



Transport User Community

Changes to road journeys

November 2020

What did we ask our community?

Changes to your road journeys

A question to understand how road users' experiences have changed, if at all, over the course of the pandemic.

Have they observed any new congestion 'hotspots' for traffic lately? What do they think is causing them, and what do they think should be done to address those issues?

Conversely, are there any previous hotspots for traffic that no longer are?

Who is our road users community?

40

people using
motorways and major
'A' roads in England



Across England



Mix of vehicle types



Mix of commuters,
leisure and business
travellers, and those
who drive for work



A spread of age,
gender and ethnicity



Some have
disabilities

Road users have noticed changes to their normal routes, but do not always understand why

The community recognises that traffic has returned to something akin to pre-pandemic levels

- Road users do not object to this per se – as with the previous week’s deliberation, the general sense is that the reduced congestion was enjoyable while it lasted, but unremarkable now.
- Most congestion hotspots are found on local roads rather than motorways and major ‘A’ roads.
- Where congestion does occur, this is not ascribed to anything relating to Covid-19. Queues due to breakdowns were mentioned.
- Respondents have noticed changes to cycle lanes which, on local roads, can create pockets of congestion and, in one respondent’s experience, make it harder for shoppers to park.

“Roads seem to be back to normal, especially the M62 heading west to Manchester – very busy. Leeds city centre is covered with roadworks with serious congestion right through the main roads in the city.”

Male, 47, North West

“Around Harpenden and St Albans there has been a lot more congestion spots due to roadworks. There are roadblocks from trucks as more people seem to be having work done on their houses...the M1 going into London seems busier too.”

Female, 23, South East

“I have noticed that road congestion has ramped back up to pre-lockdown levels, which I’m a bit surprised to see. You might have thought people would think a tad more ecologically now! Roadworks are a constant, too.”

Male, 37, South

A minority of respondents have observed significant changes, primarily around London and the M25

Specific issues encountered prior to the new national lockdown included:

- Bus lanes changing to 'all day' lanes resulting in one-lane traffic on the A217
- Congestion on the A10 as pubs and restaurants close at the same time
- Congestion on the M25 (J30 near Dartford) as more people return to work
- Road closures making main road journeys on the A406 busier

More generally, however, the return to more normal forms of travel (at least during the period under consideration) struck some respondents as sudden.

Travellers are attending bars, restaurants and other leisure premises but, unlike before the pandemic, much more frequently doing so by car. The community has noticed this and, while it doesn't lower the quality of their road journeys per se, it has been a challenge for some to adjust their estimations of journey time.

“I’ve seen congestion hotspots in areas where there are pop-up cycle lanes but I don’t mind as long as people are using them – I just don’t think they look great and I think they should be more permanent, but that costs money.”

Male, 38, North West

“I haven’t noticed any major congestion hotspots on my routes. There are a few repairs being done to road surfaces and potholes local to my village but apart from that it’s not been an issue – in rush hour it’s been back to busy but with fewer cars on the road.”

Female, 58, East

“I have noticed in and around central London more drivers are trying to avoid the new congestion charging hours by avoiding those areas, which leads to more congestion that generally would be more clear otherwise.”

Male, 39, South East

The community has noticed that peak-time traffic has become less severe

- The reduction in traffic and congestion struck this community as more general – not bound to any specific road or stretch of the network.
 - Areas that were known pinch-points for traffic continue to be so, and the community often ascribes this to issues with the design and planning of the road network itself.
 - Roadworks, cycle lanes, rules around bus lanes, diversions and closures all play a role here.
- The main difference here is more around timing than location – drivers notice that peak-time traffic is less severe given the number of people working from home.
- The community has noticed more and more people using the roads to make the most of different leisure activities before lockdown commences.