

Transport-related social exclusion amongst young people in the North of England

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Introduction

In our latest research on transport-related social exclusion across the North of England, Transport for the North examines the travel experiences of young people aged between 16 to 29 years old, who mainly live in rural areas.¹ We used travel diaries, interviews and focus groups to test assumptions about how transport affects young people's lives.

Our 2024 to 2025 analysis shows that 2.95 million people across the North face a high risk of transport-related social exclusion. Across England, this has risen from 9.2 million in 2019 to 11.2 million in 2024. Much of this increase is in rural and coastal areas. Rising living costs, changes in health and reduced transport services have driven this trend.²

This report draws on first-hand accounts of how young people travel and use local transport. It shows how transport shapes access to education, work and social life. While we have researched transport-related exclusion before, less attention has focused on young people, particularly those in high-risk rural areas. These findings will be most relevant to local authorities and those working on youth mobility and inclusion.

The report also includes user profiles. These bring young people's travel experiences to life and support transport planning and business cases.

This research will inform future updates to our [transport-related social exclusion tool](#). The tool estimates risk and causes across England and supports targeted interventions. We will include insights from this research in the next planned update.

Key themes

We spoke to 36 young people as part of this research. Four clear themes emerged:

1. Transport access shapes young people's future opportunities

Mobility can act as a gatekeeper to educational, economic and social opportunities, negatively impacting young people's independence when first starting out in life.

2. Car use is often reluctant, but necessary

Passing your driving test feels like a key step towards independence and adulthood. But owning a car is seen as a financial burden and in rural areas it often feels like a necessity, not a choice.

3. Public transport is frequently viewed as inconsistent, fragmented and time-bound

Young people are highly knowledgeable about their local public transport network, but this is not translating to usability. Local public transport is seen to only work during certain times, select days and weather conditions.

4. Journey planning is a form of work, especially for non-drivers

For young people who cannot drive or access a car, planning journeys takes time and feels like work. This can limit independence, participation and access to opportunities.

Methodology

Approach

This research applies qualitative methods to understand young people's travel experiences and incidents of transport-related social exclusion. To do this, a 14-day travel diary task, followed by interviews and a focus group were facilitated. In total 36 young people aged between 16–29- from across the North of England took part in this research.

Travel diary task

Out of the 36 participants, 31 completed a 14-day diary recording the journeys they made, their purpose, the transport modes used and any challenges they encountered. They also were invited to submit any images or videos which they felt visually represented their journeys. The diary captures everyday travel patterns and informs the follow-up interviews.

Interviews

31 semi-structured telephone interviews explored the experiences of young people aged 16 to 29 living in rural areas. Each interview lasted 30–40 minutes and followed a discussion guide to ensure consistency across topics.

Focus group

A focus group involving five participants aged 18 to 29 living across the North of England was also used in this study. The discussion explores general travel experiences, providing a broader context for the rural interview findings.

Sampling and recruitment

We deliberately chose participants who were relevant to this research. Its application is to capture a range of experiences. The sample includes variation in age, gender, ethnicity, disability, employment status, caring responsibilities, and access to private vehicles.

Interview participants were recruited from rural areas identified as being at higher risk of transport-related social exclusion, with representation from the North East, North West and Yorkshire and the Humber. For the focus group, age and residing in the North were the only sampling criteria.

This research does not aim to produce a statistically representative sample. Instead, it illustrates the range of experiences and challenges young people face in different circumstances.

Analysis

Interview, focus group and diary data were recorded, transcribed and anonymised. The analysis used thematic methods supported by qualitative analysis software to identify recurring patterns and key issues, across the sample. Thematic analysis enabled user profiles to be developed, which have applications beyond understanding and interpreting this piece of work.

Limitations

These findings reflect the experiences of the young people who took part and do not represent all young people in the North of England. However, the consistency of themes across participants and methods suggests the issues identified are likely to be widely relevant, particularly in rural areas.

Young people’s travel realities: a set of user profiles

- Young people’s experiences of transport vary, but several common patterns emerged across diary studies, interviews and the focus group discussion. The following four user profiles draw together several frequently recurring themes identified across the research.³
- Young people are likely to experience elements of more than one user profile at any one time and may move between them over time. Together, their development provides practical insight into how transport systems affect young people across the North of England, particularly those living in rural areas.
- The following table summarises the user profiles and how travel experiences highlighted in them relate to broader transport planning considerations.⁴

Table 1: User profile summary and transport planning considerations

| User profiles | Research insights | Considerations |
|---|---|---|
| ‘The reluctant driver’ | Car use often results from limited or unsuitable alternative transport options rather than preference | Consider how affordability, reliability and availability of alternative transport options influence young people’s travel decisions |
| ‘The strategic journey planner’ | Travel may be technically possible but requires significant planning, coordination and time | Consider how service frequency, timetable alignment and integration between modes affect accessibility and usability |
| ‘The dependent traveller’ | Limited independent travel options can increase reliance on support networks | Consider how service coverage, flexibility and accessibility influence young people’s ability to travel independently |
| ‘The constrained opportunity seeker’ | Transport availability and affordability can shape access to employment, education and training opportunities | Consider how connectivity, travel affordability and access to key destinations influence participation in opportunities |

³ User profiles do not represent individual participants and are not ranked by prevalence or severity.

⁴ Table 1 is intended to support reflection and discussion, rather than list specific responses which would likely require a larger study sample.

The reluctant driver

Some young people are reluctant drivers. They drive because public transport does not support their work, education or social lives. For many, becoming a driver feels unavoidable rather than a real choice.



Travel as a reluctant young driver involves a balancing of fuel costs, insurance and maintenance among other living expenses. Whilst these outgoings are not unique to younger drivers, they do have a particular impact on those who are just starting out in life. Many young people describe prioritising their car-related costs over saving or recreational spending on social, family, or community life.

What this means

Transport shapes life choices rather than supporting them.

Young people are often faced with the task of choosing opportunities based on travel feasibility rather than interest or career development.

Why this is important for policymakers?

Improving affordability, reliability, or alternative travel options could reduce financial pressure, widening access to employment and education.

For some young people, particularly those living in rural areas, becoming a driver gives an immediate, physical independence that cannot be secured through public transport. However, it can create longer-term budgeting challenges which brings about restrictions in other aspects of their lives.

Key barriers

- **Costs:** High insurance, fuel and maintenance can strain those with limited incomes.
- **Limited alternatives:** Public transport is often perceived as unable to meet lifestyle or schedule needs.
- **Opportunity trade-offs:** Travel costs influence life opportunities and social participation.

A strategic journey planner engages in a significant amount of forward planning to get to their destination. In some cases, this involves trade-offs between time, cost and flexibility.

Rural strategic planners will regularly check live timetables where possible for services they know well, allow additional time for anticipated delays and trip-chain to reduce travel efforts and costs.

Limited evening and weekend services are seen to restrict spontaneity and social participation, with missed or delayed services halting plans entirely. Over time, daily routines often become structured around transport availability, not preference.

The strategic journey planner

Young people who do not drive often become expert journey planners. They rely on public transport and active travel. Services are often infrequent, poorly connected or do not meet daily needs. Travel is possible, but hard to rely on. This means journeys take more time and effort to plan.



What this means

Travel is possible, but it takes more time, planning and compromise.

This extra effort can create hidden inequalities compared with people who have cars.

Why this is important for policymakers?

Improving service frequency, reliability and integration would better fit young people's lives. This would widen access to education, jobs and social opportunities.

Key barriers

- **Infrequent services:** Public transport does not run often enough to fit daily schedules.
- **Poor connections:** Links between bus, rail and active travel involve long waits.
- **Limited evenings and weekends:** Fewer services reduce access to work, education and social activities.

The dependent traveller

To be independent, some young people rely on lifts from friends and family. Other transport options are limited or unreliable. This support helps them reach work, education and social activities, but depends on others' time and willingness.



Dependent travellers are often involved in coordinating plans with other people's routines, sometimes requiring advance notice or negotiations around availability. Journeys and indeed plans, are subject to changes or cancellations more for this cohort if lifts become unavailable, limiting spontaneity and flexibility with daily life.

Young people who are dependent travellers describe a frequent balancing act of feelings including gratitude for support with frustration or discomfort about having to rely on others for lifts.

Over time, relying on lifts can have long term influence on employment, education and social and community participation.

What this means

Transport shapes life choices rather than supporting them.

Young people are often faced with the task of choosing opportunities based on travel feasibility rather than interest or career development.

Why this is important for policymakers?

Improving affordability, reliability, or alternative travel options could reduce financial pressure, widening access to employment and education.

Key barriers

- **Limited transport:** Services are unavailable or unreliable when and where young people need them.
- **Inflexible services:** Transport does not fit shift work, social travel or last-minute changes.
- **Reliance on others:** Journeys depend on friends or family being available to give lifts.

For a constrained opportunity seeker, trade-offs between travel time, cost and reliability are frequently navigated.

Some young people describe turning down jobs, educational opportunities, or social events because transport would be too expensive, too time consuming and too unreliable.

Others limit their choices to roles or opportunities that fit within existing travel networks, even when it would restrict their progression or pay.

Over time, transport constraints can limit future opportunities, reinforce localised routines and reduce exposure to wider opportunities.

The constrained opportunity seeker

For some young people, transport access and cost shape the opportunities they can reach. Choices about work, education and social life often depend on whether travel is possible and affordable, not an interest or ambition.



What this means

Transport does more than help people get around. It shapes the choices young people can make. When access depends on travel, young people often choose what is reachable over what best supports their future goals.

Why this is important for policymakers?

Making transport more affordable, reliable and better connected would help young people access education, training and jobs that match their skills and ambitions.

Key barriers

- **High travel costs:** Fares, fuel and multiple tickets make some opportunities unaffordable.
- **Limited access:** Transport options make it hard to reach some jobs and education sites.
- **Unreliable services:** Long journeys, poor connections and disruption put young people off applying.

Key findings

The experiences illustrated in the previous user profile section highlight how transport shapes young people's daily lives. The thematic findings in this section explore factors that underpin these experiences.

Thematic finding 1: Transport access shapes young people's future opportunities

Across many participants, mobility emerges as a significant influence on young people's access to education, employment and social opportunities. Diary studies, interviews, and the focus group discussion consistently highlight how transport availability, affordability and reliability shape early life decisions about work, study and social participation. These constraints are most pronounced among participants living in rural areas, although similar pressures were reflected in wider discussions with young people living in different area types. Transport availability comes through as a key influence alongside broader economic, social and geographic pressures affecting opportunity access.

Key findings from the research show that:

→ Access to opportunity is filtered through travel feasibility

Many young people describe accessing employment, education and social opportunities alongside the practical realities of travelling to them. Opportunities which require complex, lengthy, or expensive journeys are frequently discounted as viable or declined, particularly where travel reliability cannot be guaranteed.

"[Feasibility and viability is a part of] why I changed jobs. Because I wanted to be closer to home. I didn't want to get stuck in traffic for 45 minutes regularly trying to get home. I find it frustrating. But even then, I still can't justify two hours on public transport and the safety of it."
Male, 25 – 29, North West

"A lot of jobs... require you to go in early, some are like 7:00 or 8:00 and a lot of buses don't start running until that time or, at least, some in my local area. So, in that aspect, to be able to work, a big advantage is to have a car. And a lot of jobs in my industry... require you to have a license."
Female, 16 – 18, North East

→ Travel costs influences whether opportunities remain viable

Participants describe weighing transport costs against incomes or training benefits, with several explaining that travel expenses could significantly reduce the financial value of employment or education opportunities. This is particularly evident among rural participants where longer journeys or car ownership created additional financial pressure.

"I have skipped going to see people due to the cost of trains... I'm currently trying to plan a trip to see a friend, but the average price of it is £80 to a £100, which is a lot more than really what I'd like to pay just to get across the country. So, I've been looking for sales, looking for deals."
Female, 25 – 29, Yorkshire and the Humber

"I have a rail card... if I'm going to go to, say, Newcastle... I'll get the train rather than getting the bus because, obviously, it works out cheaper and faster."
Female, 25 – 29, North East

→ Transport connectivity influences the spatial reach of opportunity networks

Perceived limited-service coverage and unreliable connections influence the locations young people feel able to access. Many participants describe prioritising opportunities within areas they could reach consistently, which narrows their employment, education, or training choices. Diary evidence demonstrated how travel requirements shaped daily routines and influenced decisions about where opportunities were considered viable.

“With public transport... it takes so long...so, in the essence of time, I always drive there because I've got quite a lot of family there... and that is just a pain to get to. There is a train station, but the amount of changes that would be needed... just doesn't make it worthwhile, say, for most places.”

Female, 25 – 29, North West

→ Mobility constraints shape independence during early adulthood

Participants describe how reliance on transport affordability, service availability, or support from others influences their confidence in pursuing new opportunities. These experiences are particularly evident during transitional life stages when young people are beginning to establish employment, education pathways and social networks.

“I was finding it hard to find jobs because there's not a lot of employment opportunity at the minute... So, I realised that I needed to look further afield for employment which would be hard to rely on public transport. But then, I also had quite a lot of pressure from my family because my mum reinforced the importance of independence.”

Female, 25 – 29, Yorkshire and the Humber

“I'm trying to get work... as a teaching assistant, which would require us to go to different locations. So, I've had to turn down quite a few jobs just because I can't get a bus to get there in time... then I can't take the job.”

Female, 25 – 29, North East

→ Young people reorganise daily life around the transport networks available to them

Interview and diary evidence shows that work, study and social activities are often organised around transport availability rather than personal preference. Many participants described planning routines to align with available services or adjusting commitments to accommodate travel constraints.

“When looking for a job, it's definitely been a consideration. I have been offered jobs in the city centre before but then having to rely on public transport or to be able to drive into town and park would just be a huge added factor onto the job. It has influenced my decision to take jobs closer to home.”

Female, 19 – 24, North East

Thematic finding 2: Cars represent independence, but often by necessity

Car use is one of the most common ways young people respond to transport issues, particularly in rural areas where alternative travel options are limited. Across interviews, diary studies and the focus group discussion, driving is frequently described as a practical necessity and a symbolic milestone associated with independence and early adulthood.

While many young people value the flexibility and autonomy associated with driving, car ownership is also commonly described as a financial burden and, in some cases, is reluctantly adopted due to limited alternative transport options.

Key findings from the research show that:

→ Driving is widely perceived as a gateway to independence

Across both rural interviews and the focus group discussion, passing a driving test and gaining access to a car is described as an important gateway to adulthood, independence and social participation. Many participants believe driving gives greater control over employment, education and social activities, allowing them to travel at times and to destinations not easily reached through public transport.

“[I drive] for the convenience factor. Before I passed my test, I used to get public transport everywhere, but it just tends to be a lot more time-constraining. Hence, I use my car for most travels.”

Female, 19 – 24, North East

→ Car ownership is frequently adopted to overcome limited travel alternatives

Some participants describe learning to drive or purchasing a car primarily as a response to limited or unreliable public transport options rather than personal preference. This is particularly evident among rural participants, who at times describe driving as essential for accessing employment, education, healthcare and social opportunities, where alternative travel options were unavailable or inconsistent.

“I think owning a car, being able to drive, having access to a car is really the only way to be able to move around this local area. I mentioned it in my diary, I have to take my grandma shopping because she just can't manage to do that on her own on public transport. She can't drive. She doesn't have a car... It's essential to have a car.”

Female, 19 – 24, North East

→ The financial burden of driving can create additional pressure during early adulthood

Participants frequently describe the cost of insurance, fuel and maintenance as a significant financial commitment, particularly during early stages of first-time employment, training, or education opportunities. Several young people describe balancing the benefits of increased mobility with the economic pressure of maintaining a vehicle, often requiring trade-offs in other areas of spending.

“The cost of insurance at my age [is high]. And the cost of the car... The cost of lessons has increased a crazy amount. And it's just also impossible to get driving tests and driving instructors at the moment... And then especially at my uni, they don't let you bring a car with you unless you've got particular needs for it like disabilities, so I wouldn't have been able to bring a car with me.”

Female, 19 – 24, North East

→ Social norms and peer expectations reinforce car ownership

Focus group discussions highlight how driving is often viewed as a normative step in early adulthood. Some participants reflect on social pressures around learning to drive in order to maintain social connections or participate fully in activities with peers.

“When I was 17, it was probably one of those things where I was like, I'm 17, I'll pass my driving test... But I suppose, as I got older... the earth opened up more opportunities for me because I've got a car. But when I first passed, it was like, I'm just going to do what everyone else is doing and pass my driving test.”

Female, 19 – 24, North East

“Most of [my friends] think it's essential to have car. They tell me that I should look into driving lessons again, so it's kind of like an important step to them... [It makes me feel] frustrated because I don't think you need a car. But also, I would like to have that independence.”

Female, 25 – 29, Yorkshire and the Humber

→ Widespread reliance on driving can normalise gaps in transport provision

Although driving provides flexibility and reliability, several participants believe that reliance on cars can mask underlying limitations in public transport provision. Some young people describe driving as the most practical solution to limited transport options, even where this creates financial pressure or conflicts with personal or environmental preferences.

“The driving factor was the fact that I was working in another town. I think if I'd still been in education or even working where I lived, it maybe wouldn't have drove us as fast to pass my test. But it was more a necessity.”

Female, 25 – 29, North West

Thematic finding 3: Public transport does not feel reliable

Across the research, young people demonstrate a strong awareness of their local public transport networks and many rely on them to access education, employment and social opportunities. However, participants consistently describe challenges relating to service reliability, coordination and scheduling. Many young people believe that, while public transport services may exist in theory, they do not always provide practical or dependable travel options. These challenges are particularly pronounced among participants living in rural areas, although similar concerns are found across wider discussions with young people.

Key findings from the research show that:

→ Public transport availability does not always translate into practical usability

Many participants describe situations where services exist but are difficult to use due to inconvenient routes, long journey times, or limited connections. Young people often explain that transport options which appear viable when viewed in timetables or journey planners would prove to be impractical when attempting to complete real-life journeys.

“Even though there is one [scheduled to be] coming, you don't know if it is going to come because it's unreliable... You'll often find one cancelled or one that's running half an hour late, so then makes the one after that late as well... I don't think it is brilliant, but also, I know that where I live personally is a lot better than some of the surrounding areas.”

Prefer not to say, 19 – 24, Yorkshire and the Humber

→ Service reliability and unpredictability shapes confidence in public transport

Participants frequently spoke about concerns with delays, cancellations and missed connections. These feelings are typically linked to anxieties around arriving late for work, education, or appointments. Several participants reference unreliable services reducing confidence in local public transport, particularly for time-sensitive journeys.

“[They need to improve] the reliability of public transport... Like, try to make it something you can actually rely on and you know it's going to turn up when it's supposed to. And then access to information. So just making it really, really easy for everyone, whether that's an older person who doesn't have access to technology or a younger person who wouldn't know where else to look other than online. Just making it really easy and accessible to find out where they need to be at what time to access that public transport.”

Female, 25 – 29, Yorkshire and the Humber

→ Fragmented transport networks increase journey complexity

Young people commonly mention difficulties navigating journeys that require multiple transport modes or involve different service providers. Participants highlight challenges relating to poorly coordinated connections, long waiting times between services and inconsistent ticketing arrangements. These experiences often increase travel time and added complexity to otherwise short-distance journeys.

“If the place is not particularly far away, but if you are going to have to take two buses to be able to get there versus one [bus] that's further away... generally you're not going to choose that place that's closer [because it] takes more buses... it's going to take you longer to get there. You're also probably going to have to pay out more in bus fare and things like that.”

Prefer not to say, 19 – 24, Yorkshire and the Humber

→ Time-bound service provision limits participation in everyday activities

Many participants find public transport services which are concentrated around peak travel times, with reduced evening, weekend, or off-peak services as a key factor in limiting flexibility. For them, limited-service coverage outside standard working or education hours restricts participation in employment, training and social activities. Some participants also highlight how weather conditions or seasonal timetable changes are thought to further impact service reliability and accessibility.

“[It takes] at least two buses and it would probably take me roughly an hour and a half to get there. Whereas when I drive, it takes me 25 to 30 minutes.”

Female, 25 – 29, North East

“I think like with the job application... it takes longer to get to places by public transport. Like it could take like an hour and a half by train, but then it takes like 15 minutes in a car, so that's frustrating... So, some jobs that I've seen that I've wanted to do, I can't realistically do them.”

Female, 25 – 29, Yorkshire and the Humber

Thematic finding 4: Journey planning is a form of work, especially for non-drivers

While the user profile section illustrates how planning and coordination can shape individual travel experiences, the findings in this theme highlight how this planning burden presents as a broader pattern influencing independence, participation and opportunity access for many young people.

Across diary studies, interviews and the focus group, participants frequently describe journey planning as requiring sustained time, attention and coordination rather than functioning as a simple enabler of travel. This hidden labour is particularly evident among young people who do not drive or who rely on lifts or public transport to travel independently.

Key findings from the research show that:

→ Journey planning and coordination can act as a form of hidden labour shaping mobility access

For many participants, journey planning involves repeatedly checking routes, coordinating timings with other responsibilities and continuously adapting travel arrangements. This planning burden is found across the research and often requires significant time and attention before travel can take place. Diary evidence demonstrates how planning activities frequently form part of daily routines rather than isolated tasks.

"It's so difficult to plan...because...there's no warning for if buses are going to be cancelled or if they are running late. It's just quite inconvenient."

Female, 25 – 29, North West

"I have to do a lot more planning around, kind of, if I want to go somewhere, I have to know what time the bus is meant to come, what time the bus after it is meant to come and then plan my way back as well. And I spend a lot of time on Google maps."

Female, 19 – 24, North East

→ Reliance on others for lifts creates a pressure between dependence and independence

Young people who rely on lifts from others describe needing to align their own travel with other people's schedules, renegotiate plans when availability changes and manage expectations within support relationships. Participants frequently mention balancing appreciation for support with frustration about reduced autonomy and limited flexibility, particularly during early adulthood when learning to drive might not have happened yet but the need for independence is becoming stronger.

"It's pretty frequent for me [to get lifts]... but usually, it's at the discretion of other people because I wouldn't usually ask for a lift. It's just like, okay, someone wants me to come with them, or someone wants to do something and they're willing to pick me up on the way or whatever. In that case, I would accept the lift. But usually, I would, to be honest, just restrict myself to places I could get by public transport if I didn't have the option."

Male, 25 – 29, North East

→ Modifying behaviours is often needed, despite how it restricts participation and opportunity

Some participants, particularly non-drivers, speak about adapting their behaviour to reduce travel complexities, including trip chaining, avoiding certain times or destinations and limiting spontaneous social or employment opportunities. Over time, these modifications could shape how young people engage with work, education and social networks, reinforcing patterns of constrained mobility.

"[I try to avoid going without anything by relying on lifts because] I would be maybe already travelling anyway for one reason or another, so I can probably combine the journey rather than stay around."

Male, 25 – 29, North East

→ **Planning burden reinforces inequalities between drivers and non-drivers**

Participants commonly contrast their experience with those who are able to travel flexibly by car. Several describe how the time, coordination and uncertainty involved in planning travel without a car reduces spontaneity and flexibility, reducing the number of opportunities that feel achievable. These differences are particularly evident among rural participants where travel alternatives may be limited.

"I didn't have a car over the summer because mine broke down. And it basically put a halt to everything I was doing. I was having to get lifts to work from my mum because I couldn't get there otherwise. I wasn't able to go and see people as much because I couldn't get there. It put a massive halt to anything I was able to do because I couldn't drive to get there."

Female, 19 – 24, North West

Other travel behaviour and experience insights: rural active travel

- Across all research activities, participants frequently describe incorporating active modes into their everyday travel routines, often as a response to wider transport constraints discussed earlier.
- While active travel does not come through as a standalone theme, diary evidence, interview and focus group discussions highlight how environmental conditions, infrastructure quality and rural geographies can influence whether active travel feels practical, viable, safe, or sustainable.

“I can walk to school. It's not the most direct route. I often walk home because I can take longer basically. But if I was to walk to school, it would mean I'd have to wake up significantly earlier because it takes around 40 minutes to an hour for me to walk. But then it's only about a 10, 15-minute drive, so. I could walk, which sometimes is the case. Especially in the summer, it's often what I do. But as it's winter now, it's not something that I often do in the mornings.”

Female, 16 – 28, North West

“I was supposed to go to a lecture at 9 am... I got to the bus stop and the bus was cancelled. And I could have walked there because it's about a 25-minute walk, but I would've been quite late to my lecture... it was freezing cold, so I just went home.”

Female, 19 – 24, North East

“I wouldn't say [the public transport links] are great to the actual train station. They don't seem, from what I know, [be] that frequent. And then, yeah, like you say, if I didn't have that car, that would be quite a problem for me. I mean, I don't mind walking, but, obviously, in the winter, when it goes dark earlier, the weather's not great, it's quite a walk and it's not a straightforward walk either. It's not that pedestrianised in some parts.”

Female, 25 – 29, North West

Other travel behaviour and experience insights: travel subsidies and concessions for young people

- Participants also gave their views on travel discounts, railcards and concessionary travel schemes.
- Many participants describe railcards and other discount schemes as value for money, particularly for longer-distance travel. However, discounted fares are still sometimes perceived as costly, especially for frequent travellers.
- While discount schemes are viewed favourably, some feel the upfront costs can be a financial barrier. Age-based eligibility is generally accepted, though some think that financial need does not always align neatly with age thresholds and could be widened to increase their social benefit.
- Some participants support more targeted concessions for those most in need, with others expressing concern that means testing could introduce complexity, stigma, or administrative burden that might discourage uptake.
- Several participants outline how discounted fares can influence decisions about social travel, education and employment opportunities, suggesting that concessionary support affects whether certain journeys feel viable.

"I have a railcard... I think since having my child, I'm not on the train maybe as much as I used to be because I've never taken her on one yet... But for me, the railcard is worth it even if I'm only doing two trips... And even my railcard is worth it, even for just those... without any other trips anywhere. So, the railcard is something I get every single year because, like I said, even two to three trips, or a trip to London... it's still worth it."

Female, 25 – 29, North East

"After I lost the discount, probably for the first month, I was definitely travelling less, even attending university less."

Female, 25 – 29, Yorkshire and the Humber

Other travel behaviour and experience insights: future travel behaviours

- In each interview, participants are also asked how they hope to be travelling in the next five to 10 years.
- A significant number of participants hope to continue travelling primarily by car, particularly for local journeys or where alternatives are perceived as limited. Even among those who express an openness to public transport, car use is often viewed as the most reliable and flexible option under their current conditions.
- Many participants express a desire to use trains, buses, or trams more frequently in the future. However, this preference is consistently framed around improving reliability, increased frequency, better connectivity and lower fares. Without these changes, participants expect their travel patterns to remain mostly unchanged.
- Of all modes of public transport, trains are most commonly seen as desirable, particularly where they enable productivity, comfort or social travel. However, participants highlight cost, overcrowding, limited local station access and service frequency as barriers that need improving to support greater use.
- Few participants expect major shifts in how they travel unless significant infrastructure improvements occur, such as new rail stations, expanded services, or enhanced connectivity. In many cases, participants see future mobility as dependent on wider structural changes rather than personal behavioural shifts alone.

"I'd say probably I would want to have access to a car. But I'd probably still be using buses within the city centre itself purely because of, obviously, the congestion issues that I've mentioned before."

Male, 25 – 29, North East

"I think day to day, it would probably be very much the same... I've wanted to travel in the UK more, see more of the UK so... trains or maybe even buses, coaches, stuff like that. But I still think car is always going to be the main mode of transport, unless anything significant changes, which I can't see happening."

Female, 25 – 29, Yorkshire and the Humber

"I wouldn't mind getting the bus still because I feel like it's better for the environment and it should be less stressful than driving. That is kind of in an ideal world."

Female, 19 – 24, Yorkshire and the Humber

Conclusions

- This research highlights the role transport plays in **shaping young people's independence**, access to **opportunities and everyday decision-making** across the North of England. While young people's experiences vary, consistent patterns are clear across the diary studies, interviews and the focus group discussion. For many participants, **transport availability, reliability and affordability** influence whether education, employment and social opportunities feel realistic or sustainable at this stage of life.
- Transport-related social exclusion can be experienced in many ways. Participants describe challenges linked to **service reliability, cost, coordination and the time required to organise travel**. For rural interviewees in particular, these pressures are often shaped by **limited alternatives and lower service availability**. In contrast, focus group participants frequently discuss issues relating to performance within existing networks, including reliability, congestion and cost. These differences suggest that **transport-related challenges vary in intensity and form depending on local area type context**.
- **Car use remains a central feature** of young people's mobility. Driving is widely associated with independence and flexibility, yet reliance on private vehicles can create financial pressures and uneven opportunity access between those who can drive and those who cannot. Public transport continues to play an important role, although many participants describe it as constraining due to **timetable limitations, fragmentation and unpredictability**.
- For young people without access to a car, planning and coordination form a significant part of everyday travel behaviours. Participants describe building additional time into journeys, aligning travel with others' availability and adapting routines in response to service constraints. These experiences highlight **how transport inequality extends beyond service provision** to include time, effort and independence.
- Reflections on discounts, active travel and future mobility reinforce a pragmatic outlook. Many participants express interest in using public transport or active travel more frequently, particularly where this is affordable and reliable. However, most anticipate that their **travel patterns will remain broadly the same over the next five to ten years unless wider improvements take place**.
- Overall, the findings demonstrate that transport systems influence how young people participate in work, education and social life. Understanding these lived experiences provides important context for considering how transport provision interacts with independence, opportunity and inclusion.

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