

Young people and bus travel

What do we know about young people?

Approximately one in five of the population (11m) is under 16 years of age, and some 8 million are in school.ⁱ In total, there are about 15 million young people under 20 years of age, but overall the proportion of the population that is 'young' is falling, as people on average live longer. But, what do we know about young people in the UK?

They are safer, more ethnically diverse and more mobile – but fatter and poorer (relatively) than previous generations.

- The vast majority of young people in the UK are **urban** - living in the cities in England
- They are more **ethnically diverse** than the population overall – more than 10% are from an ethnic minority
- Nearly a million young people are **disabled** and 20% of young people have special educational needs at some time during their school career. Their needs are increasingly like to be defined as behavioural or an autistic spectrum condition rather than physical disabilities
- They are now more likely than in the past to be brought up by a single parent
- 4 million children – about one in three – are defined as living in **poverty (i.e. households with below 60% of median income)**. This is the highest rate for the industrialised world, and is double the levels seen in the 1960s and 1970sⁱⁱ
- They are also **fatter**..... In 2007, approximately three in ten boys and girls aged 2-15 in England were classed as either overweight or obese. The proportion of boys aged two-15 years who are obese has increased from 10.9% in 1995 to 16.8% in 2007 and from 12% to 16.1% for girls
- Despite perceptions, children are **safer** than they've ever been, and are less likely to be killed or die before they reach adulthood. The child mortality rate (1-14 years) has fallen 61% between 1980 and the late 2000s, reflecting improvements in medicine and road safety, including bus and coach safety.
- The number of children (under 16 in Great Britain) killed or injured as a passenger in a coach or bus has fallen from 1,679 in 1997 to less than 1,000 by 2008. Children using buses are safer per mile travelled, and per trip on buses or coaches than other modes (Bus casualties account for about 4% of all child casualties but buses account for more than 8% of journeys);
- And about 15% of 16-24 year olds are **not in employment, education or training** – but conversely 85% are!

Who provides bus services and subsidises fares?

Outside London bus services are 'deregulated'; bus companies can decide where and when they wish to operate services, and register these with the Traffic Commissioner. Within London, routes are regulated and operators bid for contracts from Transport for London to operate routes.

Local authorities outside London have a duty to look at the bus services that are available commercially and decide whether any others are 'socially necessary'. If so they will tender for operators to provide those specific routes/services. The criteria for what is deemed socially necessary varies from authority to authority. About one in five services in 2006 nationally was supported by local authorities, the proportion being higher in rural areas.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the six main urban cities, there are Passenger Transport Executives that coordinate transport and work on behalf of the local authorities in their areas, for example Nexus is the PTE for Tyne and Wear area and coordinates passenger transport on behalf of the five metropolitan Boroughs within its area.

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For young people, local authorities may provide concessionary fare schemes – but are under no obligation to. If these are provided under the Transport Act 1985 they have to be limited to those in full time education up to 18 years of age. However, authorities can now use well-being powers to provide support concessionary fare schemes for other young people.

The main statutory duty to provide transport for young people is on the local education authorities, who are obliged to ‘facilitate attendance’ at school by pupils of compulsory school age. This means they have to provide free transport for those living over walking distances from their nearest school (i.e. 2 or 3 miles depending on age), and for some young people living in low income households. All other transport whether free or provided at a charge is discretionary.

Government expenditure

We don’t really know what the State spends on subsidising young people’s travel. Funding is fragmented, inconsistent, and poorly recorded. The vast majority of public expenditure on travel for young people is accounted for by home-school transport, which costs local authorities about £1.5 billion p.a. in the UK (although more than half of this is for pupils with special needs). This represents a doubling in real terms over the past 20 years. In addition there is about a further £0.3 billion p.a. of funding allocated via colleges (access funds etc) and Educational Maintenance Allowances that is assumed to go towards the cost of transport.

In the metropolitan areas (and some shire authorities such as Derbyshire) there are also concessionary fares schemes for young people. Overall, support of local buses including concessionary fares for elderly and disabled, revenue support for socially necessary services and Bus Service Operators’ Grant was almost £3bn in 2008/9, but includes support for services used by all age groups.^{iv}

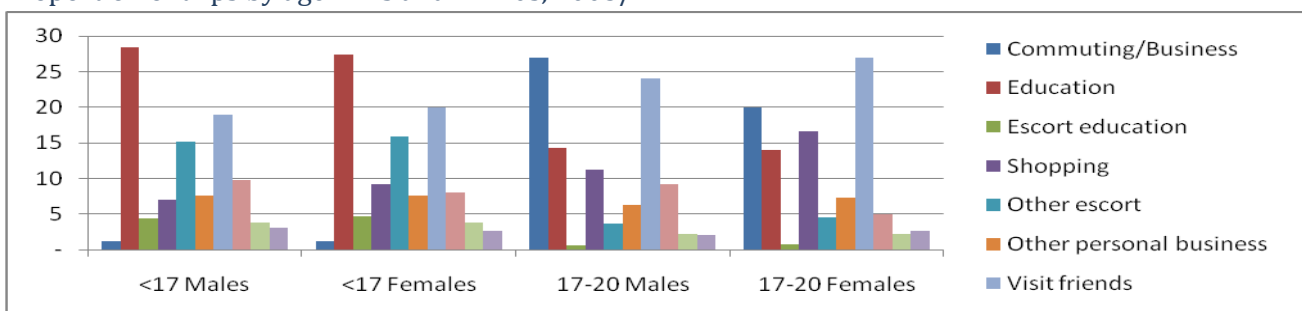
Overall, there is public expenditure providing a subsidy of at least £160 per child p.a. towards the costs of their transport, excluding the support for local bus services and concessionary fares.

What do we know about young people’s travel?

Young people under 17 typically make slightly fewer trips than adults^v and travel less miles (4,511 miles per year). Approximately 7% of their trips are by bus; more than half by car. For younger children the main journey purpose is to go to school - for the under 17s, almost a third of trips are to and from school/education;^{vi} and a quarter of all their mileage and about a third of their overall travelling time is the journey to and from school. And, the vast majority (estimated to be about 90%) of the bus journeys made by children are for the school journey.^{vii}

As children get older their travel patterns change. Shopping (especially for females) and work journeys start to account for a greater proportion of trips. Visiting friends also accounts for a larger share of overall trips by older teenagers than for younger children.

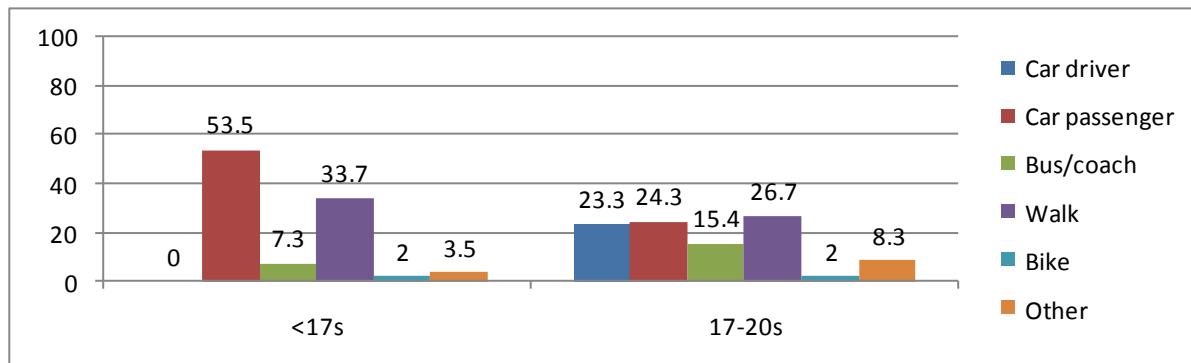
Proportion of trips by age <17s and 17-20s, 2003/4^{viii}



Walking continues to be important as children get older, but it accounts for a declining share of journeys, and car driving and bus use becoming more important. For boys walking peaks at about the age of 15. For young women the use of modes is slightly different, with less bike use overall. Walking also accounts for a decreasing proportion of trips to the age of 17 with bus use increasing. Walking again increases, as does car use as young women become old enough to drive.

The NTS data show the shift for younger children overall from walking to using buses in the late teen years, with the proportion of trips by bus doubling. However, even for 17-20 year olds who are the largest users of buses of all age groups, only 15% of their trips are made by bus.

Proportion of trips by mode, <17s and 17-20 yr olds 2006 ^{ix}



What young people (or their parents) spend on bus travel

Information on young people's income and expenditure is extremely limited. Research that is available suggests the average child in Britain receives £6.84 a week in pocket money, but spends £13.18p per week, with pocket money supplemented by earnings and gifts. ^x Overall this represents an estimated collective spending power of £4.89+ billion a year. But, only 30p on average per week is spent by children on travel – compared to £2.30 a week on sweets and confectionary! This suggests transport costs for younger children, are being paid for by parents (or the state).

Research undertaken by BMRB suggested that transport to get children to and from school costs parents on average £366 for each child per year and is their largest single item of expenditure to send them to school; (more than the annual cost of lunches (£358) and PE kit (£169)). However, this £366 represents an average figure and more than half of those travelling by bus or taxi said that they did so at their LEA's expense. Those who were paying for transport themselves did so at an average £9.54 per week, with a third paying more than £10 per week. Whilst the vast majority (83%) of parents reported they were very happy or happy with the costs of schooling overall, 6% of parents reported these levels of costs caused real hardship. ^{xi}

Older children aged between 13 and 18 receive around £936 a year through a combination of pocket money and allowances, Christmas and birthday money, paid employment and money for odd jobs. ^{xii} However, the average hides wide variations, with the best off 10% of teenagers receiving £1,476 each year, but the poorest 10% getting just £144. With 13-year-olds given around £45 a month this rises to £80 a month on average by the age of 16 and £120 a month by 18, supplemented by £70 at Christmas and £50 for their birthday. Teenagers spend an average of £350 each year on their appearance, while they spend around £360 on socialising and going out with their friends. Four out of 10 teenagers said they spent around £260 a year on alcohol, while 18% admitted they spent £240 on cigarettes. Transport expenditure appears to represent a small proportion of the average teenager's overall expenditure.

However, bus fares for children have risen significantly over the past decade. These are usually set at a fraction of the adult fare – often half or two-thirds. Whilst children have seen a reduction in fares in London – where they now travel free - general bus fares in England have risen by 16% in real terms over the past decade in Shire areas and by 23% in PTE areas.^{xiii}

What young people think of public transport

Expensive?

For children, cost of transport becomes an issue as they get older, probably reflecting the fact they are more likely to be responsible for their own money. However, wealthier parents are likely to see public transport as cheap, as do those on state benefits. The cost of public transport seems to be particular of issue to those in the middle income C1/C2 socio economic groups.^{xiv}

Affordability of public transport has been found by several studies to be an issue for young people themselves, especially in more rural areas.^{xv} The National Youth Agency found that cost was regarded as a main barrier, preventing young people from using buses in three of their four case study areas. The Youth Parliament says half of young people think public transport too expensive, and 83% reported they would use public transport more if it was cheaper.^{xvi}

However, it appears cost, per se, is not the only issue. In rural areas, young people have been found to have concerns about the inequity of very different concessionary fare schemes, and focus groups with young people in South Yorkshire and Merseyside in 2009 showed many of the issues around fares were not related to the level of fare itself, but concerned fairness, inconvenience, and ‘barriers to entry’ to the fares regime. Young people are often knowledgeable about the network and fares on offer, but they are often perceived as unfair/illogical for example by permitting travel only at certain times. DfT research in 2002 also found that young people complained about the steep rises in bus fares that kick in at ages 14, 15 or 16, and the difficulty in proving age for concessions where they did not have photo-card identification.^{xvii} They noted that whilst three quarters of commercial operators offered fare discounts, and that half of local authorities and all the PTEs had some form of concessionary fare scheme for young people, there were considerable variations in:

- the level of reductions/discounts against adult fares;
- the hours applying,
- the upper age limit

and that these discrepancies could lead to conflict between drivers and young people.^{xviii} The lack of consistency of concessionary fare schemes; and the fact that these may not apply to those who are not in full time education; together with the complexity of commercially provided fare structures for public transport, have all been found to create confusion and prompt criticism of public transport by young people.^{xix}

Research by the CRC and the Rural Authorities’ group have emphasised the problems of these differing entitlement criteria and charges for post-16 transport for students, which, compounded with cross border travel for students, creates inequalities and problems.^{xx} The Joseph Rowntree Trust research in the West Midlands and Hull also found cost was not the major issue, but the inequality of young people being charged fares when elderly people received free travel was raised in focus groups. Young people felt that as many in both age groups were reliant on buses for local travel, and both young and old often had limited incomes they thought they should not be treated differently.^{xxi}

The true cost of transport to and from school and additional weekend travel is also often only superficially understood. Neither parents nor children in focus groups in Merseyside or South Yorkshire^{xxii} added up the weekly or monthly aggregate cost of numerous separate fares. However, the need to find cash “up-front” is

known to be a significant deterrent to purchasing pre-paid weekly and termly travel, particularly to those on low incomes.

Unwanted?

Young people express a low sense of entitlement to use public transport, reporting 'dirty looks' from older passengers and a voluntary segregation - with the elderly to the front of the bus and young to the back. There are frequent reports of confrontations with drivers and that young people are seen as likely to cause trouble.^{xxiii} DfT research has shown that a common theme among young people is drivers not accepting young people's bus passes and the need to improve relations between young people and bus drivers.^{xxiv} The appearance of drivers and their treatment of pupils were also raised by young people in the DfT's research on encouraging bus use for school journeys.^{xxv} In the West Midlands, young people complained that drivers would drive past young people waiting and made the presumption that they would cause trouble.^{xxvi}

In the recent focus groups in South Yorkshire and Liverpool the general perception of buses was poor. They were viewed as unsafe, dirty, overcrowded, and poorly driven. For many participants, the bus was seen as a difficult place where 'stranger danger', school feuds and older peers all conspired to make some journeys difficult for them. MORI also found that operators were largely fatalistic about this age group, regarding them as likely to stop using public transport when they got a car or were old enough to drive and therefore saw no advantage to marketing to the 17-22 year olds.^{xxvii}

Unclean?

The poor condition of buses - dirty, littered and vandalised, and poor behaviour especially on school buses were highlighted as of concern to young people in the DfT research.^{xxviii} In more recent work, in rural areas, young people identified the poor quality of some vehicles and lack of cleanliness as issues.^{xxix} In Centro's research in the West Midlands, teenagers were much more likely to think the shelters/buses dirty and vandalised than their parents (perhaps reflecting young people's greater levels of use of public transport).^{xxx} The Youth Parliament survey found a quarter of young people thought public transport was unclean, which made it unpleasant to use.^{xxxi}

Unsafe?

The perception of young people and parents is that children are less safe travelling by bus than being transported by car. However, it is personal security and bullying rather than road safety that dominates concerns. Young people (particularly young women) have similar anxieties to adults about waiting for public transport, particularly after dark. Young women cite fear caused by cars passing or stopping at a bus stop while they are waiting alone, the relatively infrequency of or perceived unreliability of transport in evenings and at weekends adds to these concerns.^{xxxii}

Crime Concern found that although travelling alone on a bus is perceived by young people as generally safe, nearly a third of those aged 13 or over felt uneasy travelling alone on a train.^{xxxiii} In the Centro research, it was concerns about personal crime on the way to and from bus stops/stations that were greater than at other times.^{xxxiv} However, research in South Yorkshire showed that travel awareness lessons with young people can increase confidence about safety.^{xxxv}

Potential market and good practice

Although research shows car ownership remains an aspiration for young people, it is becoming less of a reality due largely to the costs and increasing requirements relating to the test/licence (as well as environmental concerns), suggesting that public transport is, and could be, even more important to this age group than in the past.

Older teenagers do see public transport as potentially offering freedom and independence. Overall, research suggests that this teenage cohort is willing to use public transport, seeing it as offering independence; however, their concerns mirror those in surveys of adults and are about personal security, the attitude of drivers, cleanliness and reliability; and about their lack of involvement.^{xxxvi} Nearly one in five young people say that better public transport would improve their area.^{xxxvii}

Summing up

Young people represent a significant potential market for bus travel at almost 20% of the population and often a captive market unable to drive themselves and having to attend education. They are a group with considerable and growing spending power overall. Whilst the cost of transport per se appears not to be the major concern for most, the levels of fares clearly cause hardship for some; but it is the perceived inequities and inconsistencies in fare structures that prompt more concern.

Perceptions of safety and security are however at odds with the statistical evidence, but research suggests that young people have similar concerns about the quality of bus travel as adults; although the attitude of drivers, perceived as unwelcoming and unsupportive, is a recurring theme.

A way forward:

The research suggests that what young people want and need regarding bus travel includes:

- The necessary skills to enable them to use public transport safely and effectively. Rather than punishing them for misbehaviour, providing them with training and support to ensure they know how to use a bus would be more constructive approach. Increasingly young people have never used buses prior to starting secondary school.
- A more secure and less punitive environment, where they are not open to ridicule and embarrassment. Younger children want to be able to rely on drivers to keep order and for fair play, to be helpful and sufficiently protective. Older children want to be welcomed rather than challenged about proof of age/entitlement.
- A service that is reliable and on time – young people are penalised for being late at school or college (or employment) including financially and feel it unfair if this is the fault of transport they have to take.
- Provision for waiting that feels safe and use of technology to prevent having to wait at roadsides (e.g. mobile phone alerts)
- A consistent and simple fare offer, marketed via schools and colleges that does not have significant barriers to take up e.g. application forms and up front charges.

Overall, they just want to feel valued as customers!

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- i DCSF (May 2009) Statistical First Release – Schools, Pupils and their characteristics Jan 2009 Provisional SFR 08/2009
 - ii Child Poverty Action Group and Joseph Rowntree Foundation figures.
 - iii Transport Select Committee Eleventh Report 2006 section 6
 - iv DfT (2009) Transport Statistics Bulletin Public Transport GB Edition 2009 supplement
 - v DfT (2009) Transport Trends 2008 Edition TSO. London p 54
 - vi Assumes an average of 380 school trips per annum (less typical 10% of absence) = 340 trips per year being for school journeys
Calculated from Transport Trends data for 2006 – 937 trips p.a. of which 7.3% are by bus for under 17s. For school trips
approximately 18-20% are by bus and the school journey accounts for about a third of all trips made by under 17s. Therefore
20% of 340 = approx 90% of 7.3% of 937.
 - viii DfT (2005 updated 2006) Focus on personal travel NTS Chapter 4
 - ix DfT (February 2009) Transport Trends 2008 Edition
 - x LSE research cited in e-parenting
 - xi DCSF (2009) Cost of schooling 2007 BMRB Social Research. p13
 - xii According to television channel MTV One
 - xiii DfT (2009), Transport Statistics Great Britain, Table 6.15
 - xiv Centro WMPTA (2007) Child consultation research study 2006 p 40
 - xv Commission for Rural Communities (August 2006) The case for concessionary fares for young people in rural areas TAS. p 1
 - xvi Youth Parliament (2008) Fares fare – transport report from the UK Youth Parliament. p 5
 - xvii DfT (2002) p 9
 - xviii DfT (1999b) Increasing bus use for journeys to school. WS Atkins p 29
 - xix DfT (1999a) Young people and crime on public transport Crime Concern.
 - xx Rural authorities' group (July 2007) Long distance learners? Transport for teenage learners in rural areas. Martin Camillin
Associates
 - xxi JRT (2007) p 74
 - xxii pteg (2010) Concessionary fares for young people. SWP. London.
 - xxiii Storey P & J Brannen (July 2000) Young people and transport in rural areas Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
 - xxiv DfT (2006) Young people and transport – their needs and requirements p 9
 - xxv DfT (1999b) Increasing bus use for journeys to school. WS Atkins
 - xxvi Centro WMPTA (2007) Child consultation research study 2006 p 37
 - xxvii MORI Scotland (2002) Young people and transport Research Findings No 155/202, produced for the Scottish Executive.
 - xxviii DfT (2006) Young people and transport – their needs and requirements p 10
 - xxix Rural Authorities' Group (2007) Rural transport – long distance learners. Martin Camillin Associates. p 29
 - xxx Centro WMPTA (2007) Child consultation research study 2006 p 35-7
 - xxxi Youth Parliament (2008) Fares fare – transport report from the UK Youth Parliament p 5
 - xxxii McWhannell F & S Braunholz (2002) Young people and transport – report for the Scottish Executive
 - xxxiii DfT (1999a) Young people and crime on public transport Crime Concern.
 - xxxiv Centro WMPTA (2007) Child consultation research study 2006 p33
 - xxxv SYPTE (2007b) Market Research – Mega travel pass.
 - xxxvi NYA (January 2007) Young people and public transport Spotlight briefing paper.
 - xxxvii DCSF (March 2010) TellUs4 National Report NFER RR 218