



Transport User Community

Christmas journeys

8 December 2020

What did we ask our communities?

Journeys around Christmas

We first checked in with people on their Christmas plans before the 5 day relaxation of restrictions was announced (week commencing 9 November) and then again after the announcement was made (week commencing 30 November) to see if and how plans had changed.

A task to understand the travel that respondents are planning to do around the Christmas period this year. How are they making the decision around whether or not to travel? What sources of information do they factor into their decision?

What modes of transport will they take, and how different to 'normal' will all this be compared with previous seasonal travel?

Does the guidance feel clear? And how do people feel about the prospect of taking public transport over Christmas, if that is what they plan to do?

Who is in our rail and bus communities?

60|60

60 people using rail to commute and 60 using bus, prior to Covid-19



Across England, Scotland and Wales



Mix of payment methods



Mix of those currently using public transport and those not



A spread of age, gender and ethnicity



Some have disabilities

Who is in 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

The communities factor a range of considerations into their travel plans – not just the core government guidance

‘Are cases falling?’

A handful were waiting to see how the trajectory of the pandemic changed over the course of lockdown. If the second national lockdown in England did not significantly reduce case numbers, they would not travel at Christmas even though it is allowed.

‘Am I vulnerable?’

Those with long-term health conditions, particularly those who were previously advised to shield, along with those visiting vulnerable family or friends, are much less willing to travel around Christmas, irrespective of the guidance itself.

‘Am I near my loved ones?’

Transport users able to visit close friends and family without extensive public transport usage are much more likely to do so. The risk feels smaller.

‘Am I allowed to visit others?’

This is the overriding factor for many people. Transport users will follow government guidance as to how and when they are allowed to mix with other households.

Plans have not changed significantly since Christmas restrictions were announced: Christmas will be small-scale, local and cautious

Key workers have known for a while that they will be working over Christmas

These respondents are hopeful that the rest of the public will be sensible and follow the guidelines around household number as much as possible.

News of the five-day window has not made a significant impact on plans

The news of the recent restrictions appears to have 'greenlighted' pre-existing plans rather than changed them significantly. Few, if any, were planning to have a large number of different households come together prior to the news coming out. They planned for the worst.

Most are planning to stay within a bubble of one or two other households

This is usually seen as sufficient to bring the immediate family together; there is no real appetite to hold Christmas gatherings among extended family. The goal is fairly modest; just to bring any adult children together with parents.

“My plans for Christmas have changed since we last spoke [because of] all the restrictions that are in place over England, Wales and Scotland and with friends not being able to mix. I’m waiting to hear what the restrictions are for the new year. At the moment I’m planning to stay at home with my partner because both our parents are elderly.”

Female, 38, South East, roads

“After careful consideration, even though lockdown has been lifted we have made the difficult decision not to go to Wales and travel. Even though the government has said travel is okay we feel the family’s health is more important and would rather be on the safe side.”

Female, 35, South East, roads

“My plans haven’t changed since you last spoke to us. I’m a student and planning on travelling back to my family home for Christmas. I’ll travel by train. I always get the train when I go home because it’s quicker than driving; I don’t have a car at university so there’s no other option.”

Female, 24, York and Humber, bus



“I’m planning to do Christmas with my mum and stepdad with my wife and kids. We’ll all have COVID tests the day before just as a precaution. We won’t be using any rail services during Christmas, but I might use Avanti and SWR to see family in Surrey who are in the same tier as us.”

Male, 45, North West, rail

“My plans haven’t changed from what I’d anticipated. My partner is a key worker who’ll work on Christmas day. He’ll drive my children and me to my mum’s on the way to work and pick us up when he leaves work (which will be late). All travel to be made by car.”

Female, 50, South East, rail

“At this time, I’m not planning on travelling.....She (my wife) has to shield so we won’t be travelling. I won’t be travelling anywhere this Christmas other than the supermarket. And for that journey, I’ll drive.”

Male, 35, South East, bus

Those who plan to travel around Christmas are overwhelmingly likely to do so by car, rather than public transport

The main intention is to visit family for Christmas – this was often done by car pre-COVID

- Family visits are often outside the usual routine for these respondents and do not abide by the same principles as, say, routine leisure trips or the commute.
- In addition, travel by car has been felt to be safer than public transport since the start of the pandemic. The community is sincerely hopeful that they will be able to visit family over Christmas – and doing so by car feels like the safest way to make this happen.
- The roads community is relatively unfazed by the prospect of traffic congestion around Christmas – the assumption here is that it will be no worse (or even slightly better) than in previous years. They are accustomed to Christmas traffic and see it as part and parcel of the season.

"Any family-style events we do sneak in will be done by car as it's very difficult to make the short-distance trip by bus or train (they live in a different direction to where all the bus routes point)"

Male, Bus User, 37, North East

"I don't plan to make any long journeys on trains over the Christmas period, regardless of lifting the lockdown restrictions. I live quite close to family members, so will use my car to travel over the festive period. This is quite normal, I don't tend to use the trains to visit family over Christmas."

Male, Rail User, 53, South East

"I will travel to Cambridge from London to my parents house. I will go by car because it is safer (Covid-wise) and easier to transport belongings."

Female, Road User, 25, South East

There are concerns over catching public transport for Christmas journeys

Christmas has exacerbated the existing fears around using rail and bus

Elderly Relatives

Many in our communities are going to visit elderly family members over Christmas and argue strongly that they need to avoid contact with others as much as possible beforehand. Driving is felt to be a necessary precaution.

End of Lockdown

Some argue that the end of national lockdown is likely to cause a degree of complacency among passengers and Christmas feels like the most likely time for standards to slip on public transport. Others argue that case numbers still feel too high.

Winter Flu

Passengers understand that the winter months are a difficult time for healthcare services and do not want to make the situation worse by transmitting the virus via public transport.

Social Distancing

Passengers have not seen or heard any reassurances around the safety measures bus and rail companies are taking. They recognise the potential for increased crowding and do not want to take the risk.

Only two respondents are definitively planning to use public transport as a key part of their travel over Christmas

Female, 24, York and Humber, bus

A PhD student who always uses the train to visit home. She does not have access to a car at university and therefore feels she has no choice. While she has no specific concerns about using the trains, she will not use them to go back to university after Christmas. It will be one quick trip.



Male, 50, South East, roads



On investigation, this respondent has realised that taking the train is cheaper than using his motorbike and this has been a major factor in his decision. The ability to make an advance booking has been a significant saving during an expensive time of year. He is afraid that the train could be packed with commuters not adhering to social distancing.