

# Using the bus: what young people think

Summary report  
February 2018

transport**focus** 

## Foreword

**M**ore young people use the bus than any other single group of passengers. Yet despite the importance of bus to younger people we know from our Bus Passenger Survey (BPS) that they are the least satisfied group of passengers. So, for this important group, there is a clear challenge to Government, bus operators and local authorities to make the bus a better experience.

Several bus operators and authorities have seized the opportunity by introducing initiatives to improve their service and encouraging young people to make more bus trips.

These improvements include:

- cheap and easier to understand fare deals for those in full-time education
- supporting better use of the time on buses by providing free Wi-Fi and at-seat charging for personal mobile devices
- using mobile technology to provide smart ticketing and journey planning.

But these initiatives are patchy across Great Britain.

**So what more could we do to help young passengers and encourage Government and the industry to make buses more attractive and, in turn, a sustainable choice for younger people?**



Our new research set out to understand the current experiences and views of young bus passengers, and how the industry could attract and retain them as the bus users of tomorrow.

This work reinforces what we have learned from other Transport Focus research: improving value for money, punctuality and reliability are constant priorities. The industry – bus operators, local authorities and Government together – need a relentless focus on delivering these basics. Getting the essentials right, alongside a more effective and targeted approach to customer retention, will help build trust and loyalty to make using the bus a viable long-term proposition for young people. As part of this new research we also took the opportunity to capture the experiences and needs of young people under the age of 16, an age group that our current BPS work does not cover. This new work contributes to understanding what the important 14-19 age group needs and wants from bus services today to encourage them to be tomorrow's bus users.

### Anthony Smith

Chief executive  
Transport Focus

*"Sometimes you get on a bus and don't know anyone on there... but it can be exciting, because it's a different experience, it's having some independence."*

Solihull 14-16

**Find out what young people want from bus services...**

# What do young people want from bus services?

## 1 Building confidence

Young people are starting to travel to more places spontaneously and independently. As a result, they are using different transport options that can offer welcome independence and freedom. However, this also brings anxiety about 'getting it right' – a key concern for young people. They don't want to be embarrassed in public or in front of their friends, so they may be reluctant to interact with the driver or other passengers. At the same time, they appreciate the reassurance of the journey going as expected, to build their confidence.

*"My bus arrived exactly on time and so I am feeling more relaxed about my journey now."*

Essex, 14-16

### Make it stress-free and easy to use

Many of the concerns young people have come from a lack of confidence or not understanding 'the system'. For some, using the bus seems like a club where they don't belong. This impacts all the stages of a young person's journey. For example, they don't necessarily know where to go to find information and then at the stop, young people may worry about what they should do if the bus is late, drives past or doesn't turn up at all. They also want to be sure they know which stop to get off at. Real-time information is a key requirement to provide reassurance.

The experience of boarding the bus can be a stress point too. These concerns are largely focused around the interaction with the driver:

- Do I know where I am going and will the bus driver understand what I'm asking for?
- Do I have enough money, the right change or will my pass work?

Young people worry that if they get this bit wrong, they might be asked to get off the bus.

A fifth of young people in our survey have additional needs, classifying themselves as having a disability – which may be hidden – where they may need even more support.

We also found that even if they do use the bus for school, this doesn't seem to teach young people the skills they need to catch the bus at other times. Sometimes the experience of the school bus is unpleasant and these negative memories can carry into their wider experience of using a bus. Young people need encouragement to give the bus another go.

### How do you find information about your journey/ plan how you are going to get somewhere?

#### Key information sources:

Ask friends or family	51%
Google maps	46%
Nationwide travel websites	44%
Local bus, train, tram operator app/website	37%
Information at bus stops	33%
Nationwide travel apps	28%
Departure boards/information screens at stations	26%
Paper timetables	21%

Base: all (1003)

*"I am going to Norwich City Centre to get my nails done. I am feeling a bit anxious about the journey as I haven't been on a bus in a long time."*

Norwich, 17-19

*"Make it clearer which stop you are passing because if you don't know the area you won't know where you are."*

Essex, 14-16



## Planning a journey is a two-step process



**1 What is quickest and most convenient for me?**



**2 How much will this cost me?**

## 17-19<sup>YEAR</sup> OLDS

**OLDER GROUPS (17-19) PREPARED TO PAY OUT A BIT MORE TO GUARANTEE CONVENIENCE, WHICH IS HIGHLY VALUED**

# £2-£3

**IT MAY BE £2 TO £3 MORE TO GET UBER, BUT CONSIDERED WORTH IT BECAUSE OF DOOR-TO-DOOR CONVENIENCE**

## Recommendations

- Help young people to feel more confident to use buses independently and give reassurance through positive experience.
- Simplify the process of using the bus so it is more attractive and intuitive for young people, making it simple to understand where, when and how buses run.
- Tackle the areas causing anxiety – for example, planning, interaction with driver and information.
- Empower and support drivers in their role, including duty of care for younger passengers.
- Put Government and the industry at the forefront of supporting teaching programmes for 'young people'.
- Work with local young people's groups and representatives to really understand what they need to build confidence in using the bus.



## 2 Get the basic service right

### Young people are put off by poor quality

The journey experience starts at the bus stop.

**Punctuality is a big issue, with a quarter of regular bus users in our survey claiming the bus is late all or most of the time. The environment here makes a big impact and young people really notice poor quality.**

Young people shared their negative experiences of bus stops that were dirty, littered with rubbish, poorly lit and displaying timetables that were unreadable. Young people – like all passenger groups – want a proper shelter with somewhere clean and comfortable to sit rather than just a pole and a sign.

While on the bus, young people were strongly negative towards litter and dirty seats, which made them feel uneasy.

### No time wasted

Information is an important requirement at the stop, both paper timetables and live bus running times. Young people are not used to waiting and don't want to waste time standing at the bus stop. They would prefer a system that gives them the bus times in advance, so that they can plan to get to the stop just in time. This ease of use is important for infrequent and non-bus users as well.

For a comfortable experience on the bus, young people want to sit with their friends. They can feel quite uncomfortable on an overcrowded bus and don't like it when 'randomers' sit next to them. The bus driver is also key to how young people feel about the journey; a friendly approachable driver makes young people feel relaxed when they board and helps to set the tone for the journey.

Young passengers want to use their time effectively and not feel bored. For them this means listening to music, using social media, browsing the internet and chatting to friends.

Wi-Fi is needed to support many of these activities – and it has to be fast and reliable. When asked to rank improvements, this was young people's second highest priority. Equally important was the provision of charging points at seats, particularly when they feel their journey is longer than a short-hop.

### Features of the ideal journey

- Buses turning up on time
- Clean seats and floors
- Comfortable seats
- Friendly bus driver – smile and say 'hello'
- Device charge points
- Fast Wi-Fi
- Better legroom
- Digital displays/live trackers



*"I feel fairly comfortable as the chairs have a reasonable amount of padding and space between each one."*

Essex, 14-16

*"I feel safe on this bus, the driver is friendly."*

Norwich, 14-16

### The top three improvements young people want to see are



**1 Value for money**



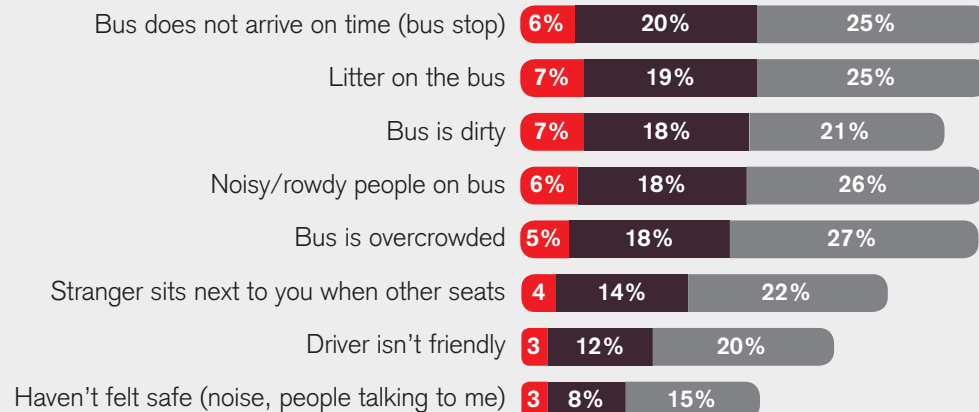
**2 Availability of Wi-Fi**



**3 More buses at the times you wish to use them**

## Negative experiences often reported

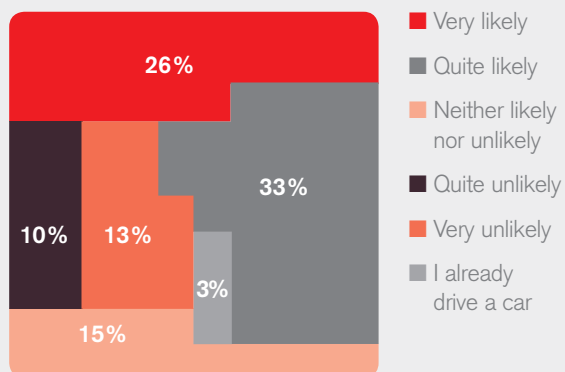
■ All of the time ■ Most of the time ■ About half the time



**Q15** How often do these happen when you are travelling on the bus?

Base: Bus users (807)

## Likelihood of access to car/motorbike in next two years



**Q8** How likely is it that you will have access to a car/motorbike/moped in the next two years?

Base: all (1003)

"Dirty windows make it more difficult to look out of the window."

Essex, 17-19

## Recommendations

- Tackle the negative perceptions of bus – including among non-users.
- Keep improving the quality of the bus once on board: keep it clean; provide fast, reliable Wi-Fi, at-seat charging points, better seat design, and friendly drivers.
- Focus on the core journey elements: providing a seat, and a reliable and punctual service.
- Ensure the consistent reliability of bus journeys – implementing measurable targets and considering a compensation scheme when targets are not met.

"My bus was so dirty, you can smack the fabric seats and all the dust will fly off."

Leeds, 17-19

### 3 Use technology to engage me

Young people, like other passengers, want the systems they use to be straightforward, intuitive and inviting. This applies to all the different parts of bus travel; planning the journey, finding information about routes and stops, getting advice about tickets and fares, through to actually buying the ticket.

#### Learning from other sectors

Using mobile apps is a familiar way to access services for young people. However, space on young people's phones is limited and, therefore, valuable. Apps must first stand out as interesting enough to download and must then prove their worth through relevance and usefulness to earn a permanent place – they must also be designed well and easy to use. Young people like using Google Maps, which comes ready installed on most smartphone devices; it does the job well, pulling different transport options together, and is seen as reliable.

Young people are reluctant to download additional apps that do the same thing. Therefore, there may be more merit in collaborating on a single source, or integrating functionality into Google maps. There is additional value too in an app-based solution to minimising interaction with bus drivers and other passengers. This would help younger passengers avoid the anxiety of being 'shown up' in front of friends or other passengers when things go wrong.

Many systems young people are familiar with – such as apps to book cinema tickets – offer an easy-to-use interface, downloadable tickets and tailored offers and discounts. These apps are supported by good customer service that offers individual deals and options, and that put the consumer in charge with little interaction with staff. In contrast, young people don't feel that they have any relationship with bus operators, nor do they see that offers are targeted at them, or have them in mind.

"My journey could be improved if the bus had more facilities for example wifi or an ability to charge my phone as they often do on trains, a preferred method of transport for me."

Leeds 17-19



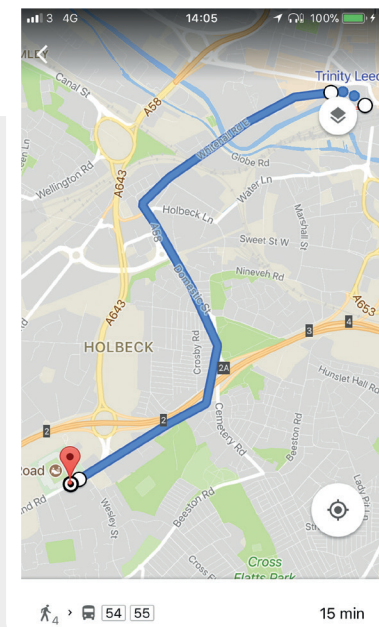
#### Personalised journeys

Reliable, real-time information is key to helping young people feel confident when using the bus and improving their journey experience. They want easy-to-use, centralised and streamlined information. Young people want visual mapping and the ability to personalise their journey, across modes and operators.

They want systems to 'hold their hand' through the experience and create a sense of understanding and familiarity. This includes fares shown with journey plans and at bus stops, clear information on discounts and easy ways to pay such as through smart and contactless. They also want information that updates along the journey, especially during delays, to give the cause, revised journey times and connections, supported by announcements and screens on board. Information is key.

While the basic needs for information and support are much the same for most bus passengers, is the industry doing enough to differentiate its offer to young people? Young people want to be engaged in the process of improving services and facilities. They want to be involved by decision-makers through social media, pop-up surveys within apps, short questionnaires on board and incentivising responses through prize draws or money-off deals.





"They have focused on social media with the live timetable, but they haven't really improved the services once you are on the bus."

Solihull, 17-19

"Display bus fares at the bus stop, with the timetable."

Essex, 14-16

"The best solution would be to have the electrical signs or an online thing where you could track your bus, so then I can judge when I need to leave home."

Essex, 17-19

"Would be nice to have something that tells you where you are or when you are getting to a certain bus stop because I had to look on Google maps on my phone. Or at least for it to say the name of the bus stop at the actual stop."

Essex, 14-16

## Recommendations

- Provide a centralised source of information and ticketing – intuitive, easy-to-use app that will earn its place on a young person's phone.
- Make information on fares, discounts and passes widely available so passengers know what to expect before boarding.
- Look at the successes of industries and sectors that have adapted their service and products for young people.
- Improve on-board information systems.

## 4 Simplify fares, make them consistent and reward me for my loyalty

**Young people find fares confusing. They don't know what the different fares are called or how to find out what the fare costs before they travel. Not knowing how much the fare will be is likely to worry them as they wonder if they'll have enough money or the correct change.**

This also reinforces the perceived benefit of travelling with friends by car, where costs are shared. Young people would value the opportunity to reduce the cost when travelling by bus in a group.

### Raising awareness of young-person benefits

Although there are lots of discounts and special offers available for young people, there is limited awareness of these. Around half of young people did not understand the different discounts or special fares offered, including just under a fifth who weren't sure these existed at all.

Young people also don't feel like promotions are targeted at them. Only 42 per cent agreed that buses are the cheapest way of getting to places. In addition, 35 per cent pay for fares from their own pocket money or earnings, so feel the expense more keenly. Among young people, as in all age groups, value for money is the top priority for improvement.

Eligibility for reduced fares for under-16 or under-18-year-old passengers is not well understood. Young people are confused about what they are entitled to and when. "Can my bus pass that gives half fare for travelling to education during the week be used for weekend travel?" "Why do I have to pay adult fare if I am under 18 and travelling to college?"

*"I got an adult day rider, I paid €4.20 for this. I honestly think this is quite expensive to go to town and back."*

Leeds, 17-19

It is felt particularly unfair to have to pay an adult fare under 18 when the school leaving age has been raised to 18. And with no national scheme for a young people's concession there are confusing inconsistencies between bus operators and areas. Young people would like to see a reappraisal of bus fares for young people, applied consistently across areas and operators, with action to ensure they aren't missing out on the best fares, to encourage greater use and make this a real and affordable option for them.

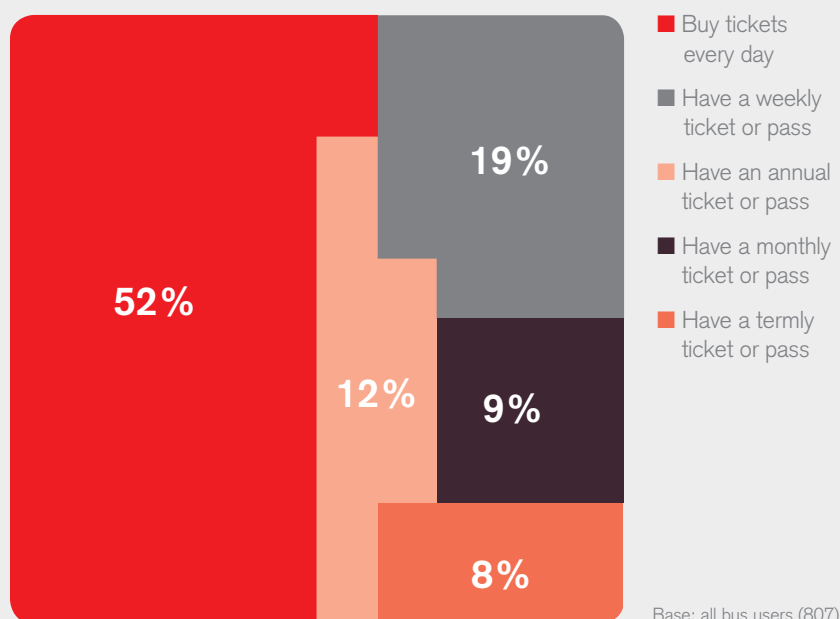
*"I think my bus pass for a month would be about €48, which would mean I would get 2 weeks of the month free, but I don't know how to go about getting it. It says the prices online, but doesn't tell me how to get it."*

Norwich, 17-19



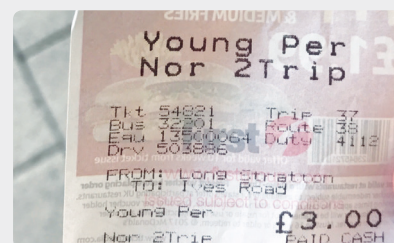


### Type of ticket or pass



# 52%

**NOT SURE EXACTLY WHAT SPECIAL FARES AND DISCOUNTS ARE AVAILABLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE OR EVEN IF AVAILABLE AT ALL**



# 35%

**PAY FOR FARES FROM THEIR OWN POCKET MONEY OR MONEY THEY HAVE EARNED**

"One thing I would say is the price of the bus, which was £2.60. For me it's quite expensive, because it was a five minute journey and I only really get £5 a week pocket money, so that's like half my allowance gone... to get a bus is quite expensive. It's a lot more expensive than I was expecting."

Essex, 14-16

"This is my single ticket with a child concession due to a bus pass. This is very useful as otherwise the bus can be quite expensive considering."

Leeds, 17-19

"Advertise any discounts more. They could have child, teen and student prices, and make it clear what the age groups for each category are."

Essex, 14-16

### Recommendations

- **Government consideration** for a young people's concession applied across operators and areas that is consistent with school leaving age and reaching adulthood at 18.
- **Offer consistent, logical fare deals** for young people.
- **Make it easy** to find the cost, the best ticket and how to pay.
- **Give consideration to loyalty schemes** with rewards, working towards more tailored offerings.
- **Target communication and promotions** through effective channels where young people can find them.

## Conclusion

In many respects, young people want the same from their bus journey as their fellow passengers, ranking value for money, punctuality and reliability highly as priorities for improvement.

**There are however key differences that young people want to see addressed:**

- They don't feel services are designed with them in mind, or that enough is being done to encourage them and make them feel valued.
- Not knowing how the system works or what to do is a barrier and a source of anxiety about 'getting it right'.
- Improving the journey experience is important; young people notice poor quality provision.
- There is a need to design systems better, learning from other industries in the way they appeal to young people.
- Fares for young people are confusing and inconsistent.

This work provides valuable understanding of young people's needs and aspirations for bus services. We present the recommendations in this report as a combined checklist for action and a catalyst for bringing the industry together, working in collaboration towards making buses better for the users of tomorrow.



"If the bus is late, usually it just stays on 2 minutes on my app or the digital thing at the bus stop, but I would prefer it to be more realistic, so rather than '2 minutes', say '10 minutes'."

Leeds 17-19

"You would think that the buses would get cleaned every night at the depot, but they don't because you get on a bus early in the morning and it's disgusting."

Leeds 17-19

### What we did

- We held eight focus groups with young people between the ages of 14-16 and 17-19 in four locations, Leeds, Norwich, Solihull and Shenfield.
- We carried out 1000 interviews with 14-19 year olds from across the country.

"Charging sockets, free Wi-Fi, clean, comfortable seats, a happy driver. If the driver isn't moody with you, then that puts you in a better mood."

Leeds 14-16





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Transport Focus is the operating name of the Passengers' Council

**Transport Focus is the independent consumer organisation representing the interests of:**

- all users of England's motorways and major 'A' roads (the Strategic Road Network)
- rail passengers in Great Britain
- bus, coach and tram users across England outside London.

**We work to make a difference for all transport users**