

Working with young people to make buses better

A guide for the bus sector



About this guide

This guide is for anyone who works in the bus sector and provides information on how to work with young people¹ to make buses better for all.

This guide looks at:

- Why you should engage with young people
- What are the key concerns for young people
- Examples of ways that young people are working to improve their local transport services
- About the children and young people's sector, how to get in contact with young people and ways of engaging

¹ For the purposes of this guide the term young people is used to describe all children and young people up to the age of 19 (and up to 25 for those in public care or with learning difficulties).

Background to this guide

This guide was written after young people, bus companies, transport authorities and government departments got together to look at ways to improve young people's access to, and experience of, using buses. One of the suggestions was to write this guide.

A companion guide has also been produced providing information for young people on how the bus transport sector works and how they can make buses better in their community.

This guide is supported by the 'Taking forward travel and transport for children and young people group'.



Introduction

When asked what issues affect them, public transport is always at the top of young people's list of concerns. Travelling by public transport is central to young people's lives and those of their families and they are particularly dependent on public transport services as they are less likely to drive or be able to travel by car on their own.

Public transport allows young people to access education, employment, volunteering and social opportunities. At the same time, it helps them to develop social skills and the confidence to become independent.

Young people want to use public transport and understand that reducing private car use is an effective way of reducing carbon emissions. However, they face a number of barriers to making use of public transport. These include cost, safety, accessibility and availability. Everyone can face some barriers to using transport services but these are felt more strongly by young people living in poverty, disabled young people, young people in rural areas and some young people from minority ethnic groups.

Why involve young people?

Young people have said that they want to use public transport now and into adulthood, would like bus services that better meet their needs, and would like the transport sector to engage with them to improve their access to and experience of using bus services.

It would be a good idea to consult young people as we are here, we have time and we are prepared to help you.

Aneela, 14, Young NCB advisory group member

As it's our area, I want to ensure that the decisions are not being made by old men who don't understand what young people want!

Amy 16, Youth Councillor

I feel it's important for me to influence decisions as I know I have changed something for the better.

Tom, 14, Youth Councillor

Involvement brings respect and ownership. In other words, [services] are less likely to be defaced or vandalised if it is what young people want and they feel they have helped to create them.

Steering group member for a built environment project

Children and young people make up almost one fifth of the UK population. They are one of the largest user groups of public services – including public transport. However, often they are not asked for their views on the services they use. Participation or involvement has been shown to provide clear benefits to children and young people, to service providers and to the wider community. The [National Participation Forum](#)ⁱ, a group of influential organisations and individuals committed to the engagement of children and young people, believes that asking for and acting on young people views and experiences can “improve service planning, design and implementation” and help to “save money by making sure what's on offer is what children and young people want.”ⁱⁱ

Currently there is a strong thrust to empower local communities to make decisions about services in their local areas. As active participants in those communities, children and young people have a right to be heard and be involved in those decisions. When young people are engaged, not only will communities become stronger but perceptions of young people will improve. A report produced in partnership by the Local Government Group and the National Youth Agencyⁱⁱⁱ found that youth participation strengthens outcomes for local authorities by:

- Improving service delivery
- Leading to development of new appropriate provision
- Improving community cohesion
- Improving personal and social confidence in young people
- Improving skills of young people
- Improving the political literacy of young people
- Saving councils money

Case study: London's young people give their views on transport

TfL's Youth Panel was established to enable TfL to gain young people's views on transport policy, youth initiatives and campaigns. The Panel are aged between 14-25 years old. The Panel members meet several times per year, and smaller groups come together to work on specific projects and campaigns.

The members are drawn from a number of youth organisations including Platform 51, UK Youth, the Prince's Trust, the Children's Society and British Youth Council. The Panel also includes members of the GLA (Greater London Authority) Peer Outreach Workers.

The Youth Panel has helped TfL by:

- Acting as advocates for and helping to communicate campaign messages to their peers on issues such as Teen Road Safety, Zip It, Safer Travel at Night and Considerate Travel;
- Disabled young panel members have helped our Customer Research team with mystery shopping surveys;
- Panel members have taken part in an engagement event and responded to the Mayor's Transport Strategy consultation.

What are young people's key concerns about buses?

Availability and accessibility

For some young people, the lack of the right bus services at the right time can be a real barrier to getting around, particularly in the evenings and at weekends.^{iv} In addition, many young people say they struggle to find clear, accurate and useable information about local transport services and travel schemes. Often they do not feel confident about using what transport services are available.

Those living in rural areas face particular difficulties and find it hard to match timetables with their extra-curricular activities, social lives and post-16 education plans^v. Conversely, as shopping and leisure centres are increasingly located out of town centres, often without good transport routes, urban families who cannot afford a car are disadvantaged. They cannot access the same facilities as many other people or are forced to use expensive and complex transport services.



- **12%** of young people said the availability of transport made it difficult to do what they wanted in terms of post-16 education and training^{vi}.
- **More than 70%** of teachers said transport problems meant [rural] children have difficulty even getting to school or college^{vii}.

Case study: Improving rural transport services in Lincolnshire

Young people, council officers and people from transport companies met at a youth transport conference in January 2011 to discuss how they could find local solutions to transport problems in their area in rural Lincolnshire.

“The purpose of the conference was to assess how we can find solutions for these aims without any Government funding such as subsidies. It is hoped that by integrating all three sectors we can encourage better communication and develop a strong and lasting partnership that deals with the issues we face constructively and gives the public customer satisfaction.” **Joseph Hayat (18), conference host and Deputy Member of UK Youth Parliament for Lincolnshire**

Young people in the area experience the same problems as other young people in rural areas: bus services either might not exist at all or they are not available when young people want to use them and where they want to go.

Using the conference as a springboard, they are trying to look for creative solutions which will bring improved services and greater availability when and where young people need to travel but without increasing the cost either to the local authority or to the service user. Ideas being investigated include: staggering bus arrivals and departures meaning fewer vehicles could make more pick-ups; an on-demand community bus service for young people; and a youth transport Facebook group.



Safety and security



Despite crime on most transport systems continuing to fall, some studies have shown that young people are more likely than adults to rate personal security on public transport as ‘poor’^{viii} – but their safety concerns often mirror those of adults (large groups of people, antisocial behaviour by others, dark stations and lonely bus stops)^{ix}.

However, a young person’s

unpleasant experience while travelling by or waiting for public transport can have an impact on their choice of travel mode as an adult^x.

Parents and carers are key in making decisions about how young people travel, particularly for under 16s^{xi}. They are worried about their children using public transport – as well as cycling and walking alone – due to concerns about traffic and personal safety.

Sometimes, young people feel unwelcome on public transport and report that bus drivers, transport staff, police and the travelling public view them as potential troublemakers, which can lead to unnecessary confrontations and disputes^{xii}. However, when young people come together with transport providers and drivers to discuss behaviour on transport anecdotal evidence suggests they often reach agreement on what is acceptable behaviour for all parties.

- **84%** of young people feel unsafe when there are drunk and disorderly passengers on public transport even though the driver and other sober passengers might be there^{xiii}.
- **Over half** of under-19-year-olds have found bus drivers to be rude with 45% saying other adult passengers had been rude as well^{xiv}.

Cost

In a national survey 83% of young people said that they would use public transport if it was cheaper^{xv}. However, many young people find the current cost of public transport prohibitively expensive. It can affect what they do on an everyday basis and can have an impact on important choices such as taking up employment or accessing education.



While many local authorities, operators and other agencies do offer young people support in meeting travel costs, this is not universal. Where concessionary fares for young people do exist, young people can find inconsistency between, or even within, geographical areas on eligibility, restrictions on use and pricing levels confusing and frustrating, posing a barrier to travel. Consistency and simplicity of fares for young people can be just as important as cost in supporting young people to use public transport^{xvi}.

The *How can I make buses better?* guide helps young people become aware of how the bus sector works and the financial constraints under which operators, transport authorities and local authorities operate.

Case study: Affordable travel in Staffordshire

Staffordshire County Council has approved a new £1 youth bus fare across the county to start in June 2011. The Your Staffordshire card will give anyone aged under 20 the right to make any one-way journey for just £1 regardless of educational status. This is the result of a lengthy campaign by Staffordshire Youth Action Council (YAK) and will benefit thousands of Staffordshire young people.

To gather evidence of the need for this concession fare, YAK held conferences and led consultations over several years. Last year they also conducted a survey that received 1,800 responses with 60 per cent of young people saying a £1 ticket would get them to use the bus. Throughout the process, YAK maintained an on-going dialogue with county Councillors to keep them informed and emphasise the benefits of a mobile and independent youth population to other community members.

“ It’s great to see young people being heard and shows that the County Council is willing to listen and make change on behalf of young people. On a personal level it means I will be able to access wider positive activities in my community and help me to access volunteering opportunities.” **Matthew Mills (17), Financial Officer for Youth Action Council (YAK)**

- **Almost 70%** of respondents to a survey of young people up to the age of 17 said that the cost of travel ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ affects how frequently they use public transport or where they go^{xvii}.
- In one study, **18%** of young people identified the costs of transport as a barrier or constraint to pursuing post-16 education or training, and a third of those who did not go onto post-16 learning said they would have done so if they had had more money to cover transport costs^{xviii}.
- Older young people are particularly concerned about the sharp increases in bus fares at ages 14, 15, or 16 when discounted fares for children offered by operators might no longer apply^{xix}.

How can I engage with the children and young people's sector?

To involve young people in improving your services you will probably want to engage with the children and young people's sector as they will be able to help you facilitate contact with young people. They represent many existing groups of young people that you may be able to tap into to get views, ideas and work alongside. The sector will also provide expertise and experience in how to engage with a wide range of young people.

The children and young people's sector consists of all professionals, volunteers, agencies and organisations that work with, or are set up for the benefit of, young people. They might be in a local authority, the third or not-for-profit sector, or private organisations. The sector represents young people in a range of ways, such as through national and regional youth parliaments, regional and local youth councils and fora, youth groups and special interest groups.

Young people are generally defined as being up to the age of 19. However, young people with learning difficulties and in public care are classed as young people up to 25 years old. Different groups and settings have slightly different age categorisations.



It is important to think of young people as part of the wider community, not a separate section of it. As transport users, young people will have many concerns similar to users of all ages and could contribute to service improvement and planning across all aspects of your work.

It is also important to work with parents and carers to address their concerns about traffic and personal safety and to try and change their attitudes to public transport. By doing this it is more likely that they will encourage their children to use it.

Getting in contact with young people

Contacting your **local authority** may be a first option for getting in touch with existing groups of young people. If you are not successful contacting anyone via the participation team, the children's or youth services, you can contact the head of children's services within your local authority who should be able to put you in touch.

In addition, you can tap into other existing local networks of young people, like these:

Youth councils

A youth council is a democratic organisation created, run and developed by young people for young people. There are currently over 620 youth councils active across the United Kingdom. They exist to represent the views of young people at a local level giving young people the opportunity to have a voice, discuss relevant issues, and engage with decision-makers to contribute to improving the lives of



young people within their community. Youth councils work at all levels of local government including Parish and Community Councils as well as Unitary Authorities, Borough and County Councils.

The **British Youth Council** is the national youth council of the UK. It aims to connect with its member organisations and networks of local youth councils to empower young people aged 25 and under, wherever they are from, to have a say and be heard. You can find your local youth council at www.byc.org.uk



Youth parliament

Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) are elected annually in every part of the UK. There are currently over 600 MYPs and Deputy MYPs aged 11 to 18. MYPs meet with MPs and local councillors, organise events, run campaigns and hold debates. The most important part of their role is to make sure they represent the views of the young people in their constituency.

You can find your local MYP and the groups that support them by searching on the **UK Youth Parliament** website at www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk

Young mayors

A young mayor is a young person who is democratically elected by young people to represent them. There are currently more than 10 Young Mayors throughout the country. The **Young Mayor Network** gives directly-elected young mayors the chance to support each other and come together with a view to getting their voices heard on a national stage.

You can find out if there is a young mayor in your area by contacting your local authority or by visiting the **Young Mayor Network** website at www.ymn.org.uk

Informal fora and special interest groups

Lots of young people are involved in some kind of group even if it is not one of the above – it might be a sports club, a youth group or a campaigning group – but they will still have useful contributions to make. Some young people and groups of young people are often missed out when more formal methods of engagement such as the above are used. These could be young people who do not have the confidence to get involved, do not know about the groups or who services generally fail to engage. It is important that everyone is given the chance to have their say.

Your local authority can give you details of any groups that exist to support young people. These may include groups and fora for younger children, disabled children and young people, Children in Care Councils, and children and young people with caring responsibilities. Or you can try **Participation Works**, which is a partnership of children and young people's charities, will be able to put you in touch with groups in your area. Contact them at <http://www.participationworks.org.uk/> or enquiries@participationworks.org.uk

Other national bodies

Alongside those already mentioned, there are a number of other national young people's organisations that are involved in community action, national and strategic policy making and campaigns. Here are some examples:

The **National Council for Voluntary Youth Services** is a diverse network of over 250 national organisations and regional and local networks that work with and for young people. ENVOY is NCVYS's national youth forum and is a network of young people aged between **11 and 25 from across England**. Contact them at www.ncvys.org.uk

Young Advisors are young people typically aged between 15 and 21, who show community leaders and decision makers how to engage young people in community life, local decision-making and improving services. Visit their website at www.youngadvisors.org.uk

Young NCB is a national membership for children and young people up to the age of 18 who wish to speak out and take action on the important issues and decisions that affect them. The group is hosted by National Children's Bureau (NCB). Contact them at www.youngncb.org.uk

Ways of engaging

There are lots of ways that you can engage with young people. Take guidance and advice from whoever is facilitating your contact with the young people. Sometimes young people will already be involved in formal panels or council bodies. Other young people may prefer to be involved in different ways including doing research, writing letters or running a campaign. Holding meetings with young people can be time-consuming, expensive and not suited to some of the groups you might want to engage. But there are many other ways to get young people's voices involved – some young people enjoy contact via social media or online surveys which may only take a couple of minutes of their time, others prefer face-to-face engagement. The important thing to remember is to be open to suggestions, flexible, ready to listen – and ask what works best for the young people.

Resources

There are lots of resources available to help you to involve young people in your work. They can give you ideas and tools, show examples of what others have done, and give you the information you need to work safely and effectively with young people.

Here are some websites where you will find useful resources:

Participation Works is a partnership of six national children and young people's agencies that enables organisations to effectively involve children and young people in the development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their lives. It is a hub for information, resources, news and networking on the involvement of young people in dialogue, decision making and influence across a wide range of settings. Visit www.participationworks.org.uk/resources

The **British Youth Council** resource centre has downloadable training materials, consultation and campaigning guides, research and member briefings. Go to www.byc.org.uk/resource-centre

References

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- ⁱⁱ Participation Works (2010) *An Equal Place at the Table for Children and Young People*. London: NCB.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Local Government Group (2010) *Executive summary, Valuing voices, strengthening democracy: the contribution made by youth engagement*. London: LGG
- ^{iv} Department for Transport (2006) *Young People and Transport: their needs and requirements*.
- ^v See for example Storey and Brannen (2000) *Young People and Transport in Rural Areas*. Leicester: Youth Work Press
- ^{vi} National Foundation for Educational Research (2008) *Barriers to Participation in Education and Training*.
- ^{vii} Association of Teachers and Lecturers (9 September 2008) www.atl.org.uk/media-office/media-archive/lack-of-transport-blights-rural-lives.asp
- ^{viii} Department for Transport (2004) *Young People's Experiences and Perceptions*. (Tackling Crime on Public Transport Factsheet 5). London: DfT
- ^{ix} Department for Transport (2010) *Passengers' Perceptions of Personal Security on Public Transport – Qualitative Research Report*.
- ^x Department for Transport (2001) *Young people and crime on public transport: 10*
- ^{xi} Department for Transport (2006) *Young People and Transport: Understanding their needs and requirements*. London: DfT
- ^{xii} British Youth Council and NCB (2010) *Survey of under 18s on transport safety*
- ^{xiii} British Youth Council and NCB (2010) *Survey of under 18s on transport safety*
- ^{xiv} British Youth Council and NCB (2010) *Survey of under 18s on transport safety*
- ^{xv} UK Youth Parliament (2008) *Fares Fair*
- ^{xvi} Scott Wilson Transport Consultancy (2010) *Concessionary Fares for Young People research study*
- ^{xvii} Young NCB transport survey conducted in 2007, unpublished
- ^{xviii} National Foundation for Educational Research (2008) *Barriers to Participation in Education and Training*
- ^{xix} Department for Transport (2006) *Young People and Transport: Understanding their needs and requirements*. London: DfT