

How Far Will You Travel for a Client and Do You Charge for Travel Time?

I was contacted by a PC about appealing a conciliation court judgment. The county where this was filed is about 40 miles from me. I'm going to meet the PC for an initial consult at a midpoint on Tuesday to review his documents. This is probably going to be a low \$\$ case--I'm not even sure he would come out ahead after paying for an attorney (and he may not prevail on appeal).

It got me to thinking about how far attorneys are willing to travel for a case. I realize that it may depend on the type of case (i.e., a good PI case might be worth a long drive). So, do you have a specific limit (in mileage or drive-time) that you aren't willing to exceed? Or, if a good case comes along but it's beyond your predetermined limit, will you take it but then charge for travel time that exceeds your limit?

Thanks.

That's easy with hourly. As far as the client is willing to pay for.

Shell Bleiweiss, Illinois

It depends. Crappy answer, but it is true.

My oldest son has lived in Orange County for 8 or 9 years now. It is 400+ miles from us. I will take cases down there because it gives me a reason to see him. I will also take cases in San Diego (500 miles from me) because then I go to the cemetery where my parents are buried.

However, if I have to go more than 100 miles north, I don't want the case at all!

Jonathan Stein, California

Much of my practice is in Vermont -- rural state with not much population.

So, I'll take cases all over the state, as do many attorneys here (at least outside of the population center in Burlington). Maximum distance is about

2.5 hours. I generally charge half of my rate for travel time (unless the client is pissing me off, in which case I'll charge the full rate!).

Almost all of my work is hourly billing.

Katie Burghardt Kramer, Vermont

I practice in rural (greater) western Colorado and often travel 75 miles one way; occasionally more. As a general rule, I charge half my regular rate for travel time. Although, sometimes, I charge the full rate round trip; it depends.

David Masters, Colorado

Here, circumstances and individual matters dictate policy. I actively encourage some to get local counsel and point out the difference in travel costs.

I have been hired for cases far away where the client did not trust local counsel, in some cases with good reason. In other matters I have had preexisting relationships with the client that made them prefer I deal with the case.

Texas is large, and I have hit near each of its borders for one reason or another. Flight times over eight hours (due to flight schedules) or drive times over twelve hours have occurred.

Darrell G. Stewart, Texas

Los Angeles to the Bay Area.

Roger M. Rosen, California

I'll generally travel about 30 miles for any client, and have a fixed travel fee for any travel within that 30 mile radius, including travel to/from 2 local courthouses within that radius. For me, as someone who does a lot of estate planning, this is usually to/from a client's home or hospital/rehab facility. Anything further is at my hourly rate, or I handle with a video or teleconference, or refer to others. I've occasionally traveled further for IP clients with little or nominal charge, but most of them are very comfortable with video or teleconferencing.

Cynthia V. Hall, Florida

We cover Houston, Texas (so Harris County) and all of the surrounding counties - which can be a 50-75 mile drive one way. We also have an office in Austin, so cover that city (which is 150 miles away). Usually these are for flat fee or contingency cases - so either we price in the travel (2 trips included) or reimburse later on as an expense.

There are some counties that are notoriously "hometown" friendly, which we avoid even if close, and some that are "outsider" friendly.

Houstonians also stay away from Dallas Fort Worth metroplex as a quality of life issue ;)

Murtaza Sutarwalla, Texas

With rare exceptions, I make my clients come to me. They can meet me at court or at my office. I also offer phone consultations for folks who live in the greater area, but whose schedule or travel time would be annoying.

With Mt. Diablo in the middle of the East Bay, there are often no direct routes between cities.

For those of you not in the Bay Area, I am at the far, far, far, far Eastern edge of the San Francisco Bay Area. There are two county courts vaguely near me (30 minutes and 45 minutes away). The closest bankruptcy court is in Oakland (1-2 hours away; generally, I BART so it's about an hour). I am willing to travel that far. I recently had an SF case, which was an extra half hour on top of that. Every time I take an SF case, I remember why I don't take them. Travel is so annoying! That said, if PG&E ends up filed in SF like it was in 2001, you bet I'll be gunning for one of the committees like every other attorney admitted in the District.

Corrine Bielejeski, California

The farthest I've gone is about 830 miles. A real My Cousin Vinny experience.

John Davidson, Pennsylvania

I moved my office home about 20 years ago. I rarely meet with clients here, because I do not want them here. So, I generally meet with clients at their homes or offices, or have local office/conference room facilities I can rent by the hour. The tradeoff is that since I don't pay rent, I don't charge for travel time locally (or for hourly charge for a conference room). Out of town travel is a different story. I charge full rates for week day time up to an 8-hour day. Somewhat arbitrary.

Henry R. Reckler, Colorado

I neglected to answer one of the basic questions. There is no limit on how far I would travel. I think the longest is that I have gone from Denver, CO, to Washington, DC, quite a few times. That is about 1,500 miles.

Henry R. Reckler

My policy, to-date, has generally been that I will not charge for travel time within my county, or to an adjoining county. Increasingly, however, I'm less willing to leave my county, as travel time can be burdensome, and I've moved away from using that time for catching up on calls, as 1) I don't like distracted driving, 2) it's virtually impossible to make notes, and 3) it's hard to track the use of time without tedious review of cell phone bills.

When I do bill for travel time, I will choose - based on what I know of the travel conditions to the county in question - to bill at the IRS reimbursement rate per mile, or \$50/hour. The latter is easier to account for, generally.

I also charge a nominal fee if I have to arrange a document execution in a home, a hospital, or some other facility, though I generally do NOT charge for meeting a client at home or in the hospital. It's just that arranging witnesses, etc., often requires more logistical work.

Richard J. Rutledge, Jr., North Carolina