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1 Background

As part of the development of Better Connected, the Department for Transport undertook a series of policy engagement exercises and analysed recent evidence to shape our approach:

Regional Roadshow

A series of “town-hall” style events to gather views from regional professional stakeholders on transport priorities, opportunities and explore how our approach could support improvements.

People’s Panels

A series of sessions held with members of the public from groups whose voices are often underrepresented in transport policy and planning.

Call for Ideas

An open exercise inviting views from members of the public, frontline transport workers and organisations about their experiences of transport and suggestions for improvement.

Review of relevant evidence and analysis

An internal exercise reviewing evidence from established data sources and research, examining travel patterns, people’s experiences across the transport network and the role of transport in supporting economic growth and access to opportunities.

This report summarises the key findings from the Regional Roadshow and the People’s Panels exercises. The results from the Call for Ideas, as well as the findings from our review of relevant evidence and analysis have been published separately. The above exercises have been complemented by additional targeted stakeholder engagement.

This strategy has also been informed by informal engagement with local leaders and mayors, transport advocacy groups and local authority partners.



2 Regional Roadshow

Background

From 11 February to 11 March 2025, the Department for Transport held a Regional Roadshow, consisting of 11 events across England as part of the engagement for Better Connected. Events took place in Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham, Leicester, Ipswich, Bristol, Brighton, London, Falmouth and Milton Keynes.

In total, 634 people attended the sessions over the five-week period. Participants were invited by sub-national transport bodies and included representatives from:

- local government (174)
- advocacy and membership groups (105)
- transport operators (74)
- private companies (55)
- charities (54)
- government agencies (42)
- consultancies (41)
- education (18)
- business and commerce (5)
- other (66)

The discussions focussed on five core themes identified in advance by the Department:

- **User experience, accessibility and inclusion** – ensuring people’s needs are central to transport’s design, build and operation.
- **Health and wellbeing** - enabling more people to be physically active as part of everyday journeys, improving health and air quality.
- **Housing, planning and place** – enabling local leaders to deliver transport that is right for their communities.
- **Economy and growth** – delivering a transport system that enables access to jobs, education and public services.
- **Sustainability and climate** – meeting Net Zero by 2050 and adapting to the impacts of the changing climate.

Top national headlines

The Roadshow generated over 5,000 ideas and comments, however there were some clear standout themes that were broadly consistent across all 11 events:

- a) **User-focussed, easy and accessible** – Participants emphasised the need to prioritise transport accessibility, reliability, affordability, and integration to improve quality of life. They felt a passenger-first approach should enable seamless regional journeys across all types of transport, supported by integrated ticketing, real-time data, and simplified fares. Equity was a recurring theme raised, with calls for policies that empower all users, including disabled people, rural communities, and low-income households. Some participants also highlighted that transport should be considered a right, not a privilege (~135 references).
- b) **Transport hand in hand with development** – A strong message from participants was the importance of integrating transport into local growth plans, housing strategies, spatial frameworks and statutory guidance from the outset. Some participants widely saw retrofitting transport into new developments as ineffective (~110 references).
- c) **Funding reform and devolved powers** – Participants suggested replacing current short-term funding cycles with a ten-year (or more) capital and revenue funding model that enables local transport authorities to plan effectively and develop their own approaches to funding. Some suggested that a balance between infrastructure maintenance and new investments is needed, and greater devolution of transport budgets and decision-making power will allow for solutions to be tailored to local needs (~90 references).

- d) **Making space for car-free alternatives**
– Some participants expressed a desire to reduce car dependency and encourage multi-modal, sustainable travel. They viewed this as a helpful step towards easing congestion and achieving carbon and health goals. Many emphasised the importance of high-quality alternatives such as bus priority measures, improved walking and cycling infrastructure, and more affordable rail fares. Some suggested that disincentives like road pricing could play a role (~70 references).

Aspirations for transport

The opening discussion for each event was intended to draw out initial expectations and ambitions for transport. When asked what would ‘delight’ them, participants contributed nearly 800 keywords and phrases:

- a) **Connectivity and integration:** Participants’ most frequently mentioned aspiration was for a transport system that is truly connected across modes and places. They called for seamless end-to-end travel, better links between bus and rail, and a strong emphasis on integrated ticketing (~140 references).
- b) **Funding reform:** Participants highlighted the need for stable, long-term funding. There was a desire amongst participants to move away from fragmented, short-term transport funding streams to multi-year settlements to allow local places to plan and deliver improvements with confidence (~53 references).
- c) **Ambitious action on key issues:** Participants identified several areas where they want to see bold ambition, including accessibility (34), cycling and active travel (56), and climate and sustainability (29).

- d) **User experience:** Participants emphasised the importance of improving service levels (49), reducing travel costs (28), and making people (44) and communities (34) the priority for decision making.
- e) **Specific policy interventions:** Nearly 100 comments from participants mentioned specific policy interventions, including devolution (11), and integrated spatial planning (7).

Roadshow participants had a strong appetite for public transport to become a more desirable experience. When asked about user experience, participants envisioned a national transport system that feels relaxed, safe and straightforward. The most frequently referenced themes included:

- a) **Relaxed and stress-free:** Over 150 comments described the ideal travel experience as relaxed, calm and happy, with some calling for journeys to be joyful rather than stressful.
- b) **Safe:** There were 121 specific references to feeling safe while travelling, spanning from women feeling safe on public transport to people feeling safe walking, wheeling and cycling.
- c) **Connected, easy and empowering:** Participants called for a connected (51) travel experience that is easy (48) and that people are confident to use (51) and leaves people feeling empowered (30).

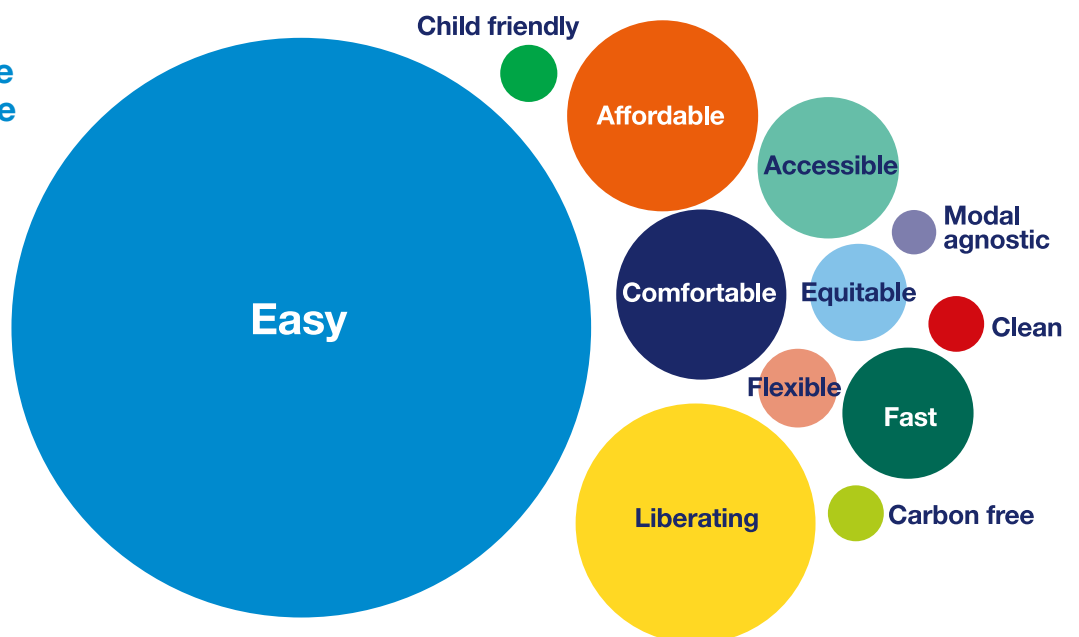
How should transport make people feel?

Figure 1: Most mentioned themes when participants were asked “how should transport make people feel?”



What should the experience of transport be like?

Figure 2: Most mentioned themes when participants were asked “what should the experience of transport be like?”



The size of each bubble is proportional to the number of people that mentioned this theme.

Headlines for the five key themes

Participants were asked to explore five core themes; a summary of the discussions can be found below:

User experience, accessibility and inclusion

Participants told us that a fully accessible transport system must be designed from the start to ensure it is welcoming, inclusive and makes people feel safe. Features such as step-free access, well-lit infrastructure, and safe, seamless walking, wheeling, and cycling routes were seen as essential by participants.

Participants also said that public transport should be a more reliable and affordable choice, particularly for people who face barriers accessing transport. Ongoing public engagement was highlighted by participants as critical to improving the experience, alongside the need for simple, clear and real-time information.

A human-centred approach was seen as key, with participants highlighting the importance of transport education in schools, to build understanding and confidence from an early age. It was felt that this should be supported by a system that is easy to navigate, with seamless multimodal connections and transparent pricing to encourage public transport use.

Health and wellbeing

Participants highlighted that transport investment decisions and cost-benefit appraisals should factor in long-term health benefits like improvements in air quality or reductions in obesity. Without this, they believe that the full social and economic value of transport is not reflected. Participants also noted that the potential health impacts associated with road infrastructure investment may not always receive sufficient attention in decision-making.

Closer collaboration between the transport and health sectors was seen as crucial by participants to promote healthier travel. It was suggested by participants that joint-funding could support more active travel initiatives, GP-prescribed walking and cycling schemes, and improving

access to healthcare via public transport. A more holistic approach, where transport planning actively contributes to NHS priorities, was seen by participants as a way to reduce long-term healthcare costs and improving people's overall wellbeing.

Housing, planning and place

Participants told us that transport should be fully integrated from the start in placemaking and urban planning to create sustainable, well-connected communities. This includes aligning transport, housing, and infrastructure decisions, supported by more devolved decision-making powers. Increasing housing density along existing transport corridors was also raised by participants.

Participants said there should be a greater focus on how transport can support everyday life. Participants saw school streets, cycling infrastructure, and public transport connections as important to creating liveable neighbourhoods and ensuring seamless access to jobs, education, healthcare, leisure, and retail.

Meaningful community engagement on change was seen as critical by participants. They called for consultation and co-design processes so that transport solutions reflect local needs and encourage greater uptake of public transport and walking, wheeling and cycling. Participants also said that upgrading transport links into existing areas and designing new developments with community input were also priorities.

Economy and growth

Participants suggested that transport should be fully integrated into regional growth strategies, ensuring access to jobs, housing, and skills. Participants felt that access to opportunities could be enhanced through a well-integrated system that connects key sites through sustainable transport links.

Breaking down barriers to economic participation was a key theme from participants. Suggestions included improving multimodal connectivity, aligning travel timetables with work patterns, and ensuring services are reliable and frequent.



Participants shared strong support for long-term, devolved funding pipelines to enable better investment in sustainable infrastructure – both for maintaining travel existing networks and expanding public transport and walking and cycling options.

Sustainability and climate

Participants told us that reducing car dependency could play an important role in achieving Net Zero and improving sustainability. They felt the challenge lies in making sustainable transport the most convenient, affordable, and attractive option. Suggestions included measures to encourage public transport and active travel, such as integrated ticketing, improved frequency and reliability and high-quality cycling infrastructure.

Participants felt that enabling this shift would require a coordinated programme of engagement. Ideas ranged from public awareness and behaviour change campaigns to initiatives like low or free travel fares for young people, promotion of car clubs and employee engagement programmes.

Climate resilience was also highlighted as a priority, with participants calling for transport infrastructure to be future proofed to withstand climate change impacts such as flooding. They suggested there are opportunities to integrate green infrastructure and urban drainage into the transport system, delivering biodiversity benefits while making it more attractive.

Barriers and solutions

Participants identified what they feel to be the barriers and potential solutions to an integrated transport system, briefly summarised below.

Perceived barriers	Suggested solutions
Decisions around transport are often made in isolation, with limited coordination across modes, sectors or levels of government.	Empower local authorities to make decisions through a shared national framework; develop common standards; strengthen cross-sector and cross-government collaboration.
Short-term funding cycles restrict the ability to plan and deliver transport initiatives.	Introduce sustainable, long-term funding models; expand devolved powers; use broader appraisal methods that capture social, economic and health benefits.
Lack of clear leadership and ambition at local and national levels can stall progress.	Reform legislation and policy to enable more ambitious local leadership; support regional partnerships; articulate a strong national vision for transport.
Many people face challenges with navigating and using the transport system.	Adopt a user-centric approach to transport planning with universal accessibility as a baseline; improve integrated ticketing and real-time travel information; invest in developing workforce skills to better respond to passenger needs.
Limited investment in public transport and active travel.	Increase investment in these modes to support a more integrated transport system, alongside targeted measures to promote their use and raise public awareness.
Rural areas often lack reliable and joined-up transport options, leaving communities disconnected.	Strengthen rural bus networks; improve cross-modal integration (e.g. bus and rail links); provide targeted support for community transport initiatives.
Transport improvements can face resistance or lack of support if communities aren't meaningfully engaged.	Run consistent and early engagement through local and regional partnerships; engage with communities to build trust and shape locally relevant transport solutions.



Local transport successes

Across England, participants highlighted a range of local transport successes. Of the examples shared, we heard the following most frequently:

- Expanded cycle paths, walking routes, and wheeling infrastructure have made it easier and safer for people to choose active travel.
- Investment in local buses and bus franchising has led to increased passenger numbers.
- Integrated and affordable ticketing, including multi-operator tickets, capped fares, and seamless links between bus, rail, and tram has made public transport more attractive and easier to use.
- New and restored rail stations, higher-frequency services, and zero-emission trains are connecting communities and supporting greener travel.
- Passenger engagement schemes that are helping to shape services around local needs.
- Expansion of electric vehicle charging networks, car clubs, and park-and-ride schemes are supporting the shift to cleaner vehicles and low-traffic neighbourhoods.
- Data-driven innovations, such as real-time travel information and improved analytics, are helping to plan better services and secure investment.
- Strategic freight forums and cross-sector partnerships are improving efficiency and sustainability in the movement of freight.
- Community-led and inclusive transport initiatives are ensuring that services reflect the needs of all users.



3 People's Panels

Background

From 9 to 12 June 2025, the Department for Transport held seven online People's Panels as part of the engagement for Better Connected. We heard from 56 members of the public, representing a range of backgrounds and geographic locations across England.

The sessions aimed to explore the specific challenges and lived experiences of people from seldom heard communities, whose voices are often underrepresented in transport policy and planning. Facilitated conversations focussed on how our approach in Better Connected could best reflect the needs of these groups.

Each session was dedicated to understanding the transport experiences of a specific group. A social research agency was commissioned to recruit a diverse mix of participants within each group, recognising the importance of intersectionality. The seven sessions focussed on:

- older people (aged 65 and over)
- younger people (aged 17 to 24)
- people on low incomes
- people living in rural areas
- women and girls
- disabled people
- neurodivergent people

Discussions were structured around five key areas:

- **Everyday transport use and preferences** – how people currently travel, why they make those choices, and how satisfied they are with their journeys.
- **Journey planning and travel information** – how easily people can access and understand travel information, and what barriers they face.
- **Changes in travel habits** – how travel behaviours have evolved over the past five years and the factors driving those changes.

- **Improving the travel experience** – what would enhance people's experiences across public transport, active travel and driving, focusing on issues like reliability, safety, accessibility, and affordability.
- **Transport and life opportunities** – how better transport could improve people's lives, such as access to jobs, education, healthcare and social activities, and support independence, wellbeing and sustainability.

While the number of participants was not statistically representative, the panels provided rich qualitative insights and personal stories. We focussed on groups that were underrepresented in responses to the Call for Ideas to help build as complete a picture as possible of public perspectives - ensuring our approach reflects a broad range of lived experiences and supports a more inclusive and effective transport system.

Older people said...

Improving safety and accessibility on transport is essential to preventing isolation later in life. Many older people said they still want to go out in the evenings but are put off by traffic congestion, poor visibility, and limited parking spaces. Driving was felt to be stressful or impractical, especially in unfamiliar or busy areas. Some participants said they would be more likely to use public transport if evening services were more frequent, clean, and felt safe, with a visible staff presence offering reassurance.

Physical safety is a concern across all parts of the journey, from walking routes to public transport. Poor pavement quality, blocked paths, and a lack of safe crossings discourage walking and wheeling especially for those worried about falling. Narrow walkways, uneven surfaces, and parked cars on pavements were all mentioned as barriers. Rest areas along walking routes are essential for people with mobility needs, allowing them to travel at their own pace.

Free or discounted travel is a lifeline. It helps older people stay connected with family and friends, maintain social lives, and take part in activities they enjoy. Many said they would gladly give up driving altogether, so long as public transport is affordable and improved in local areas to support independent, confident travel. Some noted that clearer communication around free travel entitlements would ensure more people can access the benefits available.

“In London, there is so much antisocial behaviour, and there’s no presence of staff - never anyone on the platform, and very few at station entrances and exits. There’s a sense of insecurity - that something could happen at any time.” – R, [72].

Young people said...

Transport costs are a major barrier to access and opportunity, influencing if and how young people travel. Participants cited cheaper fares as the key change they want to see. Many reported walking long distances to avoid costs, while others rely on bursaries and grants to get the train to college or university. Participants said rail cards and student discounts were either insufficient or difficult to access. The cost of transport does not just affect how they travel, it influences their educational choices, attendance and ability to maintain a social life.

Safety concerns play a significant role in shaping travel behaviour. Poorly lit, unstaffed stations and dark walking routes around stations and transport hubs are particularly concerning for young women, often determining when and how they travel. The state of pavements is another issue, with participants describing narrow, overcrowded, and poorly maintained walkways making walking feel unsafe. There were calls for better lighting, wider and more direct routes, and improved maintenance to make walking a more comfortable and viable option.

The reliability of public transport affects their quality of life. Delays, infrequent services and limited routes were all cited as sources of stress. Missed classes and cancelled plans were

common experiences, particularly for those relying on trains. Participants also expressed frustration at the lack of flexibility in the system, with limited service options making it difficult to adapt to changing schedules or attend events. There was a strong desire for improvements, such as additional carriages or increased frequency during peak times, including commuter hours and major events like football matches.

“If my trains are delayed, or one is cancelled, I miss my next connection and then I’m late for my lecture.” – J, [20].

People on lower incomes said...

Transport costs are a major barrier to opportunity, affecting daily life. Travel costs take up a large portion of household budgets, with people needing to choose between getting to a job interview and affording essentials like food. Many participants rely on monthly bus passes, while others avoid faster transport options due to the higher cost. Financial pressures mean some restrict non-essential trips altogether, leading to feelings of isolation. Participants said that more affordable fares and integrated ticketing could significantly improve their quality of life and open life opportunities they are currently locked out of.

Infrequent, unreliable, and poorly connected public transport services create stress and limit mobility. Delays, infrequent services and poor connections are a major source of frustration. Missing a bus or train can mean missing a class or important appointment. In some areas, public transport is so infrequent that participants felt that arriving on time was like a gamble. Others described the challenge of navigating malfunctioning ticket machines. Even when online travel information is accurate, participants feel that the real-world experience, with frequent delays and cancellations, often falls short - contributing to stress and making public transport feel like an unreliable option.



Safer, more accessible, and better-maintained walking environments are needed. Beyond public transport, many participants expressed concerns about the basic infrastructure that supports walking or wheeling. Pavements are often uneven, cluttered, or too narrow, forcing people like parents with prams, onto the road. A lack of safe crossing points and poorly lit paths adds to the feeling that walking is unsafe or unpleasant, especially at night or in busy urban areas. Several participants highlighted how these conditions discourage them from walking, even though it is the most affordable option available. There were calls for greater investment in walking infrastructure, including cleaner and safer routes, rest areas with benches, better maintenance, more rubbish bins, and more greenery to make walking enjoyable.

“If I need to start work at 8:30am, I can’t always be sure I’ll make it [on the bus] because although it’s affordable it is so unreliable. Even small joys like going to the cinema are no longer feasible. It sounds silly, but I just can’t afford it.” – E, [55].

People living in rural areas said...

Limited and unreliable public transport restricts rural mobility. People in rural areas told us they want to reduce their environmental impact and rely less on their cars, but infrequent, unreliable and poorly connected services make this difficult. Trains and buses often do not run early in the morning or late at night, and in some areas they are not available at all. For many, driving is the only viable way to access jobs, essential services, and social connection. Those who want to walk or cycle more are discouraged by safety concerns, including high speeds on roads and the lack of pavements. Without realistic alternatives, people feel stuck with car dependency despite their willingness to change.

High costs and complex ticketing create additional barriers. Transport costs are a concern, with many participants using rail split ticketing, and discount passes to go on longer journeys. They find this process stressful and unfair, particularly when cheaper fares often exist but are not offered in a streamlined way. Fragmented ticketing systems and poor connections between services add to the frustration.

Safety, staff presence, and visible investment in public transport are key to building confidence. Physical and emotional

safety is a key concern, particularly among women and older people. While transport information is easy to access, the presence of transport staff is vital for security and support to help when things go wrong. Antisocial behaviour and poor lighting deter people from using public transport, especially at night. Participants voiced frustration at the slow pace of infrastructure improvements, noting that even basic road maintenance feels neglected. They feel that consistent, visible improvements, like more staff, better lighting and safer paths would make greener transport choices feel more realistic and appealing.

“We want to see my family and friends more. My daughter only lives two miles away, but my wife doesn’t drive, and she can’t walk there safely and there’s no public transport, so I have to give her a lift.” – K, [70].

Women and girls said...

Safety concerns significantly shape travel choices for women and girls. Many described feeling vulnerable when using public transport or travelling at night, citing overcrowded services, poorly lit streets, lack of staff presence, and anti-social behaviour, including harassment. The presence of visible staff was seen as essential for improving both safety and comfort. A lack of confidence in public transport, often rooted in past negative experiences or fear of what could happen, remains a major barrier, especially when travelling alone or after dark.

The cost of all types of transport limits flexibility and choice. Train tickets, even for short journeys or family outings, are often unaffordable, pushing people toward car use despite rising fuel and insurance costs. At the same time, unreliable and infrequent public transport makes it difficult to plan journeys with confidence. Even those who prefer public transport said they often avoid it due to stress, long wait times, or overcrowding. Participants highlighted the need for simpler ticketing systems and fares to make public transport a more viable option.

The quality of walking and cycling infrastructure directly affects how they travel.

Well-maintained pavements, good lighting, safe crossing points, and scenic or green walking routes were all seen as essential. Narrow or obstructed paths, fast-moving traffic, and poorly lit areas discourage walking especially at peak times of the day. Concerns were also raised about cyclists using pavements, with calls for better segregated cycling infrastructure. For drivers, poor road conditions like potholes and rising costs add further strain. Across all types of transport, participants stressed the need for infrastructure that supports safety, comfort, and ease of movement.

“I do worry about safety (on public transport), for me and my children. My son was on the train recently and a gang of kids approached him and threatened him with violence. A fellow passenger tried to intervene but there were no staff present to help. What do you do when there’s a problem on a train and you can’t just get off?” – K, [44].

Disabled people said...

The current transport system often fails to meet their needs. Poor physical access, such as the lack of dropped kerbs, uneven pavements, and a lack of seating, can prevent people from making everyday journeys independently. Unreliable services and limited support for non-visible conditions add to the stress. Even short trips can feel exhausting, especially when accurate travel information is not available. Lift outages, last-minute cancellations, and inaccessible stops and platforms make planning harder and increase reliance on others to complete journeys. For many, public transport feels like a system they are expected to work around, rather than one designed to work for them.

Inaccessible and unreliable transport limits access to essential parts of life.

Getting to healthcare appointments, work, education, or social activities is often difficult due to infrequent services, long distances between stops, or the

physical strain of standing for long periods. Some avoid public transport altogether because of delays, overcrowding, or being ignored when asking for help. Others rely on cars to get around even though they would prefer not to, because services are often delayed, cancelled or not well connected. Driving brings its own challenges with potholes, rising insurance costs, and a lack of accessible parking. A more inclusive system would support individual wellbeing, reduce isolation and improve quality of life.

They are willing to change how they travel, but only if the system becomes genuinely inclusive and dependable. Better staff training, more frequent and accessible services, and real-time updates that reflect actual conditions are essential. Staff support needs to go beyond physical assistance, with people wanting to feel respected and listened to when they travel. Improvements to walking and wheeling routes, better lighting, and more rest areas would also make a difference. Confidence in the system is key, and improvements need to be visible to increase trust. People want to travel independently, without fear of being stranded or put at risk.

“This conversation made me realise something I hadn’t thought about before - my travel habits are shaped by needing to avoid peak times, because I can’t stand for long periods. I’ve become so used to planning around that, it just feels normal now. If I need to go into central London, I’ll pay extra to travel ridiculously early, just so I can get a seat and feel safer with fewer people around.” – D, [55].

Neurodivergent people said...

Public transport can be difficult to navigate. Confusing ticketing systems, unclear peak and off-peak rules, and overlapping fares from different operators create stress and uncertainty. Mistakes are easy to make, and the fear of being unfairly fined adds to the anxiety. Some said they avoid certain services altogether because of this confusion. While travel apps help with planning, travel information gaps remain - for example, when Wi-Fi or mobile data is unreliable, and

when chatbots, rather than people, are available for support.

Cost is another barrier. Participants commented that driving outside of London is often cheaper than taking the train or bus, even though they would prefer to use public transport. Fare structures are seen as overly complex and off-putting, and many called for a simpler, more transparent system. Frequent, affordable services are seen as essential to making public transport a viable alternative to driving or ride-hailing services.

Safety, sensory overload, and staff presence shape how they feel when travelling. Overcrowded, noisy, or unclean environments on streets and on public transport can trigger anxiety and discomfort. Some still see public transport as unhygienic since coronavirus (COVID-19). There was a call for more visible staff to enforce rules, offer support, prevent anti-social behaviour, and provide reassurance. Without that presence, particularly during peak times or when travelling at night, many feel vulnerable and alone.

Walking and cycling are appealing in principle, but often not practical. Poor pavement conditions, obstructed kerbs, and a lack of safe crossings make walking or wheeling difficult. Cycling feels unsafe too, with busy roads, shared spaces, and few dedicated bike lanes. Participants wanted scenic, well-maintained routes with greenery, benches, and better lighting. Clearer routes and safer design are seen as key to enabling more people to walk, wheel, or cycle.

Confidence in the system is key. Many said they would consider changing how they travel if improvements were visible, reliable, and part of a long-term plan. Safety, affordability, and ease of use are central to building trust.

“I will walk if I have to, but the pavements are terrible and I’m worried for myself and my grandparents. There needs to be more safer crossing points. When I pick up my sister the crossings aren’t safe, it’s chaotic. There also need to be more scenic routes that are more pleasant for walkers, with plants, and no litter – it would make people more inclined to walk.” – R, [19].

