were hitting some of the cheapest products.

In one supermarket, Monroe wrote, a year ago the “cheapest rice” cost 45p for 1kg. Today it’s £1 for 500g. Curry sauce was 30p, now it’s 89p. A bag of small apples was 59p, and is now 89p.



Figures from jack monroe twitter thread
<https://twitter.com/BootstrapCook/status/1483778776697909252>

Inflation underestimating costs

Monroe argues the ONS's latest annual inflation figure of 5.4% for December "grossly underestimates the real cost of inflation as it happens to people with the least," not just because the cheapest products see some of the biggest hikes, but because supermarkets are slashing the value ranges upon which poorer families rely.

Monthly year-on-year inflation since January 2021



Source: ONS

Value products worse affected

Value products are typically sold at lower margins than branded goods. This means when costs rise, businesses selling cheaper goods have less margin to absorb it and prices rise faster and further.

It is a trend seen across household staples. Sainsbury's value peanut butter went from 85p to 89p in the past 12 months while Meridian fell from £2.80 to £2.

Supermarkets are also accused of shrinking their value ranges. Asda sold a Smart Price 1kg bag of rice for 45p at the start of 2021 but discontinued it online in September. Now, the cheapest option is £1.18.



Some supermarkets are responding.

Monroe wants supermarkets to add an extra penny or two to each of the other products in the category, rather than placing it on the cheapest where low-income shoppers are disproportionately affected.

Iceland (the supermarket) is setting an example, she says, by ring fencing its £1 frozen lines from any price hikes until the end of next year.

After seeing Jack's earlier Tweets, Asda said it would stock its Smart Price and Farm Stores ranges in all 581 food stores and online by March 1 to help its customers with the cost-of-living crisis.

News > UK > Home News

Coronavirus: Man proposes in Iceland supermarket after Iceland holiday cancelled

Robert Ormsby was determined minor detail like dream trip being aborted wouldn't stop him popping question

Colin Drury • Saturday 21 March 2020 17:18 • Comments

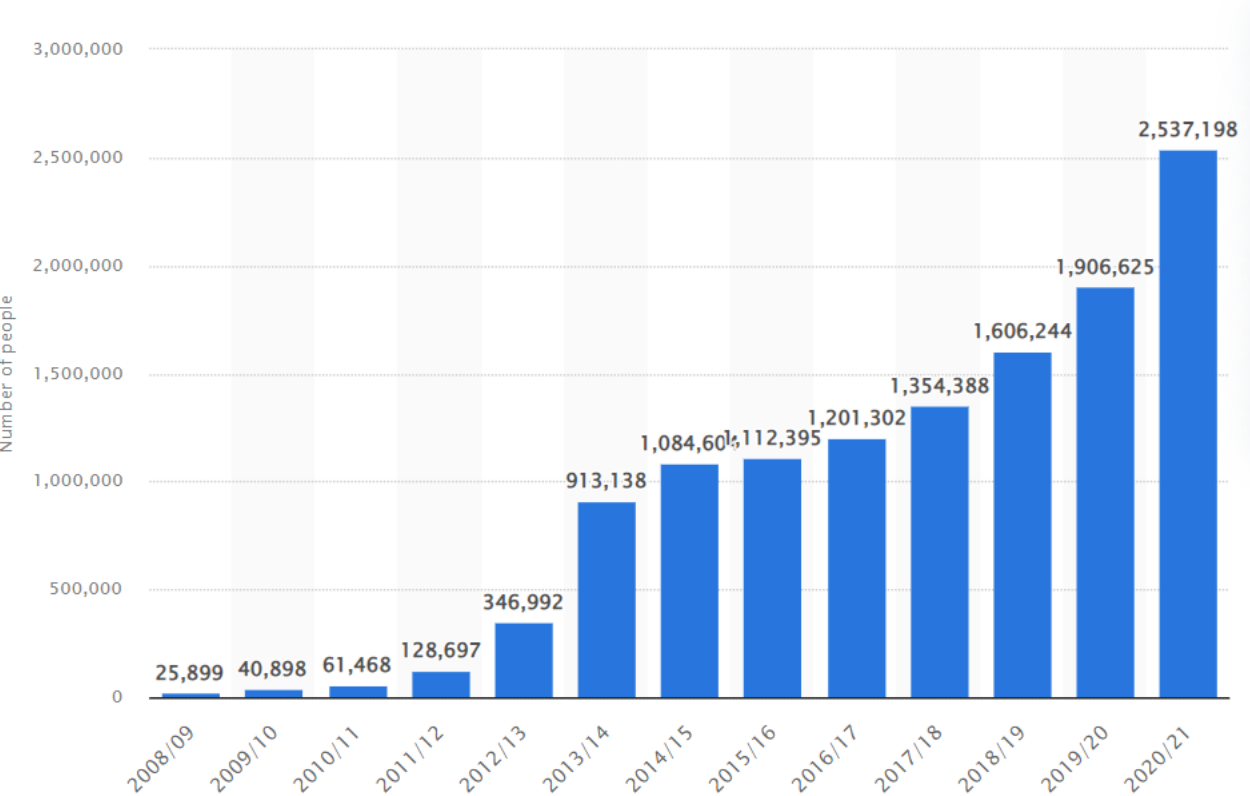


Food costs and rising foodbank use

The number of families forced to rely on food banks amid rapidly rising prices looks set to shoot up, charities have warned.. While prices jumped across the board, some of the biggest rises were seen among everyday essentials.

In 2020/21 approximately 2.5 million people used a foodbank in the United Kingdom, over 600 thousand more than the previous year.

Number of people receiving three days' worth of emergency food by Trussell Trust foodbanks in the United Kingdom from 2008/09 to 2020/21



“Everyone in the UK should be able to afford the essentials in life – but food banks in our network continue to see more and more people facing impossible decisions like whether to put food on the table or heat their homes. This is not right.”

Other responses

Monroe is also working to establish “Vimes Boots Index” as the name of a new price index, which is intended to document the “insidiously creeping prices” of basic food products.

In [this blog](#) ONS recognise that “everyone has their own inflation rate” based on goods they buy. They have ongoing work to better understand different people’s spending patterns and increase the number of price points surveyed.



Fun fact: In his novel *Men at Arms*, Terry Pratchett detailed the “Sam Vimes ‘Boots’ theory of socio-economic unfairness,” which crisply explained how expensive it is to be poor.

Political economy upshot

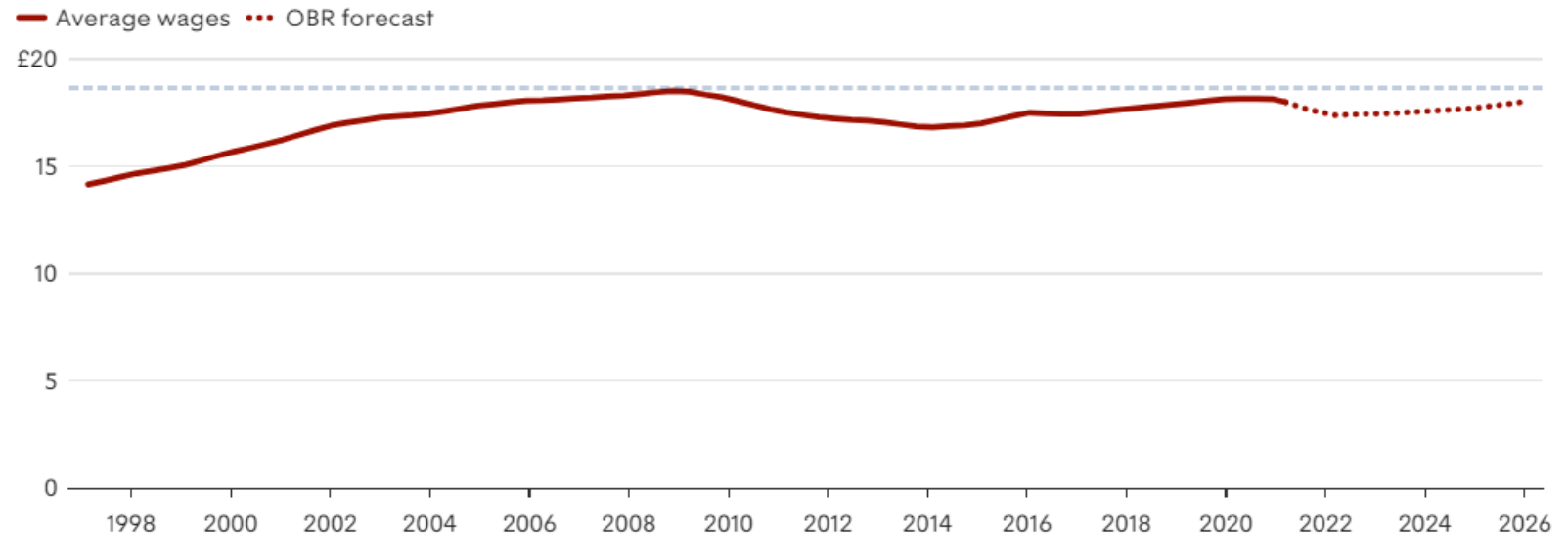
If wages don't rise in line with prices – and the expectation is they won't – then real wages, and therefore living standards, decline. Recent statements by the current Bank of England governor that workers ought to accept falling real wages have been criticised as tone deaf. FT columnist Martin Sandbu has [written](#) candidly about the issues with orthodox economics in believing that when inflation is forecast, wages must be eroded.

The theory is that if workers bargain wages upward then further price increases will be needed as labour has become more expensive. Sandbu argues that this logic holds just as true for profits, which is often omitted from the debate.

The arguments for why company profits ought not be eroded don't stack up, and is more likely ideological than empirically sound.

Real wages will still be lower in 2026 than 2008

Average hourly wages in real terms, and OBR forecast



Historical prices and forecast deflated by Q2 CPIH

Source: Institute of Fiscal Studies, ONS Average Earnings, OBR EFO

Sheffield named UK's "hardest-working city"

Hard Working Steel City

A study polling 2,000 office workers revealed the different attitudes to work between UK cities – with those based in Sheffield working the longest hours. And 83% of workers in the Yorkshire city have worked more than their contracted hours.

We're always interested in new research and have in the past critiqued the intention of research like this. This is no different. On the face of it the sample size isn't big enough for the 13 cities the 'study' is focused upon. We're also interested to see that a **GLOBAL FLEXIBLE WORKSPACE BROKERAGE FIRM; OFFICE FREEDOM** have commissioned the work.

We have highlighted some interesting results but also some issues with this research on the following slides.

TOP 5 HARDEST-WORKING CITIES:

1. Sheffield
2. Belfast
3. Glasgow
4. Birmingham
5. Leeds

Workplace habits changing

Richard Smith, **CEO OF GLOBAL FLEXIBLE WORKSPACE BROKERAGE FIRM; OFFICE FREEDOM** which commissioned the research, said: *“Every city is different when it comes to the way its businesses operate. It’s been really interesting to see how different areas of the UK vary, and how the nation feels about their workplace and its habits in general.”*

Glaswegians enjoy the earliest finishes, while those based in Leeds think they are the most sociable outside of work. Companies in Newcastle and Leeds came out joint top for being the most appreciative of staff and colleagues.



We enjoyed this slightly dated stock image which worked its way onto every article. Which covered the story.

Sheffield gets the headlines

The news articles (but mysteriously not the actual report) show that Sheffield workers have the longest hours and are the hardest working.

What is not explored is whether this is a good or bad trend; working long hours and being rewarded for that is positive but not getting remunerated is clearly negative! However, the headlines are not a bad thing and can place Sheffield and South Yorkshire positively in investors minds.



Note: We cannot find the report and as a result are not 100% sure what the scoring in the chart means.

A pitch for flexible working?

The study has some interesting findings that all have a **FLEXIBLE WORKSPACE** angle. This includes that two-thirds of all workers generally enjoy where they work, with the average worker typically taking part in two social events per month(!). A further 38% consider their colleagues as friends, with one in five (21%) enjoying their company outside of work at least twice a month. Since the start of the pandemic and the introduction of flexible working, 72% now enjoy work more because of it.

The findings are great news for companies such as **GLOBAL FLEXIBLE WORKSPACE BROKERAGE FIRMS.**



And finally...



Imperialism of a different sort

The Independent reported that the government is to launch a study of the economic benefits of reintroducing imperial units of measurement.

This month Jacob Rees-Mogg was appointed “minister for Brexit opportunities” in order to examine how Britain can benefit from leaving the EU.

Imperial-only labelling fell out of business use when Britain joined the European common market in the early 1970s, but some people who remember the system remain attached to it.

~~We all love an economic benefit study. We raise our pints to it!~~

Brexit: Government to launch study on economic benefits of reintroducing imperial units

Exclusive: Business minister mocked for ‘ludicrous’ attempt to quantify ‘Brexit benefit’

Jon Stone Policy Correspondent • 22 hours ago • Comments

LIVE Westminster

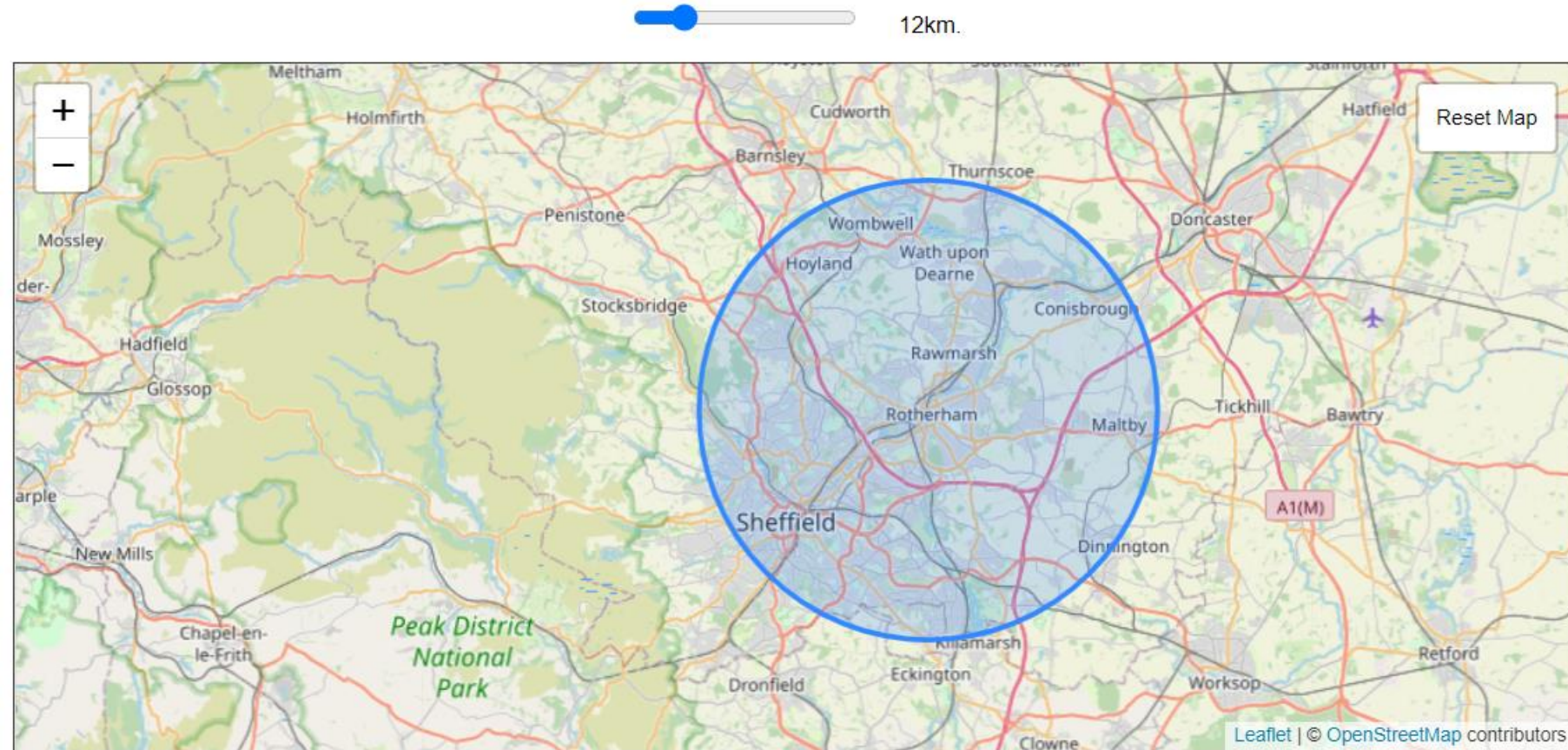
| Imperial unit | Number of smaller imperial units in it | Metric units (approx) |
|---------------|--|-----------------------|
| 1 inch | None | 2.5cm |
| 1 foot | 12 inches | 30cm |
| 1 yard | 3 feet | 91.4cm |
| 1 mile | 1760 yards | 1.6km |
| 1 ounce | None | 28g |
| 1 pound | 16 ounces | 453g |
| 1 stone | 14 pounds | 6.4kg |
| 1 pint | None | 568ml |
| 1 gallon | 8 pints | 4.5 litres |

Population around a point

Speaking of metric measurements, Tom Forth has built a tool that estimates population around any point on the globe, and you can customise the radius.

An interesting finding: Rotherham has more people living within a 12km radius from its centre than Sheffield does.

Have fun playing around with it [here](#).



Estimated population within circle in 2015:

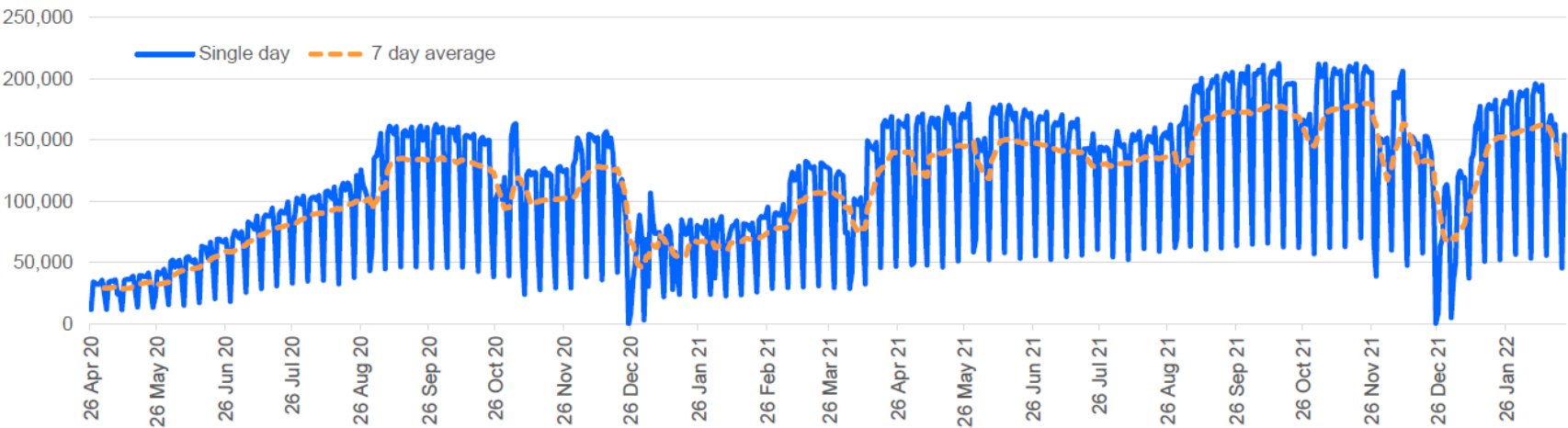
754,065

Local Data

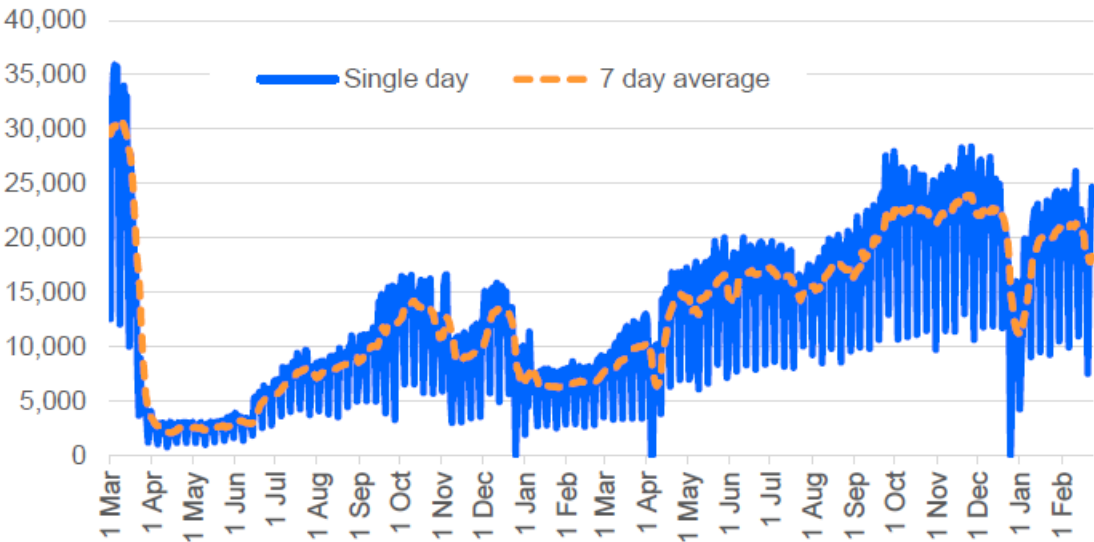


PUBLIC TRANSPORT TRACKING

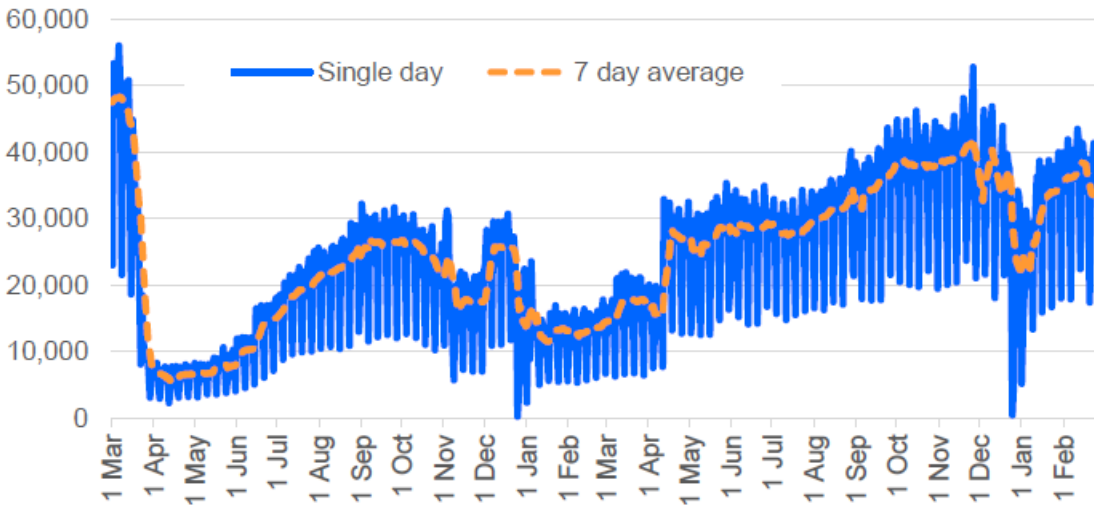
Bus Patronage
(First, Stagecoach and TM Travel)



Supertram Patronage



Total Interchange People Counter Data
(Excludes Doncaster due to data reporting lag)



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