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I have the answer to the January blues: the reverse commute

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Are you desperate to get a seat? No, not to see Cate Blanchett in *When We Have Sufficiently Tortured Each Other* at the National (it's sold out), but on your train to and from work? By this point in January, the festive bonhomie has well and

truly worn off, and millions of us are dreading the twice-daily carriage crush.

I may have the answer: the reverse commute. Instead of living in a suburb or town and travelling into the big city in which you work, sweating it out on the train or queuing in a traffic jam day in, day out, you do the opposite. You live in the city, with its bright lights, culture and 24/7 amenities, and work outside, with any luck getting a seat or an easy drive to the office.

Granted, this relies on you having the money (and desire) to live in a concrete jungle — and getting a job outside it — but from Ealing to Exeter and Brighton to Bristol, enough people are doing the counter-commute to make the rest of us take notice. By 2016, about 305,000 people were living in London and travelling to work outside the capital.

I'll bet that, as they sit down to read or catch up on Fiona Bruce's Question Time debut, they thank their lucky stars they're not one of the almost 5m workers who journey into, or within, London every day, according to Office for National Statistics estimates analysed by Knight Frank estate agency.

In fact, it seems the joys of the countryside aren't all they're cracked up to be. The latest

figures from Hamptons International estate agency show that 9.2% of Londoners who sold up and bought homes in rural areas returned to the capital within three years.

The trend for reverse commuting can be explained by demographic shifts that are seeing people getting married and having children later in life, and living longer. “Those factors mean people are coveting central locations to live and play, but not necessarily to work,” says Nick Whitten, director of residential research at the property company JLL.

Thea Carroll, senior buying consultant at the Buying Solution, says the reverse commute is a hot topic for clients — especially as house prices in many cities have dipped. “One client relocating from Europe will work in Woking, but is looking for a home in southwest London so he can do an easy reverse commute from

Clapham Junction,” she says.

“His children will be going to top secondary schools in the capital and his wife would prefer the London buzz on her doorstep, with a ready-made social scene, rather than having to travel in every day.”

Home reader Ian Chaplin agrees that swimming against the tide is best. Responding to our feature on the top places to live by the sea in winter, he said: “I live in Hove and commute to Bexhill. I wouldn’t want to swap them round.”

I’m loving... Local newspapers. They perform a crucial service, allowing us to feel truly connected to where we live and highlighting the issues that have an impact on the quality of our everyday lives. They also provide merriment in these uncertain times, courtesy of the ingenious Twitter account [@CrapLocalNews](#), which collates their most mundane, bizarre and unintentionally hilarious headlines. My favourites include “Sheep gets stuck on Norfolk river bridge... again”, “Row erupts after dog steals baby’s brioche” and “37 stone man forced to pay for two seats on jet from Ireland – finds they are rows apart”. Check it out on your commute tomorrow. It might give you a much-needed laugh.

I'm loathing... Trifling January sales. We know that retailers fiddle with pricing in the run-up to make discounts appear larger, but can anyone tell me the point of trumpeting the fact that there's £50 off a £1,195 sofa? Or £10 off a £345 coffee table? Maddening.

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Helen Davies is away

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