



**TRANSPORT
SCOTLAND**
CÒMHDHAIL ALBA

Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme - Year 1 Evaluation

**Elaine Wilson-Smith, Kate Skellington Orr,
Emily Seaman**

Contents

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	i
Key Findings	iii
Awareness, Uptake and Use of the Scheme	iii
Impact on Travel Behaviour	iv
Affordability	v
Impact on Young People and Families	vi
Perceptions of and Issues with Bus Use	vii
Unintended Consequences and Suggested Improvements	ix
Conclusion	x
1. Introduction.....	1
Background	1
Evaluation of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme	1
Scheme Aims and Expected Outcomes	2
Methodology and Sample Profile	2
Follow-Up Survey with Young People and their Families	3
Focus Groups with Young People and Parents/Carers	6
Secondary Data Analysis	7
Research Caveats and Report Presentation	8
Limits of the Research	9
Report Presentation	10
2. Awareness, Uptake and Use of the Scheme	11
Awareness of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel	11
Uptake of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme	12
Application Process	13
Use of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme	16
Reasons for Not Using the Scheme	20
Reasons for Stopping Using the Scheme	21
Reasons for Not Signing Up for Scheme	22
3. Impact on Travel Behaviour.....	26
Mode Choice.....	26
Baseline vs Follow-Up Surveys.....	26

Frequency of Travel.....	30
Journey Times	31
New Journeys vs Those Happening Anyway.....	32
Learning to Drive	34
Environmental Impacts	37
Expected Long Term Impact of Travel Choices	38
4. Impact on Affordability.....	39
Travel Spend	39
Affordability	40
Financial Impact for Young People and Families.....	41
5. Impact on Young People and Families	44
Independence for Young People	44
Experience or Age of the Young Person Limiting Use	45
Accessing Opportunities	47
Difficulties Accessing Opportunities/Activities	48
Newly Accessible Opportunities	50
Lost Opportunities Due to Losing Access to Scheme	52
Impacts on Family Travel.....	53
Travelling by Bus More as a Family	53
Reasons for Not Travelling by Bus More as a Family	56
Wider Benefits for Young People and Families	57
Non-Drivers and Single Car Households	57
Cashless Travel	57
Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing/Covid-19 Recovery.....	58
Impact of Being Unable to Access Scheme	59
6. Perceptions of and Issues with Bus Use.....	60
General Perceptions of Bus Use.....	60
Issues Experienced with Bus Use.....	60
Perceived Safety of Public Transport.....	62
Focus Group Perceptions of Safety	65
Anti-Social Behaviour, Bullying & Discrimination	67
Focus Group Experiences.....	69
Distribution of Anti-Social Behaviour	72
Conclusion	72

7. Unintended Consequences & Suggested Improvements	74
Unintended Consequences and Other Issues	74
Change in Travel Patterns/Mode Choice	74
Differences in Access to the Scheme/Benefits	74
Busier Services and Capacity Issues	76
Welfare Concerns	77
Difficulties Using the Young Persons' NEC	78
Suggested Changes/Improvements.....	79
Expand the Scheme to More Services, Modes and Users	79
Greater Restrictions on Eligibility	80
Policing the Use of the Scheme/Users Behaviour	81
Application Process and Use of Technology	81
Greater Information Made Available to Students.....	82
8. Discussion	83
Meeting Outcomes.....	83
Short Term Outcomes.....	83
Medium Term Outcomes.....	85
Long Term Outcomes:	86
Key Benefits and Other Impacts	87
Conclusion	89
Appendix A - Follow-Up Survey Sample Profile	90
Appendix B - Supplementary Analysis Tables	93

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme (or the Under 22's scheme) was launched on 31 January 2022. It provides the opportunity for free bus travel across Scotland for all young people resident in Scotland and aged 5-21 years old.

As part of the ongoing monitoring of the scheme, Transport Scotland commissioned a Year One Evaluation study, which took place between April and August 2023. This involved primary data collection, analysis of secondary data, and the comparison of results with the [baseline study](#), which was conducted before the scheme was introduced. The evaluation included a survey and focus groups with young people (aged 5-23) and parents/carers, a consultation-based survey with professional stakeholders and interested organisations, and analysis of a range of secondary data sources. This report outlines the findings from the Year One Evaluation as it relates to the primary research with young people and parents/carers and the secondary data. A separate report details the [findings from the stakeholder consultation](#) and a [summary report draws together the findings across all elements of the evaluation](#).

The survey with young people and parents/carers elicited 10,875 valid responses. This covered responses from both parents/carers (81%) and young people themselves (19%) and included a range of age and life stages of the children/young people who were the subjects of the survey. In addition, seven focus groups were conducted, with 42 participants contributing to these discussions. Focus group participants included a mix of young people and parents/carers, those who used the scheme and those who did not, and one group dedicated to bus users aged 22+ who were not eligible for the scheme.

During the design of the scheme a series of short, medium and long-term outcomes were identified against which to measure its impact and success. These expected outcomes are detailed in the table below, along with an assessment of progress based on the findings of the Year One Evaluation.

Expected Outcome	Progress	
Short Term Outcomes		
1. Increased numbers of young people registering for a card/aware of the scheme	✓	Good progress to date
2. Fewer young people learning to drive	?	Mixed results - longer timescale required
3. Increased awareness of bus as a viable travel option	✓	Good progress to date
4. Increased awareness of bus as a viable travel option amongst young women	✓	Good progress to date
5. Reduction in travel costs for young people and their families	✓	Good progress to date
Medium Term Outcomes		
6. Increased numbers of young people using the scheme for journeys otherwise paid for	✓	Good progress to date
7. Journeys which would have been made by car (driving/lift from parents etc.) are made by bus	✓	Good progress to date
8. Young people have increased access to services	✓	Good progress to date
Long Term Outcomes		
9. Reduction in poverty rates amongst young people	?	Longer timescale required to understand if any impact
10. Improved access to education and employment opportunities	✓	Good progress to date
11. Improved access to social and leisure opportunities/activities	✓	Good progress to date
12. Reduction in private car kilometres	?	Impact unclear - longer timescale required to understand if any impact

The table shows that good progress is being made to date against all of the expected outcomes, apart from outcomes 2 (Fewer young people learning to drive), 9 (Reduction in poverty rates amongst young people) and 12 (Reduction in private car kilometres), where a longer timescale is required to understand if there is any impact.

Key Findings

Awareness, Uptake and Use of the Scheme

Survey results showed that general awareness of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was high (at 86%) and was considerably higher than it had been before the scheme was launched (67% in the baseline survey). Focus group feedback, however, suggested that the details of the scheme, including the policy aims and objectives, age of eligibility and possible restrictions around use, were slightly less well understood.

Official uptake figures showed that 59% of all eligible 5–21 year-olds had signed up to the scheme by the end of April 2023, although this ranged from 53% of those aged 5-15, to 70% of 16-21 year olds. Large variations were also found between local authority areas. Uptake among survey respondents was also high, with 74% signed up and using the scheme, and a further 8% had either signed up but stopped using it, or had signed up but not used it yet.

Just under two thirds (64%) of survey respondents that had signed up for the scheme indicated that the application process had been either very or fairly easy, with a quarter (25%) indicating they had found this fairly or very difficult. Those who had signed up more recently (since June 2022) however, were more likely to find the process easy, reflecting improvements that had been made to the [getyourNEC](#) application. Those who applied via their school or the [Parents Portal](#) were also more likely to indicate that the process had been easy.

Official usage data showed that a total of 62,178,745 trips had been made using the scheme between January 2022 (i.e. when it was launched) and April 2023. More trips were made by those aged 16-21, and females generated a higher number and proportion of trips than males. Most trips also occurred during weekdays. Frequency of use was also high among survey respondents, over a third (38%) said they used it five days a week or more, while a further 40% used it at least weekly.

The 23% of survey respondents and those focus group respondents who did not use the scheme outlined a range of reasons. The key issues were that they had not heard of it, they had turned 22 and were no longer eligible, issues with bus services (e.g., a lack of availability locally, reliability, frequency, route and timetable issues), safety concerns, a preference for other modes, or due to application problems or issues with the free travel card. Some noted that their card had expired, been lost or had stopped working. The most common application issues included difficulty in obtaining and providing the necessary documents for identification purposes, websites which sent applicants “round in circles”, and situations where applications

(sometimes multiple applications) had been submitted but no card ever received. Both survey and focus group respondents highlighted a lack of support related to application issues, with enquiries often going unanswered or people being passed from one organisation to another with little/no success.

Impact on Travel Behaviour

Hands Up Survey Scotland (HUSS) data showed that bus use for travel to school had increased slightly in 2022 (the first year the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was introduced) compared to 2020 and 2021, while the proportions of pupils who walked and used park and stride (where people drive part of the way, park, and then walk the rest of the distance) both declined slightly. Comparisons of the baseline and follow-up surveys also indicated that car and train use had declined across nearly all journey purposes asked about, while use of the bus and active modes had increased since the introduction of the scheme. Qualitative feedback also indicated a switch from car use to bus for some, as young people did not have to rely on their parents/carers to drive them to destinations. Similarly, ScotRail data suggested there had been a general decline in the proportion of their business generated by child tickets since the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had been introduced.

Comparisons of the baseline and follow-up survey results showed that young people were travelling more often for social and leisure activities, as well as for shopping trips, since the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme. In addition, there had been an increase in the proportions of young people taking shorter journeys (i.e. those up to 30 minutes), particularly when travelling for education, shopping, healthcare, and for apprenticeships or training programmes.

Based on follow-up survey data, it was estimated that around 1,000,952 truly new bus journeys had been made by respondents since the introduction of the scheme, while 1,023,802 bus journeys would have been taken regardless of the scheme. Across all journey purposes, the majority of bus users in the follow-up survey also indicated that they used the bus now because it was free, ranging from 51% of those accessing an apprenticeship or training programme by bus, to 74% of those using the bus for social and leisure activities.

Across most journey purposes, over two thirds of survey respondents indicated that they now accessed existing locations more often and/or accessed new locations (ranging from 68% of those travelling for education as well as for their job/work, to 81% of those travelling for social and leisure activities). The only exception was for healthcare, where around half (49%) indicated there had been a change in location or frequency of travel.

Despite indications above that the scheme had generated a move away from car use towards buses, data related to driving lessons and tests were mixed. Data from the [Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency \(DVSA\)](#) and comparisons between the baseline and follow-up surveys showed that test rates and the desire to learn to drive had increased since the scheme was introduced. Drawing conclusions around the impact of the scheme, however, is complicated by the backlog in demand for driving lessons/tests generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Focus group respondents provided more mixed preferences, with some noting that they/their child planned to delay learning to drive, or that they had stopped taking lessons, as a result of the scheme. Others however, had either already passed their driving test before the scheme was introduced, or were keen to learn to drive as soon as they were old enough, often due to a lack of viable public transport options or because they considered it a valuable life skill. A longer time period will be required to fully assess the nature and extent of any impact the scheme might have on young people's desire to drive.

Affordability

Comparisons of the baseline and follow-up surveys showed little change in total household travel spend for parents/carers, however, a greater proportion were now spending less than 10% of that total on their child's travel expenses. There was also a large increase in the proportion of young people (aged 16+) spending £0-£10 on travel after the scheme's introduction, up by 26 percentage points, and decreases in the proportions across all higher spending brackets.

When rating how affordable they found travel and transport, the proportion who said it was either very or fairly affordable had risen, from 26% before the scheme was introduced to 38% afterwards. Those who used the scheme were more likely to rate travel and transport as affordable compared to those who did not use it. Further, when asked to rate their agreement with various statements in relation to bus use, 54% agreed that buses were affordable. This represented an increase of 25 percentage points since the introduction of the scheme and was the biggest change across all perceptions statements. Similarly, when asked to identify any issues they/their child experienced in using the bus, 20% selected cost as a barrier. This represented a large decrease (from 51%) compared to the baseline survey, a 31-percentage point reduction - the largest change in the barriers experienced.

Financial benefits were also flagged in the qualitative feedback as one of the main impacts of the scheme for young people and their families. It was felt that the scheme had removed cost barriers to accessing transport, minimised stress and anxiety related to travel costs, freed up money to spend on other things, and was considered to provide transport equality among young people meaning they could

travel together regardless of individual's financial circumstances. In addition, the scheme was considered to be particularly valuable for those experiencing poverty and during the current cost of living crisis.

Impact on Young People and Families

Over two thirds (69%) said that the scheme had allowed them to travel and do more without an adult. This was particularly the case for those aged 12+, with 83% of those aged 12-15 and 86% of those aged 16-21 indicating this, compared to 20% of those aged 5-11. The extent to which independence had grown was above that expected before the scheme was introduced, with 58% of baseline respondents noting that they expected it to provide greater independence.

Qualitative comments also identified independence for young people as another of the main benefits of the scheme. In addition, it was suggested the scheme had increased their/their child's autonomy, confidence and responsibility. Again, however, the age of the child was felt to limit independence, with primary school pupils typically considered too young to travel independently.

Just 15% of follow-up survey respondents indicated that they/their child currently missed out on opportunities or activities due to access or travel restrictions. This was a near halving of this issue compared to the baseline, when 29% of respondents indicated such missed opportunities. A greater proportion of those who did not use the scheme (22%) experienced this issue compared to users (13%). Missed opportunities included educational and work opportunities, as well as a wide range of social and leisure activities.

Just over a third (34%) of survey respondents who had experience of using the scheme stated that they had been able to access new opportunities and activities. While new social, leisure and club-based activities were identified most often, there was also evidence of the scheme opening up new opportunities for education and work. Again, those aged 12+ were more likely to be accessing new opportunities compared to those of primary school age (20% of those aged 5-11, 36% of those aged 12-15, and 42% of those aged 16-21).

Of the survey respondents who had previously used the scheme but had stopped, just over a quarter (28%) said they had lost access to opportunities as a result of stopping using the scheme. Again, most issues related to the loss of access to social, leisure and activity-based opportunities, but a few respondents did note difficulties in getting to school, or a negative impact on their employment.

The scheme had also increased the use of buses for family travel, with 44% of parents in the follow-up survey noting this impact. This was largely consistent with expectations in the baseline survey, where 46% thought that they would travel by bus more as a family once the scheme had been introduced. A wide range of journey purposes were outlined for family travel, with the main ones including days out (both locally and longer distance journeys), social and leisure activities, shopping, to eat out, events, and visiting friends and family. The scheme was considered to have removed barriers to travel/transport and supported family activities that had previously been unaffordable for some. It was also suggested that children travelling with siblings was common (even where parents did not use the bus with them), and that the scheme had encouraged greater bus use among children travelling with their grandparents, where everyone could travel for free. Where family travel by bus had increased, it was largely because the bus was now perceived to be cheaper than using a car, particularly where parking difficulties and costs would be an issue. Where family travel had not increased, the main reason given was that adult fares remained prohibitively high, with other options being cheaper or more convenient.

Other key benefits of the scheme were said to include the removal of travel barriers for non-drivers and single car households, cashless travel was considered to be beneficial and safer for children, and the scheme was said to support young people's mental health and wellbeing, particularly after Covid-19. There were also concerns raised for the impact on young people who could not access the scheme (typically due to application problems or lack of bus services), in terms of their independence, social skills and mental health.

Perceptions of and Issues with Bus Use

Survey respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements related to buses and bus use. The areas which elicited the most agreement were that buses were environmentally friendly, affordable, made the roads safer, were clean and comfortable, and met respondents needs. There were improvements in most of the elements that respondents were asked about, as well as a reduction in the proportions concerned about the spread of viruses on-board buses. However, there were also slight increases in the proportions of respondents who agreed that buses were too busy/crowded and that there was lots of anti-social behaviour on buses.

Respondents in both the baseline and follow-up surveys were also asked to identify any issues or barriers they/their child experienced in using the bus. The main issues experienced since the introduction of the scheme were reliability or buses not turning up on time (noted by 49% of respondents), and that buses did not run often enough (identified by 45% of respondents). There was also an increase in those

experiencing challenges related to service provision, including reliability, unsuitable timetables and lack of frequency. There were, however, positive reductions in the proportions who identified safety concerns at night (reducing by 11 percentage points) and when travelling alone (a six percentage point reduction).

Follow-up survey respondents were also asked to rate their perceptions of safety when using different modes of public transport. When considering bus use, comparison of baseline and follow-up survey results suggests a reduction in users sense of safety during the day, falling from 82% of respondents in the baseline who felt they were either always or often safe during the day, to 76% in the follow-up survey. Conversely, there was a slight improvement in the proportions who felt safe using the buses at night, rising from 37% who always or often felt safe in the baseline, to 39% in the follow-up survey. Comparing buses and other public transport modes rated in the follow-up survey shows that respondents felt safer on buses than any other modes of public transport during the day, however buses ranked third for travel at night, behind trams and trains (at 39%, 44%, and 40% respectively who said they were either always or often safe).

Despite greater safety concerns being expressed for night-time travel, several young people who participated in focus groups indicated that they would feel safer travelling by bus at night/in the dark compared to other options. This was particularly the case for young women and girls, who felt this would be safer than other options or than being on their own - with a few noting that they now went out more at night as they felt they and their friends could get home safely.

Experiences of anti-social behaviour, bullying and discrimination when using buses and other modes of public transport within the last 12 months were also explored. Just over half (54%) of the survey respondents indicated that either they/their child or their friends or family had seen or experienced anti-social behaviour, while 14% had seen or experienced bullying or discrimination. Most instances were experienced on buses, however, caution is needed here - as the survey focused on bus use respondents were more likely to be bus users and therefore more likely to recount experiences on buses, while use and experiences of other modes were under-represented. Shouting and swearing, people being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and other aggressive or intimidating behaviour were the anti-social behaviour issues most often experienced. The most commonly experienced types of bullying and discrimination were sexism/misogyny and racism.

Focus group respondents also discussed concern about anti-social behaviour, which was considered to be largely (but not exclusively) perpetrated by young people. It was felt that the scheme had resulted in more anti-social behaviour occurring on and around buses, and that it was occurring either in new areas or more frequently in

certain locations due to young people's ability to travel more easily and in large groups. While some focus group respondents felt safer on other modes of public transport, others again felt safer on buses due to the use of CCTV, the proximity and accessibility of the driver, and the presence of other passengers who could help if a situation arose.

Without access to robust recording and locational data it was not possible to say for certain what the extent of any changes in instances of anti-social behaviour had been, and/or whether such behaviour had been displaced onto bus/into new areas. However, it appears that people perceive the situation has worsened since the introduction of the scheme, with this now being an issue which elicited greater levels of concern among passengers.

Unintended Consequences and Suggested Improvements

Qualitative comments provided in the survey and focus group discussions identified several other impacts and issues. These included:

- a possible reduction in active travel among young people, with some opting to take the bus short distances where they would have previously walked;
- variable provision of bus services meant young people had different access to the scheme and its benefits depending upon where they lived;
- that the scheme had created busier services and capacity issues on some bus services;
- welfare concerns, including children travelling far from home without their parent's/carer's knowledge, or getting lost/stranded in unfamiliar areas; and
- issues with the travel card not scanning on-board buses and an apparent lack of consistency in policy/approach from drivers in how this should be handled.

A range of possible or suggested changes/improvements to the scheme were also identified by survey and focus group respondents, including:

- expanding the scheme to include more modes (particularly ferries and trains), to include night buses, and extend the age limit to 26 or include all students;
- greater restrictions on eligibility, e.g., means testing, different products and usage limits by age group, or offer discounted rather than free travel;
- tackling anti-social behaviour, either by limiting hours of operation for the scheme or allowing travel cards to be removed/suspended if necessary;
- improving the application process and making greater use of technology to provide a digital card as well as physical version; and
- making more information about the scheme available to students, with foreign students studying in Scotland felt to be less aware of this.

Conclusion

Overall, the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was considered highly successful and beneficial for young people and their families across the first year of operation, with many more benefits and positive impacts outlined compared to emerging negative issues. In particular, the scheme appears to have had significant financial benefits for young people and their families, making travel more affordable. It also appears to have increased young people's access to services and opportunities and improved independence and autonomy. Early signs also point towards a reduction in car use as a result of the scheme. The main negative issues were largely related to the provision or availability of bus services themselves, difficulties in relation to the application process, and perceptions of anti-social behaviour as a result of increased numbers of young people travelling by bus.

The benefits and impacts of the scheme will require longer-term monitoring to determine any sustained impacts, the scale of these, and new 'norms' once the scheme has been fully embedded and travel choices/patterns stabilised. However, early indications are very encouraging in relation to the extent to which the scheme is positively impacting on young peoples' lives.

I. Introduction

Background

In 2020, the Scottish Government announced plans to introduce free bus travel for children and young people up to the age of 19 resident in Scotland. This was later expanded in 2021 to cover all those aged 5 to 21.

The scheme aims to encourage more sustainable travel behaviours and tackle issues related to transport poverty and access to services by:

- embedding positive sustainable travel behaviours;
- opening up social, education, employment and leisure opportunities; and
- reducing household outgoings to aid children, particularly those living in poverty.

All children and young people resident in Scotland (including asylum seekers and refugees) are eligible to apply for a National Entitlement Card (NEC) or Young Scot National Entitlement Card (Young Scot NEC), which provide access to free bus travel. Around 930,000 children and young people were estimated to be eligible. The scheme provides free travel on any bus in any part of Scotland, with young people able to travel on buses both locally, and outside the area they live - although a few services, such as premium-fare night buses and City Sightseeing buses, are not included within the free travel scheme.

The Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme (also known as the Under 22s scheme) commenced on 31 January 2022, although applications for the card could be made from 10 January 2022 onwards. The scheme is being delivered in partnership with the Improvement Service, the National Entitlement Card Programme Office (NECPO) and Young Scot.

Evaluation of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme

Since the outset, Transport Scotland has been committed to monitoring and evaluating the scheme as it rolls out and becomes embedded. Transport Scotland aims to assess the short, medium and long term impacts of the scheme by comparing conditions at different stages, as follows:

- **Baseline Study:** Ahead of its implementation, Transport Scotland conducted [baseline research](#) to establish the travel patterns and perceptions of bus use among eligible children and young people, as well as their awareness of the

forthcoming scheme and expected use. This included a national online survey with those aged between 5-21 and their parents/carers, as well as analysis of a wide range of secondary data sources.

- **Stage 1 Evaluation:** This considers the short to medium term impacts and outcomes of the scheme after it has been operational for one year, and provides insights into how the policy is working in practice. This report presents the findings from this particular evaluative stage.
- **Stage 2 Evaluation:** Future evaluative work will take place up to five years post-implementation. This will focus on longer-term impacts and outcomes.

Scheme Aims and Expected Outcomes

While the main aims of the scheme are to encourage more sustainable travel behaviours and tackle issues related to transport poverty and access to services, a series of expected outcomes were also developed in order to monitor and measure success. These were split into short, medium and long term outcomes, as follows:

Short Term Outcomes:

1. Increased numbers of young people registering for a card/aware of the scheme
2. Fewer young people learning to drive
3. Increased awareness of bus as a viable travel option
4. Increased awareness of bus as a viable travel option amongst young women
5. Reduction in travel costs for young people and their families

Medium Term Outcomes:

6. Increased numbers of young people using the scheme for journeys otherwise paid for
7. Journeys which would have been made by car (driving/lift from parents etc.) are made by bus
8. Young people have increased access to services

Long Term Outcomes:

9. Reduction in poverty rates amongst young people
10. Improved access to education and employment opportunities
11. Improved access to social and leisure opportunities/activities
12. Reduction in private car kilometres

Methodology and Sample Profile

Wellside Research Ltd. (an independent social research consultancy), supported by Stantec (a transport planning consultancy), were appointed to undertake the Year One Evaluation exercise. Work was conducted between April and August 2023.

Both primary data collection and analysis of secondary data sources was required, with a mixed methods approach adopted, as follows:

- A repeat of the baseline survey (or follow-up survey) with young people and parents/carers;
- A series of focus groups with young people, parents/carers and other bus users;
- A consultation-based survey with professional stakeholders and interested professional organisations; and
- Analysis of secondary data sources.

This report presents the findings from the follow-up survey, the focus groups and the secondary data analysis, and largely focuses on the impact of the scheme on young people and their families. [Feedback from the stakeholder consultation survey is presented in a separate report](#) and includes both a process and impact assessment. In addition, a [summary report draws together the findings across all elements of the evaluation](#).

Follow-Up Survey with Young People and their Families

Consistent with the baseline survey, the online questionnaire was developed for completion by parents/carers of young people (aged 5-23) and by young people themselves (aged 12-23). Although young people are only eligible for the scheme until the age of 21, those up to the age of 23 were invited to participate in the survey as they would have been eligible for the scheme at some point since its introduction (and therefore be able to reflect on and share experiences of the scheme).

Many of the survey questions remained consistent with the baseline survey in order to facilitate before and after implementation comparisons, while other questions were amended and updated to consider usage of the (now operational) scheme. The questionnaire sought feedback around:

- Current travel patterns for different journey purposes;
- Current spend on transport and travel;
- Perceptions of bus use;
- Safety concerns on public transport; and
- Uptake, use and impact of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme.

The survey was advertised nationally via a number of channels. This included seeking the support of Directors of Education and schools across all 32 local authorities to email survey invitations to their parent/carer forum (or, where relevant, their pupil network). Adverts were posted on the Higher Education Institution (HEI)

Trickle page (an internal platform for communicating with colleges and universities across Scotland) to invite college and university students to participate. Transport Scotland and a range of other stakeholder organisations also advertised the survey via their networks and social media channels. The survey ran for six weeks, from 29 May to 9 July 2023.

In total, 10,875 people submitted a valid response to the follow-up survey. While most responses were provided by parents/carers (81% of responses came from parents/carers compared to 19% from young people themselves), responses represented a range in the age and life stages of the children/young people who were the subjects of the survey:

- 39% (n=4,228) of all responses related to children aged 5-11;
- 43% (n=4,743) related to young people aged 12-15;
- 17% (n=1,816) related to young people aged 16-21; and
- 1% (n=88) related to young people aged 22-23 (A small sample size was achieved for this age group due to the scheme being relatively new and it is expected that few were likely to have signed up to the scheme for the short time they may have been eligible)

Responses were received from across all local authority areas, although the numbers achieved in each area varied - ranging from 17 responses from Falkirk Council area to 2,315 responses from Glasgow City Council area (a full breakdown by local authority area is provided at Appendix A - Follow-Up Survey Sample Profile). A good mix of urban, rural and island also responded, as follows:

- 43% (n=4,613) of respondents lived in a city;
- 33% (n=3,559) lived in a town;
- 20% (n=2,084) lived in a village or the countryside; and
- 4% (n=390) lived on an island (Note: the remaining 229 respondents did not disclose this information).

Where surveys related to young people aged 16+, respondents were asked to identify whether they/their child was in school, college or university, an apprenticeship or other training programme, in work (part-time, full-time or voluntary), or none of these (with multiple responses being permissible at this question). Those aged under 16 were assumed to be in school and not working, etc. Respondents were also allocated to their 'main' sector - e.g., where a young person was at school and working part-time their main sector was 'at school', similarly, where a young person was at college/university and working, they were allocated to 'at college/university' for their main sector. Table 1 and 2 provide the breakdown of responses and show that the participants largely represented the views and

experiences of school pupils. Multiple responses were possible at the question for 16-23 year olds (Table 1).

	Number	Percent of Cases
At School	1,297	68%
At College/University (full or part-time)	509	27%
Doing an apprenticeship or other training	64	3%
Working (full-time, part-time or voluntary)	507	27%
Not in Education, Training or Work	51	3%
Base	1,904	-

Table 1 Education/Training/Work Status Age 16-23

	Number	Percent
At School	10,268	94%
At College/University (full or part-time)	392	4%
Doing an apprenticeship or other training	44	<1%
Working (full-time, part-time or voluntary)	121	1%
Not in Education, Training or Work	50	<1%
Base	10,875	100%

Table 2 Education/Training/Work Status Main Sector Age 5-23

Demographic information was also gathered in order to facilitate comparisons of results between different groups and to identify any issues which may be more significant/relevant to particular cohorts. The demographic breakdown of the survey sample is provided in Appendix A, although a brief summary is provided below:

- Slightly more females (50%) than males (46%) were represented in the sample, along with 1% who identified as transgender, non-binary or other;
- 5% of the sample were young carers;
- 3% were care experienced;
- Most respondents were from a white ethnic background (83%) while 13% were from minority ethnic backgrounds;
- Around three quarters (73%) of those aged 16+ were straight/heterosexual while 13% were gay, lesbian, bisexual or identified in a different way;

- 11% indicated that their own/their child's day-to-day activities were limited (either a little or a lot) because of a health problem or disability;
- A good mix of household incomes were represented, ranging from 5% with an income of £100,000 and over to 14% with an income of £50,000-£74,999; and
- 18% did not own/have access to a car/van, 39% owned/had access to one car/van, and 37% owned/had access to two or more.

As this was a self-completion survey, all respondents were self-selecting, and no quotas for particular respondent typologies were applied. However, data were weighted for analysis purposes by education/training/work (ETW) status to ensure the results were representative in this respect. This assigned and weighted respondents based on their main ETW Status (as outlined in Table 1 & 2). Where gender based analysis was conducted, data were weighted to the relevant gender split across the Scottish population to again ensure results were representative. The only exceptions to using weighted data were where questions were asked of only the 16+ age groups and for open ended questions. In these cases, the raw data were used for the analysis. Frequencies and crosstabulations within the follow-up data were conducted, and the results outlined below highlight any differences which were identified at the 95% confidence level. Comparisons between the baseline survey and follow-up survey results were not, however, tested for statistical significance. Qualitative data was read to identify the dominant themes and issues.

Focus Groups with Young People and Parents/Carers

Qualitative research was carried out in order to gain a more detailed understanding of people's views and experiences of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme. The purpose of the qualitative research, through focus groups, was to provide an in-depth understanding into particular issues, by exploring experiences and behaviours relating to the scheme.

As is typical, sample sizes were smaller than those used for quantitative surveys, and it was not the intention to obtain a statistically representative sample through the qualitative research, but to understand matters in more depth. Reporting of the qualitative data was done through analysis and description of opinion, rather than counts or measures. The following descriptions have been used below when reporting qualitative findings:

- all - everyone participating in the interviews made this point
- most/many - more than half of participants
- some - more than several but less than most/many
- several - less than half but more than three participants
- a few - two or three participants

- one/an individual - just one person

Focus groups sought to understand travel behaviour and decisions; gather feedback on awareness and use of the scheme or reasons for not using it; to explore impacts of the scheme; understand challenges, barriers and concerns about the scheme; and explore ways in which the scheme could be improved.

In total, 42 people participated across seven focus groups, which is a very good sample size for this type of research. The group cohorts included:

1. Parents/carers of children aged 5-11 who used the scheme;
2. Parents/carers of children aged 12-18 who used the scheme;
3. Young people aged 12-18 who used the scheme;
4. Young people aged 16-21 who used the scheme;
5. Parents/carers of those aged 5-18 who did not use the scheme;
6. Young people aged 16-21 who did not use the scheme; and
7. Other bus users not eligible for the scheme - aged 22+.

Topic guides were designed to be appropriate for each cohort. The groups were held over a four week period between 6-26 July.

Qualitative analysis was undertaken on focus group data, with recurring issues and key themes identified both within and between groups. Differences in views and experiences were also identified between different demographic characteristics and between focus groups. Given the nature of focus group discussions, topics and areas of importance for participants emerged which were not always directed by the topic guide adding additional and important insight to the findings. Verbatim quotes have been used to illustrate key points and may be drawn from different types of participants. The use of quotes does not infer any weight of response by that type of participant, rather they serve to illustrate a point.

Secondary Data Analysis

All secondary data analysed in the Baseline Study were revisited, however, in most instances there were either no new updates available, or updates did not cover the post-implementation phase being considered by the current work (i.e. February 2022 onwards). In such cases, no new analysis was undertaken. The only exception was the [Hands Up Survey Scotland](#) (HUSS), where data for 2021 and 2022 was available. This was included in the analysis for the Year One Evaluation.

In addition, data related to the uptake and usage of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme across its first year of operation was made available for analysis, with data provided from January 2022 to April 2023. Analysis of ScotRail ticketing

data was also made available to facilitate consideration of any impacts on rail patronage since the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme.

Other data sources which were considered by the Year One Evaluation included:

- Crime data to assess the impact on Anti-Social Behaviour - this included Scottish Government data on Recorded Crime in Scotland 2022-23 and Police Scotland Management Information Reports 2021-22 and 2022-23; and
- Driving tests taken and licenses issued from the [Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency \(DVSA\)](#).

Research Caveats and Report Presentation

Data collection for the Year One Evaluation was undertaken in the spring and early summer of 2023 (i.e. May to July). This differed from the baseline study, which was conducted in the winter (i.e. December 2021 to January 2022). The timing of the fieldwork likely contributed to the lower sample size achieved in the follow-up survey and issues with recruiting respondents to take part in focus groups. The period approaching the summer holidays is particularly busy for schools and students are on exam leave with many S6 pupils and those at university not returning to their place of education after their exams, making them difficult to access via their representative institutions. Further, the focus groups were largely arranged for the first two weeks in July, which is a particularly busy holiday period for families, meaning that many eligible families were unavailable to participate. The seasonal differences in fieldwork periods should also be borne in mind when interpreting any differences in results between the Year One Evaluation and the baseline study as travel patterns may vary at different times of the year.

The total sample size achieved in the follow-up survey, however, still provides good statistical reliability. It provides tight confidence intervals ($\pm 1\%$) for disaggregation - for example, at the 95% confidence level where 50% of those surveyed gave a particular response, the true figure would be in the region of 49%-51%.

Despite this statistical reliability, however, it should be noted that not all local authority areas or demographic groups were equally represented in the survey sample - people in some areas/groups took part in greater numbers while others participated in only very small numbers. As such, more locally unique impacts or challenges, or specific issues faced by some minority groups may not have been fully identified or explored by the research.

Further, the follow-up survey sample was dominated by the views and experiences of those attending school, with those in apprenticeships/training programmes, at

college/university, and those in work taking part in smaller proportions (partly due to the absence/access reasons highlighted above). While the data were weighted to address this disparity, it should be borne in mind when interpreting the results.

As the follow-up survey was only available online, and it was relatively lengthy/time consuming to complete, there is a risk that it was not accessible to all young people and their families. Although the strong response rate overall suggests that accessibility was not a significant factor, some limited feedback was received in relation to the survey length and complexity which was noted to put some respondents off completing the questionnaire.

The sample sizes achieved in the survey and focus groups reflect the different methodologies used, and both provided robust datasets for the different analysis processes and development of the findings. Qualitative and quantitative research aim to achieve different aims. In this case, the follow-up survey provides statistically robust measure for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the scheme, identifying areas that have the biggest statistical impact/change, while the focus groups provide greater depth and insight into people's experiences of the scheme, and ensure the 'user voice' is included within the findings.

Analysis of uptake data suggested this had been greater than 100% for certain cohorts within a few local authorities. This was discussed with the data provider (Transport Scotland) who noted this was likely to be due to students being included within population data under their 'home' address/local authority while registering for Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme at their 'term-time' address/local authority, thus causing discrepancies between the data sources.

Limits of the Research

The limits of the research also need to be noted. The scope of the work focused largely on identifying the impact of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme on eligible young people. While impacts were identified and explored for other bus users the findings were based on small samples and therefore were not statistically robust, and were often based on perception and anecdotal evidence. Some of these issues may benefit from more detailed research/consideration.

In addition, it was not possible to access formally recorded data in several instances. This included patronage and/or ticketing data (either for bus operators or other public transport modes) as this is considered commercially sensitive, and recorded instances of anti-social behaviour on buses before and after the scheme was introduced. This meant that changes to recorded patronage or any displacement of passengers from one mode/service to another could not be identified. Ticketing data

was further complicated by it often not being comparable with the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, with tickets often categorised as some form of 'child' or 'adult' ticket (i.e. for those under or over 16 years of age). While child tickets were fully reflected within the scheme, it was not possible to identify those aged 16-21 within adult ticket sales, again making ticketing comparisons difficult. As such, travel pattern changes reported here rely solely on feedback provided in the baseline and follow-up surveys, but this did not allow any analysis of the impact the scheme may have on the travel behaviour of other bus/public transport users. Similarly, issues related to anti-social behaviour rely on perception and anecdotal evidence from the follow-up survey and focus groups.

Report Presentation

The remainder of this report presents the findings from the work. Quantitative data (from the follow-up survey and secondary data sources) are included alongside qualitative feedback from survey questions and focus group results. The report is structured around the emerging key findings rather than considering each data collection method in turn.

2. Awareness, Uptake and Use of the Scheme

Awareness of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel

Awareness of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was high. Of the 10,821 follow-up survey respondents who answered this question, 86% had heard of the scheme, compared to 10% who had not heard of it and 4% who were not sure. This represented a 19 percentage point increase in awareness since the baseline survey, when 67% of respondents had heard of the scheme.

Similarly, all focus group participants indicated that they had heard of the scheme, including those who used it, those who were eligible but did not use it, and those who were older than 21 years old and so were ineligible for the scheme. Participants indicated that they had generally heard of the scheme either via their own/their child's school or from the news or social media. Some non-users had heard about it from other people who were eligible and/or already using the scheme.

While general awareness of the existence of the scheme was high, focus group findings suggest that awareness of the scheme's stated aims and objectives, as well as any restrictions around usage were typically less well known or understood among the general public. Some had a vague idea, or assumed that the scheme aimed to make transport more affordable for children and young people and support access to services and opportunities. Among focus group participants who were eligible but did not use the scheme, there was confusion and uncertainty around the exact ages for eligibility, which bus services could be used and which were out of scope, if there were time periods over the day/week where the pass could not be used, if the pass could be used on longer-distance routes/services, etc., with more information desired in this respect.

There was, however, general support for the scheme, especially for encouraging young people to use buses, both as a greener form of transport and to allow them to access opportunities:

"It's indoctrinating our youth to first of all think bus before persuading their parents to give them a lift... during lockdown everyone dropped out of using public transport because it was a risky thing to do, and I think... it is actually a good idea to get the young ones used to using buses, like we always used to when we were young, and it's a greener travel choice."
(Other Bus User)

Respondents across both the follow-up survey and focus groups were largely positive about the schemes ability to provide greater access to services, social, education, employment and leisure opportunities; and were highly supportive of the potential financial savings for young people and their families related to transport. While not an issue specifically asked about, a few focus group respondents also outlined support for the universal nature of the scheme, meaning they could consider travelling and activities as a group while being sure that no one would be excluded due to their financial situation:

“Benefits primarily are increases in access to the surrounding area and the opportunities therein... removing the financial barrier and generally just increasing freedom to travel.” (Scheme User)

Only a small minority of follow-up survey respondents and focus group participants (from the older 'other bus users' group) were negative about the scheme. Generally these respondents disagreed with the universal nature of the scheme, felt that taxpayer's money could be better spent, were concerned about the impact on other age groups/passengers, or worried that levels of walking and cycling may reduce among young people.

Uptake of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme

Uptake data indicated that the total national uptake rate was 59% among all 5-21 year olds by the end of April 2023. This ranged from 53% of 5-15 year olds to 70% of 16-21 year olds.

Large variations were also found between local authorities (see Figure 1). Those areas with the highest uptake included Edinburgh (83%), Inverclyde (82%), and North Ayrshire (77%). Meanwhile, those with the lowest uptake to date included Falkirk (41%), Clackmannanshire (41%) and Dumfries and Galloway (42%).

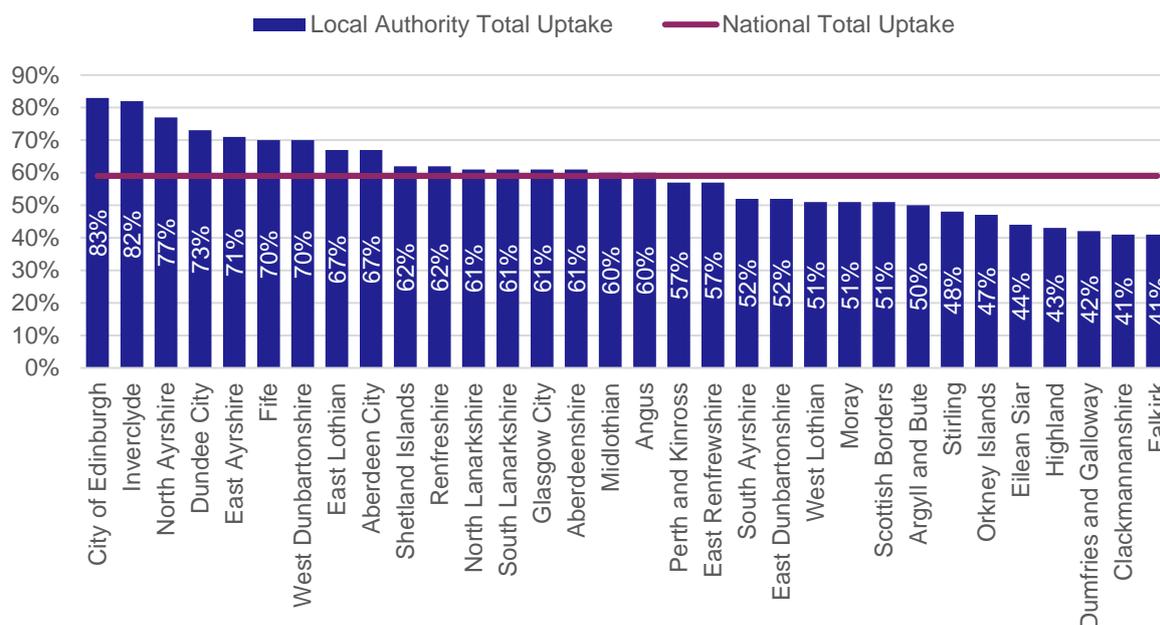


Figure 1 Local Authority Level Uptake vs National Uptake
 Source: NECPO Uptake Data

Uptake of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was also high among follow-up survey respondents with 74% having signed up and used the scheme. The responses were as follows:

- Yes, signed up and used it: n=7,993 (74%)
- Yes, used to use it but stopped: n=263 (3%)
- Yes, signed up but not used it yet: n=588 (5%)
- No, not signed up: n=1,674 (15%)
- Don't know: n=357 (3%)

Application Process

Parents must apply for the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme on behalf of children aged under 16 years old, while young people aged 16-21 must apply themselves. Two types of free travel card are available, a National Entitlement Card (NEC) or Young Scot National Entitlement Card (Young Scot NEC). The NEC provides free bus travel only and is available to all eligible young people. Meanwhile, the Young Scot NEC combines the free bus pass with the Young Scot card, and can be used as age identification and for other discounts, as well as free bus travel, this is only available to eligible young people aged 12+.

Various application processes have been/are available for the scheme, often with different methods being offered in different locations and at different points in time.

Applications can be made directly online via [get your NEC](#). Each local authority also offers an application process for their residents, and some schools facilitate applications via the [Parents Portal](#). Upon the launch of the scheme, some schools also offered parents/carers the opportunity to sign their children up for the scheme via hard-copy applications (with some potentially continuing to offer such an application process on an annual or ongoing basis). Those turning 12 years old and applying for a Young Scot card for the first time are also able to opt for the free travel scheme to be activated (i.e. apply for the Young Scot NEC) as part of a single application process. Some with existing Young Scot cards are able to activate the free travel scheme on their card via the Young Scot App, while others, with older Young Scot cards are required to apply for a replacement or new Young Scot NEC. Following feedback on the application process shortly after the scheme launched, the main [getyournec.scot](#) application was updated in June 2022 to provide a better user experience.

Follow-up survey respondents were asked how easy they had found the application process. Of the 8,379 respondents who had signed-up and provided a rating, 64% had found the application either very or fairly easy, compared to 25% who had found it very or fairly difficult (the remaining 11% had found it neither easy nor difficult).

Those who had applied more recently found the application process easier compared to those who applied when the scheme first launched, with greater proportions finding this either very or fairly easy since June 2022 (i.e. after the [getyournec.scot](#) application had been updated). There was also a marked improvement in how easy respondents had found the [getyournec.scot](#) application process between the launch of the scheme and more recently, rising from 57% who found it either very or fairly easy when applying over 12 months ago, to 73% of those who applied in the last two months (see Table B1 in Appendix B). Those who applied via the Parents Portal or through their school were also more likely to find the process very or fairly easy compared to the other application methods available.

Tables 3 & 4 provide full ratings disaggregated by when and how the application was made while Table B1 in Appendix B outlines ease of the application process by the timing and method of the application.

	Very or Fairly Easy	Neither Easy nor Difficult	Very or Fairly Difficult	Total (n)
When Applied				
Over 12 months ago (i.e. Jan - May 2022)	63%	10%	27%	4,563
7-12 months ago (i.e. June - Nov 2022)	66%	12%	22%	2,212
3-6 months ago (i.e. Dec 2022 - March 2023)	66%	12%	22%	809
In the last two months (i.e. from April 2023 onwards)	71%	10%	19%	399

Table 3 Application Process Ease by When they Applied

Source: Follow-up survey

	Very or Fairly Easy	Neither Easy nor Difficult	Very or Fairly Difficult	Total (n)
Application Method				
Online at getyournec.scot	59%	11%	30%	3,904
Online at parentsportal.scot	70%	6%	24%	954
Via the local council (e.g. library, council website, etc)	63%	11%	26%	1,144
Through the school	76%	11%	13%	1,686

Table 4 Application Process Ease By Application Method

Source: Follow-up survey

Feedback from focus groups revealed that both parents/carers and young people (who used the scheme) felt that the application process could be clearer, faster and easier overall:

“To find the application and do it online was quite hard, mainly because I had to verify all of my own information first on one system before I could then apply for the card. And when the card did come through, I was told I needed to do something with the card to activate it, but when I tried to log in to my original details, it kicked me out and said I was over 21. It was very confusing. Maybe just a website with big shiny lights that says ‘apply here’ would be easier. There was a lot of ID that was needed for the process.” (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

Some questioned why children could not automatically be issued with cards by their schools, and it was suggested that this might help families where English was not their first language and who may find the application process difficult.

Issues with the application process were also highlighted as a reason for not using the scheme among non-users, and as presenting a barrier to accessing it - this is discussed in more detail below.

Use of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme

Based on usage data provided, a total of **62,178,745** trips had been made using the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme between January 2022 and April 2023. Figure 2 outlines the number of trips made using the scheme since its introduction, and shows general growth month on month, although there were dips in usage noted typically around holiday periods (e.g. July, December, and April). Peak usage was noted in March 2023, with over 6.3 million journeys recorded.



Figure 2 Number of Trips Using the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme Since Launch
 Source: NECPO Usage Data

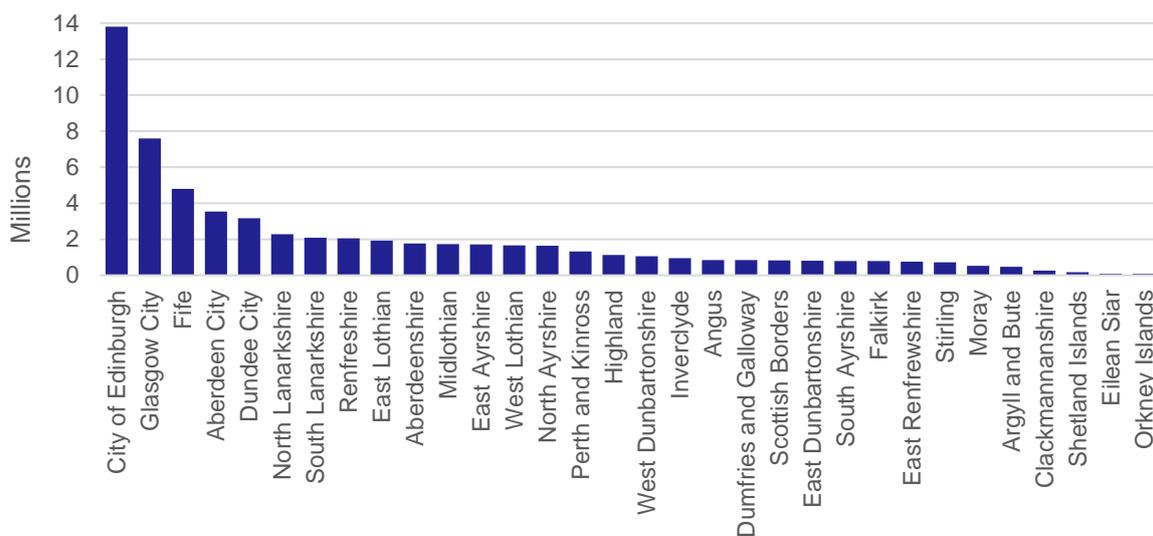


Figure 3 Total Bus Journeys Made via Scheme by Origin Local Authority
 Source: NECPO Usage Data

Figure 3 details the total number of journeys made using the Young Persons' Free Travel Scheme. Data is disaggregated by the local authority which issued the travel card. The total number of journeys made since the scheme was launched ranged from 79,301 for Orkney Islands to 13.8 million for the City of Edinburgh. The different population sizes by local authority need to be borne in mind, however, when interpreting this data.

Cards issued by large city authorities (i.e. Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee), plus Fife, generated the largest volume of journeys, while those issued by island authorities (Shetland, Eilean Siar and Orkney) generated the lowest volume of journeys, followed by Clackmannanshire.

Figure 4 outlines total uptake and usage for each local authority area and highlights some interesting findings. For example, while Inverclyde had the second highest uptake, they had relatively low usage rates. Similar patterns can be observed in North Ayrshire and the Shetland Islands. Conversely, Glasgow ranked 14th for uptake but had the second highest volume of journeys made. This may be driven (at least partly) by the extent of the bus services/network available in such locations.

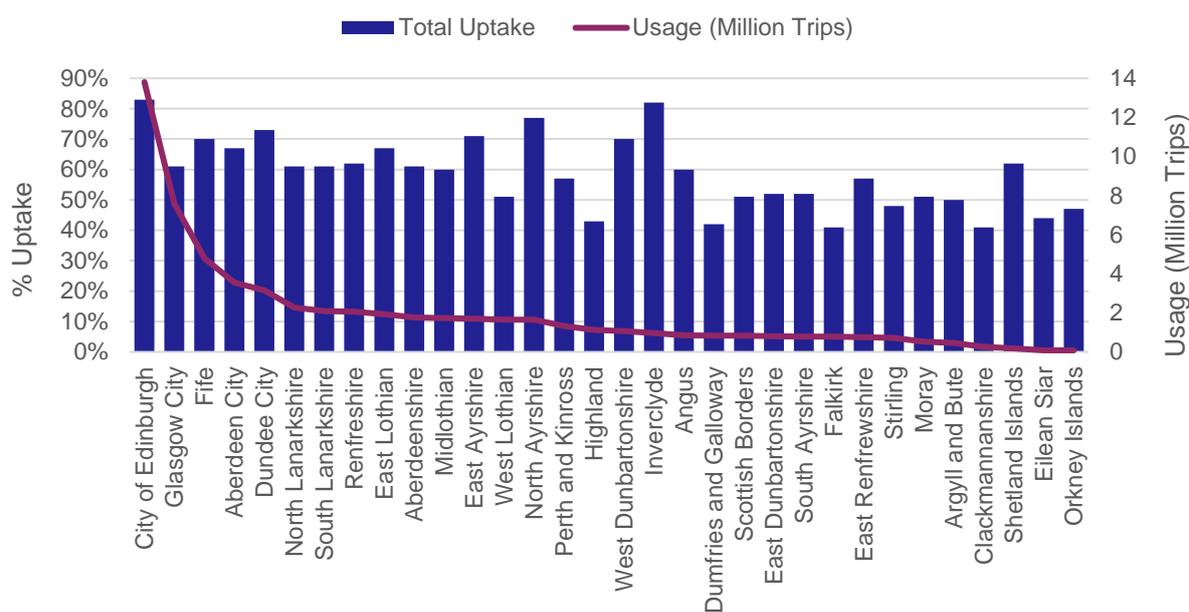


Figure 4 Total Uptake vs Total Journeys Made by Local Authority Area

Source: NECPO Uptake and Usage Data

NECPO usage data also showed that most trips were made by those aged 16-21 and that females generated a higher number and proportion of trips than males:

Trips by Age Group:

- Journeys taken by those aged 5-11: n=6,649,009 (11%);
- Journeys taken by those aged 12-15: n=18,563,170 (30%); and
- Journeys taken by those aged 16-21: n=36,965,895 (59%).

Trips by Gender:

- Journeys taken by females: n=28,436,793 (46%);
- Journeys taken by males: n=24,374,610 (39%); and
- Journeys where gender unknown: n=9,367,342 (15%).

The data also showed that more trips occurred during the week (49 million journeys) compared to at weekends (13 million journeys). This may be linked to the perceptions held by professional stakeholders that greater numbers of school pupils were using the bus to travel to school (see the Stakeholder Feedback Report), with the Hands Up Scotland Survey also indicating a slight increase in school pupils using bus to travel to school (as discussed in Chapter 3). Some young people who attended the focus groups also suggested that they had fewer places to go/be at the weekend (particularly on Sundays). Most journeys were also made either during the morning or evening rush hour periods or during the day (see Table 5). Those aged 16-21 were the most prevalent users of the free bus travel between midnight and 6am, and again between 7pm and midnight, while males were more likely than females to use the free bus travel between midnight and 6am.

	00:00 – 05:59	06:00 – 09:59	10:00 – 15:59	16:00 – 18:59	19:00 – 23:59
Age Group:					
Age 5-11	<1%	11%	13%	10%	5%
Age 12-15	3%	33%	30%	31%	25%
Age 16-21	97%	56%	57%	59%	70%
Sex:					
Male	55%	38%	38%	39%	45%
Female	43%	44%	46%	46%	45%
Prefer not to say	2%	18%	16%	15%	10%
TOTAL	259,801 (<1%)	11,928,188 (19%)	25,840,011 (42%)	15,677,272 (25%)	8,473,473 (14%)

Table 5 Journeys by Time Period

Source: NECPO Usage Data

Among focus group attendees, travel was also determined by time of day (often for safety concerns). Most young people under 18 indicated that they would mostly travel during the day, that they were less likely to travel at night, and were less likely to travel long distances, with various (often self-imposed) curfews/restrictions suggested:

"On the bus, I would probably just go about 30 minutes away." (Scheme User)

"Not travelling really late, maybe 7pm or 8pm. If it's wintertime, I won't really go out after 7pm or 8pm." (Scheme User)

Meanwhile, some older young people indicated that they used the bus mainly at night:

"Maybe when I was younger but I'm 17 now and I've been on a bus quite late, about 10 o'clockish when I've been at work late, and there's been no issues." (Scheme User)

Respondents who used the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme in the follow-up survey also indicated high levels of usage, with over three quarters (78%) using it at least weekly. The full breakdown of responses by how often they used free bus travel was as follows:

- 5 days a week or more: n=3,021 (38%)
- 3-4 times a week: n=1,725 (22%)
- Once or twice a week: n=1,463 (18%)
- Once or twice a month: n=1,079 (14%)
- Less than once a month: n=349 (4%)
- Rarely: n=297 (4%)

Figure B1 in Appendix B outlines frequency of use by local authority and shows that areas with high total usage figures do not always result in high frequency of use by individual users. For example, Clackmannanshire was among those with the lowest uptake and total number of trips made but ranked 7th for the proportion of survey respondents using the scheme five days a week or more, and ranked 2nd for the proportion using the scheme at least weekly. Conversely, Edinburgh City Council had the highest uptake and total number of trips made but ranked 13th in relation to the proportion of follow-up survey respondents who used the scheme five days a week or more.

It should be noted, however, that usage data and frequency of use may also have been impacted by the availability/quality of local bus services as well as the availability of alternative public transport options. For example, Dundee City showed high uptake, a high number of total trips and ranked highest in terms of individual users frequency of use, probably linked to the extensive bus network available across the city and a lack of other public transport options.

Reasons for Not Using the Scheme

Those who had previously signed-up for the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme but had stopped using it, those who had signed up for the scheme but not used it yet, and those who had not signed up, were asked to outline why.

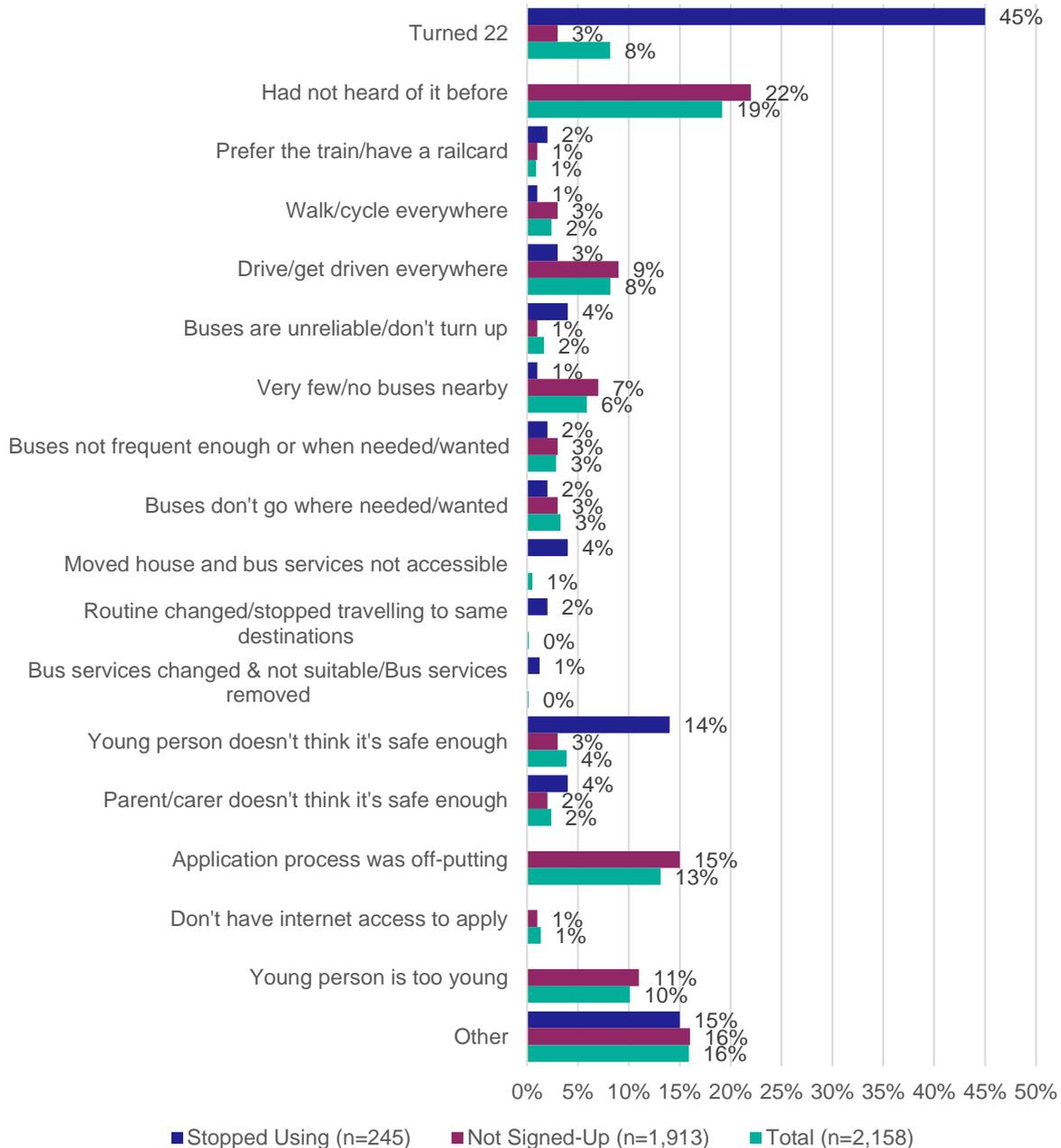


Figure 5 details the responses.

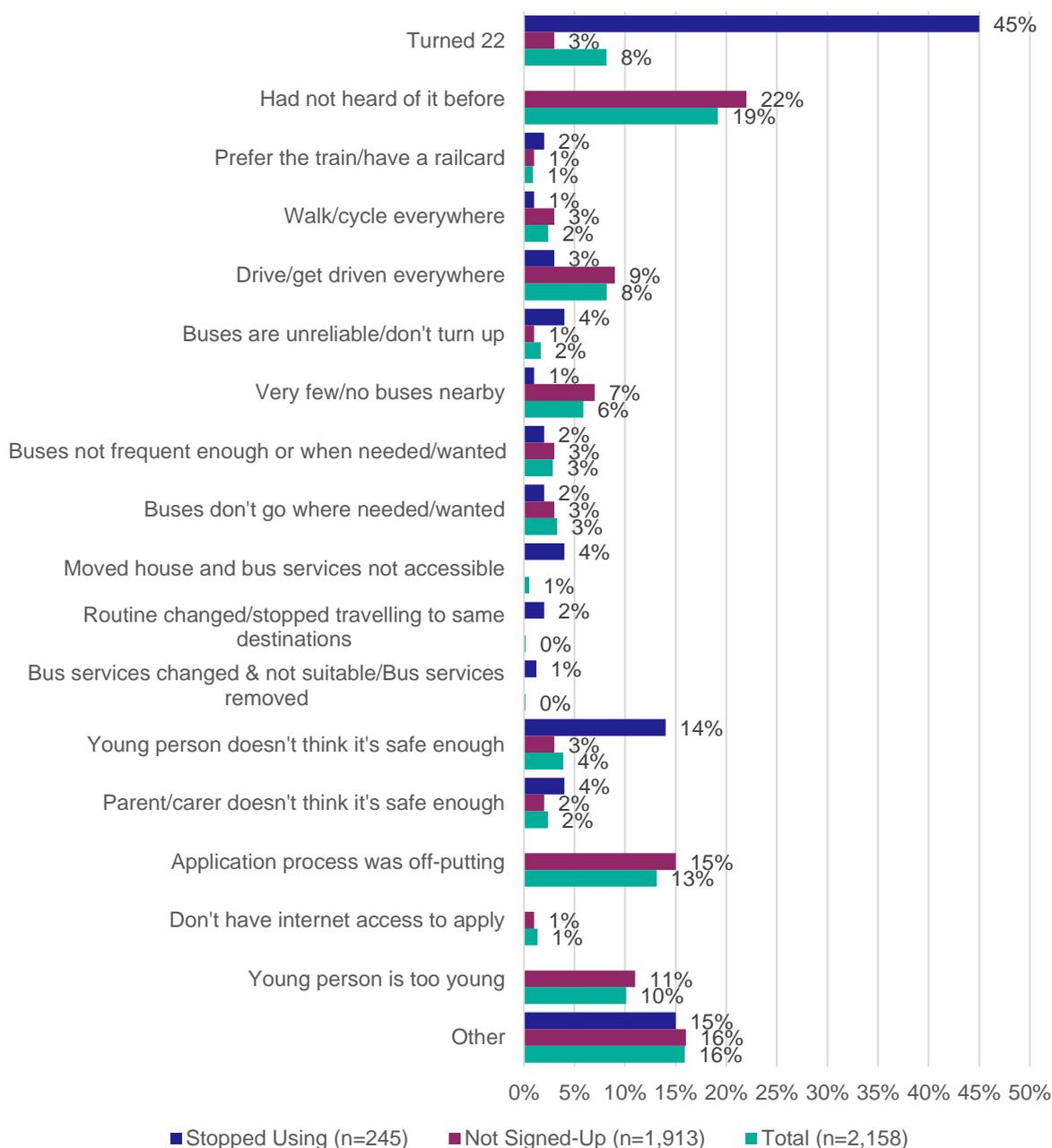


Figure 5 Reasons for Not Using the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme

* Note: Response options available differed in some instances

Source: Follow-up survey

Reasons for Stopping Using the Scheme

The main reason why young people had stopped using the scheme was that they turned 22 years old and were therefore no longer eligible (45%). This was followed by the young person not thinking it was safe enough (14%), while 16% indicated a range of accessibility issues with local bus services.

Other reasons given for young people having stopped using the scheme included that the free travel card had either expired, been lost or stopped working, and it was difficult to apply for/obtain a replacement:

“His card ran out in March when he turned 12 and I'm having trouble renewing.” (Follow-up survey respondent)

“Card was lost. Can't reapply as my daughter doesn't currently have a passport... She has a card registered via her school and her current address with her photo and only needs a replacement... It is now costing her a lot of money weekly as she is over 16 and paying adult fares each time when she is entitled for this to be free.” (Follow-up survey)

A few respondents also indicated that their child was too young to travel alone but it was too expensive for fare paying adults to accompany them on the bus:

“It is too expensive to also pay for parents to travel by bus. It is cheaper to drive than pay for two parents just to use free child pass.” (Follow-up survey)

Reasons for Not Signing Up for Scheme

The main reasons why young people had not signed up for the scheme included:

- 22% had not heard of it;
- 15% said the application process was off-putting;
- 11% said the young person was too young;
- 14% identified issues with bus services (including 7% where very few/no buses are available nearby, 3% where buses do not go where needed/wanted, 3% where buses were not frequent enough or when needed/wanted, and 1% where buses were unreliable/not turning up); and
- 13% indicated they preferred or used other modes of transport (9% drove/were driven, 3% could walk/cycle everywhere, and 1% preferred the train).

A further 16% indicated there were ‘other’ reasons for not using the scheme. Again, these largely related to problems with the application process - either difficulties experienced with the application process itself, or that an application (or in some cases multiple applications) had been submitted but no card ever received:

“We have tried continuously to apply but the application process is rubbish, it constantly leads us to a dead end.” (Follow-up survey respondent)

"After trying to register in January 2022, young person is now on the 5th attempt (3x online, 2x via local library) to receive the bus pass while their parent is slowly losing the will to live. Just tried again recently and currently waiting for outcome." (Follow-up survey respondent)

Similar difficulties were also discussed by eligible non-users across the focus groups, where problems and negative perceptions around the application process was highlighted as one of the main reasons for not signing up to the scheme:

"Discussions with friends and people I knew that said the process was really quite complex and they weren't hearing back, so I didn't take it any further, that kind of put me off straight away." (Parent of Eligible Non-User)

Across both the survey and focus groups with non-users, it was also suggested that there was a lack of help for parents and young people who were having issues with the application, and a lack of advice and feedback for those who submitted applications but never received the travel card. Respondents in these situations suggested they either received no response when they contacted organisations for advice or updates about their application, or were passed from one organisation to another generally with no success:

"Despite multiple applications no pass has been received, and lack of help from local authority despite multiple times asking for help." (Follow-up survey)

"Filled in the form given to us by school and never received my sons card. Have made enquiries to the school, local council and Transport Scotland but haven't been able to get any answers on what has happened to his bus pass." (Follow-up survey)

Specific difficulties with the application process itself tended to focus on:

- Lack of full birth certificate (it was noted that only the abbreviated version was issued currently with parents/carers having to pay for copies of the full version, this was not issued to parents at birth as standard), or difficulties caused by birth certificates issued outside of the UK;
- Lack of photo ID for both parents/carers and young people themselves;
- Websites not user friendly - several suggested they were 'sent round in circles'; and
- The online application process timed out and applicants needed to start again.

While the need for certain documentation appeared to be a widespread issue for many parents and young people, it was particularly restrictive for young people in care/accommodated children, where carers may not have access to these original documents and are not the birth parent:

“My YP [young person] is a looked after and accommodated child. I have been trying to apply for a card but it's very difficult as I am not his birth parent.” (Follow-up survey)

“Tried to fill in the form as a foster carer and it would not let me fill it in completely. Mum and social worker has tried to fill it in but again had trouble.” (Follow-up survey)

In addition to those who did not know about the scheme, a few respondents also indicated that they did not know how to apply, or that they didn't know the eligible age groups (particularly the younger age limit) and again, a lack of information or response from agencies following queries around this were noted. Others were aware of the scheme but simply had “not got round to applying yet”.

As well as being an issue for 14% of survey respondents, a lack of suitable and reliable bus services nearby was also a key issue for non-users in the focus groups. Many suggested that taking the bus was not an option as either there were no buses available nearby, or the service either took too long (longer than other options, including walking in some cases), was unreliable (with one indicating they had nearly missed job interviews as a result of the bus running late), or did not go where they wanted/needed it to. Others, who lived in/near the centre of towns/cities felt that everything was within walking distance and so they had no need to use buses - they largely suggested they would also prefer to use the train for longer journeys. Typically, it was felt that the expected difficulty in applying for and obtaining the Young Persons' NEC was not outweighed by the benefits it would provide due to the lack of services or current levels of bus use:

“I'd either drive or walk everywhere, or get the train if I have to get public transport, because a train for me to [nearest city], including the time it takes for me to drive to the train station is 20 minutes, but the bus to [nearest city] takes an hour and 10 minutes, so I'd rather pay with a Young Persons' Railcard... The bus is also very infrequent but the train is every 10 minutes.” (Eligible Non-User)

Again, a few follow-up survey respondents highlighted the cost of adult bus fares as a reason for not having signed-up for the scheme, particularly where children were considered too young to travel alone or where the child had a disability or ASN so

needed to be accompanied. Several also indicated that they/their young person already had a concessionary bus travel card. A few had also chosen not to sign-up due to their objections to the scheme, as they disagreed with universal benefits and/or the scheme on principle.

3. Impact on Travel Behaviour

Mode Choice

The [Hands Up Survey Scotland \(HUSS\) data](#), which was available up to 2022, details the mode used by primary and secondary pupils to travel to school. The survey is undertaken annually in September, and provides a snapshot of how pupils are travelling to school on a 'neutral' day. Table 6 shows a slight decline in walking to school, although it continued to remain the most popular form of travel to school, with levels still above those recorded in 2019. Park and stride (where people drive part of the way, park at a distance to their destination walk the rest of the way) also showed a slight decline, with this representing a continued decrease since 2019. Conversely, there was a slight increase in bus use in 2022, the first year when the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was available. This largely returned bus use to pre-Covid-19 levels.

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Walk	41.0%	44.8%	43.6%	42.6%
Cycle	4.1%	3.8%	4.0%	3.9%
Scooter / Skate	2.7%	2.6%	2.7%	2.9%
Park & Stride	10.2%	9.9%	9.9%	9.5%
Driven	23.8%	22.8%	23.2%	23.1%
Bus	16.0%	14.1%	14.5%	15.8%
Taxi	1.7%	1.6%	1.5%	1.6%
Other	0.6%	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%
Total (n)	472,617	405,917	418,147	456,695

Table 6 Travel to School 2019-2022 (excluding nursery)
 Source: HUSS Data

Baseline vs Follow-Up Surveys

When comparing the modes used to travel for different journey purposes between the baseline and follow-up surveys (see Table B2 in Appendix B) car and train use had both declined across nearly all journey purposes, while bus use and the use of active modes (including walking, cycling and scootering) had increased.

Figure 6 outlines the change in modes used by journey purpose. This shows there was a 10 percentage point decrease in car use for visiting family and friends, and a nine percentage point drop in car use for social and leisure activities (although this varied depending on the nature of the social/leisure activity specified in the baseline survey).

The largest increase in bus use was for social and leisure activities, rising by 12 percentage points from an average of 33% in the baseline survey to 45% in the follow-up survey.



Figure 6 Percentage Point Difference in Mode Use by Journey Purpose
 Source: Baseline survey and follow-up survey

Impact on Other Modes

Follow-up survey responses and focus group participants also suggested at least some modal shift away from car use to buses as children and young people were able to travel more independently and did not have to rely on parents or others driving them to destinations. Some also suggested that family travel by bus had also increased:

“Living in the country meant I was fully reliant on my parents for lifts. I can now take the bus to part-time work/seeing friends more frequently and when I choose.” (Follow-up survey)

“I’m an avid car user myself, but since the introduction of the travel cards it’s been fantastic because now I would say that the majority of the travel that goes on, I would probably say about 90% of it, has changed from car to buses.” (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

ScotRail data for the Young Persons' Railcard (for ages 16-25) was also reviewed for the period before and after the implementation of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme. Figure 7 outlines the results. This shows a steady growth in the proportion of ScotRail business made up of this product ahead of the launch of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, followed by a slight decline following the introduction of the free bus travel. The proportion of business made up of the Young Persons' Railcard has, however, largely levelled out, showing seasonal peaks around school holiday periods. ScotRail noted that those using the Young Persons' Railcard were among the most loyal rail users, representing repeat/habitual users. It should be noted, however, that this ticket type collates those aged 16-21 and 22-25, and does not disaggregate the behaviour of these two age groups (i.e. those eligible for the Free Bus Travel Scheme and those who are not). Further, the data is based on the 'proportion of business' by ticket type, rather than actual usage numbers. As such, proportions could be driven by changes in the use of other ticket types (e.g. reduction in the use of child tickets, or tickets bought by adults or older passengers who's travel patterns have been impacted by Covid-19), rather than necessarily being as a direct result of the use of the Young Persons' Railcard.

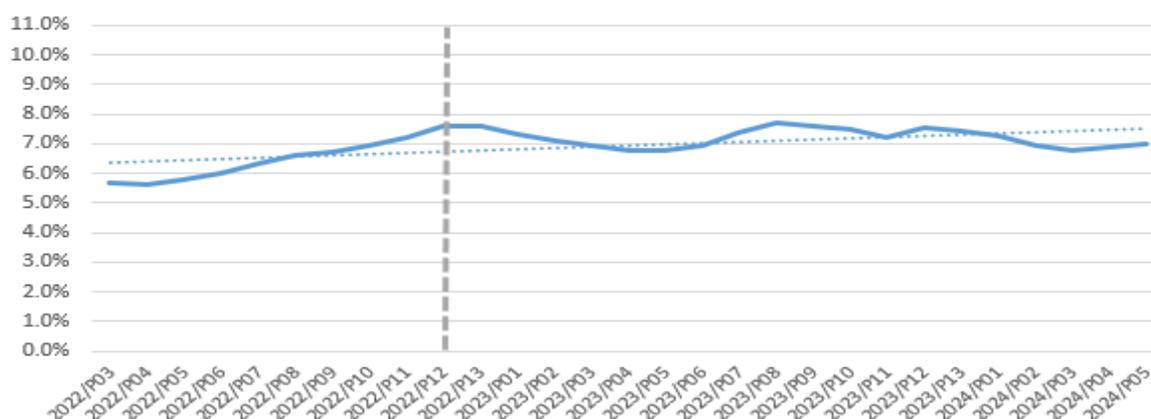


Figure 7 Young Person RailCard as a Percentage of ScotRail Business (3 month rolling average)
 Source: ScotRail Data

Data relating to child tickets (covering ages 5-15) for ScotRail was also analysed (see Figure 8). This shows an overall decline in the percentage of the business made up of child tickets, despite seasonal fluctuations around school holiday periods. There was also a clear decrease at the launch of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme. ScotRail noted that this ticketing type now makes up a significantly smaller proportion of their business compared to August 2021 (where it accounted for 10% of all business). Again, however, it is important to note this is based on 'proportion of business' rather than ticketing numbers (as above).

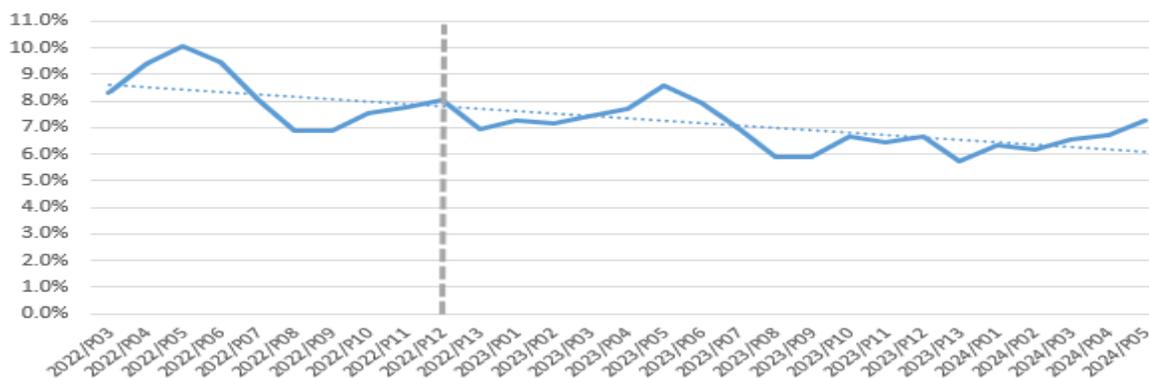


Figure 8 ScotRail Child Tickets as a Percentage of ScotRail Business (3 month rolling average)
 Source: ScotRail Data

While these changes are likely to have been impacted by the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, the use of ScotRail's own 'Kids for a Quid' tickets are also likely to have contributed to the overall reduction in the use of child tickets on rail services. Data for this ticket type was, however, too seasonally driven to provide any useful insights into the impact of this product.

Among focus group attendees, while most young people reported that they definitely used the bus more since the scheme became live, many also reported that they continued to use alternative forms of transport, mainly for speed and convenience:

"I definitely use it [the bus] more and I never really used a bus before it came out. I still use the train sometimes because quite a lot they [buses] break down and don't turn up and stuff so I have to get the train. And sometimes, if I'm going further, it's easier to get the train because you'd have to get more than one bus, whereas I can get a train direct. And, if I'm able to get a lift, I will go in the car." (Scheme User)

Young people reported that they did still sometimes need to be transported by car to places that were further from home and/or were not on bus routes. Both young people and parents/carers said that they would also still choose to walk or cycle to places that were close to home or due to perceived problems with bus routes:

"Sometimes I do go to a sports club on a Sunday or something and if the buses don't come when I need them to my dad will drive me... otherwise, if it's a short distance I'd probably just walk." (Scheme User)

"Because there's loads of roadworks at the moment between me and my work I have got a bike recently and I have been using it a lot more, but that's more the fact that a lot of the bus routes are not always very direct. So, quite often you're just better off walking and cycling." (Scheme User)

Most (but not all) parents and carers who took part in focus groups indicated that they would also take the train instead of the bus as they perceived it was more efficient. While they would use the bus if travelling with their children (as the children would travel for free) they would still travel more by train when travelling alone. Some adults reported that they would also still use the train to travel longer distances with their children due to the Kids for a Quid tickets and because the train was faster.

Frequency of Travel

Comparisons between the baseline and follow-up survey suggest that young people were travelling for social and leisure activities, as well as for shopping trips, more often since the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme (see Table B3 in Appendix B). For these journey purposes, the proportions of respondents travelling at least once a week have increased, while the proportions travelling for social, leisure and shopping activities less than once a week have decreased. The same pattern is observed for those visiting family and friends, albeit to a lesser extent, with the proportions of those visiting family and friends at least once a week increasing, and those travelling once or twice a month, and less than once a month decreasing - however, it should be noted the proportions of respondents travelling rarely or never for this purpose also increased. Changes in the frequency of travel for all other journey purposes were more mixed. Figure 9 outlines the percentage point changes in frequency of travel by journey purpose.

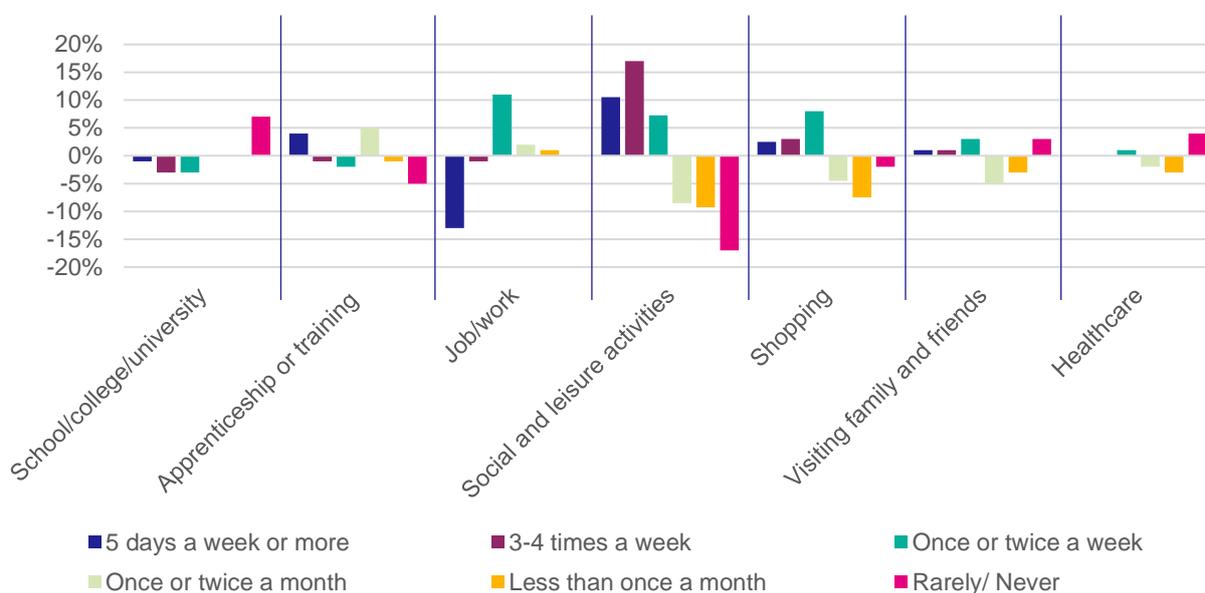


Figure 9 Percentage Point Difference in Frequency of Travel by Journey Purpose
 Source: Baseline survey and follow-up survey

Journey Times

Journey times of 11-30 minutes were the most prevalent for all journey purposes within the follow-up survey, and the majority of journeys took up to 45 minutes (consistent with journeys made in the baseline survey). However, comparisons between the baseline and follow-up survey data suggests there had been an increase in the proportions of young people taking shorter journeys (i.e. those up to 30 minutes) since the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Pass (see Table B4 in Appendix B).

Journey purposes which showed an increase in the proportion of shorter journey times, while all other times decreased in prevalence or remained fairly static included:

- Shopping, where the proportion of journeys up to 10 minutes increased;
- Education and healthcare, where the proportion of journeys up to 30 minutes increased; and
- Apprenticeship or training programmes, where the proportion of journeys between 11-30 minutes increased.

The proportions of journeys taking 11-45 minutes increased for social and leisure activities. For those travelling for their job/work, the proportion of journeys up to 10 minutes and those 31-45 minutes increased while the proportion of all others decreased. While the proportion of respondents travelling up to 30 minutes increased for those visiting family and friends, so too did the proportion of those travelling over an hour and a half.

Figure 10 details the percentage point difference in journey time by purpose between the baseline and follow-up surveys.

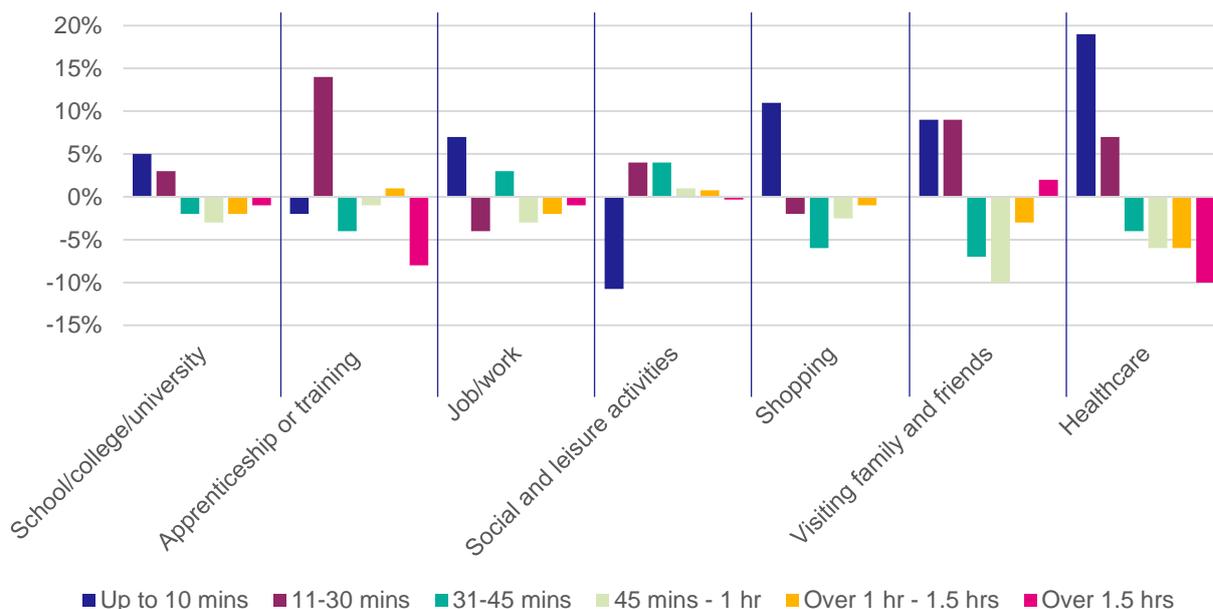


Figure 10 Percentage Point Difference in Journey Time by Journey Purpose
 Source: Baseline survey and follow-up survey

New Journeys vs Those Happening Anyway

The follow-up survey gathered data on the total number of bus journeys made using the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, as well as how many of these journeys would have been made anyway (even if the young person had to pay a fare or use an alternative mode of travel). This allowed the number of 'new' journeys to be calculated. While data were requested for the most recent 7 day period, the last month, or since signing up for the scheme (based on frequency of use), this was compared with how long they had been signed up for the scheme, and data factored up to cover the full time period they had been receiving free bus travel. However, caution is required over the accuracy of this number. The nature of the questions involved a number of risks which impact on data quality. Figures presented here are intended to provide an indication around the extent of 'new' journeys generated by the scheme and the number of 'existing' journeys that are now free for users - they **do not** represent an accurate measure.

Over one million (**n=1,000,952**) new bus journeys (i.e. those that would not have been made by any other means) were calculated to have been made by survey respondents since the introduction of the scheme. Meanwhile, just over one million journeys (**n=1,023,802**) would have been taken regardless of whether the child/young person received free bus travel or not, representing a significant overall cost saving for young people and families.

Respondents to the follow-up survey, who used the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, were also asked to indicate whether they used the bus now because it was free, or if they would have used the bus anyway. Figure 11 details the results for those who indicated they used the bus for each journey purpose. Across most journey purposes, the majority of bus users indicated that they used the bus now because it was free, ranging from 60% of those who used it for healthcare to 74% of those using the bus for social and leisure activities. The only exception was for those using the bus to access an apprenticeship or training programme, where around half (51%) used the bus because it was free while the other half (49%) would have used the bus anyway.

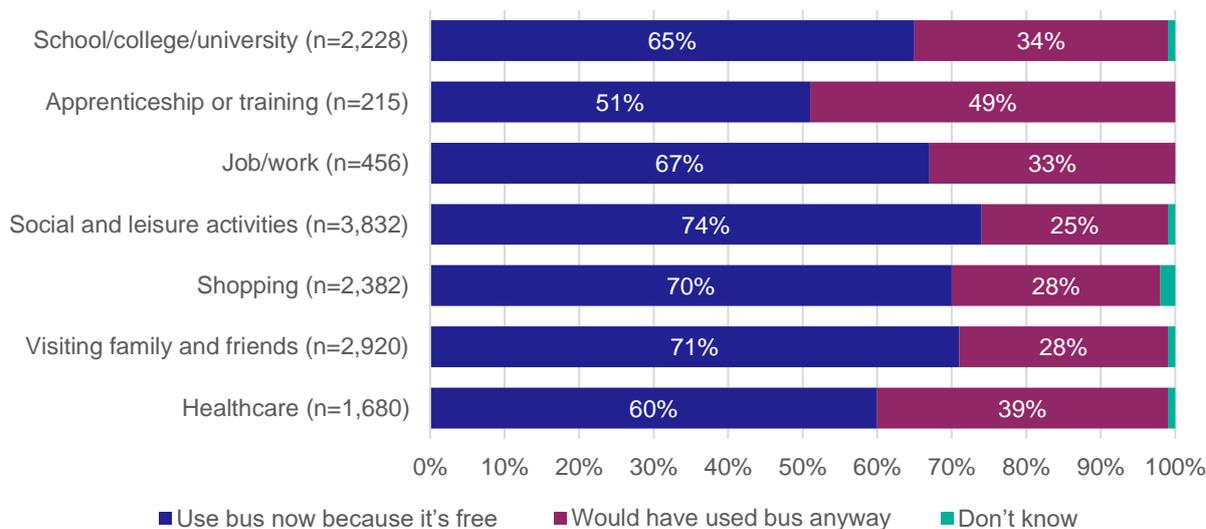


Figure 11 Use of Bus because it is Free vs Would Have Used Bus Anyway
 Source: Follow-up survey

Those who used the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme were also asked to identify the impact this had on where they went and how often they travelled for each journey purpose. Table 7 Scheme Impact on Travel Patterns by Journey Purpose

outlines the results and shows that across most journey purposes, over two thirds of respondents indicated some form of change to either how often they accessed existing locations and/or accessed new locations (ranging from 68% of those travelling for school/college/university as well as for their job/work, to 81% of those travelling for social and leisure activities). The only exception was for healthcare, where around half (49%) indicated there had been a change in location or frequency of travel.

Those travelling for social and leisure activities were slightly more likely to indicate that they both travel to the same location more often and to new places now (30%).

For all other journey purposes, respondents were more likely to travel to the same places but more often.

Journey Purpose (ALL Scheme Users)	More journeys to same places	Travel to new places	More journeys and new places	No change	Don't know	Total (n)	More journeys and new places: Total
School/college/university	43%	13%	12%	30%	2%	3,653	68%
Apprenticeship or training	31%	21.5%	21.5%	22%	4%	251	74%
Job/work	51%	9%	8%	32%	<1%	636	68%
Social and leisure activities	24%	27%	30%	17%	2%	6,120	81%
Shopping	29%	19%	23%	27%	2%	3,780	71%
Visiting family and friends	35%	14%	23%	26%	2%	4,654	72%
Healthcare	33%	7%	9%	45%	6%	2,307	49%

Table 7 Scheme Impact on Travel Patterns by Journey Purpose

Source: Follow-up survey

Feedback from focus groups also showed that, even where young people reported that they were not necessarily going to 'new' places, they still welcomed being able to make journeys more independently and with more frequency:

"Mostly just the things I was doing before but more often... it's just more easier for me... Sometimes, if my parents are busy or something, I can just tell them I'm going out." (Scheme User)

Learning to Drive

The [Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency \(DVSA\)](#) provides data on the number of tests taken in Scotland for those aged 17-25. The total number of tests taken for this age group, and for those aged 17-21 (i.e. those eligible for the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme) shows that test rates have returned to pre-Covid-19 levels, and increased between 2021-22 and 2022-23 (i.e. pre- and post-implementation of the scheme). Figure 12 shows that those aged 17-21 made up the majority of tests taken among the 17-25 age group, with the number of tests taken in 2022-23 (i.e. the first year after the scheme launched) by those aged 17-21 at its highest since 2016-17.

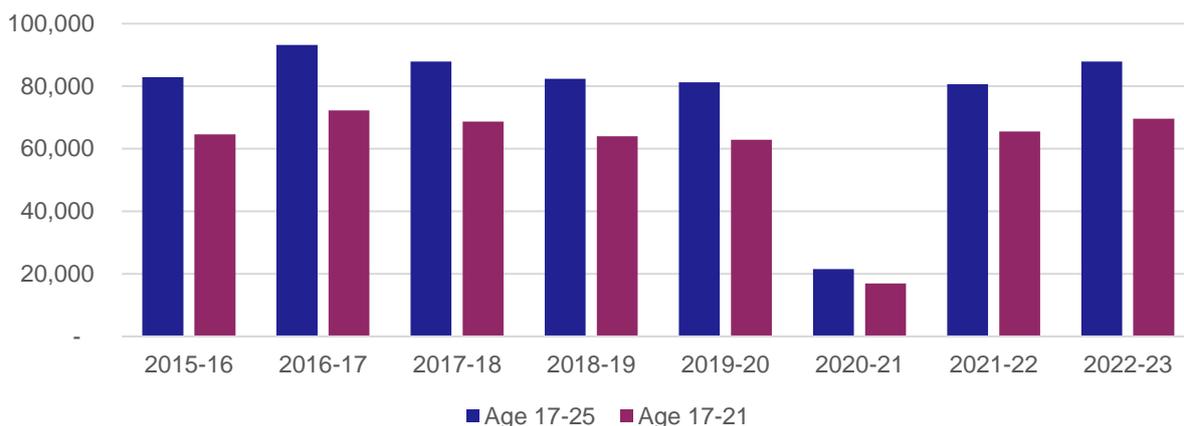


Figure 12 Total Tests Taken by those Age 17-25 vs Age 17-21 between 2015-2023
 Source: Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA)

When considering individual age groups, however, the nature and extent of the changes in the number of tests taken varied between the year before and after the introduction of the scheme. Figure 13 shows that the number of tests taken by those aged 17, 20 and 21 increased by around a quarter in the year after the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was introduced. However, there was a 15% decrease in the number of tests taken by those aged 18 and relatively static numbers of tests taken by those aged 19.

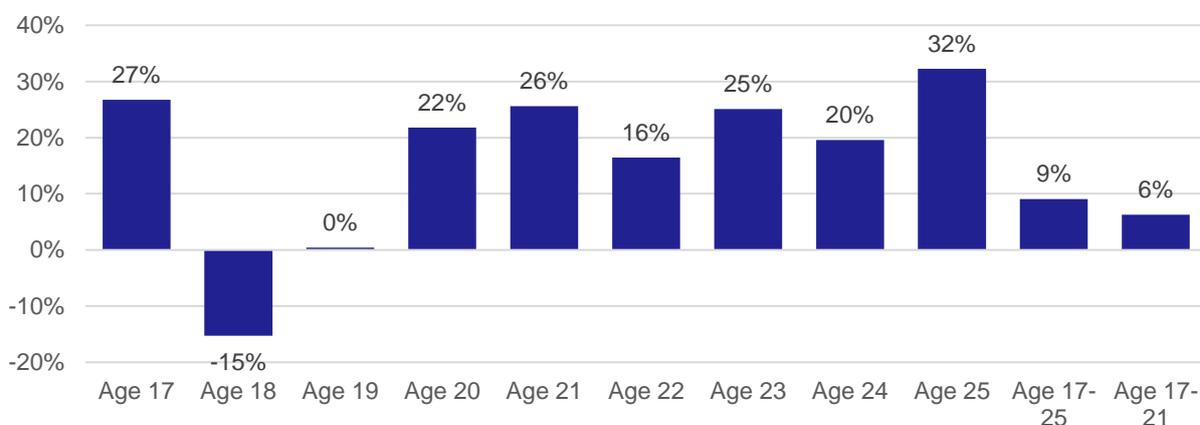


Figure 13 Percentage Change in Tests Taken for those Aged 17-25: 2021-22 & 2022-23
 Source: Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA)

Comparison of the baseline and follow-up surveys also indicates an increase in the proportions of young people who either drive or were learning to drive across all ages between 17-20. The only exception was for 21 year olds, where the proportions remained reasonably static.

	Baseline Survey	Follow-Up Survey	Percentage Point Change
Age 17	47%	53%	+6%
Age 18	50%	57%	+7%
Age 19	47%	55%	+8%
Age 20	44%	50%	+6%
Age 21	56%	56%	0%
Total (Age 17-21)	48%	54%	+6%
Age 22	-	59%	
Age 23	-	50%	

Table 8 Young People who Drive or were Learning to Drive

Source: Baseline survey and follow-up survey

While it would appear from the statistical data that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme has not, as yet, had an impact on reducing the numbers of young people learning to drive, caution is required over this assumption. A significant backlog in demand was likely to have been caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which halted most driving lessons and tests. Current capacity for driving lessons and tests will further impact numbers. It may be that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme has reduced the desire to learn to drive among some young people, but this is not identifiable within the data. In addition, many young people aged 17+ who signed up for the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme may have already been taking lessons or have passed their test before the scheme was introduced.

Indeed, those attending the focus groups provided mixed responses in relation to the desire to learn to drive. Some did suggest that they/their child was less enthusiastic about learning to drive and were likely to delay this as a result of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, either due to cost, environmental concerns, or simply the convenience of bus use. This included some living in rural areas, but with access to buses:

"I think it's delayed the desire to learn. My son is 17 and is now able to apply for his provisional driving licence, and he literally has said to me, 'I'm in no rush as I've got my free bus pass, I can get anywhere'... It's definitely holding him off learning to drive." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

"I was going to learn to drive this year, but because I live next to a bus station, I don't think I'm going to learn to drive any time soon because the bus is just a lot more accessible, and it's cheaper and it's a lot more green." (Scheme User)

"My eldest... he stopped lessons once he got the pass. Because the buses are so frequent, and because he mainly goes to [city] where there

is no parking, and also because of the environmental point of view as well, he just said he was going to put it on hold and save the money he would have been spending on driving lessons.” (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

Some parents also commented that they were less likely to encourage their children to start to learn to drive, mainly due to the cost, both of lessons and the price of insurance for young drivers. Based on estimates outlined by the [UK Government](#), on average, people complete 45 hours of instructor-led driving lessons to pass their test, costing an average of £1,350 to £1,800. This was considered to be unaffordable for many.

In the main, however, parents and young people who attended focus groups reported that they/their children either already drove, were learning to drive, or wanted to learn to drive as soon as they were old enough. This was considered necessary to help them access more opportunities in the future, or to overcome the lack of suitable/any public transport options:

“[My son] was of the view that, from age 17 he’d be learning [to drive]. Again, I think in a more remote area a lot of the kids do try for their test as soon as because it’s a way of getting about when things aren’t as accessible.” (Parent of an Eligible Non-User)

“I want to learn to drive as soon as I can... just because I think everyone should be able to and know how to drive just in case something happens and you can’t take a bus. You should be able to know how to drive.”
(Scheme User)

While learning to drive was considered essential for some, many also saw this as a valuable life skill, providing more autonomy, freedom and control.

Environmental Impacts

Young people who attended focus groups spoke about feeling conscious of the environmental benefits of bus travel:

“I feel so much better taking the bus compared to the car because of the greenness and feeling that it is more environmentally friendly.” (Scheme User)

While several 18-21 year olds commented that environmental concerns were in their minds when making travel choices, a few of those at the younger end of the age

spectrum were perhaps less driven by environmental concerns in their attitudes towards different modes of transport:

“I don't really think of the environmental side when I'm thinking of driving... you do a wee bit, but lots of people drive so if it was just me that doesn't drive it won't make that much difference.” (Scheme User)

Some parents/carers who attended focus groups also commented (unprompted) on positive environmental impacts and felt that their children's use of the scheme had encouraged the whole family to consider more sustainable ways of travelling.

Expected Long Term Impact of Travel Choices

Focus group participants (who were users of the scheme) were asked if they thought they/their children were likely to continue to use the bus after they turned 22. For parents and carers, there were mixed responses:

“I think they'll probably still use it but honestly I think they'll maybe start thinking about driving again, or maybe the train for speed, but I think if the bus was still evenly priced and frequent, they might still use it.”
(Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

“I think my son is quite keen about the environment and so I'd like to think that he would at least think about different ways to travel and not just, you know, use a car. I think he will continue to use the bus for at least some of the time.” (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

Young people themselves said that, while they would probably continue to use the bus after losing eligibility for the scheme, they felt this use would reduce in frequency, mainly because the cost benefits would disappear, and they could take more efficient or active modes:

“I think I'd probably use it but much less often because there are other modes of transport that are easier and faster.” (Scheme User)

“I probably wouldn't use it for journeys that could in theory be walked.”
(Scheme User)

4. Impact on Affordability

Travel Spend

Across both the baseline and follow-up surveys, parents and carers were asked to estimate their total household spend on travel expenses per month, and to identify what proportion of that was spent on their child (who was the subject of the questionnaire). Table B5 in Appendix B details the comparison in results. This shows that the overall proportions in travel spend remained relatively static before and after the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, with 45% of households continuing to spend over £100 on travel each month.

However, the proportions spending less than 10% on their child's travel expenses had increased across all spending brackets, ranging from 31% of those spending over £100 per month (up from 16% before the introduction of the scheme), to 72% of those spending £0-£10 each month on travel (up from 69% in the baseline survey). Meanwhile the proportion of respondents spending over 10% on their child's travel had generally decreased across most other spending brackets.

Young people aged 16+ who completed the surveys themselves were also asked to identify their monthly spend on travel expenses. Table 9 Young People's Travel Spend Before and After Scheme Implementation

outlines the results across the baseline and follow-up surveys and shows a large increase in the proportion of young people spending £0-£10 on travel after the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel was introduced, (up by 26 percentage points), and decreases in the proportions across all higher spending brackets.

	Before Scheme Implementation (Baseline Survey)	After Scheme Implementation (Follow-Up Survey)	Percentage Point Change
£0-£10	15%	41%	+26%
£11-£25	20%	15%	-5%
£26-£50	25%	11%	-14%
£51-£75	15%	7.5%	-7.5%
£76-£100	8%	5%	-3%
Over £100	8%	7.5%	-0.5%
Don't know	9%	13%	+4%
Total (n)	1843	704	

Table 9 Young People's Travel Spend Before and After Scheme Implementation

Source: Baseline survey and follow-up survey

Similarly, while there was little difference in the total household spending on travel and transport in the follow-up survey by use of the Young Persons' Free Travel Scheme, parents/carers whose children used the free bus travel were more likely to indicate that lower proportions of that spend went on the child. In addition, those aged 16+ who participated in the follow-up survey themselves were more likely to spend less on travel and transport where they used the free bus travel scheme:

- 42% of parents/carers whose child used the free bus travel reported they spent less than 10% of their total travel costs on their child, compared to 23% of those with a child that did not use the free bus travel; and
- 51% of those aged 16+ who used the free bus travel indicated they spent £0-£10 a month on travel, while a further 18% spend £11-£25. This was compared to 24% of those who did not use the free bus travel and spent £0-£10, and 14% who spend £11-£25.

Affordability

All survey respondents were also asked to rate how affordable or unaffordable they found travel and transport. Figure 14 outlines the results between the baseline survey and the follow-up survey. This shows an increase in the proportions of respondents who found travel and transport affordable after the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was introduced (rising from 26% who found it either very or fairly affordable before the scheme's introduction, to 38% after), and a reduction in those who found travel and transport unaffordable (declining from 48% to 38%).

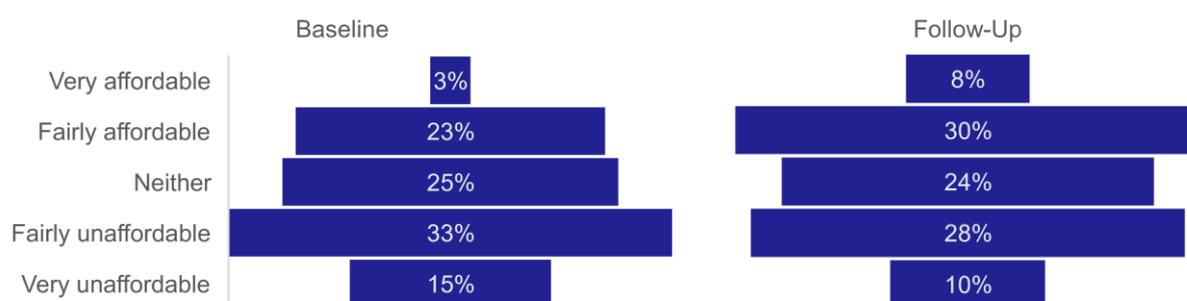


Figure 14 Affordability of Travel and Transport Before and After the Scheme's Introduction
 Source: Baseline survey and follow-up survey

Young people tended to find travel and transport more affordable than parents/carers, while those who used the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme were slightly more likely to find travel and transport affordable than those who did not:

- 49% of young people indicated they found travel and transport either very or fairly affordable, compared to 33% of parents/carers; and

- 39% of those who used the scheme indicated they found travel and transport either very or fairly affordable, compared to 32% of those who did not use the scheme.

Tables 11 and 12 in Chapter 6 also highlight improvements in perceptions related to the cost and affordability of buses. Table 11 shows that the proportion of respondents who considered buses to be affordable increased by 25 percentage points between the baseline and follow-up surveys, while Table 12 shows the proportion of respondents who indicated that cost of bus use was an issue for them/their child had reduced by 31 percentage points.

Financial Impact for Young People and Families

Focus group participants noted cost savings for young people and their families as a result of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme - indeed this was commonly reported to be the main benefit/impact of the scheme:

"I've seen a major impact on my finances because I'm not having to take them everywhere - the buses are frequent, reliable and I've cut my costs quite significantly." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

"I would say the main benefit of it is to save you a lot of money. Before I used to spend £35 a month and after the bus scheme, I don't need to spend that money. And I have a brother as well, so instead for my family, that's £60-£70 a month they can spend it on something else." (Scheme User)

"I know someone who uses it quite a lot... and she's ended up saving, only in the past year it's been like £800... so she's saved a lot of money." (Eligible Non-User)

In March 2022, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) published their report, [The Cost of a Child in Scotland](#), which suggested that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme would save "a total of £3,000 in the lifetime cost of a child in Scotland compared to England." However, based on the comments above, CPAG's figure might be an underestimate of the actual savings relevant to Scottish young people and their families, at least for some.

In addition to saving money, the scheme was also said to have made young people and families feel less worried about money linked to travel:

"I've been able to travel to cities across Scotland, visited museums and art galleries, had more opportunities to meet with friends and not had to stress about spending money to travel to uni [university]. In general, the free bus travel has saved me a huge amount of money, which I've been able to put into savings and help cover the cost of university." (Follow-up survey)

"It's easier just to go out and about - it saves money and it's one less thing you have to worry about paying for." (Scheme User)

"This is my first year in [city] and I still don't know all the stops and everything and I'm always scared that I'll get lost somewhere. Knowing that even if I'm lost I can just take the bus for free and get back to the city centre compared to having to pay and not have money and being lost without money or spending too much - I'm so much more chilled about it now." (Scheme User)

Even parents/carers of younger children who were not yet using the scheme frequently commented that they could foresee longer term financial benefits, which had eased some concerns:

"I can definitely see the benefits of this for my children in the future... The financial side of it in the future is just going to be massive when I think about the amount of money that I spent to go to college and I think 'Gosh, my children won't have that financial burden to worry about' and that might open up opportunities for them." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

While saving money was seen as a key benefit of the scheme, it was also considered to support people in a more general financial sense, as young people and families would have money available to spend on other things. This was considered among various stakeholders to be particularly valuable for those experiencing poverty and during the current cost of living crisis.

Financial Equality for Travel

The Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had also created a sense of equality between friends in being able to go out/travel together regardless of their individual financial situations, and this was very welcomed:

"I do go out a lot more with friends, because, before, we'd have the whole complex thing of 'Do you have the money to go out?', 'I've not got the money' - it just makes it a lot more simpler." (Scheme User)

“Sometimes you don’t know people’s financial situation... so I guess that helps that you can travel anywhere and there is no financial panic involved in travelling. So, we can do a trip out in [city], and I don’t need to talk to them about if they can afford it or anything... I’m more likely to ask people [to go out] and I can ask more frequently.” (Scheme User)

5. Impact on Young People and Families

Independence for Young People

Respondents to the follow-up survey were asked whether the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had allowed them/their child to travel and do more without an adult. Of the 7,961 who answered the question, over two thirds (69%) said this had allowed them to do so more independently, 20% indicated that it had not made a difference because their child was too young, and 10% felt it had not made a difference. The remaining 1% did not know.

Table 10 Impact on Independence by Age Group

outlines the results by the age of the young person. This shows that those of primary school age (5-11 years old) were most likely to indicate that there had been no impact in this respect because the child was too young. Conversely, those aged 12-23 were all more likely to feel that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had made them more independent.

	Age 5-11	Age 12-15	Age 16-21	Age 22-23	Total	Baseline
Yes	20%	83%	86%	76%	69%	58%
Not yet, still too young	72%	7%	1%	3%	20%	23%
Not made a difference	7%	9%	12%	17%	10%	17%
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	4%	1%	2%
Total (n)	1,945	2,714	3,164	137	7,960	15,198

Table 10 Impact on Independence by Age Group

Responses to the Baseline question varied. They were 'yes', 'yes, but only when old enough', 'no, won't make a difference', and 'don't know'

Source: Baseline survey and follow-up survey

When compared to the baseline survey results, where respondents were asked about their expectations in this respect, the actual increase in young people's independence had been greater than expected. In the baseline survey, 58% expected that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme would have an immediate impact on their child's ability to travel and do more without an adult, while 69% felt this had happened in the follow-up survey, representing an increase of 11 percentage points.

Qualitative feedback also highlighted independence for young people as one of the key benefits/impacts of the scheme.

Many respondents discussed the increased independence, autonomy, confidence and responsibility the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had given them/their child. It was considered to have helped young people to become better planners, both time planning and route planning, but was also seen to provide them with valuable life skills, and supporting the development of more general independence. A parent, whose son was due to start a work placement on the other side of the city from where he lived, explained how he had been excited to download and explore the Apps to see when his bus would be due, to plan his journey, and be able to travel alone to a new place. Others highlighted how they were not so reliant on parents to take them places or were more confident travelling on their own and/or to new places for the first time:

“She can take the bus to anywhere in town now and doesn't have to rely on parents to take her. It has encouraged her to be more responsible and take responsibility, e.g. looking up timetables on the app and planning journeys.” (Follow-up survey)

“In all fairness, it is less about new opportunities, but more about the child now travelling independent. Before, most travel was taken by car in order to get her there, now she is empowered to do so on her own by using the bus.” (Follow-up survey)

“I would feel more confident travelling maybe a little bit further [for work] if I had the bus pass and I wouldn't have to wait on somebody coming to pick me up.” (Scheme User)

For parents/carers of young people living on the islands, comments were made that having the free bus pass to travel freely around the islands would help prepare young people for travel on the mainland:

“I think it will really increase their independence and confidence being able to move around the island, so that when they do leave the island to go to college or university, they might already have the confidence to do that elsewhere as well.” (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

Experience or Age of the Young Person Limiting Use

Focus group respondents discussed the age of the child as limiting their ability to take full advantage of the scheme. While most of those aged 12+ were reportedly

using the bus much more often, younger children (typically those in primary school), were often still accompanied by parents/carers, or they continued to be driven, for example, to local clubs, afterschool activities, etc. There was general consensus that those at primary school were too young to travel alone or independently with their friends (with only some in the upper primary school age range described as doing so) - although it was suggested that some younger children were keen to be granted this level of independence:

“It’s been talked about - maybe meeting up with a friend on the bus route - but it hasn’t happened yet and it probably won’t for the foreseeable future.” (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

“It hasn’t really changed their travel behaviour much at the moment... We do still tend to use the car a lot because it is easier, but I think as soon as I let them, if I let them, travel alone when they’re older, they will be off like rockets and travelling as often as they can.” (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

Typically, parents of children at primary school were most likely to say that they did not and would not let their children travel alone yet, with the start of secondary school being seen as a reasonable time to allow children to travel more independently. This was not unanimous, however, and there was some speculation that the age at which children should be allowed to travel independently varied by child, depending on their level of maturity, confidence, desire to travel alone, etc.:

“Probably when they start secondary school... but it’s different. One [child] is a lot more responsible than the other one so I don’t think I would put an age on it. I just I would know when they were ready to be trusted with these things by themselves. Probably by the time that they’re going to secondary school... but not at the moment.” (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

A few survey respondents and parents who participated in focus groups also highlighted concerns about their children not being experienced enough to know what to do if there was an unexpected change, e.g. in the route taken, diversions, buses not turning up, what to do if they needed help, etc. This was particularly relevant for both younger children and those with additional support needs:

“I do worry about a child that is maybe not 15 or 16 years old making decisions when things do go wrong... It’s very easy to say ‘you take this bus and go from here to there’, but if the bus breaks [down] or something unexpected happens, I feel children of a younger age don’t respond to

these changes very well, they can't just 'think on the fly' and find an alternative easily." (Parent of Eligible Non-User)

"If something unusual happens, having the level of maturity to deal with that, it's not even if the bus broke down, but if a group of people got in the bus that were causing a problem of some sort, what do you do, where's the adult to help you, and there isn't one." (Parent of Eligible Non-User)

Another barrier for some young people may also be a general lack of familiarity with using buses, with parents feeling that a period of 'training' may be required where they travel with them to ensure they know what to do. However, it was felt this was challenging for parents who work, have other children to care for, and who would need to pay for their tickets during this period:

"As we don't use the bus as our first method, I don't think my son really understands how to navigate the bus network and how to use it very well, so it would take a lot of training and practice so that he could go later on his own, which means I would have had to spend time doing this, and with a full-time job and other kids to care for it's just not ideal." (Parent of Eligible Non-User)

In a similar way, another focus group parent (this time to younger children who used the scheme with adult family members) noted that they were preparing their children for when they would be able to use the bus unaccompanied:

"They're probably a bit too young to be getting on the bus by themselves. However, we have talked them through what it might look like if they were to get the bus to Gran and Grandad's house, which is sort of two towns over and is easily accessible by bus. So, when I've been on the bus with the boys, I've said to them 'This would be the stop that you'd get off, and you just walk across there to be at your Gran and Grandad's house'... It's probably something that might have happened anyway but I think they think it's more realistic now that they have actually got the bus passes in their hands." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

Accessing Opportunities

Across both the baseline and follow-up surveys, respondents were asked whether there were any opportunities or activities they/their child missed out on due to access/travel restrictions. Relevant respondents who participated in the follow-up survey were also asked if there were any new opportunities or activities that they/their child could now access as a result of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel

Scheme, and/or whether they/their child had lost access to any opportunities or activities as a result of no longer using or being eligible for the scheme.

Difficulties Accessing Opportunities/Activities

Of the 10,520 follow-up survey respondents who provided an answer, 15% (n=1,572) indicated that they/their child currently missed out on opportunities or activities due to access or travel restrictions. This represents a near halving of this issue compared to the baseline, where 29% of respondents indicated such missed opportunities.

The proportions who felt they missed out on opportunities and activities rose by age group, from 13% of those aged 5-11 and 14% of those aged 12-15, to 17% of those aged 16-21 and 21% of those aged 22-23. In addition, there were significant differences noted by use of the scheme - 13% of those who used the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme said they experienced such limitations, compared to 22% of those who did not use the scheme.

Opportunities and activities which were being missed out on varied, but included:

- Social and leisure activities;
- Hobbies, sports and activity clubs, classes and events, including after-school activities;
- Outdoor pursuits and activities;
- Visits to cultural and historical sites;
- Days out/day trips;
- Visiting friends and family;
- Accessing care and support services for those with additional support needs (ASN);
- Job/employment opportunities (including work experience); and
- Limits on the locations of further/higher education facilities that could be accessed.

Respondents who specified what their travel or access issues were generally cited either a lack of bus services (or other public transport options) to get them/their child to/from the venue, infrequent services, services which stopped too early at night or did not operate at the weekend/on Sundays, services which took too long to arrive at the destination or which were considered to be unreliable, and a lack of ability to drive/be driven:

“Eldest would like a part time job, but we live in a small village and buses are not regular or frequent enough to allow him to commute. Leisure

activities are dependent on us being able to pick him up as bus times don't work for homeward journey." (Follow-up survey)

"Bus route doesn't serve college at the right time to attend classes in the morning, and there is only one option. Very poor bus links to major colleges in the area." (Follow-up survey)

Where young people reported use of the scheme mainly during the week and on Saturdays this was generally because bus services were less frequent on Sundays or that they didn't have anywhere to be on Sundays:

"I use it quite often, mostly going out at the weekends, but not on a Sunday as there's only a bus every hour." (Scheme User)

Problems with availability of suitable bus/public transport services were particularly acute for those living in villages and rural areas, although such issues were not unique to these areas. Those living on islands also flagged limitations due to the lack of suitable/regular bus services, however, this was also exacerbated by the availability and cost of ferries:

"We live in an island with no bus, ferry to mainland is not free for children." (Follow-up survey)

"We pay around £70 a week in ferry fares to attend a sports club that is not offered where we live. It's crippling. My child shows potential but will likely not be able to excel fully due to the cost of travel to get there. Ferry fares are too high. Trains and buses do not meet the ferry and tie in, so we have to take the car every time." (Follow-up survey)

The cost of travel was also cited as an issue for several respondents who had either not signed up to the scheme, or who had tried to sign up but encountered problems with the application process:

"Because I don't have a bus pass. My mum doesn't know how to apply and has tried many times. Bus costs are too high for her. So, I don't travel anywhere." (Follow-up survey)

"Taking my three children on the bus, be it only a few stops, costs £10 a return journey. This is a large amount of money. This dissuades us from taking leisure, shopping and social trips. I am learning to drive since it will be cheaper (one journey per day adds up to £280 a month)." (Follow-up survey)

Newly Accessible Opportunities

Follow-up survey respondents who use the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, and those who had used it previously but had stopped, were asked if there were any new opportunities or activities that they had been able to access as a result of the scheme. Just over a third (34%) stated that they had been able to access new opportunities and activities.

When disaggregated by age, a significantly lower proportion of those aged 5-11 (20%) had accessed new opportunities or activities as a result of the scheme compared to all other age groups (36% of 12-15 year olds, 42% of 16-21 year olds, and 34% of 22-23 year olds). Those who currently used the scheme were also more likely to have accessed new opportunities and activities compared to those who had used it previously but stopped (35% vs 21% respectively).

Respondents who indicated that they did have access to new opportunities were asked to outline what these were. While new social, leisure and club-based activities were identified most often, there was also evidence of the scheme opening up new opportunities for education and work:

“College - free bus travel allows me to attend as otherwise wouldn't afford it.” (Follow-up survey)

“Better paying work further from home, which would not have been viable without the scheme.” (Follow-up survey)

“Started a new job which is only part time around studies and is minimum wage for her age. Had she not had her free travel her wage would have only just covered her bus fare each day so it wouldn't have been worth her working.” (Follow-up survey)

The range of new opportunities and activities that were said to have been accessed as a result of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme included:

- New schools in out-of-catchment areas (or continuing to access existing schools after moving house), and accessing other schools within the local authority or colleges for wider educational opportunities/subject choice;
- Supporting the choice of college and university locations, as well as other training programmes (including accessing open days);
- New jobs (including better paying jobs and those more suited to the individual), internships, apprenticeships, work experience/placements;
- Social and leisure activities and events;
- Sports and activity clubs, classes and events (including the gym);

- Volunteering and coaching;
- Attending church and church activities;
- Visiting family and friends;
- Visiting new/different areas, travelling further afield, this included their nearest town or city for socialising/activities, as well as other towns/cities and rural areas for parks, the beach, walking, etc. for days out;
- To access healthcare as well as support and care services for those with disabilities and ASN; and
- For short breaks and holidays.

“Visits to shops, art gallery, concerts, family, relatives, generally gaining more independence. Free bus travel has been a godsend, giving so many opportunities to our children, including cultural, educational and social opportunities, as well as work and study. A brilliant initiative.” (Follow-up survey)

Personal feedback from a parent/carer via the stakeholder survey also suggested that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had opened up a wide range of opportunities for their children:

“I have two kids making use of free bus travel. We are fairly rural, and the free bus travel scheme is a complete game changer for our family. Gives the kids freedom to meet friends and to go on independent adventures. It also opens up the possibilities for part-time working in towns a bit further away that might otherwise not have been feasible. Girl No 1 is away to start college in August and will use the free travel to get into town daily. One of the best things ScotGov has done to date.” (Parent/Carer Feedback via Stakeholder Survey)

Focus group respondents also highlighted that the scheme had allowed them to travel to new places or do new things, often for leisure purposes, but also to explore new or different work opportunities and volunteering roles:

“I probably would not spend much time in the middle of town as I do if I didn't have access to free bus travel... it means I can [now] stop in the museum whenever I want, or just spend time in [city centre park], and I like that.” (Scheme User)

“When I was looking for a job, I wasn't limiting myself just to my town. I was increasing it to where the bus journeys might take me, so I would get more opportunities.” (Scheme User)

"I work with a sports charity and, before I moved [house] I was pretty close to it so I was able to just walk or cycle there... But after I moved, cycling or walking there wasn't convenient at all, because it's 5 or 6 miles... But after the bus pass, I was able to restart going back there again." (Scheme User)

Others also suggested that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had encouraged a general desire to travel and explore, and that they were embracing the freedom provided:

"I think it also gives the kids a world of possibilities - 'Oh, let's go here this week' or 'Let's have a trip to the sea', so it gives them a bit more independence and desire to try new things." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

"Free bus travel opens my horizons!" (Follow-up survey)

Whilst not a new opportunity per se, it was noted (across follow-up survey and focus group feedback) that students living away from home were also able to visit home more often as a result of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme.

Parents of younger children (in the focus groups) were most likely to comment that their children travelled by bus purely for fun, i.e. the pleasure of travelling by bus. They also generally felt that their children were too young to have used the pass to travel to 'new' places, or to travel unaccompanied, but that this may be something that would naturally occur as they got older.

Lost Opportunities Due to Losing Access to Scheme

Follow-up survey respondents who had previously used the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme but had stopped were asked if there were any opportunities or activities that they had lost access to as a result of no longer using the scheme. Of the 260 respondents who provided a response, 28% indicated there were, 51% said there was not, and 21% did not know.

Again, most issues related to the loss of access to social, leisure and activity-based opportunities, such as clubs, meeting friends, and visiting family and friends:

"I just can't get out as much to the bigger towns/cities (I live in a rural area) because bus tickets cost so much, so I rarely leave the house for leisure now unless I know I can afford the trip out." (Follow-up survey)

However, a few also noted difficulties in getting to school, and others noted it had had a negative impact on their employment, with one declining shorter shifts at work, as it was not cost effective, and another having to give up their job as the cost was unsustainable/prohibitive:

“Had to give up a job in [city] as the travel costs to commute made the job unsustainable in terms of earnings.” (Follow-up survey)

“Visit friends less often, join lectures remotely, don't opt for shorter shifts as travel costs make it not financially viable.” (Follow-up survey)

Impacts on Family Travel

Parents who completed the follow-up survey were also asked if the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had encouraged them to make more journeys as a family by bus. Of the 5,775 respondents who provided a response, 44% said that it had, 43% said it had not, and 13% did not know. This was relatively consistent with parents' expectations in this respect in the baseline survey, where 46% thought that they would travel by bus more as a family once the scheme had been introduced.

Similarly mixed responses were provided from focus group respondents who used the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel in terms of impacts on family travel.

Travelling by Bus More as a Family

Those who said they did now travel by bus more as a family were asked to outline the types of trips they made. The main journey purposes included days out (both locally and longer distance journeys), for social and leisure activities, to go shopping, to eat out, for events, and visiting friends and family. Several also noted using the bus for church, healthcare and other appointments. Short trips, weekends away and even taking family holidays were also mentioned by a few respondents.

Several survey respondents and focus group participants indicated that the main family travel involved the young person and their siblings, rather than travelling with parents/carers:

“During the weekend, my oldest child takes my youngest child to places like [city]. They used to use the train but then they realised it was a lot more expensive and so now they prefer the bus.” (Parent/Carer of a Scheme User)

"My family don't use the bus, so it's just me and my brother that get the bus together." (Scheme User)

Some also indicated that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had enabled greater intergenerational travel/outings, with grandparents travelling more with their grandchildren if/where they also benefitted from free bus travel (i.e. the 60+ free travel scheme).. In addition, a few who indicated they did not travel by bus more as a family said their child only used the bus with their grandparents (not their parents) due them all having free travel:

"My parents have the older people's travel card and now they can all travel together... There is a limited bus service, but they would go on the bus mainly just to enjoy the trip, rather than to actually go anywhere, just because they enjoy the bus." (Parent/Carer of a Scheme User)

"My dad certainly has taken advantage of it and is definitely more inclined to say to the kids, 'Come on, let's just go on the bus and we'll go into town', and he wouldn't necessarily have done that before because to have the three of them on the bus would have been quite an expensive day out." (Parent/Carer of a Scheme User)

This latter parent explained that their children used to travel regularly with their grandparent before they went to school (i.e. when bus travel was free) but that stopped until the bus pass came was introduced, which made trips with grandparents (who also had free travel) more affordable again:

"Previously, when they were under five, they were able to travel for free so they would take the three of them up to [city]... it was just a big adventure. And that did stop as they started school and they had to pay for the bus fares, and I think he [grandparent] was cheerier than I was to get the bus passes... Because he loves doing that with them." (Parent/Carer of a Scheme User)

Those who outlined why there had been an increase in family travel by bus typically indicated that it was now cheaper than using alternative modes, particularly driving where fuel and parking costs were involved. Although some did also note it was also cheaper than taking the train and taxis:

"It is a more affordable option now children are free. We take bus instead of car as paying for 2 adults return on bus works out cheaper than driving and paying for parking in city." (Follow-up survey)

"...as a family we used to take the car to the city centre, but now as 3 children (young adults) have bus passes we now take the bus as it is cost effective." (Follow-up survey)

In addition to the cost differences, parents (in both the follow-up survey and focus groups) also felt there were advantages to taking the bus over car use in certain areas. In particular, where parking was difficult to find, and where there were time restrictions on parking (or financial costs to staying longer):

"Meeting friends in the centre of the city because parking is too difficult to find and too expensive and time restrictive. The bus means we can relax without worrying when we need to rush back to the car." (Follow-up survey)

"If we go to things at the weekend where there's not going to be parking, we definitely use the bus then... we probably use them more for places where it would be difficult to get parked." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

There was also evidence that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had removed barriers to travel/transport and supported family activities that were previously unaffordable:

"It means we can now do more as a family as we couldn't afford to before." (Follow-up survey)

"Day trips that are too far away to walk and where cost of public transport tickets would have been a barrier to make those trips." (Follow-up survey)

While the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was appreciated by all respondents who used it, it appeared to be particularly beneficial for large families (i.e. those with three or more children):

"Family days out - as we are a big family and my parents couldn't afford the bus tickets for all of us, so with us children being free, we can go out more now." (Follow-up survey)

"Get to visit more places, like museums and parks, etc. as it was too expensive before as we are a family of eight." (Follow-up survey)

"I am a single parent to six children... so getting the bus anywhere used to be too cost prohibitive. We now use the bus quite a lot." (Follow-up survey)

A few respondents also noted the environmental benefits of using the bus more often, and the impact of the Low Emission Zones (LEZ) meaning that bus use was preferable/easier.

Reasons for Not Travelling by Bus More as a Family

Those that had not used the bus more often as a family were asked to outline why.

The main issue for respondents was that adult bus fares were generally perceived to be too expensive, with some indicating that the train, taxi and driving remained cheaper options:

“Adult fares are expensive - it costs double what we pay to go by car including parking.” (Follow-up survey)

“Because I can't really afford the bus prices.” (Follow-up survey)

“If all five of us were travelling it would be £16 for just me and my husband even with the free bus passes, so the cost and the convenience of the car means we would probably just use that.” (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

A wide range of other reasons for not using the bus more for family travel were also outlined, and included:

- Having access to, and already paying for the upkeep of a car, and finding that car use was more convenient/practical;
- Issues with bus services, including lack of services, reliability, the length of journeys, timetabling, routes, and busy/crowded services;
- Instances of, or the risk of experiencing anti-social behaviour on-board buses;
- Buses were considered less convenient/practical when carrying lots of bags/goods or travelling with a pram/buggy;
- There was no change in behaviour as the family already used the bus;
- That parents did not like buses or were prone to travel sickness on buses;
- They preferred to use the train, particularly where they had a railcard as it was cheaper than adult bus fares for family travel;
- That bus travel was not suitable due to either a parent or child having a disability, ASN or anxiety;
- The young person wanted more independence and did not want to travel as a family;
- Those in rural areas indicated that they had little alternative but to use their car; and
- Some parents preferred to walk or cycle wherever possible.

Wider Benefits for Young People and Families

Non-Drivers and Single Car Households

The Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was felt to have been particularly helpful for parents/carers who did not drive and for families with multiple children where there was just one car in the household. Not having access to a private vehicle made it difficult for some families to take different children to different places at the same time, and the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had opened up opportunities for families to engage in different activities concurrently (i.e. freed them up to be more independent of one another).

Non-drivers and single car households also commented that the scheme had allowed children and parents to travel during holidays when the other parent was at work and using the car, e.g. a day out for shopping or sightseeing when the main car user was at work:

"If my husband has his car at work, I would take them all [out] and, to be honest, if I think about it, if they didn't have their bus passes, I might have said "We'll go at the weekend"... but I maybe now would be more inclined." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

"As a non-driver, it helps me to be able to get out and about with the kids during the holidays, and then when they get older it will help them to have that little bit more independence to do things on their own and travel to where they want to be. So, for me, it's all good really!" (Parent/Carer)

Cashless Travel

Parents/carers who attended focus groups commented on the positive aspects of children not having to carry cash when travelling, as this meant that there was less likelihood of money being lost (preventing them from getting home), and no temptation to spend their travel money on anything else. One parent also explained that the need to carry cash to pay for children's travel had been a barrier to their bus use before the scheme was introduced:

"When the buses first went contactless, you could only pay for one person on your card, so if I was going anywhere with the children, I would have to pay for myself with my card and given them each a little pile of money so that they could then pay for themselves to get on. And that would definitely have put me off - just the organisation of that - giving cash to a

child who is going to drop it... It's definitely a lot more convenient to have the bus pass." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

Similarly, the ability to simply tap the card also removed the stress of having the right bus ticket for the right service, making travel and journey planning less stressful:

"Especially now that you don't have to buy multiple tickets, you just use the one card, and that makes it a lot more stress free to travel. Because even if you miss a bus and get a different one, you don't have the stress of having to buy a new one [ticket], or having to explain to the bus driver that you missed your bus, you can just get on." (Scheme User)

Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing/Covid-19 Recovery

Several survey respondents also suggested that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was beneficial for young people's mental health, and was seen as particularly supportive in this respect after Covid-19 and the related isolation:

"More activities to meet new people and socialise, really positive for mental wellbeing." (Follow-up survey)

"I can go out and socialise with my friends more which has helped after Covid where we were stuck in." (Follow-up survey)

"As a teen my child chooses to travel to meet her friends. I'm very grateful for the free bus travel. It gave kids more freedom after Covid and now a huge help during cost of living crisis." (Follow-up survey)

Parents/carers (particularly of teenagers) who participated in the focus groups also spoke of their children/young people feeling less under scrutiny as a result of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, i.e. there were fewer concerns about parents dropping off or picking up and "spying" on young people, as they could travel to/from places with more privacy:

"I would say it's definitely given them more independence... realising that she can be dropped off at the cinema instead of relying on her dad, which is embarrassing if your friends are waiting... and I think it's encouraged her to be a bit braver too, and to be more resilient." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

As a result, there had been some unexpected benefits to the quality of relationships between parents and their children:

"I think our relationship has actually got better because she feels that we trust her and that she and her friends have their own time that is more relaxed and independent, that allows her to feel like a young adult."
(Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

Impact of Being Unable to Access Scheme

For eligible young people who were not using the scheme, it was felt that while they may not be missing out on the range of opportunities open to them per se, they were generally less independent in accessing them, accessed opportunities less often (due to cost and/or the need for someone to take them), and/or it cost them significantly more money in travel than their friends and peers:

"It's not that they're missing out, but maybe it's something they could do more often... for us to access a leisure facility we may not go as often as we need to organise what we're doing. But if it was something convenient that my son would feel confident doing on his own, he may be able to go and enjoy that more often as he wouldn't depend as much on us as a family planning that activity. He could be more independent in that sense."
(Parent of an Eligible Non-User)

A few parents (typically those who wanted to use the scheme but could not, often due to application issues or a lack of suitable bus services), however, were concerned that there could potentially be longer term impacts on young people's social skills and mental health compared to their peers due to their inability to access the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme:

"My YP [young person] is more dependent on me and doesn't have the opportunity to travel independently - this affects their mental wellbeing when they are forced to use public transport as it isn't familiar and they don't feel safe. The YP would rather miss out on opportunities to ensure there is no additional stress on us and they have to accept our limitations, which shouldn't be the case." (Follow-up survey)

6. Perceptions of and Issues with Bus Use

General Perceptions of Bus Use

Across both the baseline and follow-up surveys, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements related to buses and bus use. Table 11 Agreement with Statements about Bus Use Pre- and Post-Scheme Implementation

outlines the proportions of respondents that agreed with each statement and highlights the changes in attitudes. This shows that two thirds (67%) of respondents in the follow-up survey agreed that buses were environmentally friendly (an increase of eight percentage points), while 54% agreed that buses were affordable (an increase of 25 percentage points - and representing the biggest change across all perceptions). There were improvements in most of the elements that respondents were asked about, as well as a reduction in the proportions concerned about the spread of viruses on-board buses. There were, however, also slight increases in the proportions of respondents who agreed that buses were too busy/crowded and that there was lots of anti-social behaviour on buses.

Agree/Strongly Agree	Before Scheme	After Scheme	Percentage Point Change
Buses are environmentally friendly	59%	67%	+8%
Buses are affordable	29%	54%	+25%
Bus travel helps to make the roads safer	50%	53%	+3%
Buses are clean and comfortable	44%	52%	+8%
Current bus routes meet my/their needs	47%	51%	+4%
Buses are too busy/crowded	45%	47%	+2%
There's lots of anti-social behaviour on buses	39%	45%	+6%
Buses are a fast and convenient way to travel	40%	45%	+5%
Worried about viruses spreading on buses	54%	24%	-30%

Table 11 Agreement with Statements about Bus Use Pre- and Post-Scheme Implementation

Source: Baseline survey and follow-up survey

Issues Experienced with Bus Use

Respondents in both the baseline and follow-up surveys were asked to identify any issues they/their child experienced in using the bus. Table 12 Issues Faced with Bus Use Before and After Scheme Introduction

outlines the results and shows that cost was no longer the main issue following the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme. Again, this represents the largest change, with a reduction of 31 percentage points in those who reported cost as an issue.

	Baseline	Follow-Up	Percentage Point Change
Buses are not reliable/on time	37%	49%	+12%
The bus doesn't run often enough	35%	45%	+10%
Timetables are not suitable	27%	38%	+11%
The bus takes too long	36%	35%	-1%
Safety concerns at night	45%	34%	-11%
Safety concerns when travelling alone	38%	32%	-6%
Buses don't go where need/want	28%	29%	+1%
Too young/not confident to use on own	29%	28%	-1%
Parent/carer decides on travel	24%	23%	-1%
Have to rely on family when travelling	27%	20%	-7%
Cost	51%	20%	-31%
There's no bus stop nearby	12%	12%	-
Don't know about services/how to pay	20%	11%	-9%
Other	3%	3%	-
Accessibility issues	2%	1%	-1%
Total Respondents (n)	16,616	10,417	

Table 12 Issues Faced with Bus Use Before and After Scheme Introduction

Source: Baseline survey and follow-up survey

The proportions of respondents highlighting safety, knowledge about services/how to pay, and having to rely on family when travelling as barriers had also reduced.

Based on the follow-up survey findings, the main issues experienced since the introduction of the scheme were reliability or buses not turning up on time (noted by 49% of respondents), and that buses did not run often enough (identified by 45% of respondents). There was also an increase in those experiencing challenges related to service provision, including reliability, unsuitable timetables and lack of frequency.

Those who indicated 'other' challenges (3%), identified a wide range of issues. These included anti-social behaviour; buses being too crowded/busy; young people with a disability, ASN or anxiety found using the bus difficult; a lack of direct routes; journeys that took too long; no bus services available nearby; the cost for adults to travel with their children; limited services, particularly in the at night and at the weekend; inability to take bikes on-board; poor cleanliness and comfort; and difficulties in obtaining the free travel card.

Similarly, many eligible non-users within the focus groups also highlighted that they faced issues in relation to a lack of accessible, reliable services which went where they wanted/needed and didn't experience excessively long journey times. It was suggested that improvements were needed to bus services in order to make the scheme more accessible and attractive for young people in certain areas. In particular, some areas were said to be lacking any services, while others called for greater reliability, greater frequency, alternative routes, and shorter journey times to be made available.

Several non-user survey respondents and focus group participants also noted they would need to drive to a bus stop as there was nothing accessible locally, but there were no parking facilities available. While some felt that they might as well drive for their full journey, others suggested that locating parking provision near bus stops along key routes, or main bus interchange locations, may encourage more young people to use the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme:

“Having parking near bus stops... When I drive back over to [transport hub] you can get a bus to pretty much anywhere from there, it's so handy... but you can't just park and ride.” (Eligible Non-User)

Perceived Safety of Public Transport

As noted in Table 12 above, safety concerns when travelling at night and alone were explored, with both issues having improved since the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme. 'Safety concerns at night' showed an 11 percentage point reduction between the baseline and follow-up surveys, while 'safety concerns when travelling alone' showed a six percentage point reduction.

In order to more fully understand any impact that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme may have had on perceptions of safety, respondents to the follow-up survey were also asked to indicate the extent to which they/their child felt safe using different forms of public transport during the day and at night/in the dark. Different modes were covered to provide context of perceived safety across the public transport spectrum.

Figure 15 shows that young people felt safer more often during the day compared to at night/in the dark across all modes. This was consistent with the baseline survey, where respondents were asked to consider how safe they felt using the bus during the day and at night/in the dark (82% felt they were either always or often safe during the day compared to 37% at night/in the dark).

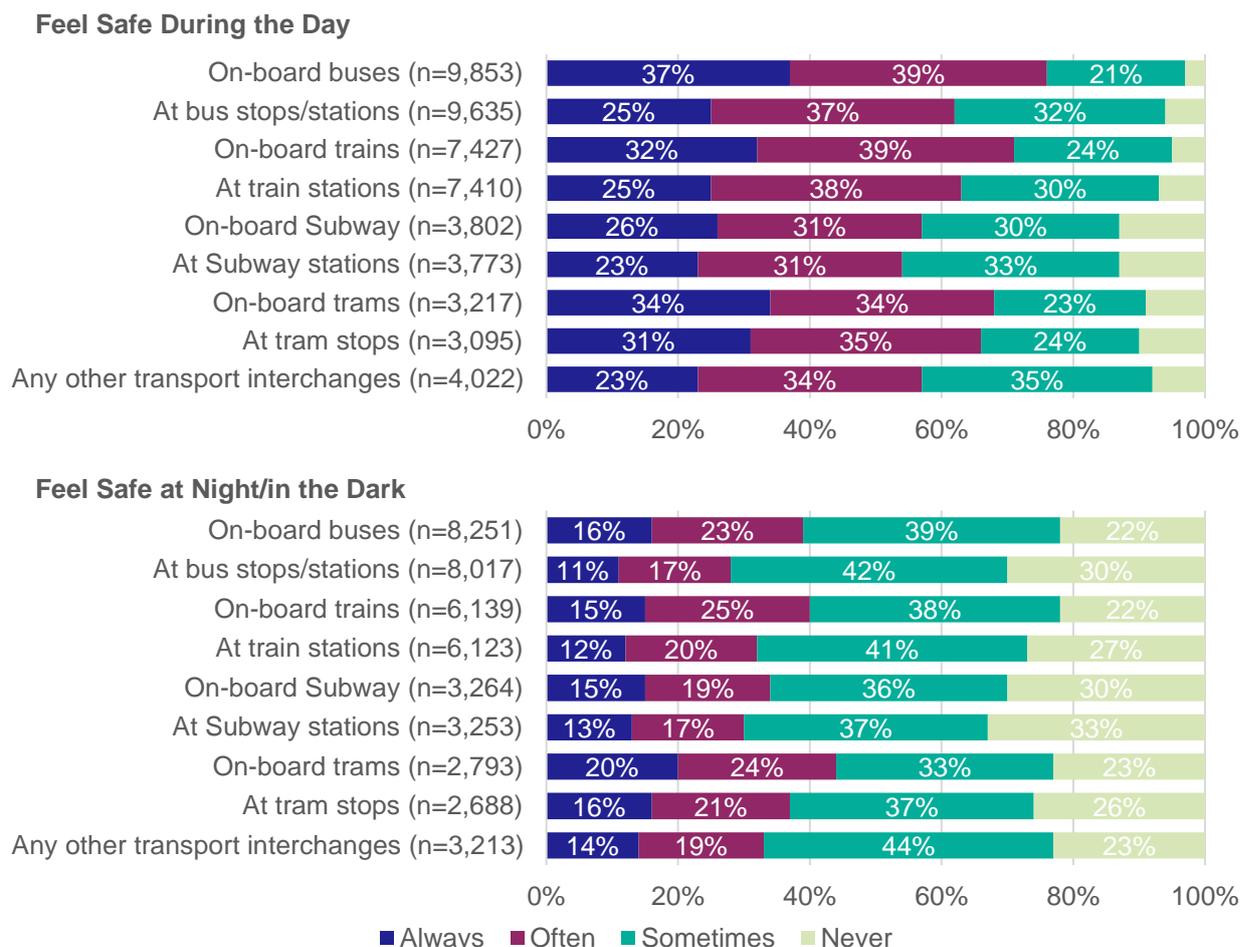


Figure 15 Feel Safe by Public Transport Mode and Time of Day
 Source: Follow-up survey

When considering bus use only, comparison of the baseline and follow-up survey suggests a reduction in users sense of safety during the day, falling from 82% of respondents in the baseline who felt they were either always or often safe during the day, to 76% in the follow-up survey. Conversely, there was a slight improvement in the proportions who felt safe using the bus at night, rising from 37% who felt always or often safe in the baseline, to 39% in the follow-up survey. While this is not as extensive as the 11 percentage point reduction in the proportion of respondents who experienced issues with safety concerns at night (noted at Table 12 Issues Faced with Bus Use Before and After Scheme Introduction

above) the combined results suggest an improving situation in this respect.

Comparing buses and other public transport modes rated in the follow-up survey shows that respondents felt safer on buses than any other modes of public transport during the day (76% felt safe on-board buses either always or often during the day). While safety at bus stops/stations ranked third (behind tram and train stops/stations)

there was little difference between these (at 66% for tram stops and 62% for bus stops/stations).

When travelling at night, those using trams tended to feel safest on-board (with 44% feeling safe either always or often), with buses ranking third. Respondents felt least safe regularly at bus stops/stations, with 28% indicating they always or often felt safe at bus stops/stations at night/in the dark compared to 37% who felt this way about tram stops.

When the data was compared by demographic group, the following results were observed:

- Gender: across all modes of public transport (both on-board and at stops/stations and interchanges), males were more likely to say they always felt safe compared to females and trans, non-binary and other those who identified as another gender. Meanwhile females and trans, non-binary and other those who identified as another gender were more likely to say they sometimes felt safe compared to males.
- Sexual Orientation (aged 16+ only): results were highly variable, although in general, straight/heterosexual respondents were more likely to say they often or never felt safe, while LGB+ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and those identifying as having an 'other' sexual orientation) respondents were more likely to say they sometimes felt safe. However, LGB+ respondents were more likely to say they never felt safe when using buses at night.
- Disability: for travel during the day, respondents who indicated they had a disability were less likely to say they always and often felt safe and more likely to say they sometimes or never felt safe compared to those without a disability. At night, however, disabled respondents were less likely to say they always and often felt safe, and more likely to say they never felt compared to those without a disability, while there was often little difference in the proportions who sometimes felt safe.
- Ethnicity: when using buses, trains the Subway, and other transport interchanges during the day and at night, respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to say they always felt safe compared to those from white ethnic groups.

The reasons given for not always feeling safe while using the bus and other modes of public transport were largely consistent, although concern was often more acute when travelling alone and/or at night. Key issues included:

- Anti-social or rowdy behaviour, including swearing, loud music, vaping, spitting, fights, vandalism, etc.;
- Intoxicated people (i.e. alcohol and/or drugs);

- Inappropriate behaviour/attention from other passengers (both groups of young people (often described as teenagers, youths or gangs) and adults (often men));
- The perceived risk of children mixing with strangers and unknown adults;
- Age of the young person - it was felt inappropriate for young children to travel unaccompanied, particularly at night;
- Witnessing or being personally subjected to bullying or harassment (or concerned about being a target of this), including sexual, racial, homophobic (or other LGBTQ) harassment, or due to religion/belief;
- Busyness and crowding/overcrowding of services being intimidating for children and young people;
- Physical safety when service was busy (e.g. having to stand in a moving vehicle) and lack of seatbelts;
- Young people with disabilities and ASN also indicated that their condition led to them feeling less safe, less able to cope with public transport, or were concerned that it could make them a target for bullying/discrimination;
- Lack of (visible or accessible) staff, policing or security - this was more of an issue for trains, the subway, trams and other transport interchanges compared to buses; and
- Poor lighting, especially at stops and stations.

Focus Group Perceptions of Safety

Focus group participants also discussed their perception of safety using buses compared to other modes of public transport, with mixed responses.

For some, the train was considered safer than bus use (although some did indicate this depended on the route, time of day/night, and any events that may be happening). It was noted that the ban on alcohol was enforced on trains, that a conductor was typically available to monitor behaviour, there was generally more space on trains so passengers could move seat or carriage if necessary, and that the British Transport Police would arrive quickly if needed:

“I think it’s worse on the buses. On the train, there’s the conductor and police at the stations and stuff, and they’re always on hand if anything does go wrong, and on the whole I think it’s definitely a lot calmer on a train.” (Scheme User)

Similarly, two participants felt there was less anti-social behaviour, as well as less littering and greater levels of cleanliness on trams compared to buses. They posited a direct link between the age of passengers on the bus compared to trams, with trams typically being used by fewer young people and more working age people.

Conversely, some parents/carers and young people themselves felt safer on-board buses compared to other types of public transport or using active modes. Generally these respondents were reassured by the use of CCTV on-board buses, as well as the proximity and accessibility of the driver and presence of other passengers due to an expectation that they would assist if required:

"In general, they [parents] think the buses are safe, and I think so too, because they're all CCTV'd and stuff." (Eligible Non-User)

"I would say to my kids if they were going to be traveling on their own to sit downstairs so that they have the driver there if they needed help, but also other passengers can stick up for each other. I'm sure someone would intervene if my kids had any trouble on the bus. Whereas the train, you can be in a completely empty carriage at times... So, overall, I'd feel safer with them on the bus rather than on the train." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

"I find that on the train, at night there's a lot more creepy people and anti-social behaviour because you don't feel like you're being watched as much, whereas on the bus it's a smaller area and you're quite close to the driver so you could say something, but on a train you're just in empty carriages with some drunk guy trying to hit on you." (Eligible Non-User)

More specifically, several young people suggested they would prefer to use the bus at night as they felt this was safer than other options (often compared to walking alone in the dark):

"I'm much more likely to take the bus in the evenings when I have the free bus pass because I guess that's safer when my university finishes, often at 9 or 10 [pm] and especially in the winter... I usually take the bus. Even if it's empty, I just feel safer than walking." (Scheme User)

Young women in particular noted that they felt that taking the bus at night would be a safer option. Some were again reassured by the presence and accessibility of the driver, while others suggested that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had reduced the stress of travelling alone or worrying about how friends would be able to get home safely at night. Girls and young women could now either travel home together in a group, or were reassured that individuals were not travelling alone. This was said to make them more inclined to pursue night-time social opportunities:

"I think the latest I'd ever want to stay out if I was travelling on the bus would be, like, 10pm because I don't like being out when it's dark. But that's nothing to do with the bus, that's just my personal preference. And I

would feel safer on the bus than if I wasn't on the bus, because I know that there's other people on the bus whose job it is to make sure that the passengers are safe." (Scheme User)

"I would only go out with my family before. I wouldn't go out with my friends because I'd be worried about how we would get there, how we'd get back, would I be safe... but because everybody has the free bus pass then you know that you'll be together and you won't be split up to get home. So, it feels a lot more safe so I feel more inclined to go out."
(Scheme User)

Anti-Social Behaviour, Bullying & Discrimination

In addition to exploring general safety perceptions, both the follow-up survey and focus groups sought feedback on respondents' experiences of anti-social behaviour, bullying and discrimination when using buses and other modes of public transport within the last 12 months. It should be noted, however, that no official statistics related to anti-social behaviour on board buses were available for inclusion within this evaluation. Bus operator data detailing instances of anti-social behaviour before and after the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was either unavailable or considered commercially sensitive, while official national statistics either do not adequately identify anti-social behaviour within a distinct category, or do not identify anti-social behaviour on transport/buses. As such, the findings presented in this section rely solely on perceptions and anecdotal evidence provided by survey and focus group respondents. This was based on their experiences and personal interpretation of what constituted anti-social behaviour, as well as being informed by respondents own levels of tolerance in relation to what they considered acceptable/anti-social.

As shown in Table 11 above, when survey respondents were asked whether they agreed there was 'lots of anti-social behaviour' on buses, there was a six percentage point increase from the baseline to the follow-up survey. However, as also discussed above (Table 12) when asked to identify issues experienced when using buses, concerns related to safety showed decreases both when travelling alone and at night from the baseline to the follow-up survey (a six percentage point reduction and an 11 percentage point reduction respectively).

In addition to the questions noted above, a new question focused on specific experiences of anti-social behaviour was asked in the follow-up survey. Overall, 54% of follow-up survey respondents indicated that either they/their child or their friends or family had seen or experienced anti-social behaviour when using any form of public transport in the last 12 months. Respondents were also asked a similar

question in relation to bullying and discrimination, and while this issue had been included in the baseline survey, question wording differed between the two surveys. Overall, 14% of follow-up survey respondents had seen or experienced bullying or discrimination when using any form of public transport in the last 12 months, compared to 18% of respondents in the baseline survey that had experienced bullying and discrimination on board buses at some point.

The vast majority of instances of anti-social behaviour, and bullying and discrimination, were experienced on buses. However, as the survey was targeted at bus users it is to be expected that respondents would be more likely to experience issues on this mode. Experiences on other modes of public transport were likely to be underrepresented due to limited usage. Much higher proportions of respondents travelled by bus for each journey purpose (between 33%-57%) compared to all other public transport modes (where up to 11% used trains and up to just 2% used the Subway, trams or ferries).

Figure 16 outlines the extent to which various types of anti-social behaviour were experienced by survey respondents, while Figure 17 details the types of bullying and discrimination that were experienced.

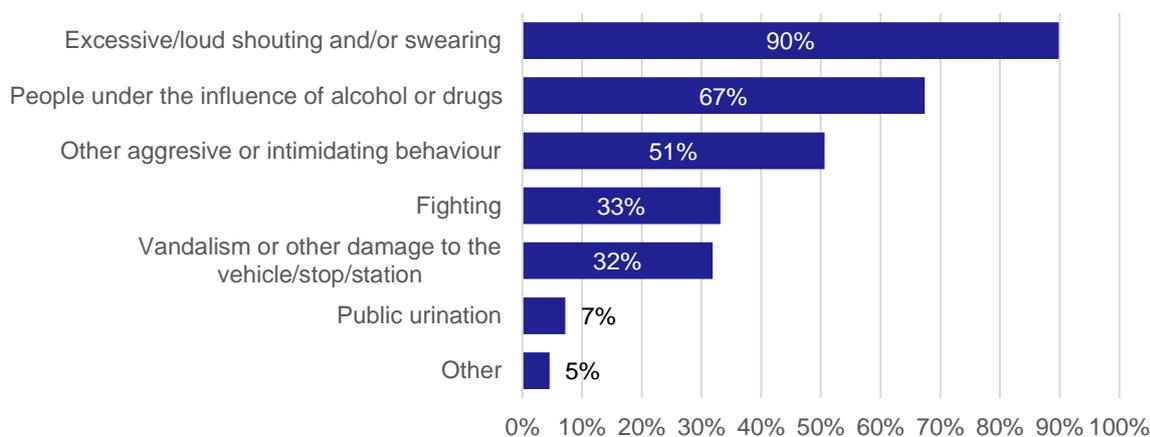


Figure 16 Types of Anti-Social Behaviour Experienced

Source: Follow-up survey

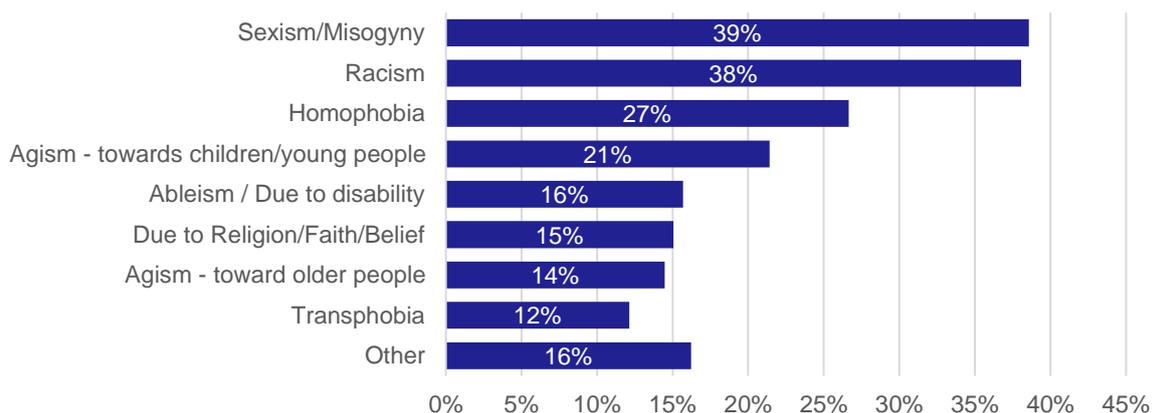


Figure 17 Types of Bullying and Discrimination Experienced Source: Follow-up survey

Shouting and swearing, people being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and other aggressive or intimidating behaviour were the anti-social behaviour issues most often experienced by follow-up survey respondents. While the baseline survey did not explore instances of anti-social behaviour specifically, it was raised by respondents in their qualitative comments as one of the main reasons for not feeling safe on-board buses. Where the nature of such anti-social behaviour was outlined, this was largely consistent with the experiences of follow-up survey respondents.

Meanwhile, among follow-up survey respondents, the most commonly experienced types of bullying and discrimination were sexism/misogyny and racism. The next most common issues were homophobia and agism towards children and young people. Other types of bullying and discrimination included people being targeted due to their appearance, including weight and height, body image/shaming, the way they dressed, hair colour or style, facial features, makeup styles, and wearing glasses. A few also noted they had been targeted because of where they came from (e.g. out of town, England, etc.). General bullying and aggressive behaviour were also described, with other children/young people often said to be the perpetrators, although some adults were also said to exhibit such behaviours. Again, results were largely consistent with those in the baseline survey, where bullying and discrimination was largely linked to a person's appearance and/or protected characteristics.

Focus Group Experiences

All focus group participants were asked about experiences of anti-social behaviour, bullying or discrimination while using buses. While a few participants, typically less frequent bus users, and those who travelled at less busy times, indicated that they had not witnessed or experienced this, most did outline concerns and personal experiences. While many of the discussions focused on aspects of anti-social

behaviour, a few female respondents did identify instances of sexual harassment, including being stared at by older men, being groped, and verbal sexual abuse.

In terms of anti-social behaviour, it was suggested this was usually (although not exclusively) perpetrated by young people. The most common instances/concerns discussed included young people being loud and disruptive on buses, and arguing with the driver or other passengers, as well as drunk people (typically adults) on buses and at bus stops/stations:

“Quite often, there’ll be people, often my own age, being anti-social. Like, I’ve had people on the bus that have been playing things on their phones really loud and then when older people ask them if they’ll turn it down, they’ll have really rude replies. Or there’ll be people smoking and vaping on the buses with the windows closed, and when [other] people open the windows, they’ll have rude things to say about it. It’s just sometimes not a nice place to be, on the bus.” (Scheme User)

“I’ve seen people shouting and swearing at each other and stuff, more in [city] and stuff, it’s young people causing issues... You see the odd argument here and there... I probably wouldn’t get involved, because it’s my safety at risk.” (Scheme User)

There was also a sense that such behaviour was happening around buses as a result of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme as many of the young people would not have been using the bus otherwise:

“My daughter and I were on a bus in [city] one afternoon, and at one of the stops there was a very large group of young people with their passes who got onto the bus. They were being rude to the driver straight away and then they went upstairs and started stomping and being rude until the driver stopped the bus... and made them all get off. They were all very abusive to the driver when they got off, and I suppose it did make me think, I don’t think these kids would have been getting onto buses if it wasn’t for the passes - so that maybe is a downside.” (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

Parents and young people expressed some concerns about the lack of official interventions and inconsistent responses from bus drivers when dealing with anti-social behaviour:

“Sometimes the drivers don’t actually know about it [anti-social behaviour] or, if they do, they won’t really do anything about it. They’ll just let the passengers deal with it.” (Young Person)

"My children were waiting at a bus stop in [city] where there were older kids hanging around and just generally being a nuisance, and when the bus driver pulled up he literally refused to let all the kids on, regardless of if they were in that group or not... they were then left waiting for over an hour and I eventually went and picked them up." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

Conversely, other parents, typically those living in island and remote rural communities were more likely to say that drivers were helpful and flexible in meeting their needs, giving them confidence and greater peace of mind in relation to their child using the bus independently:

"The drivers, because it's always the same kids getting on and off all the time, even though we don't live right at the bus stop, the driver knows where the house is and so he would look out for them in the mornings if it was chucking it down with rain. Sometimes, the driver would wait on a school day, knowing they were coming out, so it's been really positive for us." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

"We live in a rural area and usually the drivers are quite friendly and helpful, and even make additional stops sometimes, so we've never had any issues." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

Further, as outlined above, not all focus group participants had experienced instances of anti-social behaviour, with some stressing that not all young people were rude or troublesome while travelling by bus. A few also stated that they tried to remember that they were young once as well and tried not to judge young people's behaviour overly harshly:

"I try to remember that I was 13 to 14 years old at one time, and I was probably cheeky as well... It is nice to see youthful energy on the buses. And it is fair to say that not all the kids are rowdy or are looking to cause trouble... and to have a busy bus I suppose, because during Covid there were only three or four people on them sometimes, so it is nice to see the bus a bit busier I suppose." (Other Bus User)

Others also stressed that anti-social behaviour was not limited to buses, and suggested that they had either witnessed or experienced similar issues while travelling on other modes of public transport:

"I have experienced extremely drunk people on the trains." (Other Bus User)

"We've only got really one train service... and that can be really really crowded and used as a party train, so the buses are sometimes preferable." (Other Bus User)

"I get the Subway for the football, and I suppose that can be pretty raucous. I don't feel it because I'm part of that crowd, but if you're not part of that crowd it must feel very anti-social." (Other Bus User)

Distribution of Anti-Social Behaviour

In addition to perceptions or experiences of anti-social behaviour on and around buses, there was also a perception across a few respondents (to both the follow-up survey and focus groups) that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme may have introduced instances of anti-social behaviour into new areas due to the ability for young people to travel and congregate in new/different places:

"Now that young persons have free bus passes, they're being used and abused by teenagers travelling to previously inaccessible areas of the city (for them) and causing disruption, vandalism and general nuisance behaviour." (Follow-up survey)

"I live near the beach and all the way through the hot weather the buses were full of kids coming from across the areas going to the beach, and we've had a lot of anti-social behaviour down here with gang fights and stuff, and it's really been quite horrible - because they're facilitated to move around... it is intimidating... There are many, many more kids from out of area, far out of the area travelling down to where we are out of hours." (Other Bus User)

It should be noted, however, that without robust data on instances and locations of anti-social behaviour, it cannot be determined whether such examples represent truly 'new' instances and increasing levels of anti-social behaviour overall, or if anti-social behaviour has been displaced, moving from one area to another.

Conclusion

As outlined above, data on the number of instances or rates of anti-social behaviour on-board buses or other forms of public transport was not readily available. However, the findings suggest that, while the types of anti-social behaviour have not necessarily changed since the baseline survey, there was a perception among some respondents that this problem had become worse/more frequent on and around buses since the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme.

Indeed, there was a six percentage point increase in the perception that 'there's lots of anti-social behaviour on buses' between the baseline and follow-up survey (shown in Table 11 Agreement with Statements about Bus Use Pre- and Post-Scheme Implementation

). Professional stakeholders (including bus operators and local authorities) also perceived there to have been a rise in anti-social behaviour related to bus use (see the [Stakeholder feedback report](#)).

Considering the above results alongside [Police Scotland Management Information Force Reports](#), which shows that the total number of anti-social behaviour incidents reported to them nationally had declined by around a third between 2020/21 and 2022/2023, it may be that anti-social behaviour on-board buses is not being reported and recorded in official statistics.

Without access to robust standardised recording practices and statistical data which spans pre- and post-implementation periods, however, it is not possible for this research to say with certainty whether instances of anti-social behaviour have truly increased, decreased, or remained relatively static overall since the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme.

Similarly, it cannot be determined whether anti-social behaviour had moved away from some areas and onto buses and/or into newly accessible areas. When considering safety concerns and the issue of anti-social behaviour on buses, it is also important to note that some respondents perceived buses to be safer than alternative options, particularly when travelling at night. In addition to the qualitative comments showing that both young people and their parents/carers were reassured on buses by the use of CCTV, access to the driver, and the presence of other passengers, Table 12 Issues Faced with Bus Use Before and After Scheme Introduction

showed an 11 percentage point decrease in respondents having safety concerns when travelling by bus at night, and a six percentage point decrease in safety concerns when travelling alone. As such, the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme appears to have brought perceived positive safety impacts as well as increased levels of concern over anti-social behaviour.

7. Unintended Consequences & Suggested Improvements

Unintended Consequences and Other Issues

The Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme set out to deliver against a number of short and long term outcomes. However, it was anticipated there might be some unintended consequences as a result of introducing a universal policy. This section highlights some of these issues.

Change in Travel Patterns/Mode Choice

As outlined in Chapter 3, there appear to be early signs of changes in mode choice, with young people opting to use the bus rather than car, train and potentially some active modes. A few focus group respondents also indicated that they were opting to use the bus for short journeys where they would have previously walked as a result of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme:

"Because it [was] £2 a ride, and the ride is only 10-15 minutes from where I live in [city], I would probably just have walked [before using the scheme] because £2 for 15 minutes is quite a lot, and then if I travel quite a lot that's £4 a day." (Scheme User)

"I live in the city centre...and I use it quite often for short trips if it's a bit quicker than walking." (Scheme User)

Differences in Access to the Scheme/Benefits

It was indicated that differences in bus service provision meant that some young people benefited from the scheme to a greater extent than others, while some had very little opportunity to use the scheme or obtain the benefits offered. Challenges in accessing bus services (and therefore the scheme benefits) were identified for island communities where bus services were limited or did not offer sufficient choice in destinations, and because ferry travel was not included within the scheme; in rural areas with limited service provision; and also other areas, where limited services in the evening and at weekends was highlighted as an issue:

"When our sons are on the Scottish mainland they can access a range of university opportunities, live sports, music events, etc. But without free ferry travel... these opportunities cannot be accessed by students,

particularly those who are accessing their courses at local education establishment[s] on the island.” (Follow-up survey)

“I’m a bit disappointed that I can’t use the bus pass more often with my daughter, but it’s not because of the scheme, it’s because the services aren’t suitable.” (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

“The limited bus service probably doesn’t always make it practical for my son to travel with his card - the times might not always suit what he actually needs to do. The bus service has also been reduced so there is a limited service, but he does still try to use it when he can.” (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

A reduction in services was also highlighted as a barrier to use and created unequal access to the scheme and its benefits as a result:

“It’s very frustrating that young people in Edinburgh can travel all over Scotland for free, when there’s a threat that our village bus service might be cut so the young people here can’t travel a few miles to our local town... never mind our closest city.” (Follow-up survey respondent)

“They’ve just announced they’re stopping all Sunday buses from the [main] town further into the [rural hinterland/surrounding area], so there’s going to be even less ability for people to use public transport.” (Parent of Eligible Non-User)

While results outlined in earlier chapters suggest that having access to the Young Persons’ Free Bus Travel Scheme provided benefits in relation to cost savings, independence, access to services and opportunities, and was generally positive in terms of mental health and wellbeing, there were concerns over the impact on those young people who struggled to make use of the scheme due to a lack of bus services. It was felt this impacted these young people’s independence, social skills and mental health. It was also suggested that the threat of, or move towards, reduced and removed bus services was incompatible with other policy directives:

“With no buses there’s no way for her to go and have that independence [in relation to socialising with friends] and I feel that could potentially have a longer term impact on social skills and mental health issues. Our local council’s constantly talking about how they want to improve mental health and reduce isolation and improve employability, but at the same time they are taking away our bus services, and it’s counter-intuitive to me as it’s taking away the ability for young people to have that independence,

connectivity and improve their mental health and socialisation.” (Parent of an Eligible Non-User)

Further, a lack of opportunities more generally was identified as an issue in some areas, particularly remote, rural and island locations. This was felt to limit the use of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme as there was little to encourage additional travel.

Busier Services and Capacity Issues

Qualitative feedback from focus groups also suggests that capacity issues were proving problematic for some other bus users. This was an issue for particular routes at peak times, often corresponding with the start/end of the school day:

“It was always busy if you were unfortunate enough to travel at school coming out times before the scheme was introduced, but since the scheme was introduced it has increased many fold and it's a bit of a 'bun fight' as to who gets on the bus and who doesn't when you've got 30 kids all trying to get on... there was a problem before the scheme was introduced but this has made it a lot worse.” (Other Bus User)

A few focus group respondents (who were ineligible for the scheme) also suggested that the introduction of the scheme had changed their travel behaviour and made them avoid using particularly busy services:

“I pick up my children on my way to and from [work] sometimes and I have to use the bus... so sometimes we'll get off a couple of stops earlier knowing that it's going to be much busier and we'll walk the rest of the way... it's more comfortable for everyone to just walk to the next couple of stops so that we can actually get around a bit easier and we're not crammed in this really packed bus. Or we sometimes take a different mode of transport altogether... That particular route is really busy so it has made me change how I travel, especially with my children.” (Other Bus User)

“My wife and I do avoid the coming out of the school period. We actively avoid it... we'd try to travel before or after.” (Other Bus User)

Negative impacts were not just noted by older respondents, it was also felt that busy services, combined with anti-social behaviour, was off-putting for young people as well. Parents/carers and young people themselves noted this could contribute to a

lack of use of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme or the need for avoidance techniques:

“For my son specifically, I think he would be nervous... The buses tend to be really busy, we also have observed anti-social behaviour, people drinking, and... I think he would feel a little bit overwhelmed and worried about being on his own.” (Parent of Eligible Non-User)

“I have been waiting on a bus and avoided getting on it because there was someone who'd come up to the bus stop and was just harassing other people there. I decided rather than waiting for the bus to just start walking so that I could avoid having to interact with them.” (Scheme User)

A few focus group respondents, however, suggested that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme and the uptake in bus use had supported the post-Covid-19 recovery and sustainability of bus services:

“Increased demand does give me confidence over the sustainability [of bus services].” (Other Bus User)

Welfare Concerns

A few respondents across both the follow-up survey and focus groups highlighted welfare concerns. This included the potential for children and young people to travel very far from home without their parents/carers knowing, making it easier for young people to meet others they don't know/meet online, and introduced the potential for young people to get lost as well as concerns about them becoming stranded in unfamiliar places (particularly if the card did not work or the last bus home did not turn up). A few respondents highlighted a desire for greater safeguarding restrictions to be placed on the scheme:

“History of running away/not coming home. Free bus travel allows ability to get further away.” (Follow-up survey)

“Concern that a young person with this card can decide to travel across Scotland. Why does someone in Aberdeenshire need the ability to travel by bus to Glasgow or Edinburgh? Would sign-up if the card was for local access.” (Follow-up survey)

“I do not want it used when she is not travelling with me because I do not feel that at her age that it is appropriate, particularly as she is a vulnerable young person, I don't think that it is appropriate for her to have the ability

to go where she wants when she wants... I would like to see additional restrictions put on there from a safeguarding point of view. I appreciate that's not easy, but I think it's making it easier for more children to become more vulnerable, particularly among the younger ones." (Parent of Eligible Non-User)

Other parents of younger children also said that they would welcome some way of being able to track their child's use on different buses to know where they were and in case they went missing, etc.

Conversely, people living in rural and island communities felt that their children would be safer travelling locally compared to the mainland. Although there was some anti-social behaviour in the smaller communities, parents felt that there was less risk of their children being exposed to anything more serious.

It should be noted that [safeguarding guidance and training](#) has been developed for bus drivers across Scotland. The training was developed by Barnardo's Scotland and includes general safeguarding and the signs of exploitation, as well as reporting protocols for any concerns.

Difficulties Using the Young Persons' NEC

A few follow-up survey respondents and several focus group participants also noted issues with the young persons' card not working/scanning on-board the bus and an apparent lack of consistency in the policy/approach in how this should be handled. In some cases, parents and young people reported that bus drivers had been patient and helpful, allowing them to use the bus anyway:

"Sometimes it just doesn't work. Like, when you go on the bus, it has a little green light that turns on, and sometimes it just doesn't work, but it's okay because the drivers see that I have it and just let me go anyway, so I've never had an issue with that." (Scheme User)

Others, however, said drivers had insisted that the young person had to pay the fare, or they would not be allowed to travel. This, again, created welfare concerns, particularly for younger, female and disabled/ASN users, as well as being a source of anxiety, stress and embarrassment for young people:

"When the pass works it's great but when it didn't the bus driver removed it, was very rude, and then made her pay (not telling her the cheapest option) and wouldn't let her on if she didn't, which would have left a 13 year old girl stranded in another town on her own." (Follow-up survey)

“One of the drivers didn’t let me in because my card didn’t work and there were people behind me and it made me feel really ashamed and embarrassed... Some of the bus drivers can be really not friendly enough.” (Scheme User)

Drivers being generally unhelpful, rude and intimidating to young people (which was also raised as an issue in the baseline survey), and not stopping at their stops, was also noted by several follow-up survey and focus group respondents:

“Quite a lot [of drivers] are mostly really nice, but some are just rude and stuff, and you’re just like ‘Why would I want to get on a bus when someone’s acting like that?’... a bad interaction can really put you off.” (Eligible Non-User)

“On too many occasions the bus driver has ignored them at the bus stop unless there have been other adults there. I did complain to [the operator] but it continues to happen. I have since witnessed it happen to other young people at bus stops and it concerns me as my daughter was left alone at night after a driver looked at her and drove on.” (Follow-up survey)

However, as noted in Chapter 6 above, a few respondents, typically those living in rural and island areas noted that good relationships with drivers were fostered and it was felt that drivers were helpful and supportive of young people using their services.

Suggested Changes/Improvements

Expand the Scheme to More Services, Modes and Users

A few young people who participated in the focus groups indicated a desire for the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme to be extended to include night bus services. A few eligible non-users indicated that such coverage would make the scheme more attractive:

“If there were more services available after midnight it would definitely be worth having more of a look at [signing up for the scheme] in case you’re ever stuck as there’s not really any other public transport on at that time, but it’s not like that just now.” (Eligible Non-User)

A few respondents across both the follow-up survey and focus groups also discussed the difficulties for those living in island communities being able to access

opportunities due to the free travel not extending to ferries. They suggested that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme could realistically only be used on visits to the mainland, and that free ferry travel was needed for island residents:

"Live in [island community], majority of journeys have to be by car. Free pass used on mainland visits." (Follow-up survey)

"There is no bus link between [island] and the Scottish mainland. Therefore, free ferry travel is required for students at university who are travelling [by ferry] to access these opportunities, particularly students that are studying locally." (Follow-up survey)

There were also calls for the scheme to be extended to cover the rail network, and for all young people to be able to access free tram travel (not just Edinburgh residents):

"I think if we could have access to the trams in Edinburgh to, that would be good. I think children in Edinburgh with an Edinburgh postcode can go on the trams and I know that the older person's card you can, so that would be nice if they could get on the trams as well that would be nice." (Scheme User)

A few also suggested that the upper age restriction for eligibility should be raised (with up to age 26 being suggested), and/or that the scheme should be extended to all students/those still in education and training, regardless of age. Such an extension may also reduce the likelihood of young people losing access to opportunities and activities upon turning 22 and becoming ineligible for the scheme.

Greater Restrictions on Eligibility

Conversely, a few focus group participants, typically non-users who were ineligible for the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme and parents of eligible non-users, argued that the scheme should be tightened up. This was generally considered necessary in order to better manage demand and capacity issues, as well as to address some of the safeguarding concerns and anti-social behaviour issues. Suggestions included:

- That the scheme should become means tested rather than a universal benefit;
- To reduce the eligibility criteria (e.g. only available up to the age of 18 unless a person is still in education, training or an apprenticeship);
- To have different products available for different age groups, such as free for children of primary school age only when accompanied by an adult;

- To allow local travel or travel within a pre-determined radius only; and/or
- To require card holders to pay a reduced fare rather than it being a free service (particularly for those aged 18+).

Policing the Use of the Scheme/Users Behaviour

A common theme among focus group participants was the perceived need to introduce some mechanism to police the use of the scheme and implement consequences for inappropriate behaviour. It was felt there was a need for greater partnership working between local authorities, bus operators, Police Scotland, and potentially schools. In practical terms, it was suggested that either time limits for the operation of the free bus travel could be helpful, particularly for younger users, and/or the potential to withdraw the Young Person's NEC if anti-social behaviour occurred/persisted:

"I think it should be limited to say, young school children not able to use it after eight o'clock at night." (Other Bus User)

"I notice that a lot of people who do behave in that kind of manner [anti-socially] do have a Young Scot card, so it would be good to have a penalty system to discourage them. They don't see any penalty - they don't pay for the bus, they just get kicked off and then they wait for the next one." (Scheme User)

Application Process and Use of Technology

The application process was highlighted as a key area for improvement across all feedback methodologies. A range of suggestions were provided, including utilising some form of auto-enrolment to avoid the need for the application; greater use of [parentsportal.scot](https://parentsportal.scot.nhs.uk/) for applications, including for secondary school pupils; and greater guidance and support for applicants to navigate the application process and documents required. It was also felt that replacement cards needed to be easier to obtain, including providing a facility for this via an/the App.

Several respondents also suggested there should be an electronic card or e-wallet available in order to provide an alternative option to scanning the physical card (although respondents were keen for this to be in addition to the physical card to circumvent any digital/IT issues/failures). Recognising there was already an App available to those aged 16+, one young person commented that they felt this should be extended to younger children:

"I think if we could access it digitally it would be better because... if you lose your card, you'd have a second option. So having a digital copy as well would be quite useful." (Scheme User)

"A digital option would be handy, but also the card too in case your phone died. And maybe a way to have it on your digital wallet, like Apple Pay and stuff." (Scheme User)

There was a sense that children viewed their phones as the most valuable and most important thing to look after and that they were less likely to lose a phone than a physical card:

"My kids don't leave their house without the phone, and so I must wonder, is it integrated with anything like the Apple Wallet? That would certainly help, I think. Or maybe the keyring cards like you get from the supermarket loyalty schemes - they're good too." (Parent/Carer of Scheme User)

In addition, several respondents highlighted issues with bus tracking Apps. This included the apps not being accurate, and the lack of a single source of information, with different Apps required for different operators, different towns/cities and different local authority areas. It was felt there was a need for improved and connected real time information (RTI) in order to give both young people and their parents confidence in the scheme, and bus use more generally.

A few respondents also suggested that the card, and information contained on it needed to be more robust as they had experienced issues with the hologram or photo rubbing off. It was also suggested that the card could be integrated with the YOTI App, as an acceptable form of identification verification.

Greater Information Made Available to Students

Finally, a few focus group respondents felt that the scheme was not well advertised to university students, with foreign students in particular often not aware of the scheme or how to apply. It was suggested that greater communication efforts and targeted advertising was necessary to boost uptake and ensure all eligible university students were aware of their entitlement.

8. Discussion

Meeting Outcomes

The following summary draws together the key findings and shows progress against each of the expected outcomes set for the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme.

Short Term Outcomes

1. Increased numbers of young people registering for a card/ aware of the scheme

General awareness of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme in the year after it launched was high across all research respondents, and had increased between the baseline and follow-up surveys (i.e. before and after the launch of the scheme). While the key aims and objectives of the scheme also appeared to be well understood among professional stakeholders, the focus group discussions suggest they were perhaps less well known/understood among the general population.

High levels of uptake were recorded across the first year of the scheme, with 59% of all those eligible across Scotland having signed up. Uptake was higher among the older age groups, however, ranging from 53% of those aged 5-15 having signed up compared to 70% of those aged 16-21. Regional variations in uptake were also notable by local authority area.

2. Fewer young people learning to drive

Based on the statistical data it appears that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme has not, as yet, had an impact on reducing the numbers of young people learning to drive. Pent up demand and capacity issues following the Covid-19 pandemic may have had an impact on current figures, while the newness of the scheme also means that many eligible young people may have already passed their test or been learning to drive when the scheme launched.

Focus group results were also mixed, with some young people expressing a strong desire to learn to drive as soon as they became old enough while others felt that they/their children were more likely to delay learning to drive due to the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme. Instances were identified, however, of young

people who had become less interested in learning to drive, and others that had stopped taking lessons as a result of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme.

More time will be needed to fully assess the success of this outcome.

3 & 4. Increased awareness of bus as a viable travel option & Increased awareness of bus as a viable travel option amongst young women

Over 62 million trips had been made using the scheme (from its implementation until the end of April 2023).

Focus group feedback suggests that awareness of bus travel as a viable option was also ever present and was influencing things such as part-time job application choices (for older young people) and planning more regular recreational journeys (for both older and younger users).

Usage data suggests females had used the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme to a greater extent than males - of all the journeys made, 46% were taken by females compared to 39% taken by males. Older female focus group attendees also reported increased use for travel by bus, especially at night.

5. Reduction in travel costs for young people and their families

Although total household travel and transport costs have not reduced for families since the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, the proportion of total household travel costs being allocated to children had reduced. The proportion of parents/carers spending less than 10% of their total travel spend on their child had increased across all spending brackets. Meanwhile, travel costs appear to have reduced for many young people directly, with 41% spending between £0-£10 on this per month, representing an increase of 26 percentage points compared to before the scheme was launched.

Over half (54%) of follow-up survey respondents perceived buses to be affordable, an increase of 25 percentage points since the baseline survey, and when rating how affordable bus travel was, over a third (38%) said it was very or fairly affordable, again an increase of 12 percentage points. Similarly, there was a large decrease in the proportion of respondents who said cost was an issue they/their child experienced when using the bus, at 20% in the follow-up survey compared to 51% in the baseline.

Qualitative survey comments and focus group responses also indicated that cost was much less of an issue or a barrier to travel after the introduction of the scheme, and cost savings on transport for young people and their families was flagged as one of the main benefits of the scheme. Reported anxieties linked to the cost of travel had also decreased for young people themselves.

Medium Term Outcomes

6. Increased numbers of young people using the scheme for journeys otherwise paid for

Analysis of follow-up survey results indicated that just over a million journeys would have been made by bus regardless of the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme. As such, these journeys would have had to be paid for - thus representing a significant cost saving for young people and their families nationally.

When considered by journey purpose, the proportions of bus users who indicated they would have taken the bus anyway ranged from 25% of those travelling for social and leisure activities to 49% travelling for an apprenticeship or training - again representing a significant saving for these respondents/families.

7. Journeys which would have been made by car (driving/lift from parents etc.) are made by bus

Survey results suggest a shift from driving/being driven towards bus use across nearly all journey purposes.

Qualitative evidence was also provided which suggests that young people are travelling more by bus and relying less on parents/carers to drive them to locations/venues and activities.

There appears, however, to also be an increase in the prevalence of short journeys being made since the introduction of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme, suggesting the free bus travel may also have encouraged a small reduction in active travel. This was also reflected in the qualitative comments.

8. Young people have increased access to services

Across most journey purposes, over two thirds of follow-up survey respondents indicated some form of change either to how often they accessed existing locations

and/or accessed new locations. The biggest impact was for social and leisure activities; however, many also noted such a change for school/college/university as well as for their job/work. Even for healthcare, around half of the respondents indicated there had been a change in location or frequency of travel. This suggests that, for many young people, the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme has increased their access to services, both new ones and those already being visited.

Long Term Outcomes:

10. Improved access to education and employment opportunities

Indications from the follow-up survey and focus groups suggest that this outcome was already being progressed, even at this early stage.

Between two thirds and three quarters of follow-up survey respondents who used the scheme indicated that they travelled more often to the same places and/or to new places for education, an apprenticeship or training, and/or for work. Qualitative comments also indicated that the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme had allowed children and young people to:

- Access/remain in schools out with their catchment area (e.g. having moved house it has allowed them to continue attending their original school);
- Consider different college and training courses than would have been possible before;
- Obtain part-time work (alongside school or studies) where this would not have been possible before, either due to a lack of opportunities locally and/or because they would have been reliant on parents driving them to/from work; and
- Cast a wider net for employment opportunities, and seek out jobs either with better pay, of greater interest/suitability to them, etc.

Concerns around the sustainability of any increased access to opportunities were also identified, however, with 28% of those who had stopped using the scheme (due to age, access to bus services, expired/lost cards, etc) having lost access to previous opportunities, including jobs. There were also concerns over costs and accessibility for those who remain in education above the age of 21.

11. Improved access to social and leisure opportunities / activities

Again, indications from the follow-up survey and focus groups suggest that this outcome was already being progressed.

Survey results indicated that the frequency of travel for social and leisure purposes had increased since the introduction of the scheme, along with frequency of travel for shopping and visiting family and friends. Similarly, many indicated that they travelled more often to the same places and/or to new places for social and leisure purposes, shopping and for visiting family and friends.

Qualitative comments also suggested that the main use of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was likely to be for social and leisure purposes.

Family travel by bus had also increased for many, again, often being linked to social and leisure activities, days out and even short-breaks and holidays. Siblings travelling together, and children travelling with grandparents had also notably increased and was reported across different research strands.

Again, however, it will be important to monitor the sustainability of any improvements in access to social and leisure activities going forward and as young people 'age out' of the scheme. This is especially the case where the cost of alternative travel modes are similar to travel by bus, but where they are seen as more efficient or direct.

9 & 12. Reduction in poverty rates amongst young people & Reduction in private car kilometres

At the time of writing, data was not yet available for these measures. The impact of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme will need to be considered over a longer time period in order to assess the success of these final expected outcomes.

Key Benefits and Other Impacts

In addition to the progress made towards achieving the outcomes outlined above, a wide range of benefits and impacts were identified. These included both positive and negative impacts, as well as positive and negative unintended consequences.

In terms of the key benefits, these included:

- Early signs of a reduction in car use;

- Increased affordability and reduced travel costs/cost barrier for young people, and by extension, for their families;
- More young people moving into lower spend brackets for their travel costs, and more parents/carers spending lower proportions of their total household travel budgets on their child's travel;
- A reduction in the proportion of young people experiencing difficulties accessing opportunities due to travel barriers - this issue had nearly halved in prevalence since the baseline survey;
- Increased access to opportunities for young people, including social and leisure activities, education, and work - just over one third of those using the scheme identified access to new opportunities;
- Greater than expected increase in independence for young people, particularly for those aged 12+;
- Improvements in young people's perceived freedom, autonomy, confidence and responsibility as a result of the scheme;
- Supporting Covid-19-recovery (for in terms of young people's mental health and the sustainability of bus services), as well as assistance during the cost of living crisis;
- Equality between young people - as bus travel is free to all and not reliant on an individual's financial situation it was felt the scheme offered new or more frequent opportunities for all, removing the stress or stigma of affordability;
- Safety benefits for young people, especially when travelling at night/in the dark - while this was reported as a general benefit, it was particularly important for women and girls; and
- Increased family travel by bus as a result of the scheme - 44% of those who used the scheme said it had increased family travel by bus.

Other impacts, more negative in nature, included:

- Travel inequalities highlighted due to variable bus service provision/access to bus services and access to the scheme (this included between those with good bus links vs those with little/no access to buses, for those who desire to access the scheme but experience application issues, and for those on island communities due to the scheme not offering free ferry travel);
- Challenges in accessing the scheme due to continued application problems;
- Capacity and overcrowding issues on buses;
- A perceived increase in anti-social behaviour in and around buses;
- The exclusion of older students from eligibility; and
- Possible modal shift away from other public transport and active travel.

Conclusion

Overall, the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme was considered highly successful and beneficial for young people and their families across the first year of operation, with many more benefits and positive impacts outlined compared to emerging negative issues. In addition, the positive benefits tended to be felt more widely than the negative impacts. Cost savings, improved access to a wide range of opportunities, and increased independence and autonomy were the main benefits for young people and their families. The main negative issues were largely related to the provision, availability or capacity of bus services themselves, difficulties in relation to the application process, and perceptions of anti-social behaviour as a result of increased numbers of young people travelling by bus.

The findings from across the first year of operation indicate that the scheme is making good progress in delivering against most of the aims and expected outcomes. Evidence shows not only short and medium terms impacts being achieved, but also that some of the long term impacts were already being felt - i.e. improved access to education, employment, social and leisure opportunities. The impact on young people learning to drive was complicated by the unique situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and will require ongoing monitoring. Meanwhile, only a few outcomes could not be evidenced at this time, and will require large scale national datasets to become available - i.e. to identify any reduction in poverty rates and private car miles.

Ultimately, the scheme will require longer-term monitoring to determine whether observed impacts are sustainable, the scale of these impacts, and to understand any new 'norms' once the scheme has been fully embedded and travel choices/patterns have stabilised. Longer-term monitoring will also be required to establish whether the scheme will fully achieve all expected outcomes and to determine the scale and impact of any unintended consequences over time. However, early indications are very encouraging in relation to the extent to which the scheme is positively impacting on young peoples' lives.

Appendix A - Follow-Up Survey Sample Profile

Table A1 Responses by Local Authority Area

Local Authority Area	Number	Percentage
Aberdeen City Council	728	6.7
Aberdeenshire Council	1,005	9.2
Angus Council	305	2.8
Argyll & Bute Council	191	1.8
City of Edinburgh Council	996	9.2
Clackmannanshire Council	50	0.5
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles)	73	0.7
Dumfries and Galloway Council	269	2.5
Dundee City Council	592	5.4
East Ayrshire Council	50	0.5
East Dunbartonshire Council	99	0.9
East Lothian Council	223	2.1
East Renfrewshire Council	118	1.1
Falkirk Council	17	0.2
Fife Council	314	2.9
Glasgow City Council	2,315	21.3
Highland Council	166	1.5
Inverclyde Council	60	0.6
Midlothian Council	235	2.2
Moray Council	234	2.2
North Ayrshire Council	105	1.0
North Lanarkshire Council	150	1.4
Orkney Islands Council	41	0.4
Perth & Kinross Council	96	0.9
Renfrewshire Council	353	3.2
Scottish Borders Council	53	0.5
Shetland Islands Council	201	1.8
Stirling Council	109	1.0
South Ayrshire Council	101	0.9
South Lanarkshire Council	732	6.7
West Dunbartonshire Council	320	2.9
West Lothian Council	312	2.9
Not Disclosed	262	2.4
Total	10,875	100%

Table A2 Gender

	Number	Percent
Male	5,003	46%
Female	5,441	50%
Transgender, Non-Binary or Other	154	1%
Not Disclosed	277	3%
Total	10,875	100%

Table A3 Young Carers and Care Experienced

	Number	Percent of Cases
Young Carer	566	5%
Care Experienced	359	3%
Neither	9,372	86%
Not Disclosed	629	6%
Base	10,875	-

Note: Multiple responses were possible at this question

Table A4 Ethnicity

	Number	Percent
African, African Scottish or African British	339	3%
Arab, Arab Scottish or Arab British	105	1%
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British	574	5%
Black, Black Scottish or Black British	82	1%
Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British	25	<1%
Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British	83	1%
Gypsy/Traveller	10	<1%
Irish	57	1%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	131	1%
Polish	211	2%
White, White Scottish or White British	8,305	76%
White Other	433	4%
Other ethnic group	38	<1%
Not Disclosed	482	4%
Total	10,875	100%

Table A5 Sexual Orientation (Aged 16+ Only)

	Number	Percent
Straight/Heterosexual	1,382	73%
Gay or Lesbian	75	4%
Bisexual	141	7%
Other	30	2%
Not Disclosed	276	14%
Total	1,904	100%

Table A6 Disability

	Number	Percent
Yes, limited a lot	360	3%
Yes, limited a little	815	8%
No	9,291	85%
Not Disclosed	409	4%
Total	10,875	100%

Table A7 Household Income

	Number	Percent
Less than £10,000	1,056	10%
£10,000-£19,999	1,308	12%
£20,000-£34,999	1,520	14%
£35,000-49,999	1,376	13%
£50,000-£74,999	1,570	14%
£75,000-£99,999	867	8%
£100,000 or more	599	5%
Not Disclosed	2,579	24%
Total	10,875	100%

Table A8 Number of Cars or Vans Owned or Available for Use

	Number	Percent
0 cars/vans	1,908	18%
1 car/van	4,291	39%
2 cars/vans	3,450	32%
3 or more cars/vans	585	5%
Not Disclosed	641	6%
Total	10,875	100%

Appendix B - Supplementary Analysis Tables

Table B1 Ease of Application Process by Timing and Method of Application

Method of Application	Timing of Application	Very Easy	Fairly Easy	Neither	Fairly Difficult	Very Difficult	Total
Online at getyournec.scot	In the last two months (April 2023 onwards)	36%	37%	8%	11%	8%	164
	Between 3-6 months ago (Dec 2022 - Mar 2023)	22%	37%	11%	16%	14%	311
	Between 7-12 months ago (Jun - Nov 2022)	22%	40%	12%	18%	8%	1027
	Over 12 months ago (Jan - May 2022)	21%	36%	10%	22%	11%	2275
Online at parentsportal.scot	In the last two months (April 2023 onwards)	37%	41%	7%	7.5%	7.5%	68
	Between 3-6 months ago (Dec 2022 - Mar 2023)	37%	42%	4%	11%	6%	129
	Between 7-12 months ago (Jun - Nov 2022)	27%	47%	5%	13%	8%	268
	Over 12 months ago (Jan - May 2022)	23%	41%	6%	20%	10%	457
Through the local council (e.g. library, council website, etc)	In the last two months (April 2023 onwards)	37%	21%	13%	21%	8%	52
	Between 3-6 months ago (Dec 2022 - Mar 2023)	33%	28%	19%	13%	7%	133
	Between 7-12 months ago (Jun - Nov 2022)	26%	34%	12%	17%	11%	300
	Over 12 months ago (Jan - May 2022)	27%	39%	8%	16%	10%	623
Through the school	In the last two months (Apr 2023 onwards)	44%	29%	13%	7%	7%	99
	Between 3-6 months ago (Dec 2022 - Mar 2023)	38%	36%	12%	9%	5%	198
	Between 7-12 months ago (Jun - Nov 2022)	38%	40%	10%	7%	5%	459
	Over 12 months ago (Jan - May 2022)	40%	35%	11%	8%	6%	823

Figure B1 Frequency of Use of Scheme by Local Authority

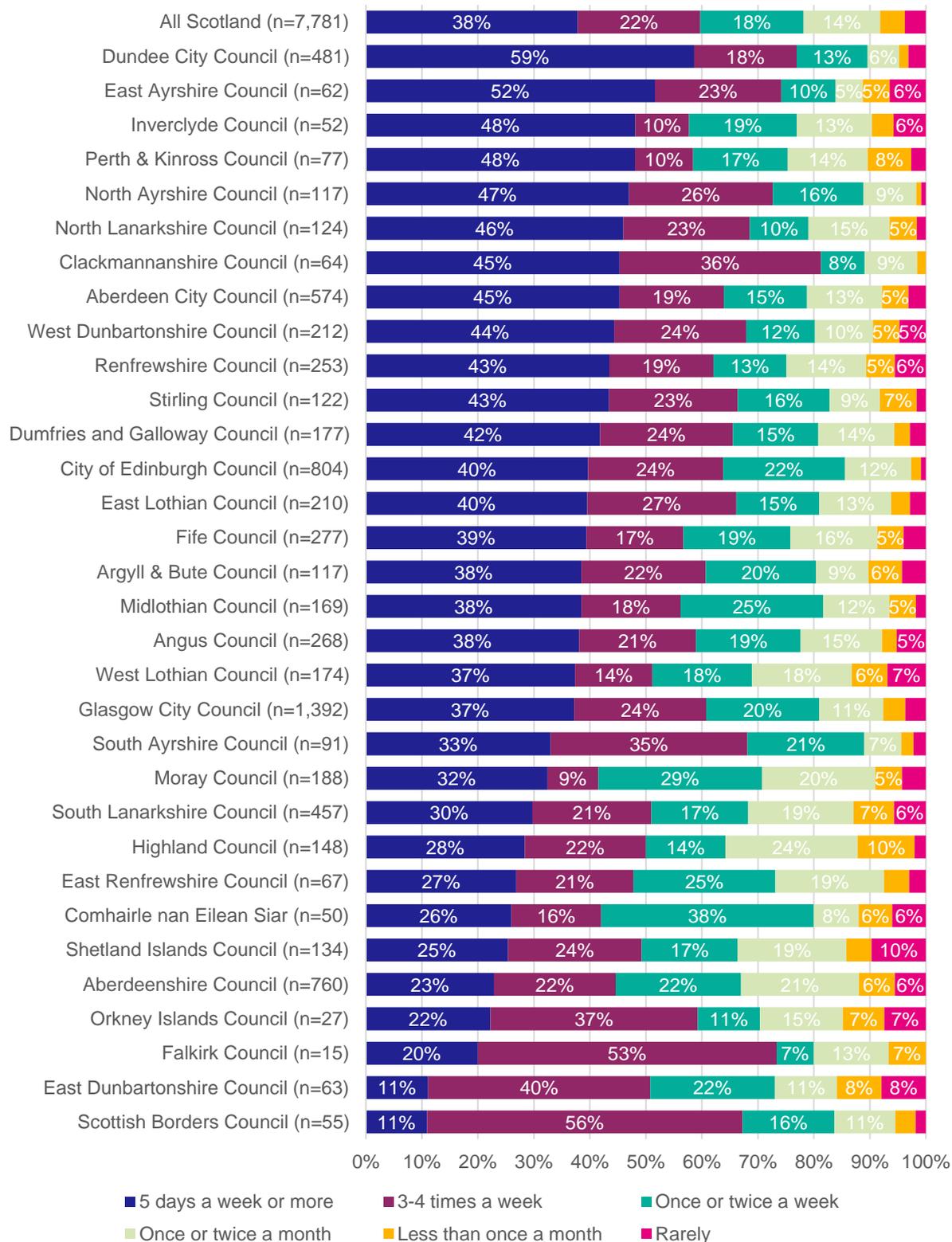


Table B2 Mode by Journey Purpose (Pre- and Post-Implementation)

	Car/Private Vehicle	Taxi	Walk/Cycle/Scooter ³	School Bus	Bus/Minibus	Train	Other	Total
School/college/university - Before	19%	1%	29%	15%	30%	5%	1%	13,173
School/college/university - After	16%	1%	31%	15%	34%	2%	1%	7,780
Apprenticeship or training programme - Before	27%	3%	3%	-	54%	10%	3%	271
Apprenticeship or training programme - After	18%	<1%	14%	-	57%	11%	-	430
Job/work - Before	29%	1%	11%	-	51%	5%	3%	3,176
Job/work - After	30%	<1%	17%	-	46%	4%	3%	1,233
Social and leisure activities - Before ¹	43%	2%	13%	1%	33%	6%	2%	13,100
Social and leisure activities - After	34%	1%	15%	1%	45%	3%	1%	9,997
Shopping - Before ²	48%	2%	14%	1%	32%	4%	2%	13,111
Shopping - After	42%	1%	16%	1%	36%	2%	2%	8,379
Visiting family and friends - Before	51%	1%	9%	1%	30%	6%	2%	15,418
Visiting family and friends - After	41%	1%	12%	1%	38%	5%	2%	9,245
Healthcare - Before	49%	2%	15%	<1%	31%	2%	1%	11,233
Healthcare - After	44%	2%	17%	1%	33%	1%	2%	6,563

Source: Before data is taken from the baseline survey and after data is taken from the follow-up survey

¹ Average of 'Sports/Clubs or Other Activities', 'Social Activities (day)', 'Social Activities (evening/night)', and 'Day Out for Leisure/Event'

² Average of 'Grocery Shopping' and 'Other Shopping'

³ 'Walk' and 'Cycle/Scooter' were offered as separate options in the follow-up survey but collated to allow comparison with the baseline survey

Table B3 Frequency of Travel by Journey Purpose (Pre- and Post-Implementation)

	5 days a week or more	3-4 times a week	Once or twice a week	Once or twice a month	Less than once a month	Rarely/ Never	Total
School/college/university - Before	62%	15%	9%	2%	1%	11%	14,757
School/college/university - After	61%	12%	6%	2%	1%	18%	9,518
Apprenticeship or training programme - Before	58%	15%	16%	2%	2%	7%	292
Apprenticeship or training programme - After	62%	14%	14%	7%	1%	2%	440
Job/work – Before	40%	31%	16%	2%	2%	9%	3,502
Job/work – After	27%	30%	27%	4%	3%	9%	1,356
Social and leisure activities - Before ¹	3.5%	12%	27%	20%	13%	25%	17,462
Social and leisure activities - After	14%	29%	34%	11%	4%	8%	10,875
Shopping - Before ²	1.5%	7%	29%	24%	15%	25%	17,462
Shopping – After	4%	10%	37%	19%	7%	23%	10,875
Visiting family and friends - Before	6%	14%	32%	25%	11%	12%	17,462
Visiting family and friends - After	7%	15%	35%	20%	8%	15%	10,875
Healthcare – Before	1%	1%	3%	19%	40%	36%	17,462
Healthcare – After	1%	1%	4%	17%	37%	40%	10,875

Source: Before data is taken from the baseline survey and after data is taken from the follow-up survey

¹ Average of 'Sports/Clubs or Other Activities', 'Social Activities (day)', 'Social Activities (evening/night)', and 'Day Out for Leisure/Event'

² Average of 'Grocery Shopping' and 'Other Shopping'

Table B4 Journey Time by Journey Purpose (Pre- and Post-Implementation)

	Up to 10 mins	11-30 mins	31-45 mins	45 mins - 1 hr	Over 1 hr - 1.5 hrs	Over 1.5 hrs	Total
School/college/university - Before	28%	42%	14%	9%	5%	2%	13,059
School/college/university - After	33%	45%	12%	6%	3%	1%	7,736
Apprenticeship or training programme - Before	8%	29%	25%	21%	7%	10%	271
Apprenticeship or training programme - After	6%	43%	21%	20%	8%	2%	430
Job/work - Before	15%	43%	17%	17%	7%	1%	3,123
Job/work - After	22%	39%	20%	14%	5%	<1%	1,227
Social and leisure activities - Before ¹	25%	48%	17%	8%	2%	1%	12,251
Social and leisure activities - After	14%	52%	21%	9%	3%	1%	9,915
Shopping - Before ²	17%	49%	21%	10%	3%	1%	13,040
Shopping - After	28%	47%	15%	7%	2%	1%	8,304
Visiting family and friends - Before	5%	29%	27%	22%	11%	6%	13,523
Visiting family and friends - After	14%	38%	20%	12%	8%	8%	9,153
Healthcare - Before	13%	36%	19%	12%	9%	11%	15,238
Healthcare - After	32%	43%	15%	6%	3%	1%	6,507

Source: Before data is taken from the baseline survey and after data is taken from the follow-up survey

¹ Average of 'Sports/Clubs or Other Activities', 'Social Activities (day)', 'Social Activities (evening/night)', and 'Day Out for Leisure/Event'

² Average of 'Grocery Shopping' and 'Other Shopping'

Table B5 Travel Spend by Proportion Spent on Child: Before and After Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Introduction

Percent Spent on Child		Total Household Spend					
		£0-£10	£11-£25	£26-£50	£51-£75	£76-£100	>£100
Baseline	<10%	69%	37%	23%	18%	19%	16%
	10%-25%	22%	37%	37%	36%	34%	34%
	26%-50%	4%	12%	23%	26%	26%	29%
	51%-75%	1%	5%	9%	14%	15%	16%
	76%-100%	4%	9%	8%	6%	6%	5%
	Total	272 3%	532 6%	1312 14%	1479 16%	1771 19%	3947 42%
Follow-Up	<10%	72%	56%	41%	39%	35%	31%
	10%-25%	14%	25%	35%	31%	31%	32%
	26%-50%	8%	11%	16%	20%	22%	22%
	51%-75%	2%	4%	5%	8%	9%	11%
	76%-100%	4%	4%	3%	2%	3%	4%
	Total	262 4%	381 5%	831 12%	1031 15%	1367 19%	3230 45%



**TRANSPORT
SCOTLAND**

CÒMHDHAIL ALBA

© Crown copyright 2023

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence> or e-mail: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Further copies of this document are available, on request, in audio and visual formats and in community languages. Any enquiries regarding this document / publication should be sent to us at info@transport.gov.scot

This document is also available on the Transport Scotland website: www.transport.gov.scot

Published by Transport Scotland, November 2023

Follow us:



transport.gov.scot



**Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot**