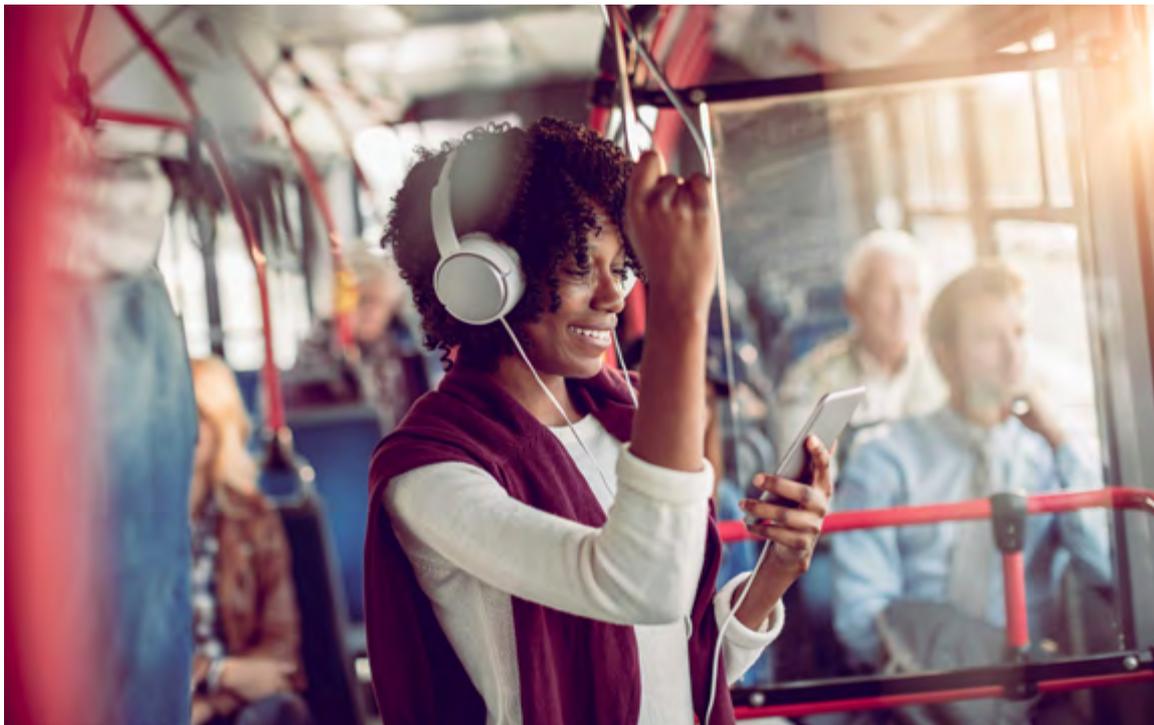


Fair bus fares for young people

A policy briefing assessing bus fare support for young people across the UK

Authors: Sarah Collings (UWE Bristol), Kiron Chatterjee (UWE Bristol) and Andy Cope (Sustrans)



“Buses are the sole form of transport available where I live. I do not drive and I do not intend to... I therefore need the buses to get anywhere” Katie, 24, Cornwall

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Transport to Thrive Policy Briefing July 2022

Between the ages of 16 and 24, young people experience a succession of life changes. During this time, transport plays an important role in helping young people to connect to new experiences, to become independent and to develop their identity.

However, young people across the UK say transport can be a barrier to them accessing the places, opportunities and people they need to help them to thrive^(1,2).

Many young people are reliant on buses, yet the cost of bus use is a particular challenge for this group. Guided by young people and policy experts, this policy briefing brings together new and existing insights. It assesses the current situation with regards to bus fare support for young people across the UK and explores the features and outcomes of existing, ambitious schemes that are making the cost of the bus more manageable for young people.

In pink boxes throughout, you will read the perspectives of the [Transport to Thrive Young Advisors](#) aged 16-24, whose expertise and insights have guided this Policy Briefing.

Find out more about [Transport to Thrive](#).



Executive summary

Part 1: Current picture and future ambition

This section gives an overview of i) young people's needs for bus fare support, ii) recent policy development and iii) the bus fare schemes available to young people aged 16+ across the UK. In new analysis completed for this policy briefing, this section describes the ambitions of 79 Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) in England for bus fare support for young people as set out in their Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs), plans submitted by LTAs in November 2021 in order to access national funding.

Findings:

Many young people are reliant on the bus. This group often struggles to make ends meet. Recent policy developments across the UK indicate an increasing recognition of the needs of young people over the age of 16 in relation to bus fares as seen in BSIPs and in recent national policy developments in Wales⁽³⁾ and Scotland^(4,5). However, there is still considerable variation in the support young people can expect and the ages that are eligible for this support (see [Maps 1-4](#) below).

“I do not think that offers for young people are fair across the UK... some young people have better access to vital locations for their educational and social development.” Katie, 24, Cornwall

Part 2: Four case studies

Part 2 contains case studies of schemes in South Yorkshire (18-21, Zoom Beyond), West Yorkshire (19-25, MCard), London (16-17, Zip Pass) and Scotland (under 22s). They examine their policy justification, uptake by young people and the benefits of the schemes to young people and minority groups.

Findings:

Justification: Bus fares for young people are an important policy lever for local and national policy makers for delivering multiple objectives including supporting young people to access opportunities, reducing inequalities and shifting travel behaviour away from the car (see Scotland and South Yorkshire).

Uptake: Real-world schemes show demand for bus fare support by young people beyond 16. For example, in London, 98% of young people said

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that free transport was important to them, and just nine months into a scheme in South Yorkshire 30% of 18-21 year olds were pass holders.

Benefits and inclusion: Fare schemes for young people aged 16+ can help make the bus the default choice for how they travel. They can enhance the mobility of young people from all backgrounds, helping to level the playing field by removing cost as a barrier to opportunity (London). They can support young people to stay connected to friends, save money and be independent (London, South Yorkshire).

Part 3: Time to act

Part 3 summarises the policy priorities that bus fare policies for young people can help address. It ends with a set of asks to national governments, Local Transport Authorities and operators, developed with our Young Advisors.

In summary

To address inequalities between groups of young people and urgent national policy priorities such as levelling up, climate change etc., we call on UK nations to set out a minimum offer for young people aged up to 25 and to support local transport authorities to move towards this.

We ask any decision maker developing their offer to young people to:

- offer flat fares to young people at least up to the age of 25 years, aligned across authority boundaries
- work with young people to develop offers to help ensure available support meets their needs
- collect and share evaluation data to show how these schemes meet policy objectives

“A consistent fare for young people allows for an increased chance at equal opportunity.” Sunshine, 16, North Wales

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Part 1: Current picture and future ambition

The need for bus fare support beyond 16

There is patchy provision of bus fare support for young people across the UK, particularly beyond the age of 16. However, the following three observations highlight why now is an important time to meet the needs of this age group.

First, young people aged 16-24 use buses more than older age groups and have lower access to a car (see [Figure 1](#)).

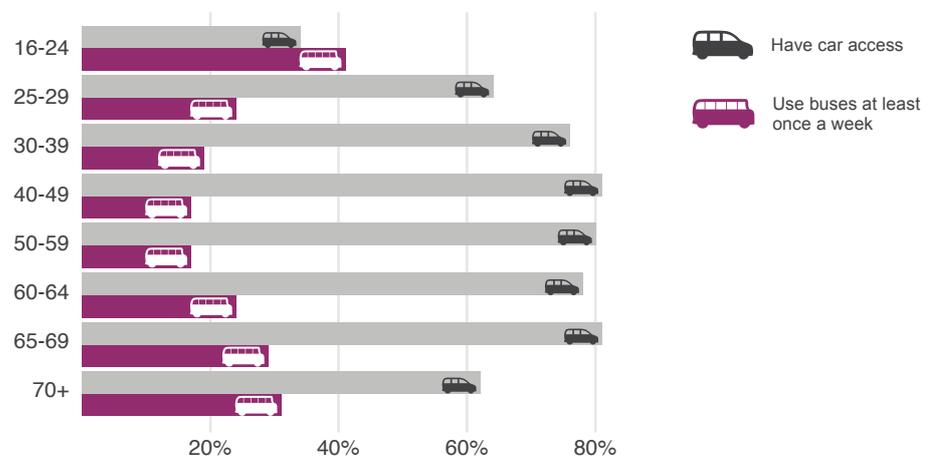


Figure 1: Rates of car access and bus use by age group, adapted from Chatterjee et al. 2019⁽⁶⁾

“Buses are the only way to travel without depending on someone else for transport.” Michał, 16, Leicester

Second, as young people move through early adulthood, their financial circumstances become increasingly challenging.⁽⁷⁾

Percentage of young people who experience financial precarity

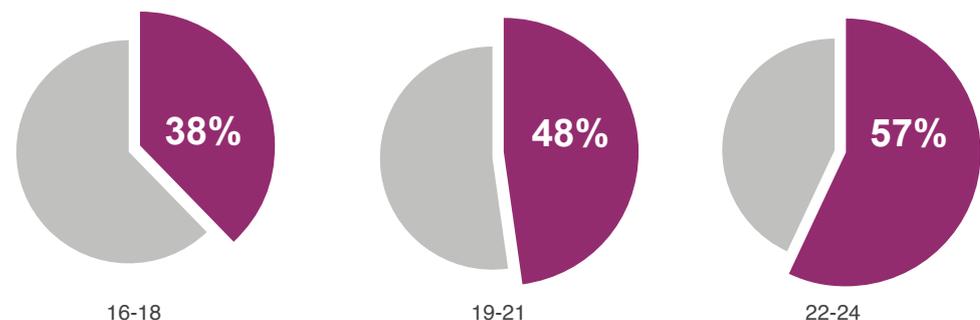


Figure 2: RSA survey data for the UK, 16-18-year-olds, 19-21-year-olds, 22-24-year-olds⁽⁷⁾

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Third, compared to previous generations, young people are remaining in education for longer, are moving into employment later, have less disposable income and are driving less⁽⁹⁾. Therefore the need for bus fare support in early adulthood has increased.

This Policy Briefing focuses on bus fares for young people. However, we stress that decision makers also need to consider other major barriers to bus use for young people including the availability, reliability and quality of services, which need to run at times that young people need and want to travel^(9.10).

Other important issues for young people include safety and comfort whilst using the bus^(9.10). Physical accessibility also affects some young people (as well as older age groups) with disabilities.

“My wheelchair is too big to fit on the bus... it makes it harder to get around by bus.” Poppy, 16-24

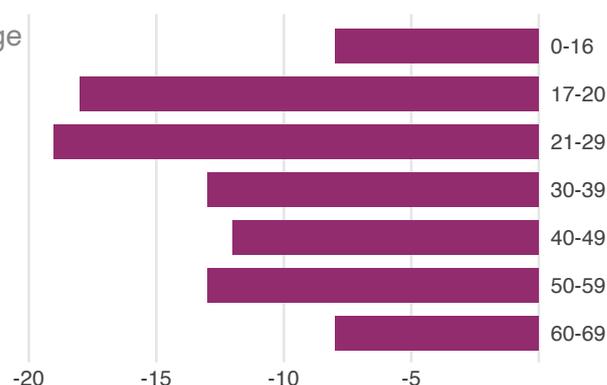
Long-term decline in bus services and use

The Transport Act 1985 led to the deregulation of major aspects of the bus industry including routes, provision of services and pricing^(1.1). Since then, there has been a sustained fall in the number of passenger journeys made by bus^(1.2) in parallel to a depletion of bus service supply^(1.3).

The reduction is particularly pronounced in groups that typically rely on buses including young people and students^(1.3). At the same time, national travel statistics show a bigger decline in young people’s level of mobility compared to older age groups (see [Figure 3](#)).

Figure 3: percentage change in number of journeys by age group between 2002 and 2019.

Data calculated from NTS601 number of trips (trip rates)^(1.4).



Transport is a known barrier for many young people in accessing the things they need (see^{1.2}) suggesting a reduction in mobility is problematic.

Recent developments in bus policy in the UK

Since 2015, there have been several major policy developments across the UK that recognise the importance of buses and, in some cases, bus

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fare support for young people, in addressing wider priorities. Notable in the context of this policy briefing are:

Bus Back Better Strategy (England, 2019)^(1,2) which represents the first national bus strategy for England (outside London) since deregulation. LTAs were asked to develop 'Bus Service Improvement Plans' in order to access Government funding. The first iteration of these plans was published in November 2021. A **National Bus Travel Concession scheme for young persons order (Scotland, 2021)**⁽⁴⁾ and subsequent amendment⁽⁵⁾, resulted in the introduction of free bus travel for under 22s living in Scotland from 31 January 2022.

A full list of policy developments in England, Wales and Scotland can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

The situation for bus fare support for young people

This section outlines the current provision of bus fare support for young people across the UK (see [Maps 1 and 2](#)) and the ambition outlined in Bus Service Improvement Plans in England (see [Maps 3 and 4](#)). The focus is on schemes that cover the whole transport authority area and that are available to all young people. In other words, schemes that are only available to some groups such as job seekers or student fares, or fares that only apply to urban areas, are not included.

This section includes new analysis (see [Maps 3 and 4](#)) as well as updates to existing analysis (see [Maps 1 and 2](#)). The aim of the maps in this section, are to highlight variability in young person bus fares support and ambition at the national level.

A link to a table containing a more precise description of offers / ambitions at the transport authority level are available in [Appendix 2](#), along with a summary of the set of assumptions and simplifications that were necessary to generate the maps.

Overview

The maps show that there are currently many areas of the UK where there is no support for young people beyond the age of 16. In areas with an offer, there is little consistency in the type of offer that is available (see [Map 1](#)) and the upper age limit that is eligible (see [Map 2](#)), with offers ranging from free bus travel (London, Greater Manchester, and Scotland) to discounts ranging from 15-50%.

Very few schemes support young people beyond the age of 18. Notable exceptions to this include Scotland where bus travel is free for under 22s and West Yorkshire where 19-25s receive a 33% multi-operator discount (see [Map 2](#)).

Whilst ambition is increasing for young person fares (see [Maps 3 and 4](#)), there is still little consistency in age criteria and offer type.

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Maps 1 and 2: Current provision of bus fares support for young people

Maps 1 and 2 give an overview of bus fare schemes currently available at the start of 2022 to young people that are either i) funded by the 79 Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) in England, Transport for London or national transport authorities, or ii) offered as part of a multi-operator scheme. Schemes were identified from a 2019 review of reduced and concessionary fares by TAS Partnership Limited^(1.5) and these schemes were checked for later changes via an internet search.

Maps 3 and 4: Future ambition in Bus Service Improvement Plans

Maps 3 and 4 show the ambitions of LTAs in England for bus fares for young people aged 16-24+. These were identified through a detailed examination of Bus Service Improvement Plans published in November 2021.

The most common justifications of bus fare schemes for young people given in BSIPs were reducing inequalities, helping the bus industry recover from the pandemic, reducing future car dependency and helping young people access work, education, and leisure opportunities (see Appendix 2).

There are a number of challenges faced by LTAs in delivering their ambitions. The Bus Back Better Strategy pledged £3bn (over five years) to Bus Service Improvement Plans but the funding announcement in April 2022 offered £1.4bn of support, with only 31 out of 79 LTAs receiving funding^(1.6). This will limit what LTAs are able to offer in terms of subsidised fares.

At the same time, there is a risk of bus service cuts following the impact of the pandemic on bus patronage and bus driver recruitment. These factors have already led to a decline in services and patronage^(1.7). Reduced services risk inhibiting the mobility of young people further.



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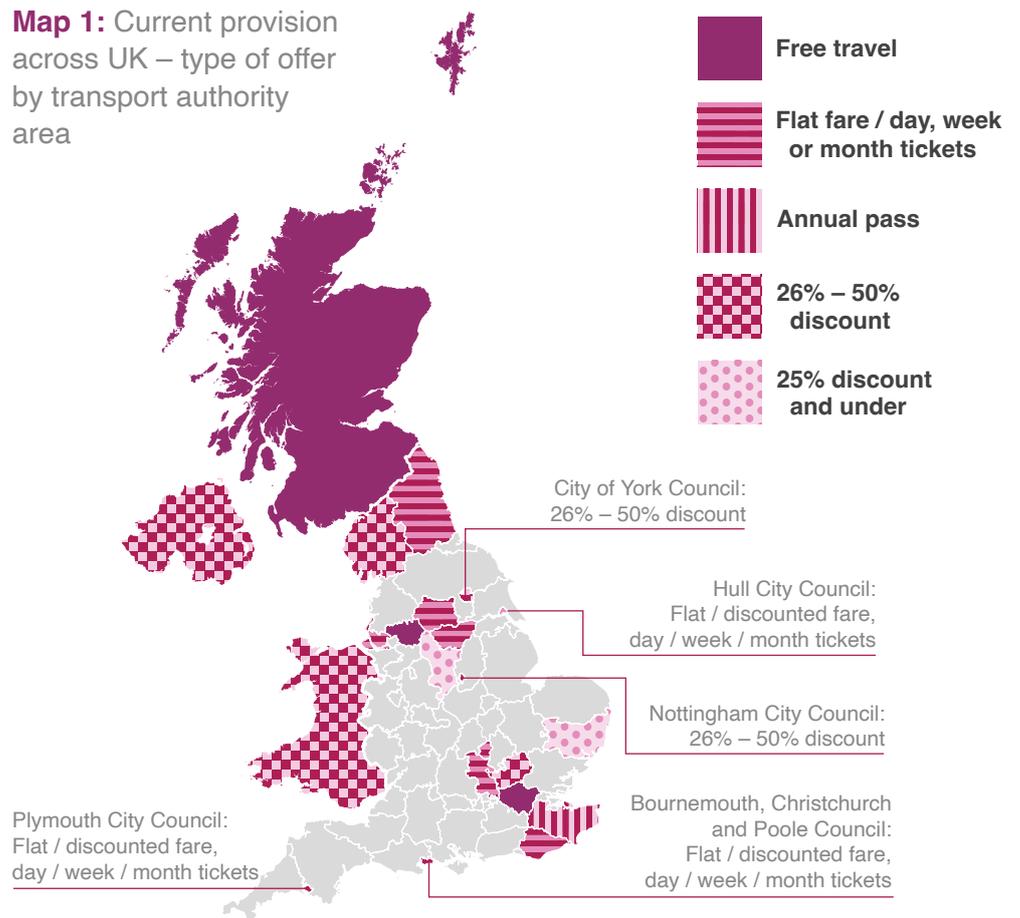
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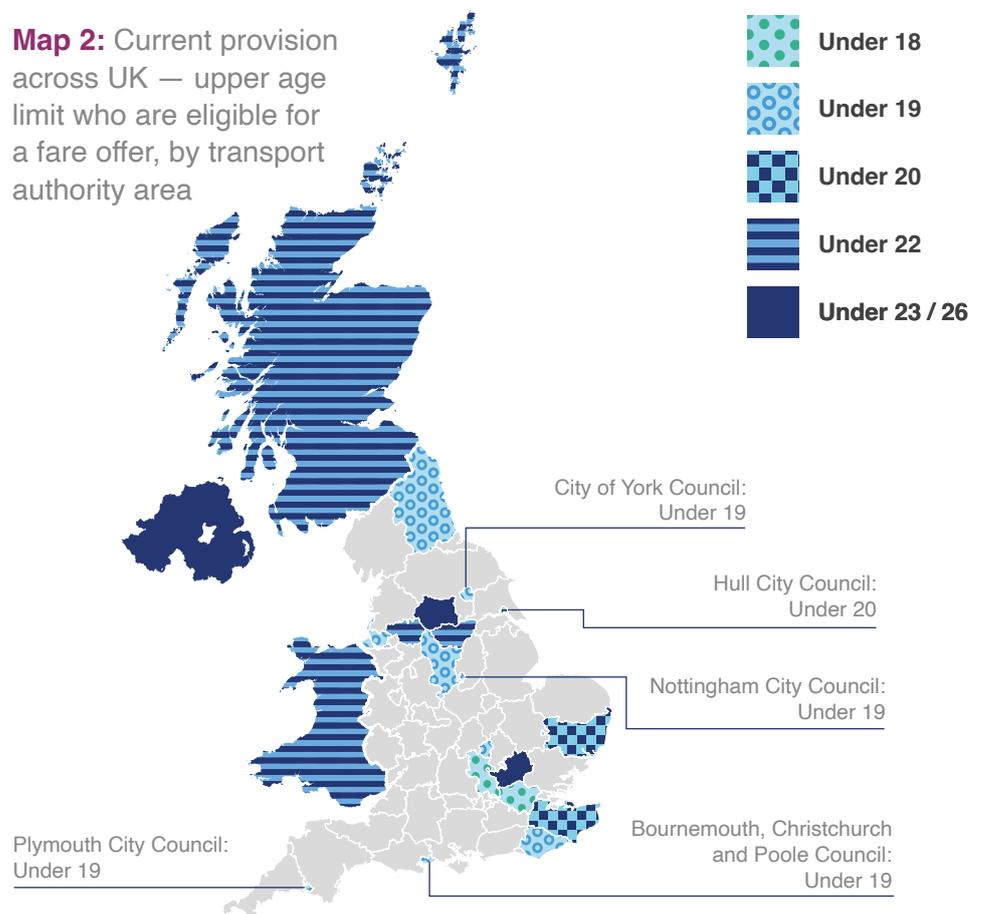
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Map 1: Current provision across UK – type of offer by transport authority area



Map 2: Current provision across UK – upper age limit who are eligible for a fare offer, by transport authority area



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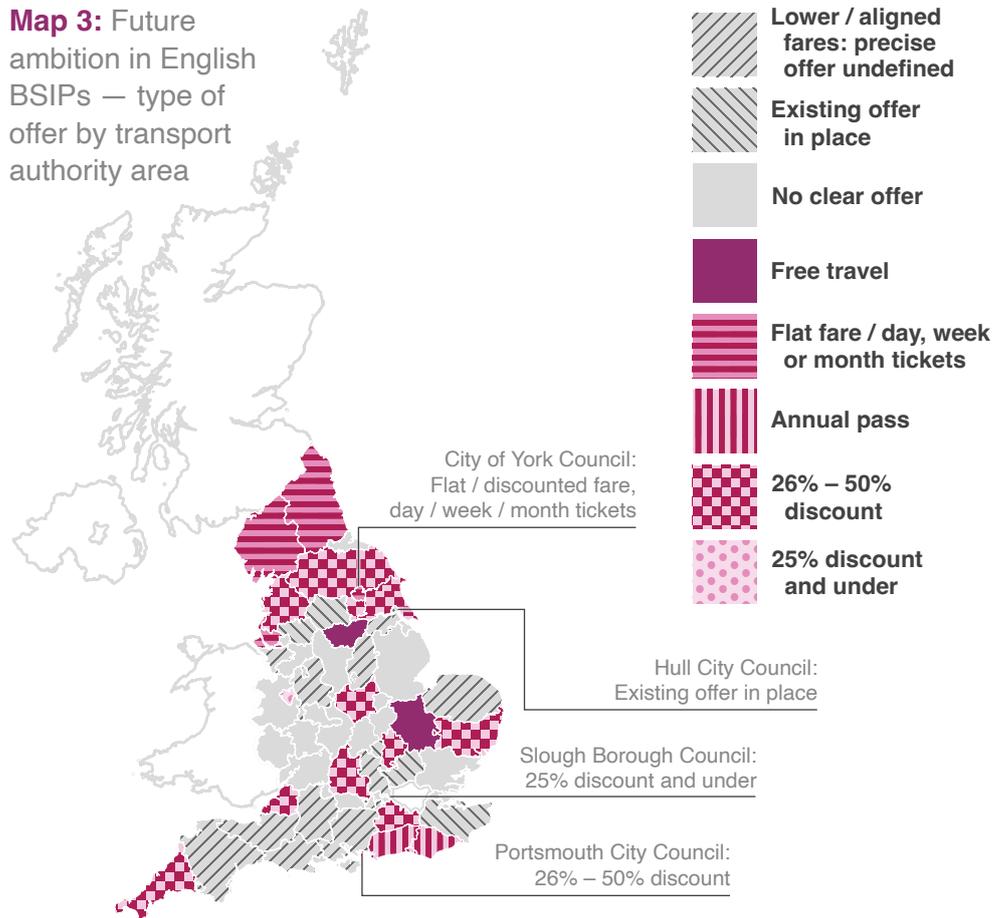
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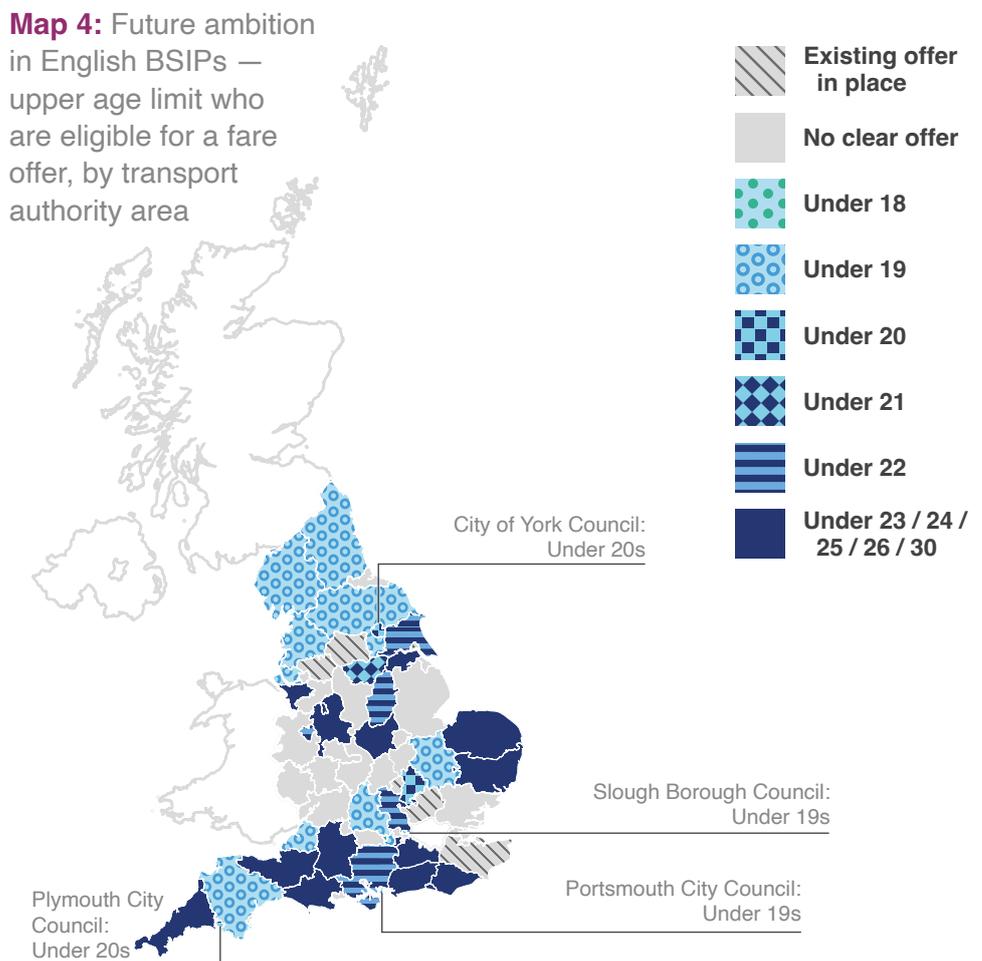
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Map 3: Future ambition in English BSIPs — type of offer by transport authority area



Map 4: Future ambition in English BSIPs — upper age limit who are eligible for a fare offer, by transport authority area



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Reflections from Young Advisors

These are some of the reflections that we gathered from young advisors on bus fare provision for young people.

The situation is unfair and unequal

“The price should be the same for everyone.” Poppy, 16-24

“I do not think that offers for young people are fair across the UK, purely because they differ, meaning that some young people have better access to vital locations in their educational and social development, and their transition to being independent.” Katie, 24, Cornwall

We like flat fares

“Multiple offers and prices make fares confusing. Annual passes are only viable with consistent usage. Flat fares are the most obvious and simplest solutions.” Sunshine, 16, North Wales

“Annual fares are not worth it for occasional bus users. Annual fares are more expensive and not everyone can afford them, especially young people who are unemployed or on low incomes.” Michal, 16, Leicester

Young people need support beyond 18

“Being a young person doesn’t stop when you are 18”
Sara, 20, West Yorkshire

“Due to the competitive job market and the pandemic, I decided to go back to uni to do a master’s and improve my skills so I don’t have much disposable income despite being in my mid-20s.” Joanna, 25, London

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Part 2: Case studies of bus fare schemes for young people

Given the small number of schemes available to young people beyond the age of 16, there is limited evidence on the justification and impact of such schemes. This section presents four case studies of bus fare schemes for young people which make an important contribution to addressing this gap. Case studies are:

- Zoom Beyond scheme for young people aged 18-21, South Yorkshire
- Zip Pass 16+, London
- 19-25 MCard scheme, West Yorkshire
- Scotland Under 22s free bus travel scheme

Case studies were developed through interviews (South Yorkshire), uptake and outcome data shared with us by transport authorities (South Yorkshire, Scotland, West Yorkshire) and through existing available publications (London, Scotland). Collectively, these case studies highlight i) the policy justification of schemes, ii) uptake in use by young people, iii) benefits to young people and iv) inclusivity outcomes.

Case study 1: Zoom Beyond Scheme in South Yorkshire

Introduction

The Zoom Beyond Travel Pass is a temporary scheme offered by South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA). Evaluation data of the scheme commissioned by SYMCA and interviews with SYMCA and a young person conducted for the purpose of this policy briefing offer rare insights on the justification and benefits of a bus fare scheme offered to young people beyond the age of 18.

What's covered in this case study?

Policy justification ✓ Uptake ✓ Impact ✓ Inclusion ✗

About the offer

Zoom Beyond was initially introduced as a one-year scheme in June 2021 as part of the South Yorkshire COVID Recovery and Renewal Plan^(1.8). It has since been extended by a further year^(1.9).

Age eligibility: 18-21

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Offer type: 80p flat fare single tickets on buses and trams

Funded by: South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA)

Dates: June 2021-June 2023

Policy justification

Mark Cowling, Head of Data and Intelligence at SYMCA, spoke about the policy justification for the scheme⁽¹⁹⁾.

1. Helping young people recover from the pandemic

“The Mayor was very keen, as we were coming out of restrictions, that there was nothing going to stop young people from traveling to college, to education, but just as equally importantly, to leisure, to culture, to meet their friends.”

Mark also spoke about the wider policy priorities that Zoom Beyond complemented:

2. Giving young people choices of where to live, work and study

“We want to make sure that people have access to the kind of jobs that they perhaps wouldn’t have thought of if they weren’t aware that there is connectivity to get them to different places... We don’t want to stop people from having their choice of education simply because of distance.”

3. Enabling young people to enjoy their lives

“How can we make people enjoy their life? It’s almost like a satisfaction index which is a mix...of themes, and transport is the facilitator of that.”

4. Supporting the best possible start in life for everyone

“South Yorkshire is quite a deprived area... it’s about giving people the best possible start. So, we didn’t want to put barriers in the way of people being able to travel.”

5. Retaining and attracting a younger population

“We want people to enjoy South Yorkshire, and particularly if you’re... not a South Yorkshire resident, you come here to university, we’d like people to think: actually, this is a really good place for me to live, and I will stay here.”

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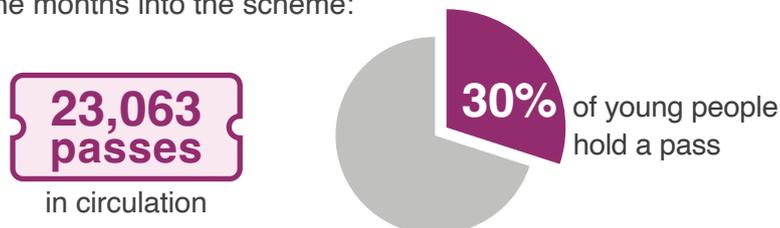
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Uptake of Zoom Beyond

SYMCA was able to auto-issue Zoom Beyond to over 12,000 young people aged 18, who held an existing bus pass for young people aged 16-18 years (the Zoom 16-18 Travel Pass), allowing a seamless transition to the new offer⁽¹⁸⁾.

Nine months into the scheme:



912,000 trips

made by bus and tram, of which:



Figure 4: participation after nine months

Impact of Zoom Beyond

Data collected from i) telephone interviews with young people (Nov-Dec 2021) commissioned by SYMCA (n=605 of which 42% were pass holders)⁽¹⁹⁾ and ii) an interview collected for this case study with a young person from Barnsley (Feb 2022)⁽²⁰⁾ give important insights into the impact of the scheme.

Telephone interviews with young people

76% of young people said they were satisfied with the pass.

They also said that Zoom Beyond will help them to:

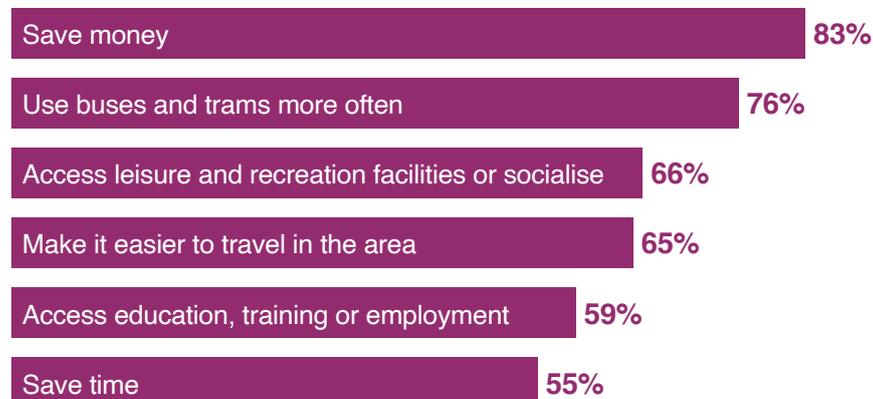


Figure 5: reported benefits to young people

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Interview with a young person from South Yorkshire

Daniel was at university when the pandemic began. Living in Barnsley (South Yorkshire), studying in West Yorkshire, and as an active member of the Local Youth Council, Daniel was used to making trips daily. He used buses, trains and sometimes his car.

Like many people, when the pandemic hit, these journeys stopped.

Since leaving university, Daniel has found employment.

Daniel discussed several impacts that Zoom Beyond had on him:

1. Saving money, which helped for job hunting

“I’ve saved a lot of money which I could then use for other stuff... so, IT equipment what might be needed for this [new] job.”

2. Helping to feel connected after the pandemic

“Actually, you discover going back to normality, of some sort...going on the networks, seeing other people, hearing drivers complain about the traffic.”

3. Enabling and inspiring him to explore new places

“I didn’t know something called Lakeside [a shopping outlet]... and I used Zoom Beyond to get there and that’s something which I would probably have never discovered until recently... So, it’s like finding out about new, different areas.”

4. Using buses for more journeys (and the car/ train less)

“Another benefit was taking the stress out [of] thinking: Do I take the car? Do I take the train? When you got the Zoom Beyond you think, I’ll go straight, directly to bus...that’s your number one priority...”

5. Considering using the bus more in the longer-term

“Do [I] keep on public transport once the Zoom Beyond finishes? That might be something which might be beneficial for me because I’m thinking, although it might be a bit more expensive, the use of public transport has been quite good at the moment”

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Reflection from SYMCA

“It’s achieved the sort of the policy aims that we were hoping around helping people’s access, education, etc. What that means for us is that we know that these schemes work.” Mark Cowling, Zoom Beyond, SYMCA

Case study 2: Zip Pass 16+ London

Introduction

There is very limited data showing the impact of bus fare schemes on young people’s broader outcomes. The Zoom Beyond case offered rare insights on the impact of a scheme on young people aged 18-21. Another exception is a long-running scheme for 16–18-year-olds living in London. The following case study gives an overview of the impact of the scheme in London.

What’s covered in this case study?

Policy justification ✓ Uptake ✓ Impact ✗ Inclusion ✓

About the offer (+ uptake)

Age eligibility: 16-17 (+ 18-year-olds who continue to live in London in full time education)

Offer type: Free travel on buses and trams*

Funded by: Transport for London

Dates: 2006-ongoing

Uptake of the Zip Pass

In one year (2021/22) there were 119,422 passes issued of the 16+ photocard scheme⁽²¹⁾. This suggests a very high uptake rate given that an estimated 97,634 young people aged 16 live in London⁽²²⁾ and cards issued at 16 do not need to be reissued at 17⁽²¹⁾.

Impact of free bus travel

A study on the impact of the Zip Pass scheme (both 16+ and under 16s schemes) found that free bus travel resulted in the bus becoming the default choice for travel for many young people. This resulted in an increase in the use of bus for short journeys (26 percentage point increase)⁽²³⁾.

Early in the pandemic, there was a proposal to remove the Zip Pass.

* Offer also includes 50% discounts on most rail, tube, DLR and overground services in London.

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In response, Partnership for Young London (PfYL) conducted a survey with over 2,000 young people aged 16-18⁽²⁴⁾ which revealed what free bus fares meant to young Londoners. 98% responded to say that free transport was important or very important to them.

Young people also said that, in losing free travel:

they would not travel out of their area as much unless they had to

81%

they would worry that getting to school / around London is less safe

66%

they would worry their parents would struggle to make ends meet

64%

they would not be able to afford to go to the places they want to go

56%

they would no longer visit art galleries

53%

they would change the college or school they are considering attending

44%

their mental health would suffer

43%

they wouldn't go to sports clubs

38%

Figure 6: anticipated consequences of young people losing free travel

Supporting inclusion

Responses to the PfYL survey also highlight the importance of free bus travel for helping to level the playing field for all young people. For example, worry that losing free travel would have an effect on parents making ends meet varied between White (58%), Black (67%), Mixed (68%) and South Asian and Asian (78%) ethnic groups. This suggests that removing free travel would have a disproportionate impact on non-White ethnic groups. Those with care experience were also more likely to say that, in removing free travel, they would change the school they were considering attending (57%).

Studies on zip pass products for young people show that the schemes enhance social participation and physical activity by⁽²⁵⁾

- removing cost as a barrier to social inclusion
- enabling families to afford to do more
- allowing young people to maintain friendships over a wider geographical area

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- helping young people to build skills and confidence in making new and more complex journeys.

Case study 3: MCard West Yorkshire

Introduction

The Zoom Beyond pass is funded by the Local Transport Authority (LTA). In other parts of the UK, young people have access to commercial offers. The 19-25 MCard is an ambitious multi-operator scheme in West Yorkshire. As a long-running scheme, this is also a useful case study to illustrate uptake at a time without Covid restrictions.

What's covered in this case study?

Policy justification ✗ Uptake ✓ Impact ✗ Inclusion ✗

About the offer

The 19-25 MCard is offered as a multi-operator scheme. This means young people can use it to purchase tickets that can be used across operators. Multi-operator tickets can provide consistent and easy-to-understand offers making it simpler for passengers to travel by bus⁽²⁶⁾.

Age eligibility: 19-25

Offer type: 33% discount on multi-operator weekly and monthly products⁽²⁷⁾ **

Funded by: Offered as a commercial offer through a multi-operator scheme

Dates: 2016-ongoing

Uptake of the MCard

Uptake before the pandemic was strong. In 2019, the year before the pandemic began⁽²⁸⁾:

- 24,992 (11%) young people in West Yorkshire held a 19-25 MCard.
- On average, 162,771 journeys were made per month
- £2.25 million revenue was taken from MCard products in April 2019 – March 2020

Unsurprisingly, the pandemic dampened engagement with the 19-25 MCard.

** MCard 19-25 also offers a 44% discount on combined bus and rail fare. This case study focuses on the outcomes of the bus-only discount.

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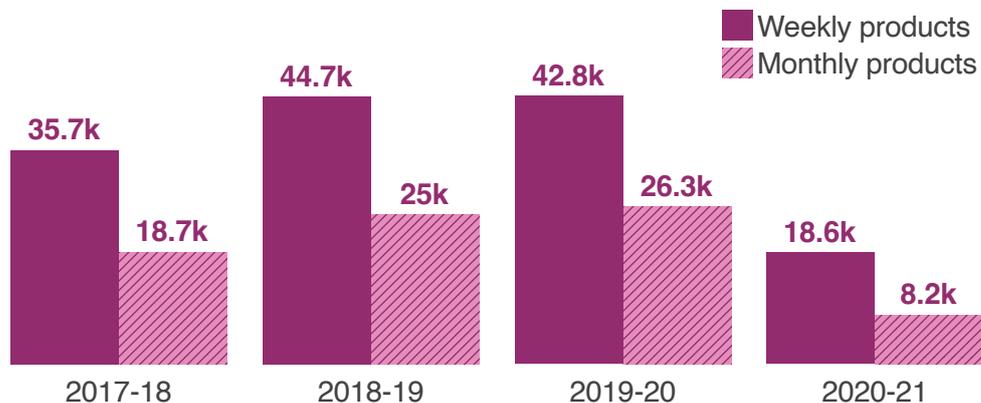


Figure 7: 19-25 MCard sales⁽²⁸⁾

Whilst it will be important to understand the lasting impacts of the pandemic on young people's travel, as a group who is less likely to drive than older age groups, pre-pandemic engagement levels from West Yorkshire suggest that demand for bus use and discounted bus fares will increase as we emerge from the pandemic.

Case study 4: Scotland Under 22s Free Bus Travel Scheme

Introduction

Zoom Beyond is an unusual case in that it is offered to young people beyond the age of 18. However, it was approved as a temporary measure in response to the pandemic. Ideally young people want schemes that can be sustained. Furthermore, a longer-term offer would be needed to reap many of the policy benefits that such schemes aim to address.

This has been recognised by the Scottish Government where a national scheme for under 22s was launched in January 2022. The case study below explains the policy justifications for this scheme.

What's covered in the case study?

Policy justification ✓ Uptake ✓ Impact ✗ Inclusion ✗

About the offer

Age eligibility: 5-21

Offer type: Free bus travel

Funded by: Scottish Government

Offered from: January 2022- ongoing

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Uptake

On 31 January 2022, an estimated 930,000 young people aged 5-21 living in Scotland became eligible for free bus travel^(29,30). By mid-June 2022, 375,765 cards were issued, an uptake of 40%, and 10,179,986 journeys made⁽³¹⁾.

Policy justification

The Scottish National Transport Strategy published in 2020 recognised the importance of transport to support equality, promote inclusive economic growth, address climate challenges and improve health and wellbeing⁽³²⁾.

Subsequently, Scottish Government approved the national Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme⁽³⁰⁾ which aligns with these ambitions by:

1. Improving access to education, healthcare, training, and employment for young people.

This ambition had strong public support. 90% of respondents to the public consultation said the scheme would improve opportunities and reduce inequalities for young people⁽³³⁾.

2. Reducing childhood poverty and inequalities by reducing household costs and increasing opportunity for young people who rely on the bus.

44% of people in low-income households (earning less than £10k per annum) use the bus at least once a week compared to just 16% of those in high-income households (over 40k per annum)⁽³⁰⁾.

3. Reducing car dominance by making the bus more attractive to families and embedding bus as the default choice for young people as they move into adulthood⁽³⁰⁾.

The scheme faces several challenges including uncertainty over local authority capacity to administer the scheme, ensuring operators are adequately subsidised and the viability of some bus services following the pandemic⁽³⁰⁾. However, the projected benefits across multiple and urgent policy priorities, have resulted in the launch of a scheme that is leading the way in bus fare policy for young people in the UK.

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This section summarises the policy priorities that bus fare support for young people can help address. It then outlines six actions for decision makers designed by [Transport to Thrive](#) Young Advisors. One action is aimed at national decision makers, whilst the other five are for any policy maker or operator designing their bus fare offer.

Policy priorities that bus fare support helps address

Bus fare support for young people has the potential to address multiple urgent policy areas.

Reducing the cost of living for an economically vulnerable group

Young people are more likely to have challenging financial circumstances and these challenges increase as they move into their early twenties (see [Figure 2, \(7\)](#)). This makes them particularly vulnerable to a squeeze on living costs.

Reducing inequalities and supporting the levelling up agenda

Large parts of the population do not have access to private transport, often including those on low-income, non-white adults and jobseekers^(1,7). Furthermore, people living in the north of England are more likely to rely on the bus than those living in the south^(1,7). Support for bus fares is likely to benefit the most disadvantaged young people the most and contribute to ‘levelling-up.’

Supporting access to jobs and education

With limited budgets and low levels of car access, young people have fewer choices on how they travel. As such, access to public transport can have a direct impact on whether a young person can access education and job opportunities. Evidence shows that the cost of public transport is a major barrier to young jobseekers and can limit choice for where young people study for low-income households⁽¹⁾.

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Supporting the future health and wellbeing of young people and society

Exclusion from social and economic opportunities in adolescence and early adulthood have been found to inhibit long term health outcomes^(2,34). As well as unlocking access to education and employment, being able to make journeys independently also plays an important function in developing knowledge, skills, and confidence which can help young people to thrive later in life⁽¹⁾.

Addressing the climate crisis

Cars are the largest contributor to domestic transport carbon emissions in the UK, and so making public transport more attractive is important to reduce car dependency and meet urgent carbon reduction targets⁽¹⁷⁾. Young people are an important group to target to increase patronage.

Increasing bus patronage

Many young people experience a series of changes such as leaving education or moving house, and these are times when transport needs and behaviours are likely to change⁽³⁵⁾. Young people are likely to be bus users (see [Figure 1](#)) and reduced fares could help to retain this behaviour in the longer term. This could also help with the recovery of the bus industry from the pandemic.

Addressing the impacts of the pandemic on young people

Since the start of the pandemic, economic activity by young people has reduced^(36,37). More young people are remaining in full time education⁽³⁷⁾. Bus fare support could help young people to access work and to continue their studies.

Calls to action

We worked with [Transport to Thrive](#) Young Advisors to develop a set of 'asks' to decision makers.

We ask UK nations to:

1. Set out a minimum offer for young people aged up to 25 and to support local transport authorities to move towards this.

“This is not only the most fair solution but also the most sustainable. This would allow young people to access many more opportunities and, therefore, increase their quality of life” Michał, 16, Leicester

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There is an incoherent picture of bus fare support for young people across the UK. This means that our transport system is not providing equitable support for this group in accessing life-defining opportunities. For a fair bus fare offer, we need more consistent support available to all young people.

We ask all transport authorities and bus operators to:

2. Offer universal free or low, flat fares to young people that they can rely on

“As a student in London where the cost of living such as rent are high, the £1.65 hopper fare on the bus gives me a cheaper option for travel.” Johanna, 25, London

Young people want a scheme that they can rely on⁽⁹⁾. Flat fare tickets (and free travel) are simple to understand and a popular choice with many young people⁽⁹⁾.

3. Offer support from 16-25 years of age (at least)

“I think that it is unfair that many financial pressures that young people face continue, intensify, and new ones develop beyond the age of 16 or 18... this is often completely overlooked by policy makers.” Katie, 24, Cornwall

Most support for bus fares stops by the age of 16 (see [Maps 1 and 2](#)). However, the need for fare-support extends at least into young people’s early twenties. To meet the changing needs of the young population and to achieve desired policy outcomes, support needs to extend up to at least 25 years.

4. Work with young people to design your offer

“Young people should be consulted on decisions made about them. It is illogical to make significant changes.... without considering the affect is has on us economically and socially.” Sunshine, 16, North Wales

Young people know their needs the best. Working with young person organisations and forums is important to generate the best offer and impact possible with limited resources.

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5. Align offers across geographical boundaries

“Why are there so many different bus fares for under 18s in the UK? I live on the border between Wales and England. The My Travel Pass [for young people in Wales] is NOT valid in England so this means if I want to go to my nearest city...then I cannot use the pass.” Luke, 16, North Wales

Inconsistent offers across transport authorities are particularly unhelpful to young people living near authority boundaries. These additional barriers could lead to reduced mobility and exclusion.

6. Collect and share evidence on the impact of bus fares schemes for young people

We need to build the case for greater investment in young people aged 16-24. There have been very few long-running schemes aimed at this group. As such, there is limited evidence available that demonstrates the potential for these schemes to address multiple policy priorities. As new schemes are launched, we ask authorities to monitor, evaluate and share impacts. This should seek to go beyond measuring take-up of schemes to identify how bus use helps young people’s access opportunities.



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About Transport to Thrive

What is Transport to Thrive?

Transport to Thrive aims to make the policy case for transport that better enables young people aged 16-24 to make journeys and reach opportunities that help them to thrive.

The Transport to Thrive project is being delivered by the University of the West of England and Sustrans. This project is part of the Health Foundation's [Young people's future health inquiry](#). The Health Foundation is an independent charity committed to bringing about better health and health care for people in the UK.

What are Transport to Thrive Policy Briefings?

In a time of high ambition in transport policy, and where rapid change is needed to address environmental and social challenges, Transport to Thrive Policy Briefings bring together new and existing evidence to give quick-fire, policy-relevant insights on the needs of young people aged 16-24 years.

Who are our expert advisors?

- Young Advisors are a group of young people aged 16-25 years who provide expertise to the Transport to Thrive project through their lived experience.
- The Board of Policy Advisors provide policy insights and expertise, with representation from Department for Transport, Transport Scotland, Urban Transport Group, CoMoUK, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Edinburgh Napier University and Sustrans.

With thanks to

- Transport to Thrive Board of Policy Advisors and Young Advisors for their steer and input
- Mark Cowling, Tim Taylor and their colleagues from South Yorkshire Passenger Transport/South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority for sharing data, taking part in interviews and supporting our Zoom Beyond case study
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- Heather Cowan, Suzanne Motherwell and their colleagues at Transport Scotland for sharing data and supporting our case study

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Appendix 1: Recent developments in bus policy in the UK

In England

The Bus Service Act 2017⁽³⁹⁾ gave some powers to Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) over bus tickets and services recognising that this control helps LTAs to address wider policy priorities.

The Bus Back Better Strategy (2019)⁽¹²⁾ represents the first national bus strategy for England (outside London) since deregulation. It compels LTAs to take greater responsibility for buses in their area by working closely with operators through Enhanced Partnerships or by franchising bus services. LTAs were asked to develop 'Bus Service Improvement Plans' in order to access Government funding and were encouraged to include policies on youth fares.

Bus Service Improvement Plans were published by LTAs in November 2021. Many outlined ambitions for lowering bus fares for young people (see [Maps 3 and 4](#)).

In Scotland

Transport (Scotland) Act 2019⁽⁴⁰⁾ provides options for local transport authorities in how they improve bus services in a way that addresses the needs of their local areas. Options include forming Bus Service Improvement Partnerships, franchising services, or running their own services. In 2022, Scottish government announced a **Bus Partnership Fund**⁽⁴¹⁾ to complement these new powers, offering £500 million for bus priority infrastructure measures.

Scotland's National Transport Strategy 2020⁽³²⁾ sets out a vision for a transport system that reduces inequalities, takes climate action, delivers inclusive economic growth and improves health and wellbeing. On young people, the strategy states "our transport system will continue to meet the changing needs of young people, particularly by ensuring they have affordable and sustainable access to education, employment and training opportunities enabling them to fulfil their potential."

A National Bus Travel Concession scheme for young persons (Scotland) order 2021⁽⁴⁾ allowed Scottish Ministers to introduce a national concessionary travel scheme for young people aged 18 and under. In 2021 an amendment to this raised the limit for eligibility to 21 and under⁽⁵⁾.

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In Wales

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015⁽⁴²⁾ compels all public bodies to “act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This applies to all sectors, including transport.

Lwybr Newydd: the Wales Transport Strategy 2021⁽⁴³⁾ sets out a vision of “an accessible, sustainable and efficient transport system” that is “reliable, affordable, flexible, easy to use, low-carbon and that encourages more people to use the bus rather than their cars.”

Bws Cymru: connecting people with places 2022⁽³⁾ followed the Wales Transport Strategy 2021 and sets out plans for bus services in Wales. It includes ambitions to ‘Make travel affordable for all’, recognising the importance of this for delivering “significant social justice and equality benefits”, including expanding the “opportunities and economic choices of young people”.

Appendix 2: Methodology, assumptions and data underpinning Maps 1-4

This appendix covers:

- Methodology used to analyse Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs) to identify their ambitions (as well as the justification for these ambitions)
- List of the assumptions and simplifications that were necessary to generate [Maps 1-4](#).

A summary of the data collected for each transport authority, including details of additional assumptions made in order to visualise data, can be found in the [supporting materials](#).***

Methodology of BSIPs analysis

[Maps 3 and 4](#) in Part 1 of this policy briefing show the ambitions outlined in BSIPs for bus fare support for young people. This is new analysis completed for this policy briefing. This section outlines how we completed this analysis.

The Bus Back Better strategy compelled the 79 Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) in England (outside London) to publish their first iteration of BSIPs in November 2021. An existing freedom of Information Act request provided a list of LTAs⁽⁴⁴⁾. Using this list, we located BSIP documents via an internet search or by contacting the relevant authority. Several LTAs co-produced BSIPs, resulting in 76 unique BSIPs.

*** https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/10822/fair-bus-fares_current-and-future-support-for-young-people-summary_transport-to-thrive.xlsx

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DfT guidance for BSIPs⁽⁴⁵⁾ suggests a common format that plans should adopt. This includes a ‘BSIP overview table’ which gives an overview of suggested measures under various categories including ‘improvements to fares and ticketing’. Whilst all BSIPs contained an overview table, there was still considerable variation in the format and level of detail included in the main document. As such, we used the following process to locate bus fare ambitions for young people within BSIPs:

- Using the search function and key search terms, we located text that could be relevant to young people and a reduction in bus fares. Search terms were: ‘young’, ‘youth’, ‘student’, ‘teenager’, ‘aged’ & ‘old’. In many cases searches for numerical values for age-years between 16 and 25, as well as 30 were made. For each age X, we searched for ‘X’, ‘X’, ‘-X’ & ‘X-’. We did not always examine search terms related to age-year if the initial search terms yielded sufficient data on young person bus fare offers and searches for age-years led to a very large number of results.
- Examined the ‘improvements to fares and ticketing’ section of the ‘BSIP overview table’.

We extracted any text identified that contained i) details on young person bus fare ambitions and ii) the rationale for these ambitions. For i), we synthesised the offer into a short summary for each LTA (see [supporting materials](#)). For ii) ‘the rationale for ambitions’, we coded text according to common policy justifications given across BSIPs. Whilst we acknowledge that our method of using search terms may not be a comprehensive analysis of policy justifications for young person bus fares, nonetheless, this exercise gives useful insights into the breadth of aspirations across transport authorities. A summary of these codes can be seen in [Table 1](#) below.

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Table 1: Frequency of policy justifications across LTA BSIPs for offering young person bus fare support

Justification	Occurrence
Reducing future car dependence / continued use of bus / sustainable travel	20
Helping young people to access work and education, social and leisure opportunities	19
Enhancing social mobility and supporting equality inclusion / reducing isolation	9
Increasing patronage	8
Increase bus patronage following the pandemic	5
Helping young people save money	3
Increased customer satisfaction and affordability	3
Removing barriers to bus use	2
Regeneration	2
Helping families save money / helping families choose bus over car	2
Road safety benefit	1
Post Covid challenges (generic)	1
Helping young people recover from impacts of the pandemic	1
Catering for a growing population of young people	1

Assumptions used to generate maps

Part 1 of the Policy Briefing includes four maps showing the current situation of bus fare support for young people, as well as the future ambition of LTAs in England (outside of London) according to their BSIPs.

To assess the current situation for young person bus fare offers, schemes were identified from a 2019 review of reduced and concessionary fares by TAS Partnership Limited^(1.5). These schemes were then checked for later changes via an internet search in June 2022.

To assess future ambition for young person bus fare offers, we examined BSIP documents (see methodology above for more details). There was considerable variation in the level of detail given in BSIPs about LTA ambitions for young person bus fares. For example, some LTAs specify both the proposed ages of eligibility and details of the discount. Others

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use more general terminology such as ‘reducing bus fares for young people’ without specifying age eligibility or offer type. Furthermore, some BSIPs outlined more than one option for youth fare discounts or different types of support for different age groups.

In order to collect and visualise the TAS and BSIP data, it was necessary to make a set of pragmatic assumptions and simplifications. These are given below.

Assumptions and simplifications that apply to all data

- In collecting data, the focus was on permanent/long-term schemes, i.e. schemes that run for >1 year, that cover the whole transport authority area, that are available at times young people want to travel and that are available to all young people within the age group. In other words, promotional schemes, schemes that were only available to some groups such as job seekers or students or fares that only apply to urban areas (where the LTA also includes wider geographies) were not included. Whilst this may neglect useful offers available to young people, the focus of this policy briefing is on offers that are applicable to all young people for all bus journeys.
- Where there are multiple offers for young people in one LTA, maps show the most ambitious offer on [Maps 1 and 3](#) and the highest upper age eligibility on [Maps 2 and 4](#). As such, the offer type on [Maps 1 and 3](#) may not match the age eligibility on [Maps 2 and 4](#). The hierarchy of ambition was set as follows in decreasing order: i) free fares, ii) Flat fare / day, week or month tickets, iii) discounts on adult tickets (various levels), and iv) annual fares.

Current provision of bus fare support for young people ([Maps 1 and 2](#))

- As this analysis focuses on offers that are available across a whole Transport Authority, it does not capture operator specific fares. One exception to this is Northern Ireland which includes an offer by Translink as they are the major public transport provider nationwide in Northern Ireland.

Future ambition for bus fare support for young people ([Maps 3 and 4](#))

- If there was ambiguity over the precise upper age limit through wording such as ‘up until the age of 20’, we assume that the upper age-year is eligible for the offer.
- Where two mutually exclusive options for age eligibility or extent of discount are given, we have shown the more ambitious offer (as above). If age eligibility is different across the options considered, we use the age eligibility given for the most ambitious offer type.
- In some instances, LTAs discuss aligning offers with neighboring authorities. In these instances, we have combined LTA areas on the map, and categorised the offer using the BSIP which gives the greatest level of detail on the offer.

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- If the BSIP does not contain explicit intent to improve the young person offer, we have recorded this as ‘no offer described’. This includes cases where a ‘review’ or ‘simplifying’ youth offers (or similar) is mentioned or if commitment appears weak through wording such as ‘might’, or ‘investigate an opportunity’.
- Where an offer for young people is mentioned but there is no detail of age eligibility then we define this as ‘no clear offer defined’ as it is not clear if intention extends to young people aged 16+.
- We assume all discounts refer are available on all operators unless otherwise stated.

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