



Transport User Community

Return to bus travel

August 2020

Who is in our bus community?

60

people using bus prior to Covid-19



Across England, Scotland and Wales



Mix of payment methods



Mix of those currently using bus and not using bus



A spread of age, gender and ethnicity



Some have disabilities

What did we ask our community?

Q1: How have you been?

An 'icebreaker' question to allow respondents to introduce themselves to us and each other, as well as gauge the impact of lockdown on the community, whether financial, health-wise or emotional.



Q2: Journeys you've taken

A question asking for broad level feedback on any bus journeys taken by the community during the pandemic. What was their emotional experience of the journey? Was the journey reliable? What would they change about it?

Q3: Imagining a journey

Inviting those who have not taken a journey to discuss their concerns, aspirations and expectations for what that journey would be like, if they were to undertake it. What preconceptions exist around bus travel now?



What did we ask our community? (2)

Q4: Poll

A more closed-ended question to gain a more quantitative read on some simple measures about how confident bus users are in their service.



Q5: Bus travel in future

A more deliberative question openly encouraging respondents to talk to one another and debate what will need to change about bus travel for them to return to it in the future.

The emotional and economic impact of COVID-19 has significantly affected this community



Being furloughed, made redundant or facing reduced hours was common

A significant proportion of the community is facing economic hardship as a result of the pandemic. The bus represents a lower cost transport option for many, and will act as something of a lifeline going forward.

Many, particularly elderly respondents and those with disabilities report feeling isolated in the early stages of the pandemic, and are gradually, tentatively re-forming their social connections as lockdown eases.

Given that we are almost six months into lockdown at the point of starting our community, a sense of frustration, fatigue and anxiety is understandable.



Very few are 'outright rejecters' of bus travel during the pandemic

The bus is recognised as a reliable, frequent and reasonably safe mode of transport. Mask wearing can be enforced more directly by the driver, for instance, and few if any respondents have seen a significant decline in service quality.

“I think for a long time, I’ll be asking my husband to drive me anywhere I want to go. I’m hoping that I’ll become more confident with socialising with friends and visiting shops.”

Female, 63, Scotland

“It’s had a massive effect on my anxiety. Will our country ever go back to normal? Will I be able to do the things I used to do without living in fear?”

Male, 20, London

“Being made redundant was the other big change. I noticed my mental health change; I’ve been a lot more anxious, nervous, stressed.”

Female, 30, Midlands

“Well, I’m neutral about the bus. What’s happening is kind of expected and it’s not anyone’s fault that the pandemic befell us.”

Female, 29, North West

Bus travel has become more pleasant, but with an underlying anxiety about potential lapses in social distancing

Having more space on the bus is valued

As a result of there being fewer passengers on board, passengers experience greater comfort, more interactions with the bus driver, and more obvious cleanliness. Buses 'feel' cleaner than they did pre-Covid.

That said, the atmosphere on some buses can be tense. Drivers can be 'sheepish', passengers avoid making eye contact with each other, and others fear confrontations around mask-wearing.

Buses on the whole remain punctual and reliable even during the pandemic.

App usage was common and has increased during lockdown. Passengers to some extent expect the unexpected, and value live information as a way of ensuring that they arrive on time.

Each time the bus stops, fears of social distancing being broken surface

While respondents feel safe at the point of boarding the bus, each new passenger is a potential 'anti-masker'. Passengers making longer journeys with frequent stops do need ongoing and persistent reassurances and re-enforcement of the rules.

“The app wouldn’t work – I think they rolled out an update that lets you see how many spare seats there are, but it wasn’t working with certain operating systems. I missed the bus while doing all that, so that was a bit annoying.”

Male, 47, Glasgow

“I was worried about getting abuse from other passengers, or a fine for not wearing a mask. Some drivers weren’t wearing a mask and some asked me to wear one.”

Female, 40, Midlands (Mask exempt)

“Yes the driver was nice, he made a joke about it being a ghost bus which I guess put me at ease. Everyone was calm but not making much eye contact.”

Female, 29, North West

Those who are not taking the bus take a very pessimistic view of its safety during the pandemic

Many assume that non-wearing of face-masks will be rife

The Uber slogan 'No mask, no ride' was popular among this group. There is a strong perception that rigorous, sometimes police enforcement of mask wearing will be necessary before non-users will consider taking the bus again.

Even our vulnerable respondents, some with asthma, are willing to wear face masks though they are legally exempt – if not for the safety of other passengers, then certainly for their own.

Others assume that the atmosphere would be even more tense than active passengers reported – as with our rail users, stories about young people ignoring the regulations have spread far. That said, few cast doubt on the overall reliability of the journey

Few, if any, see any reason why bus travel would be any less reliable than before the pandemic. The barriers to use are purely around safety, rather than performance, at this stage in the crisis.

However, those who have been away from bus travel have questions. Have bus stops been changed? Could I be refused passage if the bus is too full, and how likely is that? Has the timetable changed?

“Going forward I think bus journeys are going to need more preparation. Timetables are more reliable now but routes are changing and bus stops seem to be moving around a little too.”

Female, 32, South East

“Bus services have run fine so you probably would just turn up and go. I’d probably need to check the guidelines as to whether we wear a mask or any other rules they’ve brought in.”

Male, 47, Scotland

“I’d need to know how frequently the buses are running, how many people will be allowed on and if there’ll be a cap of passengers – and that everyone will be wearing face masks.”

Female, 24, Yorks & Humber

Some are optimistic that the changes seen during the pandemic will result in a better service in the future

Which of the following best describes your thinking when it comes to travelling more regularly?



- I have no choice but to use the bus at the moment, but am concerned or uncomfortable about it
- I'd like to start making my usual bus journeys again, but I will be cautious and wait until I feel safe
- I do not particularly want to make my usual journeys again; I'll only travel by bus when I absolutely have to

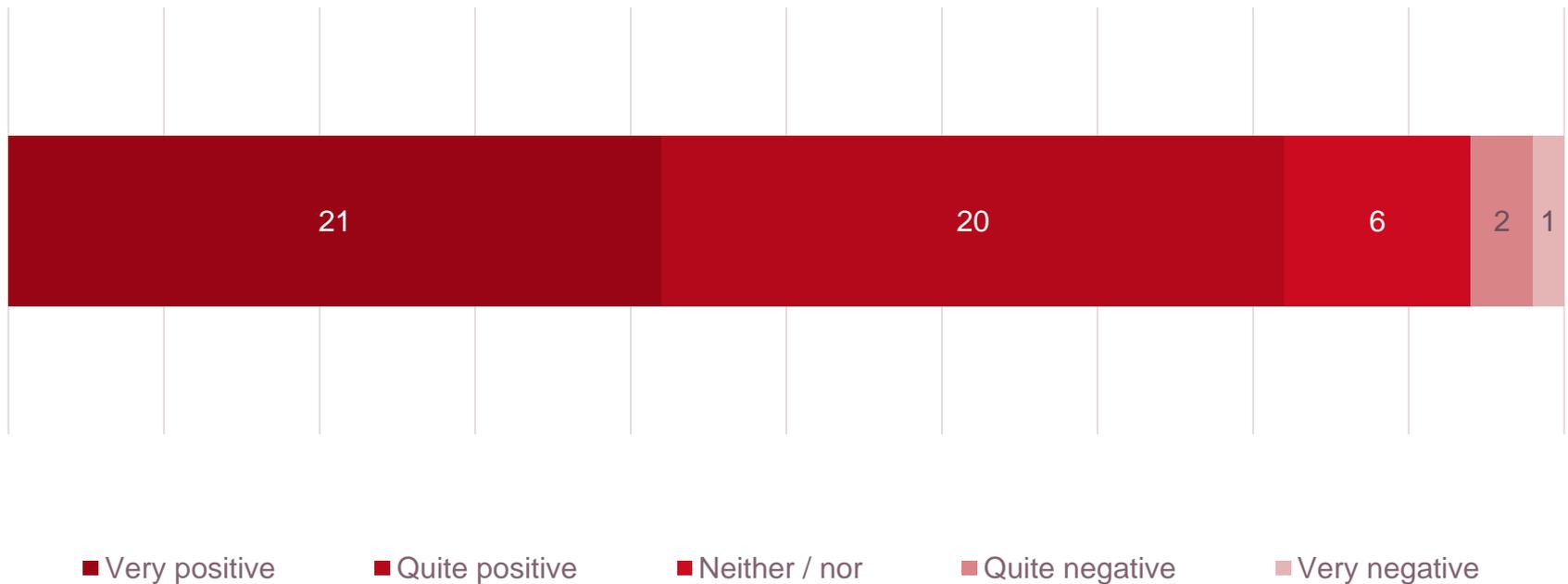
After Covid-19, do you think bus travel will be...



- Better than before
- About the same as before
- Worse than before

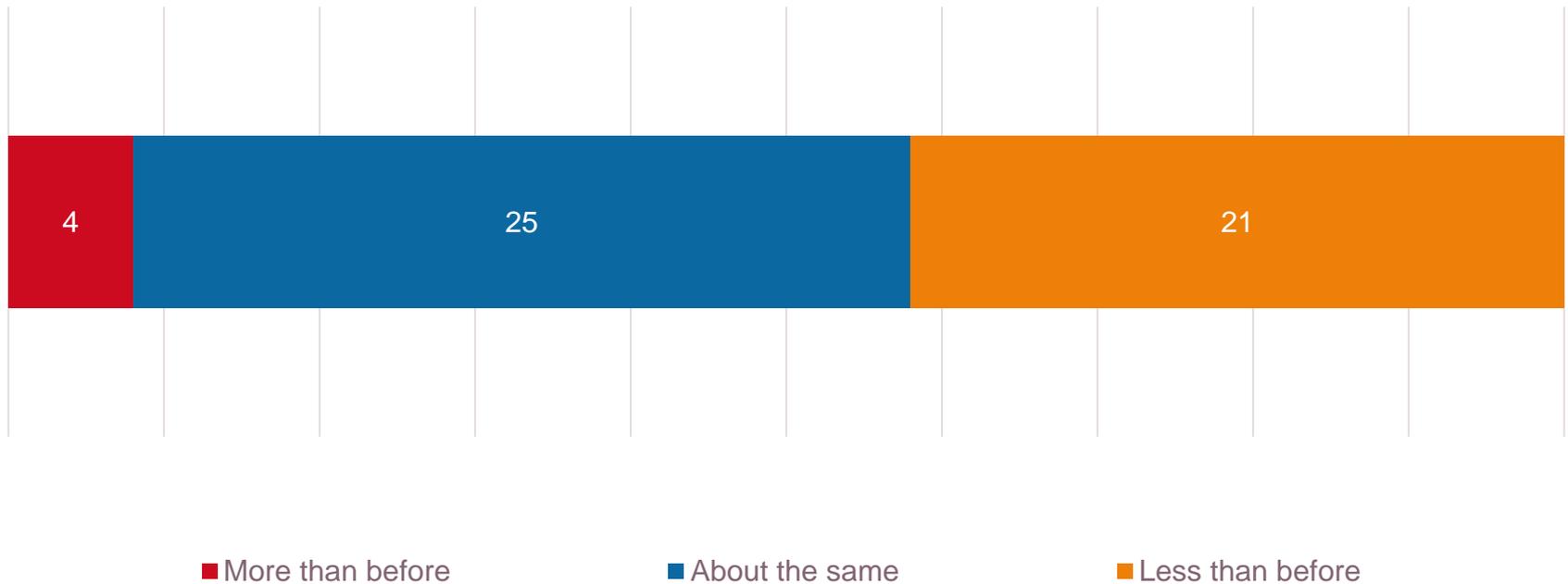
Our community is strongly in favour of face-masks

How do you feel about the recent guidance in England and Scotland to wear face masks?



A significant proportion of our community expects to use the bus less as lockdown eases

How do you think your usage of the bus will change after COVID-19, if at all?



What do passengers want from bus providers...

Now

Increased frequency

Enforced mask wearing

Onboard hand sanitiser

Digital information on crowding

In six months

Continued mask wearing

Maintained social distancing

Continued anti-viral cleaning

Tickets inter-operable across bus companies

In a year

All bus stops back in use

Return to a normal timetable

“I’d need to see higher standards of cleanliness on buses before going back to them. I also think we’ll see radical changes to timetables with fewer buses on routes due to the financial impact of Covid.”

Female, 63, Scotland

“I use the bus frequently as I don’t own a car; I’d like the prices to be cheaper though; during Covid-19 the bus fares are really expensive for me.”

Male, 22, South East

“I think going forward I’ll always be cautious of being too close to people and will continue to use hand sanitiser. I’d like transport companies to be mindful of an event like this ever happening again.”

Female, 20, Scotland