

Get In Gear: Accessibility of Public Transport For Young People



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Introduction

Public transport is a quintessential aspect of young peoples' lives as seen by the United Kingdom Youth Parliament 'Make Your Mark' results for Yorkshire and Humber 2016, which had transport as its pre-eminent issue for the region; it helps them both academically and socially. The service allows young people to travel to and from school, sixth form, college, and apprenticeships; as well as meet their friends, get to work, attend medical appointments, and attend activities at places like youth clubs and in other local venues. Public transport is a vital part of young peoples' development and character-building due to the independence young people gain. This report aims to evaluate the services and review the accessibility of public transport for young people in South Yorkshire. When referring to public transport in this report we are referring to buses, trams, and trains.

Our research incorporated focus groups, surveys and other secondary methods such as internet sites and other published reports which was all collected over a six month period. We aim to review all of the selected areas in an unbiased and analytical manner which will enable our conclusion and recommendations to be the most beneficial for any progress in the future.

Young People and Public Transport Report February 2013

In 2013 Rotherham Youth Cabinet looked at several aspects of public transport primarily in Rotherham and presented them at the Children's Commissioner Takeover Day. The following issues were brought up:

- Toilets

In order to use the facilities in the interchange people needed to pay 20p, it was believed to be "extortionate" and "should be free".

- Behaviour

Young people highlighted that there was a lot of antisocial behaviour in Rotherham interchange and on buses. For example, people were drinking alcohol, playing loud speaker music about controversial topics, smoking, there were also "shady" groups of people whose actions were making individuals feel "unsafe".

- Staff

The main problem highlighted was the lack of noticeable workers and security, particularly in the interchange. This was a problem for young people in particular as they felt that if they had a problem they wouldn't know who to approach.

- Services

It was highlighted that, “buses are late and don’t always stop” meaning that people felt this left “vulnerable” people waiting for transport in a range of weathers and environments. As a result of this, young people wanted the punctuality of buses to change. Young people stated that they didn’t know how to complain about the service. This is a problem if an issue does arise as then service providers don’t know how to improve and be the best they can be.

- Interchange Building

The building was said to be a “very cold place”, but it was acknowledged that there was limited action which could be carried out in order to alter this. It was also made apparent that young people would prefer the seating to be turned around so that people were not walking behind them, to make them feel safer. Also, it was believed that there was evidence of pickpocketing in crowded and busy areas.

The suggestions made by Rotherham Youth Cabinet after Children’s Commissioner Takeover Day event was as follows:

1. Information Needs to Improve

More ‘Information Points’ are required as are electronic timetables with up to date information, clear indication about WI-FI on buses and clear illustration about different prices of tickets.

2. Safety and Security

More guards, policing, and CCTV are required in the interchange as well as an easier complaints systemⁱ. This is because the current system was seen to be complicated and too time consuming.

This report aims to evaluate any actions taken on the recommendations made by Rotherham Youth Cabinet in 2013 in order to see if public transport services have improved and are benefiting the needs of young people and the wider community to their full potential.

Bus Passes and Pricing

Bus passes available in the area of South Yorkshire are:

- The 11-16 Megatravel passes which allows 16 year olds and under to use public transport at any time at a child fareⁱⁱ. These passes are free and are accepted by all operators, they are valid up to the 31st July of the year the young person turns 16, unless your birthday is in the month of August in which case it is valid until the day

before your 16th birthday. For these passes you apply online, and either parents or the young person can apply for these. 64% of young people applying for the pass used the internet to do so in 2015ⁱⁱⁱ.

- The 16-18 student passes are free of charge like the Megatravel passes, and are accepted by all operators to entitle young people aged 16 to 18 child fare^{iv}. These passes are available if you are in full time education, and your household pays council tax to a South Yorkshire local authority. These passes can be obtained with a unique validation code which is given out by the educational facilities. Applying for a pass can be done either online or via the post depending on individual preference.
- The Mi card is a free card for under 18s in Barnsley^v they are valid the same as a 11-16 Megatravel pass, except the pass is automatically renewed after your 16th birthday and runs out the day before your 18th birthday. The pass allows travel at 60p for those in Barnsley, 80p anywhere else, as well as half fare on all train journeys within South Yorkshire. These can be obtained online on the Barnsley council website.
- Zero fare passes are also free and are valid for use during the academic year until 7pm^{vi}. These are paid for by the local authority to help with social mobility. A young person can qualify for this pass if they are in full time education, have to travel more than 3 miles to get to school (under 8 year olds are required to travel more than 2 miles to be eligible for the pass). If these require replacing, there is a charge of £7. Young people aged 16-18 are not entitled to these passes if they cross a boundary between local authorities^{vii}.

These bus passes are particularly useful during term time as seen by the dates of expiry for many passes; however, more young people wish to use public transport for socialising, medical appointments and work during the summer holidays in particular. Despite this increase in demand at this time of the year, young people don't feel able to afford the cost of public transport when passes expire meaning they "have to pay adult prices"^{viii}. For most young people this is unsustainable as they cannot afford these price increases because they have little disposable income available to them for a variety of reasons including being in full time education and having qualifications to obtain. This may affect the amount of times young people go out during the holidays as they can't afford to travel.

In addition to passes there are also a variety of tickets available which can be found on the South Yorkshire Transport website. It is believed that some of the tickets available for young people such as the £6 Weekly First bus ticket and the £7.50 Get About Week tickets are extremely good value for money. However, tickets are not advertised by all companies and it is found that often young people are not always purchasing the cheapest option due to lack of knowledge about what is available to them and where they can purchase certain tickets. 59.2% of tickets are bought on board and 20.8% are bought from travel information centres, with 13.1% using the website to purchase tickets^{ix}. This may mean that some young

people spend more on transport than is necessary.

It should also be noted that young people taking part in the National Citizen Scheme will receive free and discounted travel with the First bus company. It was believed this would help with financial implications for the two week social action project within the program. The company said the action was to “reward young people for their hard work and dedication”^x. Other groups in the area felt that this was unfair as there are social action projects who also benefit the community and meet during the holidays, this will mean these young people will have to pay full fare in order to commute to and from their specific groups.

Times

Public transport times have always been a discussion point, and this is certainly evident through consultation forums such as the one held in Dinnington^{xi} and the one being held in Barnsley^{xii}. This demonstrates that public transport providers acknowledge that there is a problem with the times of specific routes and they are trying to address the problems.

In addition to this, how people found out the frequency and times of the buses was a point of enquiry for this report. It was found that the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive carried out a consultation in 2014 which found that only 18.5% of people used paper timetables, 19.9% used of these were at the bus stops, and 22% used the Travel South Yorkshire website for a variety of reasons. 215 of the 1570 people surveyed stated they were dependent on paper timetables and 96 of these had no other access to any other form of information^{xiii}. This demonstrates that there is a need for easily accessible information both online and on paper to ensure that everyone can view data easily.

Many young people have recently complimented the apps which are now available for bus timetables, as they are quick, easy to get access to, and convenient as they show all the bus stops in the local area. This is useful if a young person is searching for a specific stop or is going out or coming home and requires to catch the bus.

Experiences on Public Transport

Often there is a negative connotation with public transport; however from a survey conducted by the Rotherham Youth Cabinet, it is evident that there are a lot of people who have positive experiences. 48% of respondents to the survey said that they had had positive experiences on public transport and many of these individuals who shared their experiences with us. Highlights from this data includes a “bus driver (who) waited for 2 minutes” when a regular user of public transport was running late from school, “a really nice bus driver who helped (a young person) work out where (they were) going after getting off at the stop”, and on the tram a young person said that talking to ticket conductor “brightened (their)

day"^{xiv}. Due to these experiences, many people will be encouraged to use public transport regularly as they feel valued and not an inconvenience.

Despite these experiences, 65% of respondents said that they had had a negative experience at some point on public transport. Some of the most prominent comments received included "bus drivers are rude", "buses are rarely on time", and a bus driver who was said to have "drove straight past (a young person) whilst (they) were at the stop"^{xv}. Experiences like these put many people off using public transport. As a result this can mean that young people can feel uneasy and may find other ways of travelling even if it's slightly more expensive or time consuming which in the long run could compromise what activities the young person takes part in due to financial pressures as well as have physical and mental implications.

Furthermore, recently there has been uproar with First South Yorkshire over the change to the X78 route which covers the Doncaster, Rotherham, and Sheffield area. Passengers have said that the changes have caused "absolute chaos" due to the "less frequent" buses which can't "cope with the demand" with the amount of passengers using the service. Customers have taken to social media to complain about the service; tweets such as "X78 took ages to turn up this morning and was a packed single decker", "X78 cancelled Sheff Int to Donc Int 09:40. Taxi to work again, what has happened?", "utter shambles", "how can it be late every day for over 3 weeks? But a snip at £20 a week!", and "Absolutely shoddy service". However, First have responded by saying they "sympathise with customers who have not been satisfied with the recent services"^{xvi}. On Monday 31st October 2016 some changes will be made to this route to address some of the concerns raised by customers.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are an ever increasing option amongst young people aged 16-19, however due to them not being in full time education they do not qualify for a bus pass. As a result, we felt that we should have a section to highlight their thoughts about public transport.

Most of the respondents of a targeted questionnaire, were in their first year of their apprenticeship and under the age of 18; many of them used public transport regularly and relied on it in order to get to their apprenticeship.

From the survey, 53% of young people in an apprenticeship spent more than £3 on transport a day, and 62% of all the respondents have had difficulty using public transport for a multitude of reasons. The young people who responded said that public transport was "very expensive" and "unaffordable". The price wasn't the only issue which was brought up, with time being another issue which was constantly highlighted. Multiple responses were extremely similar to one another and emphasised the inconvenience of late buses and the subsequent consequences, particularly if these resulted in them being late for their

apprenticeship.

There was only one positive experience recorded by the respondents of this survey, which was that “buses are very useful”. This indicates that for apprentices public transport is something they try to avoid if they can help it, but in reality they depend on it and are forced to preserve or find alternatives to using public transport.

The idea about having an ‘apprentice bus pass’ was well received by the respondents. Comments such as “excellent and very worthwhile”, “good idea, saves money”, and “it would be very helpful” were gathered. The ‘apprentice bus pass proposal’ would look at allowing apprentices to have access to a standard young persons’ fare and would entitle them to the same privileges as young people in full time education. This would apply to those apprentices who earn below a certain amount^{xvii}.

Rotherham’s Looked After Children’s Council

On Wednesday 4th May 2016 we held a focus group with the Looked After Children’s Council in Rotherham. The group were asked five open questions and their answers were accurately recorded in minutes.

The first question was about the positive aspects of public transport, answers for this included the USB chargers now on the X78 buses. The group found this extremely useful as they were able to charge their mobile phones and other electronic devices if they required, meaning that they always had access to an easy communication system in case of emergencies. Another positive aspect was that the buses were warm in winter and the WI-FI on certain buses was particularly useful for checking emails and researching things such as cinema times if they were socialising with friends. This meant that they went out more often and they believed this factor influenced their mental health.

The next question was about the negative aspects of public transport. There were many more responses given, which included buses not being on time. This was an issue for the young people getting to their place of education or their apprenticeship as it meant that they could be late through no fault of their own. This was also an issue when the buses were earlier than stated, meaning that the young people could still be late even though they were on time for the bus. This they felt was unfair and made the members of the Looked After Children’s Council more “anxious”. Due to some young people in the group requiring numerous connections, if one bus is late they could miss the next, which may not be as regular as other provided services. Another aspect which was brought to light was about the “disrespectful” and “awkward” drivers of certain buses. This has been evident through the language used towards young people in the group, who have asked questions about the route of the bus and have been responded to in a discourteous and “rude” manner. This behaviour hasn’t been exclusive to just the driver of the bus, the group reported that other

passengers have been equally as aggressive. Experiences like this have resulted in group members being put off using public transport for a couple of weeks afterwards and having to use the other alternatives to travel. The bus drivers have “no discretion” over the rules, this is made apparent by the drivers not applying common sense to situations such as when a young person in school uniform forgets their bus pass and is charged full fare. They felt that if this had a constant approach it would be less of an issue. However, this is currently perceived to be unfair as it is “common sense” that the young person is clearly under 18 and it is believed that they should only be charged a standard young persons’ fare. In addition to this, the group were appalled by the vandalism of public transport, which made their experiences uncomfortable and thus less pleasant.

The next question was about the cost of public transport. The consensus from the group was that on the whole, without a pass it is expensive as many young people in the group have to travel in many different areas throughout South Yorkshire in order to get to educational facilities, jobs, and youth groups such as the council. Additionally, the ‘zero fare’ passes given to young people cannot be used at weekends, after 7pm, or during holidays. This was thought to be unfair, particularly the aspect of after 7pm as some young people have commitments and events after school which may run until this time meaning they may end up paying a fortune to get home afterwards. However, the First company bus prices were praised, as the group believed they were fair particularly their weekly bus ticket.

We next asked who they would tell if they had a problem with public transport. Answers included colleges, foster carers, and the workers at the Looked After Children’s Council. This was because they felt that they could trust these individuals and they were approachable. They said that they wouldn’t tell the companies themselves because it was time consuming, was expensive due to it not being a free number, and them being constantly redirected to people.

The final question was about what they would change regarding public transport if they could. There were several recommendations from their experiences and our overall discussions. The first one was to have more working cameras on the buses so that unacceptable behaviour like swearing, littering, and vandalism can be tracked and reduced in order to make the experience of using public transport more enjoyable and less stressful. Secondly, it was thought that more time should be spent cleaning the buses after a particularly busy period. This is felt to be necessary because it means that not only are there more seats available, but young people also said that the frequency they use services may increase as it is a more pleasant environment. The last recommendation that they proposed was improving the training for bus drivers. They proposed aspects such as training around customer service and also positive communication skills. In order to track its efficiency and effectiveness feedback forms or contact details could be put in a convenient location on the bus which asks for the driver’s name or number bus along with the experience regardless if

it is positive or negative, offering a motivation or reward for comments in order to get constructive feedback and a factor of accountability towards the drivers' behaviour.

The Looked After Children's Council also felt that this statement should be included in the report as they felt it was worth empathising:

"We are a child centred borough, but we leave children on the street when they can't afford the bus".^{xviii}

Rotherham Young Carers' Council

On Tuesday 12th July 2016 we held a focus group with the Rotherham Young Carers' Council. They were asked the same five open questions as the Looked After Children's Council and their responses were recorded.

Regarding the first question, the responses included one member sharing an experience when she forgot her bus pass on the way to school and the driver accepted a stranger, who recognised them, vouching for their age. Consequently they were allowed to get on the bus for young persons' fare. Another experience which was shared was when the bus driver allowed one member on for 10p less due to not having the right change for a specific journey. Both of these acts demonstrate the discretion some drivers use regarding young people.

However, when they answered the second question about any negative experiences they had had, yet again there were far more responses. One negative experience which was shared was about a bus driver who swore at the young person when asked if the bus went a certain way; as a result the young person didn't use the bus again for around 2 weeks and either walked or got a lift from their parents. Another experience was buses driving past young people who were signalling for the bus. This means that young people would be late for activities such as education, which has resulted in young people having to leave an hour earlier than actually needed in order to make sure that they arrive on time for lessons. Additionally, there have been incidents when young people have been charged full fare on the train even with a pass. Young people who rely on this mode of transport would be unable to afford this for long periods of time due to reasons such as not necessarily having disposable income available. Another issue was the inconvenience of having to know the routes and times of buses in advance as asking the drivers caused problems regarding rudeness and people being patronised. Furthermore, there was a recollection of a driver shutting the door on someone's leg. This is completely unacceptable and should not have happened. This put off this individual from using public transport due to the trauma it caused.

The cost of public transport they thought was unjustifiable, especially with it going up in

price. They felt that there needed to be a more uniform pricing system across South Yorkshire and services. Train pricing was particular issue which was highlighted, especially for local connections.

If a young person had a problem with the service they said that they would likely tell friends and family as they felt that companies and schools didn't seem "bothered" and "didn't listen" to the problems in a serious way. They also felt that the official process of providing feedback was too time consuming.

The first change that the Young Carers' Council proposed was to train the bus drivers in particular areas including customer service, in order to make the experience more pleasant and encourage young people to use the service more frequently. Another suggestion was to have cleaner buses, as the council felt that the condition and state of cleanliness of the buses were "not adequate for public usage" and something was required to be done. Also, more frequent buses would be desirable as some areas have bus services which don't run regularly or at convenient times, which means that traveling using public transport can be extremely difficult for some young people. The last recommendation that was proposed was to introduce a young carers' concession. This is because adult carers get free travel, but young carers do not get this and have to pay the normal fare. If a young carer accompanies someone under their care to a medical appointment this can become expensive as they have to pay standard young persons' fare, which can accumulate with multiple connections. The group suggested this be linked to the carers' card, which is given to young carers, as currently modelled in Doncaster.

The young carers asked for the following to be included in the report:

"Not enough good comments".^{xix}

Further Comments Collected

From the research, many other comments were collected and due to the sheer number we were not able to include them all. However, we felt that it was necessary to include a few of these as they helped form the report and the direction that it took as the writing progressed.

- "They need to think about the outside villages as well"
- "More free city buses- Wakefield had a free city bus, super, super useful"
- "Customer service of the drivers needs improving"
- "Make it easier for apprenticeship students and travel costs"
- "Fares need to be capped. Need to introduce oyster system"

Conclusion

After all of the data was collected and the report was compiled, I felt that a conclusion could be easily formed. Public transport is on the whole a good service, however, it does require some improvements. Examples include pricing, customer service, and punctuality; which all add to the experience of using public transport and have all been criticised more than complimented. If we did implement further or improve the existing training for customer service, then the consistency across South Yorkshire would be improved and you are more likely to have increased satisfaction more frequently. Also, having consistent tariffs will result in more people using public transport, allowing increased efficiency due to economies of scale. This will be beneficial to the customer satisfaction and the environmental aspects of the local areas.

Recommendations

1. Further the expiry date on the 11-16 Megatravel and 16-19 Student passes.

Instead of running out in July, leaving students with over a month where they pay adult fare, extend the duration to early September to allow young people to have the chance to get a renewed pass and avoid both confrontation and additional costs to young people.

2. Introduce a zero fare or free bus pass for 16-18 year old students going to a sixth form or college.

If you live further than a certain distance to go to sixth form or college, free travel should be available like for secondary and primary education in order to help with social mobility and improve flexibility of aspirations.

3. Improve the advertisement of various tickets.

By improving the advertisement of various tickets, people will be able to purchase the most appropriate ticket for what they need at a rate that is fairer and more affordable in the long term for a young person.

4. Invest in customer service training.

Invest in and improve training of individuals who are the face of the company, such as bus drivers, conductors, and complaints people, as they influence the opinions individuals hold

and affect the experience of service users. This could potentially improve the use of public transport.

5. Introduce an 'apprenticeship passes'.

Introduce an apprenticeship pass for 16-18 year olds who earn below a certain amount, to help encourage young people to use public transport to get to their apprenticeship, and to implement a fair system which addresses a social stereotype around apprenticeships.

6. Look at the cleanliness.

After a busy time period check, the buses, trams, and trains for any litter etc. which may make the experience unpleasant for other users. This could also free-up seating and reduce accidents of people slipping on litter.

7. Link the young person's carers' card to their fare.

If a young carer is with the person that they help look after, a free fare should be permitted, like it is for adults. This could be connected with the already distributed carers' card and would have no financial implication for implementation.

8. Improve how information is collected regarding complaints and praise.

By improving how the collection of data is carried out around the service from users, a true reflection of what is required can be gained, helping improvements to be made in the future. This could be done through a free phone number or a survey (either electronic or paper) with a small incentive to encourage participation.

9. Implement free chargers and Wi-Fi on all services.

Like on the X78, implement free charging points and Wi-Fi on services throughout the region. This may have financial implications but may be worth the investment.

10. Continue to promote timetables in a variety of ways.

By having both paper and electronic timetables, the accessibility to public transport will be at its optimum.

Special Mentions

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ⁱ (Rotherham Borough Council, 2015)

ⁱⁱ (Travel South Yorkshire, n.d.)

ⁱⁱⁱ (South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, 2014)

^{iv} (Travel South Yorkshire, n.d.)

^v (Travel South Yorkshire, n.d.)

^{vi} (Travel South Yorkshire, n.d.)

^{vii} (Travel South Yorkshire, n.d.)

^{viii} (Rotherham Youth Cabinet, 2016)

^{ix} (South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, 2014)

^x (First Transport, 2016)

^{xi} (Rotherham Advertiser, 2013)

^{xii} (South Yorkshire Transport, 2016)

^{xiii} (South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, 2014)

^{xiv} (Rotherham Youth Cabinet, 2016)

^{xv} (Rotherham Youth Cabinet, 2016)

^{xvi} (Upton, 2016)

^{xvii} (Rotherham Youth Cabinet, 2016)

^{xviii} (Council R. L., 2016)

^{xix} (Council Y. C., 2016)