



Transport User Community

Feeling safe on the bus

October 2020

What did we ask our community?

Feeling safe

A task to understand the what impacts feeling safe on a bus. We know from previous tasks that social distancing, Face covering-wearing and capacity are significant factors, but how do they interact, and which ones, if pushed, emerge as more important than the other? How important are cleaning and ventilation to the feeling of safety on the bus?

Triggers to abandon a journey

Would anything cause a passenger to abandon a bus journey? What would happen if a passenger did decide to abandon a journey? What impact does the prospect of waiting for another bus have on that decision?

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

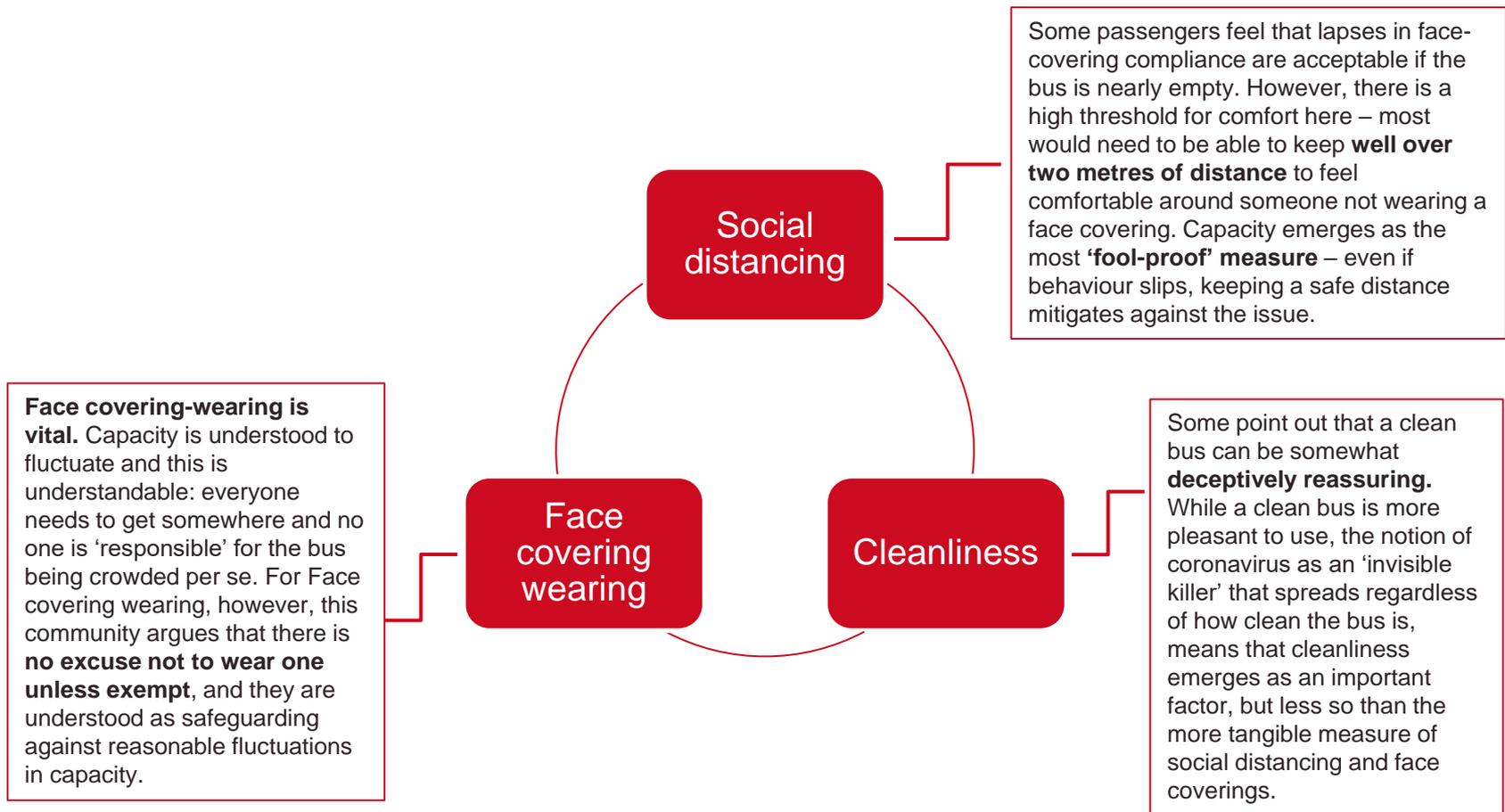


A spread of age,
gender and ethnicity



Some have
disabilities

The ability to maintain social distancing is most important factor, followed by face-covering compliance - the two are mutually reinforcing



Ventilation emerged as another factor in feeling safe, and can go some way to compensate for others not wearing face-coverings

Several passengers felt that a well-ventilated bus was important to feeling comfortable on a journey even before the pandemic

Open windows and well-circulating air are as much issues of comfort as they are of safety. Passengers argue that ventilation can make the bus feel less claustrophobic, as well as preventing the virus from circulating exclusively within the vehicle.

Condensation on windows and a general sense that the air is stagnant can 'feel' unhygienic and uncomfortable. A few respondents have asked their fellow passengers to open the window and actively push for ventilation on the buses they use.

One vulnerable passenger, who has had a tracheostomy, has always valued air circulation on the bus, because she can become congested and short of breath if the air is too dry or stale.

“I think buses are never going to be spotless, let’s be honest. People will never observe mask wearing unless it’s enforced by marshals on the bus, so personally I’d prefer a more socially distanced journey.”

Female, 46, York and Humber

“I think it’s okay for masks to come off if the bus is nearly empty. We’re sitting far apart and the windows are open.”

Male, 39, South East

“I might get on a bus that only has 3 or 4 people and two of those might not wear masks, but with distance and the windows open it isn’t too concerning.”

Female, 21, South East

“If the bus were sanitised and everyone wore masks correctly then I’d be slightly less worried.”

Female, 22, South East

‘Standing room only’ implies that the bus is too full, even if the passenger can stand at a safe distance away from everyone else

When presented with ‘standing room only’ as a scenario, having to stand is likely to make passengers feel unsafe on the bus, with some saying they would get off the bus if that were the case.

This is an emotional trigger rather than a practical one – it signifies that the social distancing system has broken down and that the bus is too crowded for passenger behaviour to be monitored effectively. It’s less about the individual passenger and their ability to stay at a safe distance, and more about the overall ‘feel’ of the bus being too full.

Other triggers include:

Being sat next to

Many passengers have had to confront their fellow bus users for trying to sit next to them on a crowded bus. While a significant determinant of safety, it does feel ‘controllable’, inasmuch as passengers feel confident defending their space, or putting a bag on the seat to stop anyone else sitting down.

Difficulties with ‘one metre plus’

This is less easy to define. People agree that they would struggle to stay two metres away from other passengers, but most are happy to compromise on ‘one metre plus’ and do not necessarily need the full two metres at all times.

Lapses in face covering-wearing

Some buses just feel ‘off.’ For a few passengers, seeing that they have boarded a bus with passengers not behaving appropriately is enough to take a chance on a second bus.

Many passengers identified various things within their control that they can do to feel safe, even when other passengers are being negligent

However, some in our community would get off a bus that felt unsafe without hesitation – and a few already have.

- Moving away from a passenger to re-establish social distancing
- Re-doubling on hand sanitiser
- Opening a window for greater ventilation

Fundamentally, the task revealed that passengers do feel some personal control over their own safety – they do not feel powerless, even when other passengers are ‘letting the side down’.

Indeed, several pointed out that they can usually gauge the safety of the bus at the point of boarding. If the bus feels unsafe, they just won’t get on. Likewise, there was some willingness ‘to ride it out’ and tolerate the journey, even if lapses in social distancing were substantial.

"I would stay on the bus and be extra vigilant. I won't inconvenience myself by getting off the bus. It's a risk I took before I got on, and I wouldn't get on in the first place if I wasn't prepared to take that risk."

Male, 25, North West

"I try to sit by a window or if there's a window open make sure there's plenty of ventilation. But I wouldn't get off – I'd keep myself to myself, wear my mask and sanitise my hands."

Male, 48, Scotland

"I think it depends how much longer I have left on my journey. If I could easily walk the rest I'd just get off but otherwise I'd try and tackle whatever it was that was making me feel uncomfortable – asking people to socially distance for instance."

Female, 24, York and Humber

"The buses to my home are verry irregular so I'd have to consider staying on. But as soon as I arrived home I would shower and wash my clothes right away."

Female, 22, South East