Transport User Community

Role of staff in passengers feeling safe

October 2020

transportfocus

What did we ask our rail community?

Feeling safe on the train

A task to understand how important the presence of rail staff are to the overall feeling of 'safety' on rail. How safe do passengers currently feel, in light of the prospect of a second wave and tightening restrictions?

Staff on the train – general thinking

A task to understand how staff enforce the rules 'on the ground' and what passengers think about staff activities on rail. Are issues resolved effectively or not, and how could this be improved?

Staff on the train – the detail

A more deliberative task to understand how passengers feel staff should be managing behaviour on public transport. How should staff balance their own safety with those of the passengers and the smooth running of the journey?

transport**focus**

Who is in our rail community?

60
people using rail to commute prior to Covid-19

Across England, Scotland and Wales

Mix of payment methods

Mix of those currently using rail and not using rail

A spread of age, gender and ethnicity

Some have disabilities

transport**focus**

Staff play a central role to helping passengers feel safe and secure on the train

However, many report a 'skeleton crew' at their local stations

- Staff play an important role in terms of managing behaviour at the station – well recognised as a pinch-point in terms of congestion – serving as a consistent and reassuring monitoring presence that can challenge lapses in social distancing.

- However, on the train itself, questions of safety hinge on evidence of regular cleaning and the taping off of seats. Seeing litter left over from previous passengers can give the impression that antiviral cleaning is being neglected.

- Some report basic functions like ticket inspection falling by the wayside, and there is a strong sense that the ideal response to the pandemic would to see more staff on trains and at the station, rather than less.

- Others argue that many of the 'enforcement' functions for social distancing are relegated to speaker announcements rather than in-person management.

  - Most argue that there needs to be a 'human element' to enforcing social distancing, particularly as the rules become more strict and, in some people's view, more complex.

  - Again, the visibility of rail staff is a signifier of the rail company taking social distancing seriously, and reassures passengers that behaviour is being actively monitored rather than simply advised upon from a distance.

- Greater visibility of cleaning staff, as well as ticket and crowd management workers, would serve to reassure passengers. While many have heard that trains are being cleaned more extensively, few if any have seen this happen with their own eyes.

transportfocus

"On my weekly journeys, sometimes even tickets aren't inspected – there seems to be a skeleton staff at the stations I journey through but little contact has been made, although it's not really required."

Male, 43, West Midlands

"I believe staff do play a big role in the future safety of the rail network. Without staff I would not, and do not, feel totally safe. They're a human deterrent and reassure passengers, and offer advice if needed."

Female, 64, Wales

"I do feel that my overall feeling of safety is helped by the presence and actions of rail staff. Staff should be visible on trains and remind people where necessary that face coverings should be worn."

Male, 34, South East

"I made several journeys last week and saw no rail staff on any of the trains. Fortunately I didn't require assistance but I also appreciate them keeping their distance at this time."

Female, 24, West Midlands

transport**focus**

Where our community has observed staff talking to passengers, these interactions have usually been positive

Crowd management

The community values seeing members of staff directing passengers to keep a one-directional flow of traffic – they recognise that this is a crucial aspect of social distancing and ensures a safe and smooth journey.

Face coverings

Cases where staff have had to enforce face covering-wearing among passengers were successful. The passenger usually obliged, and leaves our community wondering why staff do not enforce this more often.

On-train enforcement

This is usually where the community feels staff activity falls flat. The train itself is the most worrying part of the journey and the community has observed groups of young people behaving anti-socially, not wearing face coverings, and going unchallenged even when staff have been present on the train.

transportfocus

"No staff on the train, I felt this was really bad and I hope they sort this out. I don't understand why there aren't any staff patrolling the trains which is so important right now."

Female, 50, South East

"I've seen a member of staff telling people to maintain the traffic system to allow for social distancing. The person was apologetic and followed the rules after being told. I guess he forgot the new normal."

Female, 32, South East

"'I've seen a staff member ask a passenger to wear their face covering properly and the passenger obliged. I wish staff did this more often because it worked. The passenger listened and it made me feel more safe."

Female, 29, West Midlands

"Staff are too scared to approach any member of the public not wearing a face covering. Some people can be very aggressive so I do understand why they're not approaching people – but this is one of the primary reasons why I'm not travelling on the train."

Male, 46, South East

transportfocus

There is a broad consensus that greater police presence would reassure and improve safety on rail

The community takes a fairly dim view of other passengers' ability to follow the rules on their own accord

- Throughout the past twelve weeks, the community has highlighted that some passengers simply refuse to wear face coverings or socially distance. Even a sporadic or ad hoc presence of police on rail would give a greater sense that the most extreme departures from the guidance can be dealt with effectively.

- Ultimately the community is pragmatic and recognises that police cannot and should not be omnipresent – simply knowing that police *could* be involved in a passenger's journey is sufficient.

    - Some argue that extending the presence of COVID-Marshalls to rail would be a helpful compromise.

The community recognises that staff should not have to break social distancing to enforce the rules

- By 'enforcement', the community understands this to mean strongly stating what the rules are (and in their experience, this is often enough).

- But, they do not expect staff to escalate a confrontation to the point where their own safety is in question.

- At this point, police serve as an important 'back-up' when staff enforcement is not enough. The community recognises that COVID restrictions are a point of law, and see police enforcement as appropriate as a result, both on the train and at the station.

transport**focus**

"I would like police to tell people who are wearing face coverings incorrectly to cover their mouth and nose. I think train staff should be able to do this with police supporting them if required."

Female, 29, West Midlands

"It would be very helpful if police could be on the train as there aren't enough staff and they could come under attack – it's their personal safety first, then the safety of passengers. They're not paid enough to take the backlash."

Male, 34, South East

"'I think transport police should e more visible in the winter months because there's an even bigger risk of passing on or contracting COVID due to the limited space and the environment of the train." **Male, 47, South East**

*"*Staff shouldn't have to put themselves in a position where they have to get closer to people than necessary – polite reminders to passengers would be the best way and if they're being difficult staff should be trained to enforce the rules or refer to the authorities."

Male, 33, North West

transportfocus

What did we ask our bus community?

Feeling safe on the bus

A task to understand how important the presence of staff are to the overall feeling of 'safety' on the bus. How safe to passengers currently feel, in light of a second wave and tightening restrictions?

Staff on the bus – general thinking

A task to understand how staff enforce the rules 'on the ground' and what passengers think about staff activities on the bus. Are issues resolved effectively or not, and how could this be improved?

Staff on the bus – the detail

A more deliberative task to understand how passengers feel staff should be managing behaviour on public transport. How should staff balance their own safety with those of the passengers and the smooth running of the journey?

transport**focus**

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

transport**focus**

Since we first 'checked in' with the community eight weeks ago, the bus community feels somewhat safer on the bus

The main drivers of feeling safe on bus at this stage of the pandemic are:

Cleaning surfaces

While many passengers are satisfied with other passengers' behaviour (though this may be a function of how empty many buses are observed to be), concerns remain around rails, stop buttons and seats. Frequent boarding and de-boarding leaves passengers afraid of germs spreading through contact with these surfaces, and demonstrating more frequent antiviral cleaning would be valued.

Driver enforcement

'No face-covering, no ride' is felt to be enforced effectively, although some point out that the driver not always wearing a face covering can send the wrong message. The community want bus drivers to have the authority to refuse admission to passengers not wearing a face covering, and the desire for 'enforcement' rather than mere 'guidance' continues to come through strongly.

Space

Hard limits on passenger numbers are felt to significantly enhance the safety of the bus. The community values the guarantee that they will not have to sit next to anybody, and can take the window seat to avoid close contact down the aisle. However, some note that seats are not taped off consistently, undermining the sense that two-metre distancing can be kept.

> One member of the community is **visually impaired** and points out that he has no way of knowing how well social distancing is being adhered to. He is nervous on the bus, and has **no clear sense of his personal risk in travelling.**

transportfocus

"I have been on one bus journey recently and it was a bit hit and miss to be honest, with some people wearing face masks and some people not which I find crazy and frustrating – we're still fighting a pandemic."

Male, 43, North West

"I feel very comfortable on the bus. I put something on the seat next to me so no one can sit next to me and once the driver refused to move until everyone else had sat down."

Female, 65, South East

"I'd like to see social distancing enforced with seats taped off and not in use. Bus drivers should be allowed to enforce the rules and hand out fines to people not complying with the regulations."

Female, 24, Yorks & Humber

"I'm a VIP [visually impaired] and completely unable to tell whether people are wearing masks or keeping a distance – But I would feel safe if there was a conductor on the bus."

Male, 75, South East

transportfocus

The community is sympathetic to the prospect of drivers receiving verbal abuse from passengers after enforcement of the rules

As a result, there is a sense that they need more authority to manage behaviour, or additional support is needed

While the community acknowledges that the driver has some power to manage behaviour as passengers are boarding the bus, behaviour once the journey is underway can feel like something of a free-for-all.

The community didn't have a perfect solution to this problem but felt that the bus driver does at times need extra support given they already have to put up with a great deal of challenging behaviour and should not be expected to confront or escalate their interactions with passengers further.

Some gave examples of a council member or other authority hopping on and off the bus to check passengers are complying with the rules. While a constant second presence is not necessarily seen as essential or desirable, people do feel that at times the bus driver could use additional support in some form.

transport**focus**

"I think police would make people follow the rules, but it seems like a massive waste of resources – a pub bouncer could do the job cheaper! Police are too busy and calling them to the bus could delay the journey."

Male, 39, South East

"I feel sorry for bus drivers as they can't tell every one at every stop to wear a mask – it just isn't fair because they are far too open to abuse. I don't know what the solution is here."

Female, 65, South East

"I'd feel much better if someone was managing passengers more – if drivers told you where to sit on the bus that would be even better rather than having everyone gather at the front like I've seen lately."

Female, 32, Scotland

"I have noticed that there are people getting on the bus from the local council to check everyone is wearing them (face coverings)....hopefully this will encourage everyone to follow the same rules."

Female, 40, Wales

transportfocus

While additional enforcement is called for, the community is divided over whether police presence would be an appropriate response

Some wonder whether bus staff need to be given 'more authority' than they currently have

The community often called for 'greater powers' to be given to bus drivers to **refuse admission** to passengers, or even refuse to continue on the journey until all passengers were seated appropriately and wearing face coverings. Indeed, many assume they already have this authority but are simply not exercising it.

There was a sense that introducing police onto buses would come across as **heavy-handed.** While there was no doubt that this would improve adherence to the rules, most felt that the same objectives could be covered by having a member of bus staff seated with passengers, engaging them consistently, managing seating arrangements and reminding them of the rules.

The goal here is for closer monitoring of passenger behaviour, rather than a campaign of fining and enforcement – though a handful of community members argue that this is the only way to ensure compliance. The community sees adherence to social distancing 'slip' over the course of a journey, and a light touch, authoritative presence among the passengers could see this addressed.

transportfocus