



Transport User Community

Recent restrictions and rail and bus travel

October 2020

What did we ask our community?

Recent restrictions and the impact on travel – week of 28 September 2020

A task to understand how bus and rail passengers have reacted to the rising numbers of Covid-19 cases, announcements in the news and new restrictions that have been announced in recent weeks.

How would passengers explain these developments to someone who had not heard of them before, and what makes them different to previous restrictions? What do they mean for travelling in particular?

And what impact, if any, have these restrictions had on passengers' willingness to board the train or bus?

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

Fearing a second wave, our community feels that travel has become more unsafe

The community is confused by the new restrictions and many default to staying at home unless the journey is seen as necessary

- Even respondents who felt relatively on top of the rules in recent months are conceding that the variety of restrictions by region and circumstance are beginning to evade them.
- Rising case numbers have not caused our (relatively few) existing travellers to stop travelling. These journeys are usually perceived as 'essential' trips to work or see family.
 - The overwhelming majority of our community was cautious about rail as early as March and only making journeys that they personally saw as necessary from the outset.
 - The community do not feel any particular call to action in terms of travelling more, or travelling less.
- Those under local lockdown effectively disregard national-level restrictions and focus only on what they are told to do in their region. Again, however, this has not had an impact on the question of whether or not to travel since these respondents were making only non-discretionary journeys in the first place.

“Being in an area under local lockdown I have, in essence, switched off to the national restrictions. I continue to work from home as directed and at this time I wouldn’t be comfortable on public transport.”

Male, 39, Wales

“I can foresee a second wave but the restrictions make no sense. A 10pm curfew is ridiculous because everyone clambers onto public transport at the same time.”

Female, 50, South East

“I don’t feel there’s any difference regarding the new restrictions as things stand. I’m not aware of any new restrictions around travelling by rail and all my journeys are work related so I’m not expecting any change.”

Male, 43, North East

“I’m watching the news more than I did in the summer and I feel more isolated in my home and restricted to socialising with my family. I had just got used to going out again. I haven’t been travelling by train recently and I’m going to work from home until March.”

Female, 52, Wales

The official guidance and restrictions do not seem to drive usage, or non-usage, of rail

More significant than the restrictions themselves is the question of how safe rail appears to be

- As ever, this is driven by other passengers' adherence to social distancing, monitoring and enforcement of mask-wearing and the cleanliness of the station and rolling stock.
- Many members of the community have not changed from the full-lockdown approach of late March. Any movement in the restrictions, therefore, have little to no impact on willingness to travel.
 - Enticing passengers back to rail will therefore involve more than reassuring passengers that they are 'allowed' to travel.
 - Undermined confidence in the restrictions, particularly around the rule of six and 10pm curfew, and the nagging sense that they do not go far enough, mean that rail needs to move beyond compliance with these rules and towards a more comprehensive and well publicised set of safety measures.
- Ultimately, passengers continue to feel that they exercise choice over whether or not to commute to work. Several community members' employers have 'shelved' plans to return to work in the spring of 2021.

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Certain aspects of the new restrictions are attracting confusion, and the community is feeling frustrated

Several have noted that public transport becomes more congested as people leave pubs and restaurants at a specific time and the rationale behind the 10pm curfew is seen as somewhat unclear. However, most in the community feel able to mitigate against this by simply staying at home during the late night.

Increased fines for not wearing a mask are well-received, but let down by what the community sees as lax enforcement of the rules in practice. One respondent saw their first argument between a police officer and a young woman at the bus stop over mask-wearing which escalated to involve other passengers.

The rule of six makes sense to the community but the reasoning behind exceptions for commercial circumstances like the workplace (or indeed, public transport) is unclear.

Restrictions on seeing family and friends are causing emotional distress, and are particularly galling when their fellow passengers seem able to flaunt the rules with impunity.

"I think the restrictions are all very annoying and frustrating. Travelling is no longer fun and we all feel like criminals and prisoners. I don't take kindly to people telling me to wear a mask."

Female, 40, West Midlands

"I'll be choosing my journeys more wisely as a result of the new restrictions – it's confusing and frustrating especially the 10pm closing time which means people pour out into the streets."

Male, 43, North West

"I don't mind the new restrictions as something has to be done. I'm all Covid-ed out. I'll still get the bus at the moment – strangely enough the buses are still quite empty here and I feel safe because no one can sit next to me."

Female, 63, South East

"I have a car, and I drive – so if I'm completely honest it doesn't bother me at all. It's not impacted me going into work although the guidance is so confusing that sometimes even the government can't explain them."

Male, 32, North West

The community's behaviour around bus travel is unchanged

One difference is that bus passengers are likely to avoid travelling socially around 10pm

- However, few respondents could see any relevance of the new restrictions to bus travel in particular. They focussed on restrictions around pubs and restaurants, and household gatherings.
- The majority of respondents still feel safe on the bus – the issues are around what passengers do when they get off.
- Since many are either working from home or looking for work, they still have a good deal of flexibility about when and if to travel.
- There is hope, as yet unrealised, that the tougher rules around mask wearing will improve their journeys but this has not yet been proven.