

Northern Transport Voices

Passenger priorities for rail in the North

Summary report
October 2025



We know from previous research that lower cost and improved reliability are top factors which would encourage passengers to choose to travel by rail more often. But what about other factors? Which improvements to our railways would help to make a difference to people living and working in the North, giving them a greater choice of transport options?

To find out more about the attitudes to rail travel in the North of England, in collaboration with the Rail North Partnership, we surveyed our online research community, [Northern Transport Voices](#), between 14 February – 31 March 2025. We received 694 responses from across the region.

The study focused on factors that passengers said would encourage them to travel more often by rail (beyond the top priorities of lower fares and greater reliability) as well as exploring how and where passengers currently travel by rail, and where passengers would like to see more services in future.

There are a number of areas that respondents told us would encourage greater use of trains, alongside lower fares and improved reliability:



More seating capacity



Improved connectivity to a wider range of destinations including towns, airports, coastal and rural locations, including more direct services



For non-users, easier to understand ticketing options would also be an important encouraging factor

Of the respondents who currently use rail services:



60%

- 60% travel by rail for leisure purposes



18%

- 18% use rail to commute to work



25%

- 25% travel to airport destinations by rail

Unsurprisingly, major cities and towns in the region are the main destinations for rail travel, although coastal and rural destinations are also popular for around a quarter of those who travel by rail.

The priorities when onboard for passengers are:



Getting a seat on the train, or access to a pre booked seat




Cleanliness of the train, including the carriage and toilets



Comfort of the seating


Drawing out the opportunities for rail travel in the North




Our research found that communities in the North highly value the role that railways play for their local area – even if they do not use rail directly. 82% of existing rail users said that rail is important for their community, as did 47% of those who do not use rail services




Post pandemic, the majority of train users do so for leisure purposes, with smaller numbers using trains for commuting or for travelling on business




The potential for greater patronage on trains is significant, with 73% of existing users telling us that they are likely to use trains more frequently in future, as did 33% of non-train users



Users want to see better connections to towns and airports in the North. Such connections could drive increased use of rail



There is an indication of significant demand for earlier or later services, particularly late evenings (10pm-12am), due in the main to going to and returning from social events. At the same time, a notable minority would like to use trains in the early mornings (4am-6am) for travelling to work, or work related purposes



To ensure the potential for growing patronage on our railways is realised, there needs to be a focus on getting the basics right for passengers – meaning good value for money, reliable and comfortable services which connect passengers to a wide range of destinations, requiring as few interchanges as possible.

What next?

Transport for the North works with mayoral combined authorities, county combined authorities, local transport authorities and national partners to support transport improvements that unlock sustainable and inclusive growth. We have a number of ways that we can help our constituent authorities to achieve their aims.

Passenger priorities for rail in the North

Download the [main report](#) that accompanies this publication.

Passenger priorities for rail in the North - reveals further information, data and detail on our work looking at this issue in the North. This comprehensive report details our research with the Northern Transport Voices panel through a wide-ranging online survey.

For further information, contact us at research@transportfornorth.com

Read our other transport research publications:

Safety and public transport in the North - Exploring personal safety when using public transport reveals information and detail on our work to look at personal safety on public transport in the North.

Download the [report here](#).

Passenger experiences of rail station accessibility in the North - looks at the accessibility issues of rail stations in the North of England from the perspective of passengers, identifying the barriers they face when making journeys.

Download the [report here](#).

For further information, contact us at research@transportfornorth.com

TfN Offer

The TfN Offer is our data and evidence resource hub. Available to constituent authorities and other partners in the North, we can provide technical services, advice, analysis, modelling and planning tools.

For more information on how we can help to support our local authority partners, please contact us at TfNOffer@transportfornorth.com

Bronze: Self-serve

Free access to tools, dashboards, and data you can use right away.

Silver: Tailored help

Free custom analysis and insights specifically for your projects.

Gold: Bespoke support

Dedicated one-to-one help from our experts for your complex projects.