Why getting transport right matters to young people

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This factsheet summarises why transport matters to young people and why changes in government funding of transport impact on young people more than other groups. The evidence focuses on 17-20 year olds, except where otherwise stated.

### How young people travel

Young people travel a shorter total distance and make fewer journeys than they used to but must now make longer journeys to reach their most frequent destinations. They make most of their journeys by car but, in common with older people, they use cars less and travel by bus more than people in the middle age groups.¹

However, they make significantly fewer car journeys than they did – down from almost 600 trips per person each year in the mid-1990s to 377 trips in 2011 – and fewer young people now own cars or have driving licences (only 38% of 17-20 year olds now have a driving license compared to 48% in the early 1990s). The reasons are not yet well understood but certainly include the increased costs of motoring and use of the internet and social networking.²

Today’s young people have grown up with very limited freedom of independent travel, compared to previous generations. Their surroundings had been dominated by traffic and their travel options limited because of the danger of traffic.³

Travel behaviour and lack of exercise are factors in growing obesity levels. Children and young people also suffer disproportionately from the effects of car use.⁴ They figure prominently in road casualty statistics with road collisions the most common cause of death for 14-35 year olds. They are often more exposed and more vulnerable to air pollution from traffic.⁵ They will have to live with the consequences of carbon emissions from transport and climate change.

Young people make a higher than average proportion of journeys on foot. The proportion of journeys they make by bicycle is no higher than the average for all groups and is strikingly low. The proportion and number of journeys made by bicycle by young people have declined since the mid-1990s.⁶ There is mixed evidence on young people’s attitude to driving, public transport and cycling. While most young people still want to learn to drive, they attach less symbolic value to cars and public transport can meet their changing transport requirements.⁷

Young people have been making more of their journeys by bus and use buses much more than any other age group (15% of their journeys are by bus compared to 7% for all ages). They often depend on buses for access to education, training and jobs.⁸

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### Bus and car use by age

- **Percentage of trips by bus**
  - 17-20: 47%
  - 21-29: 41%
  - 30-39: 34%
  - 40-49: 27%
  - 50-59: 22%
  - 60-69: 17%
  - 70+: 12%

- **Percentage of trips as car driver (4 percent per car)**
  - 17-20: 21%
  - 21-29: 18%
  - 30-39: 15%
  - 40-49: 12%
  - 50-59: 9%
  - 60-69: 7%
  - 70+: 5%
**Young people’s concerns about transport**

For a long time public transport, and particularly buses, has come at or near the top of young people’s concerns; these focus on three main transport issues: cost, access and safety. A campaign to ‘make public transport cheaper, better and accessible for all’ was selected by the UK Youth Parliament as the priority campaign for 2011/12.9

Transport problems frequently prevent young people from accessing employment. Low skilled jobs are increasingly located out of city centres where they are more difficult to reach by public transport and may involve shift or weekend work when buses are less frequent or may not run at all.10

With education it is the cost rather than the availability of transport that is likely to present most problems for young people. The majority of students travel to college by bus. For those at college, help with travel costs can be inadequate and, since the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance, is at the discretion of the college.11

Older people and those with disabilities have statutory concessionary travel schemes that meet their local public transport costs but travel concessions for younger people are patchy and, because they are provided at the discretion of the local authority or bus operator, are vulnerable to spending reductions.

There are 89 local authorities responsible for the concessionary fares scheme for older and disabled people. 86 of these also offer add-ons for older and disabled people (for instance extending the times older people can travel for free). In contrast, only 28 local authorities offer schemes for young people and only four offer schemes for unemployed people.12

Now public transport services themselves are at risk from central and local government spending cuts. For the tenth year in a row, the Government has required that train fares rise by more than the rate of inflation. The funding squeeze has also led to bus fares increasing by 33% in cash terms from 2007 to 201213 and cuts in discretionary concessions on bus travel for young people.14 Many bus services have been reduced or discontinued entirely with over 40% of local authorities again making cuts in 2012/13.15

These pressures are likely to increase. Local authority revenue expenditure, which subsidises many marginal bus services essential for vulnerable groups, may be further reduced following the 2013 spending round as the Government seeks to increase capital spending on infrastructure at the expense of revenue spending.

**Recommendations**

- The 2013 spending round should not result in young people being further priced off public transport or more cuts being made in bus services; and should recognise the need for a national free concessionary travel scheme for young people and jobseekers
- Existing Department for Transport (DfT) programmes should consider the needs of young people more clearly and the Better Bus Areas fund, in particular, should encourage bidders to improve the offer for young people in their areas
- The DfT should give a stronger impetus to accessibility planning by local authorities
- The planning system should support the creation and retention of jobs in locations that can be

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served by public transport, particularly for entry level jobs suitable to young people

- A package of measures should be introduced to make roads safer, provide cycling training at schools and promote cycling as a normal activity for people of all ages and backgrounds
- Travel planning and Wheels to Work schemes should be improved to help young people reach education, training and employment
- Local authorities should consider how to integrate expenditure on home to school and college transport with wider support for public transport
- Bus operators themselves should be encouraged to see the benefits that improving their offer for young people will have for their businesses and should look, for example, at how they can align their corporate social responsibility programmes with young people’s reliance on their services, for instance targeting programmes at young people on low incomes or those looking for work.

Without the kinds of actions outlined above, we face a situation where young people are priced out of opportunities. Spending cuts that lead to this situation will simply add to long-term costs for our society as a result. It is time that young people’s needs as transport users are taken seriously by the country’s decision makers.

This factsheet accompanies a fuller research project on young people’s travel, which has been funded by the Intergenerational Foundation.

References

1. Information about travel behaviour based on National Travel Survey, Department for Transport (DfT)
2. See for example National Travel Survey table NTS0203, DfT and On the Move: Making sense of car and train travel trends in Britain, Scott Le Vine and Peter Jones, RAC Foundation 2012
4. Sustainable Development Commission, 2011, Fairness in a Car Dependent Society
6. All statistics on travel behaviour based on NTS0601, DfT
7. See NTS0204 and Ruud, A and Nordbakke, S Decreasing driving license rates among young people – consequences for public transport, 2005
11. House of Commons Education Committee report 2011, Participation by 16-19 year olds in education and training
12. See DfT Concessionary Bus Statistics BUS0841. There are concessionary schemes for young people offered by bus companies in 80 of the local authority areas
13. Bus statistics tables BUS0405 and BUS0415, DfT
14. Pteg, 2012, Moving On – working towards a better public transport offer for young people in tough times

Campaign for Better Transport’s vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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