

# Barriers to bus use in the West Midlands

## Qualitative research

# Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Headlines
3. Usage patterns of these bus users
4. Awareness and understanding of bus services in the West Midlands
5. Users: Triggers to bus use
6. Barriers to use/further use
7. Conclusions: how to overcome barriers

# 1. Introduction

# Project background and overall aim

- As head of the Bus Alliance in the West Midlands, Transport Focus is working with Transport for West Midlands and National Express to gain a thorough understanding of the role that buses might play in **reducing the number of car journeys made in the West Midlands**
- To achieve this, Transport Focus requires an understanding of the **factors that could potentially encourage those driving** in the area to consider and **take up buses** as an option, whether it can **influence** those factors or not, as well **what might be required of other bodies**
- To achieve this a comprehensive exploration of **barriers to use and opportunities for improvements to bus services in the West Midlands was needed, specifically exploring**
  - The factors that would encourage **those who currently make trips by car** to use a bus service instead (non users)
  - The factors that would encourage **existing bus users** to use buses more often in place of using the car (users)

# Research objectives

**Overall: Understand what drives the decision-making process in choosing a mode of transport for a particular journey, and the roles that information, value for money and punctuality play in that decision**



Wide range of questions for qualitative research to explore:

1) How different categories of people value their time and the precise value they place on that time

2) General awareness and understanding of West Midlands bus options

3) Triggers and barriers to using buses

4) Awareness, and impact on bus usage, of recent initiatives and improvements

5) Thoughts on value for money (absolute vs. relative cost; impact on road user satisfaction)

6) Impact of broader journey context on VfM and overall satisfaction

7) Possible impact of new travel initiatives, including fare changes, new ticketing schemes and clean air zones

8) Customer journey experience: users

9) Journey experience: non/occasional users

# Research method and sample

- **72 respondents interviewed via a mixed methodology, comprising:**

- 16 workshop quads (all 90 minutes) with users and non/occasional users of buses, across a range of locations in the West Midlands
  - Almost all completed a pre-task of a journey diary
  - 13 non/occasional user respondents (thus far) additionally completed 'Give Bus a Go' task
- 8 depth interviews (75 minutes) with disabled / impaired respondents

| Audience type   | Type of journey / destination   | SEG                 | Age  | Disabled / mobility impaired |
|---|---|---------------------|--|------------------------------|
| 6 x quads with bus users                                | 2 x mainly travelling for work / education                                | 2 x C2DE            | 1 x 16-18<br>1 x 35-59 (younger end)                                       | 3 x depths                   |
|   | 2 x mainly travelling for other-time critical reasons (e.g. appointments) | 1 x BC1<br>1 x C2DE | 1 x 19-34<br>1 x 35-59 (older end)   |                              |
|   | 2 x mainly travelling for leisure (no time constraints)                   | 1 x BC1<br>1 x C2DE | 1 x 35-59 (younger end)<br>1 x 19-34                                       |                              |
| 10 x quads with non/occasional bus users (driving cars) | 3 x driving to work (commuting) or place of education                     | 1 x BC1<br>2 x C2DE | 1 x 16-18<br>1 x 19-34<br>1 x 35-59 (younger end)                          | 5 x depths                   |
|   | 3 x driving for other time-critical reasons (e.g. appointments)           | 1 x BC1<br>2 x C2DE | 1 x 35-59 (older end)<br>1 x 19-34<br>1 x 35-59 (older end)                |                              |
|   | 4 x driving for leisure (no time constraints)                             | 2 x BC1<br>2 x C2DE | 1 x 19-34<br>1 x 35-59 (younger end)<br>1 x 19-34<br>1 x 35-59 (older end) |                              |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>16 quad groups</b>   |                     |  | <b>8 depths</b>              |

Fieldwork took place 29 January – 11 February 2020

## 2. Headlines

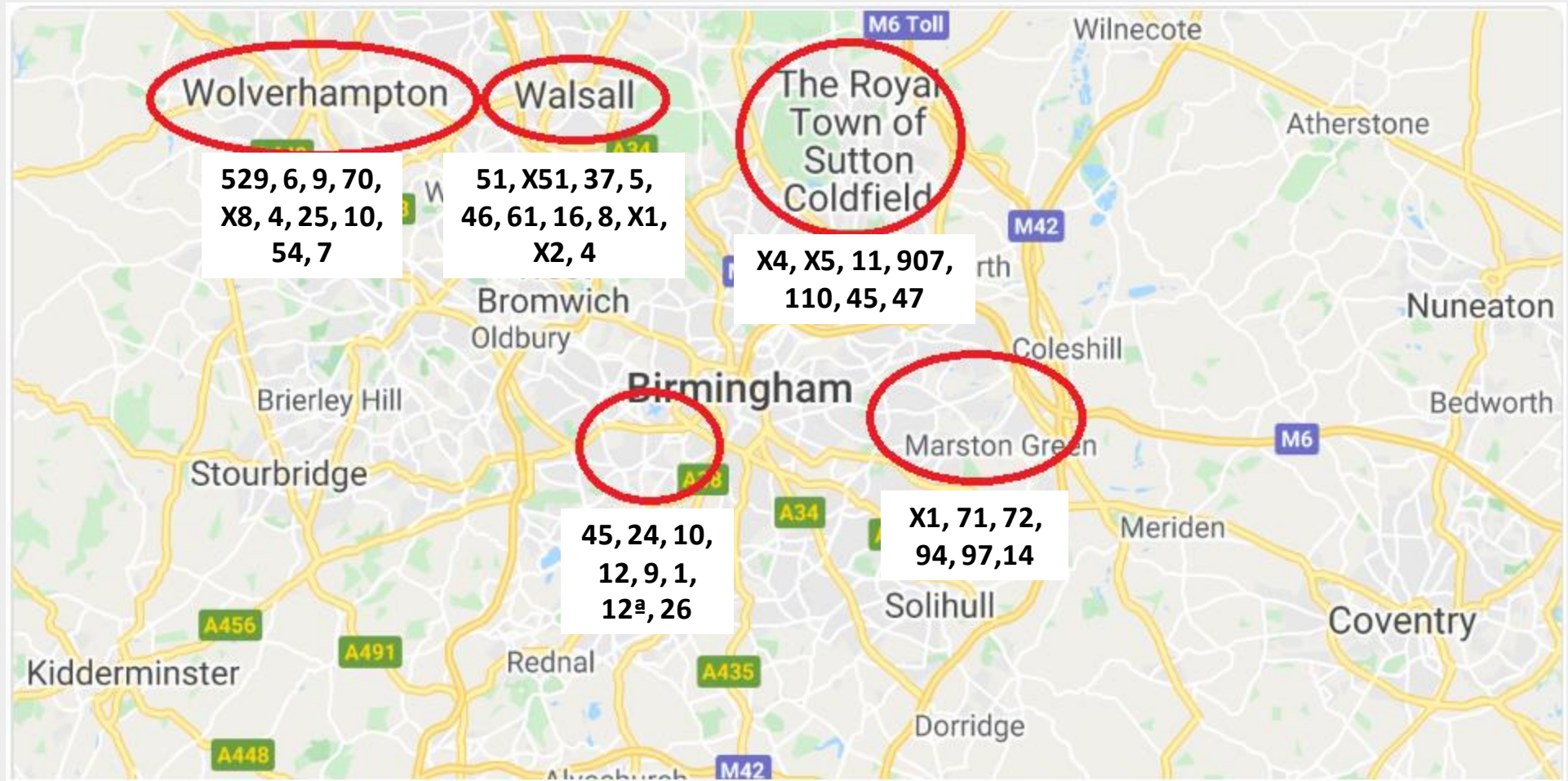
# Headline Findings

- Even within this small sample, different types of users emerge– **‘Traditional’ users**, whose usage centres on familiar, regular journeys, and **‘Newer’ users**, who are more likely to take advantage of new, digital improvements and are (theoretically) more open to increased bus usage
- **Types of journeys taken by bus** varied according to location / individual, but typically centred on travel to city/larger town centres (for work or leisure), local town centres (for work, shopping or appointments), other places of work, college/university or hospitals → Short journeys of a few miles were most commonly reported
- Basic **knowledge and awareness** of local bus routes was high even among non-users, but more detailed knowledge was limited to bus users. However, lack of knowledge did not appear to be a major barrier to use
- Similarly, although different types of respondents felt under more/less **time-pressure**, this did not appear to be a fundamental barrier to use, providing that people could **accurately plan / predict their journey time**
- A range of positives / triggers to use are identified by **bus users**, with the relative importance of these varying considerably between types of destination (city centre vs. other)
  - The most powerful triggers focus on a combination of ease/convenience and stress-reduction, particularly when travelling to large cities
  - Reasonable **punctuality and reliability** are **hygiene factors** rather than triggers to use
  - Whether or not **value for money** was a trigger was complex and varied according to other modes of transport available and the perceived cost of these
- A range of barriers to use / increased usage are also identified, the most powerful of which focus on fears around **personal safety, antisocial behaviour, and cleanliness/hygiene** on the buses → These fears are magnified at certain times of day and on particular services



### 3. Usage patterns of these West Midlands bus users

# Research locations and routes/services covered

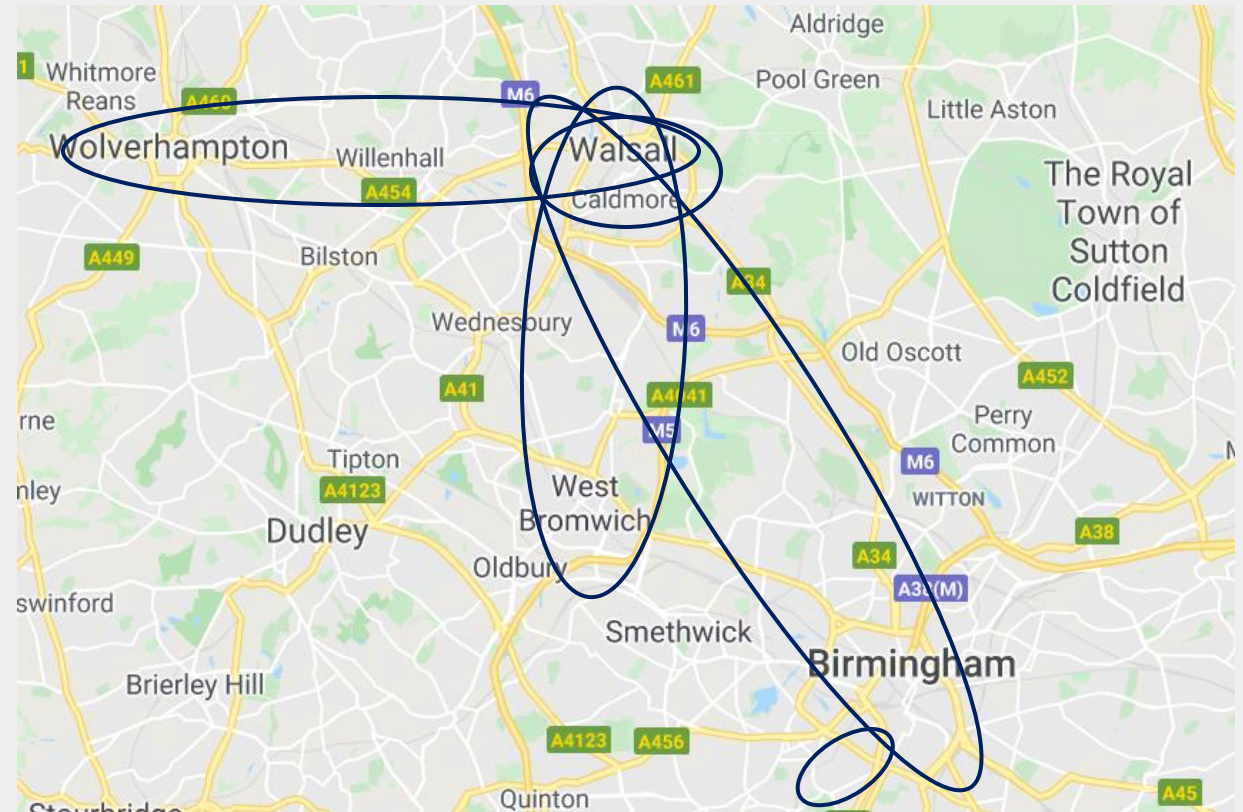


# How buses are being used – some examples of services used and destinations by location: **Walsall**

## Walsall

Most commonly mentioned journeys are to W'hampton (for work) and locally within Walsall. A few mentions of Birmingham (work or leisure)

- 529 to Wolverhampton (most mentions)
- 37 and 4 – local journeys within Walsall (several mentions)
- 51 and X51 from Birmingham city centre to Walsall (several mentions)
- X1 to/from Birmingham city centre
- X2 to/from Birmingham city centre
- 46 to West Bromwich
- 61 to Edbaston (user who takes 2 buses)
- 16 from Birmingham to Hamstead Village
- 8 from Edgbaston to Fiveways (Birmingham centre)



# Overview: Bus users split broadly into two types, although with some overlap – ‘Traditional’ users

## ‘Traditional’ users

- Have been travelling by bus all their life – often older (35+)
- Mostly C2DE
- Use the bus as a **default mode of transport** for a variety of reasons
  - Do not own another vehicle (NB – this type was limited at recruitment)
  - Have limited access to another vehicle (e.g. partner uses car during daytime)
  - Can drive, but dislike driving
- Tend to use the same bus(es), at the same times of day, for the same journeys
  - Very familiar with ‘their’ service in terms of frequency, reliability, operating hours – but unfamiliar with other services
  - Not always positive about bus use, but have typically found a service / time of day that can work for them
- Tend to use the bus in the same way they always have – pay by cash, do not use apps

*I just don't mind buses. I just like getting the bus. It's something I'm used to doing. [User, Leisure, East B'ham]*

*I'd say around 10 minutes you're waiting for the next bus. [User, Work/Education, Walsall]*

*I know a few but only the local ones, 3 or 4 I know well. [User, Work/Education, East B'ham]*



# Overview: Bus users split broadly into two types, although with some overlap – ‘Newer’ users

## Newer users

- Tend to be younger (broadly under age 35, but traits below most commonly seen in 16-c.25)
- Mix of BC1 and C2DE
- A mix of **reasons for usage** – as per traditional users, some have no option:
  - Do not own another vehicle (includes all 16-18’s)
  - Have limited access to another vehicle (e.g. partner uses car during daytime)
- For others, the benefits of using the bus are considered, and it is **selected** as a mode of transport despite other options being available (usage by choice rather than by default)
  - Can drive, but dislike driving
  - Other public transport options inconvenient / impractical / too expensive
- More open and interested in new technologies that improve the experience of travelling by bus and make it more **efficient**, e.g. apps, newer/quicker forms of payment

*I don't have a train station near me but it would cost more I think anyway, and the bus is straight to college [User, Work/Education, East B'ham]*

*It's not like the old days. You've got wifi, plugs and CCTV [User, Work/Education, Sutton Coldfield]*

*When I've used them they've come on time with the app. Over recent years it has improved a great deal. And you've got that information on the bus shelters as well all digitally lit up for you. [User, Leisure, East B'ham]*

# How buses are used → typical journeys amongst these users

## Journey length

- Bus users typically use the bus to make **shorter journeys** of a few miles or less
- For **longer journeys**, journey time becomes a factor (and occasional fear of having to stand on the bus due to overcrowding) and **other modes of transport are sought unless a good/reliable Express bus is available** (e.g. Wolverhampton → Birmingham)
- Although a small number of people report taking two buses, most are using **one bus** for the whole trip

*For short journeys, they're the best form of transport. They go lots more places than the train.*  
[User, leisure, South-West Birmingham]

## Journey type

- Most users use the bus for **more than one type of journey**
  - E.g. those travelling **regularly** for work or education, also use the bus for **less regular / more ad-hoc leisure trips** (e.g. travelling to the gym, travel to local friends / family, non-food shopping, travel to 'nights out')
  - This applies to both **traditional** users (who tend to make the same few journeys) and **newer** users, who are more open to considering the bus for a range of journeys

*I used to always take a taxi to the city but since I started using a bus for college, I looked up buses to town, and I use that now to get in on Saturday evenings as it's a lot cheaper. It's not as quick but I'm not in a hurry* [User, 16-18, South-West Birmingham]

Many journeys involved an element of **choice** to use the bus (over driving or using another form of public transport). For newer users, a good experience can trigger additional usage.

# Even among bus users, some types of bus journey are avoided where possible

## Time of day

- Although some users do travel in **peak hours**, there is a general preference to avoid this where possible due to **overcrowded buses** and **congestion on the roads**
- Avoiding buses during **school-run hours** where possible is also widely-reported, both due to overcrowding from school-children, and fears/experiences of anti-social behaviour
- There is also a strong preference for **avoiding bus travel at night** (e.g. after 8pm) due to fears about **personal safety**
  - Those travelling to evenings out may take the bus for the outward trip, but travel home by taxi

*Sometimes it's very busy at certain times, so you end up having to stand up for your whole journey. [User, Work/Education, Walsall]*

## Presence of young children

- Those who have to travel with **multiple children**, particularly if any are **babies or toddlers**, can be deterred from taking the bus if they have an alternative
  - This is mostly attributed to practical / logistical issues, e.g. buggies, baby 'paraphernalia', but also fears about behaviour

*With three kids under 5, it's so much easier just to drive. Public places, kids playing up, you get stressed, you have to wait around. And the buggies too. [Non-user, leisure, South-West Birmingham]*

## Food shopping / large items

- Although a few traditional users do take the bus to a supermarket, most of those who are shopping for food or other bulky / multiple items prefer to use a car
  - Again, this is down to logistics of how much they are able to transport, and the relative comfort of having to carry heavy bags vs. putting them in the car

# Express buses are strongly preferred over traditional buses, and are used in preference whenever possible (with a few users refusing to use non-Express)

## Benefits of Express buses

- Express buses are **more comfortable and modern** – wifi, charging ports, etc – making the **overall journey experience** more pleasant
- Express buses have **fewest stops**, and are **more** direct, making overall journeys **faster** (often favourably compared with the speed of car journeys for certain types of trip)
- Express buses typically do not stop in **areas of high deprivation** / known **'crime hotspots'**, e.g. certain council estates,
  - This is a major a benefit for those who are **worried about other passengers' behaviour** and their own **personal safety**
- Fewer Express buses stop at locations that **take children to and from school**
  - This is a major benefit for those who have to travel in school hours, but who worry about anti-social behaviour from children

*[Comfort] That's another difference: it depends if you get a new bus. The new ones are better than the old ones. [User, Work/Education, Walsall]*

*The X12 sticks out from the rest of the buses in that it's modern. It looks clean, has got a lot of advertising and it's fast. And we're very fast paced. [User, Leisure, East B'ham]*

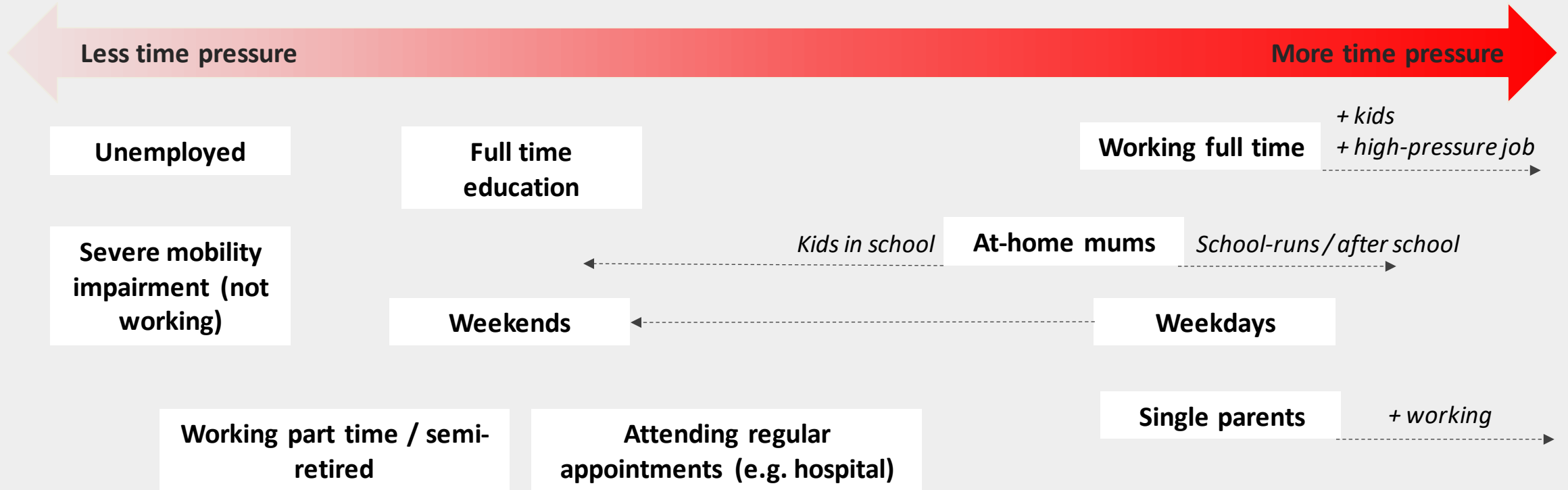
*The 70s are always the older buses and you can't get the comfy seats and the wifi. I'd rather go for the X12 if it's there. I prefer to get the newer buses. They seem warmer as well and the seats are better. [User, Work, mobility impairment, East B'ham]*

Those who predominantly use Express buses tend to be *most* satisfied with bus usage overall



# The value of time – who feels more / less time-pressure

Few respondents report being time-rich – most articulate demands on their time that make them feel busy



Feeling time pressured (or not) did not appear to have a significant impact on whether or not a bus was chosen as the mode of transport – other triggers and barriers over-rode this factor

# The value of time: Time spent travelling on buses is essentially 'dead time' / used for **relaxing**

- Users typically report spending the time during the journey **relaxing** – e.g. looking at phones, listening to music, reading, looking out of the window, having 'me time'
  - Almost no reports of **working** on the bus (e.g. laptop) – some fear this would make a target for robbery, others think it would be uncomfortable due to lack of tables, others are uninterested and prefer to relax
- When journey times are accurate and there are **no other mitigating factors** (disruption, discomfort), this 'wasted time' does not appear to decrease satisfaction with bus travel, even among the busiest / most time-pressured users
  - Acknowledgement that any travel-time is 'wasted time' (even by car)

*I do like to take in the scenery [User, Leisure, Wolverhampton]*

*I'm usually on my phone [User, Leisure, Wolverhampton]*

*Look out the window and try not to pull faces. [Occasional user, Leisure, East B'ham]*

*I just look outside. Like, look out the window. I've got the WIFI. And I just chill [User, Commuter, Mobility Impairment, Walsall]*

*[Work?] No I'd get robbed. And you have the tables on the train. [Non/occasional user, Leisure, East B'ham]*

Assuming users can accurately plan their journeys, know how long the journey will take, and do not encounter any unpleasantness on the bus, they are satisfied with the time they spend sitting on buses

# Dissatisfaction rises when things go wrong and **journeys take longer than planned / expected**

A number of factors can negatively impact satisfaction with journey times, particularly among users who are most time-pressured, or are making time-critical journeys

- Factors that increase waiting time at bus stops (particularly in inclement weather, at exposed bus stops)
  - Late-running buses – mitigated if the service is very frequent; exacerbated if the service is infrequent
  - Live timetables (at bus stops or via an app) being inaccurate
- Factors that increase journey time on the bus
  - Congestion and roadworks
  - (Occasionally) Sufficiently bad behaviour from other passengers that driver is forced to stop / call police

*The 54 service – I think it's a Diamond bus or something. That was a nightmare because sometimes it doesn't come and then you're just there for an hour! [User, Leisure, Wolverhampton]*

*If you've got to get to work you need the times to be accurate. When you leave your house you don't want to be waiting for half an hour if it doesn't turn up. it stresses me out. [User, work, mobility impairment, East B'ham]*

Improving bus conditions and ensuring good punctuality and reliability could increase satisfaction and bus usage overall

## 4. Awareness and understanding of buses in the West Midlands

# Overview: **Knowledge varies considerably** among different user types and non-users, but there is little sense that this is a key barrier to use

## Traditional users

- Typically quite **set in their ways**
- Good knowledge and awareness of their **local routes and services**; lower awareness of **improvements**
- Increasing knowledge and awareness of improvements is unlikely to increase use, as usage is more driven by **habit and familiarity**

## Newer users

- Bus use is a mix of default and choice
- Better knowledge and awareness of some **recent improvements**, although this is patchy / variable
- For these users, increasing knowledge and awareness of their **options**, particularly around **new technologies** that facilitate more efficient, pleasant bus travel, could lead to buses being considered more often

## Non-users

- Some basic knowledge about local buses but very low awareness of recent improvements
- However, little sense that low knowledge or lack of information is the most **fundamental barrier** underpinning lack of use
- Although raising awareness of the benefits of bus usage, and of the new technology options that can make bus travel more efficient may help, there are other, **more fundamental barriers that must be addressed** first

The more fundamental barriers to uptake or increased use are not centred on lack of knowledge or awareness

# Overview: The comparative cost of **driving** is factored into considerations around and **perceptions of value for money**

- **Mixed opinion over whether driving by car is cheaper or more expensive** than taking the bus
  - The car can be considered cheaper for **short journeys**, where the bus is seen as comparatively expensive
  - The car can also be seen as cheaper when there are no **parking costs** at the destination – however, if there are costs, the bus is often seen as better value
  - In general, the **more people travelling** (e.g. a family with children or small group of friends), the better VfM travelling by **car** is seen to be, particularly if different bus ticketing options such as group tickets are not known ('by car' can also include taking taxis / Uber)
- **Emotionally, taking the bus can feel more costly to some**, given the direct handover of money required to travel by bus
- Although the **direct costs** of using the car, such as petrol and parking at destination, are considered, **wear and tear / car depreciation** are less often mentioned as a cost of driving
  - Being less top of mind means these **indirect costs** may not be factored into considerations

*The day saver is good for more than one journey. The amount it costs, you'd spend more than that on parking [Non-user, South-West Birmingham]*

*[Cost of driving by car] If it's just petrol there and back, it's about the same as the bus. [User, Work/Education, Walsall]*

*If we're out on the lash we'll just take an Uber into town, it's only £8 or so for four of us and it's door to door [User, South-West Birmingham]*

Although bus travel is generally considered relatively low cost, whether or not it is seen as the **best value for money** varies considerably among individuals and different types of journey

# Overview: Likely **reliability** and **punctuality** are both important in decision-making about which mode of transport to use

- **Buses arriving late was reported as an issue across users** – the impact of this (and subsequent prioritising in decision-making about how to travel) depended on how **frequent** buses were (the more frequent the buses, the less impact a single late-running bus had on journey time)
- Buses arriving on time then **becoming late en-route** (e.g. due to congestion) had a more significant impact on some journeys
  - Those who regularly make the same journey (e.g. for work/education) tend to **learn the regular issues**, so can work around these, e.g. by allowing more time for their regular journey
  - However, those making non-regular time-critical journeys, e.g. hospital appointments, job interviews, **do not know about issues** as they do not travel the route regularly
  - For such people, a single bad experience, leading to a missed appointment, means they **no longer consider using the bus for such journeys**, and usually drive instead

*Say I'm driving, I can allow myself more time to get ready and pack everything. But if I'm going to take the bus, I need to allow more time for that. If I know it's likely to be running late, I build more time in. You get to know the pinch points*  
[Non/Occasional User, Work/Education, Walsall]

*I missed a hospital appointment because the bus was held up in traffic. I can't afford for that to happen again so I drive now and leave earlier*  
[User, leisure, Sutton Coldfield]

Reliability and punctuality are critical factors, particularly for those making non-regular time-critical journeys. Without reasonable expectation of a reliable, punctual service, the bus will not be taken up for such journeys. Some effort should therefore be made to ensure better reliability, particularly for less frequent services

# Both users and non-users had a good **basic knowledge** of their local bus services

Both audiences

- ✓ Location of nearby bus stops
- ✓ Which buses stopped there & (broadly) where they went (e.g. 'to Birmingham centre')
  - More detailed knowledge among users, e.g. stopping points, other destinations
- ✓ Difference between Express and other buses
  - ? Lower awareness of individual operating companies
- ✓ Basic frequency – how many buses per hour (approx.)
  - Unsurprisingly, users had better / more detailed knowledge
- ? Basic ticket prices
  - ✓ Users knew the cost of their usual ticket
  - ? Patchier awareness of cost among non-users – most had a ballpark idea but a few were completely unaware → general assumption that bus would be cheaper than train

Users only

- ✓ Operating hours in terms of 'the last bus home'

*I know where the local buses go [Non/Occasional User, Leisure, Mobility Impairment, Sutton Coldfield]*

*My local one – you cross the road, walk down the alleyway and my bus stop's right there. It's kinda close. [Non/Occasional User, Work/Education, Walsall]*

Basic awareness in non-users is typically driven by general knowledge of the local area – walking past bus stops, seeing digital timetables, occasional or past bus use



# Among users, the **ticketing options** of single fares, Day Savers and Swift PAYG are relatively well-known and understood

## Day saver

- ✓ All aware of this ticket option and how it works – most commonly reported ticket option used → sense that this is the **easy, uncomplicated** option
- ✓ Aware that cheaper after 0930
- Popular with mums due to ‘add children for £1’ option

*You put your money in and you get your Day Saver or your single, and you're on your way!*  
[User, Work/Education, Walsall]

## Swift PAYG card

- ✓ Most aware of this option, although only a small number of users utilised it (more daily users – commuters and 16-18's travelling to college).
  - ✓ Of these, most reported receiving a discount/incentive via work or college
  - A few reported top-up issues so had stopped using it.
- ✓ Some non-Swift users understood that this could work out cheaper than Day saver
  - Photo ID can be a slight barrier ('more hassle than cash')
  - Those with lowest incomes sometimes do not have sufficient funds to top up

*If I get a day saver, I can add all the kids for a fiver*  
[User, Work/Commute, Sutton Coldfield]

*[Swift card] I didn't find topping it up very easy to do. I just gave up with it in the end.* [User, Work/Ed, Walsall]

## Single fares

- ✓ Very-well **understood** but almost never used – most need to return by bus, so purchase day savers

# Knowledge of other ticketing options was patchy among users, with **some confusion** about the variety of options available

## Short hop fare

- Mixed awareness among sample – not a relevant ticket type for users who travel more than a few stops

## Group or family tickets

- Some awareness that these **exist** (although not universally)
- But low understanding of options and costs among sample despite ‘travelling in a group’ being a frequent reason for electing to **use a taxi** rather than the bus

## Other ticket types

- Occasional mentions of some other ticket types, e.g. ‘PlusBus’, season tickets, combination tickets for use with tram/train
- General awareness that ‘lots of tickets exist’, but low understanding of what these are, how they work and what they cost

*I'd like to see cheaper fares or a group fare. if there's a group of you, it's cheaper to get the taxi now, rather than all pay for the bus.  
[Non/Occasional User, Leisure, Walsall]*

*Doesn't the price change on the bus? After 9 o'clock, it's a little bit more expensive – I'm sure of that.  
[Non/Occasional User, Leisure, Walsall]*

Overall, users (particularly more traditional users) were **confused** about the variety of ticketing options and tended to stick to the option they were **most familiar** with, despite being unsure of whether this represented the lowest-cost option for them.

# Although there is some awareness among users of different **payment methods**, most who 'pay on the day' report still using cash

## Cash

- Most of those who did not have a Swift card still paid by **cash** → driven by habit and familiarity
- Reassuring – a known amount with no opportunity for error → more control over finances
- Although some grumbles
  - Drivers not providing change
  - 'Other passengers' causing delays while searching for cash/change

*I didn't know they did contactless [User, Commuter, Mobility Impairment, Walsall]*

## Contactless

- Some awareness of **contactless payment** although confusion around **what this costs**
  - **Low awareness** that it is the best-value 'on the day' option
  - A few worry it may be **more expensive**
- Some wariness (particularly among more traditional users) about how to be sure how much money will be taken (exacerbated if no paper ticket given)
  - Genuine concern for those on low incomes → cash is a guaranteed amount with **no opportunity for error**

*When you tap it, how can you be sure how much money they're taking? I can't afford them to get that wrong [User, Leisure, South Birmingham]*

## Mobile payments

- Low awareness and usage among bus users, despite app being used by some to check timetables and punctuality (a few anecdotes of usage among 16-18 yr old users)

Opportunity to raise awareness and provide reassurances about different payment methods (particularly if contactless can be **guaranteed** to be no more expensive than the cheapest daily option, with reassurances that it is **safe to use**)

# Awareness of “the app” is reasonably high across bus users, although usage is mainly confined to younger users (16-30)

## Existing bus users

- Relatively high awareness of the app across the sample of users, with just under half mentioning using ‘a bus app’ (almost all younger)
  - Unclear whether all refer to the same app or whether a number of different timetable-based apps exist
- Primarily used to **check live timetables**, with only a very small number of users – primarily younger - using it to buy bus tickets
- When working as described, the app can **improve the experience of bus travel**, primarily by **allowing users to plan their time more effectively** (e.g. checking live timetables and leaving the house at a time that enables minimal waiting time at the bus stop)
  - However, complaints across users of the app that the live timetables are often inaccurate → the most **useful feature** of the app is not currently working well enough to be **relied on** (this has a negative impact on satisfaction around the app and bus use)

*The bus app is good though. West Midlands travel. I don't have it but somebody I know does who gets the bus a lot. My kids have the app. [User, Leisure, East B'ham]*

*[Bus times?] I just use the app and see when it's coming. I'm only two minutes from the bus stop so I can stay in my house until its near enough there. [User, Work/education, East B'ham]*

## Non users

- Almost no awareness of the app among non-users of buses

Raising awareness of, and promoting benefits of the app to younger non-users has the potential to increase consideration of using the bus as a mode of transport. However, for this to be effective, live timetables must be accurate.

# Lower awareness among users of other recent changes and improvements, and any awareness is at a relatively basic level

## Fares

- Some awareness of **fare freezes**, although few users are aware that this relates specifically to National Express
- Patchy awareness of **low fare zones**
- 16-18 year olds aware of **cut-price travel**, although little awareness of this initiative outside of the age group targeted (or parents/family of 16-18's)

*I've seen it on the bus, where they've got the prices – this 'low fare' thing. But it doesn't really say what that covers, how far that is.*  
[User, Work/Education, Walsall]

*I've heard of reduced prices for younger people. My younger sister's been given an app, her bus ticket is on it*  
[Non-user, South-West Birmingham]

## Advertising

- Most cannot recall seeing/hearing any advertising for local buses. A few mentions across the sample of:
  - An advert at the bus stop for low fare zones
  - An advert at the bus stop saying that the buses on that service were changing (e.g. moving to bendy buses)
  - Adverts on the outside of buses stating how frequent that service is

## Provision of more Express buses / buses to hospital uni

- (NB – only applies to South-West Birmingham, so small sample)
- Although Express buses are almost universally the preferred option for travel, respondents were unaware of this recent improvement
- Similarly, no reported awareness of additional buses to hospital / university

For those who were aware, freezing fares was seen as a positive step, although more to do with **preventing dissatisfaction** (with cost) than with **increasing satisfaction**

# All are aware of **road and junction improvements**, but these are viewed as necessary evils rather than improvements

## Road and junction improvements

- Although improving roads and junctions is acknowledged to be necessary, the process of undertaking these is a key cause of dissatisfaction with road travel in general
- These are typically described as '**roadworks**' – they cause considerable frustration and are not immediately viewed as 'improvements'
  - Temporary traffic lights are highlighted as a key irritation
- Journeys for both bus users and non-users are disrupted, with the in-progress improvements reported to increase congestion, increase journey time and reduce the reliability and punctuality of buses
- Although some appreciate that these will **ultimately** lead to improvements, the disruption caused **in the moment**, over **long periods of time**, tends to over-ride consideration of **future benefits**
  - Slightly higher tolerance when the end result will obviously improve road travel **for the majority of users** – e.g. introduction of a bus lane or additional traffic lane
  - Less tolerance when the improvement will benefit a select few (e.g. users of a particular road leading onto a junction or roundabout)

*I went to Merry Hill by bus one of the days and the motorway was horrendous. And then getting off the motorway was more roadworks and I thought I should have just got the train.*  
[Occasional user, Leisure, East B'ham]

There is no sense that road and junction improvements either increase or decrease bus usage while in progress. When finished, it is assumed that the improvements will benefit both buses and cars

# Considerations around **perceived cost / value for money** are complex, and whether this aspect is a trigger to use can vary considerably

## Actual cost vs. relative cost (£, time)

- Comparisons are made between the cost of using the bus versus the same journey using different modes of transport
  - VfM likely to be more highly prioritised when alternatives are high-cost to the individual
  - If a train is available for the same destination, taking the bus is usually compared favourably in terms of actual cost

## Ticket prices

- Users generally see **bus fares as reasonable, and a lower-cost option** than most other forms of transport, particularly for journeys of more than a few stops (i.e. not Short Hop)
  - Particularly true when factoring in the cost of **parking** at destinations (especially in city centres)

*If you're going longer distances, it can work out a lot cheaper because you only pay the Day Saver price and you can go as far as you want. [User, Work/Education, Walsall]*

*The bus is definitely the cheapest but you've got to think about time and convenience. Although if I'm not in a hurry I'll happily just sit on the bus [User, Work / Commute, Sutton Coldfield]*

Although some acknowledge that taking the bus can be cheaper than car, some still see the opportunity cost of bus travel as too high, particularly in light of the reduced flexibility, reliability and convenience they associate with travel by bus

# Whether or not value for money is a high priority often depends on the **type of journey** being made

## Type of journey

- People making **non time critical journeys** typically prioritise cost / VfM more highly than those with **time-critical** journeys
  - **Cost and VfM**, whilst not unimportant considerations for people making time-critical journeys, emerged as secondary to other factors such as **reliability and punctuality**

*My journey's like ten minutes away, so, no! I'm not paying £4.50 to sit on transport for ten minutes.*  
[Non User, Commuter, Walsall]

## Car is higher value for non users

- Although non-users have lower knowledge about specific fares, they assume that buses are a **cheap form of transport**
  - However, for these, **driving has benefits that can over-ride actual cost** (see 'barriers' section for more details)

*[Bus fare] It's not as expensive as parking.*  
[Non/Occasional User, Work/Education, Wolverhampton]

*If I'm in a hurry to get somewhere cost really doesn't come into it. If I'm looking at cost it means I'm looking well in advance.* [Non/occasional user, Leisure, East B'ham]

Although value for money is an important consideration for non time-critical journeys, when arrival time is crucial, value for money can be over-ridden by other considerations



# Sense of good value reduces when considering very short journeys and travelling in a group

## Short journeys

- Short journeys are most often raised as **too expensive**
  - The 'short hop' ticket (£1.50 for a small number of stops) is unfavourably compared to the day saver in terms of value for money, particularly when most users require a return journey
  - Some calls for more flexible options, e.g. a price per stop/mile travelled rather than a flat fare for all 'short' distances

*I pay £2.60 and it's 4-6 stops, 2 miles at most. There might be other tickets but I don't know about them. Mine seems expensive [Non-user, South-West Birmingham]*

## Group travel

- The cost of travelling in a group can be unfavourably compared with getting a taxi or an Uber
  - Partly driven by low awareness of group/family tickets (although other issues when travelling at night; see Barriers for more details)

## Nostalgia

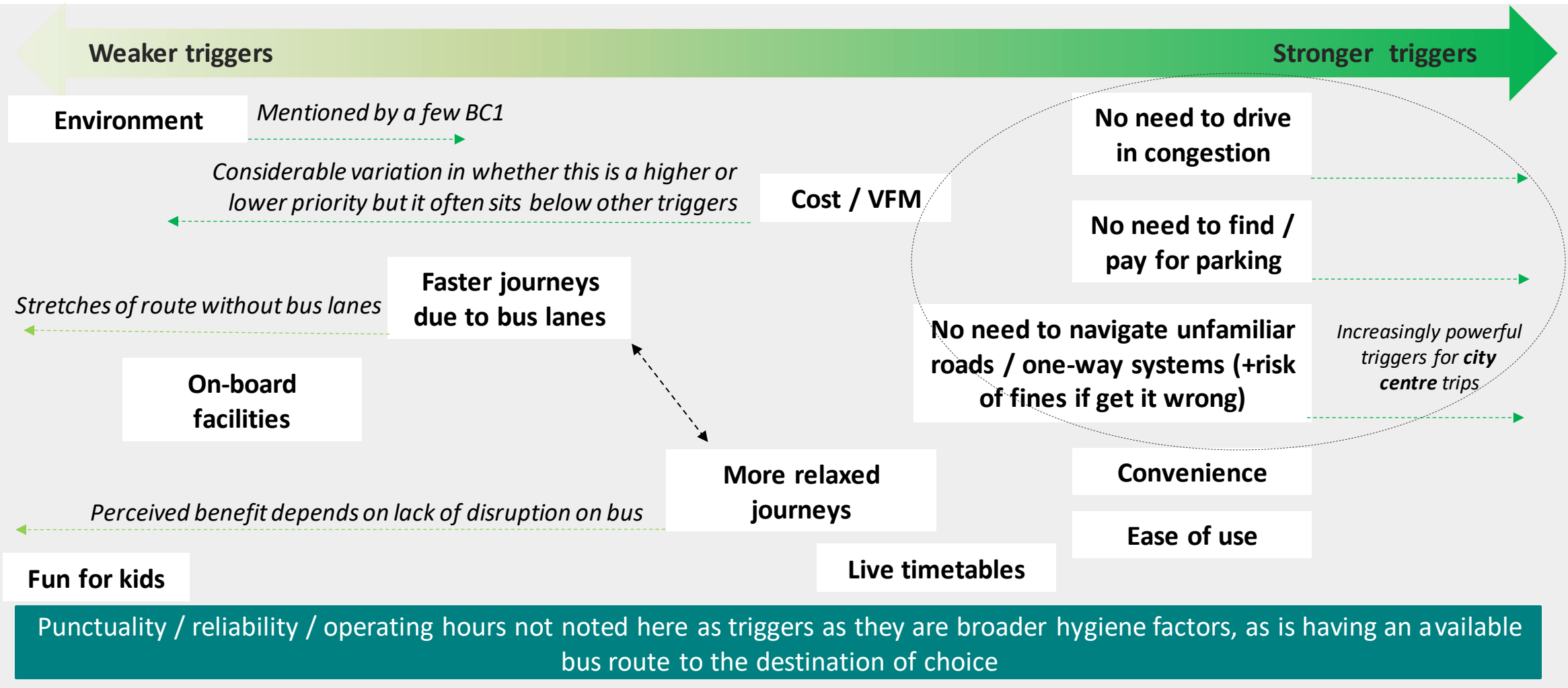
- A few older respondents see all WM buses as too expensive (although this does not prevent usage)
  - Driven by awareness of rising fares over the years
  - Nostalgic memories of childhood when travelling by bus cost a few pence

*There's a short and a stop. But the short stops are too short and there's no in-between [Users, leisure, South-West Birmingham]*

Any opportunities to reduce the cost of 'short hops' and promote / reduce cost of group tickets would be welcomed

5) Users: Triggers to bus use

A range of positives / triggers are identified by users, but **the relative importance** of these varies considerably between **types of destination** (city centre vs. other)



# Reasonable **punctuality and reliability** do motivate use but are **hygiene factors** rather than specific triggers to use

- People are more positive towards bus services if they are **reliable, frequent and on time**, and more likely to use them frequently. Whether these factors are in place varied considerably by **route**

## Punctuality

- ✓ **Reassuring** to know that a particular service almost always **arrives at the time** it is scheduled to arrive at – especially for more time-critical journeys

*The bus routes are good. They're broad and expansive. There's enough buses around that if they're not reliable you don't mind because there's always another one along [User, Work/Commute, Sutton Coldfield]*

## Reliability

- ✓ **A regular and reliable bus service** can be encouraging
- ✓ In theory, **digital timetables** and live timetables on the **app** could mitigate reliability issues – this works on some routes (see 'Barriers' for more details)
- ✓ Experience of reliable **journey times** can further encourage regular users to rely on buses for more time-critical journeys

*Reliability and staying punctual would come hand in hand. The Xs are less frequent than the 94. But if you know the timetable you can pick them up and they'll get you there quicker. [Non/occasional user, leisure, East B'ham]*

*[Speed or reliability?] Reliability. Nothing worse than standing around in a bus stop and it tells you it'll be there in 2 minutes and then it swaps and becomes 20. [Non/occasional user, Leisure, East B'ham]*

As previously outlined, consistently poor reliability and punctuality can mean that certain services are only used as a **last resort** rather than a **preferred option** – it is critical that these factors are in place

# The **ease** and **convenience** of taking the bus are most often mentioned as powerful triggers to use

## Minimal travel time to bus stop

- Having a bus stop near the house is a key benefit – little travel required to get there; no need to drive at all
- Favourable contrast with travelling by **train** – fewer people live within short walking distance of a station

## Destinations

- The option of travelling to a **variety of destinations**, both locally and further afield, is seen as a major benefit (although in practice most users have a destination they travel to most often)
- Although the high number of stops is acknowledged to slow journey times, having this **flexibility** is again favourably contrasted with trains

## Known waiting times

- Live timetables can give users a sense of **control** over their journey – even if a bus is delayed, knowing by how long can enable them to make informed decisions about their travel
- App users, who can keep track of the bus in real time, and plan the time at which they leave the house accordingly

*I've used the bus to come here, because it's easier than driving!* [User, Work/Education, Walsall]

*The bus will certainly take you to places where the train doesn't take you.* [Non/Occasional User, Leisure, Mobility Impairment, Sutton Coldfield]

Although living near a bus stop with frequent (reliable/punctual) services to a relevant destination does not over-ride all other factors, it is a strong motivation to choose the bus over other modes of transport

# Factors around **stress-reduction** are often also key triggers to taking the bus, particularly into city centres

Avoiding having to drive in congested traffic

- If caught in congestion, navigating this is the bus driver's responsibility
  - In large city centres, congestion is almost **guaranteed**; most avoid driving in these whenever possible
  - Knock-on benefit of '**sitting back and relaxing**' – e.g. looking out of the window, using phone, 'chilling out'

*The best part is you're not having to concentrate on the road. So, you get to look and see what's around you. [User, Commuter, Mobility Impairment, Walsall]*

Avoiding having to drive in city centres / find parking

- For those travelling to **city centres** (near or far), **not** having to drive in the city is a benefit (one-way systems, lane changes etc.)
- Not having to worry about finding parking is an additional benefit that many articulate – parking is seen as **very expensive**, particularly in central Birmingham and Wolverhampton
- This can also apply to driving to other town centres, e.g. Walsall, Coventry

*I will not drive into Birmingham City Centre. They're changing it too much. You could turn up this week and know exactly where you're parking. Go next week and there's a great big hole in the floor! [Non/occasional user, Leisure, East B'ham]*

If the rest of the journey is stress-free (frequent buses, on time, no disruption on the journey), a **stress-free journey** is also a powerful trigger to choosing to take the bus

# The availability of **bus lanes** also helps reduce stress and can make journeys faster

## Bus lane speed

- Bus lanes in cities **can make journeys quicker, particularly in times of congestion** – this is seen as an additional benefit and trigger to use
  - Those taking **Express** buses with few stops appreciate the **speed of the journey**
  - However, most users in this sample did not report journey speed as the most important trigger for using the bus – it is generally accepted that buses are a slower mode of transport due to multiple stops
  - This is accepted and factored into journey-planning
- Bus lanes are also **liked by car-drivers, who appreciate not having to ‘compete’** with buses stopping/merging on the main road

*It can be quicker. If I get the X12 I can be there in 20 minutes. If I was to drive its roughly the same time, but I have to find a parking spot which can be a nightmare. [User, Leisure, East B’ham]*

*In the rush hour you’re speeding down the bus lane past all them suckers stuck in a queue, stopping and starting, getting angry, and you’re sitting there relaxed thinking ‘thank god that’s not me’. [User, Commuter, Sutton Coldfield]*

## Relaxation

- However, the main benefit of bus lanes is (again) **avoiding congestion**
- Respondents report that seeing traffic queues that **they are not caught up in**, is relaxing and pleasurable **in itself**

Where bus lanes are available, their ability to make journeys more pleasant and relaxing is a greater benefit than their ability to provide faster journeys – again, lack of stress while travelling can be factored into decision-making about mode of transport

# Environmental considerations are a weaker trigger, and are only articulated by a few BC1 respondents

- A minority of respondents identified with environmental concerns as a good reason to use public transport
- Low awareness and understanding of the forthcoming Clean Air Zone – but these respondents (both users and non-users of buses) actively avoid driving into central Birmingham so are not directly affected
- Some **parents** of younger children articulated a desire to **model sustainable behaviour** to their children
- Concerns focus on reducing traffic emissions (although some do question whether the older buses used on some WM routes are in fact lower emission than cars)

*I used to work in education and I have young children. I'd like to educate them to be as green as possible. Of course I can't even get them to turn the lights out! [User, mobility impairment, South-West Birmingham]*

*[Clean air zone] I never drive into town anyway, so it would make no difference to me [User, Work/Education, Walsall]*

*I mean, if we have more buses on the road, isn't that going to pollute the air as well? [User, Commuter, Mobility Impairment, Walsall]*

Although not a primary motivator for use, highlighting the environmental benefits of using the bus could be an additional trigger for certain types of users, particularly the more affluent. This is, however, unlikely to be a primary factor in the decision-making process



# Feeling safe due to being driven by a professional can be a benefit for some

- Providing there is no disruption on board, users (including Give Bus A Go users) reported feeling **safe** on buses in terms of **being driven** by a **professional driver** (seen as lower risk than driving themselves)
  - Additionally feel that a bus is less at risk of **bad driving behaviour** from other road-users, e.g. tailgating
- However, frequent concerns raised over other **passengers' behaviour** mean that not all feel **personally safe** while on board (see Barriers section for more detail)

*You don't hear about very many bus crashes, particularly in town centres, do you. So statistically speaking you're a lot safer than if you're the driver [User, Work/Education, South West Birmingham]*

*I trust the drivers, I just don't trust the other passengers! [User, Work/Education, Sutton Coldfield]*

*I do feel safer because you're being driven by a trained professional aren't you [User, leisure, Sutton Coldfield]*

Again, comparative safety is more of a secondary benefit, although more of a motivator (and given more weight in deciding which mode of transport to use) for less confident and some older drivers

# Some more individual triggers can provide additional motivation for using bus services

- For some, sitting on a bus is more **comfortable** than driving
  - More often mentioned for modern buses, e.g. some Express buses
  - Buses can also be comfortable enough for some, although not all, **disabled / mobility impaired** users to travel on
- The on-board facilities such as wi-fi and availability of charging ports are also appreciated, although some note that power sockets can sometimes be **damaged** and the wi-fi can be **difficult to access**
- A few mention that buses can be more **fun for children** than driving

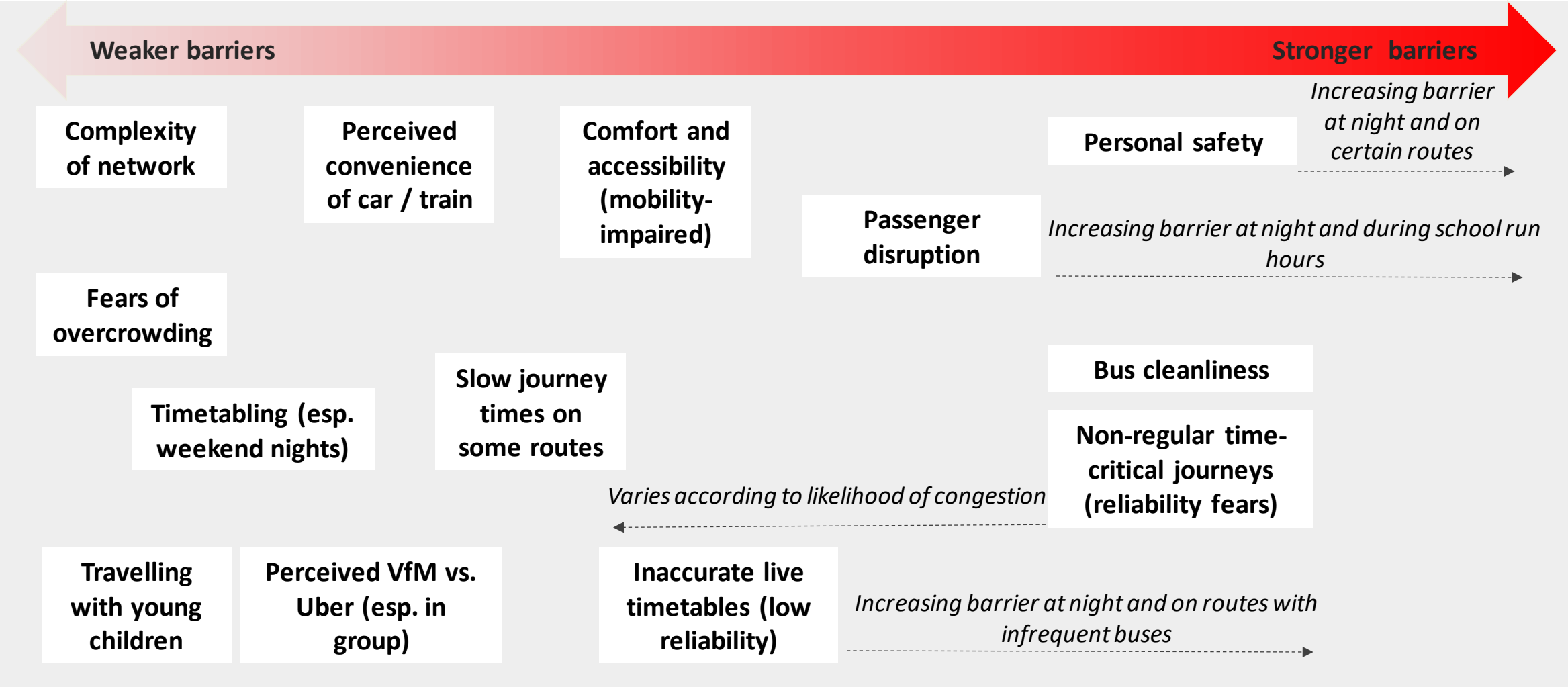
*They've improved the buses and put in CCTV cameras. The buses have definitely improved. Neater, tidier, roomier, comfier. Spaces if you're disabled or you have buggies. Having the internet. Stuff like that. Not so many rows over seating.*  
[Non/occasional user, Leisure, East B'ham]

*I like to take the kids on the bus. They enjoy it, it's fascinating for them [User, Work/Commute, Sutton Coldfield]*

Although good on-board facilities and comfort are unlikely to motivate further usage by themselves (i.e. do not dictate which mode of transport will be chosen), they can act as important **secondary benefits** to encourage use

# Barriers to use/further use

# A range of **negatives / barriers** are identified by both users and non users



# The range of different journey types / times mean that the **relative importance** of each identified barrier can vary

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Peak time vs off-peak travel and associated likely congestion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Less important for non-time-critical leisure journeys</li></ul>   |
| Dedicated bus lanes in place across route or not              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More important for time-critical commuting</li></ul>  |
| Time of travel and likely disruption on bus                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Important for those travelling during 'school run' hours and at night</li></ul>                               |
| Specific route  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Considerable variation in willingness to travel on certain routes</li></ul>                                   |
| Purpose of journey  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bus punctuality more of a barrier for time critical commuting than non-time critical leisure travel</li></ul> |

# Actual experience of buses varies widely, with non-users' combined fears of having a bad experience presenting a key barrier to use

## Existing bus users

- Users report a range of experiences on buses
- Most have had a bad experience, but these are reported as either being:
  - Relatively rare – in which case, they are assumed to be bad luck
  - Annoying rather than frightening - in which case they are factored in as part of the bus experience
  - Sufficiently common that the user changed their own behaviour – e.g. avoiding certain routes or times of day

*I don't think its the cleanest form of transport. Sometimes you'll get on and they'll smell. You expect that on public transport. I've come to expect that. [User, Leisure, East B'ham]*

## Non users

- Non-users have all **heard** about a range of bad experiences
  - Some have had a **personal** bad experience and now avoid all buses
  - Others hear about bad experiences via **WOM**, e.g. friends or local social media
  - Others read in **media**
- The risk of a bad experience **seems sufficiently high** that they prefer to travel using a different mode of transport

*It's mainly the stabbings and the weird people on there. The smells. I wouldn't get on a bus it would set me right off. [Non-user, Leisure, East B'ham]*

Whether or not non-users' fears are realistic or proportional, failure to address these mean that bus travel is unlikely to be taken up – for non-users, these fears can **over-ride all other factors**, and mean that the bus **will not be considered as a mode of transport.**

# Barriers centre on fears over personal safety and cleanliness, both of which are driven by **worries about other passengers' behaviour**

## Personal safety

Stabbing, robbing, fighting, drugs/needles, sexual harassment/assault, being followed off bus, 'undesirables' at city centre bus stops

*There's been a few stabbings as well, haven't there, on buses in Birmingham over the past few years. So, that puts me off. [Non/Occasional User, Leisure, Walsall]*

## Cleanliness / hygiene; physical discomfort

Urine & other body fluids on seats, handles and doors, broken windows, litter, chewing gum, dim lighting, dirty bus stops, general dirt (esp. older buses)

*People spitting and snotting. They deliberately put snot on the bannisters. [User, Work/Commute, Sutton Coldfield]*

## Antisocial behaviour

Intimidating behaviour (e.g. school children, people with mental health issues, homeless), swearing, drunkenness, public urination, verbal harassment, smoking cigarettes/marijuana, refusal to pay

*I've seen drivers being spat at, punched at. When I was last on, someone tried to rob the driver, that's when I said 'never again' [Non-user, South-West Birmingham]*

Anti-social behaviour is identified as a prevalent and common issue, and many users avoid buses during school-run hours and at night, when the likelihood of having a bad experience is thought to be greatest. Consequently, even for users, this barrier can **limit** bus use to certain services and times of day, preventing the bus being chosen as a mode of transport **more often**

# Further quotes and on these fears

## Personal safety

*I had an issue...This was at the Walsall bus station, where I was coming off the bus. A lady nearly sat down and there was an actual needle on the seat. This was downstairs...And that worries me...It stays with you. [User, Leisure, Wolverhampton]*

*During the day there's more people around. At night it's dimly lit, less people and you're more vulnerable [User, Work/Commute, Sutton Coldfield]*

## Cleanliness / hygiene; physical discomfort

*I won't use the bus at night. Drunks, drugs, weirdos, people going to the loo on the seats. I test the seats before I sit down, because one time, the seat was wet. [User, Work/Commute, Sutton Coldfield]*

*It's the mess and the smells on the bus! It absolutely puts me off! [Non User, Leisure, Wolverhampton]*

*You don't want to come out of your comfort zone. [Non/Occasional User, Commuter, Mobility Impairment, Walsall]*

## Antisocial behaviour

*The amount of them. They're always shouting on the bus all the time. You know, squabbling and shouting. [Non/Occasional User, Leisure, Mobility Impairment, South Birmingham]*

*Sometimes, if you're if you're going up town on a Friday or Saturday night, they'll be like a fight on the bus or something. [Non/Occasional User, Work/Education, Walsall]*

Although not articulated as such, some of the derogatory language used to describe other passengers, e.g. 'weirdos', 'freaks', 'drunks', as well as non-users using fears of these to reject all bus use, suggests an element of rejection due to 'buses not being for people like me'.



A knock-on concern is the perception that **nothing is being done to tackle** antisocial behaviour, which can generate further negativity towards buses

Perceived lack of consequences

- No sense that bad behaviour is being addressed
  - Drivers not seen to take any action in the moment – unless to call police (which can take a long time)
  - Some report that **drivers seem scared**
  - CCTV not functioning as a deterrent
  - Posters advertising ‘undercover police’ lack credibility and any evidence
  - No awareness that perpetrators are being caught and punished (e.g. fines, banned from bus)
- Passengers can feel trapped, powerless and that **the onus is on them to stop bad behaviour** (which they do not want to feel responsible for)

*The drivers don't get paid enough to confront people. The drivers are scared. They're not going to intervene. They know the kids are carrying [knives]. They stay behind their perspex. [User, Work/Commute, Sutton Coldfield]*

*Rowdy rude kids. I've had to intervene when they're rude to old people [Non-user, South-West Birmingham]*

*There's a lot of smoking of cannabis on the bus. And the driver doesn't do anything. [User, Work/Education, Walsall]*

Passengers can feel considerable resentment at the perceived lack of action, both in the moment and in more broadly tackling issues. Although this does not limit bus use in itself, it can drive **dissatisfaction among users**. Better publicity around any measures (preventative and punitive) that are being taken may help to mitigate this.

# Certain **services** are identified by users as being particularly bad for antisocial behaviour and likelihood of crime

Services 11, 9, 16, 70, 71, 72, 79, 14, 94, 97

*The 14's bad going to Allen Rock. There's been loads of stabbings and that. The traffic there as well. When I was younger it used to take an hour to get into town. [User, Leisure, East B'ham]*

*I used to use the 11 when I went to school in Acock's Green but I don't go near it anymore. Its always full of school kids or there's really weird people on the bus. [User, Work/Education, East B'ham]*

- Negative perceptions overall, driven by:
  - Too many stops in 'dodgy' areas - high perception of crime (11 and 94 most often mentioned as 'worst' and to be avoided where possible)
  - Associated passengers – those from most deprived council estates seen as most likely to cause trouble
  - Poor cleanliness and deteriorated old buses, including cracked windows, poor lighting and poor temperature control
  - Also issues with reliability across these routes

*You can get the buses that are a bit rougher, kind of thing. Like, certain bus routes, like I'd say the 79. [User, Work/Education, Walsall] n*

*Years ago, there was a young girl that was actually stabbed on the number 9...So, when you hear that – I'd never get the number 9! I'd rather walk than take me and my kids on that bus. [Non/Occasional User, Work/Education, Wolverhampton]*

Users widely report avoiding the above services altogether

# For bus users, journey times/speeds can vary and services are often slower than ideal, particularly on non-Express buses

## Existing bus users

- Users can experience variable **bus journey times**, based on factors such as:
  - **Travel hours** (e.g. peak vs off-peak) and associated levels of **congestion** on the roads
  - Amount of **stops on the route** and **numbers of passengers** being picked up
  - Number of buses required to reach final destination, with knock-on impact on waiting times etc.
  - The existence of **bus lanes** or otherwise
  - The presence of roadworks can add further uncertainty
- Respondents making short journeys into city centre tended to report fewer issues
- Respondents using Express buses, with fewer stops, also report feeling satisfied with journey times

*The X12, that one is a blessing. It flies through. The 94 isn't a bad route but it goes all that way and just takes ages. [User, Leisure, East B'ham]*

*The 11 is bad for so many reasons. It's dirty, full of weirdos, unreliable and the journeys take ages because it goes round the houses [User, Work/Education, Sutton Coldfield]*

Although the bus is known to typically involve longer journeys than other modes of transport, this is generally accepted, particularly when the journey time is predicable / as advertised. There is however a limit to this, and a point at which comparatively lengthened journey times (e.g. 'twice as long as by car') become unacceptable, and mean that the bus is less likely to be chosen as a mode of transport

# Slow journey times/speeds were also an issue for some Give Bus A Go respondents

Non users

- Issues with journey times were reported by some Give Bus a Go respondents
  - Relatively slow journey speed/time were a problem on a few services (e.g. Stourbridge to New Cross Wolverhampton and one service into Birmingham City Centre) – usually due to buses stopping frequently to let passengers on/off (frustrating for some respondents), but also due to general traffic in one instance
  - Some GBAG respondents therefore still feel that the car is a faster option for these journeys

*Everything was fine and I quite enjoyed the journey itself. However, the journey, which takes me 20 minutes by car, took over an hour. On that basis, it's not realistic as a regular alternative [GBAG, Walsall]*

*I would usually take the train from Marston Green and I will continue to do so as the bus just took forever to get into town [GBAG, East B'ham]*

Slow journey times can be a barrier - if these can be improved, they represent a potential benefit and powerful motivator to consider the service instead of driving

# Inaccurate live timetables are a source of considerable annoyance and frustration

- Passengers rely on live timetables providing **accurate information**
  - When used at the bus stop – knowing how long they have to wait is reassuring and, if necessary, enables them to change plans
  - When used on the app, respondents are able to plan when to set out for the bus stop
- However, multiple respondents report instances where live timetables were inaccurate
  - Reports of buses becoming **later and later** (in real time) then **'vanishing' from the timetable altogether**
  - Some reports of buses arriving **early**, meaning they are **missed**
  - **Although this does not prevent use**, it is identified as an important area for improvement in terms of customer satisfaction

*Especially in the city centre – you know the electric screens? It says 5 minutes, 2 minutes, and then it just disappears! [User, Work/Education, Walsall]*

*When it should be there 5 past, and the app suddenly says it won't be there till quarter past, it messes up your day. Just throws you out completely. They need to be more regular on the [X12] route. [User, work or education, East B'ham]*

When a live timetable is inaccurate, users cannot effectively plan or change their journeys, which contributes to negative perceptions about buses and means that other modes of transport are more likely to be considered, particularly for time-critical journeys

# Timetabling issues, combined with fears about personal safety at night, can mean that taxis become the default mode of transport for nights out

## Timetabling issues

- Many services stop at around 11pm, meaning that people on a night out who have not driven (e.g. due to drinking alcohol) have no option but to catch a taxi home

*Later running times, like, last services on the weekend would be particularly helpful, to be able to compete with taxis. [Non/ Occasional User, Leisure, Walsall]*

## Amplified negatives

- Regardless of timetabling, some users avoid buses late at night as issues with safety and antisocial behaviour are perceived to be **worse after dark**
  - Fears about safety on the bus (as previous)
  - Fears about safety at bus stops (homeless /drunks)
  - Fears about unreliability / lower frequency of night-time buses

*My buses don't run after a certain time. About 9 o'clock then they change. And after 11 o'clock no buses run. [User, Work/Education, East B'ham]*

## Perceived VfM

- (As previous) When travelling in a group, Uber or a taxi is often seen as better value for money than taking a bus

*[Safe on the buses?] I do in the day. If I ever go out at night I'm always a bit wary of who's around or who's on the bus. [User, work, mobility impairment, East B'ham]*

# Accessibility can pose a problem for certain mobility impaired passengers and parents, who often compete for the same spaces on buses

- Although respondents tend to find buses relatively easy to access, some with **disabilities and mobility impairments** voiced **concerns over accessibility**
  - If the bus stop is too far from the home, can be impractical to use buses at all
  - Uncomfortable **waiting areas** can **cause discomfort** for mobility-impaired passengers
  - Can be difficult to transfer wheelchairs and buggies onto buses
  - Finding a **suitable and safe space** for the wheelchair once on the bus, particularly if crowded
  - Having wheelchair spaces taken up by able-bodied passengers who **refuse to move**
  - If the driver moves off too quickly (as some report), risks **injury** for mobility-impaired passengers

*Part of the problem is also waiting for a bus. Because, it's how long I'm on my feet that is one of the defining factors.*  
[Non/Occasional User, Leisure, Mobility Impairment, Sutton Coldfield]

*I do normally find a seat...I do dread it sometimes, because I'm thinking: will I get a seat?* [User, Commuter, Mobility Impairment, Walsall]

Although only an issue for a small minority of respondents, concerns over accessibility and comfort mean that mobility-impaired respondents are less likely to use buses

# The perceived convenience, speed and safety of the car can be a barrier to bus use across different respondents / journey types

- Non users and some less frequent bus users frequently contrast the **convenience of driving by car** with less convenient bus journeys
  - For destinations that require a user to take **more than one bus**, a car is faster and more convenient
  - A car is typically perceived to be a **more reliable option** than a bus, so is often preferred for time-critical journeys
  - A car allows for **faster journeys** with **no required stops**
  - For **mobility-impaired** users and those **travelling with young children**, a car has the **space** (for buggies/pushchairs, wheelchairs, baby paraphernalia etc.)
  - A car is perceived to provide better value for money for larger groups
  - Blue badge holders can park for free

*I just prefer to use a car. It's faster and more reliable, anyway. When I wake up in the morning, I know I haven't got to wait 20 minutes for my car.*  
[Non/Occasional User, Work/Education, Walsall]

*It can sometimes take longer than what it would if you just jumped in the car.*  
[Non/Occasional User, Work/Education, Walsall]

Convenience of the car is a critical barrier that could be challenging to overcome, but could be best addressed by emphasising a **range** of benefits of using the bus, including (if credible) that journeys may be quicker on the bus.

However, **lack of space, accessibility issues and fears about antisocial behaviour** are more challenging barriers and feel harder to overcome for the affected audiences



# The comfort and safety of the car can further discourage bus usage

- The high level of both **comfort and privacy** experienced in the car often make it a more appealing choice than travelling by bus
  - The car provides a **private space** in which drivers feel physically comfortable and can talk, smoke, listen to music etc... as they wish
  - This means they are not having to share a **confined space with other strangers**, thus avoiding the **smells, noise and disturbance** associated with travel by bus
  - A car has **no risk of disruption of antisocial behaviour** as any passengers are known
  - The car is generally seen as a more reliably comfortable and private option than a bus

*I don't like public transport so I'm always in my car. If I do go into town it's in my car. [Non/occasional user, Leisure, East B'ham]*

*You can play your own music. You're in control. You're driving. Your heat, what you're having to eat in the car. You can take passengers and have a chit chat. [Non/occasional user, Leisure, East B'ham]*

Comfort and privacy are generally weaker barriers, and could be addressed / mitigated by emphasising other benefits such as stress-free travel and on-board facilities

# Several practical issues associated with buses can serve as lower-level barriers

- During peak hours, finding a seat can be challenging
  - This is **annoying** for able-bodied users, but can present more serious challenges for **mobility-impaired** users
- **For parents** travelling with children, having all the buggy spaces in use means that there is no space for their own buggy, which then blocks the aisle
  - This can annoy non-parents due to restricted access making it more difficult to get off the bus
  - This is also a concern for mobility-impaired users as a blocked aisle has more serious implications in terms of restricting accessibility
- On particularly crowded buses, the bus **not stopping** to pickup passengers
  - A few anecdotes of this happening when bus not full
- **Occasional** reports of bus drivers being **surly** and unhelpful, and driving off too quickly
- Occasional issues if **more than one bus** needed on **how to navigate the network** (e.g. where to catch next bus, which bus to catch)

*I've heard arguments over people not moving out of the buggy spaces. Mostly old people. [User, Leisure, South-West B'ham]*

Although these barriers would not be deciding factors when considering mode of transport, they can 'knock on' to other barriers and cumulatively make the bus less likely to be chosen as a mode of transport

# Conclusions: How to overcome barriers

# Tackling anti-social and illegal behaviour is the number one concern for both users and non-users, and addressing this barrier feels fundamental

## Respondent-generated ideas

- Provision of school buses provided for school runs, with unaccompanied school children not allowed on regular buses
- More obvious CCTV & better posters
- Under-cover police presence on notoriously bad services
- More on-bus staff, e.g. return of conductors
- More driver empowerment? (NB – some respondents unsure of how much perceived lack of driver action is due to rules/regulations, and how much is down to driver unwillingness to intervene)
- Consequences for repeat offenders – publicised
- Offering more Express services that do not stop at known 'bad areas'

Without addressing this issue in some way, usage seems likely to remain somewhat limited among Newer users, and non-existent among the non-users who hold negative perceptions and fears about bus travel

# Ensuring that hygiene factors are in place is likely to be of critical importance - improving reliability could increase usage, particularly for time-critical journeys

Hygiene factors  
are essential for  
bus use to be an  
option



Reliability over  
journey speed

- Improving reliability / punctuality on 'problem' services that are prone to delay would help make passengers more receptive to relying on buses, particularly for non-regular time-critical journeys
  - That schedules and operating times are easy to find (e.g. via an app and, for non-app users, online)
  - That buses are frequent enough such that people are likely to be able to **find a seat**, even in peak hours
  - That on-board facilities are as advertised – e.g. working wifi, comfortable buses
- 
- Being able to **predict** journey time is consistently seen as more important (within reason) than the **actual amount of time a journey takes** – improving predictability is therefore important
  - This might involve relaxing timetables – allowing buses to **take longer on the route**
    - Given that users are mostly taking shorter journeys by bus (a few miles) and apparently do not place a high value on overall journey speed (particularly when compared with other triggers), sacrificing some speed for better reliability would make sense
  - Improving the accuracy of live timetables is also key here – this issue is currently causing a large amount of frustration

# Modernising buses and bus stops could go some way towards making the bus experience more pleasant

## Better buses

- Phasing out older vehicles in favour of newer Express-style buses would have a number of advantages:
  - Comfier, cleaner, lighter, brighter – making buses more desirable to travel on, and can also help discourage ASB
  - More environmentally friendly
  - Better CCTV
- More buses in peak hours, to mitigate overcrowding
- More (safe) buses after midnight on weekends

## Better bus stops

- Ideally make these comfier, particularly for mobility-impaired passengers
- Improved security at city centre bus stops that currently feel unsafe at night (especially for women)

Promoting the benefits of bus use could be a good first step to encouraging usage among potential users, particularly for journeys that are likely to be stressful by car



- Key benefits to emphasise are three-fold:
  - Benefits highlighting **relaxation**, **lack of stress** and **convenience** of using the bus
  - The fact that a bus may be **faster** than driving by car due to use of **bus lanes**
- **Value for Money** is an important, although often **secondary**, benefit
  - Journey cost is rarely the single factor under consideration, but when positioned alongside other benefits, can be an additional motivating factor (particularly in areas where other public transport options are higher-cost, e.g. trains, taxis)
    - Highlighting **the different ticket options**, particularly to **groups** (assuming these can be positioned as **much cheaper than taxis**), could encourage use
- Highlighting the **new digital options** that help people **plan their journeys in real time** (particularly how long a journey will take) could encourage uptake among those who have **fears about reliability and punctuality**, and **dislike waiting for buses**
  - A pre-requisite for this is that live timetables are accurate

## Promoting the range of ticket options and consideration of changing how short-hop pricing works could increase satisfaction with pricing and perceived VfM

- Most are confused or unaware of some ticketing options
  - Particularly group and family tickets, that could mitigate against the perception that taxis are better VfM for groups
- Having a single, easy to use website with ticket options clearly and simply laid out, could be useful (+ signposting this on the front page of the app)
- Advertising that contactless payment is **always the cheapest** way for an individual to travel might encourage more use of this payment method
- Considering reducing fares or changing the fare system for very short journeys rather than having a 'once size fits all' short hop option, may encourage more frequent short trips by bus