



Trial of a passenger-led approach to collecting passenger feedback

Overall findings summary

May 2022

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- Summary

This report focuses on what we heard from passengers themselves during this pilot. We provide a snapshot here of our learnings about the methodology itself, but a separate report provides full details on this.



Piloting a passenger-led approach to measuring experience

Background

- Covid-19 caused a break in our passenger surveys, like the Bus Passenger Survey (BPS).
- During this time the government also brought in changes to the way that bus 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.
- **Transport Focus took the opportunity during 2020-21 to review the way we measure passenger experience. This has included trialling some possible future approaches to insight collection, as in this study.**

Objectives

To **trial a different approach to collecting feedback**, which 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:

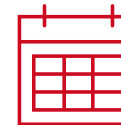
- **The practical delivery of this approach:** The invitations, survey mechanics, outputs
- **Viability:** How many people respond, and who (and who is missed)?
- **The nature of response:** Is it comprehensive, insightful and useful? (Does it provide more in-the-moment understanding of journey experiences?)

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.

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 promo material

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 / GCB 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

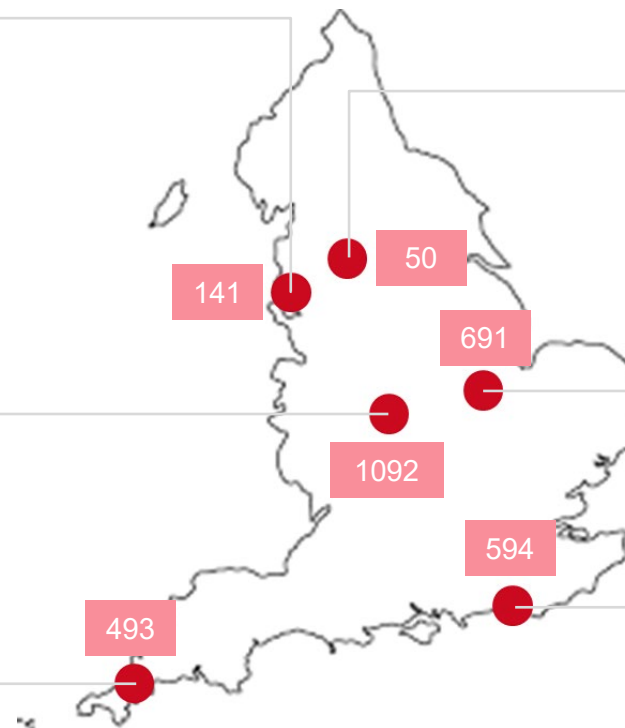
 A5 window stickers (c. 5 per deck)

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)



In total, **3,061** passengers responded during our main "live" period

What we heard from passengers

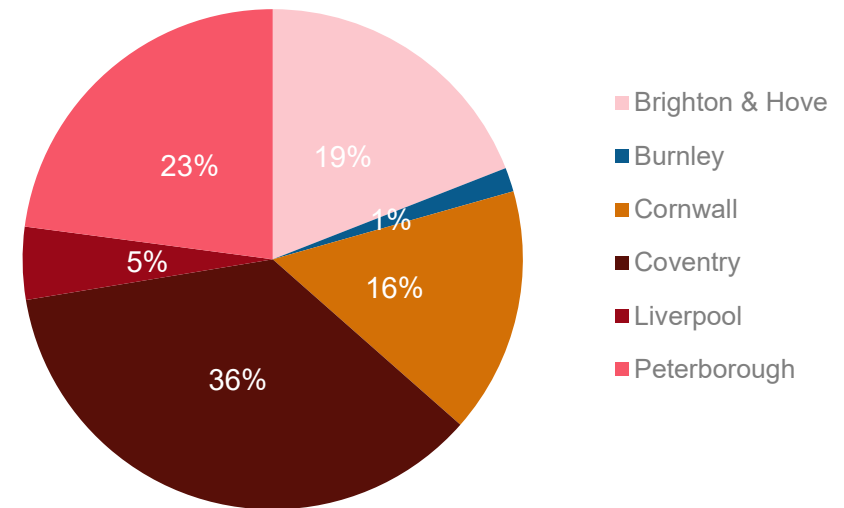
1. Context setting



About these results

Results shown in this report are based upon the following definitions:

- Date of survey completion was **between 20 September and 28 November 2021** (our official fieldwork period)
- **Surveys were completed on the same date as the journey was made** (this accounted for 93% of all responses; for the purpose of these results, the 7% made on different days are removed)
- **No further data cleaning applied** – so some responses included may not be a genuine, or properly considered assessment of a bus journey
- **The vast majority of responses (71%) came from passengers responding to survey materials displayed on board buses.** The remainder came from passengers responding to posters or stickers displayed at stops or stations
- (Where results are broken down by on or off bus materials, these exclude those for Liverpool due to a coding error)
- The largest share of responses came from passengers in Coventry, with relatively few from Liverpool and Burnley



Base: All responding to the survey, 20/09/21 – 28/11-21, where the response was given on the same day as the journey (2833)

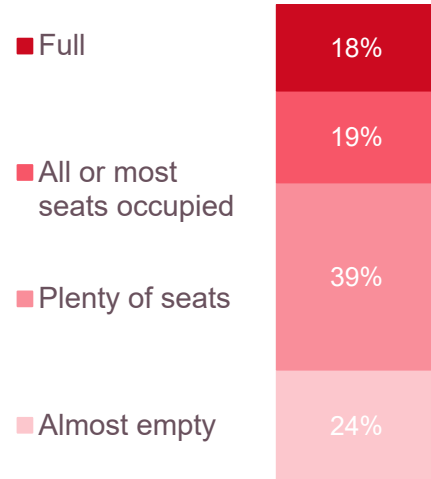
Journey context

Those completing the survey were generally on quieter buses.

With the exception of Sunday, responses were evenly spread across the week; journeys starting in the morning and afternoon peaks accounted for over half of the weekday feedback.

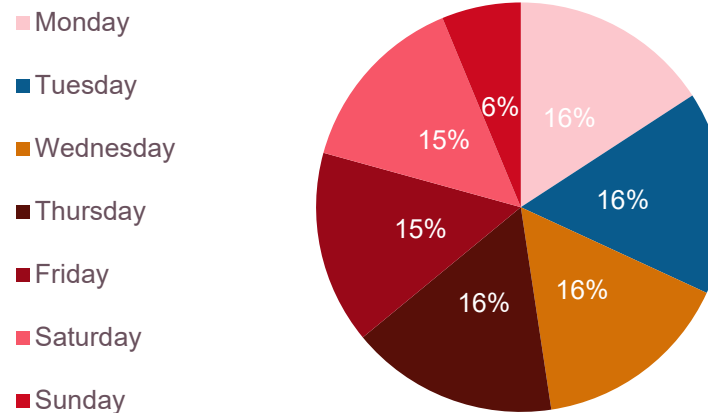
How busy was the bus

% as reported by passengers themselves, who entered the survey



Day of week of journey

% as reported by passengers themselves, who entered the survey



Base: All responding to the survey, 20/09/21 – 28/11-21, where the response was given on the same day as the journey and answering this question (crowding:2692, day:2833, boarding time:2822)

Passenger context

The majority of feedback related to journeys to work or education and using paid for tickets rather than concessionary passes. Almost a quarter of responses came from 16-18 year olds.

Demographic and journey details

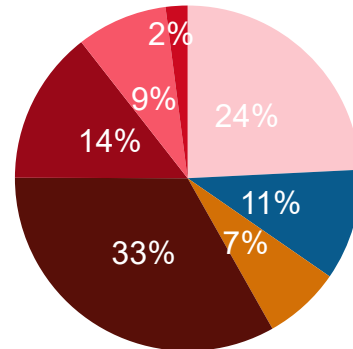
%



60%
commuting
to work or
education



83% paid for
a ticket / pass



16-18 19-21 22-24 25-44
45-59 60-79 80+



51% female
41% male



28% any
disability or
health
condition

Base: All responding to the survey, 20/09/21 – 28/11/21, where the response was given on the same day as the journey and answering this question (journey purpose:2810; ticket type:2776; age band:2833; gender:2142; disability:2140)

What we heard from passengers

2. How passengers rated their journeys

“Consciously”, and in quantified sentiment derived from passenger’s own words



Passengers' star rating for their journeys

“Conscious” journey feedback was highly polarised, with most passengers indicating their journey was either great, or very disappointing – and with a negative emphasis overall

Journey rating

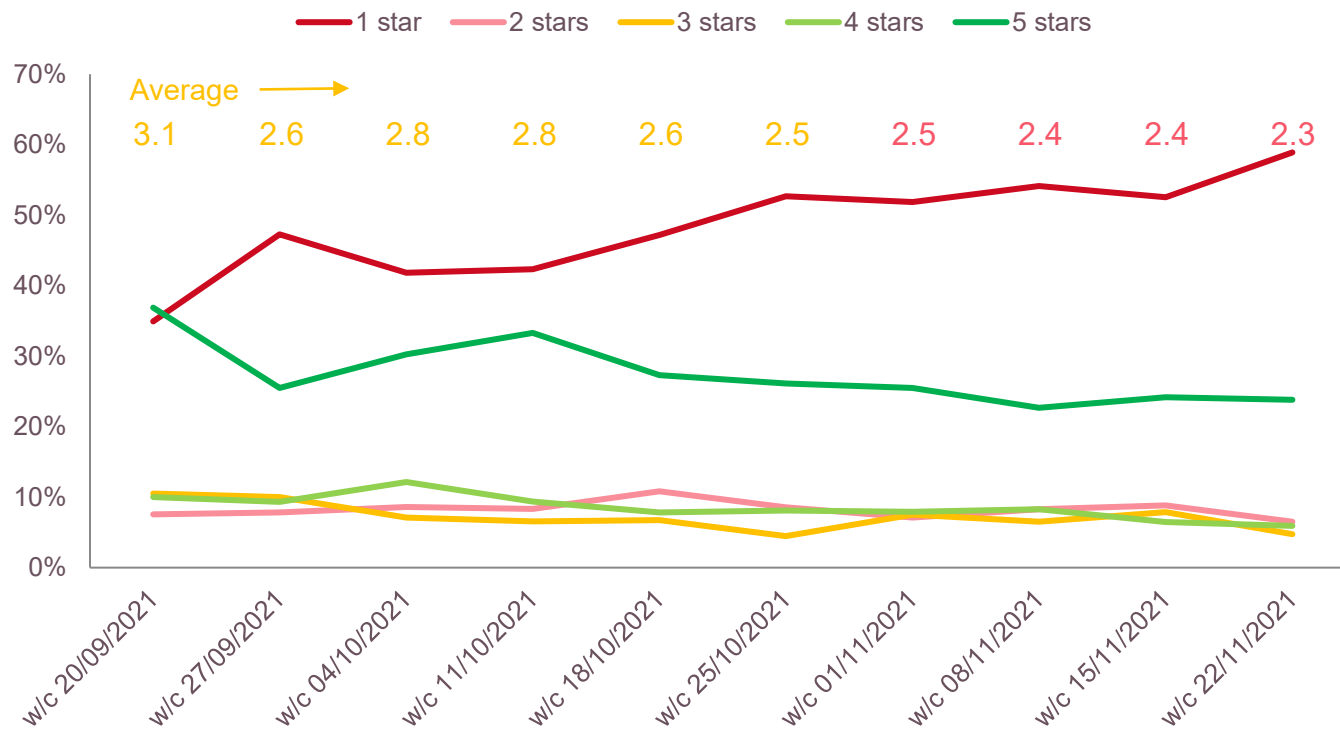
% (where 1 star is very negative, and 5 stars are very positive)



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

5-star ratings over time

After the initial few weeks average ratings fell as more 1 star ratings were given and fewer 5 star ratings



This deterioration in passenger experience could be due to a combination of factors, including the weather and its impact on people's journeys as we moved further into the winter, and some real change in service, perhaps due to driver shortages which affected all transport and logistics industry at this time. Other more localised factors may also have been at play.

Note: if this trend was due to research method effects, we would perhaps expect the opposite, since we also saw a slight trend towards reporting more historic journeys earlier on in the pilot (where people took the opportunity to complain about previous journeys) to more consistent focus on "today's" journey in the later weeks. The data shown here is also normalised to take this effect out. We therefore do believe this to reflect genuine decrease in passenger satisfaction over this period.

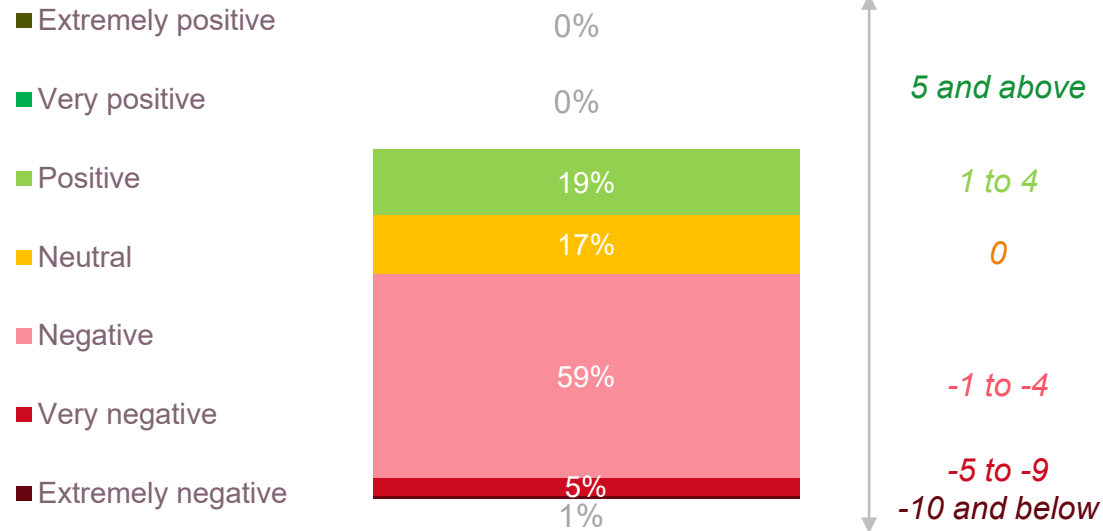
Base: All responding to the survey, 20/09/21 – 28/11/21, where the response was given on the same day as the journey and answering this question (overall:2833; w/c20/09:409; w/c27/09:459; w/c04/10:337; w/c11/10:288; w/c18/10:267; w/c25/10:222; w/c01/11:239; w/c08/11:229; w/c15/11:215; w/c22/11:168)

Sentiment derived from passengers' free-text responses

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

Sentiment bands % (summarised from sentiment code)

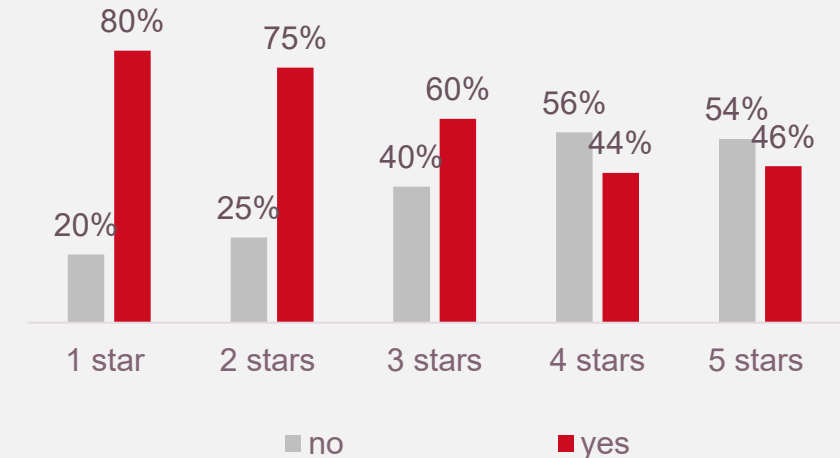
See following page for an illustration of how sentiment coding was applied



Note: full comments are more likely to be given by those having poorer journey experiences, so we might expect the nature of comments to be more negative overall, and not wholly reflective of all experiences

% providing verbatim comment, by those rating their journey overall with...

(in addition to mandatory star rating)



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)
 1 star (1467), 2 stars (196), 3 stars (140), 4 stars (114), 5 stars (384)

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	

What we heard from passengers

3. Diagnosing journey ratings and sentiment further:

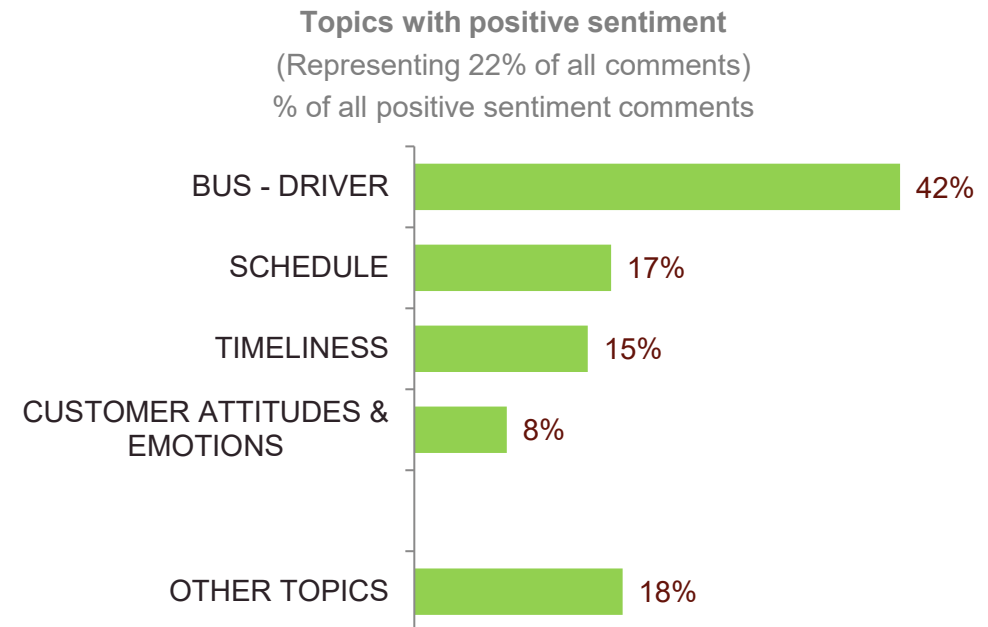
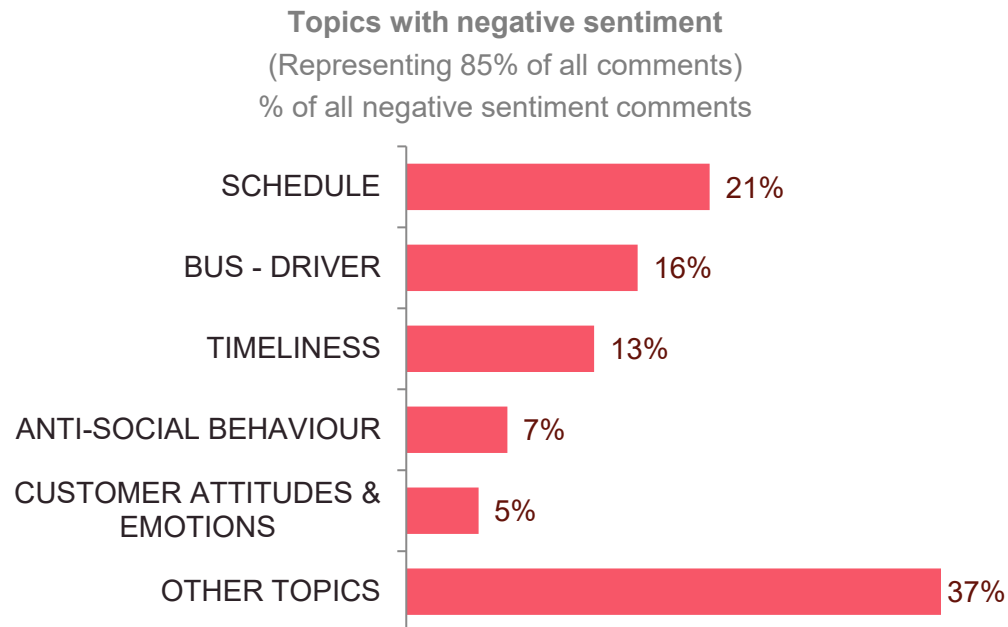
What passengers told us about their experience

Which passengers fared better and worse



Top topics within passengers' comments

Passengers' comments spanned a very wide range of topics, with emphasis on timing factors and the driver. All of these topics are associated with both negative and positive comments, confirming their importance to passengers – but impressions of the driver in particular may make a real difference in creating a positive journey experience, when other factors may be outside operators' control.

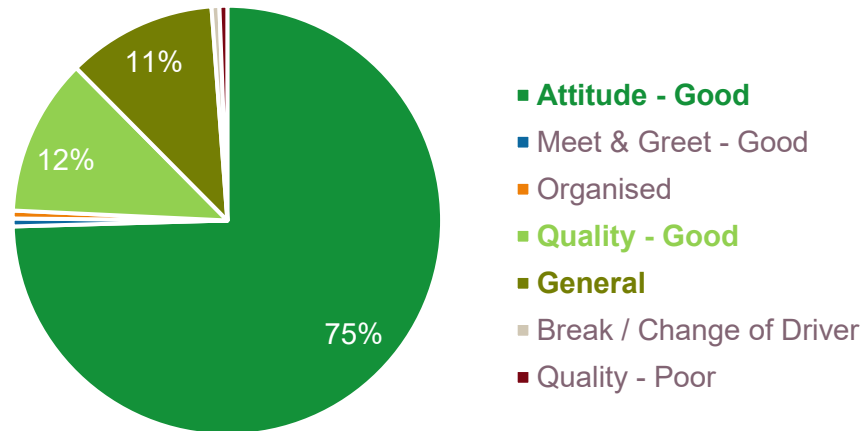


Base: topic mentions by respondents leaving a verbatim comment, 20/09/21 – 28/11/21, where the response was given on the same day as the journey:
With negative comments (1583), with positive comments (398)

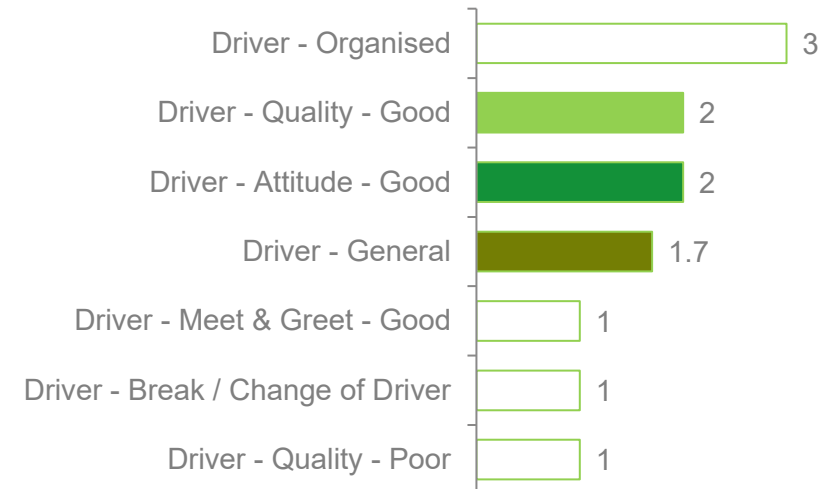
Understanding positive comments about drivers

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



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



Base: Comments for journeys / responses 20/09/21 – 28/11/21, where the response was given on the same day as the journey
All comments on **driver** with positive sentiment (169)

More detail on passengers' positive comments about drivers

Drivers praised for their attitude are those who acknowledge individual passengers and their needs. Quality driving is about the process itself, but again demonstrating an interest in individuals is an expected part of the service for passengers.

...and some notice what drivers are dealing with, so keeping a professional demeanour is worthwhile, as some will appreciate it

Example comments: Subtopics about driver, where overall sentiment is positive

Attitude – good

*Nice polite driver answered my question about my destination
Acknowledged me face to face*

Peterborough, other journey purpose, Tues 9am-3pm

*The driver ...was really helpful when my actual bus was late
due to bad weather. He even called the depot to check where it
was, advised me of a website you can track buses. All of this
was un prompted even though he was obviously about to have
a break before continuing his route. Very kind and helpful.*

Cornwall, commuting, Weds 3-6pm

*Driver was very friendly and waiting for me to seat down.
Excellent service.*

Brighton & Hove, shopping, Fri 9am-3pm

*Bus was delayed so missed my connecting bus. Driver was
polite, bus clean so 4 stars for that*

Coventry, commuting, Fri after 6pm

Quality – good

*Very pleasant driver greeted me
when my wife and I got on
he drove the bus comfortably
and wasn't rushing as some do!
And I noticed he said hello and
goodbye to every passenger*

*Brighton & Hove, shopping, Tues 3-
6pm*

*Really nice bloke the driver
was, waited to let us on :)*

*Cornwall, another journey purpose, Fri
after 6pm*

General

*Bus driver is working so hard despite working
from 6! You're doing a great job mate and
have a good attitude. Sorry things are tough.*

Peterborough, shopping, Sat 3-6pm

*The driver was very friendly and polite.... He
also waited and stayed well back from a
horse ...then waited for the rider to pull off the
road in a lay-by and slowly rolled past
ensuring not to spook the horse.*

Cornwall, shopping, Sat 3-6pm

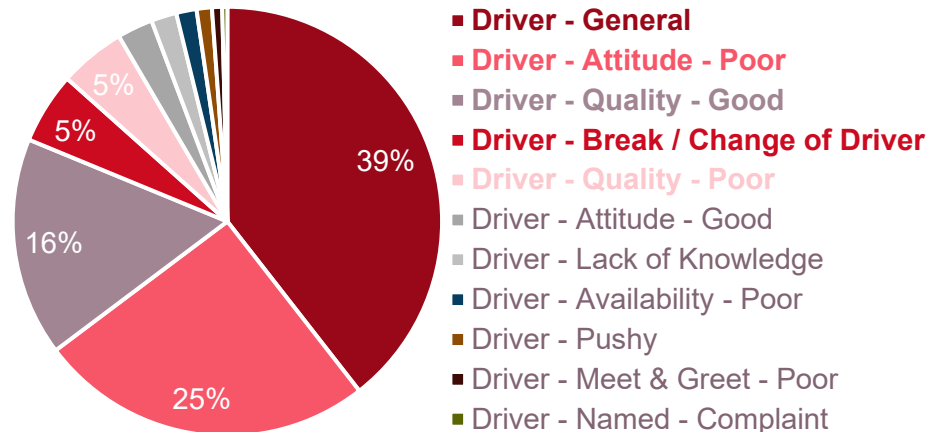
*They are trying to manage tricky situation with
shortage of drivers and heavy traffic in
Manchester city centre. The buses and
drivers are first class.*

Burnley, other journey purpose, Sat 9am-3pm

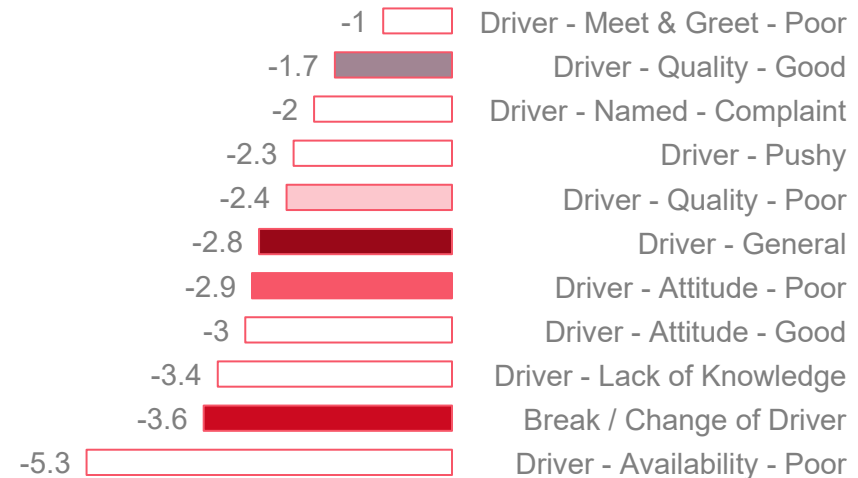
Understanding negative comments about drivers

Passengers have a range of complaints about drivers, largely relating to attitude and passenger interaction. Two areas in particular which – though relatively less common – really get passengers exercised, are the way shift changes are managed, and perceived lack of driver resourcing generally.

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



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



Base: Comments for journeys / responses 20/09/21 – 28/11/21, where the response was given on the same day as the journey
All comments on **driver** with negative sentiment (261)

More detail on passengers' negative comments about drivers

“General” negative comments about drivers span not being able board at all, difficulty when boarding / sitting, drivers' response in the context of other service problems, and perceived erratic driving.

When passengers complain about drivers' attitude, it's usually about perceived rudeness. Passengers are especially unforgiving towards drivers when they are already affected by service issues – more professionalism and empathy would likely go a long way.

As the “face” of the service, drivers can help to redeem difficult journeys a little, but also get the blame for unexpected changes to services

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

Driver – general

I was running to the bus.... The driver saw me but pretended not to and drove straight past me.

Cornwall, other journey purpose, Tues 3-6pm

Driver kept speeding off as soon as someone showed their ticket or paid so people kept almost falling. I have a leg injury and I nearly fell. He also kept randomly accelerating and breaking every second or so.

Peterborough, other journey purpose, Tues after 6pm

Attitude – poor

The driver was rude.

Brighton & Hove, commuting, Tues 9am-3pm

Bus was late, then had to get off, no apologies from driver, just moaned at because I asked why..

Peterborough, other journey purpose, Fri 9am-3pm

Driver – Quality, good

The driver was excellent considering the circumstances. The bus a double decker, was far too large for the roads.

Cornwall, other journey purpose, Thurs 9am-3pm

Break / change of driver / route

Once again the bus company decided to take a bus off without any notice or communication to passengers! ...Leaving people stranded at a bus station at midnight in the cold proves they do not care about their customers or their poor drivers. The man who was driving the 1am bus had to deal with a lot of angry people when it wasn't his fault.

Burnley, commuting, Sat after 6pm

Driver – Quality, poor

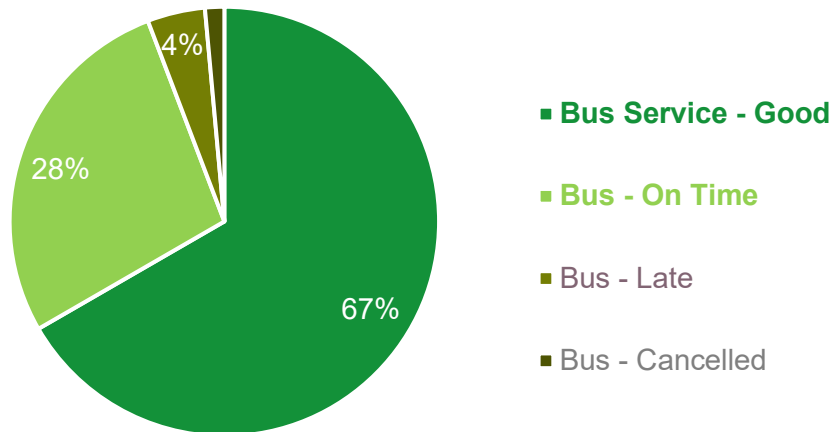
The driver of the bus failed to wait until we both sat down and my friend fell over. I suggest that all your drivers are informed of this and be more attentive to the passengers, we're both seniors. Thank you..

Peterborough, Shopping, Sat 9am-3pm

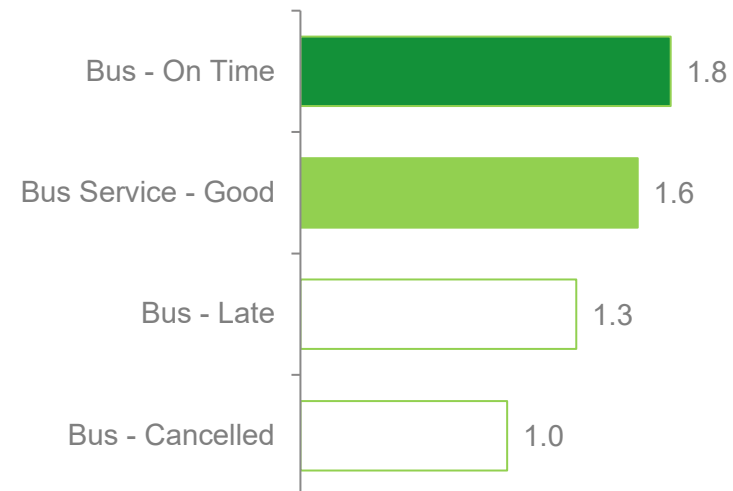
Understanding positive comments about scheduling / timing

Where passengers have good things to say about their bus schedule, they don't reach quite the same degree of enthusiasm as they sometimes do about drivers – running an effective timetable is more often than not simply expected

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



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

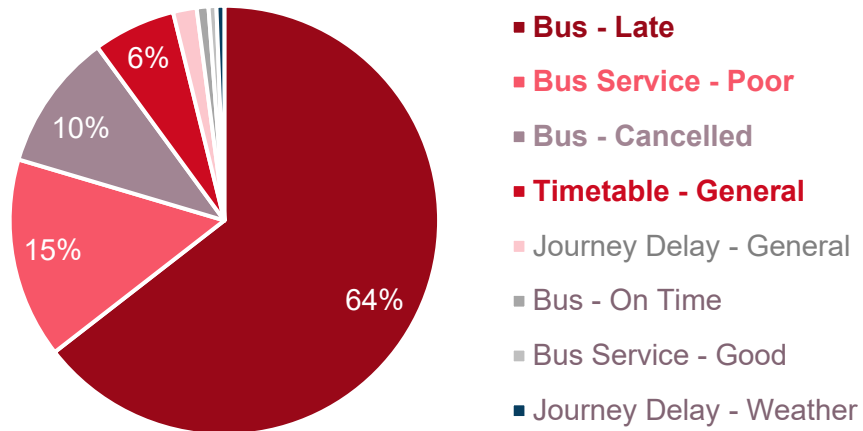


Base: Comments for journeys / responses 20/09/21 – 28/11/21, where the response was given on the same day as the journey
All comments on **schedule** with positive sentiment (69)

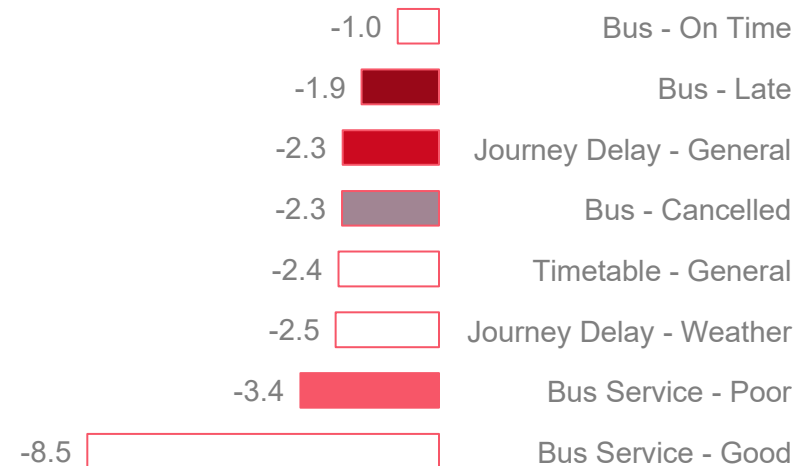
Understanding negative comments about scheduling / timing

Late running or cancelled bus services are the most common theme across all of passengers' feedback, and causes passengers to run high

Subtopics about schedule, where overall sentiment is negative
% of comments about schedule



Subtopics about schedule, where overall sentiment is negative
Sentiment score for subtopics about schedule



Base: Comments for journeys / responses 20/09/21 – 28/11/21, where the response was given on the same day as the journey
All comments on **schedule** with negative sentiment (338)

More detail on passengers' comments about timing

People appreciate when timetabling and routes work for them, and once that is in place, when journeys simply go “to plan”

Example comments: Subtopics about schedule, where sentiment is positive

Bus service – good

Great service from the hospital to Hampton, shame more people don't know about it 😊

Peterborough, commuting, Sat 9am-3pm

Bus – on time

Interesting now I can track the bus on my app, service excellent as always, on time 🙌.

Peterborough, commuting, Thurs 9am-3pm

The bus was on time and the bus journey went according to plan.

Cornwall, other journey purpose, Weds 9am-3pm

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

Example comments: Subtopics about schedule, where sentiment is negative

Bus – late

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 7-9am

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

Always late or does not turn up. Roads empty, all other buses on time. Really poor service

Liverpool, commuting, Sun 7-9am

Bus – cancelled

This is the third bus cancelled in the past 2 days which is ridiculous. At least we should be notified about it. I've been late to work countless of times in the past month because of cancelled buses.

Brighton & Hove, commuting, Thurs before 7am

Passengers' star ratings: groups with poorest experiences

Passengers' journey ratings varied greatly, reflecting patterns we have seen in other research.

Those expressing the poorest experiences included those still waiting at their stop, those travelling at the busiest times, and those reporting a disability or health condition

Journey rating: groups where more than half of passengers gave only one star
%

"Off bus"
(Those accessing survey while waiting at stop)



64%

Before 7am



52%

3-6pm



53%

After 6pm



64%

Full bus



67%

Commuters



52%

Disabled



50%

Response sentiment was especially variable at the end of the school day, with a small number of extremely negative comments.

Weekend travellers were also typically more positive than on weekdays – though with some polarisation on Sundays where a quarter of passengers had something very negative to say

Age 25-54: 54%

Summary



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.



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

Contact Transport Focus

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Transport Focus is the operating name of the Passengers' Council

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- 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.