



Transport User Community

Travel and ticketing post-Covid

November 2020

What did we ask our community?



Travelling in the future

A question to check in and see whether the community's views on the future of travel have changed since the summer. Do they feel as though rail and bus travel will go back to normal when the pandemic ends, or are these fundamental changes here to stay?



Ticketing in the future

A question to understand what the long-term impact of Covid-19 may be on how each community member's commuting pattern changes – and what this means for how ticketing is managed in the future.

Who is in our rail and bus communities?

60|60

60 people pre-Covid using rail to commute and 60 using bus



Across England, Scotland and Wales



Mix of payment methods



Mix of those currently using public transport and those not



A spread of age, sex and ethnicity



Some have disabilities

The community values public transport and hopes that it will evolve with enhanced cleanliness and less crowding after Covid-19

Reflecting on this question reminded the community that they do hope for a return to a pre-Covid-19 level of activity on the train

- Our participants see the train as a public good and hope that it is able to achieve a pre-Covid-19 level of service in the long term.
- However, most argue that even once the pandemic ends, working patterns and particularly working from home are here to stay. They widely assume that rail will need to find ways of being sustainable with fewer passengers.
- They argue that sanitation and the use of face coverings are likely to remain crucial long after the pandemic has ended. The pandemic has caused commuters to think more critically about the level of cleanliness on trains, and their own health.
- Similarly to the beginning of the community, many rail users are relishing the opportunity not to be 'packed into' a crowded train. They sincerely hope that passenger numbers will stay low enough for comfort, but high enough for rail to remain sustainable.

The community sees rail as a major part of 'normal' life – there is goodwill here, and a real hope that rail will continue to deliver a high quality service throughout the pandemic and beyond.

If the community could wave a magic wand, they would want a more flexible and low-cost approach to fares

In addition, many would want to see lower levels of crowding for the future

- As at the start of the community, many no longer feel ‘hostage’ to rail. Their schedules are more flexible, and they are spending less on fares.
 - There is a widespread assumption that rail will have to operate a diminished or reduced level of service to adjust for lower passenger numbers. Passengers fear that they will, in effect, be paying more for less, although they can struggle to articulate what that reduced service might look like in practice.
 - Reassurances around the overall ‘quality’ of the post-Covid-19 service could ease fears and frustrations around fare increases. Passengers need to know that whatever rail looks like post-COVID, it will be ‘the same or better’ in terms of overall experience.
 - Others, however, worry that the loss in revenue that rail has faced during the pandemic would make such an arrangement impossible.
- Some priorities, however, are more straightforward, and more in line with the pre-pandemic attitude to rail. Many see the reduced passenger numbers as an opportunity for rail companies to refine their punctuality, reliability and capacity.

“I think things will go back to normal. People will be encouraged back into the office and encouraged to spend to get the economy back up. Public transport is extremely important and that value will never change.”

Male, 32, South East

“If I had a magic wand I’d maintain the level of carriages that are currently being used. The trains operate with six at the moment and prior to the pandemic you’d be lucky to get four. I’d relish more capacity in the future.”

Male, 52, Wales

“I don’t ever see the full normal being returned to. Masks will stay for a lot of people, like you saw in Asian parts of the world pre-Covid-19. My priority for a clean service hasn’t changed so much as maybe just brought into focus.”

Male, 39, Scotland

“I think that even with home working continuing, the loss of revenue will be reflected in a poorer service. I will only use public transport when I need to.”

Female, 61, Wales

Those working from home expect to continue this for two or three days a week

Most respondents expect to commute no more than three times a week, post-COVID

- However, they continue to assume that their commuting times will remain relatively static and in line with the nine-to-five working day. Peak and off peak definitions are unlikely to change.
 - Many respondents are surprised by how well the working-from-home approach has been for their professional lives and few, if any, of these community members see any compelling reason to go back. Those who are home-working have done so since the start of the research and value the increase in leisure time and lower costs that this brings.
 - Some community members are actively advocating for home working within their own workplaces – the push for a blended model is coming from all levels of seniority

Most expect an almost entirely digital ticketing service in the future

Few object to the current balance between paper and digital tickets – most feel that they can access their rail ticket in the format that best suits them. Some do point out that vulnerable or less tech-enabled passengers may want to maintain paper tickets, but the consensus is that rail is likely to go the way of most other industries and go predominantly digital in the long term.

“I would like to think we’ll go back to normal. I’d like travel to be as it was post-Covid-19 but I’d still wear a mask and sanitise. I’d definitely travel to work if there were a vaccine. COVID hasn’t changed my value in public transport.”

Female, 44, Scotland

“I don’t think train travel will get back to normal. Working lives have changed – many can work from home and will only travel when necessary. And commuters will still be cautious, if there’s overcrowding.”

Female, 64, South East

“I will definitely go back to using trains. I like trains – always have. I just don’t want to go back to the bad old days. Train companies have proven that they can run a more efficient service, better timekeeping, cleaner... my God, far cleaner!”

Male, 65, North West

“I don’t think travel will ever be the same again. We need to learn to live with the virus rather than think it will be eradicated – face coverings and social distancing.”

Female, 50, South East

The bus community expects to continue using bus and wants to see it succeed, but Covid-19 has prompted a new interest in walking and cycling

The community expressed a renewed interest in walking from place to place since lockdown

- Our bus community is comprised of both leisure travellers and commuters. As a result, there has been a new interest in walking and cycling – many community members travel under less time pressure than their commuting counterparts, and a handful hope to walk and cycle for personal and environmental benefits.
- Much like the rail community, there is a widespread assumption that face coverings and cleanliness will remain priorities long after the pandemic. The community feels much more health conscious and wary of bugs/germs in general.
 - At the start of the research, the bus community noted that their local service was cleaner and more pleasant than they had ever seen it before. They want to see this enhanced standard carried forward post-pandemic.
 - This is compounded by the fact that many are sceptical about whether, even with a vaccine, we will ever really live in a ‘post-Covid’ society. They expect progress to be slow and want to see the current measures implemented for as long as the virus is in circulation.
- As with the rail community, bus passengers are realising just how much they value their service – they have a renewed respect for bus drivers and other staff, and want to see bus travel succeed.
 - The community found creative ways of making bus travel appeal to new audiences, which is something they think will be essential in a post-COVID context. Environmentally-friendly initiatives like electrification or incentives to switch from car use emerged spontaneously.

“I do think working from home is here to stay. This will mean a massive loss of revenue for public transport. I expect to only go into the office two or three days a week, even post-COVID”

Male, 39, South East

“I’d now rather spend a bit longer walking from place to place than get on a bus or other public transport, just to get in exercise and do my small bit for the environment. I haven’t got on the bus since the start of the pandemic so I’m not aware of anything I’d change.”

Female, 24, York and Humber

“I used to value a regular, reliable service but this hasn’t been the case since lockdown. I decided to walk or cycle more and that will continue post-COVID.”

Male, 48, Scotland

Almost universally, passengers would want to see improved cleanliness on the buses if they could ‘wave a magic wand’

Bus travel was never seen as a particularly clean mode of transport and passengers do not want to ‘let go of’ the progress that has been made

- In a post-Covid context, however, this will be a quality of life issue rather than a public health one. Passengers on the bus have become accustomed to a more pleasant journey.
 - One passenger argued that accountability could be maintained in this respect through a visible ‘tick-list’ of cleaning activities that had taken place, when, and by whom.
- More space on the bus emerged as a real benefit of the mid-lockdown bus service. Passengers with pushchairs and luggage have much easier journeys and, again, if they could wave a magic wand, passengers would want to see this maintained.

In summary, for bus users, their main wish is to see the standard of bus travel maintained beyond Covid-19, rather than brought back to the old way of doing things.

“I think there should be an option for both paper and digital tickets because not everyone has a smartphone – but it won’t make any difference to my journey.”

Female, 28, North West

“I think even with the vaccine things will not go back to how they were before. So many office-based businesses have become used to working from home and their staff will wish to continue to do so. I suspect people will work from home at least part time.”

Male, 39, South East

“I am now in a new job where I have to be in the office every day. I purposely chose it for walking distance because of COVID. I choose to walk to work most days. I think a lot of us have seen the light with how much time we spent commuting before.”

Female, 32, Scotland

Bus commuters expect to commute work two to three days a week, but leisure travellers are likely to return to a normal pattern

Again, much like the rail community, this task led some community members to reflect on their fondness for using the bus.

- As such, some community members see a return to bus travel as an important signifier of returning to normal life in general – using the bus day-to-day, they hope, will help them feel more at ease and that they are finally able to ‘come out of hiding’ from the pandemic.
- Most, however, expect a more blended approach. Those who use the bus for leisure are likely to maintain their usual routines, but commuter numbers, they assume, are likely to dwindle.
- Unlike the rail community, bus community members see digital ticketing methods as an important aspect of cleanliness. They hope that digital ticketing will be embraced fully across the bus network. Paper tickets ‘feel’ unhygienic, whereas digital feels more modern, convenient and up-to-date.