

Public transport: a cleaner future?

May 2021



Summary

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic Transport Focus has been listening to passengers to understand what they need to feel safe and confident to travel. As restrictions ease and passenger numbers increase, we are urging transport operators to ensure they are ready to welcome more people back to using public transport again.

Our research has shown that space for passengers to social distance is the most important issue for passengers, but that cleanliness is another key driver in feeling safe. Our insight has always shown that cleanliness is important to passengers, even before the pandemic. It's clear that it has now become even more important than before, and likely to remain a priority even if Covid-19 is no longer a significant risk in future.

Since the start of the pandemic transport operators have worked hard to enhance their cleaning regimes. Our insight shows many passengers have recognised this, with the majority of those travelling satisfied with cleanliness on their journeys. It's important these improved levels of cleanliness are maintained by operators and their efforts are communicated effectively to help reassure and win back passengers.

This report summarises our insight on the importance of cleanliness and highlights examples of operator best practice.

Recommendations

To help reassure and win back passengers, operators should:



Maintain improved levels of cleanliness – many passengers have noticed the improvement and don't want standards to slip.



Ensure passengers can physically see cleaning happening wherever possible, including while on board.



Use all available channels to communicate their efforts to both passengers and non-users to build confidence.



77%

Say that cleanliness on public transport is more important to them now than it was before the pandemic.



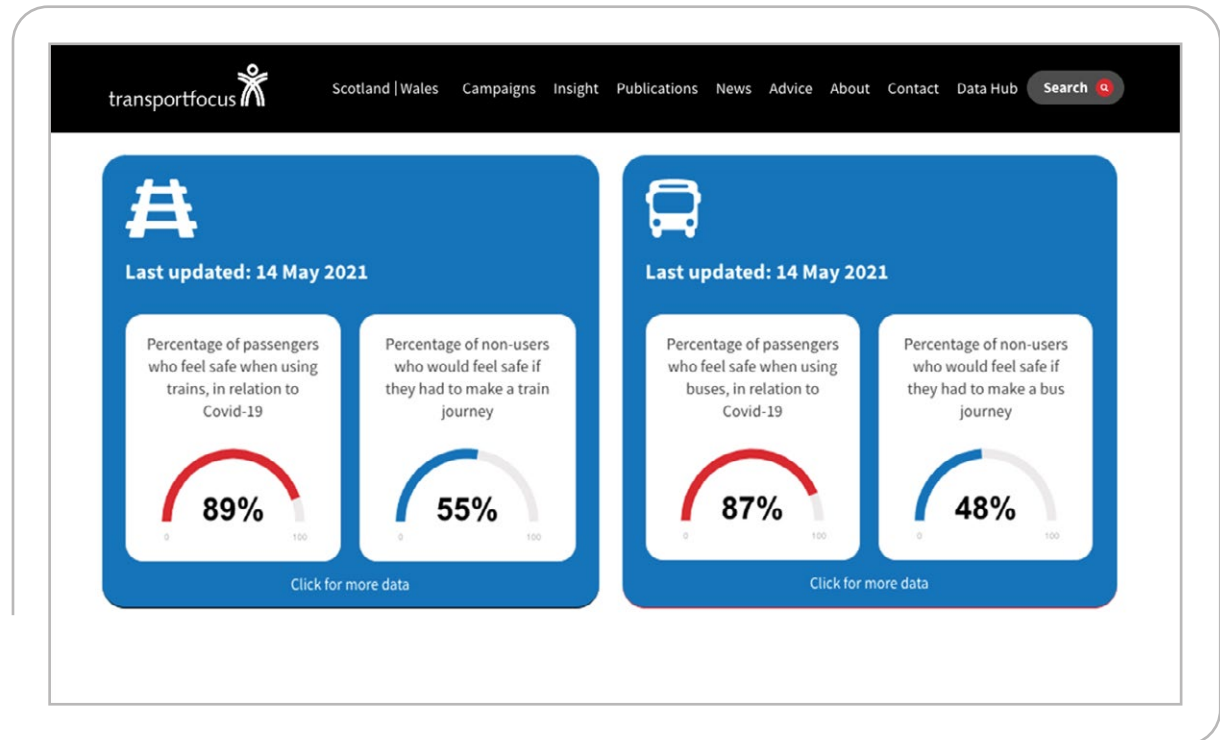
75%

Say that cleanliness of public transport will continue to be more important in the future even if Covid-19 is no longer a significant risk.

Passenger confidence barometer

Our *Passenger confidence barometer* provides a snapshot of bus and train passenger perceptions of travelling during the pandemic.

Throughout the pandemic, we have consistently seen that more than eight in 10 current passengers have felt safe on their journeys. Until recently, however, the majority of people that have not used buses or trains have said they wouldn't feel safe. In recent weeks, this gap between experience and perceptions has begun to narrow. Ensuring passengers have confidence in the cleanliness of public transport is just one way operators can respond to the challenge of attracting people back.





Our insight on cleanliness

In our report *Travel during Covid-19: key lessons for 2021* and beyond we urged public transport operators to maintain the improved standards of cleanliness they achieved during the pandemic.

This recommendation was based on our insight showing:

- cleanliness was an important driver in feeling safe for people travelling on public transport during the pandemic
- high levels of satisfaction with cleanliness, with around eight in 10 passengers satisfied with cleanliness in our latest *Travel during Covid-19 survey*.

Last year our transport user communities confirmed cleanliness had surged in importance.

"I think the priorities have changed dramatically now. My top three would be social distancing, masks and the bus being safe – free of germs on handrails and seats, and onboard sanitiser."

Female, 22, 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

Our latest insight shows that many people have recognised that levels of cleanliness on public transport have improved. In April, our *Travel during Covid-19 survey* found:

- Three in five agreed public transport is cleaner now than it was before the pandemic, with fewer than one in five disagreeing.
- More than three quarters agree that cleanliness has become more important to them on public transport. Furthermore, three quarters said cleanliness of public transport will

continue to be more important in the future, even if Covid-19 is no longer a significant risk.

- Around a third agreed public transport is clean enough, while a similar proportion disagreed. Among those who had used public transport in the last two weeks the picture is more positive, with half agreeing public transport is clean enough.

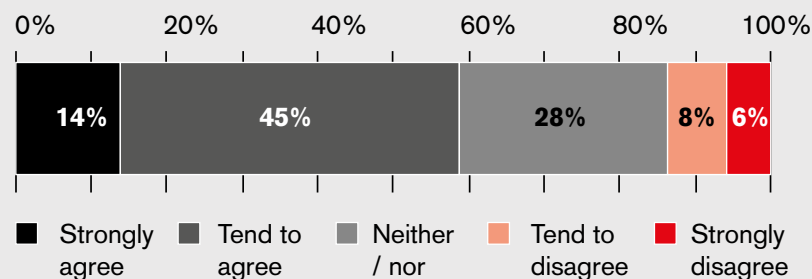
It's clear from listening to current passengers that many have been impressed with improved standards of cleanliness.

"I see less litter on the floor of trains and buses, I see how often they clean between journeys, and with mask use, everything seems cleaner than before."

"From my previous journeys this year, the buses and trains have been really clean."

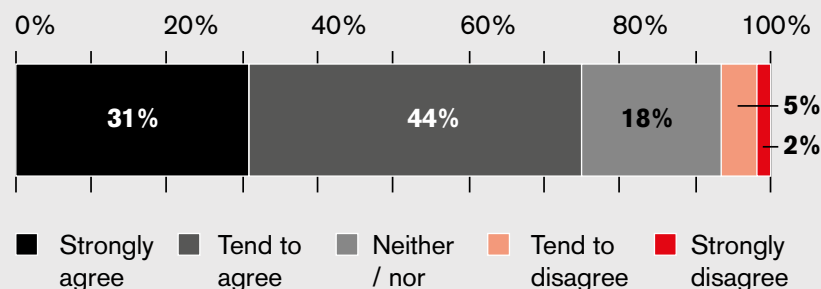
I think that public transport is cleaner now than it was before the pandemic

Base: 1,452



Cleanliness on public transport will be more important to me in the future, even if Covid-19 is no longer a significant risk

Base: 1,821



However, there are still many, especially those that haven't been using public transport, that don't think public transport is clean enough. Listening to their feedback confirms that passengers' experiences have not all been positive and that it is very difficult to convince people that public transport can be clean and safe during a pandemic.

"So many people get on and off public transport and it is impossible to sanitise areas often and thoroughly."



Our insight on cleanliness

"Whenever I travel by public transport there is always rubbish in the aisles."

"Because handrails and seats aren't cleaned when people get up or touch the bars and poles."

"Windows don't always look clean. Floors need mopping. People put feet on seats. Litter left."

"There is no way that the driver of a bus or train can ensure that all the transport is clean and wiped down after the public have been using them. Buses cannot be cleansed every stop neither can trains."

Our bus and rail priorities for improvement research has always found cleanliness to be a priority for passengers even before Covid-19 struck. Our National Rail Passenger Survey has long showed that cleanliness onboard the train was one of the key drivers of overall journey satisfaction.

All our insight now suggests greater levels of concern about cleanliness are likely to persist well beyond the pandemic – with a cultural shift towards greater care over hygiene and health. Passengers do not want to see the standard of cleanliness slip for the foreseeable future.



Communication

Effective communication about cleanliness is needed to help change the perceptions of people who have stayed away from public transport since the start of the pandemic. Operators need to make people aware of the enhanced efforts they are making and the levels of cleanliness being achieved.

Our insight shows that while some have seen and heard messages about enhanced cleaning, there are still many more potential passengers to reach.

"I know that all buses are disinfected and cleaned properly every night."

"Busses are fogged each night and touch points cleaned during the day."

"I am not certain that buses and trains are cleaned regularly."

"Transport providers seem to be taking cleanliness of vehicles very seriously and advertising the procedures."

"Not aware of what cleaning regimes they have in place. Have the opinion they do not clean enough."

Our insight on cleanliness from our *Transport User Community* found those not travelling were often unsure what additional cleaning measures were in place. Some who usually used the bus were sceptical as to whether anything had changed compared to pre-pandemic, while rail users have more trust that operators are taking appropriate measures in response to Covid-19. The examples we shared built confidence that rail and bus operators are going 'beyond the minimum' and actively working to keep people safe. It was clear our community thought better of public transport providers as a result of the information shown.

How should operators best communicate their efforts?

Bus users on our Transport User Community said cleanliness is 'experienced', but that social media activity can demonstrate that regular cleaning is taking place. Rail users also argued that train companies need to communicate their actions more loudly using every channel available to them. They recommended social media posts as a way of demonstrating cleanliness in action.

"Cleaning was still important, prior to Covid-19, but the emphasis now on cleaning is of greater importance than ever. Have a poster on the train stating when it was last cleaned – date and time."

Rail passenger, male, 45, North West

"I would consider cleanliness as a very important feature now and going forward – it doesn't end if the pandemic is over. They should continually evidence that they are providing a safe and clean environment."

Rail passenger, male, 65, South West

"I think these things need to be implemented sooner rather than later and having easily read information onboard advertising to communicate that the correct steps are being taken – otherwise what's the point?"

Bus passenger, male, 29, Scotland

"I would want clear signage on the buses and around bus stops to inform users about what steps are being taken to make the buses Covid-safe."

Bus passenger, Male, 25, North West

Our recent research *The route ahead: getting passengers back on buses* found that messages need to be across multiple communications channels and reinforced by actions. Alongside social media, eye catching posters at bus stops and on the side of the buses themselves would help to spread the message wider. There should be visible proof of cleaning, including signature sheets, the smell of disinfectant on buses, and cleaning staff at major bus stops. Many of these lessons could apply to rail and other public transport modes too.

It's clear that continuing to communicate to passengers and non-users the extra cleanliness measures operators are taking is key to rebuilding confidence in public transport.

Virucides and fogging

Many operators are conducting nightly cleaning regimes with ‘virucidal’ products that provide long lasting sanitising treatment on passenger touchpoints. As well as conventional cleaning techniques, many are also using regular ‘fogging’ with virucide products that can kill viruses on both hard surfaces and in the air.

When we showed our *community* examples of train and bus companies using ‘fogging’ and virucide technology they were impressed and reassured, with these measures often above and beyond what people had assumed was being done.

“I’m most impressed. Think the virucide is outstanding – this is the sort of application that has immediate impact and give travellers a sense of confidence...”

Rail passenger, Male, 65, North West

- Hallmark Buses are sanitised daily with disinfectant ‘thermo-fogging’. A fine mist settles on every surface and angle, and remains effective against viruses including Covid-19 for more than 24 hours.
 - Great Western Railway has been using a sanitising treatment that is sprayed inside
- carriages overnight, building a fog which coats all surfaces and claims to fight Covid-19 for up to 28 days.
- St Pancras became the first station in the world to roll out ultraviolet (UV) cleaning robots, which use UV light to destroy viruses and bacteria on surfaces and in the air.



In-service cleaning

Our Transport User Community insight has shown us that evidence of cleaning taking place is one of the key factors that can provide confidence in cleanliness. Bus passengers mentioned that they would like to see visible cleaning so they feel more confident in what is being done, while rail passengers also wanted to see evidence of the cleaning process actually taking place. Some complained they have never seen a cleaner on the train, apart from staff collecting litter. As such, we encourage as much active cleaning as possible with visible in-service cleaners present on busy routes.

- Blackpool Transport is sanitising each tram at the end of every two-hour trip. It also has a dedicated cleaning team that boards buses mid-journey, sanitising high touch areas such as grab rails, seat backs and stop buttons.
- Transport for Wales has increased on train cleaning, with catering stewards cleaning instead while onboard catering is suspended.
- Go North West put in place more thorough cleaning regimes with 'in-service' cleaners roving the network and a dedicated team at Shudehill in Manchester city centre.
- LNER boosted the number of cleaners to over 330 working on board and at stations. Teams are using sustainable disinfectant products and high-grade equipment, including 'fogging' devices which kill viruses on hard surfaces and in the air.



Hand sanitiser

The presence of fully stocked hand sanitiser, both on board vehicles and at stations, helps to reassure passengers that operators are doing all they can to reduce the spread of Covid-19. Our Transport User Community long argued for hand sanitiser to be made available on board public transport.

- Ensign buses has fitted hand sanitisers across all its fleet and says the dispensers are regularly refilled and cleaned throughout the day.
- Go NorthEast initially trialled hand sanitiser units on school buses at the start of the pandemic. This has now been rolled out on all the company's vehicles for customers to use upon boarding and exiting the vehicle.
- Thameslink has installed 1000 hand sanitising stations.

"I think one of the things bus companies could do is put more hand sanitiser by the entrance and people would see then that they are doing something."

Bus passenger, Female, 48, Midlands



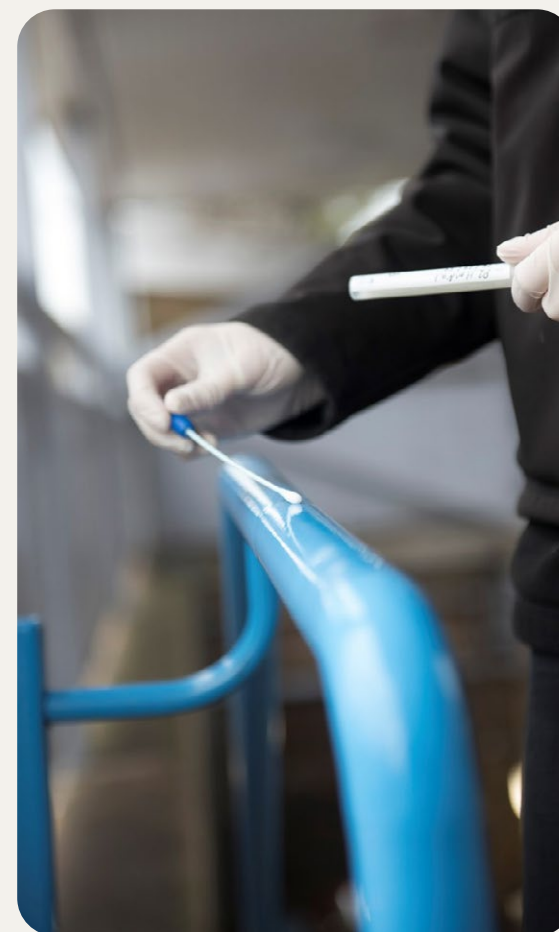
Swab tests

To provide confidence in cleanliness some operators have conducted regular swab tests for Covid-19 on surface areas and touch points.

"...gives me a bit more reassurance in that they're using industrial strength sanitising products. I would have liked to see the 'before and after effect' on improvement and getting rid of the virus."

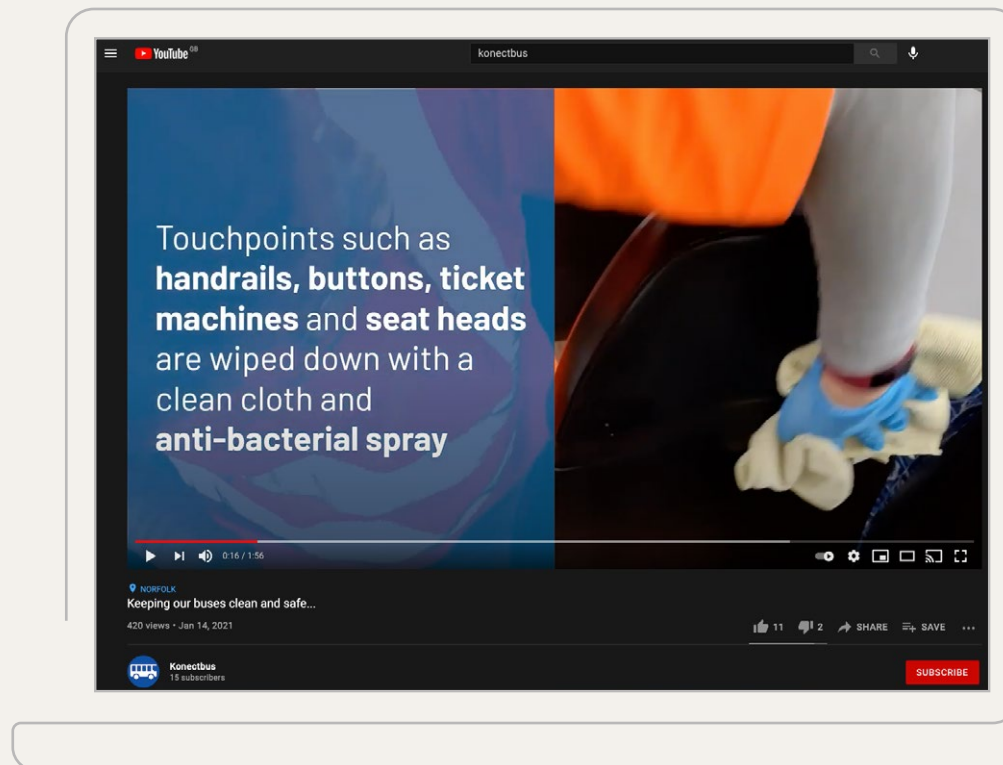
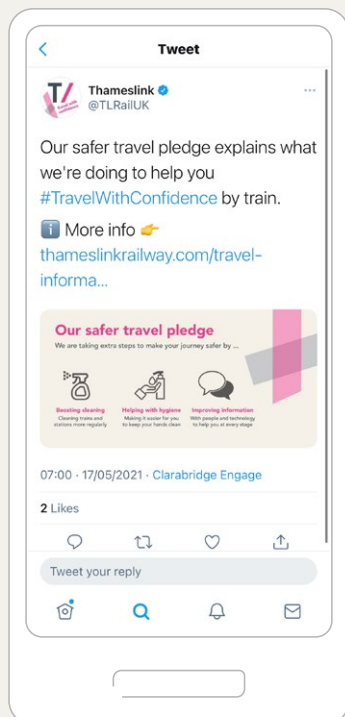
Our *community* found the fact that Covid-19 tests are being done independently on the operator's own initiative very impressive and reassuring. It signalled operators are taking the pandemic seriously and reassured respondents' concerns about catching the virus despite their best social distancing efforts.

- Greater Anglia is carrying out monthly swabbing tests trying to detect signs of Covid-19.
- Govia Thameslink Railway has carried out random tests which show long-lasting anti-viral disinfectant was effective at keeping surfaces clean for up to 23 days.
- Southeastern Railway has committed to an ongoing programme of swabbing across trains and platforms at over 40 of its stations. Negative tests have highlighted the ongoing effectiveness of its cleaning regimes.



Communications

To increase confidence in public transport it is important that awareness is raised about the additional work gone in to ensure vehicles and stations are clean. Many operators have used social media to raise awareness of their cleaning regimes.



- Go East Anglia (Hedingham, Chambers and Konectbus) has a useful video showing how buses are kept clean, swab tested and steam cleaned.

Hand sanitisers are installed on board, antibacterial mist is sprayed throughout and vehicles are put through the bus wash to clean outside.

Contact Transport Focus

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Transport Focus is the operating name of the Passengers' Council

Transport Focus is the independent consumer organisation representing the interests of:

- bus, coach and tram users across England outside London
- rail passengers in Great Britain
- all users of England's motorways and major 'A' roads (the Strategic Road Network).

We work to make a difference for all transport users.