



Rail passenger views on printed timetables

November 2022

Introduction

During the Covid pandemic, the rail industry paused the production of printed timetables, booklets and posters. Transport Focus accepted that the frequent changes to the timetable at that time made printing them problematic in the short term. There was a significant risk of providing inaccurate information to passengers.

To help inform future decisions Transport Focus wanted to know how passengers felt about printed timetables and how they might be impacted if they were no longer provided. We also wanted to understand how far in advance of travel online timetable information should be accurate.

We surveyed just under 5000 passengers who had made at least one train journey in the last year.

Key findings: printed timetable information

- Over half of the respondents (66 per cent) say that they plan all of their train journeys.
- Of those who plan at least some of their journeys, 70 per cent use website journey planners to do this. 15 per cent or fewer use printed timetable booklets or timetable posters at the station to plan.
- Just over a third say that they have never used a printed timetable booklet or timetable poster. However, of those, 28 per cent said that they could see a time when they might use a printed poster, and 18 per cent a printed timetable booklet.
- Whilst over half (62 per cent) say that they would be unaffected if printed timetable booklets were no longer available, around a third say that this would make things more difficult for them to some extent. There is a 50/50 split between those who say that they would be unaffected and those who say they would find things more difficult if timetable posters were unavailable.
- Although timetable booklets and station timetable posters are used by relatively small numbers of passengers, many others think that this material should continue to be produced. Regardless of the cost, impact to the environment and the availability of the information online. 49 per cent say this regarding timetable booklets, and 64 per cent say this regarding timetable posters.

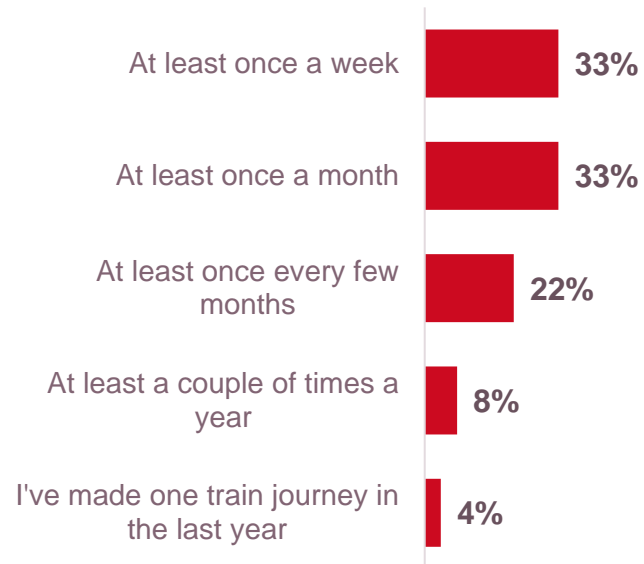
Key findings: publishing timetable information

- When planning train journeys the majority look at train times and ticket prices less than six weeks before they travel. Passengers are more likely to plan further in advance when thinking about making leisure trips.
- Over half (62 per cent) have had the experience of looking for train timetable and fare information in advance of a journey only to find this information unavailable.
- While there are variations by passenger journey type, around a third think the timetables should show correctly more than 12 weeks before trains run. A third think timetables should show correctly 12 weeks before trains run, and a further third eight weeks in advance of travel.
- Around half (53 per cent) think that it is better if online journeys planners wait until the timetable is confirmed before selling tickets. However, 40 per cent are happy for online journey planners to show draft timetables, even if that means tickets are sold for trains that are later cancelled or retimed.

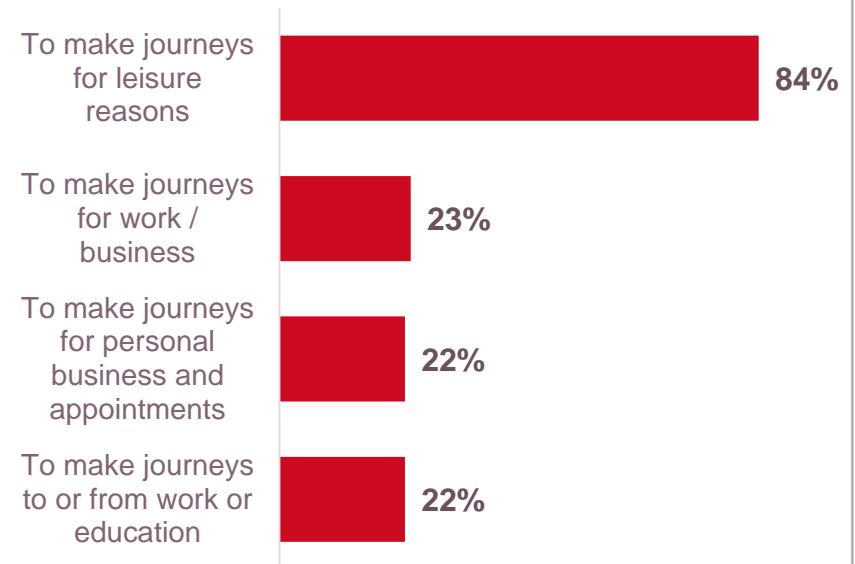
Train journey planning: printed timetable booklets and posters at stations

Two thirds are making journeys by train at least once a month – the majority of journeys are made for leisure reasons

How often, approximately, are you making journeys by train at the moment?



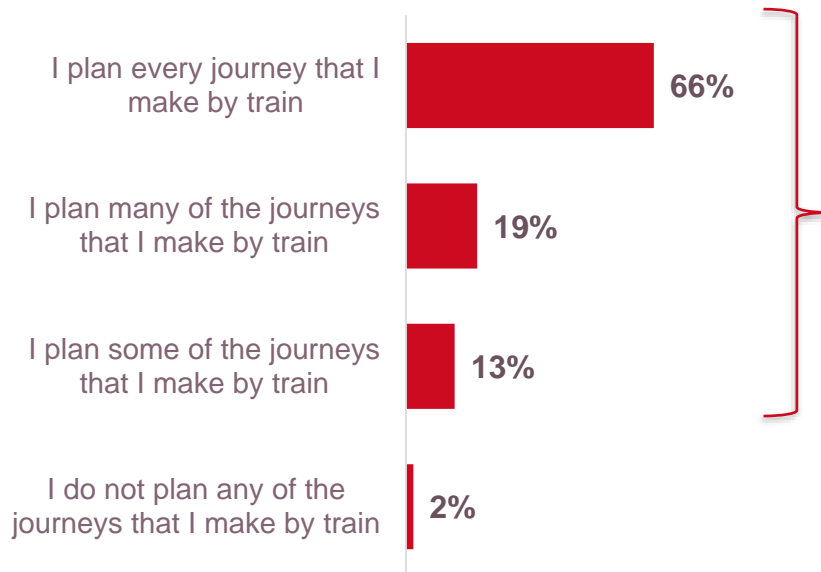
When you've made journeys by train, for what reasons have you been travelling?



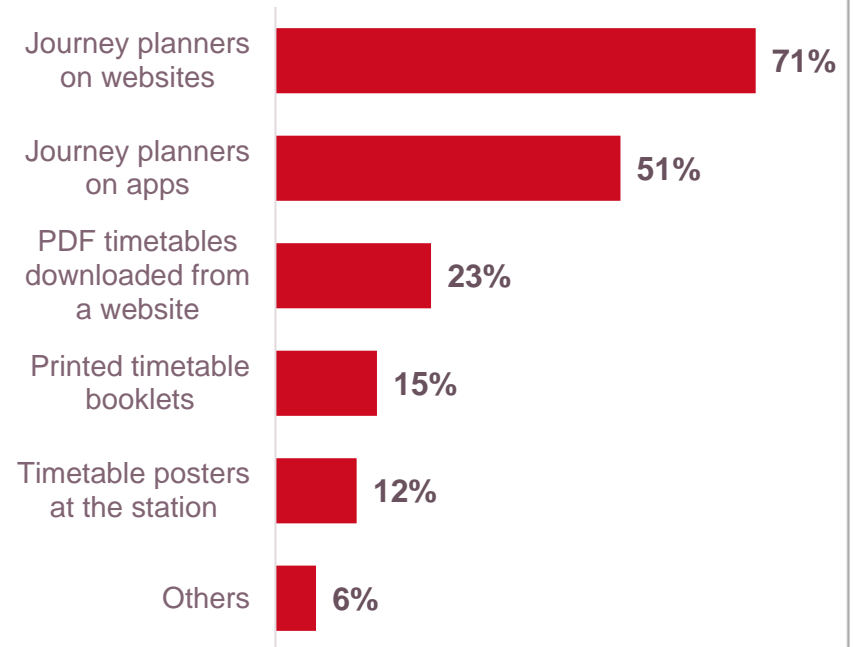
Base: All Respondents (4,815).

Two thirds plan every journey that they make by train. The majority use journey planners on websites in order to do this.

How often, approximately, do you spend time planning the journeys that you make?



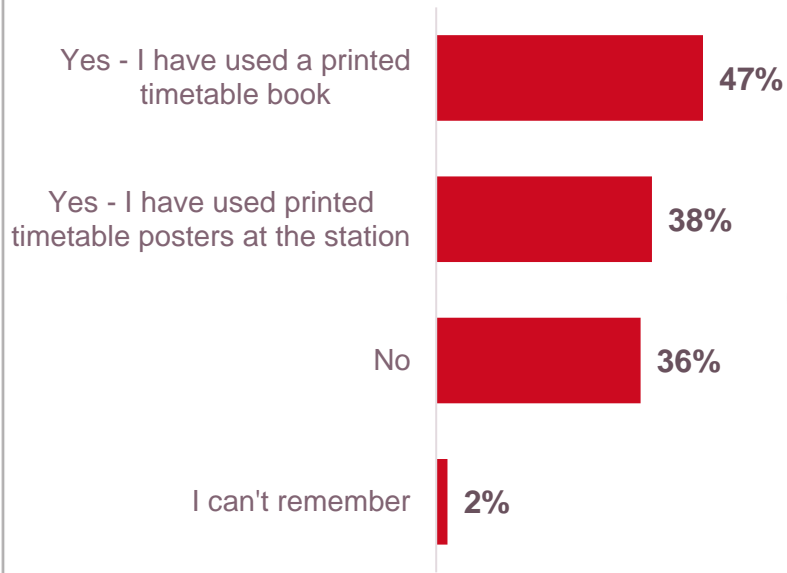
When you plan your train journey, which of the following do you use at least some of the time?



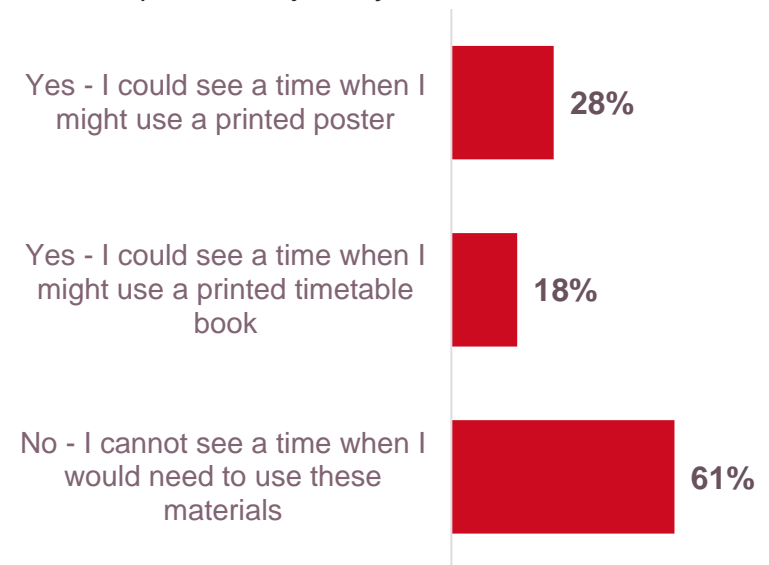
Base: All Respondents (4,815). All those who plan at least some of the train journeys that they make (4,716).

Almost half have previously used printed timetables books to plan journeys and almost two in five have used a printed timetable poster at the station. Around two in five of those who have not used these printed materials could see a time when they might use them.

Have you ever used a printed timetable book or printed timetable posters at the station to plan a train journey?



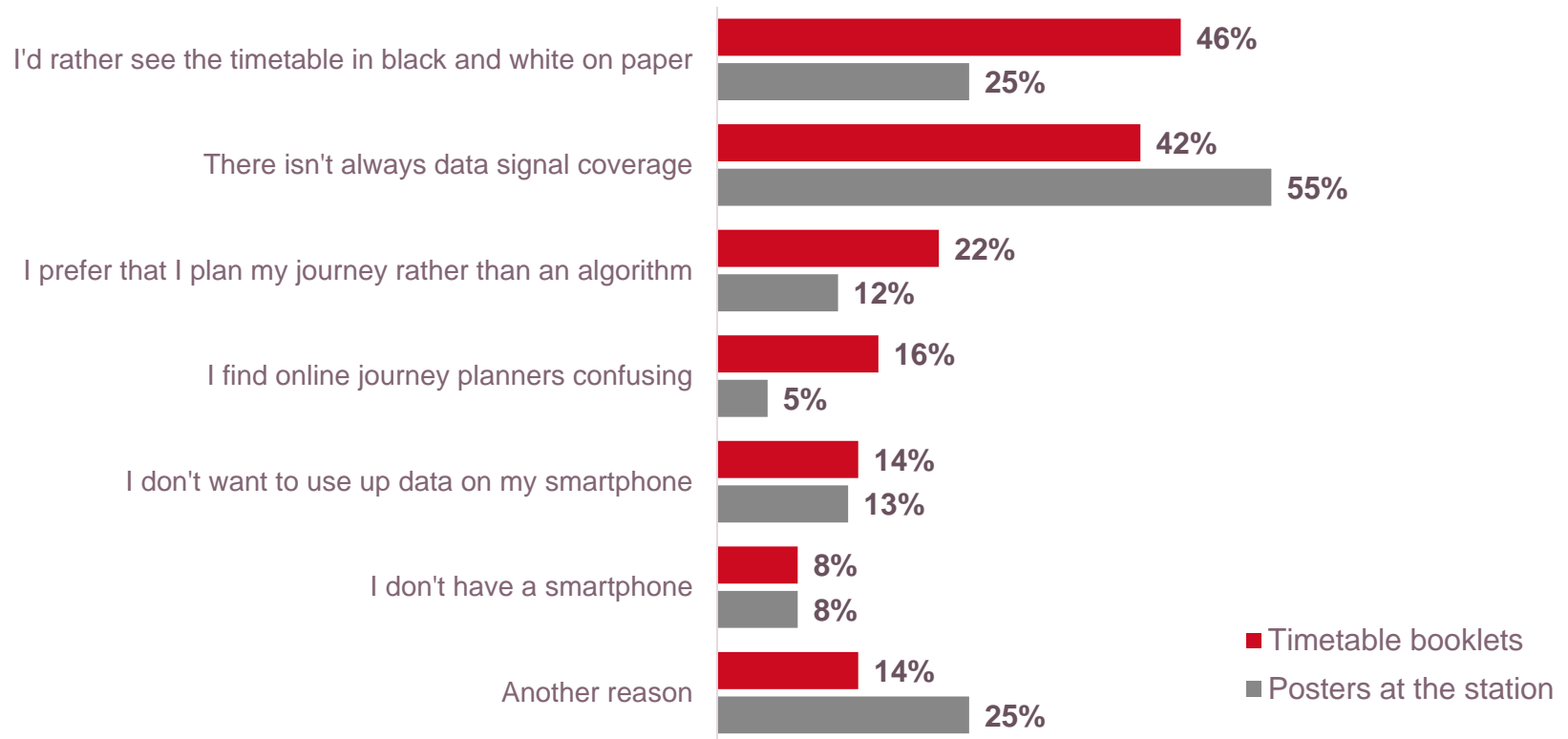
Can you see any occasion that you would ever use a printed timetable book or printed timetable poster at the station to plan a train journey?



Base: All Respondents (4,815). Those who have not, or can't remember using printed timetable booklets / posters (1,832)

Almost half say that they might use a printed booklet because they'd rather see the timetable in black and white. More than a half say that they might use a poster because there isn't always data signal coverage.

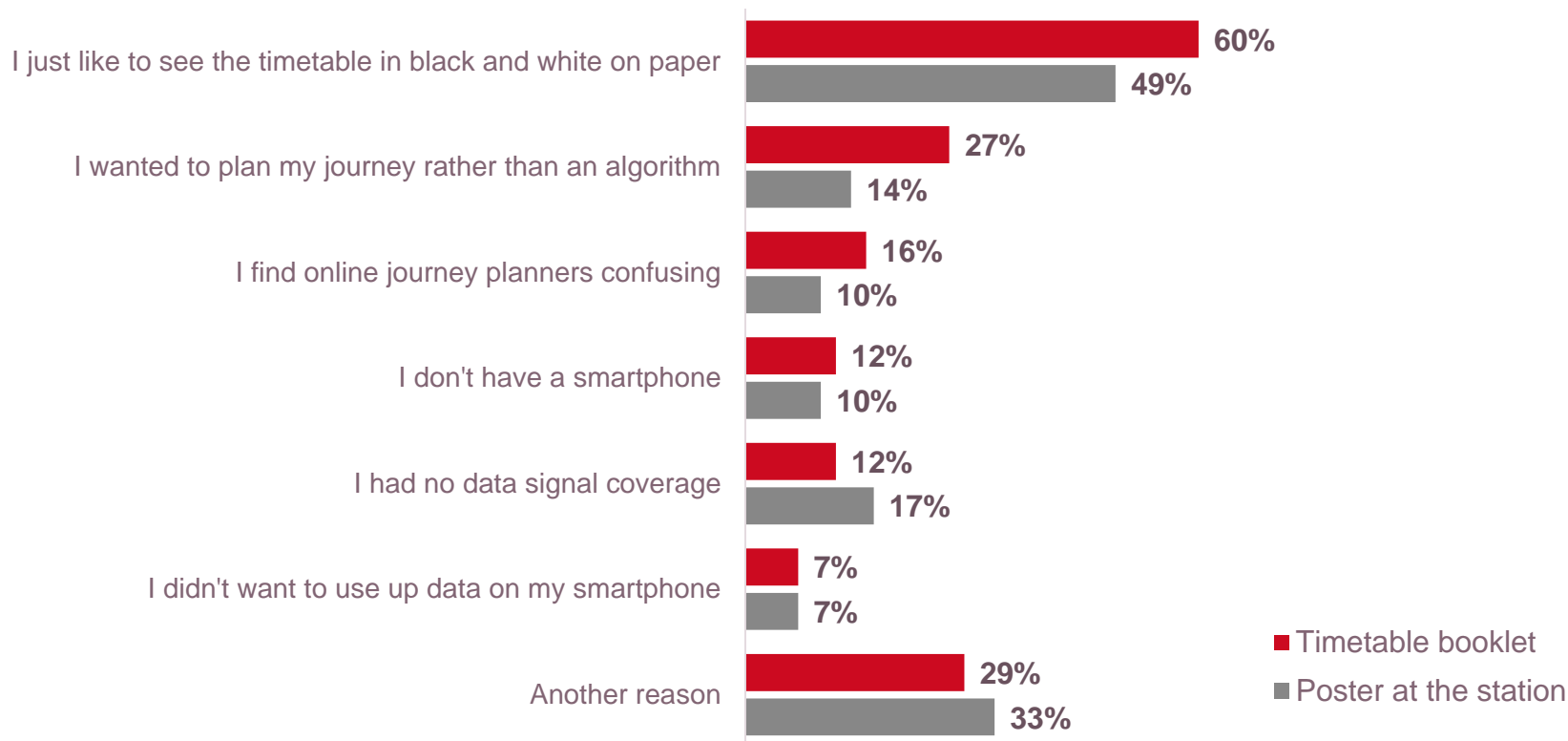
Which of the following reasons best describes why you might use a printed timetable booklet / poster at the station to plan your journey?



Base: All those who can see an occasion when they might use a printed timetable booklet / poster at the station (519 / 322).

Three in five of those who have used a booklet, and half of those who used a poster at the station, last did so because they just like to see the timetable on black and white on paper.

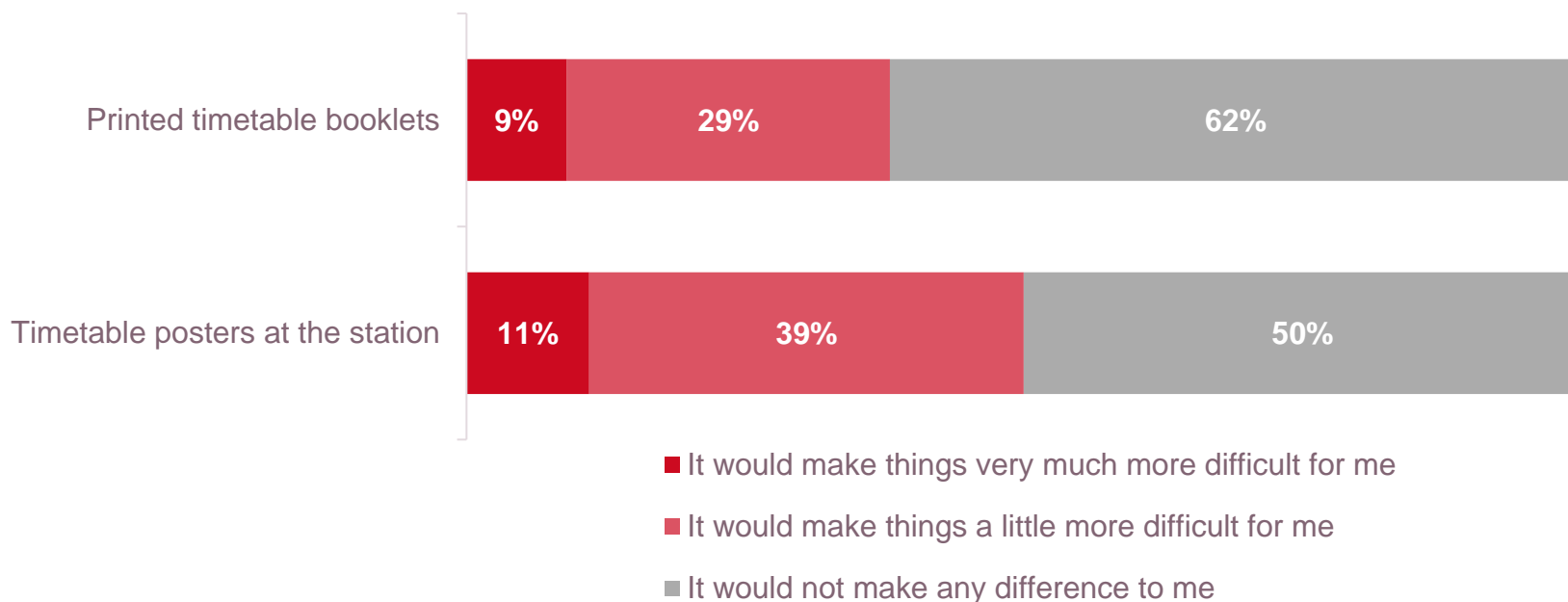
Which of the following reasons best describes the reason that you used a printed timetable booklet / poster at the station on the last occasion that you did so?



Base: All those who have used a printed timetable booklet / poster at the station (2,287 / 1,807).

Three in five say that they would be unaffected if printed timetable booklets were unavailable, while half say the same about timetable posters. Around one in ten say that they would find things much more difficult if these materials were unavailable.

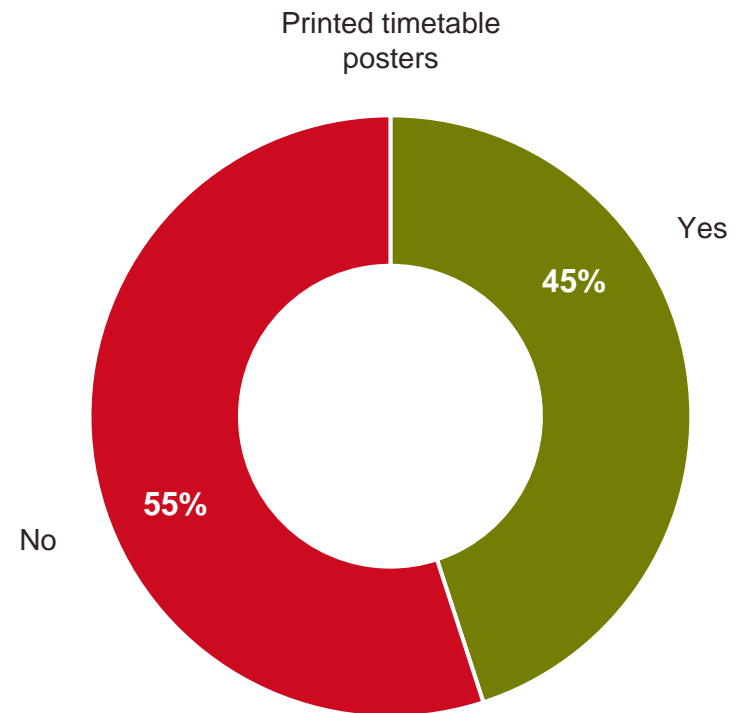
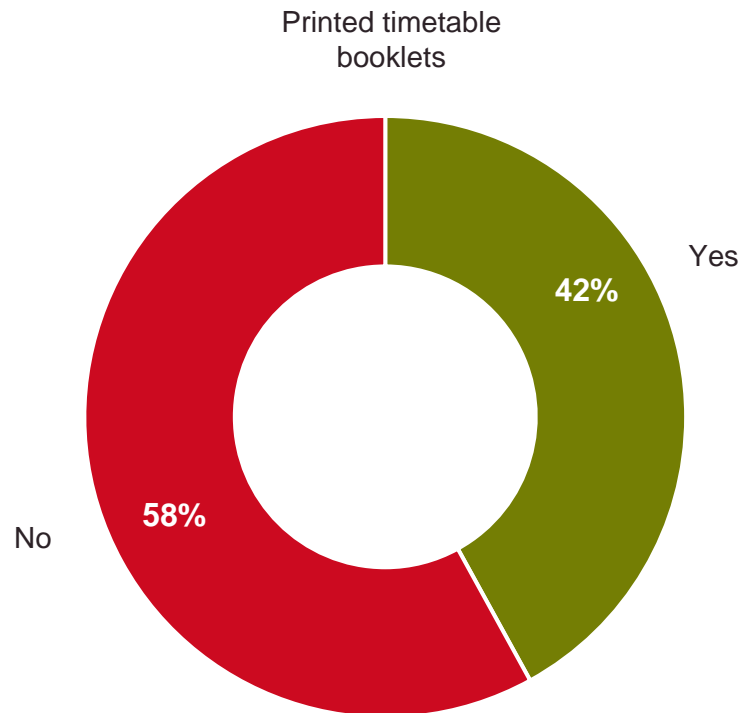
To what extent do you think it would make things more difficult for you if printed timetable booklets or timetable posters were not available at stations?



Base: All Respondents (4815).

More than half say that they do not know anyone who might find things more difficult if printed timetable booklets were unavailable; the same proportion say the same about printed timetable posters.

...And do you know anyone else who might find things more difficult if printed timetable booklets and/or timetable posters were not available at stations?



Base: All Respondents (4815).

Respondents outlined various types of people they thought might find things more difficult if printed timetable booklets or timetable posters were unavailable, or reasons that these materials might be useful.

Printed timetable booklets

"People who don't have a smartphone, people who don't understand journey planners, people with vulnerabilities such as learning difficulties, places with limited broadband coverage."

"Printed timetables allow more independent decision making e.g. having a longer/shorter time to change trains."

"It's useful to be able to see an entire service in tabular form rather than just what an app or website decides to show. Especially as they normally only show a few services at once. I also know a few people who do not have smartphones and several more who find them difficult to use beyond the basics of calling and texting."

Printed timetable posters

"If they don't have smartphones/internet then alternative data sources are needed, especially for stations without staff or departure boards as they wouldn't even have the current information."

"Not everyone can access the info on their phone. There is a massive assumption that everyone can but it's incorrect."

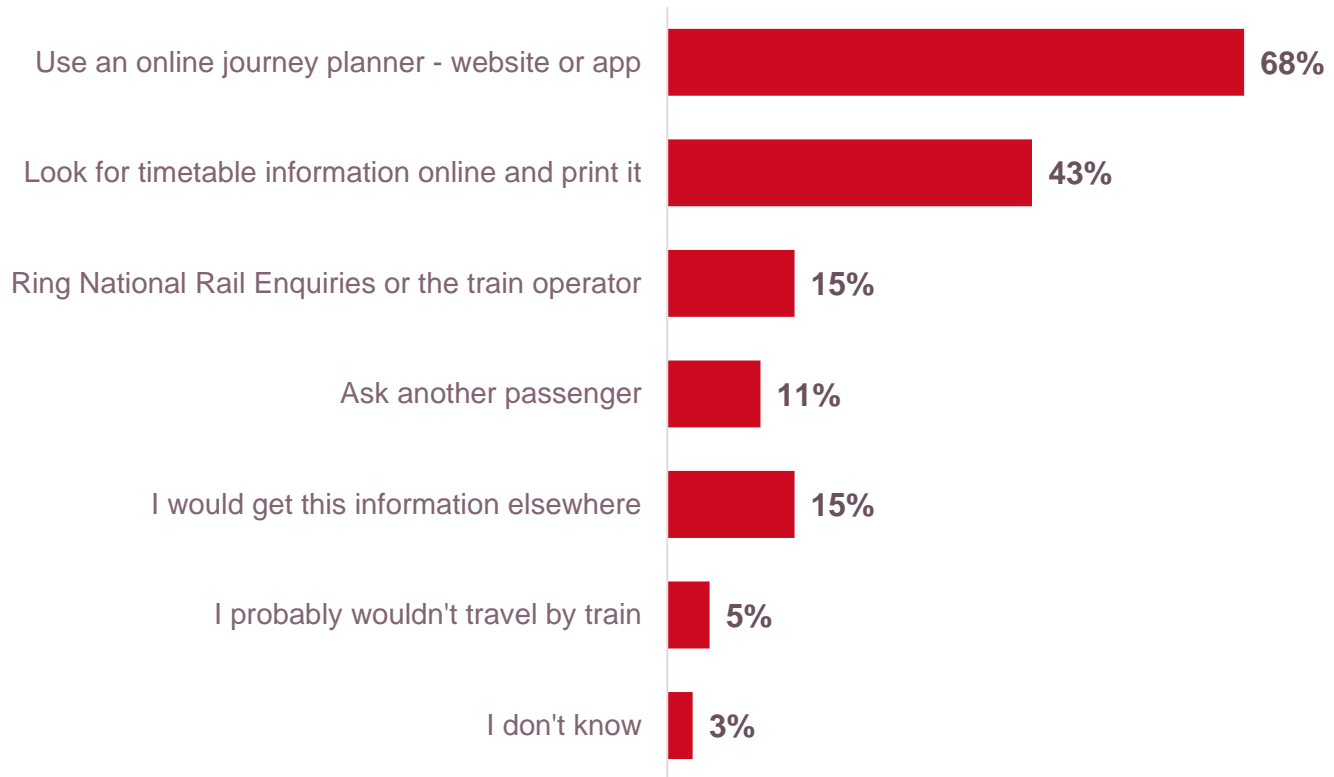
"I live in a tourist town where people (lots of them from overseas) come in for day trips and lots of the tourists use the timetable to know when they can return to their accommodation."

"Sometimes arrive at stations when the electronic boards aren't working and need to find my train."

Base: All those who know someone who might find things more difficult if timetable booklets/posters at the station were unavailable (2204 / 2162).

More than two thirds of those who say that they would find it more difficult if timetable booklets were unavailable say that they would use an online journey planner as an alternative in this scenario.

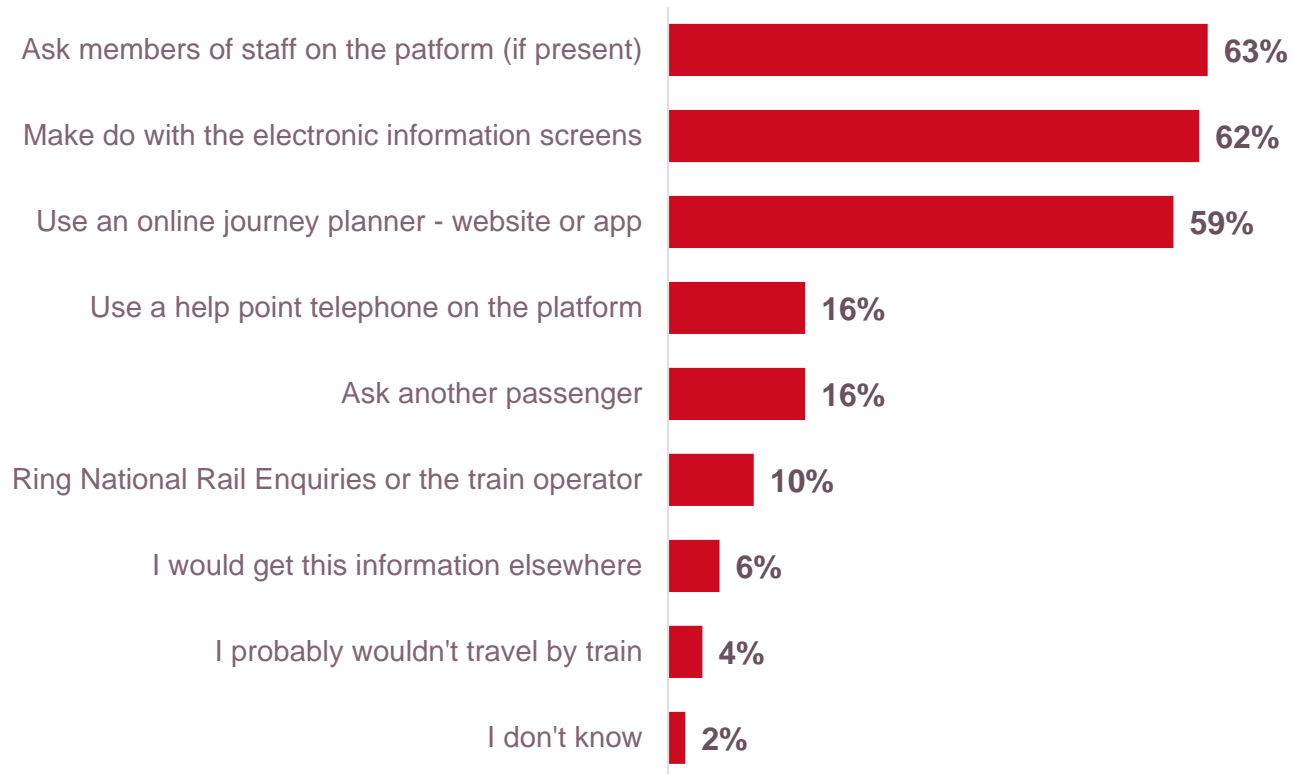
*If **timetable booklets** were not available at stations, how would you find this information instead?*



Base: All those who would find things more difficult if timetable booklets were unavailable (1809).

More than three in five of those who say that they would find it more difficult if posters were unavailable say that they would ask members of staff on the platform or make do with electronic information screens as an alternative in this scenario.

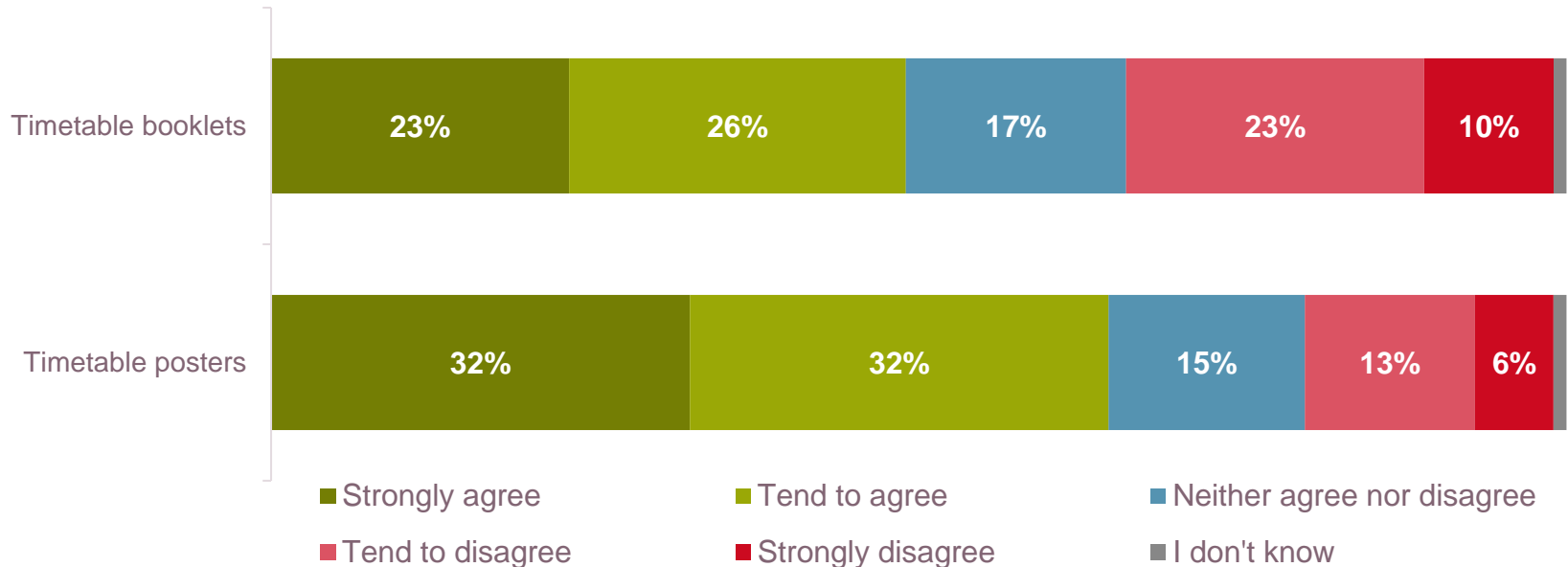
*If **timetable posters** were not available at stations, how would you find this information instead?*



Base: All those who would find things more difficult if timetable posters were unavailable (2390).

Half agree that train companies should produce printed timetable booklets despite the cost, impact on the environment, and availability of timetable information online. Almost two thirds say the same regarding timetable posters.

Do you agree or disagree that train companies should produce printed timetable booklets / posters despite the cost, impact on the environment, and availability of timetable information online?

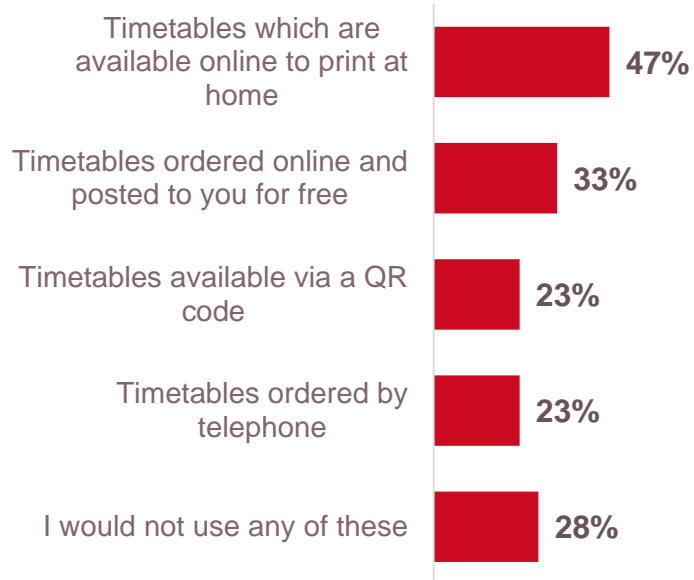


Base: All Respondents (4815).

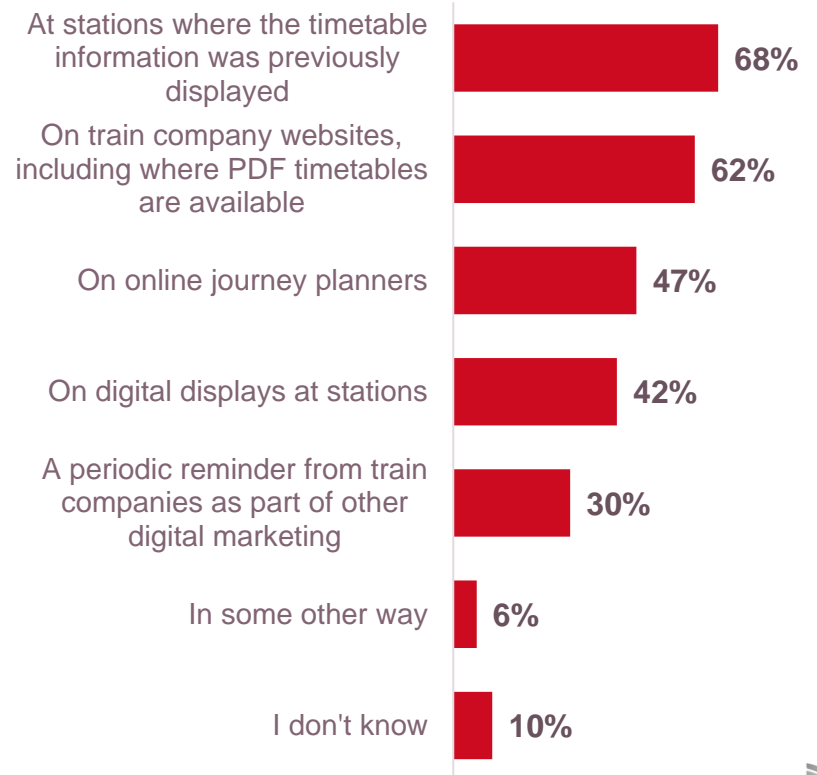
A half would use timetables available online to print at home if timetable booklets and posters were not produced. Two thirds think that this service should be advertised at stations where the timetable information was previously displayed.

If timetable booklets were not available at stations, and posters were not displayed at stations in the future, alternatives could be provided.

Some possible options are listed below. Please select those, if any, that you think you might use.



If you were able to order printed timetables to be posted to you (by phone or online) in which of the following ways do you think that this service should be advertised?



Base: All Respondents (4815).

At the end of the survey respondents gave their views in general regarding the availability of printed timetable booklets and printed timetable posters.

'I am greatly concerned about the growing tendency to put everything into the 'app/website' basket. Tech is not always available and not always reliable for whatever reason.'

'I don't think you meant 'ever' in your question about posters and printed timetables. I would never use either now and haven't done so for several years.'

'I find all times and fares for journeys with one of my friends, he doesn't have a smartphone and is not computer literate so will not use the train if he can't get time tables to use himself.'

'Information online and at many stations is excellent but some passengers prefer the advice and help of staff within a ticket office/travel centre, particularly seniors, those booking travel for groups and the disabled. The issue is keeping these facilities open and accessible, not just printing timetables which are more the domain and interest of enthusiasts.'

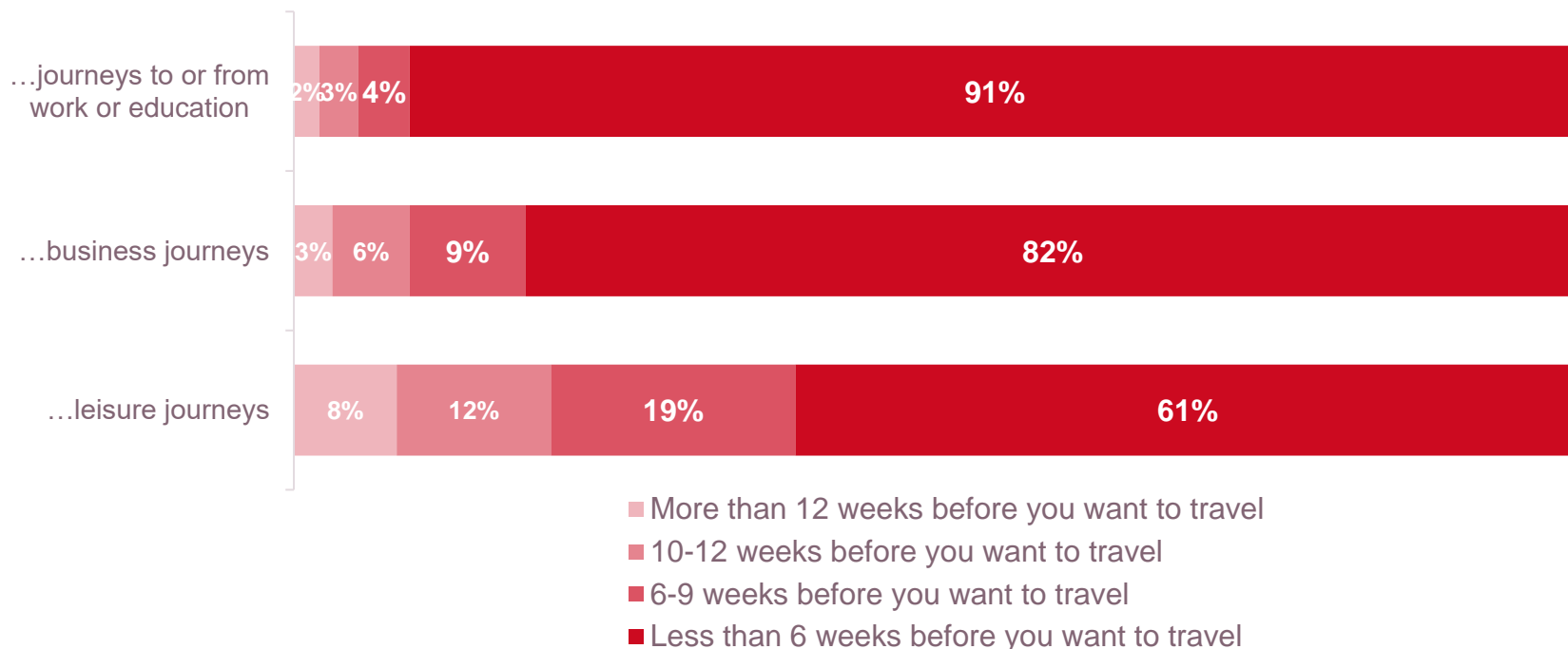
'The despite cost to train companies and environmental impact are a bit poor as conflating too separate issues. The cost savings won't be transparent and the environmental cost would be outweighed if more people find travelling by train a fuff and use other means.'

'Do the train operators not realise that their timetables are the cheapest marketing they have? Not only does a timetable induce demand, it also answers the most important two questions: where can I go? When can I get there? You don't know what you don't know. To put a destination into an online timetable tool you have to know it exists. They'll spend millions on roller skating tortoises but won't spend on advertising they only have to update twice a year, don't have to pay to distribute and they can guarantee that 100% of the eyeballs will be interested in the service? Crazy!'

How far in advance should timetable information be accurate and tickets go on sale?

The majority look for train times and ticket prices less than six weeks before they make a journey. People are more likely to plan further in advance when considering journeys which will be made for leisure reasons.

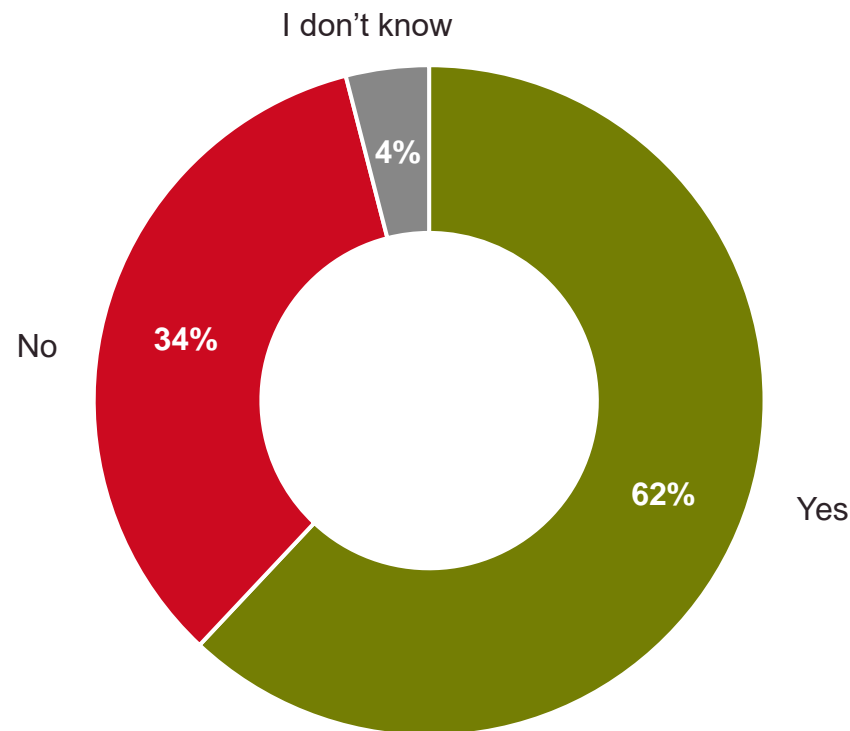
When considering whether to make a journey by train, how far in advance do you generally look up train times and ticket prices for..?



Base: All those giving a valid response – don't know/not applicable responses removed; work or education (2101), leisure (2846), business (1794).

Three in ten have had the experience of looking for train timetable and fare information in advance of making this journey, and finding that the information was not yet available.

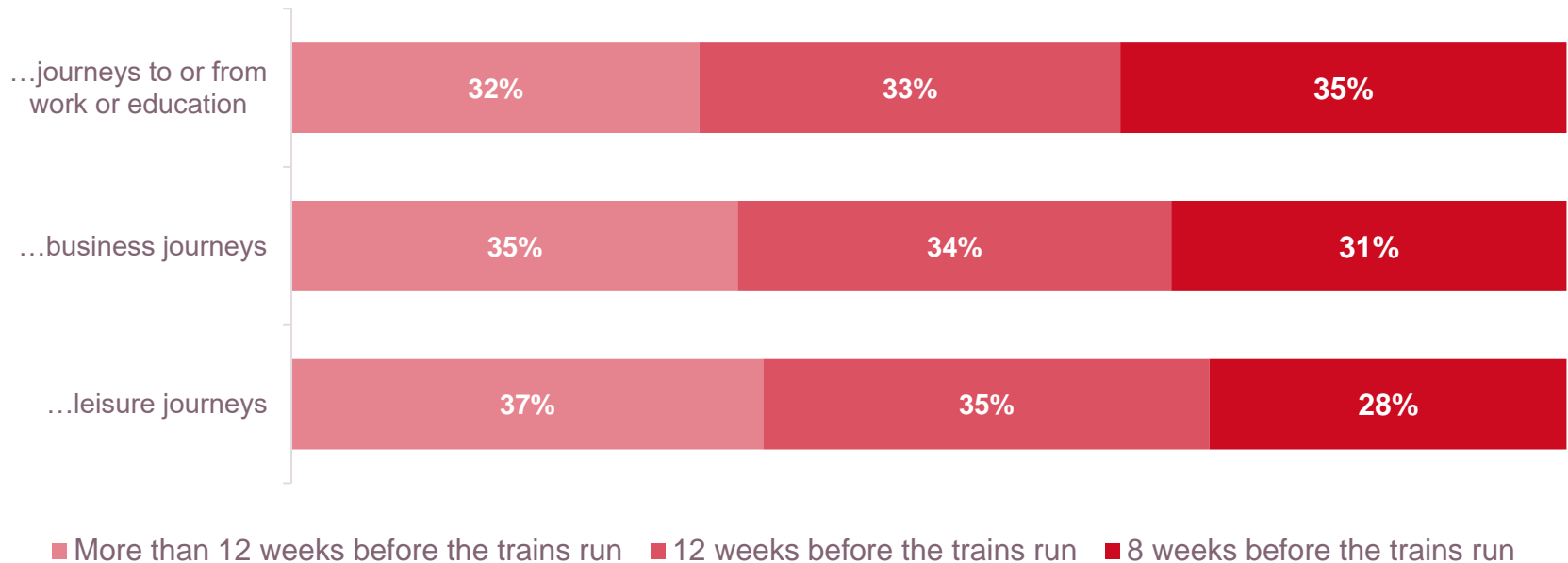
Have you ever tried to plan a train journey and found that timetable information and fares for the date that you wanted were not yet available?



Base: All Respondents (4815).

When it comes to when timetables should show correctly in online journey planners and tickets be on sale, a third each say 8 weeks before, 12 weeks before, more than 12 weeks before – the latter more so for leisure journeys.

How far in advance of any given day do you think that the timetable should show correctly in online journeys planners and tickets to be on sale for..?



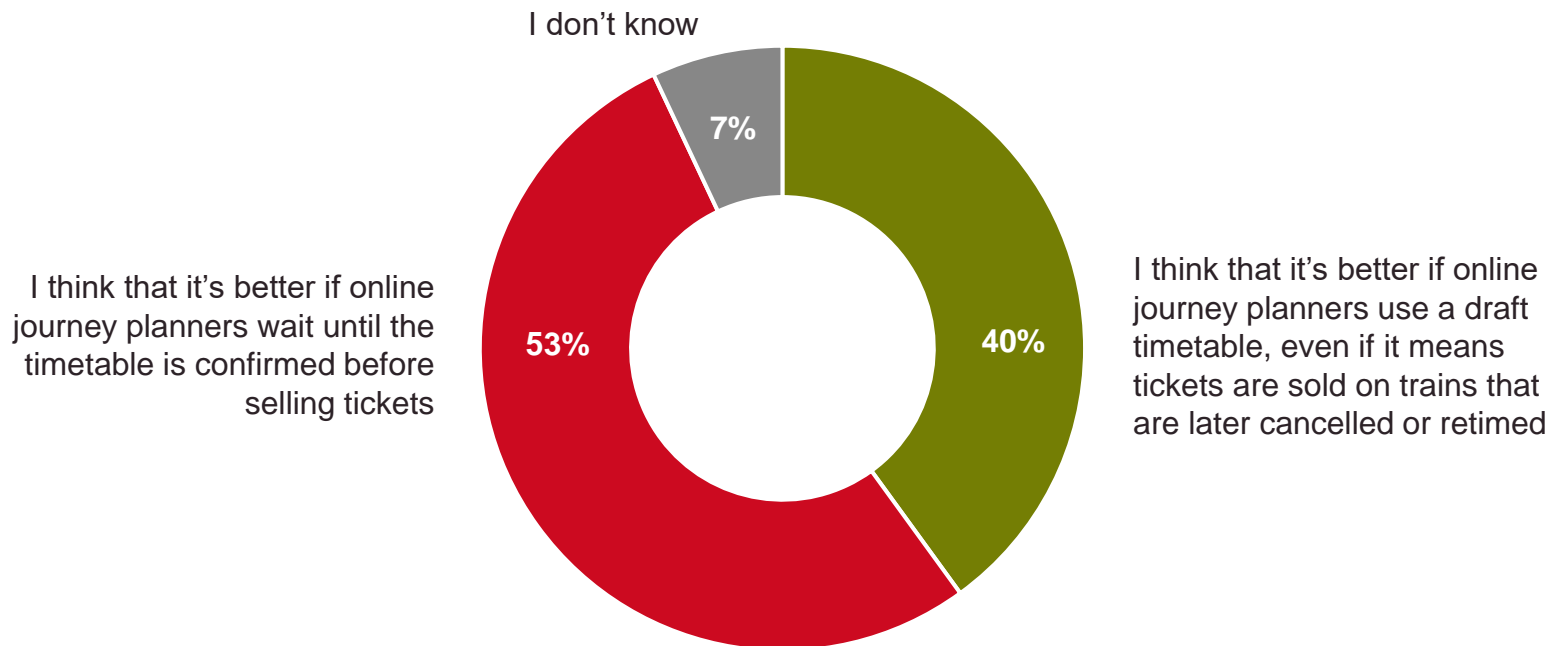
Base: All those giving a valid response – don't know/not applicable responses removed; work or education (2921), leisure (4615), business (2964).

Just over half believe that it is preferable for timetables to show on online journey planners, and tickets be on sale, only after the timetable is confirmed

The railway generally knows well in advance when engineering work is going to disrupt timetables, but it may not know the full details of the revised timetable with certainty until sometime later.

Do you think that it is better for online journey planners to use a draft or 'subject to confirmation' timetable as far ahead as possible, but with a warning that trains may later be cancelled or their times changed, or wait until all the detail is confirmed?

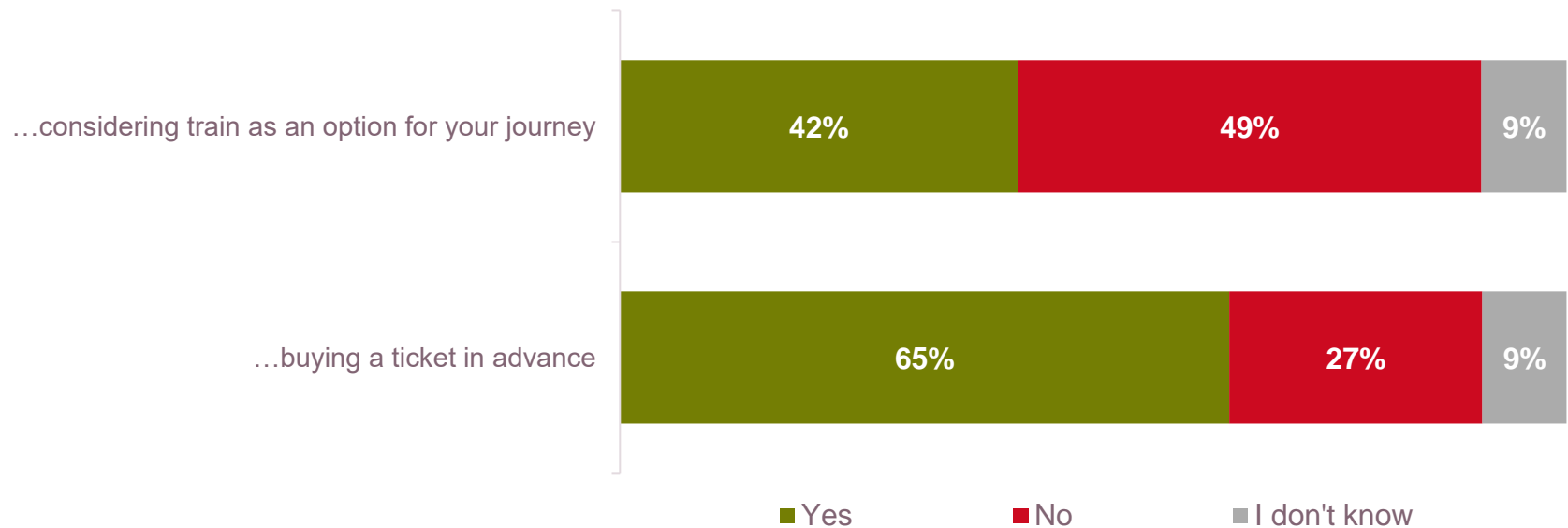
Please assume that if you bought a ticket on a train showing in the draft timetable that was later cancelled or retimed, the railway would let you know so you can replan



Base: All Respondents (4,815).

If some trains were shown as 'subject to confirmation' on online journey planners, two in five say that they would be put off considering train for their journey and two thirds say that they would be put off buying a ticket in advance.

If trains which were showing on online journey planners were marked as 'subject to confirmation', meaning that they may be cancelled or times changed at a later date, would you be put off..?

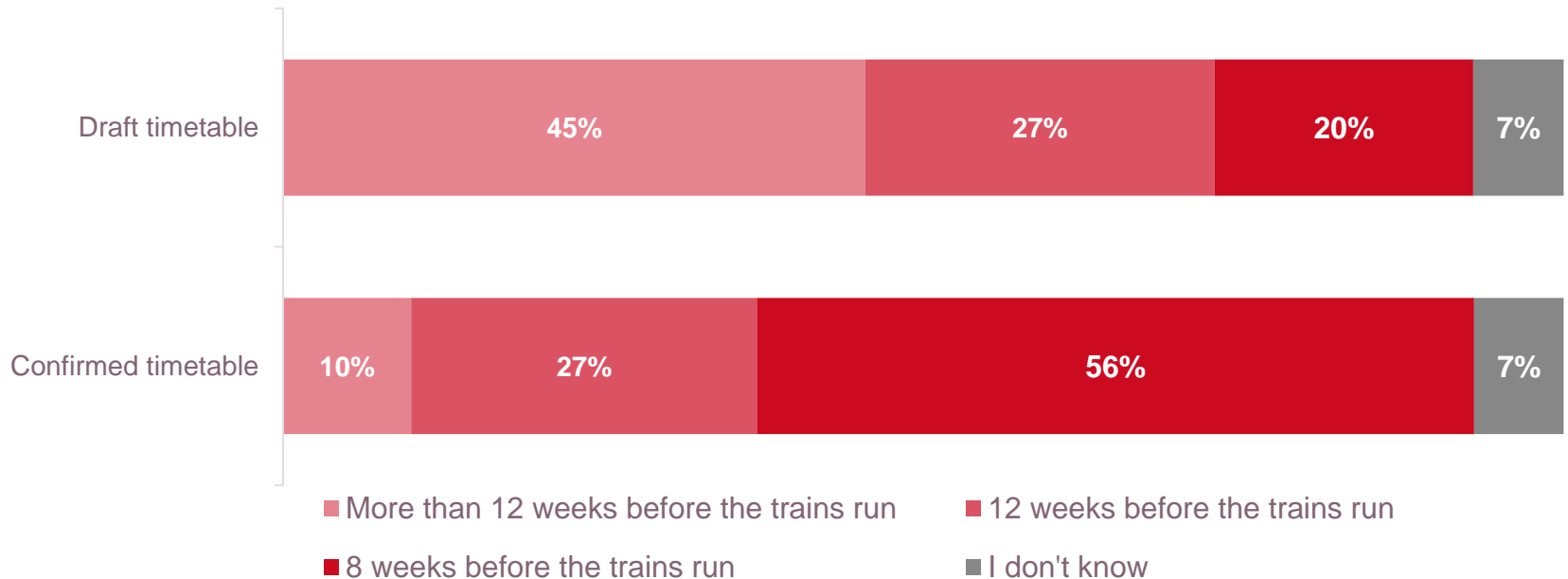


Base: All Respondents (4815).

Assuming that the railway were to publish a draft timetable first which was confirmed later, almost half think the draft timetable should be published more than 12 weeks before trains run, while more than half think that the confirmed timetable should be published 8 weeks before trains run.

Now imagine that online journey planners do use a draft or 'subject to confirmation' timetable for ticket sales and timings are confirmed later (or you are told about changes).

Firstly, how far in advance of would you expect the draft timetable to be available in journey planners, and secondly when would you expect times to be confirmed (or you are told about changes)?



Base: All Respondents (4815).

At the end of the survey respondents gave their views in general regarding how far in advance journey planners should show accurate information and tickets go on sale

"Train operating companies need to clarify if the tickets become invalid if the planned train is cancelled - if I could just get on the next train with the same ticket (or get a refund if all trains on that route are cancelled) then I don't see a problem. 8 weeks ahead for all days of the week should be achievable - some operators have 12 weeks+ planned on Monday to Friday but only about 3 weeks at weekends, which just isn't good enough."

"It can be infuriating when you're trying to plan a journey and accurate engineering works data is not available, or it can be really hard to find, either on the rail company website or Network Rail. I've cancelled trips to see people because of the uncertainty and difficulty in having a single website where you can find out more."

"A timetable is consulted to explore possibilities and options for travel at a future date. A timetable that is not confirmed is of little use because decisions on travel cannot be made. (Why book a ticket knowing that you may need to do the process again close to the actual travel date?) The current timetable could be considered 'agile' because on any one day there are so many delays and cancellations. I find it more practical to have a plan A and a plan B to make any rail journey and am prepared to swap plans minutes before travelling depending upon the state of the service as reported on the live departures website. I don't want the bother of re-booking tickets when services are late or cancelled."

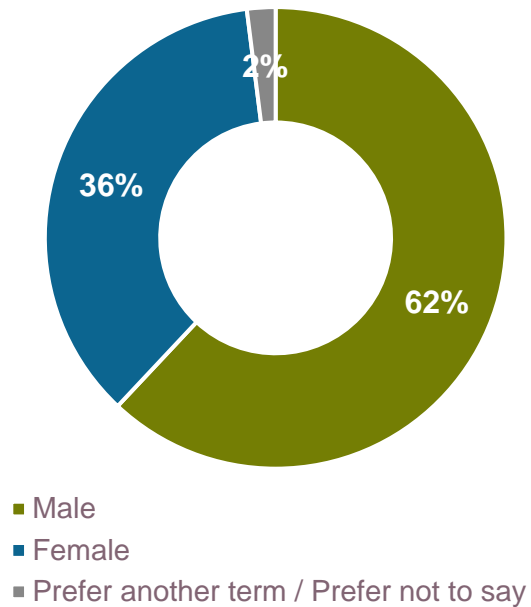
Methodology and interpretation of data

- In May 2022 we sent an email to 16,260 members of our Transport User Panel who had told us previously that they use trains inviting them to complete an online questionnaire about how they plan journeys by rail and about their use of printed timetables. The questionnaire was targeted specifically at those panellists who had made at least one train journey in the last year, and those who had not were screened out of the survey.
- A reminder email was sent to those who had not started to complete the survey or had started but stopped completing it part-way through. When the survey closed in late May 4815 panellists had submitted a response.
- In relation to interpretation of the findings in this report, please note that data is unweighted and therefore results should be seen as indicative of the views of the targeted population rather than statistically representative of them. It is particularly relevant in this case to note that almost all respondents indicate that they access the internet at least once a week and that half of the respondents are aged 65 or older.

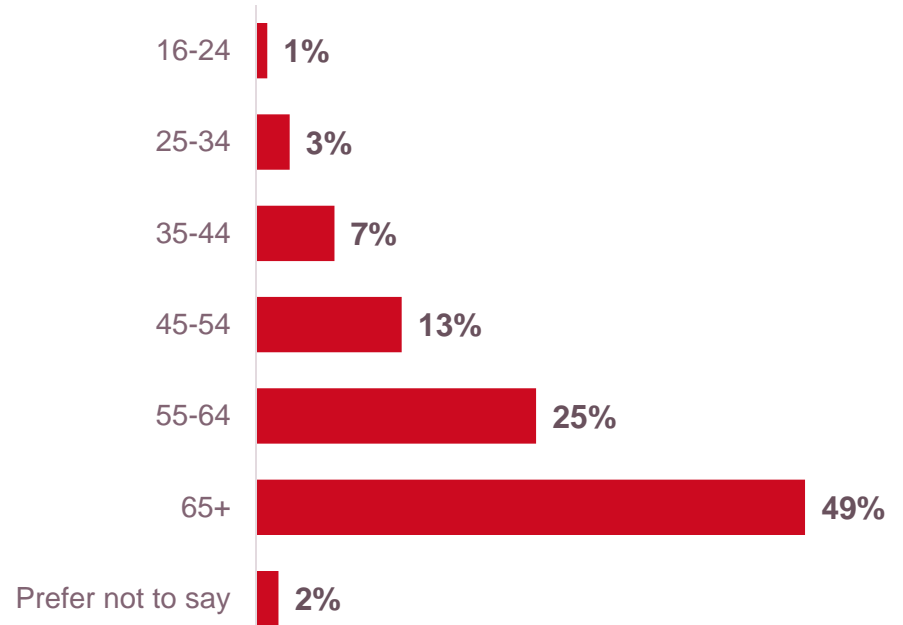
Respondent profile

Profile of respondents by gender and age

Gender



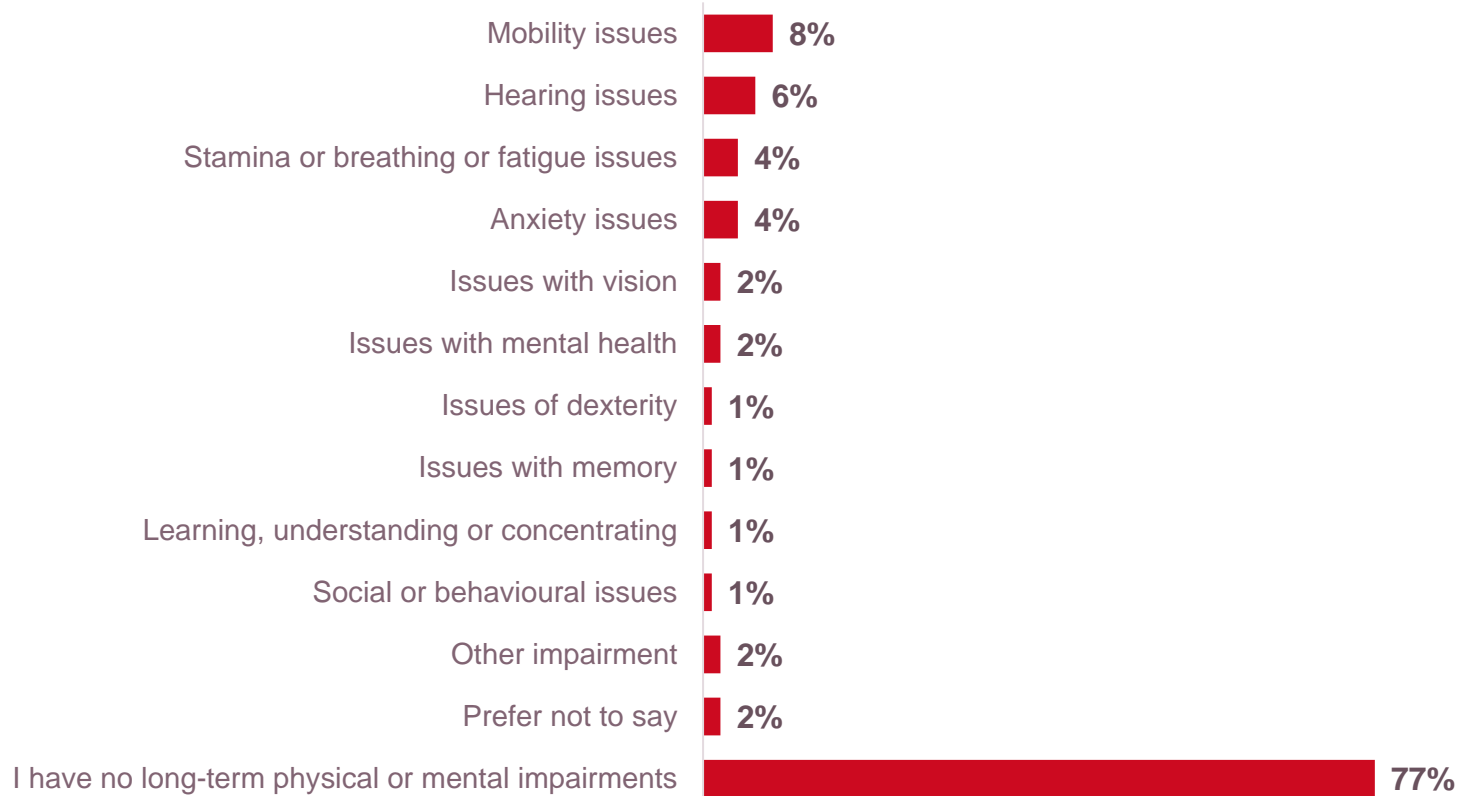
Age



Base: All Respondents (4815).

77 per cent of respondents have no disability

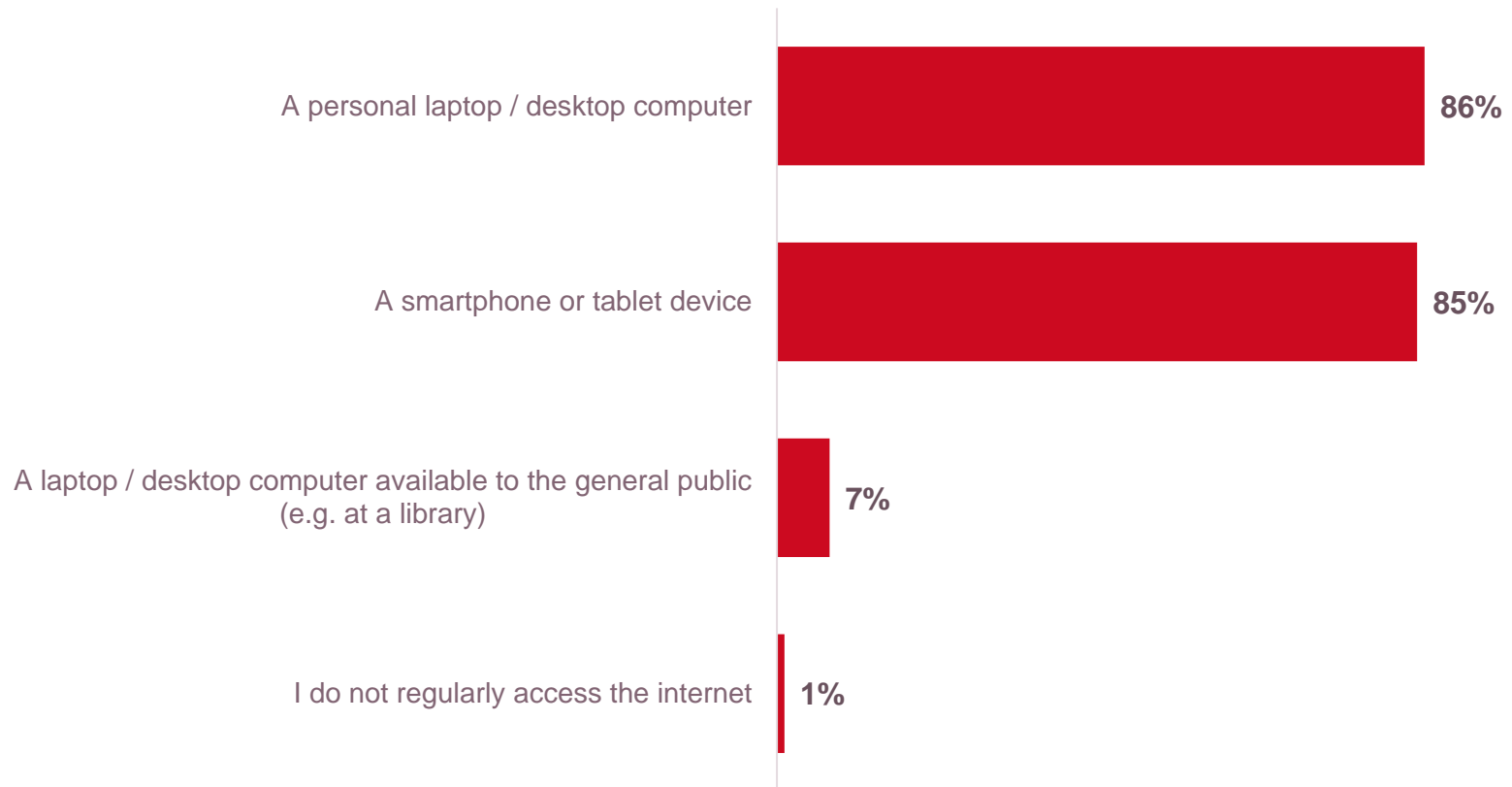
Do you have any of these long-term physical or mental impairments which limit your daily activities or the work that you can do?



Base: All Respondents (4815).

The majority of the respondents access the internet at least once a week

Do you regularly access the internet via any of the following devices? (By 'regularly' we mean at least once a week).



Base: All Respondents (4815).