



Transport User Community

The environment and travel

January 2021

What did we ask our communities?

The environment and travel

Given recent discussions about the Government's aim to cut carbon emissions by 68 per cent by the end of 2030 (compared to 1990 levels), our communities were asked for their thoughts on environmental issues when it comes to transport.

How important are environmental issues to these communities, and do they think about them during their daily lives?

Given that, as a result of Covid-19, more people are using their cars to get around, what does that mean for the environment in the future – is this an issue worth addressing, and how?

Who is in our rail and bus communities?

60|60

60 people using rail to commute and 60 using bus, prior to Covid-19, with many also driving



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 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

Until case numbers for Covid-19 have much reduced, safety has overridden sustainability as a priority, in these communities' view

The rebound in case numbers post-lockdown has reinforced ideas that the pandemic will be with us for some time. At least for the next six months, the communities do not feel it is 'the right time' to prioritise sustainability as a policy area.

Cars are well-established as the 'safer' mode of transport in terms of Covid-19 and at this stage, most argue that sustainability is a firmly post-pandemic area of focus.

However, sustainability is almost universally recognised as important

Many argue that being sustainable goes beyond public transport and sustainable behaviours in more day-to-day life were common, including plant-based diets, recycling, volunteering and environmental initiatives in the workplace.

Many have been undertaking these behaviours long before the pandemic – it does not appear to have been a particular spur for pro-sustainability behaviours.

Road users are aware of the impact their vehicles often have on the environment

Road users stress the importance of electric vehicles to a stronger extent than either the rail or bus communities

- Unlike public transport users, the safety of buses and trains is of lower importance, less salient or relevant to their day-to-day travel.
- Promoting electric vehicles, through charging infrastructure and economic incentives to adopt them, is usually higher-salience than enhancements to public transport.

Road users also feel the impact of 'green' initiatives during their journeys

- London-based drivers recognise that the ULEZ (Ultra Low Emission Zone) initiative has reduced emissions and is likely to 'nudge' people back onto public transport once the pandemic ends.
- Several drivers have adopted low-emissions vehicles to lower their costs and have positive experiences of these vehicles.

However, road users lack a frame of reference in terms of who is 'in charge' of sustainable travel

As a result, the hope to reduce emissions by 2030 can feel wishful. Unlike public transport users, who can point to their train/bus operator or government as a controlling force, road users do not have an equal sense of an overarching 'system' that can manage this transition towards a sustainable road network.

“In terms of things that can be done by the Government, I’m not totally sure what else could be done right now apart from initiatives around buying more environmentally friendly cars. I know there’s been a lot of work around cycling and walking over the last few months but that’s not always possible.”

Female, 35, North West, road user

“They should provide incentives for people to use sustainable choices, whether that’s tax relief or some kind of discount. I find it crazy that they hike prices when they want more people to use public transport services.”

Male, 32, West Midlands, road user

“I’m not aware of any examples of transport sustainability or carbon reduction initiatives, but there needs to be a directive immediately, and visible campaigning.”

Female, 59, South East, road user

Road users do suggest a range of actions government could take to promote sustainable travel

The overarching theme of these suggestions is around incentivisation:

- Direct grants for road users to purchase electric vehicles or bicycles
- Tax relief for those making 'sustainable choices' in general
- Proliferation of cycle highways and cycle lanes
- Roll-out of charging stations along the road network for electric vehicles.

These suggestions tend to be straightforward and immediate.

These respondents do not feel as though the road network is actively managed. As such few know precisely what they are able to 'ask for' in terms of improvements.

“It’s very important to me. I’ve seen changes in the weather patterns during my lifetime and the conditions that future generations will live in are very important to me.”

Female, 57, North West, road user

“I think we have already started to see action from the government in the form of banning sales of petrol cars in the next ten years; some might say it’s not enough but I’d rather it be slow than nothing at all. There’s loads more that can be done.”

Male, 42, South East, road user

“Clearly no matter how economical or fuel-efficient the car, more traffic means more pollution. I suppose the only way around that would possibly be to subsidise public transport more or nationalize. It’s insane, the cost of rail fares in the UK.”

Male, 37, South East, road user

“I do consider environmental issues to be important, but I’m not the best at reducing my carbon footprint, I wouldn’t say I am using my vehicle more or less than before as I hardly used it for work. The government’s decisions to stop the sale of diesel cars won’t effect me too much as by the time it comes in my cars probably won’t be worth a lot.”

Male, 32, Wales, rail passenger

“I understand the environmental issues however forcing people to purchase new cars is highly unfair. Financially this isn’t viable for everyone and cars can be essential for some families. I also agree that the additional strain this will put on an already overcrowded public transport system.”

Female, 30, South East, rail passenger

“Governments and train operators should make their services cheaper so that more people can afford to use their services. The difference between driving and using public transport is often large, with driving being the cheaper options per person.”

Male, 32, South East, rail passenger

Transport users seldom feel as though they have a choice in terms of what modes they use

Many in the bus and rail communities are both public transport users and drivers

These respondents have strongly delineated roles for each mode that they use, and many do not feel that switching is feasible, least of all during the current crisis.

As a result, many argue that even post-Covid, public transport will need to entice would-be users. This almost always is reflected in terms of *cost* – there are no significant expectations for public transport to offer something substantially different in terms of the service offered, provided it comes in as cheaper than taking the car for as many people as possible.

Fundamentally, any sustainability initiatives need to safeguard the needs of people who are non-discretionary drivers (including disabled people).

Suggestions on how to incentivise more public transport use included:

- More flexible and cheaper ticketing options
- Enhancements around bus lanes
- Electric and hybrid buses
- Explicit *disincentives* around private vehicle use (with care taken around vulnerable people who may rely on the car).

“There has to be a proper alternative put forward so that people do not have to use their cars. I can get into a car at 1am in the morning and travel anywhere, this is not possible by public transport. Whether fully electric vehicles are the answer I don't think the technology is there yet.”

Male, 41, Scotland, rail passenger

“I think that far too many people are using cars for journeys which could easily be done by public transport. Of course, during COVID, its understandable, but hopefully this will be short term and I would very much like car ownership to be not such a necessary thing in peoples eyes in rural areas.”

Male, 60, Wales, rail passenger

“The car industry is a major polluter, and I am glad the industry is undergoing a change within the next 10 years, although this will mean a cost to a lot of individuals personally. In terms of encouraging us to use more public transport, it would have to be safe.”

Female, 32, Wales, rail passenger

Our respondents are aware that electric cars are on the horizon and may have an impact on sustainability

Concerns around price were common and none want to be 'forced' into using an electric car

It was common for respondents to highlight 'road tax' as an important 'lever' in promoting sustainability. Putting 'road tax' (Vehicle Excise Duty) to absolute zero for electric vehicles is felt to offset the initial outlay and could therefore promote a more sustainable road network in the process.

Others point out that employers could do more in this area:

- Promoting car-sharing schemes
- Season ticket loans
- Flexible working arrangements to minimise demand

Ultimately, fears around congestion are the overriding factor. It does not matter what kind of car is on the road, electric or fuel-burning – if the roads become overwhelmed, the communities argue, then their journeys will suffer.

Many in the public transport communities have been car drivers since the pandemic and have become sympathetic with the need to keep the roads flowing smoothly. We know from previous activities that many do not anticipate a return to public transport for a long while.

“The government could address this issue by promoting public transport: having offers on fares, decreasing fares, increasing the frequency of services, making information on how buses/ other public transport facilities are staying COVID secure public and easily accessible.”

Female, York and Humber, 24, bus passenger

“I think the government can do a lot more public transport by giving bus companies an incentive to use more environmentally-friendly buses. This can reduce the bus fare, and the buses should be more frequent.”

Male, Scotland, 48, bus passenger

“I do think that maybe our council could introduce the charge system like they have in London, so to drive in certain areas, you will be charged. Maybe that could discourage more people driving.”

Female, 46, North West, bus passenger