

Northern Transport Voices

Rural travel case studies

August 2023



Introduction

In early 2023 Transport for the North (TfN) launched a new online research community - Northern Transport Voices - which brings together over 500 citizens across the North of England. Members of the community are invited to engage in a wide range of research activities, designed to provide new evidence on transport behaviours, needs, challenges and opportunities in the North, to inform the development of transport policies and strategies.

The following study, a rural travel diary task, was designed to capture a detailed first-hand account of travel experiences within a two-week period in the life of rural residents of the North, presented in the form of a set of rural travel case studies that illustrate the diversity of rural travel, as well as some of its common characteristics and challenges.

Research method

Within the Northern Transport Voices community, 80 members (around 15% of the total) describe themselves as living in a rural area, as opposed to a suburban or urban area. A short survey was sent to these members to ask if they would be willing to complete a travel diary within a specific period (with an incentive in the form of a shopping voucher being provided to thank them for their participation). From the small pool of volunteers, 10 participants were recruited. The participants were asked to record all of the journeys they undertook on at least 7 days during a 2-week period (22 March – 5 April 2023). It should be noted that industrial action on the railways had been scheduled just prior and during this time period, potentially impacting travel behaviour.¹ For each journey, participants were asked to record details regarding the journey purpose, origin and destination, duration, mode of travel, rationale for the chosen mode of travel, and any transport challenges experienced.

This document presents the case studies developed on the basis of the travel diaries recorded. All participant names are pseudonyms, and some details have been omitted or redacted to protect participants' anonymity. Direct quotes from travel diaries are presented in double quotation marks.

The locations of the case studies presented include villages and outskirts of market towns in several areas of the North, including Cumbria, Lancashire, West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, East Yorkshire and Tees Valley. The demographic profile of the travel diary participants is also varied, with age ranges from 30-44 to 65-74, household income from £15,000-£29,999 to over £105,000, and different employment circumstances including full-time employed, self-employed, retired, and long-term sick or disabled.

The case studies present a range of different transport modes being used for different journey purposes. The private car is the exclusive or predominant mode

¹ On 16 March, 18 March, 30 March and 1 April members of the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) Union working for 14 train companies were to strike. The RMT called off strike action scheduled for 30 March and 1 April that had been poised to severely limit the rail network but many travel patterns and behaviour may well have already been impacted.

of transport used in five of the ten case studies (Fiona, Sarah, Peter, Barbara and Steve). In three case studies, participants had access to a private car but also used other modes of travel (Phil, John and Karen). Two of the participants did not have access to a private car, and predominantly used rail/walking (Laura) and bus/e-bike/walking (Pauline) to travel.

Key themes

Rural car dependency

High levels of private car travel are evident across the case studies. In many cases the private car is seen by the participants as the most convenient, reliable and comfortable mode of travel. Among those who use a private car most often, there is frequently the view that this is the only travel mode available to them. Various reasons are cited for this, depending on the journey purpose and the potential alternative mode(s) of travel. These reasons include limited, unreliable or non-existent bus services (mentioned by Fiona and Sarah), having to carry or collect physical items or equipment (mentioned by Phil and Peter), requiring a private car in the course of work (mentioned by Barbara), and lack of safe options for walking or cycling for the school run between rural villages (mentioned by Sarah). Beyond complaints about traffic congestion and roadworks, there was limited evidence of participants seeing their high level of private car use as difficult or challenging, for example in terms of cost or environmental impact, although Fiona's case study has some recognition of car dependency, causing Fiona to worry about how herself and her husband will travel when they are no longer able to drive due to older age.

Barriers to active travel

There is evidence of some active travel being carried out across many of the case studies. This is predominantly walking for leisure purposes or to get some exercise and fresh air (mentioned by Fiona, Laura, Phil, John and Barbara). Phil also mentions several bike rides for exercise/leisure purposes, and Pauline uses an e-bike as a day-to-day means of getting around, to carry out errands, as well as for leisure purposes, alongside using other modes such as bus. Phil's diary highlights how use of active travel in rural areas can be hampered by personal safety concerns, particularly at night/after dark, when walking or cycling on rural paths and roads does not feel safe enough. This is not limited to night-time however, as Sarah mentions not feeling safe enough to walk or cycle with her children to school in a neighbouring village, and opting for car journeys instead, even when the weather is good, and a walk would actually be preferable. With this particular type of journey, investment in safer walking and cycling routes to facilitate greater levels of active travel would offer a low-cost alternative to private car and public transport, and would have significant health, wellbeing and environmental benefits.

Mixed levels of bus use

Across this set of rural travel case studies, bus was the third most frequently used mode of travel after private car and walking. Motivations for using bus are quite varied – for some of the participants the bus is mostly used when

travelling for social occasions when they may be drinking, so driving would not be suitable (such as in Phil's and John's case), whereas for other participants the bus is a much more essential mode of travel for day-to-day journeys (Pauline and Karen). Both Pauline and Karen are frequent and confident bus users. Karen does have access to a private car which she shares with her husband, but frequently chooses the bus for everyday journeys due to the lower cost compared to the cost of fuel and parking.

Relatively low levels of rail use

Very limited level of rail use can be seen across most of the case studies, despite the fact many of the case study participants live in relatively built-up areas with a relatively reasonable proximity to a train station. As noted above, this may have been impacted by the industrial action on railways which was scheduled to take place during part of the 2-week travel diary period. The most rail-intensive case study is that of Laura, a frequent rail traveller without access to a private car, who benefits from good rail connectivity from her local train station in Settle. During the 14-day travel diary period Laura undertook 8 return journeys by train for different purposes, covering relatively large distances. For an individual like Laura, rail appears to be a viable option for the primary mode of day-to-day travel, combined with walking, although Laura does mention several complaints about some of her rail journeys, notably issues with cleanliness, overcrowding and noise on some services.

The only other instance of rail use mentioned in the case studies is Phil's outing from Todmorden to Manchester for a day out, driving to the station and then taking the train to Manchester to avoid traffic congestion and parking issues at his destination. This is a good example of the potential to encourage greater use of rail for leisure purposes, such as days out to nearby cities and towns, by combining the use of park-and-ride sites with rail. This option may also be suitable for journeys such as Fiona's family day out to Bridlington from Hull, and Sarah's family day out to Scarborough from Wetherby, both of which were undertaken by private car.



Image: Hull

Fiona, East Yorkshire

Home: Village on the outskirts of Hull

Age bracket: 65 -74

Employment status: Retired

Household income bracket: £15,000 - £29,999

Transport modes used: Private car, walking

During the travel diary period, Fiona walked a couple of times for journeys under half a mile (one instance was a leisure walk to get some fresh air, and the other instance to pick up prescriptions from the local chemist). All of Fiona's other journeys only involved the private car, both as driver, and as passenger when Fiona's husband was with her. The journeys she took by private car during the travel diary, usually in the company of her husband, included a trip to see a GP 3 miles away, 5 shopping trips (mostly to out-of-town retail parks between 5 – 8 miles away), and 3 leisure journeys (a visit to see family members in Hull, a day out at the local wetlands nature reserve 10 miles away, and a day out in Bridlington, 35 miles away).

In her diary Fiona refers to the couple's private car as "our trusty Yaris", and she describes it as "vital" for her everyday journeys. She considers travelling by private car the most convenient, partly due to health reasons, and partly due to limitations of the local public transport services.

"The car is the most convenient, not least because on longer journeys I often suffer chronic pain and the Yaris seats are comfortable."

"We do tend to rely on our car a lot as public transport in our area is dire."

"As both hubby and I are retired, hence getting older, I worry about the time when we can no longer drive solely because other public services are so bad."

Transport challenges experienced:

Limited local bus services – "There are bus services between the villages but none that would have allowed me to get to the GP appointment on time."

"We have no other means of getting to the shops as buses do not go to the areas I need to shop within."

"I suppose it would be nice if alternatives were available but I would not know where to start looking for them. There are buses that run between villages in my area but few and far between."

Road congestion and delays due to roadworks – "You certainly have to choose the right time of day for this Sainsbury's shop. If you hit it at work leaving times then you will be held up."

"[There was] a hold up upon leaving the store. It seemed the temporary lights installed for the roadworks were out of sequence"

Summary:

Apart from very short local walks, all of Fiona's journeys recorded in the travel diary were undertaken in a private car, demonstrating a very high degree of car dependency. This is something Fiona acknowledges in her diary, mentioning her worries about how herself and her husband will cope with accessing essential services by public transport when they are no longer able to drive due to older age. Fiona is aware of the option of using local bus services, but does not see them as reliable or convenient enough to use now (in comparison to the option of travelling by private car). Lack of knowledge or information about local bus services also appears to be a barrier for Fiona, as she mentions she wouldn't know where to start to identify public transport routes as an alternative to travelling by private car for some of the journeys she needs to undertake.



Image: The Bridestones, Todmorden

Phil, West Yorkshire

Home: Outskirts of Todmorden

Age bracket: 45 – 59

Employment status: Employed full time

Household income bracket: £45,000 - £59,999

Transport modes used: Private car, walking, cycling, train, bus

Phil travelled frequently and used a variety of transport modes during the travel diary period. On one occasion he went for a bike ride for exercise purposes, and a couple of times he walked to the local sports centre, 2 miles away (which he usually walks to, weather permitting). However, he also used his private car for several short journeys all under 2 miles in length (to collect food from a local takeaway, to take items to a recycling centre, and for a visit to a local pub). He also used the car for grocery shopping 10 miles away. Phil also undertook several other leisure journeys during his travel diary. In one instance, he got a lift from his son to Hebden Bridge for drinks with a friend, he then took the bus on the way back home. For a day out in Manchester, travelling by train, he said he preferred to take the train due to traffic and parking issues. He drove from his home to the local train station (less than 2 miles away) before getting the train to Manchester. Phil also travelled by private car for a leisure trip further away from home (to Crosby beach, Merseyside).

“Choice of walk / cycle / drive [to sports centre] dictated by weather and time constraints”

"Could have used the bus but impractical with many bags of shopping, plus the bus station is a fair walk, and it was throwing down with rain"

Transport challenges experienced:

- Active travel sometimes impacted by safety fears - "Could have walked but it was dark so didn't feel safe",

"Could have cycled if it had been earlier in the day, but it was dark and I'm not comfortable cycling on narrow roads at night."

Summary:

Phil travelled fairly frequently during the travel diary period for a range of purposes. He also demonstrated a wide range of transport modes used. His choices of mode of travel seem to be primarily driven by practical reasons, including time limitations, weather conditions, and the need to carry any items during the journey. Phil is keen on active travel, and could perhaps travel actively for short journeys even more often, instead of using the private car, however personal safety appears to be one of the barriers to this, as he does not feel safe walking or cycling in his area at night.



Image: Settle

Laura, North Yorkshire

Home: Settle

Age bracket: 30-44

Employment status: Self-employed

Household income bracket: £15,000 - £29,999

Transport modes used: Walking, rail, passenger in private car

Laura does not have access to a private car, and usually walks to local destinations. For destinations further afield, she walks to the train station in Settle and takes the train to her destination. During the travel diary period, she undertook several journeys by train: twice to Carlisle for work purposes, twice to Skipton for shopping purposes, once to Lancaster for an optician's appointment, and three times for leisure purposes (visiting a friend in Harrogate, and going for recreational walks in Horton in Ribblesdale, and at Ribbleshead Viaduct). A couple of times during the travel diary she also received lifts from friends that have a car (a friend dropped her off at Harrogate train station before she returned home by train, and on another occasion a friend gave her a lift home after grocery shopping).

Transport challenges experienced:

- Rail overcrowding: "I wish the train to Settle from Leeds had more carriages as it was packed full of people like sardines."
"Skipton train (the one that goes to Leeds) is always so packed with people and loud that I get a headache."

- Rail cleanliness: “How is it possible for a train carriage to have all seats dirty? I had to walk through 2 cars before finding a seat that was somewhat clean.”
- Limited rail services: “[I] worry [about] how long my recreational walk is taking in order to get back in time for the return train.”

Summary:

Laura is a reasonably frequent traveller who relies almost exclusively on rail for work purposes, for errands such as shopping and appointments, and for leisure purposes (including getting the train to access places in the countryside for the purpose of a recreational walk). Some of these journeys are comparatively long by distance. Her diary suggests she is generally satisfied with rail as a mode of travel, except for issues of overcrowding and cleanliness on some of her journeys. She also feels somewhat limited by the frequency of rail services in the evenings, and worries about missing the return train home when on social outings or recreational walks further afield.



Image: Wetherby

Sarah, West Yorkshire

Home: Village between Leeds and Wetherby

Age bracket: 45 - 59

Employment status: Employed full time

Household income bracket: Over £105,000

Transport modes used: Private car

During the travel diary period, Sarah undertook all of her journeys by private car. She used the car every weekday to take her two primary-school aged children to and from school in a nearby village, a journey of 2 miles each way. On one instance of the school run, she mentions she would have preferred to walk as the weather that day was lovely, however she feels that the car is the only option for the school run as they live in the rural countryside.

She also used the car for several other trips, all under 5 miles in distance, including two trips to the local golf club, two grocery shopping trips (one in Wetherby and one in Seacroft), and a journey to a Wetherby leisure centre for children's swimming lessons. In addition, Sarah used her car for a shopping trip to Leeds city centre, and a day out in Scarborough with the family.

"We live in a rural village, so the car is the option for making the school run"

[speaking about journey to Leeds city centre] "I travelled in my personal car. I couldn't walk as it's too far and the roads are not so safe to be walking on, also it was raining very heavily at the time. My car is warm, easy and convenient. I

could have walked to the bus stop and caught the bus, however, they are not at all reliable and are too infrequent.”

Transport challenges experienced:

Road traffic congestion: “A few traffic queues, especially on Marine Drive.”

“A small bit of traffic driving towards the town centre, nothing major”.

Summary:

Sarah’s diary suggests she is generally satisfied with the use of private car for most of her journeys and she perceives this to be the only available option for most, if not all, of her journeys, whether short or long.

There is some indication that Sarah would sometimes prefer to walk with her children for the school run, especially when the weather is nice, however she does not feel that the rural route of the school run is safe enough for walking.



Image: Skipton

John, North Yorkshire

Home: Village in the Craven district of North Yorkshire

Age bracket: 65-74

Employment status: Retired

Household income bracket: £15,000 - £29,999

Transport modes used: Private car, bus, and walking

John owns a car and uses it regularly for trips of varying distances. During the travel diary he used the car to visit his daughter and to drop his wife off at his daughter's 9 miles away. He also used his car to go shopping in Skipton and Silsden and to visit the local town hall in Skipton (all journeys of under 20 minutes by car each way). John also used the car to drop his wife off swimming at a leisure centre in Skipton. John recorded some nested trips from the leisure centre; after dropping his wife off at the leisure centre he walked just under a mile (roughly 15 minutes) to Tesco in Skipton because he preferred to walk. The leisure centre was also a base for his volunteering trip; John drove to the leisure centre and then walked to the site where he volunteers with his wife, around a mile away (roughly a 20 minute journey on foot).

John also used the car to check on and collect his caravan near Clitheroe (a 25 minute journey). During the travel diary John collected his caravan and visited Clitheroe with his wife, a 20-minute journey from the caravan storage unit. While in Clitheroe John also used his car to access local shops. He also walked to a pub while away, but mentioned that this was because there were no buses available.

John recorded three round-trip journeys by bus, taking 30 minutes or less in each direction, throughout the course of the travel diary. These were social outings to pubs in Keighley, Skipton and surrounding villages, where he was likely to have a drink and therefore it would not be suitable to drive.

Throughout his travel diary, John also recorded some walks, on one occasion he completed a circular route of nearly 5 miles, taking 105 minutes. This was a social walk he completed with his wife and friends, and he drove to the start point, just over 5 miles from his home. He also logged a walk from home with his wife, which was just over 4 miles.

Transport challenges experienced:

- Roads: Temporary traffic lights in his village and heavy traffic around Colne caused delays to some of John's journeys.
- Bus availability in another town (Clitheroe) : [could have used] "bus to save walking, NONE available"

Summary:

John used the car for most of his journeys, and often took walks as a separate leisure trip to his everyday journeys to the local town, to the shops and to his daughter's. He also used his car to go on holiday with his caravan. He used the bus occasionally, mainly for social trips to the pub, where he was travelling for around 30 minutes.



Image: Workington

Pauline, Cumbria

Home: Outskirts of Workington

Age bracket: 45 - 59

Employment status: Long term sick or disabled

Household income bracket: £15,000 - £29,999

Transport modes used: Bus, walking, e-bike, taxi

Pauline regularly uses both the bus and her e-bike to travel. During the travel diary period she used the e-bike for two return journeys, which lasted around 20 minutes per journey, travelling roughly 2 miles into Workington town centre. She used the e-bike for local trips, when going shopping and collecting dinner. On one occasion, Pauline experienced a tyre puncture and so had to walk home instead, the journey took 90 minutes to walk. Pauline also uses the e-bike when she wants to get out for a cycle.

Pauline also uses the bus to travel into Workington town centre either with her wife or on her own, she travels to Workington to shop, to eat out, and for appointments. Pauline also uses the bus to travel slightly further afield to go shopping in Maryport and Whitehaven (both around 7 miles away from her home). The journeys take around 30 minutes for Pauline by bus including her walk to the bus station, roughly 10 minutes from her home. Pauline enjoys using the bus, she describes it as helpful and gives her confidence for her journeys, with the assurance that she won't get lost. Pauline used the bus to travel 12 times during her travel diary. On one occasion Pauline travelled with her wife via taxi for a return journey to pick up medicine in Workington town centre. The

journey took approximately 5 minutes to travel 2 miles. Pauline said that she sometimes uses a taxi and on this occasion it was because her wife's legs were sore.

"Very enjoyable travelling on public transport, the drivers are always friendly and very helpful."

"[I] like travelling on the bus, as you get used to the regular passengers"

Transport challenges experienced:

Punctured e-bike: During one journey Pauline experienced a punctured e-bike tyre and so a journey that usually takes her 20 minutes took her 90 minutes.

Noisy Bus: "... a squeaky bus, the noise was so bad it was going through my teeth"

Summary:

Pauline's main mode of transport was the bus, she enjoyed using the bus and commented that it gave her confidence for her journey. Pauline uses the bus to make local trips that take between 15 and 30 minutes. She travels between 2 and 7 miles by bus. For shorter trips into Workington (of roughly 2 miles) Pauline sometimes uses an e-bike.



Image: River Wyre

Karen, Lancashire

Home: Village in the Wyre borough of Lancashire

Age bracket: 45 – 59

Employment status: Employed full time

Household income bracket: £30,000 - £44,999

Transport modes used: Bus, private car, walking

Karen owns a car which she shares with her husband. Throughout her travel diary she used the car only once, as a passenger for an outward journey to visit friends before a social evening out, a 10 minute journey from her home. Karen and her friends then travelled the remainder of the journey on the bus to Poulton le Fylde, for a social evening. The journey on the bus was 6 miles and took 10 minutes. Karen returned home from her evening via bus.

The remainder of Karen's journeys recorded in her travel diary were taken by bus – Karen commented that she lives a short walk from the bus station. Karen's trips were mainly local trips to the library, to the opticians, visiting the local town and market, and visiting friends (all of these journeys were under 20 minutes in duration on the bus). Karen also took longer journeys by bus; she visited Blackpool via bus to go to a bank appointment, commenting that the local branch had been closed and so the travel was necessary. The journey was 10 miles and took 45 minutes by bus, which was used because her car wasn't working that day. The bus stop was a 15 minute walk from the bank. Karen commented that this is a long journey to take by bus and she would have

preferred not to. Karen also travelled to a library slightly further afield, travelling to Poulton le Fylde Library, roughly 20 minutes away, again by bus. Karen also used the bus on a bad weather day, travelling more locally to visit a friend who was 1 mile away and this journey took 5 minutes by bus.

"I could have used the car and driven there but I am trying not to use the car for short journeys, especially at the weekends when I have more time. It would have cost more as well."

Transport challenges experienced:

Cost of fuel & traffic congestion:

- "I could use the car, but it would have been more expensive, and I was not getting any heavy shopping."
- "I could have driven into Poulton but not only is it dearer in terms of fuel but there is major roadwork going on near the River Wyre and you just get stuck in traffic. I also was only doing a small amount of shopping and I had my son with me who can carry the shopping for me."

Parking:

- "I could have driven to Poulton but there are roadworks near the River Wyre and it is hard to park on market day. Also it is cheaper to get the bus than pay for fuel and parking."
- "I could have driven to Poulton but that would leave my husband without the car. Also, it is cheaper to get the bus and not have to pay for parking."

Summary:

Karen logged eight return journeys throughout the course of the travel diary, her main mode of transport throughout her travel diary was the bus for a range of everyday trips. She commented in her diary that this is a conscious choice for a number of reasons; she shares the car with her husband and sometimes he is using it, she actively tries to use the bus more often when she has the time (particularly at weekends), due to the cost of fuel, issues with parking also made Karen choose to take the bus for some of her journeys. Often where Karen took the bus, it was the most convenient option for her.



Image: Cockermouth

Peter, Cumbria

Home: Cockermouth

Age bracket: 45 - 59

Employment status: Self Employed

Household income bracket: Prefer not to say

Transport modes used: Private car, motorbike

Peter used a private car to make journeys to work. These ranged from 1 mile to 16 miles, lasting between 3 and 45 minutes. For his journeys to work he had equipment to carry. Peter also used his car to go shopping, 9 miles away. The journey to the shops lasted approximately 9 minutes and car was used to carry his shopping. During the travel diary, Peter also used a motorbike for a leisure trip to Keswick, travelling approximately 16 miles.

Transport challenges experienced:

During Peter's travel diary, he experienced issues with road congestion and road works which delayed his journeys to work and coming home.

Summary:

Peter logged five return journeys throughout his travel diary, most of these were commuter trips by car which he relies upon to carry equipment that he needs for work. He also used his car to go shopping and be able to get the shopping home. He logged one leisure journey, where he travelled by motorbike, for fun.



Image: Barnoldswick

Barbara, Lancashire

Home: Barnoldswick

Age bracket: 45 - 59

Employment status: Employed full time

Household income bracket: £15,000 - £29,999

Transport modes used: Private car, walking

Throughout the course of the travel diary, Barbara recorded 5 return journeys to work via private car, her commute is approximately 17 miles each way, lasting between 25 and 35 minutes. Barbara also uses her car to travel to study days at the local hospital, this journey is slightly shorter lasting 20 minutes, where she travelled approximately 5 miles. Barbara stated that she needs her car for work and noted that traffic was much quieter during school holidays, allowing for a shorter journey on her way home (taking 25 minutes). Barbara also recorded a trip to the hairdressers that she made by car, she travelled 36 miles from her home to Swinton where she gets her hair cut. The journey took her roughly one

hour each way. Barbara also logged a local walk with her dog, where she travelled 2 miles, the walk lasted approximately 40 minutes.

"I need my car in the course of my job so public transport is not an option for travel to work"

Summary:

Throughout the travel diary, Barbara logged 6 return journeys to work or to her study day by private car and didn't report any transport related issues. Most of Barbara's journeys using her private car were between 20 and 30 minutes. Her longest journey was to the hairdressers, where she travelled one hour each way.



Image: Saltburn-by-the-Sea

Steve, Tees Valley

Home: Saltburn-by-the-Sea

Age bracket: 60-64

Employment status: Employed, full time

Household income bracket: £15,000 - £29,999

Transport modes used: Private car

Steve owns a car and used it for all of his trips recorded in his travel diary. He used his car for a range of trip purposes, including health related journeys (visiting the hospital, collecting a prescription from the pharmacist, a visit to the chiropodist), to do his weekly shop and to refuel his car. His longest journey was nearly 15 miles and took approximately 25 minutes, to reach Middlesborough hospital. His journey to the chiropodist was a 7 mile journey and took approximately 15 minutes. All of Steve's other journeys were between 2 and 3 miles and took between 5 and 10 minutes.

Transport challenges experienced:

- Road Congestion: Steve mentioned that road works and temporary traffic lights causing delays were the only challenges with his journeys.

Summary:

Over the course of the travel diary Steve recorded five journeys and used his car for all journeys. For two journeys, he said that using a bus would have been possible, however would have prolonged the journey. Most of the journeys he recorded were essential trips that were health related.



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