



Piloting a passenger-led approach to gathering journey feedback

Our learnings about the methodology

March 2022

Outline of this report

- Background
- Overview of the approach: our objectives and how it worked
- Headline learnings
- Overview of response volume
- How do passengers access and participate in the survey?
- Who responds to this feedback mechanism?
- The nature of passengers' responses
- Understanding potential productivity
- Our conclusions for the potential of this approach

Background

Transport Focus champions the needs of transport users in Great Britain, with an emphasis on evidence-based campaigning, gathered in part via well-respected primary research. Key examples have been the Bus Passenger Survey (BPS) and National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS).

While these surveys have been widely used across the rail and bus industries, they had some acknowledged limitations, including:

- they provided feedback at points in time rather than year-round or more frequently;
- findings took time to be released (due to the method, and publication process), delaying the industries' response to results.

There have been comprehensive reviews of and enhancements to the surveys over the years; however – partly for data continuity, and partly because the reviews have not recommended major changes – the fundamentals of the surveys have largely remained.

In 2020, passenger numbers were severely affected by Covid-19, and social distancing rules meant face-to-face survey fieldwork wasn't possible. Consequently the BPS and NRPS (which both used face-to-face recruitment of passengers into the surveys) were cancelled altogether for Autumn 2020 and throughout 2021. During this time there have also been government-led changes to the way that bus and rail services are managed and evaluated, which may have implications for the way that passenger feedback is used in future, and therefore the way it is collected.

While all of this necessitated a break in the continuity of survey data, in the meantime **Transport Focus has used 2020-21 to completely review and potentially update the way we measure passenger experience. We have reviewed possible future approaches to insight collection, including pilots of some options as in this study.**

Piloting a passenger-led approach to measuring experience

Objectives

To **test the potential of a more passenger-led approach to collecting feedback**. The method is passenger led in two ways:

1. Rather than pro-actively recruiting respondents into a survey, we invite passengers in a “passive” way to give their feedback, on their own terms
2. Rather than a prescriptive set of questions, the focus of the feedback is on what passengers themselves want to say, how much, and how

We wished to understand:

- **The practical delivery of this approach:** The invitations, survey mechanics, outputs
- **Viability:** How many people respond, and who (and who is missed)?
- **The nature of response:**
 - Is it comprehensive; is it insightful and useful to our cause and stakeholders?
 - (Does it provide more in-the-moment understanding of journey experiences?)

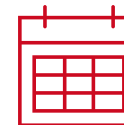
This trial project sits alongside other review and pilot work, as we consider either a single or a blended approach to collecting passengers' feedback on their journeys.

This work has been conducted with bus passengers, but having gathered learnings here we may also consider the approach, or parts of it, for passengers on other modes of transport.

The pilot



Testing a “review” style of feedback collection: during their journey, signage invited bus passengers to a short online survey, focussing on an open-ended description of their experience



Survey ran Sep-Dec 2021

Note: our analysis and findings are mainly based on responses given 20 Sep-28 Nov, when survey set up was consistent in all areas.



Six very different locations across England as test areas

Survey facilitated with the help of operators and local authorities in each area

The pilot took place in six areas of England, with some variations on the promotional materials

Liverpool (route 10/A)

Promoted at stops/stations and on Arriva* services



A2 posters

Landscape half-sized A2 posters



A5 window stickers (c. 5 per deck)

A4 posters (1 per vehicle entrance)

Coventry (National Express)

Promoted at stops/stations and on NX services across city



A3 stickers



A5 window stickers (c. 5 per deck)

Cornwall

Promoted at stops/stations and on a sample of Cornwall by Kernow / Go Cornwall Bus services across the county



A4/A3 stickers/posters



GCB: A5 window stickers (c.5 per deck)

Kernow: Circular seat backs (c.5 per deck)

Kernow : A3 posters (1 per bus entrance)

Burnley (Burnley Bus Company)

Promoted at stops/stations and on Burnley Bus Co. services across the town



A4 posters at stops

A1 posters at stations



DL flyers (c. 100 in 1 holder per vehicle)

Peterborough (Stagecoach)

Promoted at stops/stations and on Stagecoach services across the city, and on Guided Busway



A4 posters



A5 window stickers (c. 5 per deck)

Brighton & Hove (Go Ahead)

Promoted at stops/stations and on a sample of BHB/Metrobus routes across whole network area



A4/A5 posters and stickers



A5 window stickers (c. 5 per deck)

A4/A3 posters (1 per vehicle entrance)



(*Stagecoach also serves 10/A but did not promote survey on board)

Promotional materials

In all six areas, we used a mix of posters and stickers at stops / bus stations and on board

Note: we discouraged any additional local promotion, for example on operators' social media, to ensure we could compare the six regions like for like and evaluate the promotional materials and overall methodology on their own merit.

Examples shown as used to invite National Express customers across Coventry

On-board materials

(typically window sticker format)



How is your bus journey today?
Please tell the official transport watchdog about your experience – your opinions matter!

Scan to make your voice heard!

Or visit www.busfeedback.com/coventry

transportfocus All feedback is anonymous. Find out more about Transport Focus, including privacy information, here: www.transportfocus.org.uk

national express Coventry

Transport for West Midlands

NEX_001Adv_V01

The sticker features a QR code with a red arrow pointing to it, and a bus icon with three emotion faces (green, yellow, red) on its windshield.

At-stop materials

(typically A4/A3 poster format)



How is your bus journey today?
Please tell the official transport watchdog about your experience – your opinions really matter!

Scan to give your feedback

Or visit www.busfeedback.com/coventry

Make your voice heard!

transportfocus Everything you tell us is anonymous. Transport Focus is the official independent transport watchdog representing bus passengers like you. Your feedback helps us understand and give a voice to bus passengers across the country. For more information about Transport Focus, including privacy details and what we do with your feedback, visit www.transportfocus.org.uk/about/transport-focus

national express Coventry

Transport for West Midlands

The poster features a QR code with a red arrow pointing to it, and a bus icon with three emotion faces (green, yellow, red) on its windshield.

Thematic and sentiment coding: example

Respondents' verbatim responses are broken down into "sentences", with each sentence assigned to topic(s) and a sentiment rating. An overall sentiment rating is also derived.

*The bus was 15 minutes late.
The app did not update to tell me. I have to get this bus to get to work on time. It's appalling*

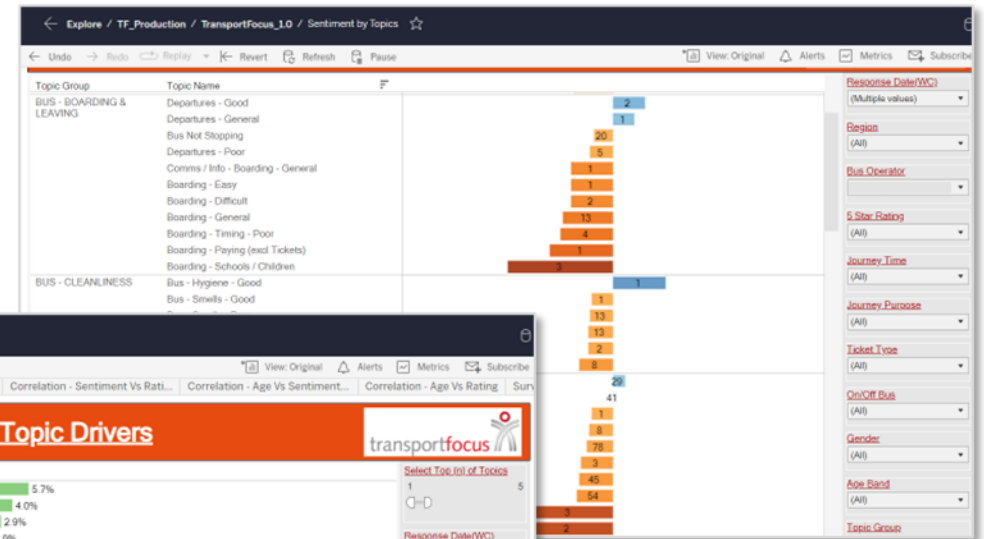
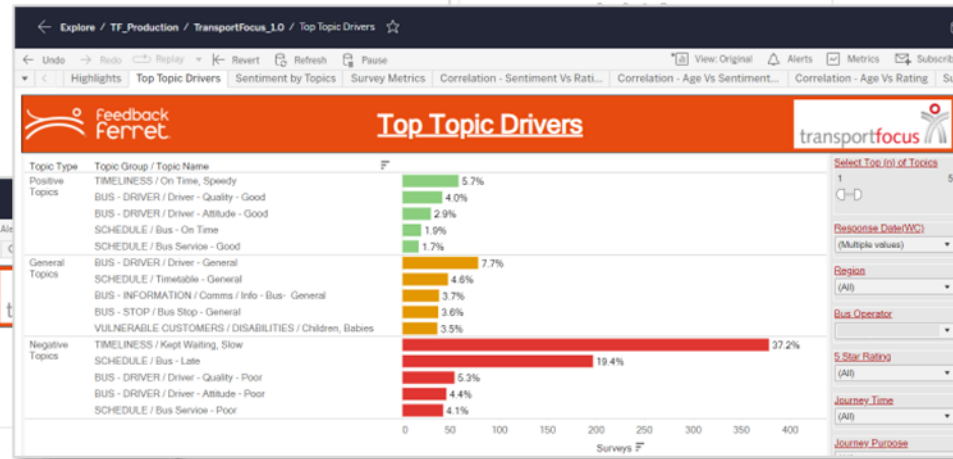
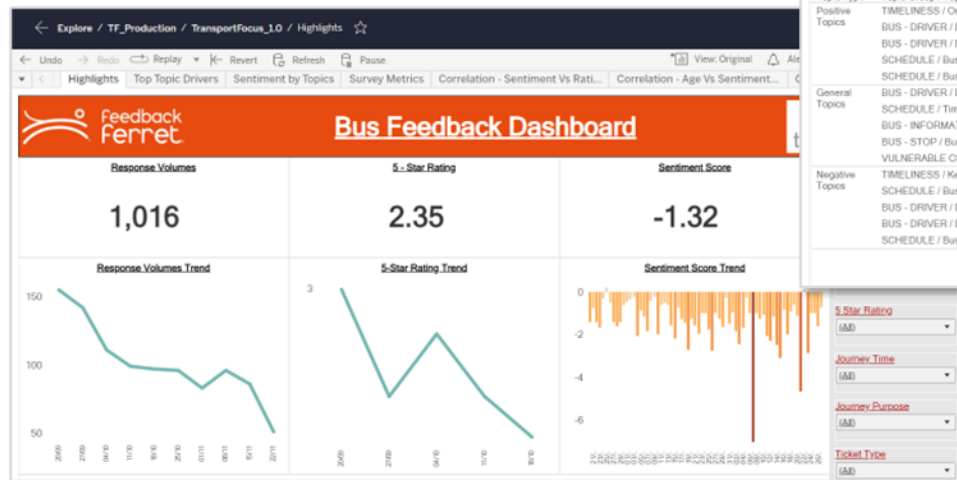
Peterborough, commuting, Tues 7-9am

Sentence breakdown	Topics	Sentence sentiment	Overall sentiment
<i>The bus was 15 minutes late.</i>	Timeliness/scheduling	-1 Negative	} -3 Negative
<i>The app did not update to tell me.</i>	Communication	-1 Negative	
<i>I have to get this bus to get to work on time.</i>	Timeliness/scheduling	1 Neutral	
<i>It's appalling</i>	-	-3 Negative	

Reporting dashboard

The pilot demonstrated lots of potential for access to results

- Live updates
- Ability to filter by date, operator, passenger subgroups, and other variables
- Potential to view full verbatim comments, with tags for the same variables
- Potential to export / download



Key learnings about the approach

Fundamentals of the potential outputs



Response volume has potential to rival BPS for some trended data at area level

But very granular (e.g. route level or weekly) feedback is likely less robust



Extremes of passenger sentiment, negative emphasis

Management



Effort

Pointers on optimising formats and placement of promotional materials

Valuable feedback



In-the-moment

Including “off-bus”

Engaged respondents, rich feedback

Inclusivity



Reaches traditionally harder to engage groups
(e.g. younger people especially males, commuters, fare payers)

Arguably underrepresents older passengers

Potential role in summary:



Useful tool to pick up on localised issues as they arise, and as they matter to passengers

Within a mix of methods, for overall more holistic picture



Representative measure of all day to day experience

Key Performance Indicator (KPI) monitor

Robustly inform more strategic service planning

In addition to evaluating the success of the methodology, this pilot project has given us great opportunity to hear from passengers in a new way, and to understand more about what is important to them.

Overview of response volume

Overview of passenger response

In total, 3,061 passengers responded during our main “live” period.

In addition to evaluating the success of the methodology, this has given us a great opportunity to hear from passengers in a new way and to understand more about what is important to them.

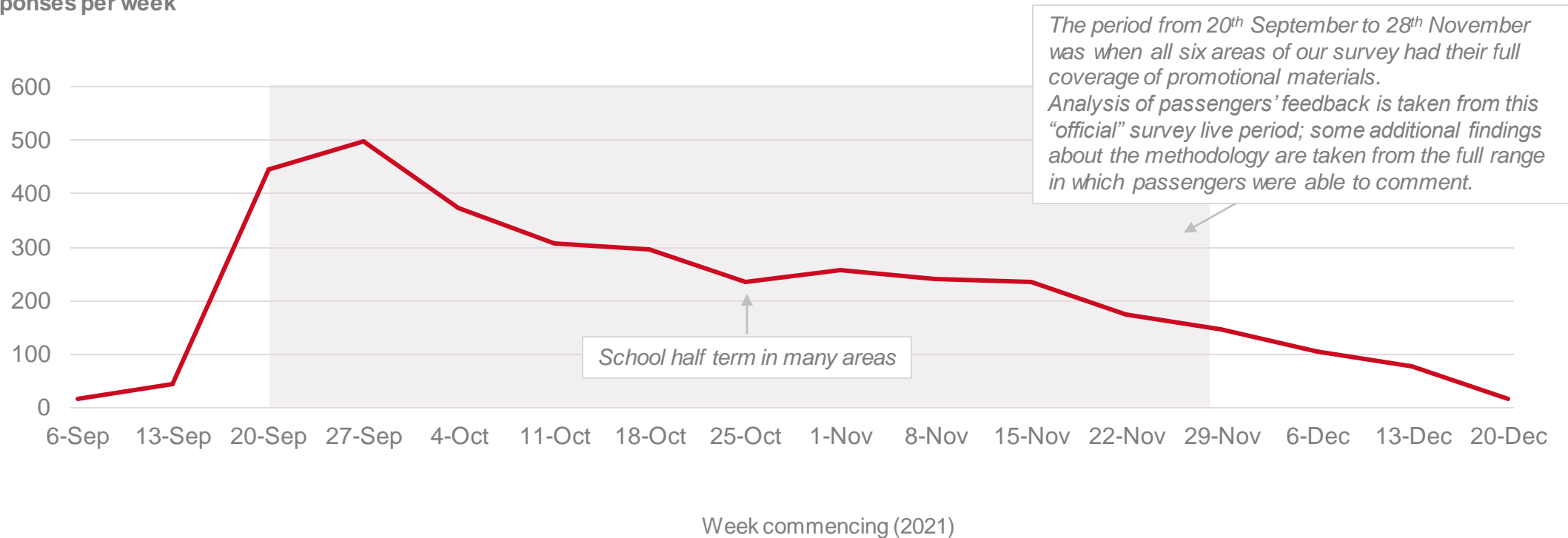
This report focusses on the approach itself, a separate report brings out the insights we gathered around passenger experience, in more detail.



Response volume by date: overall survey

We saw an initial reaction from passengers to the novelty of the survey being open...but this did settle to c. 250 responses per week. It looks likely that response volume could have dropped further even if the promotional material had stayed in place.

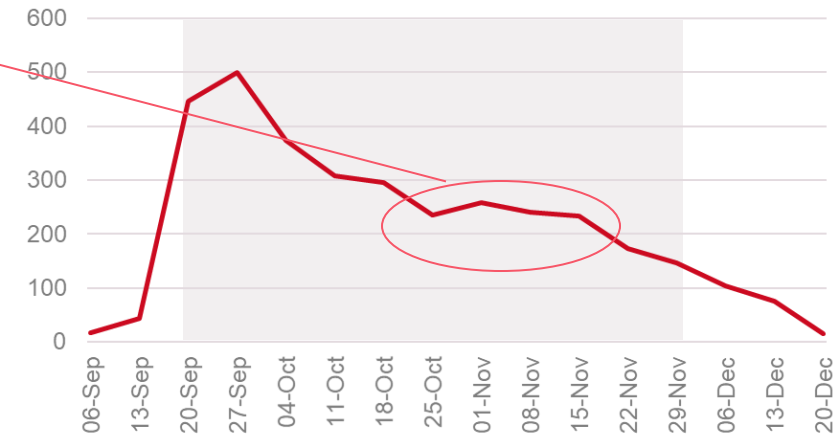
No. responses per week



Response volume by date: overall survey

After the initial novelty period, responses achieved per week in this pilot did – on average – rival what is possible via BPS or similar

Average response volume per week during "settled" period (25/10-21/11)	242
Areas covered in this pilot	6
Average response per (sampled) region per week	40
<hr/>	
Average response per area / operator per week in BPS	64*
Average response per week for proposed new survey: <i>Your Bus Journey</i>	20



In theory, a quarterly measure of sentiment could be given based on approx. 480 responses, for operational areas of a similar size to those surveyed here. (Bear in mind that we also sampled each region, so in reality it should be possible - at least in the early months - to pick up more responses per week than this, if whole areas / operations were covered in future)

If a "post-novelty" response volume pattern could be maintained, this would provide a higher volume of response per week for this informal, qualitative feedback than previous / planned more structured, targeted surveys. (Albeit that we would expect significant effort being needed to achieve and maintain this over the long term).

* Straight average across all English PSUs covered in BPS Autumn 2019, across a typical 13 week BPS fieldwork period

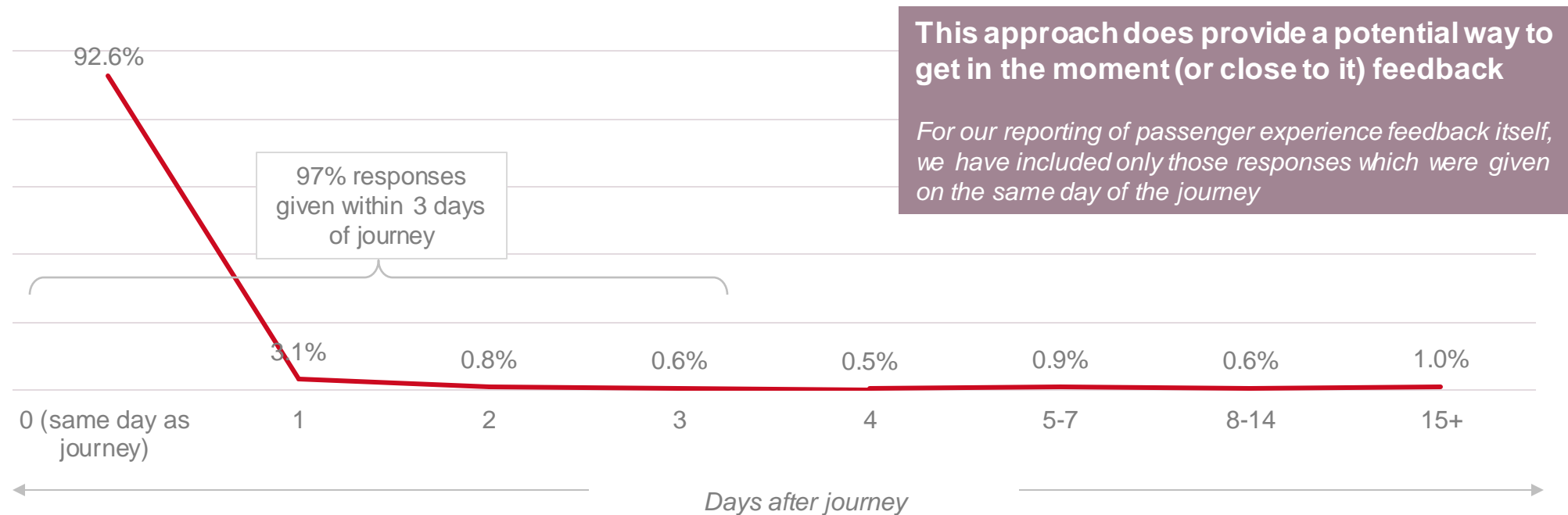
How do passengers access and participate in the survey?

When do passengers respond?

Almost all responses were given on the same day as the journey itself

Also see following notes page for more detail

% responses received by number of days since passenger's journey was made



Base: all responses 20/09/21 – 28/11/21 (3061)

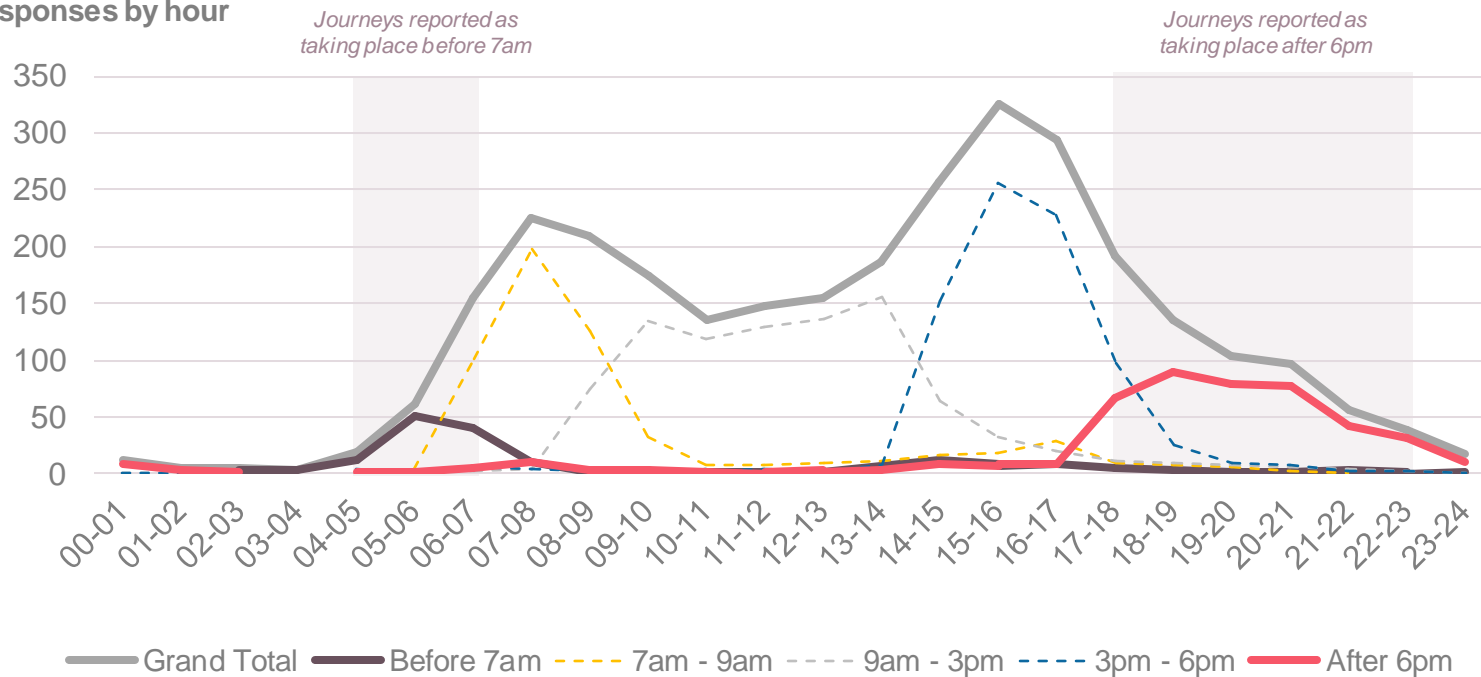
Time responses are made

Responses were made throughout all times of the day, and largely corresponded to participants' reported journey times.

People reporting pre-7am journeys were typically responding (and by proxy, travelling) as early as 4-5am; people reporting journeys after 6pm typically travelled as late as 11pm.

Also see notes page on slide 16 for further discussion

No. responses by hour



This analysis of response times:

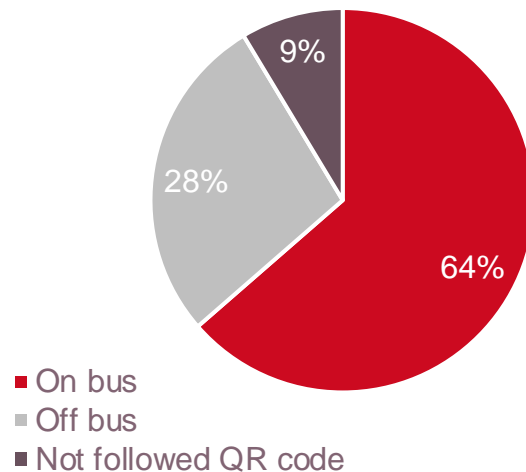
- Further confirms that **this feedback is typically given “in-the-moment”**
- Demonstrates that this approach helps to collect feedback on services which are difficult to cover with (BPS-style) face-to-face recruitment. The same assumption might be made for services in more remote locations, and infrequent services: **this approach may enable us to reach a wider range of passengers making more different types of journey.**

Base: all responses with time stamp 20/09/21 – 28/11/21 (3010)

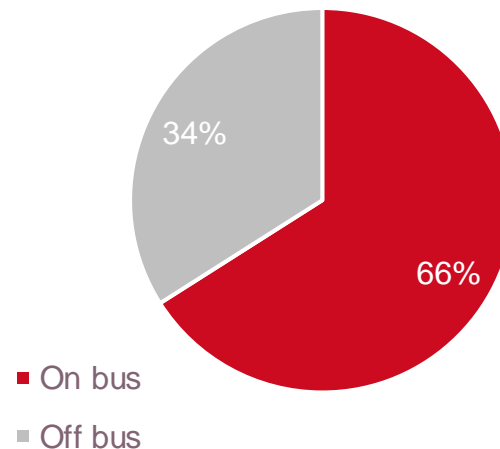
How do passengers access the survey?

The majority of respondents entered the survey by scanning a QR code on a poster or sticker that they saw on board a bus, with just over a quarter doing so at a stop or station. This reflects the proportionate placement of promotional materials.

% all responses entering the survey via:
Excluding Liverpool



% individual posters/stickers
Excluding Liverpool



On-board materials were arguably also more visible – present on several windows and sometimes on-board poster sites, compared to at-stop materials which were usually at higher footfall, “main” stops – and benefit from a captive audience.

However we do not know the extent to which at-stop posters may have planted the idea of providing journey feedback, with the on-bus materials acting as a call to action in practice.

If this methodology is adopted:

- Materials should certainly be placed on board buses
- Some partners in this project expressed concerns about placing materials at stops – for practical, logistical reasons, and due to the often more negative context in which people might enter the survey. In acknowledgement of this, because at-stop materials can play an important role, we recommend their use where possible, perhaps prioritising higher-footfall stops (reducing the task for installing, removing or refreshing them) and with consideration for competing space with other comms / clutter).

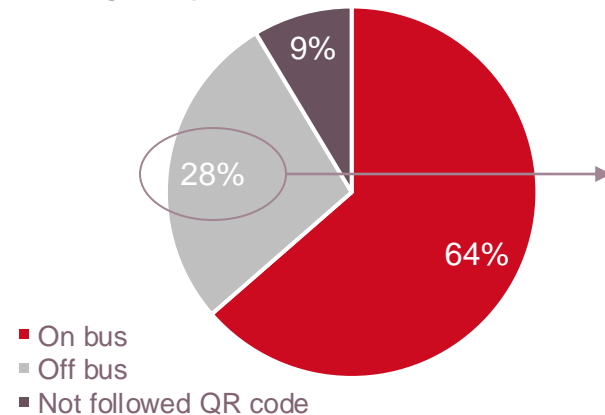
Accessing the survey on vs off bus: profiles

There were small differences in the types of passengers who picked up the QR code from a poster at a stop, compared to on board

Also see following notes page for more detail

% all responses

Excluding Liverpool



Those accessing the survey via material they saw at a stop / station rather than on board are:

- More likely to be **older** (specifically, off-bus participants are more likely to be 25-59)
- More likely to **travel to work or education**
- A little more likely than on-bus respondents to **travel early mornings (before 9am) and evenings (after 6pm)**
- Less likely to leave a full comment in addition to a star rating (despite the somewhat contradictory pattern that comments are typically negative, and off-bus respondents are typically more negative)
- Very slightly less likely to feed back straight away – we hypothesise that it is a little more practical to complete the survey immediately once you are already on board, where you are potentially sitting down, and not expecting to have to move for a few minutes at least

Typically more negative overall about their journey

These findings indicate that using both touchpoints is a good approach for inclusivity.

...We also found that the profile differences above were not dramatic enough to be the only reason for the more negative sentiment of those feeding back when “off-bus” – this is a genuinely different, and often more negative, area of experience which this approach enables us to pick up

We would advocate, where feasible, to use both at-stop and on-board promotion (and possibly other touchpoints) for a survey like this. This enables inclusion of those who tried to make a bus journey but may have been let down – a crucial part of the bus user experience which must be acknowledged.

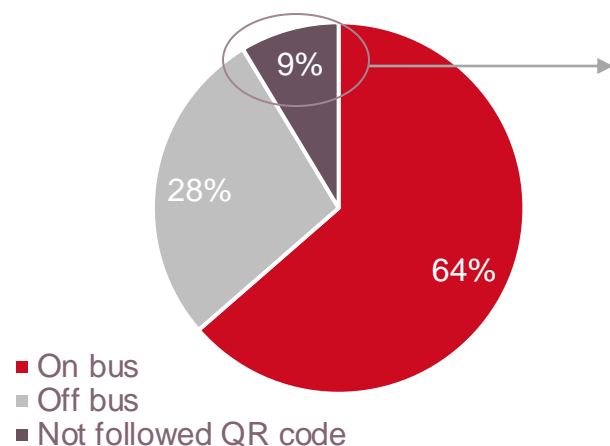
Both on and off-bus promotion could also be made more salient to more passengers, by using dynamic screens for example, as well as by using drivers or operators’ social media to draw attention to the survey (which was deliberately avoided in this trial)

Accessing the survey via QR code or URL: profiles

A small proportion of survey entrants were not recorded as being recruited on or off bus; these respondents did not follow the QR code but either noted the URL, or may have searched for the survey (though we believe this is unlikely)

% all responses

Excluding Liverpool



Those not following the QR code are more likely to:

- **Be somewhat older** (with more over 45s and fewer under 21s), though overall non-QR code users still have a fairly balanced age profile
- **Be female** (or to prefer another term; those accessing the survey via URL are also more likely to agree to give full demographic information)
- **Travel for commuting** rather than travelling for shopping or other reasons, **in peak times**
- **Give lower star ratings** (56% giving 1 star compared to 47% among those following the QR code)
- **Leave a full comment**
- Give **feedback later on** (though 89% still do so on the day, and 97% still do so within two days).

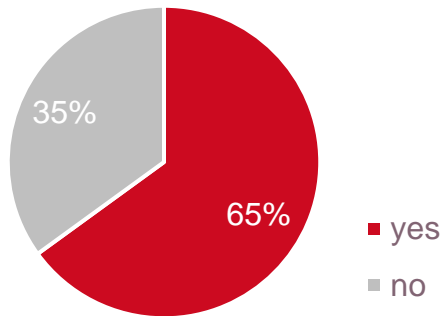
QR codes are also a little less likely to be used when the bus is busier.

Providing both a QR code and URL option is worthwhile to give people options that suit them best, especially where buses are busier and scanning a QR code may feel conspicuous or anti-social. The time lag between journey and feedback is not sufficiently different to warrant any concern about quality. However, given there are some small differences in respondent profile and sentiment or how people answer the questions (some of which may also be related to taking the survey home to do on a laptop or tablet rather than on a smaller, smartphone screen), if this approach was adopted, we should monitor whether and how the proportions of QR vs URL access vary over time and by area, and take steps to normalise this (perhaps with weighting), or at least caveat for it, in reporting.

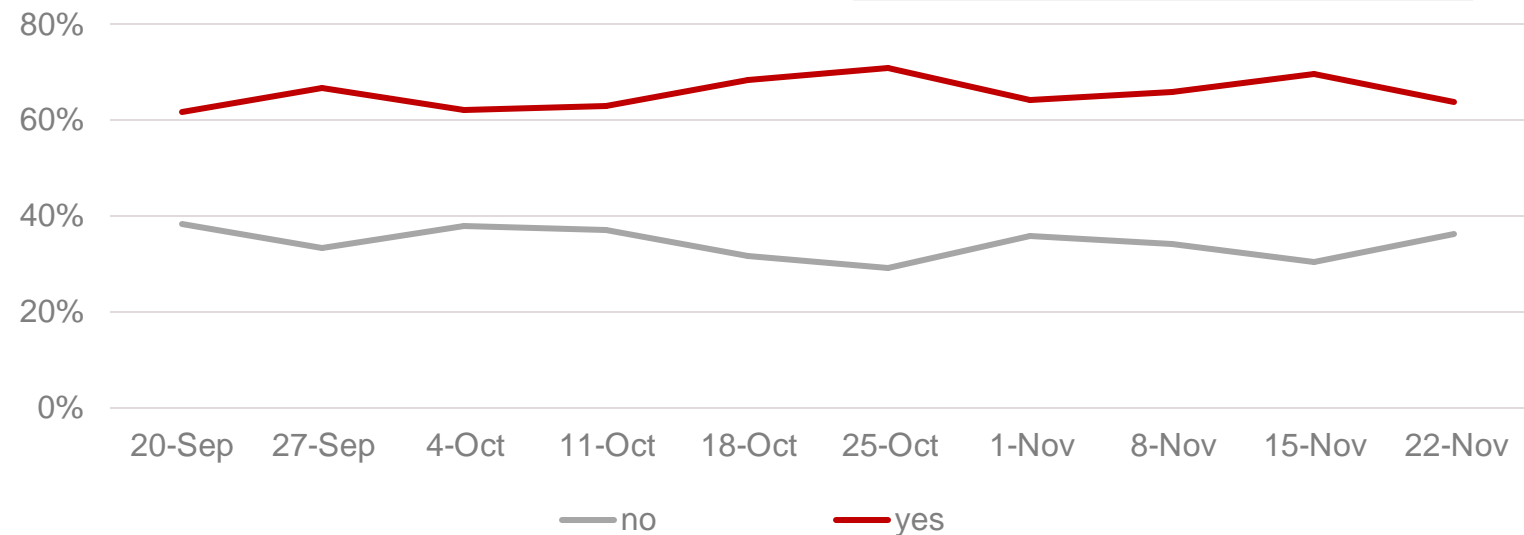
Level of engagement with the survey: leaving a full comment

Two thirds of respondents provided (the optional) free-text rationale for their star rating, with a similar level of engagement throughout the survey period

% providing verbatim comment
(in addition to mandatory star rating)



% providing full verbatim response each week



We saw a slight difference in “full” engagement if people completed the survey more than two days after their journey – those completing sooner were more likely to leave a full comment.

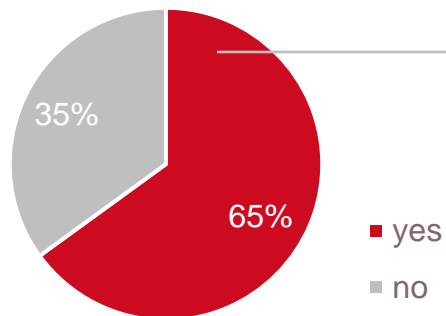
A good level of engagement and commitment from passengers to feed back (this compares well to other review-style feedback facilities in other industries), and no indication that the ability to comment freely was seen as a novelty early on and then subsequently waned in appeal

Base: all responses 20/09/21 – 28/11/21 (3061); average weekly sample size = 306

Full engagement with the survey: respondent profiles

The profile of those leaving a full comment tells us more about how this feedback mechanism works and how it appeals to different passenger groups

% providing verbatim comment
(in addition to mandatory star rating)



Those providing a comment are more likely to be:

- Female
- In the main "working age" groups
 - especially 25-59
 - much less likely to be 16-18
 - reassuringly, there seems to be no difference for older people (60+ and even 80+) - no indication that older people might struggle with the format (once they have engaged with it in the first place)
- Commuting, and have paid for their ticket
- Travelling between 7am and 9am, and slightly more prevalent on Mondays and Fridays
- Negative about their journey overall (see next slide)

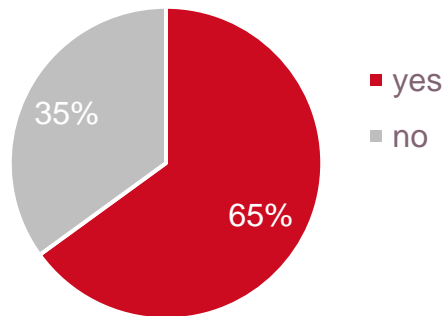
Likelihood to comment fully is linked to having more negative journey experience or being more acutely impacted by a journey (or expecting more from the service)

In addition, there is an implication that an "optional" level – and format – of participation might be working really well here both from a respondent perspective, and insight-collection perspective – with learnings for our wider research planning. Allowing very basic feedback (star rating) as the minimum may have helped secure feedback from the least "committed", while the comment question has not only picked up more detail, but also provided an "outlet" for those who really want to say something more and in their own words. **We should consider this positioning of open text vs quick, simple feedback, as a potential tool for use in other research, including in our more structured surveys.**

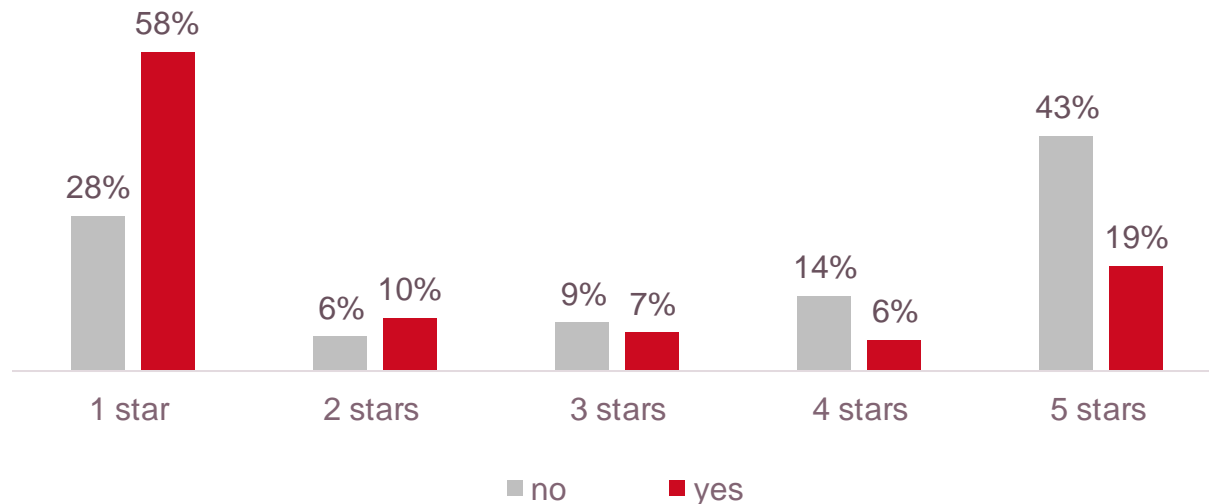
Full engagement with the survey: by star rating

Full verbatim comments are much more likely to be given by those having the poorest and best journey experience – but especially the poorest, so we might expect the nature of comments to be more negative overall, and not wholly reflective of all experiences

% providing verbatim comment
(in addition to mandatory star rating)



% providing verbatim comment, by those rating their journey overall with...
(in addition to mandatory star rating)



Base: all responses 20/09/21 – 28/11/21 (3061), 1 star (1467), 2 stars (196), 3 stars (140), 4 stars (114), 5 stars (384)

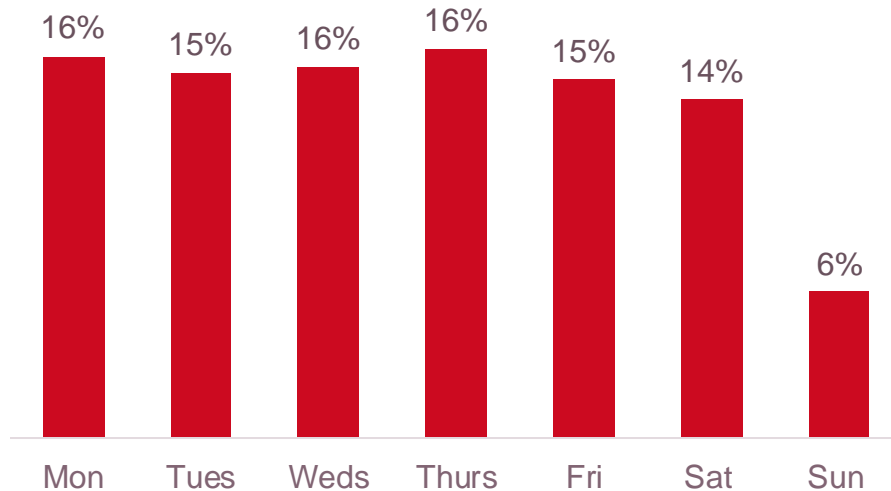
Who responds to this feedback mechanism?

Passenger & journey profiles

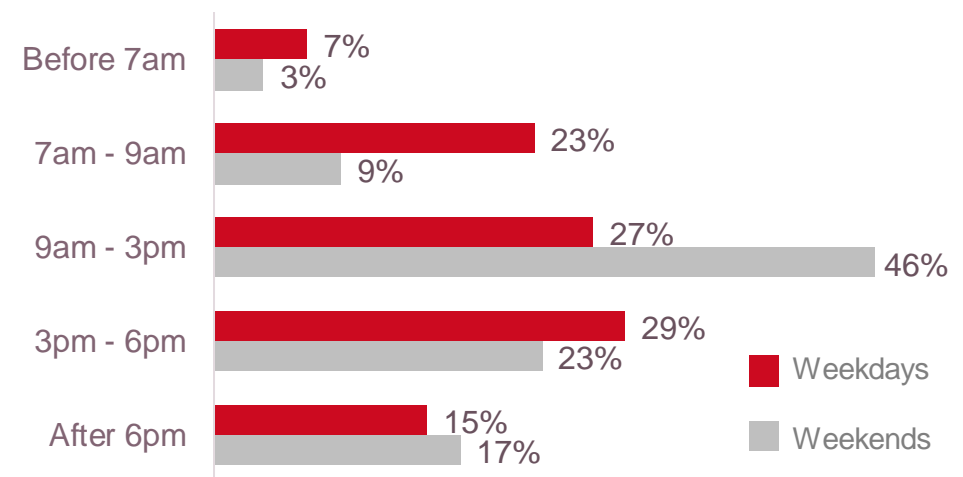
Respondent profiles: journey days / times

Feedback was received for journeys made throughout the week, spread across the day as we would expect

Journey day of week



Journey time of day



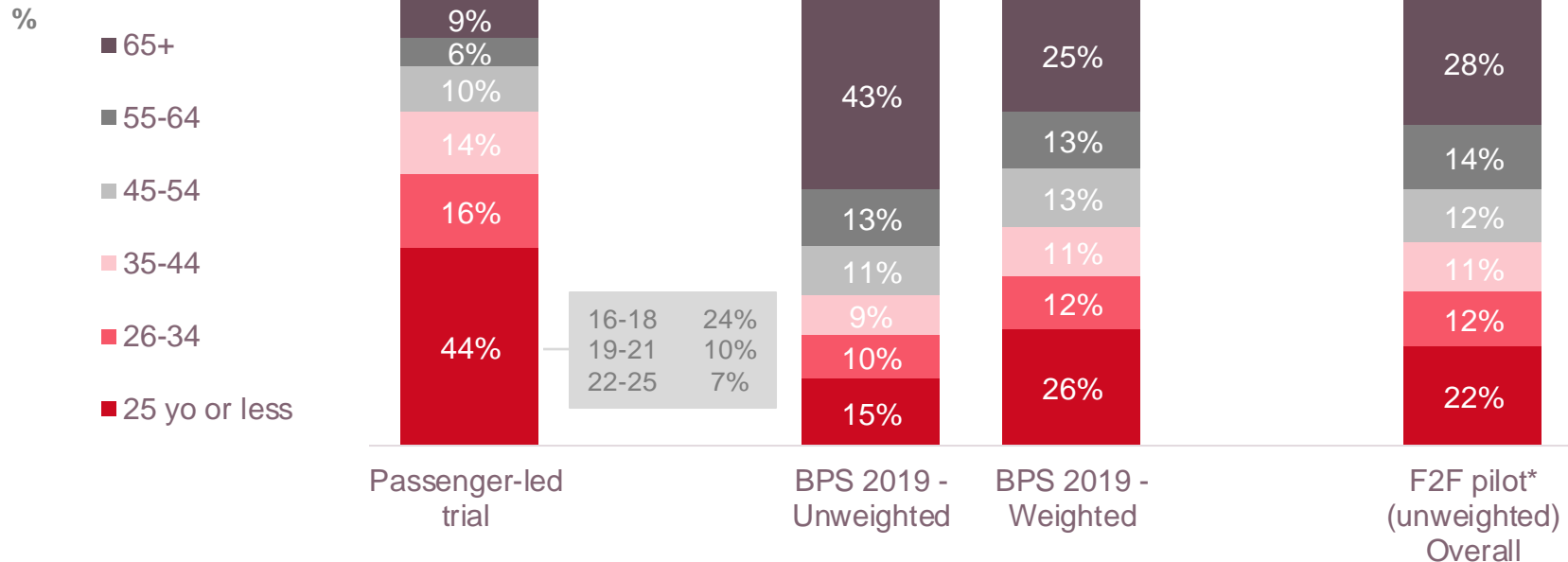
Base: all responses 20/09/21 – 28/11/21 (3061)

Respondent profiles: passengers' ages

This approach attracts feedback from a significantly younger group than more traditional survey methods

We saw a broadly similar pattern in each of the regions we covered

Reported age



This approach looks to be a good way to collect feedback from groups that are traditionally harder to engage.

However with such a strong bias towards younger passengers, it is unlikely to be appropriate in solus, as older passengers look to be proportionately underrepresented.

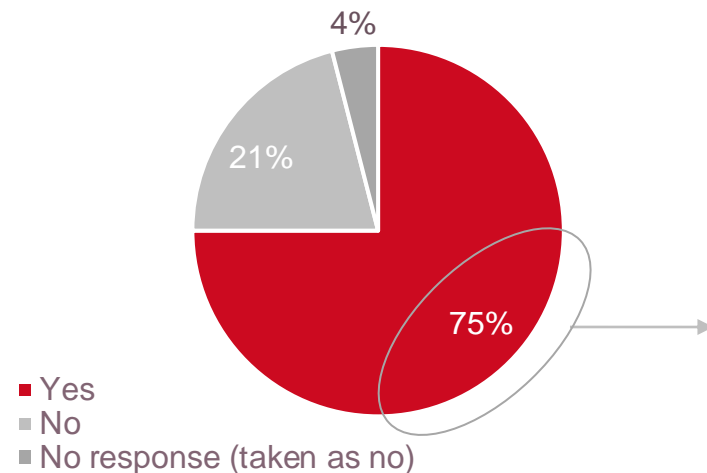
* We also ran a separate, large pilot project in Autumn 2021 to test the willingness of passengers to engage with survey fieldworkers face to face, for recruitment into an online (or paper self-completion) survey. This was another part of our work to investigate possible approaches to collecting passenger feedback, post Covid-19. The findings from this project are also available on our website under "Testing different survey methods"

Respondent profiles: passengers' gender

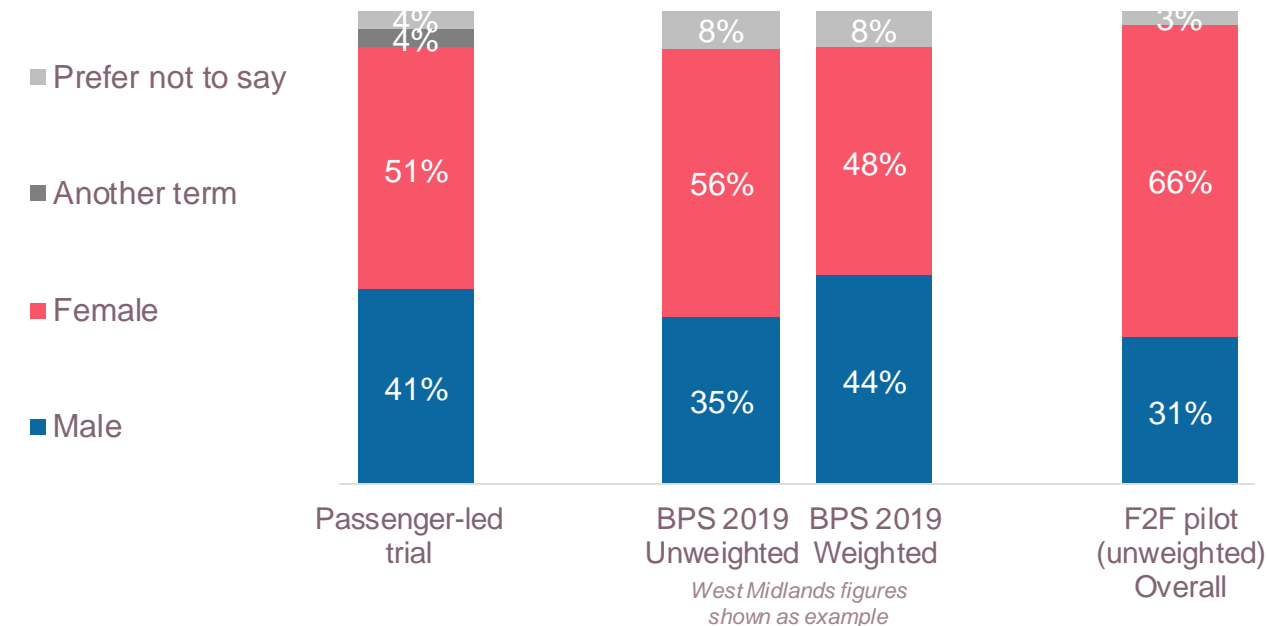
Of those agreeing to provide gender information, a higher proportion were female than male. This echoes trends in our more traditional surveys using F2F recruitment, but the approach appears to be bringing in more males (a typically harder to reach group) overall (Again, although this varied somewhat by region, the overall trend for more males than in BPS, for instance, was consistent)

Also see following notes page for further discussion

Willing to provide information on gender and health/disability %



Gender %



Base: all responses 20/09/21 – 28/11/21 (3061)

Base: all willing to be asked gender question 20/09/21 – 28/11/21 (2306)

Respondent profiles: journey details

Linked with the younger age profile, commuters and those paying for their tickets make up the majority in the approach trialled here, much more so than in our other more traditional survey methods. *(Again, although this varied somewhat by region, the overall trend for fare payers and commuters being the majority was consistent)*

Intuitively we believe that this is driven in large part by the method used here (faster, shorter, more digital), but genuine changes in journey patterns since Covid-19 are likely to have played some part – we know that a larger proportion of all journeys are now made for commuting reasons than before the pandemic, with fewer leisure trips.

Journey purpose

%



BPS

(weighted)

West Midlands figures shown as example

47%

49%

F2F

pilot

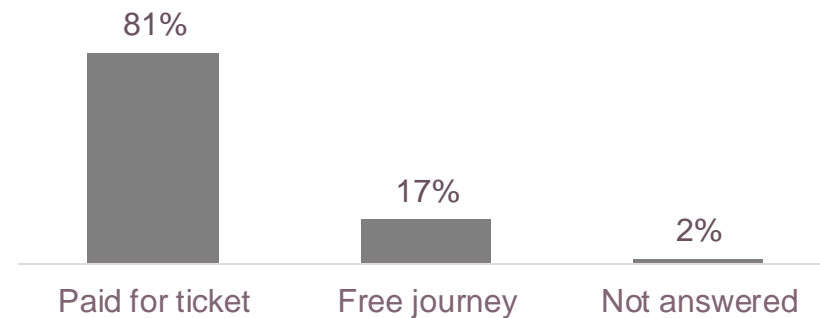
36%

25%

39%

Fare paying status

%



BPS

(weighted)

West Midlands figures shown as example

69%

28%

3%

F2F

pilot

61%

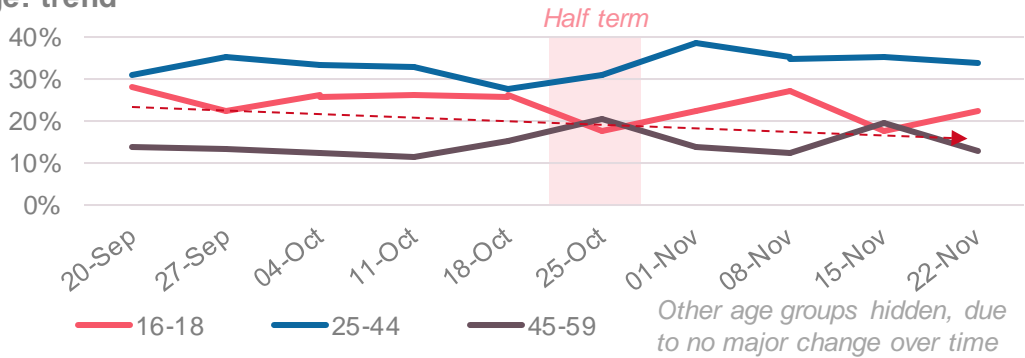
34%

11%
(other/NA)

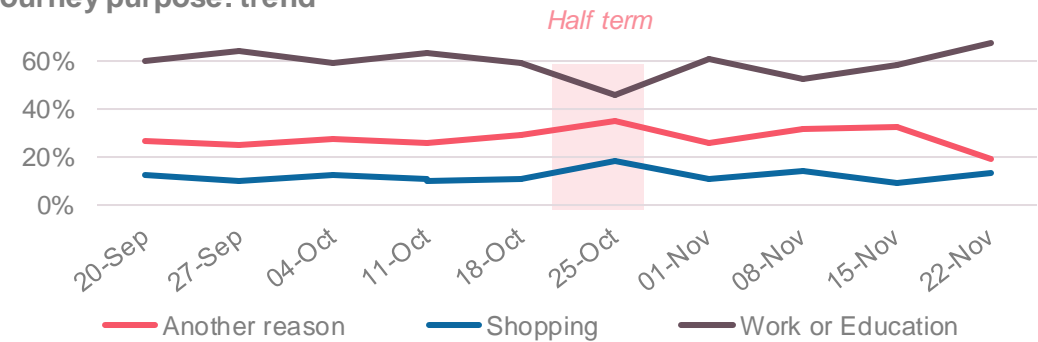
Respondent profiles over time

Respondents' journey purpose (using our broad categories) and fare paying status were fairly consistent, but small changes in gender and age may indicate a novelty wearing off, with the "usual suspects" subsequently becoming less likely to take part over time

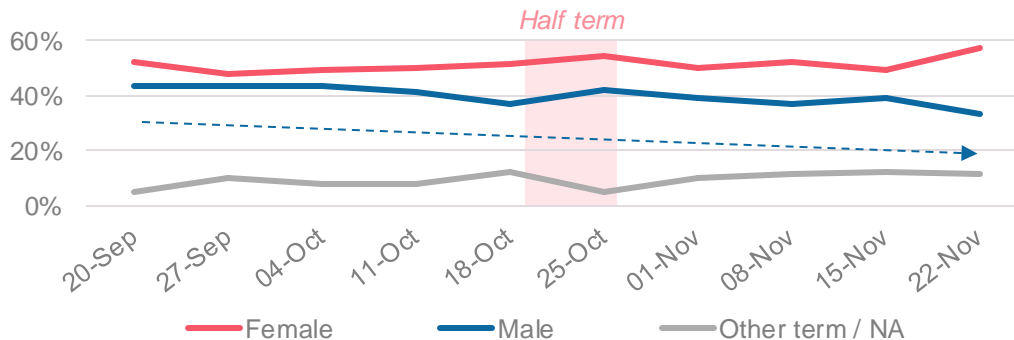
Age: trend



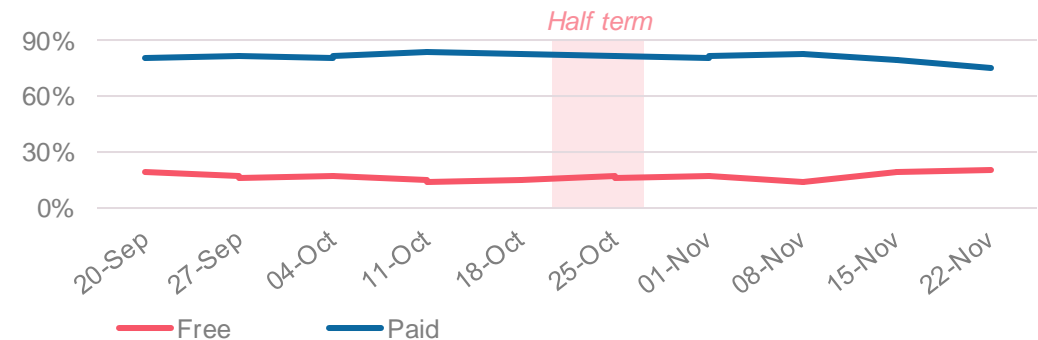
Journey purpose: trend



Gender: trend



Fare paying: trend

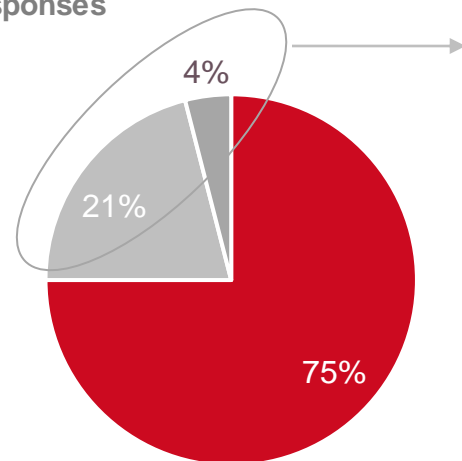


Nevertheless, overall this approach attracts responses from a very different passenger set than other methods, and the potential defaulting towards females and older passengers over time is relatively minor. It may be possible to protect further against this with refreshment of the materials or additional promotion

Willingness to provide personal information

In compliance with GDPR and MRS Code of Conduct, respondents in this survey were given the choice over whether to be asked questions about their gender and health / disabilities. Three quarters agreed to be asked the question; a quarter did not.

% all responses



- Yes
- No
- No response (taken as no)

The quarter of respondents who were not willing to answer the gender / health condition question are a little more likely to:

- Travel in the more metropolitan areas covered in this pilot (Brighton & Hove, Coventry, Liverpool)
- Travel on busier buses, and be commuters
- Be more negative overall about their journeys
- Access the feedback survey via an off-bus promotion, rather than on board
- ...Access the survey via a URL rather than via the QR code

(There was no real difference in the level of “nonsense” or offensive responses among this group, ruling out the idea that mis-using the survey might be a typical reason for preferring anonymity)

These findings may indicate that the reasons for being less likely to answer the “optional” questions are a combination of:

- The nature of travellers in an area and their typical usage and attitude towards services (perhaps feeling more transactional in busier and more metropolitan areas)
- The service experience at busier times, perhaps leading to less patience and engagement with the survey

Overall, these differences are small, but the proportion of people who bypass these questions could be a problem if we ever wished to weight this data by gender for example (as we have done historically in the BPS). We should consider ways to encourage people to provide gender information in particular, perhaps by rephrasing these GDPR-compliance questions, so as to mitigate the potential loss in data here.

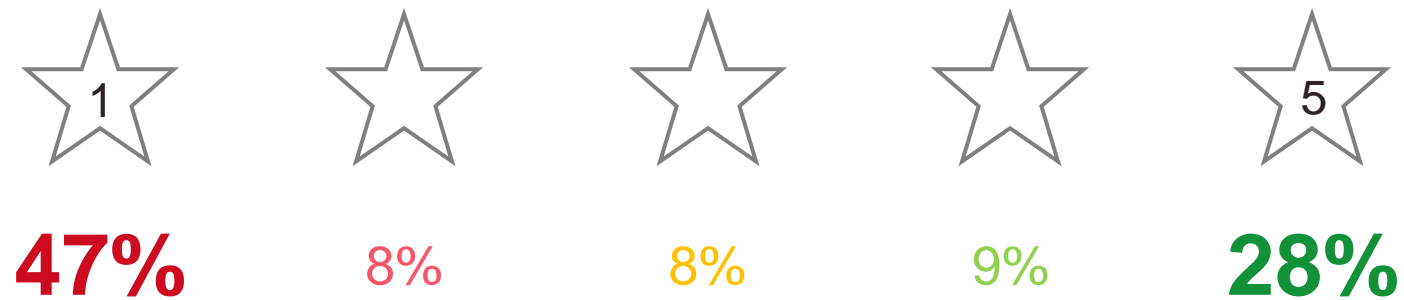
The nature of passengers' responses

Passengers' star rating for their journeys

Journey feedback was highly polarized, with most passengers indicating their journey was either great, or very disappointing – and with a negative emphasis overall

Journey rating

% (where 1 star is very negative, and 5 stars are very positive)



This outcome tallies with the nature of this approach, where passengers are only likely to engage with the feedback survey idea when they have something to say – for good or bad.

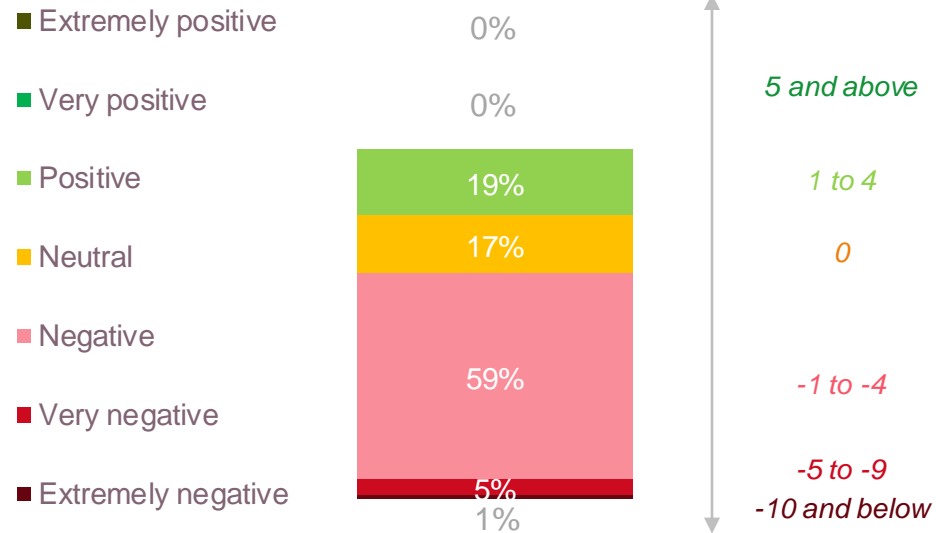
It may therefore be that **this approach can never provide a representative snapshot of what it's like to travel on buses (or other modes); rather its value is in highlighting what really matters to passengers, to make or break a journey, and in flagging up issues in a short space of time**

Sentiment derived from passengers' free-text responses

The nature of passengers' comments, where provided, is generally fairly negative

Sentiment bands

% (summarised from sentiment code)



Recap: sentiment is coded at sentence and overall answer level:

Thematic and sentiment coding: example

Respondent's verbatim responses are broken down into "sentences", with each sentence assigned to topic(s) and a sentiment rating. An overall sentiment rating is also derived.

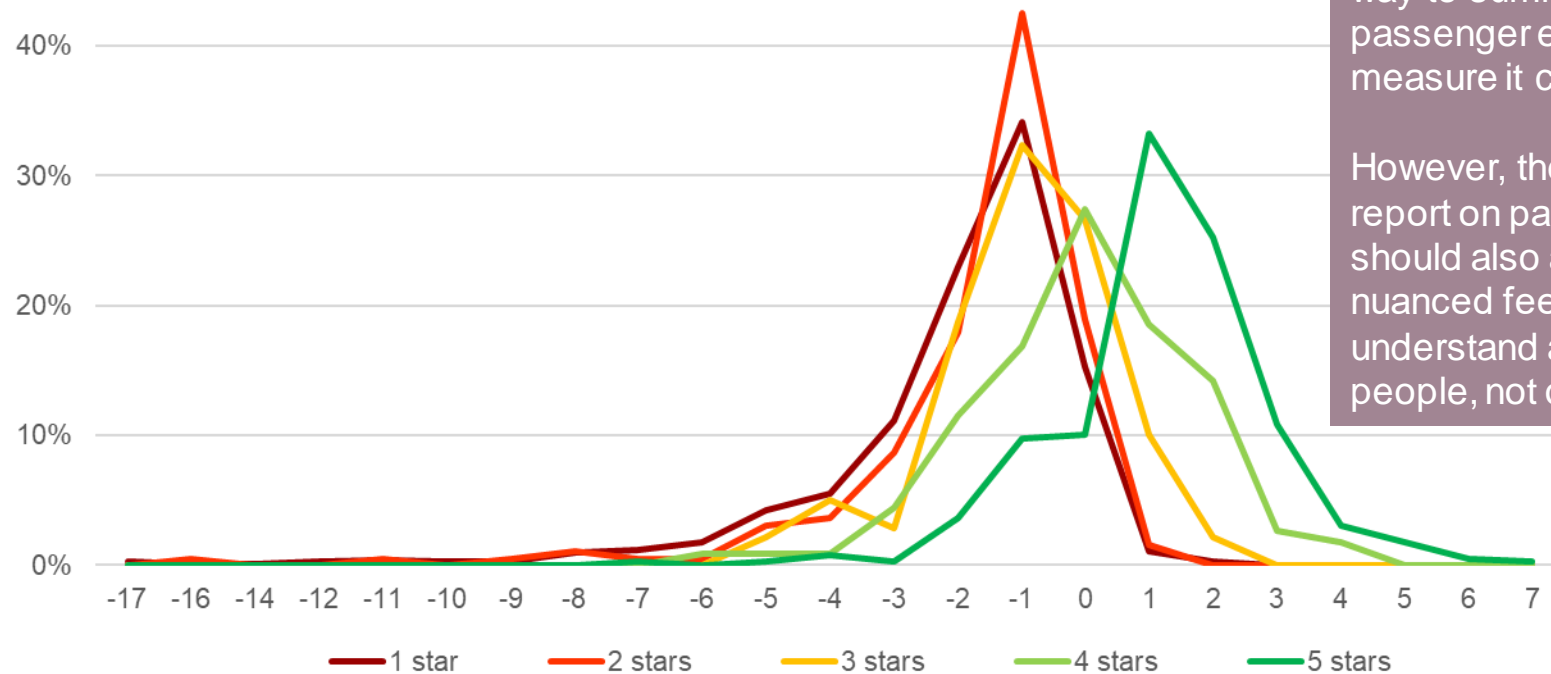
Sentence breakdown	Topics	Sentence sentiment	Overall sentiment
The bus was 15 minutes late.	Timeliness/scheduling	-1 Negative	-3 Negative
The app did not update to tell me. I have to get this bus to get to work on time. It's appalling	Communication	-1 Negative	
I have to get this bus to get to work on time.	Timeliness/scheduling	1 Neutral	
It's appalling	-	-3 Negative	

Base: All those leaving a verbatim comment, 20/09/21 – 28/11/21, where the response was given on the same day as the journey (1793)

Relationship between star ratings and derived sentiment

Star ratings (or most quantitative rating scales) can disguise more nuanced sentiment:
There is overlap between the star ratings, and within each point on the scale is a range of feeling

% expressing sentiment scored from negative to positive, by given star rating



Prescribed rating scales are a useful way to summarise and quantify passenger experience, and to measure it consistently over time.

However, the way we collect and report on passengers' feedback should also allow for a range of nuanced feeling: we're looking to understand and give a voice to people, not only to report statistics

Base: All providing verbatim comment 20/09/21 – 28/11/21, 1 star (1149), 2 stars (195), 3 stars (139), 4 stars (113), 5 stars (388)

Topic themes in passengers' feedback

Passengers' comments spanned a very wide range of topics, with emphasis on timing factors and the driver

Topics mentioned by passengers: % all mentions

Timeliness	27%
Schedule	19%
Bus - driver	15%
Customer attitudes & emotions	5%
Vulnerable customers / disabilities	4%
Communication	4%
Safety	4%
Anti-social behaviour	3%
Bus - stop	3%
Bus - boarding & leaving	2%
Bus - seating	2%
Other travel	2%
Payments / value for money	2%
Bus - cleanliness	2%
Bus - information	2%
Bus - environment & comfort	1%
Staff (excl driver)	1%
Legal / prejudice	0%
Roads	0%
Customer status / issues	0%

Kept Waiting	1,120
On Time	172

Driver - Attitude - Poor	108
Driver - Quality - Poor	44
Driver - Break / Change over	24
Driver - Availability - Poor	12
Driver - Lack of Knowledge	5
Driver - Pushy	5
Driver - Meet & Greet - Poor	4
Driver - Named - Complaint	1
Driver - Uniform	1
Driver - Smoking	0
Driver - Swearing	0

Driver - Attitude - Good	163
Driver - Quality - Good	100
Driver - Meet & Greet - Good	1
Driver - Organised	1

Driver - General	236
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10A 8:37am **did not arrive so I was late** for college. This meant that the passengers expecting to board the 10A had to squeeze onto the 10...

Liverpool, commuter, Tues, 7-9am

Pleasant driver, **bus more or less on time** and clean Cornwall, other journey purpose, Fri, 3-6pm

No bus turned up. **I understand staffing issues but this is the 4th time... in one week.** I work ...at 6am and I can't afford to get a taxi every day...more communication on the [operator] app about which buses are cancelled or maybe you don't have a driver etc would be helpful

Peterborough, commuter, Mon, before 7am

I just decide to give feedback because for the driver, **he is very patient and very polite. These days it's hard**

Coventry, commuter, Sun, 9am-3pm

The driver was **superb. As are all Arriva drivers**

Liverpool, commuter, Wed, 3-6pm

The bus driver **missed a stop and didn't pick people up**

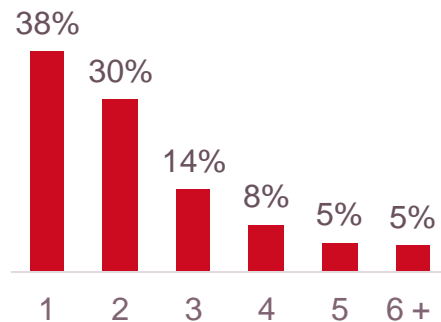
Comwall, commuter, Wed, 7-9am

Arguments have been made that we can dispense with long, structured surveys with questions on a number of topics, and allow key themes to come out naturally, on passengers' own terms and with relative importance to them made clear via frequency and strength of sentiment. The comprehensive range of topics arising in this short trial period certainly indicates that this could be possible, and worth consideration.

Breadth of topics arising in passengers' comments

Passengers may have made multiple points as part of their response – sometimes encompassing both negative and positive elements

No. different topics mentioned



Examples of multi-topic responses

Comment	Topics	Sentence sentiment	Overall sentiment	Overall rating
<p>“ Overall a good service and gets me where I need to be on time.</p> <p>However... it's irresponsible to allow the bus to be full while the Covid situation is still unclear ”</p> <p>Brighton & Hove, commuter, Mon, after 6pm</p>	<p>Timeliness</p> <p>Safety</p> <p>Crowding</p>	<p>3 Positive</p> <p>-1 Negative</p>	<p>2 Positive</p>	<p>5 stars</p>
<p>“ The bus did take me to my location.</p> <p>However the seats are ...uncomfortable and the bus inside was dirty</p> <p>....[and] more needs to be done so people respect others by not subjecting them to their music. ”</p> <p>Coventry, commuter, Wed, before 7am</p>	<p>Timetable</p> <p>Bus cleanliness</p> <p>Bus seating</p> <p>Bus environment</p> <p>A/S behaviour</p>	<p>1 Positive</p> <p>-2 Negative</p> <p>-2 Negative</p>	<p>-2 Negative</p>	<p>2 stars</p>

Again, this confirms the nuance in experience for individuals, which our research should aim to capture and acknowledge

Overall, passengers gave rich and insightful feedback

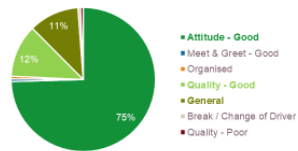
The mix of verbatim feedback, with themes coded and quantified at scale, allowed us to look at the detail in what matters to passengers (and sub-groups), and the relative importance of different factors in their experience, along with real-life illustrations.

Some examples included....
(See full debrief report for more)

Understanding positive comments about drivers

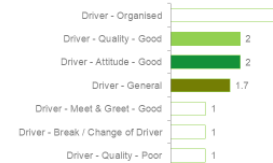
When passengers have something positive to say about their driver, it's usually about their attitude

Subtopics about driver, where overall sentiment is positive
% of comments about driver



Base: Comments for journeys / responses 2009/21 - 28/1/21, where the response was given on the same day as the journey
All comments on driver with positive sentiment (169)

Subtopics about driver, where overall sentiment is positive
Sentiment score for subtopics about driver



42

More detail on passengers' negative comments about scheduling / timing

Passengers speak (type) with real sincerity and personal impact about buses being late or cancelled, especially (and commonly) where they perceive the problem to be repeated / resolvable but unaddressed, or where they perceive no reason for the problem

Example comments: Subtopics about schedule, where overall sentiment is negative

Bus - late

Bus was 10 min late. A lot of buses seem to be late or missing lately.
Coventry, other journey purpose, Sat 9am-3pm

The bus was 12min late [and] yesterday it was 35min late. Since they started the extended route to Redruth hospital and Camborne it's never on time. Please update the bus stop and app timings to reflect what time it actually arrives. It's not good to keep people waiting in the cold for 30min.
Cornwall, commuting, Weds 7-8am

Bus was 20 mins late. Two other buses for other locations were at the stop when the bus finally showed up. Two people flagged it down and yet it failed to stop and was mostly empty. This was at 5.17pm outside Papworth hospital leaving more than a dozen cold and angry customers.
Peterborough, commuting, Fri 3-6pm

Bus service - poor

The journey itself was fine as always. But the number 7 buses are not coming at the time they should come. Very often it happens that two buses come at the same time. (Or 1 min apart). The issue with that is that sometimes there are no buses coming for 20+ minutes.
Brighton & Hove, commuting, Fri 3-6pm

Always late or does not turn up. Roads empty, all other buses on time. Really poor service
Liverpool, commuting, Sun 7-8am

Bus - cancelled

Literally it was vital
Peterborough, commuting, Sat 3-6pm

The third which notified could be better
Brighton & Hove, commuting, Fri 3-6pm

50

What do we hear differently from passengers with health conditions?

Positive comments about the driver from those with a health condition are usually very similar to those with no disability or condition: praising politeness or general professionalism; only a minority mentioned driver behaviour specifically in context of their disability. Likewise, the nature of comments on other topics - like schedule/timeliness - is similar for disabled and non-disabled passengers. In a small number of cases, those with health conditions talked about the more serious impact from commonly held frustrations, such as lack of mask-wearing, and poor timeliness.

Example comments from passengers reporting a health condition or disability: topics with different degree of importance to disabled vs not disabled passengers

Driver

I am a wheelchair user and the driver was very helpful, he waited for me to park my chair so I was safe and I didn't feel rushed getting on or off the bus.
Coventry, other journey purpose, Thurs after 6pm

The driver was polite and recognised I had a disability and didn't drive off from the stop until I had sat down.
Peterborough, other journey purpose, Thurs 8am-3pm

Very friendly and helpful driver. Didn't feel scared, because he wasn't driving like an F1 driver.
Cornwall, other journey purpose, Mon after 6pm

Bus driver was so lovely and friendly. Said hello to every single person who boarded. Asked how people were and told us to have a good day when we departed. Such a positive experience!
Coventry, shopping, Mon 9am-3pm

Anti-social behaviour

It was great however barely anyone was wearing masks which made me feel a bit unsafe and someone was playing annoying loud music.
Coventry, commuting, Thurs 3-6pm

Hardly anyone wore a mask, and nothing was said by the driver...The excuse that drivers don't want to be aggressively challenged...just doesn't wash... They're OK, they have a thick perspex screen. There's no risk to them. Your website, literature, and on-board announcements emphasise your high standards of customer care, particularly where covid is concerned...[BUT] you talk rubbish
Barnley, other journey purpose, Tues 9am-3pm

The driver was extremely rude and people were smoking weed, the bus absolutely stunk!!
Coventry, commuting, Weds 3-6pm

Timeliness

For the 4th time in two days no bus has arrived leaving me, a disabled passenger fighting for the wheelchair space. The service is an absolute disgrace.
Coventry, commuting, Tues 3-6pm

75

The potential for misuse

Perhaps inevitably given a completely passenger-led entry into the feedback form, we did see some unhelpful contributions

For example, among the 83 respondents claiming to be 80+....



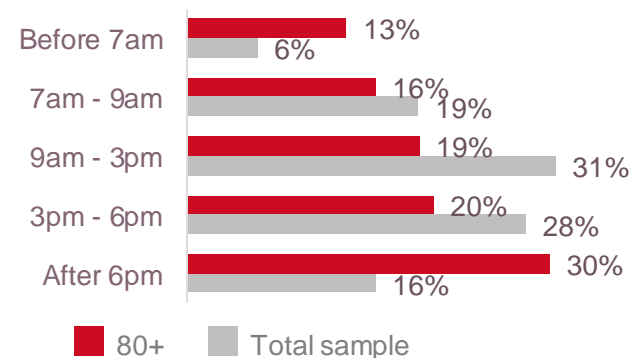
We strongly suspect a false age was given by some, as a joke

20 (24%) said they were either 99 or 100

18 (22%) said they were 110 (the maximum capped age)



An unexpectedly high proportion travelled very early in the morning or late evening



An unexpectedly high proportion of verbatim comments – where given – were obscene, offensive or nonsensical



“ I got nervous because of a crane fly on the bus
Peterborough, shopping, Sat, 9am-3pm ”

“ Amazing service crashed a few times and flew into the sea but at least I can swim [and] made a new friend...
Brighton & Hove,
other journey purpose, Sat, 7-9am ”

Overall only a minority participated in this way, and in an open survey format this would need to be accepted to a degree. We would however pursue measures to automatically flag respondents – in order that they can be investigated and potentially removed from reported data – in certain scenarios, for example if key offensive words or phrases are given. This would both remove offensive material for those using the data, and likely remove a set of less genuine responses. Similar steps could be taken to redact personal information such as emails or phone numbers given by respondents.

Level of accuracy in the thematic and sentiment coding

We did spot isolated examples of mis-coding:

	Topics	Overall sentiment	Rating by passenger
<i>Driver late, as he was in a hurry he never waited for passengers to be seated before moving off</i> <i>Coventry, commuting, Mon 7-9am</i>	Driver - Break / Change of Driver	1 Positive	
<i>Great service from the hospital to Hampton, shame more people don't know about it 😊</i> <i>Peterborough, commuting, Sat 9am-3pm</i>	Bus Service - Good	-1 Negative	

We would expect that most of these types of issues could be resolved in a larger, live project over a longer period of time, as data volume builds up to enable any auto-coding to improve (and indeed this technology is improving all the time).

However, there are instances of sarcasm, and nonsense responses for example, which are difficult to code correctly – meaning some degree of inaccuracy may be inevitable. We would be reasonably confident that, over time, these would be in a small enough minority to become insignificant overall.

Understanding potential productivity

Response volume by region

Response varied in each of the areas we piloted the approach. This was broadly in line with volume of promotional material, though the response in Peterborough and Coventry looks a little stronger on average than elsewhere, and in Burnley response was weaker

(Note that Burnley was deliberately chosen for this project, since it was known to be less survey-responsive than other areas served by TransDev from previous research, and that this approach might either confirm this trend or offer a different solution for this and similarly more challenging areas for research engagement)

Response per region, in context of volume of materials

Responses between 20/09 – 28/11/21

Region	No. promotional items	Response	Response per promotional item	
Peterborough (Stagecoach East)	1128	691	0.6	Higher response
Coventry	2060	1092	0.5	
Brighton & Hove	1385	594	0.4	Average response
Cornwall	1384	493	0.4	
Liverpool Route 10/10A (Arriva)	412	141	0.3	Lower response
Burnley	202*	50	0.2	

* In total, Burnley was provided with 9000 flyers for use on buses (100 on each of 90 vehicles), and 112 posters. Since flyers were made available as a sheaf in a holder, these have been treated in this analysis as equivalent to 1 poster being visible to passengers on board a bus.

Exploring response variations



We looked at....

- Placement, size and visibility of the materials themselves
- How busy / crowded buses felt to passengers
- Profiles of passengers (we know that some groups are more pre-disposed to participating in surveys than others)
- Anecdotal and local knowledge provided by operator / local authority partners

Quick recap on display of promo material in each area:

Liverpool (route 10/A)

Promoted at stops/stations and on Arriva* services



A2 posters

Landscape half-sized A2 posters



A5 window stickers (c. 5 per deck)

A4 posters (1 per vehicle entrance)

Coventry (National Express)

Promoted at stops/stations and on NX services across city



A3 stickers



A5 window stickers (c. 5 per deck)

Cornwall

Promoted at stops/stations and on a sample of Cornwall by Kernow / Go Cornwall Bus services across the county



A4/A3 stickers/posters



GCB: A5 window stickers (c.5 per deck)

Kernow: Circular seat backs (c.5 per deck)

Kernow : A3 posters (1 per bus entrance)

Burnley (Burnley Bus Company)

Promoted at stops/stations and on Burnley Bus Co. services across the town



A4 posters at stops

A1 posters at stations



DL flyers (c. 100 in 1 holder per vehicle)

Peterborough (Stagecoach)

Promoted at stops/stations and on Stagecoach services across the city, and on Guided Busway



A4 posters



A5 window stickers (c. 5 per deck)

Brighton & Hove (Go Ahead)

Promoted at stops/stations and on a sample of BHB/Metrobus routes across whole network area



A4/A5 posters and stickers



A5 window stickers (c. 5 per deck)

A4/A3 posters (1 per vehicle entrance)



(*Stagecoach also serves 10/A but did not promote survey on board)

On/off bus variations by region

Very broadly, ways of accessing the survey reflected the placement of promotional material in each region, though with a couple of outliers:

- **Burnley** – where a large proportion of respondents did not follow the QR code – likely taking the flyer home and completing the survey there
(analysis of the timing of response relative to journey supports this – see following notes page)
- **Liverpool** – where the on-board material does not look to have been as productive, relative to off-bus promotion
(see following notes page for more detailed discussion)

		Burnley	Liverpool	Cornwall	Brighton & Hove	Coventry	Peterborough
Proportion of promo material placed...	Off bus	55%	28%	31%	59%	27%	18%
	On bus	45%	72%	69%	41%	73%	82%
Proportion of responses generated via promo material...	Off bus	14%	49%	25%	57%	27%	7%
	On bus	52%	28%	68%	37%	63%	85%
	Not used QR code	34%	9%	7%	6%	10%	8%
Overall response per item		0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.6
		Lower response		Average response		Higher response	

Base (materials): Burnley (202), Liverpool (412), Cornwall (1384), Brighton & Hove (1385), Coventry (2060), Peterborough (1128)

Base (responses): Burnley (50), Liverpool* (40), Cornwall (493), Brighton & Hove (594), Coventry (1092), Peterborough (691)

*Arriva customers only, and from 19/10 only, from which date respondents were asked directly how they accessed the survey (this data was driven by the QR code tagging itself in other areas)

Note: there are some further variations by operator, where multiple operators participated within a region

The impact of on-board crowding on response

There looks to be a link between how crowded buses were and on-board response rate (though this is only part of the story)

Comparison between reported level of crowding and on-board response rate indicating 4 categories for on-board productivity



- Not answered
- Almost empty
- Several pax, plenty of seats
- Most seats occupied, pax able to sit if wished
- Full, some pax standing (no choice)

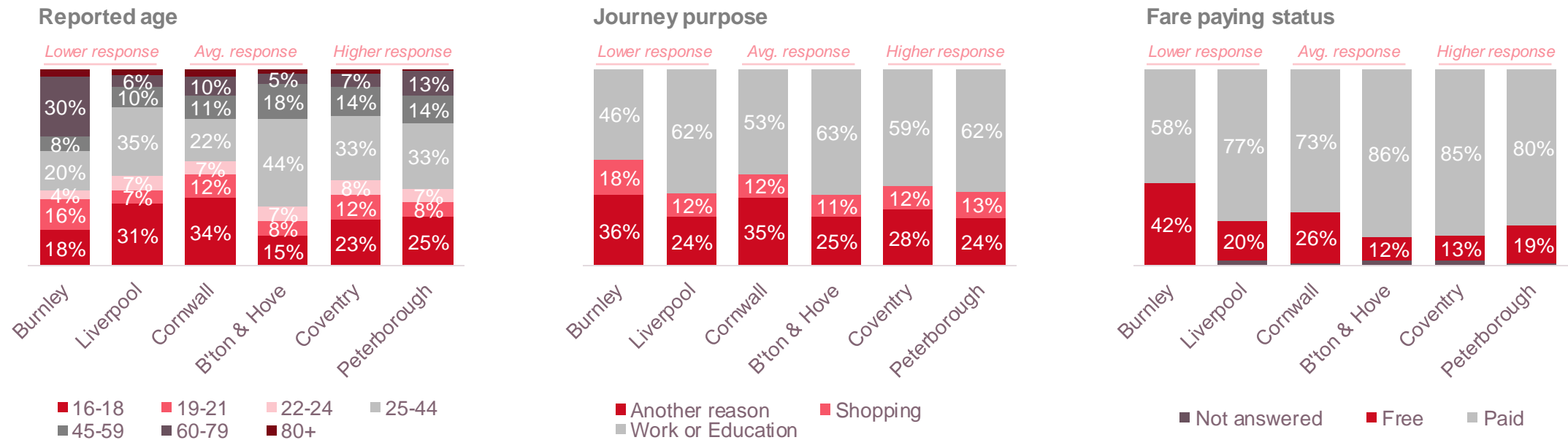
It is likely that the impact of crowding is somewhat suppressed here, since these reports are made by those who did see the material and take the survey – so we might expect this effect to be further evident in reality.

Anticipating which category a bus service (even to route level) sits in will help to inform the likely best mix of on/off bus material, and the placement of on-board material within the vehicle itself.

Base (for crowding report): Burnley (50), Liverpool* (40), Cornwall (493), Brighton & Hove (594), Coventry (1092), Peterborough (691)

Passenger characteristics: variations by region

There appears to be very little link between the typical age and journey purpose of passengers (who entered the survey) and response rate. There is possibly a weak link around whether or not tickets were paid for, with those paying more eager to give feedback.



Again, this analysis is limited by the fact that we are looking here at those passengers who *did* respond, and so typical profiles of passengers in an area may impact response rates more than is indicated here.

Nevertheless, we can conclude that – while local factors (the way people use and interact with buses) probably does impact on the likely productivity of this approach – this is not as simple as understanding age or usage profiles. This approach has the potential, at least, to pick up passengers in a variety of scenarios.

The proportion of free-pass users in an area may impact on the appeal and therefore productivity of this approach, however.

Base: Burnley (50), Liverpool* (40), Cornwall (493), Brighton & Hove (594), Coventry (1092), Peterborough (691)

Summary of patterns in productivity

	Burnley	Liverpool 10/A	Cornwall	Brighton & Hove	Coventry	Peterborough
Overall response per item	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.6
Promotional materials	Higher density off bus Flyers rather than posters/stickers on board: less visible and encouraging post-journey rather than in-moment feedback	Higher density but poorer response for on-bus materials Off-bus seen by both Stagecoach and Arriva customers; on-bus seen only by Arriva. Diminishing any effect of presence building (off-bus) and call to action (on-bus)?	Average on/off bus distribution Seat-back stickers possibly increasing visibility on Kernow vehicles, compared to window stickers elsewhere	Higher density off bus, reflected in response patterns	Average on/off bus distribution (slight emphasis on bus)	Higher density on bus
Relative crowding	Relatively higher crowding, likely hampering visibility on board	Relatively higher crowding, likely hampering visibility on board	Rarely full to capacity	At capacity fairly often: average for this project	Busy but not usually at capacity	Busy but not usually at capacity
Local population / journey characteristics	Known to be less survey-responsive than other TransDev areas Higher incidence of free pass use	Known to be less survey-responsive e.g. in BPS Higher incidence of free pass use, along with slightly younger age profile overall – more student / school travel on this route?	Higher incidence of free pass use	Lower incidence of free pass use	Lower incidence of free pass use	Avg. incidence of free pass use

While not guaranteed to drive productivity, some themes arise in the better-performing areas – for consideration when planning optimum mix and format of survey promotion

- ✓ Higher density and visibility on-bus vs off (a function of volume, placement and format of material)
- ✓ Busy “enough”, but less frequently at capacity
- ✓ More fare-paying passengers (likely leading to stronger opinions)

Summary and conclusions for the potential of this approach

Key learnings about the approach

Fundamentals of the potential outputs

- **It is possible to collect a reasonable volume of responses**, rivalling BPS for instance, at the level of an authority area or large operating unit. Further steps could also be taken to boost response, possibly with tailoring to different types of area / network.
- ...**But, very granular (e.g. route level or weekly) feedback is less robust**
- Since participation is self-selecting, this approach inevitably **emphasises the extremes of passenger sentiment**
- This means the approach is **likely to work well as a way to pick up on localised issues as they arise, and as they matter to passengers– rather than a representative measure of day to day sentiment and experience**, or as a tracker to monitor KPIs or robustly inform more strategic service planning

Management and logistics

- Some **substantial effort is required to set up and manage this feedback mechanism**, albeit that some elements can be significantly streamlined and improved on having learned from this pilot
- A mix of promotional touchpoints works well; this pilot has provided pointers on optimising formats and placement

Valuable passenger feedback

- The approach is **successful in collecting feedback in the moment, including where passengers are unable to make their journey**
- **Passengers engage well** and provide rich, nuanced descriptions of their experience, what matters, and why – across a wide range of topics

Inclusivity

- The method **attracts feedback from groups who are traditionally harder to engage**: younger people / males / commuters / fare payers. Arguably, however, it underrepresents older passengers in particular.
- This means a mechanism like this may have a role within a mix of feedback methods, for an overall more holistic picture

Passenger experience insights: summary



Confirmed priorities for passengers: meeting expectations against timetable; impact of the driver



This approach also highlights:

- The varied, personal impact of poor – and good – journeys: beyond statistics
- Relationship between information and service reality really makes the difference
- Perception of issues being sustained and unresolvable, or inexcusable
- Time spent at the bus stop is critical



Some specific areas where specific attention could be focussed:

- Weekday evenings
- Sunday evenings
- Those using buses to travel to and from work
- Pre-boarding comms

More detail on the passenger experience findings is given in the separate report on this

Passenger experience insights

When we remove the constraints of a questionnaire and allow passengers to evaluate their bus journeys as they happen and in their own words, **the things which matter to them most are confirmed: meeting expectations in terms of services running to time, as planned, or at all; the impact of the driver.**

But we've also heard:

- It's the **relationship between information and service reality which really makes the difference**, causing frustration and distrust when it mismatches
- Delays, cancellations, unexpected changes mid-journey, and poor information about them are **perceived to be sustained, often with apparently clear and resolvable reasons** – road / route changes, driver shortages, etc. Passengers understandably find this unfair and intolerable
- When services fail to deliver fully, **the impact on passengers can be great**: missed appointments, lateness for work leading to difficult relationships at work, real discomfort when forced to travel in crowded vehicles (and discrimination for some who *can't* travel in these circumstances), anxiety around safety, discomfort due to the weather, and so on
- While some factors are outside of service providers' control, **the potential for drivers to make or break journey experience – to turn around a bad (or a good) journey – is huge. There must be opportunity to do more here and really maximise the driver's potential.**
- **Time spent at the bus stop is critical**, both physically (time spent, impact of weather) and emotionally (anxiety about the service, safety concerns).
 - What more can service providers do to accommodate this, both in practice at the stop, and to acknowledge and ease passengers better when the bus arrives?
- Some specific areas in which services could be improved for specific groups, and where specific attention could be focussed:
 - Weekday evenings
 - Sunday evenings
 - Those using buses to travel to and from work
 - Covid still causing anxiety for many (during Sep-Nov 2021), with some feeling that operators' communications around this are purely lip service; more practical evidence of looking after passengers may help

Conclusions: using this method for capturing passenger feedback

- “Passenger-led” feedback will not be our primary approach – it will not be “the new BPS”
- It may have a role for:
 - Highlighting what matters to passengers, what drives good and poor journey experiences. This might be in short term, ad hoc dips.
 - Supplementing more structured surveys to capture feedback about journeys which are more difficult to intercept via traditional methods – including on more remote, infrequent or late night services
 - Capturing feedback about very targeted issues or events, if implemented around route or fleet changes, or specific disruptions, for example
 - Very localised surveillance, identifying any problems quickly and allowing fast, tactical response.... And through this, providing opportunity for constructive dialogue with customers (e.g. with “you said, we did” comms)
- Some elements of the approach used here are likely to be adopted and adapted within other survey formats, especially, in the short to medium term:
 - We are actively exploring the potential use of auto-coding verbatim feedback from free text questions within our more structured surveys. This might allow us to provide a very frequent, ongoing, more informal pulse of passenger sentiment, in between more formal reporting periods for hard, carefully sampled and weighted, quantitative data
 - Some learnings (confirming and combined with learnings from other pilot work) about the positioning and format of key questions will inform the design of questionnaires for YBJ and other future surveys

Summary of more detailed findings about the method, and tactical implications for delivery

Engagement with the survey: context

The vast majority of passengers respond “in the moment”, at all times of day and days of the week

- **Feedback can be very specific and therefore actionable**
- Responses can be **emotive, really highlighting the personal impact** of any difficulties (and positives)
- In this pilot we can already look at pre- and post-boarding feedback, and there may be **potential to develop the approach / analysis, to understand pain-points at very specific stages in passenger journeys, even further**
- This approach has great potential to enable feedback collection for services which are difficult to cover with (BPS-style) F2F recruitment, **enabling us to reach a wider range of passengers making more different types of journey, or very specific journeys.** This might include people travelling late at night, in remote locations, or in other specific scenarios such as during a period of change or disruption

When reporting on passenger experience, there are sufficient responses with very recent recall, to exclude those given some time after the journey itself

(in this pilot we excluded responses not made on the same day as the journey)

- **We can achieve a really clean measure of in-the-moment experience**
- We should acknowledge that **this can mean the sample for reported data is skewed a little younger than it might otherwise be** – since those with delayed response are typically older – **but this effect is relatively insignificant**

A minority do feed back somewhat later after their journey. In most of these cases, the survey is completed a little later on the same day, (often accessed via URL rather than the QR code). However, there are some who use this as an opportunity to feed back about a journey some days or weeks previous.

- Although valid from the passenger’s perspective, as described above we might wish to exclude this minority from any “main” reporting, for a cleaner read on passenger experience overall
- Note: we also saw that this trend was mainly only evident in the early days after promotional material was installed, after which most passengers talked about the journey they were making at the time – so what is already a minority here also looks likely to diminish fairly quickly

Engagement with the survey: “commitment”

Two thirds of survey respondents provide both a star rating and a full verbatim rationale around that rating; this level of engagement was maintained throughout this pilot study with no sign of waning.

Those leaving a comment were more likely to be female, travelling for work at busier times, and (linked to this) more likely to have negative journey experiences – or be more acutely impacted by a journey (or expect more from the service).

There was no indication that older people might struggle with the more lengthy type-in format (once they have engaged with the survey in the first place)



This perhaps confirms the value in **very short survey and question formats, and/or positioning an open-ended question nearer to the start** (and as optional), especially where capturing qualitative feedback is important.

Allowing very basic feedback (star rating) as the minimum may have helped secure feedback from the least "committed", while the open-end has not only picked up more detail, but provided an "outlet" for those who really want to say something more and in their own words.

Engagement with the survey: respondents

This approach looks to be a good way to collect feedback from groups that are traditionally harder to engage (younger people, commuters, fare payers, men), though it does also appear to somewhat underrepresent older passengers



This pattern must be acknowledged in any reporting output, and this type of approach may not be appropriate in solus, depending on the objectives at the time

In this pilot, there was some indication that these traditionally harder to engage groups were participating a little less over time



Overall, this effect was relatively minor and no real concern. It may also be possible to protect further against this in a live survey, with refreshment of the materials or additional promotion

A quarter of respondents did not provide more personal information about gender and disability. This appears to be linked to busier bus services (and varies by area) and is consistent with people – rightly – seeing this as a very quick, “review-style” feedback.



Providing that this level of engagement is reasonably consistent over time, in principle we do not see any major cause for concern in not being able to capture this information from this relatively small proportion of people

However, if we wished to weight any of the resulting data by these variables (as we have historically in the BPS, where data was weighted by gender among other factors), we would ideally collect more complete information here. We would need to look at the phrasing of the question, for example, to encourage as many as possible to provide this. *(In an approach like the one tested here, which is largely passenger-led, it may be appropriate not to weight the data – if the outputs were positioned as more of a light touch read on passenger experience, and providing the context is made clear. However, this learning on collecting data that might be used for weighting may be relevant in our other surveys.)*

The nature of responses: passenger sentiment

Passengers in this pilot gave rich feedback, demonstrating the range of feeling that sits behind a headline quantitative measure like a star rating (or a satisfaction scale). While rating scales are a useful way to summarise passenger experience, and to measure it consistently over time, these findings confirm the value in also allowing for a range of nuanced feeling in the questions we ask.

This “passive” way of triggering passenger feedback means that those who respond typically have “something to say” – meaning we hear about the more extreme examples of good and especially poor experience, and less about “ordinary” journeys.

This effect is exaggerated further among those “committing” fully to the survey and leaving full verbatim comments



Our passenger experience measurement more broadly should (continue to) include – and report regularly on – open-ended questions or research formats which allow passengers to feed back more qualitatively



- **Any reporting of this data must make this context clear, and distinguish it from feedback gathered using more deliberate recruitment methods**
- **This learning also extends to the use of open-ended questions where they are used in more structured surveys** – for example where we might use sentiment coding from verbatim responses to open-ended questions in YBJ*, perhaps reported more frequently than the “main” quantitative responses. The effect may not be so extreme in YBJ or similar surveys, where a wider sample of passenger experience is covered in the first place (and where the open text question might be different), but we might still expect verbatim feedback to be more negative overall than the sentiment captured with “easier”, more universally answered, ratings questions

There are parallels between this approach and the type of feedback that can be collected via social media or complaints feeds. Given the cost and time involved in setting up the survey and promotional material, this is a worthwhile consideration before implementing this method – and will depend on specific objectives. However, we do believe that this approach has advantages over social media monitoring, including that:

- It can be managed and reported on centrally, consistently and independently
- Feedback can be more targeted if needed, by asking specific questions on more focus topics
- Deliberately asking for feedback is likely to capture more, and wider range of response, than a more passive communication channel such as social media

**All of our review and piloting work has led to a proposed new passenger experience survey: “Your Bus Journey”. This will use a structured, quantitative questionnaire, which most respondents will complete online (with paper offered for those unable to do so), having being recruited in person as they make their bus journeys*

The nature of responses: what passengers talk about

Passengers' comments spanned a very wide range of topics, with emphasis on timing factors and the driver



- Arguments have been made that we can dispense with long, structured surveys that include questions on a number of topics, and instead allow key themes to come out more naturally; comments can be coded (using AI to facilitate scale), to enable quantification. The comprehensive range of topics arising in this short trial period certainly confirms this potential.
- **We have wider concerns about sample representativeness when using only an open-ended question(s) to make this genuinely appropriate as part of our very broad, industry- and nationwide passenger experience measurement** (as well as around logistics, management, and geographic consistency of a purely passenger-led recruitment approach), **but it may have a place in other, more specific contexts.** As always, the choice of research approach should be objectives-led.

Management: promotion on/off bus to optimise volume

Most people accessed the survey via a QR code they scanned on board, reflecting the balance of placement of the posters and stickers

Those accessing the survey while at the stop were more likely to be travelling for work, more negative (sometimes connected to the commuting context but not universally), and less likely to leave full comments. Inevitably these people talked more frequently about the experience at the stop, and the impact of waiting (too long) for buses.

Those accessing while on board had a wider range of journey contexts, represented a wider range of demographics, and were more likely to give more detailed responses (likely because they had more time, as they were already on the bus)

There is also some evidence that posters / stickers at stops and on-board may have worked together in some places, with at-stop promotion generating some awareness of the survey, and on-board promotion working as a full call to action

A small proportion (9%) accessed the survey via URL rather than QR code. These were typically older and more likely to be female, commuting and reporting that buses were busier – and a little more negative. As might be expected, these responses were less immediate, often given hours, a day, or more later. This also led to more detailed responses

It does not appear that one location worked harder than the other and so both (and indeed other touchpoints may also) have a potential role

The combination of at-stop and on-board promotion therefore appears to be important for inclusivity (different passenger types), and for capturing a broad range of experiences around travelling by bus (including those who perhaps don't manage to board, and those who may not be able to see the posters on board because it is more crowded at the times they travel)

When using a combination of touchpoints, this multiplication effect could potentially be dialled up further through the artwork design

Providing both QR code and URL options is worthwhile to give people options that suit them best, especially where buses are busier and scanning a QR code may feel conspicuous or anti-social. The time lag between journey and feedback is not sufficiently different to warrant any concern about quality, but given small differences in sentiment and respondent profile, if this approach was adopted we should monitor any variation in the proportions of QR vs URL access over time and by area, and take steps to normalise this (perhaps with weighting), or at least caveat for it, in reporting.

Management:

Learning from area variations to further inform optimisation

Response rate is unsurprisingly linked to level of crowding on board: this inevitably reduces visibility of posters/stickers, and perhaps makes people feel less comfortable to hold up a phone and scan a QR code



Where services are known to be very busy, this may further affect the mix of on / off bus promotion, as well as the placement of materials within vehicles

There was no clear evidence that window stickers worked differently to seat-back stickers (as used on Cornwall by Kernow services in this pilot)



Seat-backs (or a mix of seat-back and windows) might be a good option for more crowded services, or heavier footfall areas, to increase awareness of the survey

There is also no clear evidence about the efficacy of vehicle entrance posters (as used in Brighton and Hove and Liverpool). Though their effect is difficult to disentangle from other factors, these were not the strongest performing areas for response rate



Intuitively, and taking this together with the other findings across this project, **vehicle-entrance posters seem unlikely to have added strongly. Nevertheless, for more crowded services, it may be worth using other on-board poster spaces (including dynamic screens), i.e. where passengers may be standing, to increase opportunities to see the survey**

The flyer format used in Burnley was less efficient in generating response than stickers / posters as used elsewhere. This is partly because of likely lower visibility on board, and partly due to the nature of “take-away” format, meaning people were less likely to respond in the moment (and we know from other work that this means people are less likely to respond at all)



We would strongly recommend using promotion touchpoints which are within passengers’ eyeline and which lend themselves to immediate, in-the-moment response. We do however acknowledge that it is not always practical or desirable to put such material in passengers’ eyeline. Where this is the case, additional promotion work would be advisable to boost the efficacy of, for example, a flyer format, where this is the only option.

People in some areas are more open to taking part in surveys than others – we have also seen this across all of our other research



Areas which are known to see lower passenger engagement are likely to benefit even more from supporting promotion around a survey, and (depending on specific survey objectives) respondent incentives may also be worth considering

Management: the logistics of survey promotion

The pilot showed that there was a novelty period when the promotional materials were first installed, and there was some indication that passenger engagement might continue to wane over a longer period (this pilot took place over approximately three months)



In a live survey, we would expect to refresh the promotional posters and stickers at intervals to keep them visible. It would also be worthwhile to use other customer touchpoints to display the survey URL and QR code and / or to promote the survey

Producing promotional materials that will work in different contexts, for different operators and local authorities, is inevitably time consuming



If this approach was adopted at scale, this would need to be streamlined as far as possible, for example by setting out a limited set of format options which should work in most scenarios, from which partners could select the most appropriate

Operators and authorities that partnered with us in this pilot also spent time, and in many cases money, installing and removing the materials



This is likely to be more intensive in a live survey (since this pilot covered only a sample of vehicles / stops in each area), and is unlikely to be a one-off, since any refreshment of the materials will require additional installation / removal resource

Management: data preparation and cleaning

There were some inaccuracies in the topic and sentiment coding of some passenger comments in this pilot (this is to be expected to some extent, with non-human coding)



In a live survey we would require regular reviews of both topic and sentiment coding, with new codes introduced as needed, and bringing improvements to accuracy over time

The value for money in auto-coding the free-text responses would need to be investigated. This is cost effective when feedback is given at scale, but arguably less relevant if this feedback mechanism is not used widely nor over a significant time period

This “passive” way of gathering feedback from passengers also leaves some room for mis-use of the survey format, with some people giving nonsense, unconstructive, non-genuine, and even offensive comments



This pilot indicates that this is likely to be at a relatively low level, and so – assuming it remains at a low and consistent level so as not to undermine data trends – **to some extent this can be simply accepted as a feature of the methodology. However, some controls should be considered, for example:**

- Flags on use of certain offensive words, leading to manual decision on whether to remove or redact
- Flags on certain response patterns which are likely indicators of not taking the feedback seriously – e.g. late night survey completion, claimed age of 100+, etc.
- Warnings on using the data, if made available in the public domain
- Facility within any reporting platform to report offensive or un-constructive comments when they are found by users on an ad hoc basis
- Human quality checks (likely to be time- and cost-intensive, so other options pursued first)

Similarly, despite requests not to leave any personally identifiable information (PII), some respondents do so – usually to single out a member of staff, or because they hope to receive a direct response to their feedback



Unless a human quality check takes place between a passenger giving their response and the response being made available on any reporting platform(s) (which is unlikely), **flags and rules must be set up to identify such cases, enabling a manual decision to redact or suppress entirely**

Management: reporting and sharing results

Some partners to the pilot study queried how the “overall” sentiment score was derived, as this clearly is not a simple average across any individual sentence scores



If used on a large scale, and especially if stakeholders may use this type of data as an “interim” indicator of passenger satisfaction in between more formal survey reporting, more transparency may be required for those interested in the methodology in detail

While localised feedback from passengers can be highly valuable to specific operators and local authorities, it may not be constructive to make the full, free-text detail available publicly or even to all stakeholders or survey buyers



There is likely to be a case for restricting access, possibly in “tiers”, to allow wide visibility of the topics that matter to passengers, and potentially to headline sentiment results, and narrower access to the full detail, for authorised individuals or organisations. This also minimises the impact of PII being inadvertently shared.

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

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

We work to make a difference for all transport users.