



Transport User Community

Evaluating flexible bus fares

September 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?



Flexible fares

A task to understand how our community feels about more flexible forms of ticketing like the flexible season ticket from [Go North East](#), and the [carnet-style ticket](#) from First Group.

How much of a discount would passengers need for these tickets to be feasible, how should refunds work, and what format should the tickets take?

Lastly, would incentives to travel at specific times of the day be valuable, and what kind of incentive should that be?

Flexible ticketing was very popular with our bus community, reflecting the uncertainty of their journey habits during lockdown

Seeing flexible options reflected very well on the bus companies involved

- Passengers were **very impressed** by the willingness of bus companies to provide flexible options, and indeed the speed with which the Flexi 5 tickets were implemented by Go North East.
- Many had felt that bus companies should have offered tickets like this for a long time, even **prior to lockdown**.
- **The community's travel plans are still in flux.** Several are looking for new jobs, others are on furlough and unsure what kind of work environment they will return to.
- **The flexible ticketing options shown demonstrate real understanding of this uncertainty.**

Passengers did not see any significant differences between the flexible season ticket and the carnet approach

However, the Flexi 5 ticket could still go further to accommodate non-traditional work patterns

- Some found the concept and name of the Flexi 5 confusing, fixating on the fact that it was a five-ticket bundle, and felt it was therefore still linked to the five-day working week.
- Because of this some working less than five days a week, or more than five days a week, felt it wouldn't be suitable for them.

Welsh community members are familiar with the carnet system and see it as very useful indeed

- Generally, a timeframe of a month to use the tickets was felt to be reasonable. The carnet system emerged as slightly **more flexible and less complex**, given the different options of a ten-ticket or a five-ticket bundle.
- **The community is pragmatic about refunds.** A month feels like a reasonable space of time to use the tickets in, although some argue there should be an 'Oyster-style' system where the tickets are simply held indefinitely.

There are high expectations for how significant a discount would be called for on flexible tickets

The ideal discount ranged between 15 per cent and 30 per cent off a single journey ticket

- It should be noted that **relatively few in our community use a season ticket** – there are fewer comparators here for how much a reasonable discount ‘ought’ to be.
- **Some feel that they are no longer ‘hostage’ to the bus.** They exercise more choice about how and if to travel, and argue that bus companies need to heavily incentivise them to travel at all.

Flexible ticket options should be implemented through as many different formats as possible

- The community is mindful that older or less technologically-able passengers will still need the option of a **paper ticket**.
- The community still notes various glitches and hiccups with their **bus apps** which would need to be addressed before they adopted higher-cost / higher-commitment tickets like these.

The community would not need (or particularly want) incentives to travel at times that enable social distancing. They would happily adjust their behaviour to keep themselves safe.

“When did the universal work week become five days? There are seven days in a week and it should cover individuals for seven days.”

Male, 64, Scotland

“The five days over a month ticket is something I’d struggle with – If I’m only doing three days in the studio, say Tuesday to Thursday, I’d have to replace my ticket on the following Thursday which would be a bit weird from a routine perspective.”

Male, 37, North West

“This is definitely something worth considering as many people are currently working flexibly with some days at home and other days having to go to work so this ideal for people in those situations. Both options are appealing. I think the only thing that may be off putting is having to use your purchased tickets within a short time frame.”

Female, 44, East Midlands

“I think it’s great to see bus companies responding so quickly – it seems like they’ve really recognised the need that people are feeling and it’s great that they can launch a new type of ticket this fast.”

Male, 37, North West