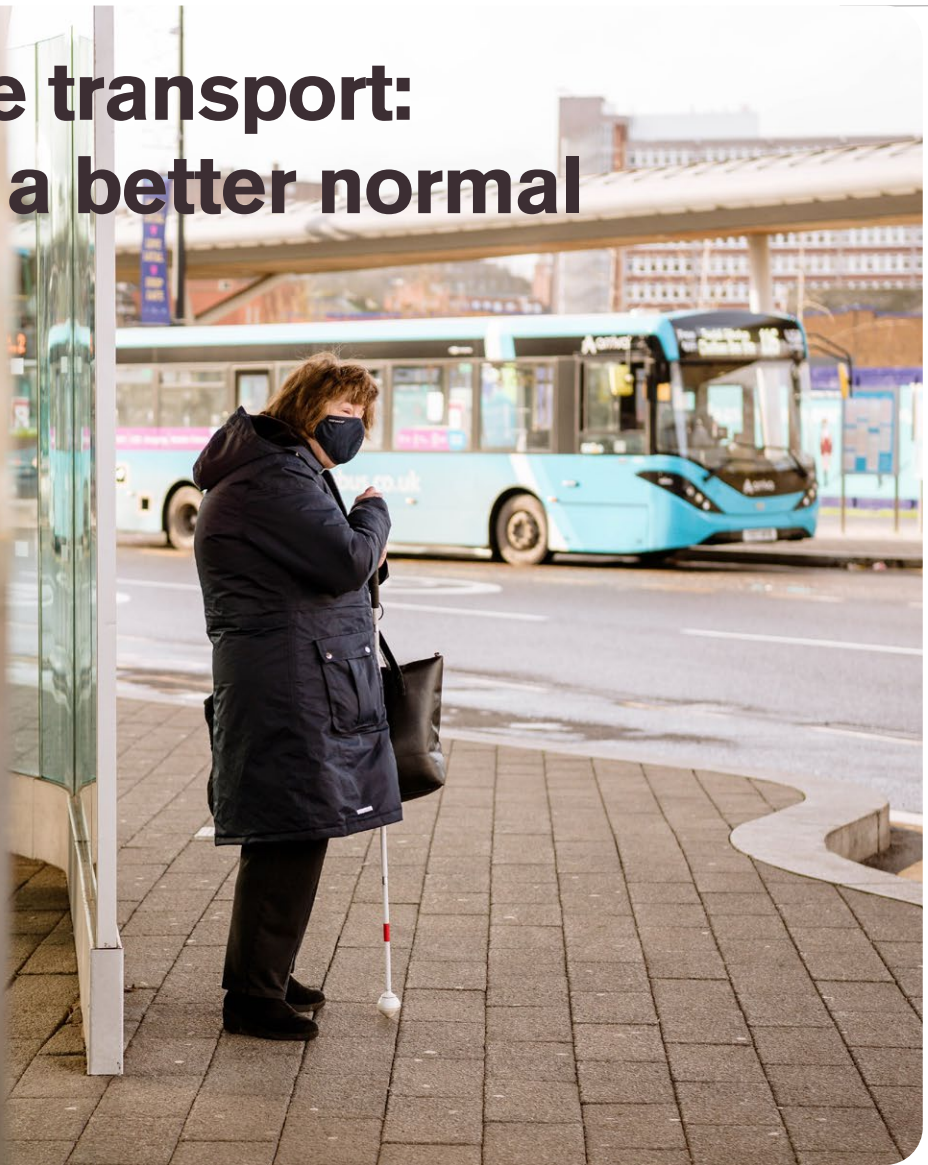


Accessible transport: unlocking a better normal

July 2021



Introduction

Throughout the pandemic, Transport Focus has been speaking to people to understand the impact of Covid-19 on transport use and future travel plans. Our regular Covid-19 tracking research captures the behaviours, experiences and attitudes of people during the pandemic, including disabled people.

To help dig a little deeper into the views and experiences of disabled passengers, we asked members of our Transport User Panel to complete an online survey asking about public transport use before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. This summary highlights the key findings from this research.

"I am disabled and I find getting on and off buses and trains quite difficult without assistance. I do have a mobility scooter but it is not allowed on public transport, buses or trains, so I am still not able to travel out of my own area."

"There is a bus every half an hour and it is frequently late or missed out altogether. For vulnerable passengers this can mean a wait of an hour. The service stops early evening so on nights out and Sundays it is every two hours with no connecting services without a long wait."

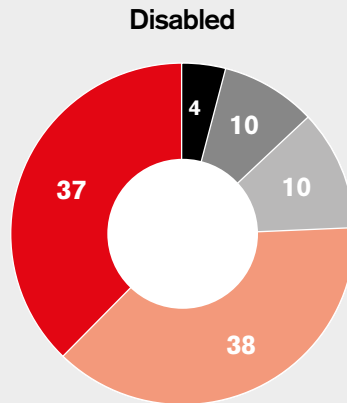
Provision of transport and ease of use

Overall, members of our Transport User Panel rated the provision of public transport in their local area positively. There was little difference between disabled and non-disabled respondents. The majority rated services as very or fairly good (70 per cent disabled and 74 per cent non-disabled). 17 per cent of disabled respondents and 14 per cent of non-disabled respondents rated services as fairly or very poor. These ratings were also fairly consistent across different disability 'types' (sensory, mobility, mental health, and cognitive).

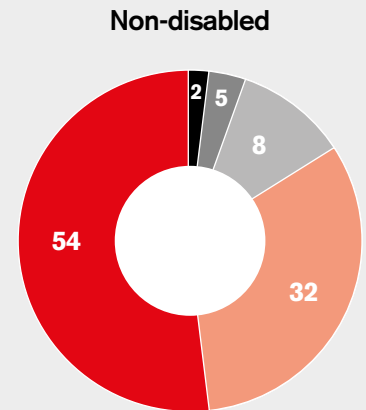
However, disabled people don't find it as easy to use public transport in their area. 54 per cent of non-disabled respondents say it is very easy, compared with 37 per cent of disabled respondents. A higher proportion of disabled respondents say it is difficult. The reasons they gave included the distance to the bus stop being too far for them to manage and greater complexity for journeys with more than one part. Again, this is quite consistent for different disability types.

How easy is it for you to use public transport in your area? (%)

- Very easy
- Fairly easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Fairly difficult
- Very difficult



Total saying fairly/very difficult: 15%



Total saying fairly/very difficult: 7%

Source: Transport User Panel
Base size: disabled 473, non-disabled 3160.

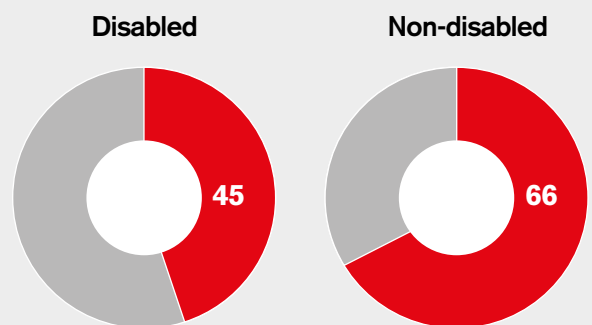
"[...] It feels to me like little notice is taken of where users are and where they need to get to. In an area like Milton Keynes, buses are the only viable alternative to car travel. I cannot cycle because of a health condition and walking would take too long. I wouldn't arrive at my destination in time for work etc..."

"Buses near my house have been cancelled for over four years, the nearest bus no longer goes to the train station. I cannot get to work in under two and a half hours anymore, and no buses at all on a Sunday so cannot get anywhere at all."

Access to a car

45 per cent of disabled respondents said they have frequent access to a car compared to 66 per cent of non-disabled respondents.

- Access all the time or whenever needed



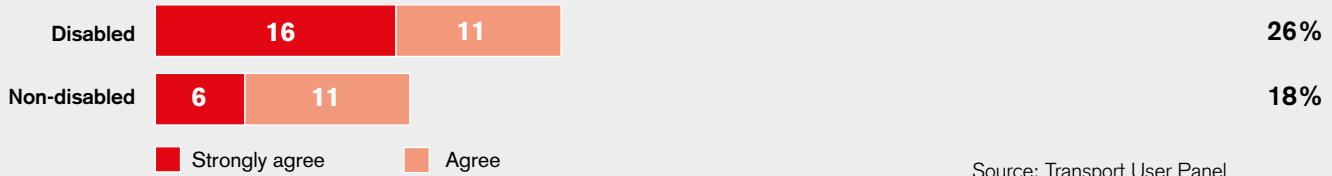
Source: Transport User Panel
Base size: 471 disabled; 3145 non-disabled
Q. Do you have a car available to you to make journeys (as a driver or passenger)?

Impact on work and other opportunities

We also wanted to understand how public transport affects access to work and other opportunities for disabled people. In our panel 26 per cent of disabled

passengers agreed that local public transport provision limited their access to employment opportunities compared with 18 per cent of non-disabled panellists.

Public transport in my area limits my ability to access employment opportunities* (%) **All agreeing**



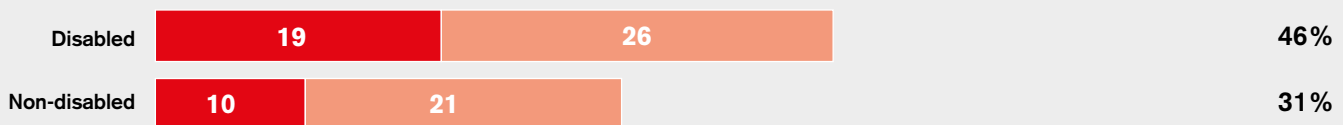
*among those in work or with an interest in seeking work

Source: Transport User Panel
Base size: disabled 212, non-disabled 1866.

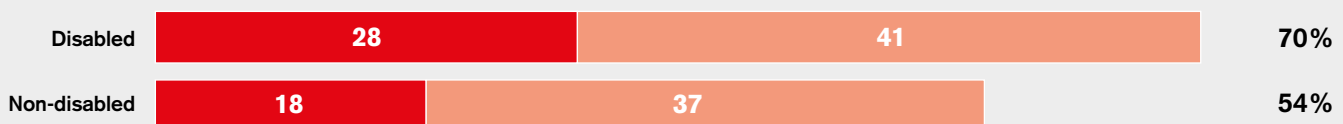
A significantly higher proportion of disabled panellists reported that public transport limits their ability to go places. This means that they do not use public transport as

often as they would like. They would also go to many more places if public transport was easier for them to use. Once again, there was limited difference across disability types.

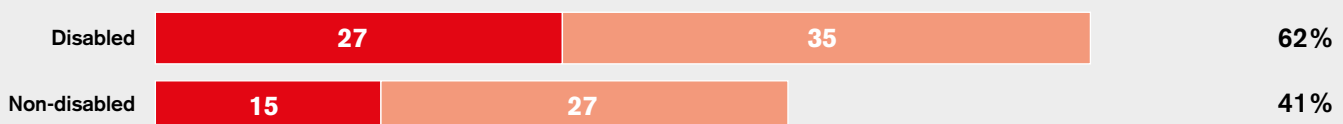
The public transport available in my area limits my ability to go to places that I would like to go to (%) **All agreeing**



I would like to use public transport more than I do (%)



If public transport was easier for me to use, I would go to many more places (%)



Legend: Strongly agree (red), Agree (orange)

Source: Transport User Panel
Base size: disabled 417, non-disabled 3145.

"I can get to the bus stop without a problem, the only issue is the bus arriving. Also the alternative bus route is reached either by an uphill half hour walk or a walk on a road with no pavement."

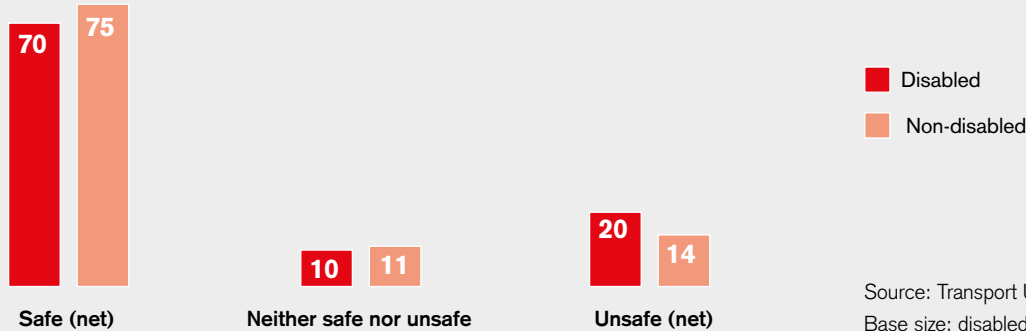
"I have mobility problems - still a lot of stepped access to train stations. Bus drivers often don't utilise the drop floor facility on their vehicles."

Perceptions of safety

We asked members of our Transport User Panel how safe they felt in relation to Covid-19 when using public transport. While the proportion saying they felt safe was

similar between disabled and non-disabled respondents, more disabled respondents said that they felt unsafe. This was quite consistent across disability types.

How safe did you feel in relation to Covid-19 when using public transport? (%)

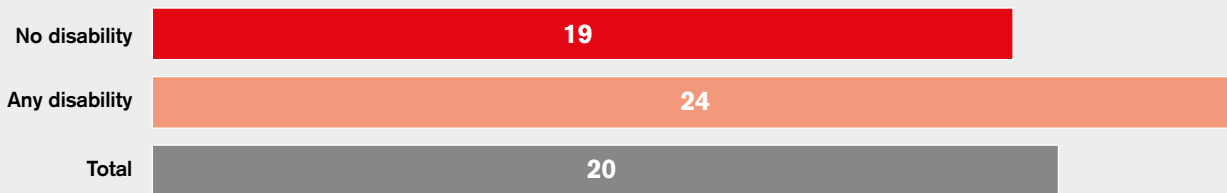


Source: Transport User Panel
Base size: disabled 353, non-disabled 2250.

This is reflected in our ongoing Covid-19 tracking research. Since May 2020 we have asked people (on a weekly or fortnightly basis) about their travel behaviour and about attitudes to travel in future.

This research also shows that disabled people are more likely to be avoiding public transport at the moment on safety grounds.

Avoiding public transport due to concerns about safety (%)



% saying they have not used public transport in the last seven days because they did not feel safe using public transport at the moment.

Covid19 omnibus: week 46 (14-16 May 2021)
Base size: total 1666, any disability 366, no disability 1260.

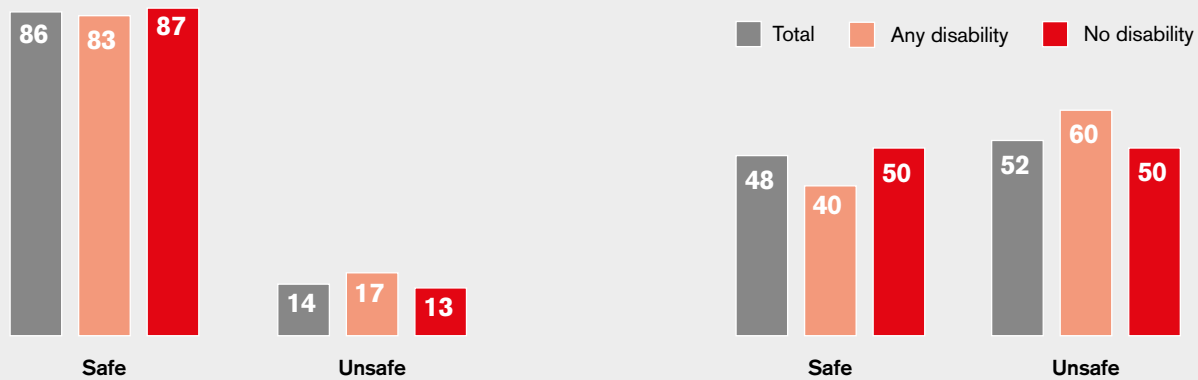
By aggregating research over six weeks (from 9 April – 16 May 2021) we can build a sufficient sample size to also look at perceptions of safety on individual modes of transport.

On bus, we can see a big difference in perceptions between users and non-users in total. Those who had actually travelled felt relatively safe, while those who hadn't travelled felt it would be unsafe. This perception gap is even bigger

when looking specifically at disability; 83 per cent of disabled people who had actually made a journey by bus felt safe while only 40 per cent of disabled people who had not made a journey by bus felt they would be safe doing so. Looking at those who felt unsafe paints a similar picture; only 17 per cent of disabled people who had travelled by bus felt unsafe compared to 60 per cent for those who had not travelled.

"On the few occasions that I used buses during lockdown e.g. for medical appointments, there were limited seats available to use so people were spread out and the majority of people wore masks."

Feeling safe - bus (%)



How safe do you feel when using buses (among all who have made journeys by bus in last seven days)

How safe would you feel if you had to make a bus journey (among all who have not made journeys by bus in last seven days)

Covid-19 omnibus: combined weeks 41-46 (9 April - 16 May 2021)

Made journey (unweighted): total (1510), any disability (297), no disability (1163)

Not made journey (unweighted): total (10,509), any disability (2457), no disability (7841) .

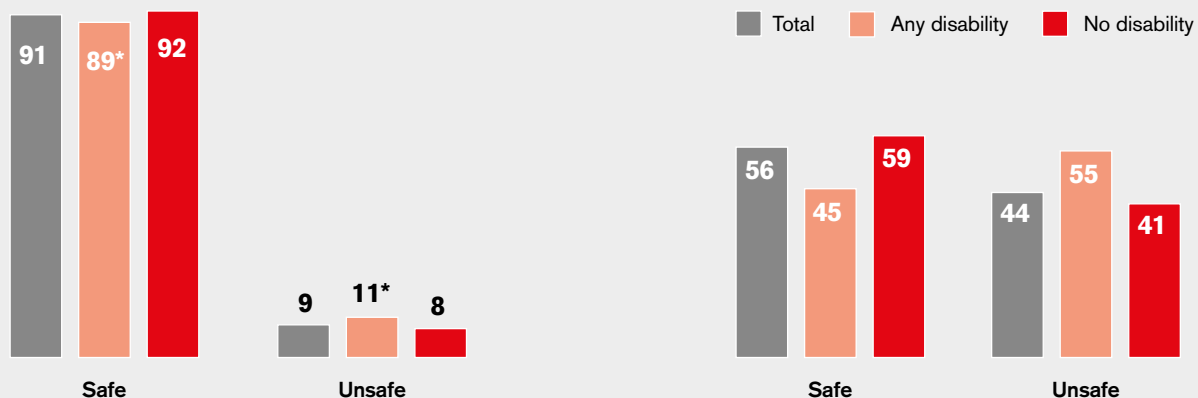
"I find other people very stressful at the best of times. Now they have the capacity to kill me by breathing near me. I have used the bus and tram only on a few

occasions in the past 14 months. Increasingly people are not using masks or not wearing them properly, including bus drivers. That makes me feel unsafe."

We can see a similar perception gap when it comes to train travel. 89 per cent of disabled people who had made a journey felt safe while only 45 per cent of

disabled people who had not made a journey by train thought they would feel safe doing so.

Feeling safe - trains (%)



How safe do you feel when using trains (among all who have made journeys by bus in last seven days)

How safe would you feel if you had to make a train journey (among all who have not made journeys by train in last seven days)

Covid-19 omnibus: combined weeks 41- 46 (9 April - 16 May 2021)

Made journey (unweighted): total (701), any disability (85*) no disability (591)

Not made journey (unweighted): total (11,318), any disability (2669), no disability (8413).

* caution - low sample size

"The trains themselves are very clean and fairly safe; it's the idiotic behaviour of the other passengers that makes me feel unsafe (not wearing masks, crowding, etc.)"

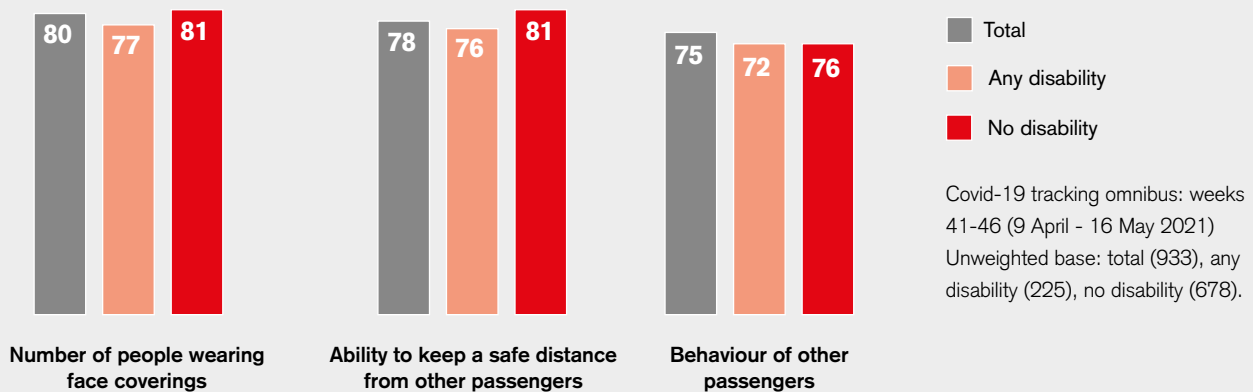
"Trains have not been busy even during rush hour, which has been really reassuring. I said fairly safe as mask compliance on trains has not been good, and I've moved seats a few times to keep distanced."

To some extent this gap between experience and perception reflects the efforts public transport operators have made to help passengers travel with confidence and feel safe. But it also clearly highlights the scale of the challenge facing operators as they try to persuade people to return to public transport in future.

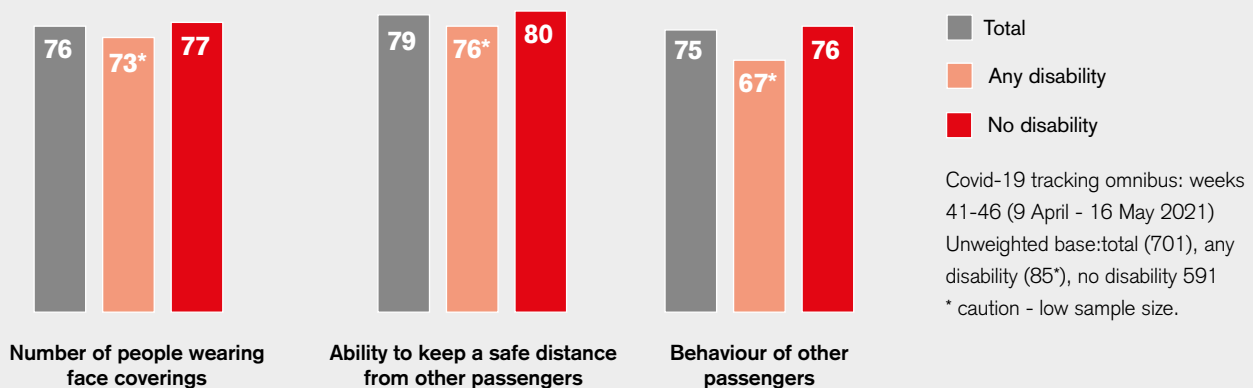
We know through our research on travel during Covid-19

that face coverings and social distancing have a major impact on these feelings of safety. By again aggregating data from our tracking research over a six-week period (9 April – 16 May) we can build up a picture of satisfaction for bus use (outside of London) and for rail use. This suggests that there are differences in satisfaction levels between disabled and non-disabled passengers, especially when it comes to the behaviour of other passengers.

Satisfaction - among those who had made a journey by bus (outside London) in the last seven days (%)



Satisfaction - among those who had made a journey by train in the last seven days (%)



"Some people on the bus haven't always used face coverings, they wait till they sit down on the bus to put them on, or windows are left shut where people don't care about catching it. It concerns me a lot when using public transport."

The lower level of satisfaction with the behaviour of other passengers is particularly interesting. We know from previous research (*Disabled rail passengers research*, 2019) that many disabled passengers experience anti-social behaviour from other passengers. We wanted to get a sense of whether this had extended to wearing face coverings and

whether those who are exempt had felt pressured, or even threatened, when they do not wear face coverings. We asked members of our Transport User Panel about their experiences of being exempt and how others had responded to this.

"I don't have any breathing difficulties but being on the Autistic spectrum technically makes me exempt. However, I don't want to be accosted or given dirty looks for not covering up when I'm outwardly young, fit and healthy. Why should I have to explain myself to people who can't mind their own business? Therefore I reluctantly cover up to save the hassle, feeling very irritable in the process."

"Bus drivers have questioned me and asked for proof of my exemption although, according to law, they should not do so. Signs in the bus do not mention exemptions. Other passengers have also been allowed to berate me for not wearing a mask and upset me greatly with no intervention or support from the driver."

While some disabled transport users haven't experienced any negativity from other passengers, it is clear that others have felt judged for being exempt from wearing a mask. This has led some to change their own behaviour by wearing a mask in order to avoid conflict with other passengers or being made to feel uncomfortable.

"No-one will say anything, but you get plenty of glares. I wish they had the courage to ask, but they're too cowardly."

Lanyards

One way disabled people can seek assistance from staff on public transport is by carrying a card that gives an indication and/or details of their impairment. The idea is that this card or lanyard discreetly informs staff, and even fellow passengers, that the individual needs a bit more support or time. We wanted to test out attitudes to

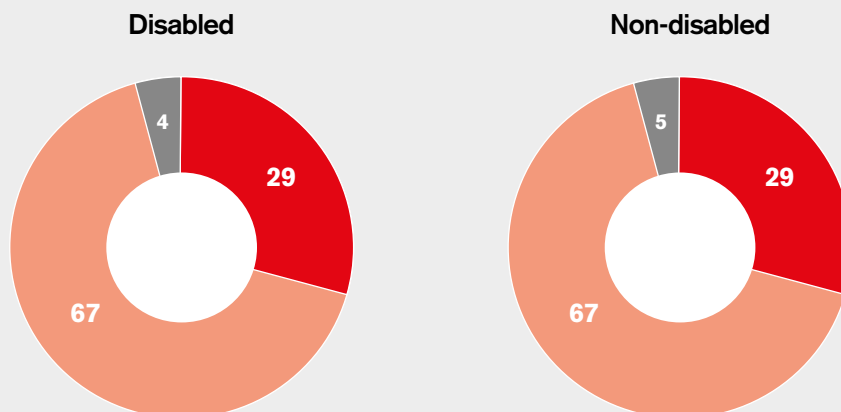
the lanyard idea among our panel.

We found relatively low levels of awareness of such schemes among disabled and non disabled with two thirds being unaware. Awareness was higher (39 per cent) among those whose disability related to mental health, learning or memory.

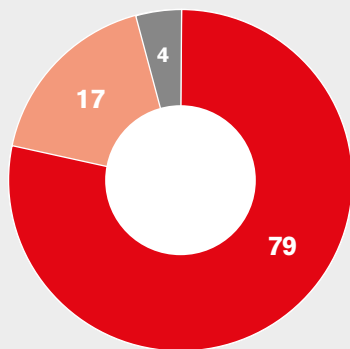
Awareness of the lanyard scheme (%)

- Yes I was aware
- No I was not aware
- Not sure

Transport User Panel.
Base size: disabled 471, non-disabled 3145.



How do you rate this scheme (views from disabled respondents) (%)



- Good (net)
- Neither good nor bad
- Bad (net)

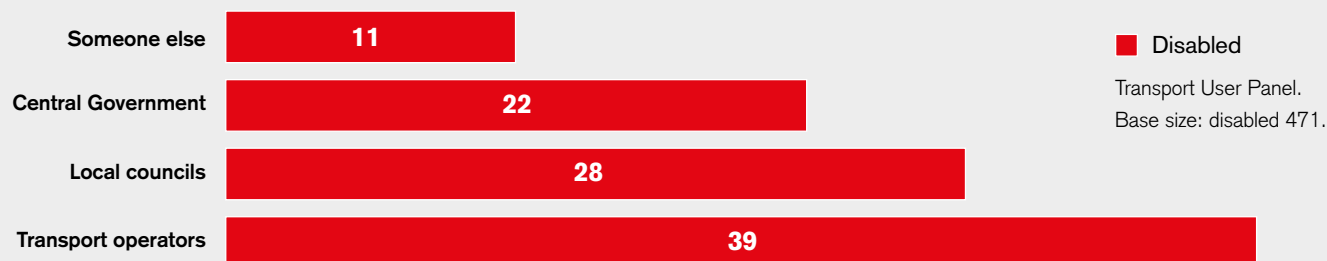
Despite this low awareness there was a good level of support for the scheme, with close to four fifths of disabled people rating it as either good or very good. This was consistent across types of disability.

Transport User Panel.
Base size: disabled 471.

Views were mixed when it came to who should be responsible for increasing awareness of the scheme. Very similar views were held across different disability types,

but those with sensory impairments were marginally more in favour of central Government (28 versus 22 per cent) and less for transport operators (28 versus 39 per cent).

Responsibility for raising awareness of lanyards - views from disabled respondents (%)



Despite broad levels of support, it was noticeable from the comments that attitudes towards such schemes were mixed. While many disabled users recognised that lanyard schemes gave confidence to disabled passengers, particularly those

with non-visible disabilities, there was also a strong sense that it should not be necessary for disabled people to 'label' themselves.

"I feel divided on this. I would rather staff treat me (and everyone!) with care and compassion by default rather than needing a card or similar to 'mark' me out as 'special'. I'm sure some people do find it useful though, and I wouldn't want to take that away from them. It's not something I'd personally prefer to have to use however."

"This just labels someone for being disabled. It would be more valuable to make public transport as accessible as reasonably possible to negate the need for such a label. It feels like this is just a quick 'job done, we're accessible now' token tick-box exercise."

Disabled panel members also expressed some concern that by labelling themselves as disabled it would leave them open to victimisation by other passengers.

"Fine in principle but a public statement of vulnerability may attract either condescension or victimisation. The badge/card should be available but not on permanent display."

"Looks like a 'I can be mugged VERY easily' badge."

There were also concerns that not everyone using the lanyards/cards had a genuine need, and that they were being used by those who simply didn't want to wear a mask.

When discussing what would improve such schemes there was a sense that there needed to be improved awareness amongst both staff and passengers. There were also those who thought a form of standardisation and qualifying criteria might help deter misuse. Understandably, there were calls for any changes to the schemes to be based on consultation with the people that would use them – embodying the disability rights mantra 'nothing about us without us'.

"Being asthmatic I have a lanyard, but one can be obtained without any authorisation or enquiry, and it is pretty clear that a fair number of people acquired lanyards, etc. simply to evade the requirement to protect others. Too late now, but if something similar occurs in the future a proper authorisation provision should be required."

Travel after the pandemic

When discussing what transport might look like after Covid-19 no longer poses a major risk, the focus for many disabled passengers was the overall number of people who would be travelling.

"I worry that there would be more people travelling so it would be harder to keep others at a distance, not everyone realises the danger they potentially pose."

"Train journeys were a crushed tense experience pre Covid. Now we are all aware of social distancing and I think it will make me more nervous about busy train services..."

"I hope I will continue to work from home, so not have to travel on public transport. I think there will be fewer people travelling, which means less overcrowded during rush hour, but probably a lot fewer services, so even longer waits, or no service at all for some destinations."

For others, it was more a question of looking forward to being able to use public transport again.

"I remain cautious, but at the same time am determined to be optimistic. Train travel is one of my great pleasures, and I look forward to taking journeys."

"I haven't used public transport during Covid-19. So I am looking forward to using buses and trains again to go shopping in Reading and going into London."



Conclusion

These findings highlight some marked differences between the experiences of disabled and non-disabled transport users. Making it easier to use public transport has the potential to improve access to employment and other opportunities for disabled people - allowing more people to make more journeys.

It is important that, as we emerge from this pandemic, transport operators proactively seek the views of disabled people - both users and non-users of their services - and incorporate this feedback into future transport strategy. It's not enough to simply go back to normal after Covid-19. It needs to be better than before.

How did we do the research?

The panel survey was sent to 14,000 of Transport Focus's Transport User Panel, made up of people who have taken part in research for us in the past and agreed to give us their views on transport issues. Therefore, results are indicative of the wider population of transport users rather than fully representative of them. It does not cover the views of non-transport users. Results are based on 3718 responses (473 disabled, 3160 non-disabled and 85 who preferred not to say) received 14-19 April. Data was not weighted.

Our Covid-19 tracking research is completed online by 2000 people per wave using Yonder Consulting's omnibus.

The sample is nationally representative of the Great British population. Not all respondents are passengers on public transport. Those who have provided a response are excluded from the subsequent wave of research. Fieldwork is repeated every weekend. Wave 41- 46 covers the period 9 April - 16 May 2021; wave 46 covers the period 14-16 May 2021.

Read our other recent research on accessible transport here:

[Disabled passengers' experiences during Covid-19](#)

[An accessible road network? Disabled user experience on England's motorways and major 'A' roads](#)

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