

The cost of staying connected

An investigation into the cost-of-living for those most at risk from transport-related social exclusion

June 2023



Executive summary and key findings	2
Introduction.....	4
Aim, objectives and methodology	7
Evidence review.....	9
Primary research	9
Evidence consolidation.....	14
Evidence review	15
Cost-of-living in the UK.....	16
Demographic and intersectional identities.....	18
Age.....	19
Gender	22
LGBTQ+	23
Caring responsibilities.....	24
Disabilities and long-term health conditions	26
Ethnicity and migration status.....	27
Summary: evidence application to the North of England	29
The impacts of the cost-of-living in the North.....	30
Accessibility	31
Behaviour changes and frequency of travel.....	34
Community and the high street.....	35
Mental health	37
The cost-of-living	39
Transport behaviours and choices.....	42
Summary: The impacts of the cost-of-living in the North	45
Decoding the cost-of-living analysis	46
Concluding remarks	51
Appendix and references	53
Appendix	54
References.....	55
Report information.....	65

The pressures many felt at the peak of inflation are still being felt by some of the most vulnerable people in our society, indicating that cost-of-living pressures could be here to stay. Cost-of-living research shows that those with disabilities, caring responsibilities, those in low paid work amongst other groups are most at risk from increased costs-of-living. Incidentally, these sections of society have been found to be at risk from transport-related social exclusion too. This paper investigated how some of these very groups are being impacted by the cost-of-living, with focus on how travel behaviours are being affected. Reduced travel and opting for alternative modes of travel were found consistently which was seen to be negatively impacting people's mental health and wellbeing. These findings suggest that the cost-of-living is sustaining and exacerbating social exclusion.

Background and methods: This report is a follow-up to Transport for the North's (TfN) Connecting Communities strategy which sets out a vision for reducing transport-related social exclusion (TRSE) and commits to assessing how the rising cost-of-living may impact social exclusion. We fulfilled this by carrying out an extensive literature review on the impacts of the cost-of-living across different demographic and socioeconomic as well as conducting primary research to help shape our own Northern evidence base into this area.

Defining TRSE and the cost-of-living: TRSE is the inability to participate fully in society due to a restriction of opportunities, key services, and wider community life, due to challenges in travelling and mobility. Unlike TRSE, defining cost-of-living pressures is much more fluid and ambiguous. In general, the cost-of-living refers to the impacts of declining real income levels in the context of persistently high inflation. This report focuses specifically the rapid rise in inflation seen in the UK in 2021 and 2022, and the persistently high level of inflation seen in 2022 and 2023, and the impacts of this on populations at a higher risk of TRSE.

Population impacts and key findings: The cost-of-living is disproportionately impacting people living with disabilities and long-term health conditions, those from an ethnic minority background, women, young people, people with caring responsibilities and LGBTQ+ people. Economic inequalities such as higher unemployment rates, large pay gaps in the workforce and higher monthly outgoings mean these communities are at a significant disadvantage when costs-of-living increase. For many communities, even prior to high inflation, the daily costs to live were already a struggle. This research found the cost-of-living is changing the frequency many are travelling which is affecting the mental health of many: guilt, lack of confidence, depression and loneliness are some of the feelings being felt by those in high-risk TRSE groups. Alternative modes of travel are now being considered as is whether the purpose of the trip itself is necessary. In short, those most at risk from TRSE are facing more constrained travel decisions and consider whether travelling is worth it.

Solutions: Addressing TRSE requires significant transport investment across the North, and the targeting of that investment to areas and populations that face the highest risk. Improving services and integrating different modes and networks across boundaries will provide access to opportunities that will enable people in the North to lead a more fulfilled life, both socially and economically and increase community cohesion and social inclusion. The findings in this report build upon our Connecting Communities strategy and greater emphasise the urgency in addressing issues such as improving rural mobility, making transport more affordable and greener and accessible for more people across the North by implementing our regional vision by 2050.



- 1 -

Introduction

TfN first began advocating for a socially inclusive transport system in the North in 2019 with the very first Strategic Transport Plan. Delivering access to key services and opportunities for all is key to reducing social exclusion in the North, particularly amongst marginalised communities in our society. Understanding TRSE and addressing its challenges supports the wider aim of rebalancing the UK economy and allowing our diverse communities to flourish. This report builds upon the extensive work that TfN has carried out previously on TRSE and begins building an evidence base looking into the effects that cost-of-living pressures are having on the 3.3 million from communities in the North most at risk from social exclusion.¹ Extending our evidence base to incorporate the cost-of-living element grows our TRSE evidence base, advancing the urgent need for economic investments in transport, so the lives of those most at need can be improved whilst reducing inequality and boosting growth in the economy.

The Connecting Communities strategy TfN published in May 2023 sets out a regional vision on how to significantly reduce TRSE in the North by 2050, and the policy framework necessary to achieve this. This includes measures such as integrating ticketing across administrative boundaries and modes of public transport, improving safety and acknowledging a diversity of travel patterns and behaviours outside of peak times and major commuter routes.² Additionally, Connecting Communities sets out a commitment to conducting research into the impacts of the cost-of-living pressures on communities impacted by TRSE. This report fulfils this commitment by reviewing literature on the impacts of the cost-of-living on some of the population groups most impacted by TRSE, and presenting qualitative insights from residents of the North on how transport-related difficulties are impacting their daily lives and how the cost-of-living might have changed their travel behaviour.

Whilst research on the impact of the cost-of-living on communities across the UK and research on TRSE are both plentiful, little research has been done to understand whether the cost-of-living is exacerbating TRSE. There is, however, reasons to expect these impacts: for example, younger people are seeing their nominal wealth drop more than older age groups, women are more likely to view the cost-of-living as a source of worry, and those with caring responsibilities are facing greater affordability challenges. Further, many people with disabilities are seeing their monthly outgoings skyrocket despite low levels of employment and high levels of poverty. This indicates that the cost-of-living is likely to exacerbate the inequalities that contribute to TRSE but leaves a significant gap on the elements and extent of this relationship.

Responding to this evidence gap, this report uses qualitative insights from Northern residents to understand how the cost-of-living is impacting them and their travel behaviours, patterns, and perceptions. Impacts ranged from isolation and declining mental health to high costs in accessing key destinations by public transport, deciding to make fewer journeys overall, and greater focus on transport affordability relative to other costs. The themes echoed wider transport issues that are linked to TRSE. Drawing upon this evidence, particularly from the focus groups, a much-needed Northern perspective is being added to the cost-

of-living research space. Furthermore, it allows us to continue to argue that TRSE is disproportionately impacting specific, often marginalised, populations and therefore public transport and active travel needs serious investment to create an equal and equitable North of England.

Finally, this report builds upon extensive TRSE-related work that TfN has done previously. It presents the foundations to an evidence base on how the pressures from costs-of-living are interacting with TRSE and what impacts people are feeling. The findings and conclusions give TfN the opportunity to further research the cost-of-living impacts, as well as other issues impacting transport on a bigger, more conclusive scale. In doing so, we can continue to work effectively with our local partners and stakeholders, using our Connecting Communities strategy as a framework in tackling TRSE in our region.



- 2 -
**Aim,
objectives
and
methodology**

Aim, objectives and methodology

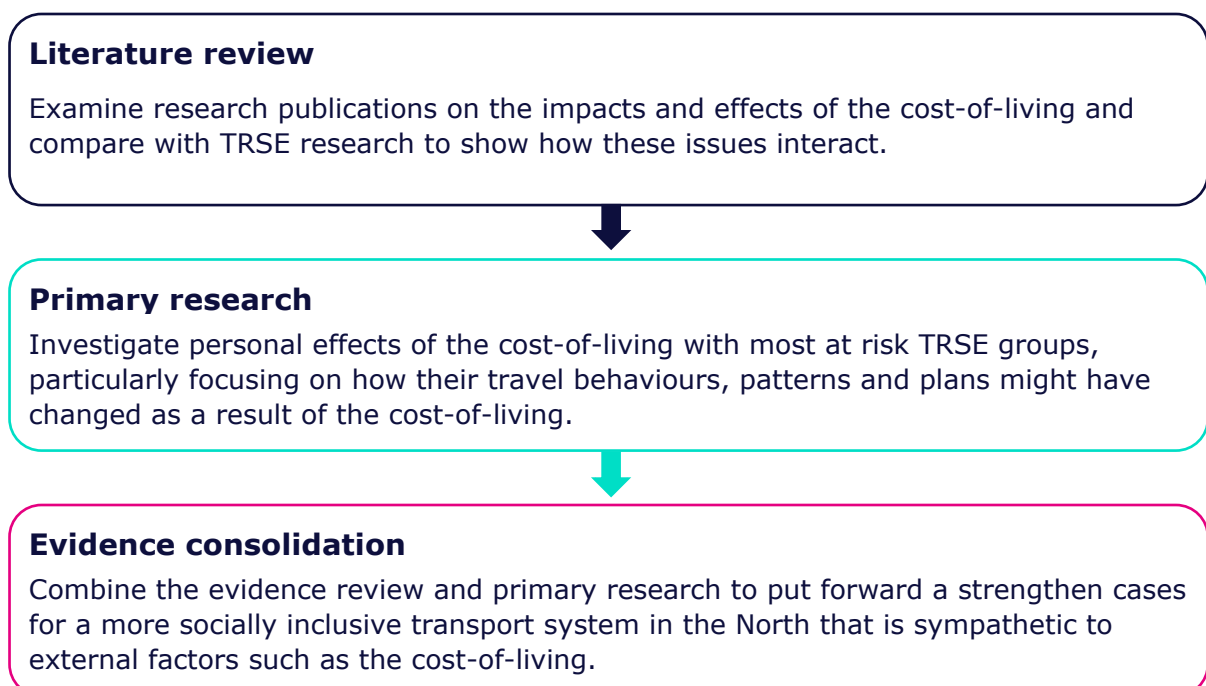
The potential cross-over of impacts and effects felt by the increased cost-of-living and TRSE and how the former may exacerbate the latter is explored at length in the literature review section that follows. Previous TfN research into TRSE informed the approach taken in this research as we engaged with demographics and socioeconomic groups vulnerable to TRSE. In doing so, we can begin to understand how the cost-of-living may be impacting social exclusion further. In reviewing the wealth of evidence into the cost-of-living that is out there, we can identify where these crossovers with TRSE are and go on to explore these more in-depth with communities across the North which is TfN's aim with this body of work.

In meeting this aim, we can expand our current TRSE evidence base on the determinants and nature of TRSE and show how unexpected events such as high inflation can impact the way people in the North use the transport systems and networks to remain connected. Inflation may now have peaked, but we consistently see from current research that the impacts and effects are not lifting and therefore could leave a significant long-term legacy. Having this new cost-of-living element in our TRSE evidence base, we can take the necessary actions along with our partners and stakeholders to ensure transport plans, strategies and policies are working in the best way they can for local communities, whilst we continue to advocate for further transport investment in the North from central government.

To meet this aim, the following objectives for this research are:

1. Review external evidence on the impacts the cost-of-living is having on key demographics
2. Engage with Northern communities to understand how the cost-of-living is impacting them personally, focusing on their travel behaviour, patterns and difficulties they experience whilst travelling

Diagram 1.1 – cost-of-living research methodology



Evidence review

In the first stage of this research, we undertook an extensive review of current literature on the cost-of-living impacts across a range of demographic groups. This included a focus on transport themes where these were present in the literature. Where the literature did not directly reference transport effects, previous TRSE research was used to link the two areas, highlighting the similarities in outcomes among different population groups.

The evidence we reviewed ranges from academic publications, public sector and research agency reports, and TfN's publication. The sources used in the evidence review were evaluated for relevance, peer reviewed status, methodological rigour, sub-themes and empiricism in looking at age, gender, LGBTQ+, disability, caring responsibilities and ethnicity. We then used the outcomes of this review to inform the sample requirements and key themes for the primary research element of the project.

Primary research

The primary research investigated how the increases in cost-of-living are manifesting in people's lives, focusing on how the increased costs with transport are affecting them and their daily lives. This aim was met by running two focus group sessions with members of the public who all reside in one of the three regions of the North. Each session had five participants who took part virtually on an online platform. The research process is demonstrated and summarised in Diagram 1.2.

Diagram 1.2 – primary research approach

Focus group sessions

Collaborate with the Northern Transport Voices project to have direct access to a sample of 500+ people who reside in North and come from various demographic and socioeconomic groups to establish how cost-of-living pressures is impacting them on a daily basis.

Two 75 minute sessions with five participants in both. Participants all resided in either the North East, North West or Yorkshire and the Humber and fell into age ranges from 30-44 to 65-74. Participants all had an annual household income of under £15,000 or between £15,000 and £29,999.

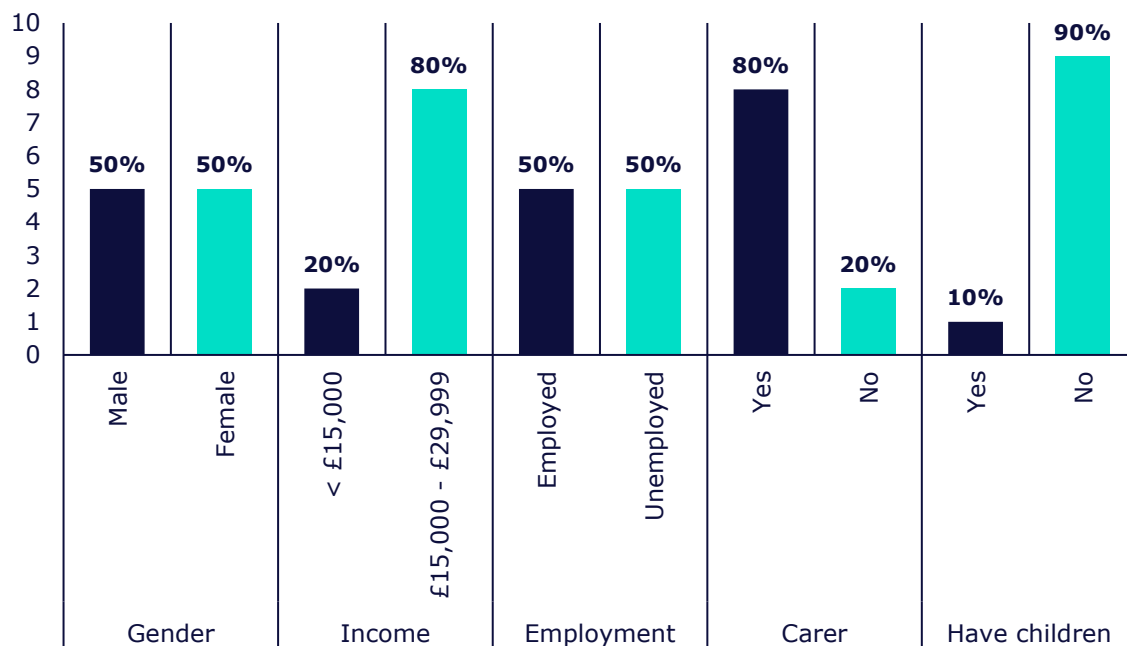
Explore themes such as difficulties with the current transport system, how is the cost-of-living impacting travel behaviours and patterns, the impacts of these behaviour changes and what they feel needs to be done about the cost increases with transport.

Due to the nature of this project and the overall aim of the research, taking a qualitative approach was the most appropriate. By its very nature, the cost-of-living is a sensitive topic and to understand how people are coping with price increases and what their daily lived experiences as a direct line of communication felt best placed to allow us to explore themes and areas that could be missed through quantitative methods or other qualitative approaches.

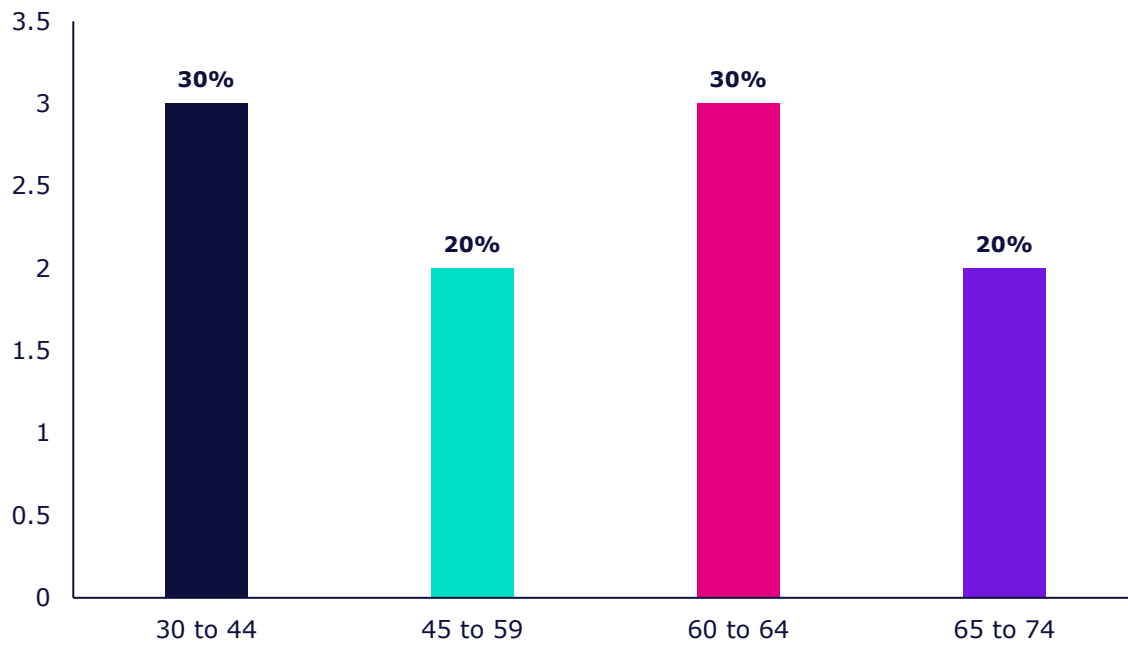
Northern Transport Voices is an online research community project led by TfN, consisting of more than 500 members. Members are drawn from diverse areas of the North, and from varied and diverse social and economic groups. As part of the project, the community are involved in a number of research activities ranging from focus groups, surveys, and travel diaries. The community are regularly consulted on a range of transport topics including their views on more sustainable modes of delivering goods, electric vehicles, and rural mobility. Consequently, asking for views on the cost-of-living in the context of transport was not out of the ordinary for the community, which meant gaining valuable insights from an engaged and diverse group of participants was more likely.

Before the selection of participants, we developed a criteria list to focus the primary research on those who are particularly vulnerable to TRSE and to cost of living impacts. As stated throughout this paper, a number of demographic groups are more at risk of TRSE than others, but economic impacts are also highly significant in general. With this in mind, engaging with those on lower incomes from the community was a key priority and the starting point in the participant selection process. Other criteria screened for included: public transport usage, rural and urban area type, access to a car or van, and their experience of a range of transport issues. Characteristics of the sample can be seen in Graph 1.1 to Graph 1.5.

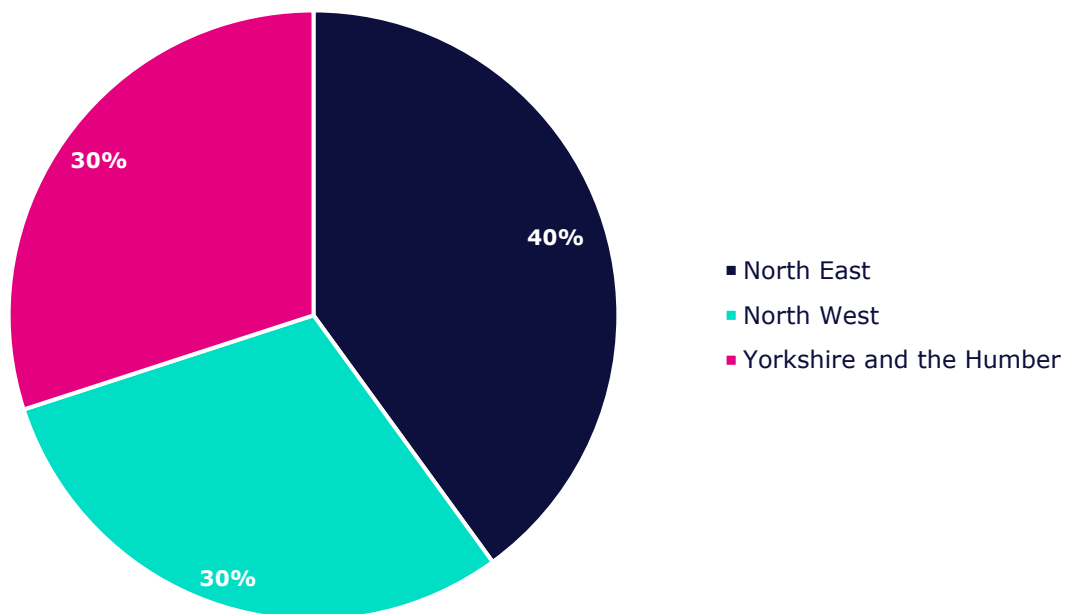
Graph 1.1 – sample characteristics: demographics and socioeconomics



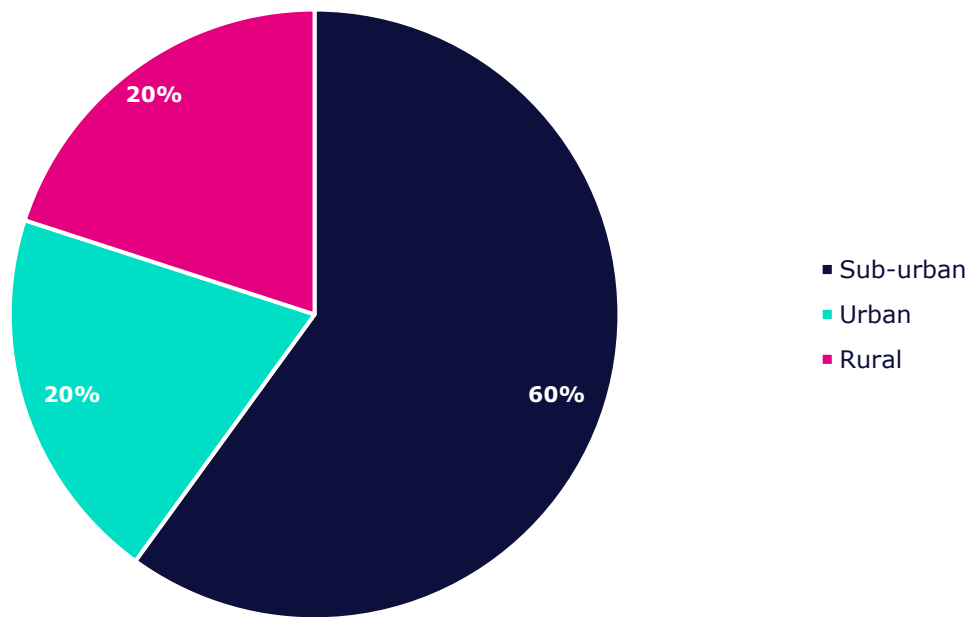
Graph 1.2 – sample characteristics: age



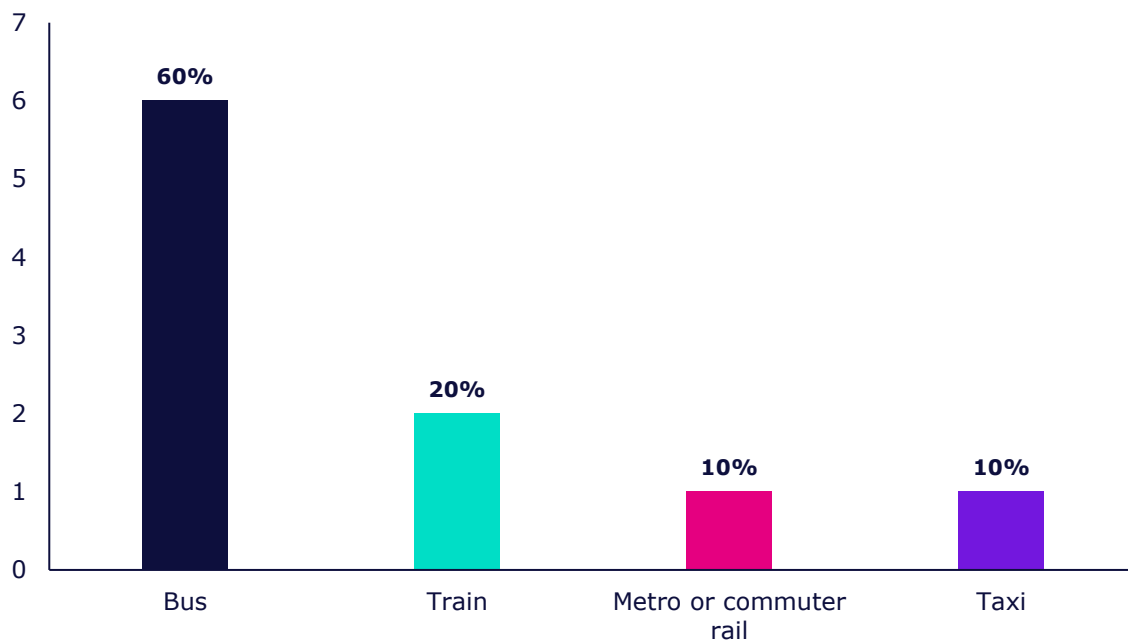
Graph 1.3 – sample characteristics: region



Graph 1.4 – sample characteristics: location type



Graph 1.5 – sample characteristics: typical public transport mode used



We used a deductive thematic analysis approach to these sessions. Upon conducting an evidence review of the research into the cost-of-living and TRSE, it was clear that certain themes and concepts were consistent and universal amongst different demographics in response to increases in the costs-of-living. As a result, the themes raised in the focus groups were expected to confirm and extend upon these themes from the literature further.

Prior to starting the focus group sessions, we used the evidence review outcomes to devise a coding theme guide. This allowed us to assess whether the participants in the focus groups had similar or opposing experiences and lived realities of the cost-of-living compared to what is included in the literature. Additionally, the coding theme guide was utilised as a supplementary document for the moderator of the sessions, along with the discussion guide. The coding theme guide is summarised in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 – coding theme guide

Themes	Very likely	Likely	Possible
High costs	●		
Mental health		●	
Isolation and loneliness	●		
Reduced services		●	
Safety concerns			●
Family and friends	●		
Employment	●		
Caring responsibilities	●		
Climate change		●	

Following the sessions, we coded the data using thematic analysis. This involves seeking out singular topics that fit into broader themes, creating dimensional insights whilst attempting to explain phenomena.³ This was undertaken using qualitative data analysis software (NVivo), and included producing a number of charts, tables and graphs to guide insights from the qualitative dataset.

Thematic analysis is often seen as a foundational qualitative research method, with some suggesting the method is simply a process adopted by other methods and not a rigorous method in its own right.⁴ However, others argue that thematic analysis is a valid methodological approach and creates insightful findings.⁵ This research project takes the view of the latter and felt the research design gives flexibility and allows for the synergy of studying TRSE and cost-of-living, again, providing scope for future research projects in this area.

Evidence consolidation

In the final phase of this research project, we consolidated the evidence gathered through the review and primary research. This report sets out this consolidated evidence base, demonstrating how the cost-of-living is contributing to social exclusion, and the interactions of this with TRSE. The report sits alongside previous TfN TRSE research and fulfils the commitment set out in the Connecting Communities strategy that TfN would research the cost-of-living pressures.



- 3 -

Evidence review

TfN's work on TRSE takes a multidisciplinary approach, both in terms of researching the social phenomenon and in devising possible solutions and policies to tackle the inequalities inherent in our transport system. As a general framework, we categorise TRSE into the following elements that contribute to or are related to the exclusion of certain groups:

Geographical exclusion: Residential area types and the distribution of transport resources limits or prevents access to transport systems and networks.⁶

Physical exclusion: Challenges within the transport infrastructure, such as stations and stops that have not been adapted for those with disabilities or their proximity to areas that do not lend themselves favourably to accessing via walking, wheeling or cycling. Physical exclusion has also been applied to the wider built environment and how the distances from key facilities such as schools, healthcare locations and employment sustain exclusion.

Economic exclusion: The monetary costs of traveling limit or restrict people accessing and using public transport.⁷

Time-based exclusion: Demands based on time, such work, household and child-caring responsibilities.⁸

Spatial exclusion: The security or space allocation prevents groups from accessing spaces, e.g., gated communities or areas with high levels of crime such as anti-social behaviour which would particularly impact active travel route options or first-class waiting areas and lounges.^{9, 10}

Cost-of-living in the UK

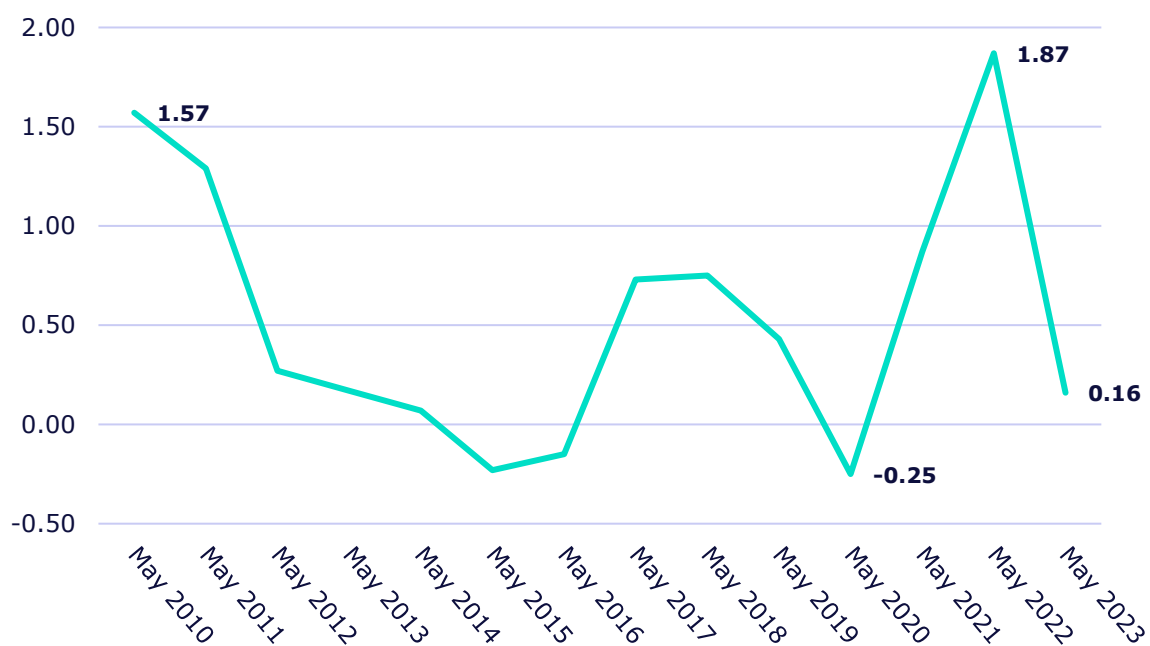
The cost-of-living in the UK is at record levels and households saw inflation reach 40-year highs of 9.6% in October 2022 and currently sits at 7.9% as of May 2023.¹¹ The good news is that inflation is technically easing, but sadly the effects people were facing at the peak are still being felt now and there is little evidence to show that any behaviour changes, coping mechanisms or strategies that were made in response to cost-of-living pressures lessening. Households are still being met with bills that are higher than most have ever experienced for essentials such as energy, water, food, property and internet.

ONS figures revealed that in the 12 months leading to January 2023, gas and electricity prices rose by 129.4% and 66.7%, respectively. Energy regulator, Ofgem announced in February 2023 that the energy price cap for April to June 2023 will be set at £3,280 which is a £1,000 drop in the previous price cap which was £4,279 showing wholesale prices are falling but are still extremely high.¹² Housing costs also rose with the average monthly cost of a new mortgage for a semi-detached house in the UK rising by 61% in December 2022 according to the ONS, with the cost burden likely being passed on to renters to ease the

pressures on mortgage-payers. Linked to these rising pressures, forecasts by the Resolution Foundation projecting that overall absolute poverty rate will increase from 17% in 2021/22 to 22% in 2023/24 which is an increase of 3.1 million and mean 14 million people would be deemed to be in poverty.¹³ While not always at the forefront of political and media discourse, there has also been significant inflation in transport costs. Annual transport inflation peaked at 15.2% in June 2022. While the level of transport inflation has generally fallen from this peak, transport inflation rose for the first time in nine months to 1.6% in April which was being attributed to a rising demand for second hand cars between March and April 2023.

Rail fares rose by 5.1% in the year up to April 2023, which is lowest since June 2022 and far lower than when the rates peaked in July 2022 at 8.7%.¹⁴ The petrol price inflation rate also peaked in July 2022 at 43.7% but has been falling consistently and fell by 8.9% in year to April 2023. However, despite all this easing of transport inflation, 33% of British adults are cutting back on what they deem to be non-essential journeys to help cope with the cost-of-living. This demonstrates how the pressures faced by many are far from over with people adopting coping strategies where they can.

Graph 2.1 – CPI: contribution to all items annual rate for transport



These recent inflationary pressures have added to broader financial pressures in the UK transport system. This is in the context of a wider crisis on public transport that many have been experiencing since before the pandemic: patronage levels are still significantly lower than before the pandemic; bus operators are reducing their services and networks significantly; bus and rail services are unreliable due to staff shortages; and higher costs for both operators and users.¹⁵ Local communities across the UK and the North have

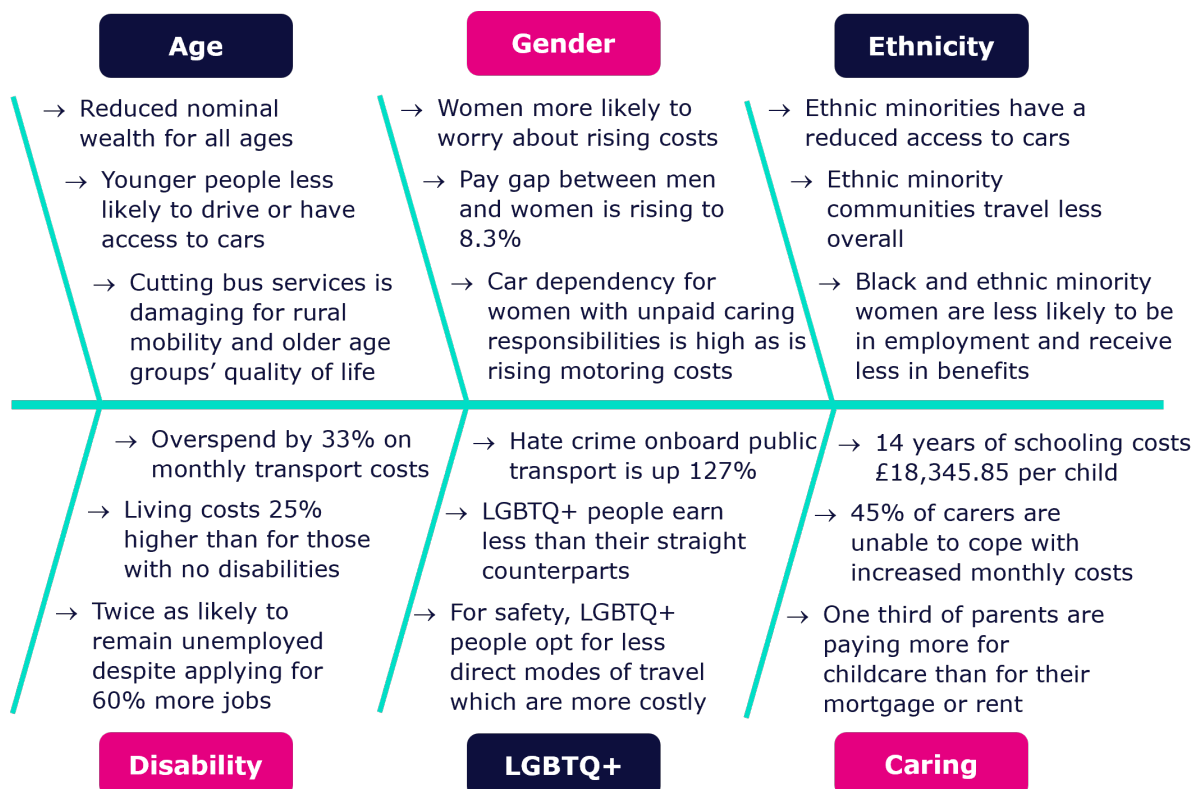
experienced services axed and prices increase significantly whilst poor connectivity and accessibility remains for years, the cost-of-living pressures are now amplifying these issues and creating a much needed dialog on how transport is invested in.

Demographic and intersectional identities

In this section, we review the literature into some of the communities most at risk from TRSE and how cost-of-living pressures are impacting their lives. In doing so, a demonstration is made, showing how social groups can find themselves shifting in positions of privilege or exclusion when considering structural systems and unforeseen events such as the increased cost-of-living. This includes analysis of intersectionality, across multiple identity groups.

Considering intersectionality is key to understanding TRSE and adjacent issues such as the cost-of-living. The approach can significantly widen the knowledge base of TRSE and add further societal context in identifying inequalities with precision and developing policies to assist social groups.¹⁶ This term, coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s, describes how multifaceted identities overlap one another to reinforce societal hierarchies of privilege and oppression, and has become synonymous when researching and discussing inequality and social equity.

Diagram 2.1 – Summary of cost-of-living impacts that could be exacerbating TRSE for select demographics



Age

The current cost-of-living has revealed the extent of the wealth disparity between young and old in the UK, which is essential context when considering age and its impact on TRSE. Between 2018-2020, those aged 55-75 years old owned more than half of Britain's wealth, with millennials owning 8%.¹⁷ Analysis has shown those aged 65-74 could see their nominal wealth fall by around £18,000 between October 2022 and January 2024, due to a fall in their property wealth which is a result of high interest rates for those with mortgages. Whilst this is a huge drop in personal wealth, and has the potential to cause financial hardship, it is expected those who do own property will be more shielded from other cost-of-living pressures. Comparatively, those aged 20-29 years old are expected to see the smallest losses, reflecting the limited wealth generally seen by younger people, with their nominal wealth expected to fall by £2,500. However, as property costs makes up a greater share of young a family's total wealth, relative changes in wealth between October 2022 and January 2024 are set to be worse for younger age groups making them more vulnerable to other cost-of-living pressures, including that of transport.

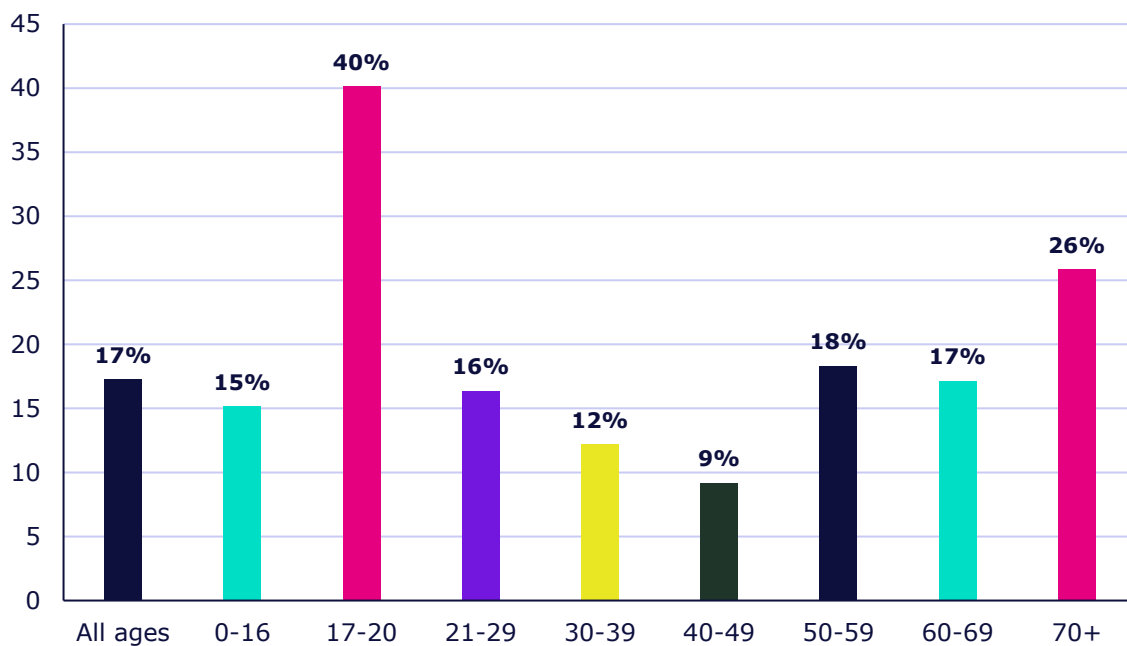
Moreover, it is not just disproportionate property costs that are impacting young people, with university students in a Sutton Trust survey claiming they are undertaking lifestyle changes to cope with cost-of-living pressures. Up to 63% of surveyed students were found to be spending less on food and essentials, and 28% were skipping meals to save on food costs. To save on transportation costs, they were found to be walking to campus and around their university town or city to more as well.¹⁸ In response to this, students were relying on family support but to varying levels based on their socioeconomic background, 38% of working class students receiving additional support vs 48% of middle class students, reinforcing social exclusion.

It is evident our young people are experiencing economic insecurity at greater rates than other age groups with studies suggesting that up to 47% of young people are in financially precarious situations.¹⁹ Financial or economic precariousness is difficult to measure quantitatively, but is often attributed to those in insecure work, such as zero-hour contracts, those who are underemployed and working fewer hours than desired, or even those who are unemployed – all of which impact younger people greatly.²⁰ Younger renters and young people in full-time employment are particularly vulnerable to feeling financially precarious at 58% and 63%, respectively. Similar studies have claimed that young people's economic vulnerability, is a result of structural challenges such as high housing costs which hit young people first and foremost and a higher cost-of-living risks independence and a safe transition into adulthood and therefore adds greater risk to experiencing TRSE.²¹

Applying the economic reality for many young people to transport and TRSE is a clear and obvious link when we consider the state of bus networks in our communities. Those aged 17-20 make more journeys via bus compared to any other age group outside of London.²² Considering this in the current climate of

the cost-of-living pressures and precarious position younger people are seeing themselves in at the start of their transition into adulthood, younger people who rely on transport, particularly buses are at a significant risk from geographic and economic exclusion. Moreover, when we consider those out of employment, 77% of job seekers do not have readily available access to a car, van, or motorbike and when considering those aged 18-24, the figure rises to 87% demonstrating how economic exclusion can be exacerbated by poor transportation links.²³

Graph 2.2 – Mode of travel by bus by age group from Department for Transport National Travel Survey 2021



The problem is made worse when bus cuts are now commonplace and a looming situation which will restrict economic activity further, such as gaining and sustaining employment. Local Transport Commissioners found that 1 in 10 bus routes had been axed in the year leading up to January 2023, equating to more than 1,000 routes vanishing which were keeping communities connected.²⁴ These cuts occurred despite central government support for operators such as the Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) and the £2 fare scheme which aimed to make bus travel more attractive for passengers and provide a vital lifeline for operators. Moreover, councils reported a 20% increase in operational costs, most notably high fuel costs, in providing commercially unviable services compared with the same period last year. The knife edge that travelling by bus finds itself is concerning and is disproportionately affecting young people who need public transport to participate in society.

Reinforcing these high levels of bus use is the fact that younger people are driving private vehicles less: in terms of obtaining a driving license and purchasing private vehicles, indicating motoring costs are too expensive for many, particularly during other cost-of-living increases. Analysis by UWE Bristol

and Sustrans found that despite the age bracket of 18-20 being the biggest age group that travel by bus, they are facing struggles in accessing cheaper and discounted travel, or free in some cases beyond the age of 16.²⁵ There is support for bus fares across the UK, but their extent and reach vary significantly and creates a postcode lottery for young people. In South Yorkshire, 18-21 year olds can purchase a Zoom Beyond travel pass which permits unlimited travel in the county by bus and tram and the first issue of the pass is free of charge. In Scotland under 22s can enjoy free bus travel with the Young Persons' Free Travel Scheme. These examples are not enjoyed throughout the UK though and the UWE's analysis found there was often a reluctance amongst some local transport authorities to create bus travel support for those beyond the age of 18. The lack of such schemes threatens the most disadvantaged younger people accessing opportunities. In addition to economic disadvantages and creating inequality amongst areas and regions, these restrictions of opportunities are also linked to negative long-term health outcomes associated with stress and poor living conditions from living in poverty.²⁶

Cost-of-living pressures are not a unique problem impacting only the young with Age UK finding that 15% of older people, equivalent to 2.5 million people were skipping meals regularly.²⁷ ONS figures revealed that 75% of people aged 50-69 and 67% of those over the age of 70 are now using less fuel directly due to the cost-of-living compared to 57% and 51% last year, respectively.²⁸ This comes as the Chartered Institute of Housing's finding that 60% of over-65s live in the least energy-efficient homes in England and with many reducing their consumption due to higher costs, which poses significant health risks.²⁹ There have also been high profile anecdotal evidence featured in mainstream media of elderly people riding public transport to stay warm due to their energy bills skyrocketing showing the impacts the cost-of-living is having on public services.³⁰

Studying age in relation to TRSE in a context of increased costs-of-living is also important given that England's population is ageing, and it is projected that in the next 25 years, the number of those aged 85 and older will double to 2.6 million.³¹ An illustration of this can be seen when looking at the number of over 65s with no social care needs being on the rise. In 2006 adults aged 85 and over with no social care needs was at 51%, in 2018 this rose to 57% all whilst an increase in the prevalence of long-term health conditions amongst this population group was observed, people are undoubtedly living longer and perhaps healthier overall. This being noteworthy for policy makers because an ageing population may increase the need for the obvious health and social care services, but the requirements for such a reality may be more complex and far reaching: for example, the need for more accessible and efficient transport services to support independence to promote better mental health, quality of life, improving social integration and economic wellbeing.³² It is also worth noting there are higher concentrations of older people living in more rural areas which are seeing some of the biggest cuts to bus services. This potentially could be jeopardising vital transport links keeping people connected and mobile.

In support of this, older adults have been found to participate within societal activities and places beyond walking distance and getting out and about has been seen as affecting wellbeing and as a result is linked to higher social inclusion, reduced connectivity through transport can therefore be seen to achieve higher social exclusion and reduce overall wellbeing.³³ Satisfaction with public transport has been noted as acting as encouragement for others in the same or similar demographic groups to travel more on public transport and thus increasing social connectedness and engagement.³⁴

Gender

The literature we reviewed demonstrates a number of differences in how men and women use transport, and shows that mobility is inherently influenced by gender.³⁵ Men tend to dominate car access and take rail transport more, with women more likely to make more shorter car journeys or take the bus or walk.³⁶ Child caring allocation often falls on the mother and therefore adds time and physical constraints that are often missed by men, in fact it has been argued by some that if an individual's gender is not male, they are 'mobility-poor', implying that transport favours and works better for men. Our towns and cities have traditionally been designed and built in favour of private car access and this has led some scholars to see this as a disadvantage against women due to them being more responsible for fulfilling what has been dubbed as 'chained trips'.³⁷ Chained trips can be completed with public and private transport is seen to favour and encourage private car use over public transport. Bus and train networks are seen to be missing out areas or locations where people, mostly women, need to be in a timely manner when completing chained trips. The outcome of these trips can be one of several: difficulty in managing their unpaid caring responsibilities, difficulty in maintaining work obligations or avoiding public transport altogether and opting for personal, private vehicles and thus, creating social exclusion.

Car dependency has potentially negative gendered impacts as previously outlined and due to the generally lower levels of wealth women enjoy, the added costs such as the cost of the vehicle, monthly finance repayments, insurance and taxes, and general maintenance costs have the potential to impact women more during cost-of-living pressures. It has been observed that high petrol and diesel costs are making people cut back on journeys they deem as non-essential. In fact, one in three (36%) UK adults are still cutting back on these types of journeys, citing the cost-of-living as a reason.³⁸ This is despite fuel costs remaining high but ultimately falling as inflation more generally eases. However, for those who only travel by car for necessary trips, such as chained trips, the choice to not pay high fuel costs is stripped away from. High fuel costs and inaccessible public transport has been noted as potentially risking women's safety, particularly in more rural locations adding personal insecurity and safety concerns to financial insecurity and concerns.³⁹

Whilst pressures brought about the cost-of-living are impacting both men and women, there appears to be a gendered effect, seeing men more protected against cost-of-living pressures. An online survey of 5,021 people found that

78% of women view the cost-of-living as a 'constant source of worry' compared to 68% of men and more likely to pursue cutting back measures.⁴⁰ The survey also found that 86% of women were cutting back on luxuries compared to 76% of men and that in general, women are 14 days away from the breadline if they lose their source income, whereas for men it is around 28 days. The Living Wage Foundation found that 35% of low-paid women had skipped meals regularly due to their finances compared to 29% of low paid men.⁴¹ The latest UK pay gap between men and women figures show that pay gap has increased amongst fulltime employees, rising from 7.7% to 8.3% in April 2022, showing women in fulltime employment are still earning less than men. Women are also more likely to be in part-time employment, representing 74% of all part-time workforce which reduces the wealth and savings women can enjoy.⁴² The conclusion of this apparent she-flation can be attributed to the juggling of unpaid caring responsibilities and being more likely to have less financial resource to rely on private forms of transport, exposing them to the fragility of public transport systems that incur unexpected delays and cancellations when under time constraints.

LGBTQ+

Research into LGBTQ+ people's experience of public transport and general travel behaviours is limited. However, from the research available, there appears to be evidence that LGBTQ+ people may travel differently in some contexts. However, general concerns of public transport are in the line with wider population concerns such as, overcrowding, crime, unreliability and costs. Despite this, in the dedicated literature, LGBTQ+ communities have been shown to be at higher risk of TRSE, namely spatial exclusion which is due to the higher violence, harassment, discrimination and victim of anti-social behaviour incidents when using public transport networks which are typically gender normative, masculine and heterosexual domains.⁴³ Moreover, public transport has been found to be one of most cited places where people conceal their sexuality due to fear and negative reactions from others.⁴⁴ The result of this had led LGBTQ+ people to develop strategies and coping mechanisms as alternatives to a heteronormative public transport networks to avoid these threats.⁴⁵ Using private forms of public transport such as taxis have been found to be just one of the measures LGBTQ+ people are taking, along with seeking out less direct routes and even altering their clothing and appearance. These daily tactics for overcoming such barriers may present feelings such as anxiety and anguish which has been found to take a significant toll, physically and mentally on LGBTQ+ people.⁴⁶ In a cost-of-living context, the visible and invisible costs LGBTQ+ people face whilst travelling are both exacerbating and sustaining social exclusion.

Societal views towards LGBTQ+ people have undoubtedly changed drastically in the UK thanks to political, legal and social factors, however these communities are still marginalised and face major barriers when participating in society and perhaps best illustrated when looking at transport-related hate crime data. British Transport Police data shows that in 2021/22 there were 615 incidents

recorded motivated by sexual orientation and 70 incidents motivated by transgender identity.⁴⁷ This is a 127% increase on 2020/21 figures which were significantly lower due to less travel overall because of Covid restrictions, but the most recent figures do match up with 2019/20 figures and do show a 75% increase in transgender identity-motivated incidents from 2019/20 and 2021/22 figures. These findings are consistent with literature that shows gender-nonconforming, non-binary and feminine identities report more harassment, and lesbians, bisexual women and trans women experience disproportionate levels of discrimination across society.⁴⁸

Spatial exclusion in the form of violence affects gay men too, who are more likely to fall victim to physical violence and lesbians are most likely to be subjected to verbal confrontation, this is despite men statistically more likely to experience violent crime, it is those who identify as women who report feeling the least safe overall.⁴⁹ LGBTQ+ people of colour also impacted by disproportionate levels of violence, illustrating just how these identities intersect and increase the exposure risk of TRSE.⁵⁰ Despite these high recorded incidents and hierarchical exposure risks, it must be noted that hate crimes are generally underreported to authorities due for wide-ranging factors such as fear of institutional biases, fear of being outed or othered and even fear of discrimination from authorities themselves. The result of which may mean that hate crime, both in general society and on public transport is actually more common and a bigger issue, which would be a catalyst for further social exclusion.

The limited research assessing cost-of-living pressures on LGBTQ+ people emphasise an economic inequality amongst LGBTQ+ people. A 2019 survey by YouGov on behalf of LinkedIn and charity Black Pride found that of the 4,000 respondents who identified as straight, gay, bisexual or other that LGBTQ+ workers are earning £6,703 less before tax than their heterosexual counterparts.⁵¹ The same study found that 26% of LGBTQ+ employees do not reveal their identity in the workplace due to the fears of judgement and prejudice and further 14% felt their opportunities of promotions were hindered if they were open about their identity. This pay gap makes the disparity larger than the general UK pay gap between men and women and only 1 in 8 employers acknowledged they actively monitor their LGBT pay gaps.⁵² Whilst further pay gap analysis is needed to truly understand the extent LGBTQ+ people may be earning less, there is an increased economic and employability discrimination amongst this demographic which could be inflamed further due to the cost-of-living pressures.⁵³

Caring responsibilities

People with caring responsibilities, whether that be for children and/or those with disabilities or long-term health conditions are at high risk of exposure to TRSE due to the costs and time-constraints associated with facilitating and administering care. Currently parents in the UK are faced with huge childcare costs, with data showing that one third of parents paying more in monthly childcare costs than they pay for the rent or mortgage.⁵⁴ The figure rises

considerably when intersectional identities are considered, for example parents from an ethnic minority (47%), those on Universal Credit (40%), single parents (38%) and parents who work fulltime (38%) are all more likely to pay more for their childcare. When considering the context of reduced bus services and increases in rail fares, those caring for children are under existing financial pressures and such connectivity challenges can add to this and result in costly car dependency. Opting for private transport, such as cars may give the perception of better mobility, but petrol and diesel prices were some of the biggest price increases at the peak of the cost of living with fuel inflation at 43.7% in July 2022 and still expensive for many. Car dependency simply is not a viable option for all with children either, as children from households in poorly connected areas more likely to experience reduced travel choices which continues the systemic cycle of TRSE.⁵⁵ Sustaining a cycle of TRSE can be evidenced by the fact just 15% of secondary school children can only access one school within a 30-minute bus journey placing children and parents with severe choice limitations and possible minimising good educational outcomes.

Sending children to secondary school is costing UK parents £39 per week on average and £19 for primary school aged children.⁵⁶ Uniforms, learning materials, lunches, educational visits and transport is setting parents back £18,345.85 per child through 14 years of schooling, which equates to £1,755.97 per secondary school aged child, per year and £864.87 per primary school aged child, per year. Whilst there is assistance available to parents and those on low incomes, the help varies across the nations and regions. Eligible low-income families of primary school children in England are paying £30.85 per week whilst Scottish equivalent parents are paying £16.46, but even with the assistance, these are still high prices to pay. Out of the all the additional costs people with children are paying in the UK, transport-related costs top the list as being the most expensive, costing £487.54 per secondary school aged child, per year.

In addition to parents caring for children, children and young people who provide unpaid care to family members are also feeling the pressures of the cost-of-living, not just financially but also emotionally too. Young carers typically administer care whilst in education which as a result can be impacted negatively as they may take more absences or leave earlier, restricting their opportunities and access to further and higher education as well as employment opportunities, increasing the likelihood of living in poverty. More than 51% of young carers felt the intensification of unpaid caring is increasing which is a direct result of juggling the caring responsibilities along with their studies, employment, and social lives.⁵⁷ Young carers are administering the care for longer than ever before too, with 56% of those surveyed claiming the length of time administering care has increased in the last 12 months. Other surveys have found worrying trends such as, 54% of parents and young carers having skipped meals or reduced the portion sizes of meals to make their money go further.⁵⁸ More than one in ten (13%) admitted to cutting back on essential items for disabled children with 83% of families in debt and many applying for extra credit to be able to pay for necessities and not always from legal or ethical providers.

One of the main necessities carers need to spend on is travel and the costs associated with travel tends to be a common theme in transport literature looking into this area. The research consistently finds that transport costs are a barrier for many, and in light of the current cost-of-living, even more so than ever before. Carers UK found in a 3,300 wide survey of carers that just under half (45%) were unable to manage with the increases in monthly costs, such as transportation for both themselves and to get the person they care for to appointments, whilst 46% felt the increases were impacting their own physical and mental health.⁵⁹ In the times where carers do have free time, getting out is often a barrier and due to the inaccessibility of the transport in their area.⁶⁰ Avoidance behaviours (i.e., avoiding trips altogether) have been observed in carers towards leisure time and whilst this can potentially save carers much needed money during cost-of-living pressures, the social and mental wellbeing effects this can restrict is concerning for overall quality of life.⁶¹

Disability and long-term health conditions

Barriers to accessibility and increased exclusion within transport infrastructure for those with disabilities and long-term health conditions are likely most associated with issues such as accessing stations where there is no wheelchair access, and whilst this issue is a recurring challenge, the inaccessibility of public transport with creates TRSE extends further. Inaccessible vehicles, unsafe and unusable road crossings along with ticketing machines that are not adapted and potentially higher costs are just some of the other challenges those with disabilities and long-term health conditions face when using transport. The impact for this community is that travel is severely restricted and more expensive, creating a transport inaccessibility gap. This gap, on average, equates to disabled people making 38% fewer journeys on public transport than non-disabled people and leads to a reliance on private transport modes such as private vehicles or taxis.⁶² Disabled households were overspending monthly by 33% on their transport needs prior to cost-of-living pressures, suggesting the figure is much higher given transport inflation the UK has seen in recent years and months.⁶³

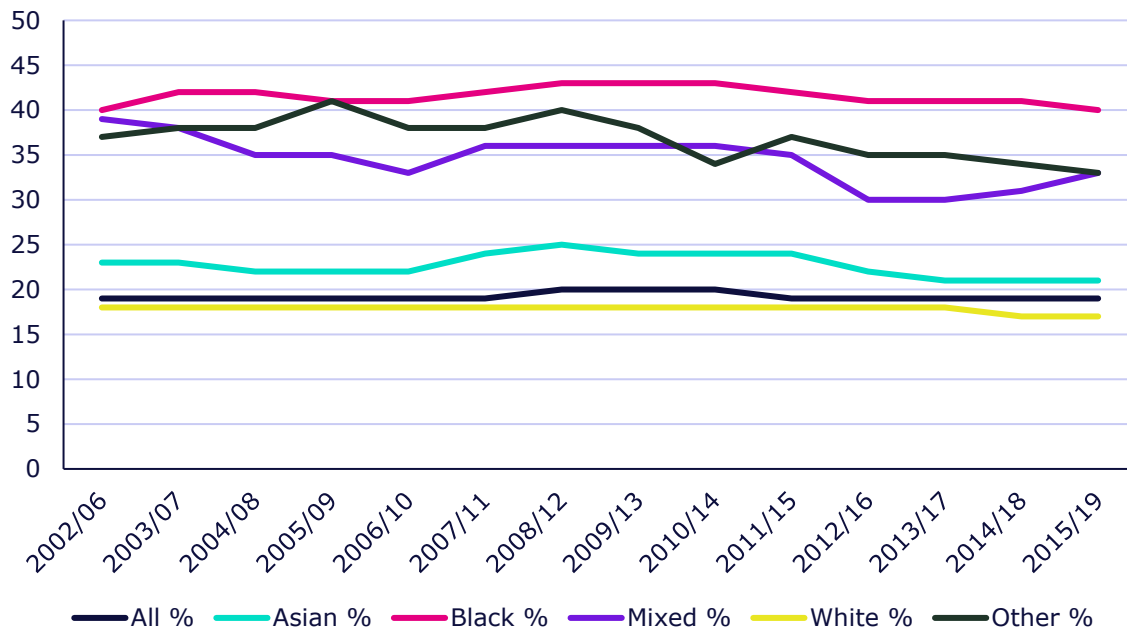
Economic burdens as a result of health conditions vary from person to person and from condition to condition but often are there due to typically low employment rates for those with disabilities and with their living costs being 25% higher non-disabled people.⁶⁴ Just 13% of those with complex disabilities are in fulltime employment and 29% rely on Universal Credit to support them.⁶⁵ A quarter of working age disabled people cite the lack of accessible transport as their barrier to gaining and maintaining employment ⁶⁶– and when considering that disabled people apply to 60% more jobs than non-disabled people and are twice as likely to remain unemployed ⁶⁷– the transport network is actively contributing to socio-economic disadvantage and social exclusion. Additionally, those with disabilities are observed to be over spending for transport on a monthly basis more so than those without disabilities, further their economic difficulties and exclusion.

Improving access to employment for those with disabilities, through better transport systems would potentially have huge fiscal benefits too, for example saving £18.6bn from moving people off benefits and into employment and an increased individual income of £10.2bn. Furthermore, in the West Midlands alone, £4m is estimated to be the potential revenue lost in the region annually due to disabled people taking fewer trips.⁶⁸ Whilst other cost-benefit analysis for other demographics explored are not readily available, it would not be unplausible to suggest this could be the case across the across other communities and demographics in society, including those highlighted in this report.

Ethnicity and migration status

Ethnic minorities and migrant identities unfortunately feature less in transport studies literature, and this extends to research on TRSE. The research that does explore ethnic minorities will often explore the transport inequalities in the affordability of transport, which is a key focus and concern for this report.⁶⁹ Transport affordability is a major issue for all demographics and social groups in society. For example, research has indicated that in OECD countries, motoring costs account for 80% of household spending⁷⁰– and in the UK 9% of households suffer from car-related economic stress.⁷¹ However, in the UK ethnic minorities are significantly less likely to have access to a car or van and have more environmentally friendly everyday travel patterns, which can be linked to wider economic disparities between white communities and ethnic minorities. Black people in the UK are the most likely to have no access to a car at 40%, compared to 33% people with a Mixed ethnicity, 21% of Asian people and 17% of white people⁷²– and in fact social networks are more dispersed for ethnic minorities and recently arrived first-generation migrants are more likely to fly and have the lowest car mileage when travelling to see friends and family.⁷³ As a result, the research shows those from ethnic minorities rely most heavily on public transport are bear the consequences of the high prices, cancellations and inaccessibility of our public transport systems and networks.

Graph 2.3 – % of people with no access to a car or van, by ethnicity over time



Over the last decade, the changes to the tax and social security system appear to have had a regressive impact for those most in need in society, with added racialised and gendered effects which is going to be further impacted by inflationary-related pressures. White households in real terms are receiving £454 less a year in benefits compared to just a decade ago.⁷⁴ The figure rises significantly for black and ethnic minorities to £806. Black and ethnic minority women are less likely to be in employment and currently receive £1,040 less in benefits than they would have a decade ago, therefore, making the financial pressures and overall rates of poverty disproportionately impacting non-white people is making it more difficult to meet the rising costs-of-living. Poverty rates for white people is 19%, significantly lower than Bangladeshi (53%), Pakistani (48%) and Black communities (40%).⁷⁵

The causes of this trend are complex and will vary, but as with disability, those from an ethnic minority experience higher an unemployment rate than their white counterparts which is a major contributing factor to financial pressure. Government figures from 2021 show unemployment rates for ethnic minorities were at 8% compared to 4% for white people.⁷⁶ However, it must be noted that ethnic minorities are not a homogenous mass, for example those from an Indian ethnic group had the lowest unemployment rates out of all ethnic groups and were found to be comparable to white communities.

Similarly, there are notable differences across the regions and areas of the UK in terms of employment and ethnicity. Across all regions in England and Scotland, unemployment was lower for white people than for all combined ethnic groups.

The most pronounced gap between white communities and ethnic minorities being in the West Midlands, the North East and Yorkshire and the Humber.

When looking at unemployment and tackling poverty, particularly within ethnic minority communities, improving transport links is necessary solution and is effective and demonstratable in economies across the world to reduce a range of disparities including unemployment and economic inactivity.⁷⁷ There has been research conducted which aimed to establish the social impact and benefit that bus networks have and just how they can positively improve people's lives. Employability and ethnicity were major socio-economic (along with disability and gender) where people from these communities were more inclined to not go and stay at home where the connectivity and bus networks did not have a perceived or actual social benefit or impact.⁷⁸ This finding is line with other research that reiterates the point that adults from ethnic minorities take substantially fewer trips than those from white or mixed groups and is contributing to people from these communities remaining socially excluded and poorer which is potentially more damaging during increased costs-of-living.⁷⁹

Summary: evidence application to the North of England

The application of cost-of-living research to TRSE-vulnerable populations provides a set of likely impacts that could be felt across communities in the North during cost-of-living pressures. As a result, the evidence has strengthened our evidence base in understanding TRSE and learning how the cost-of-living intersects with transport and can be seen to exacerbate TRSE. This has been achieved by reviewing large amounts of published empirical evidence, however the evidence review did leave gaps in knowledge. There was a clear lack of evidence that came directly from the North of England, and therefore, it left unanswered questions such as whether the cost-of-living is sustaining an unequal North. The primary research that follows this review aims to change this.



- 4 -

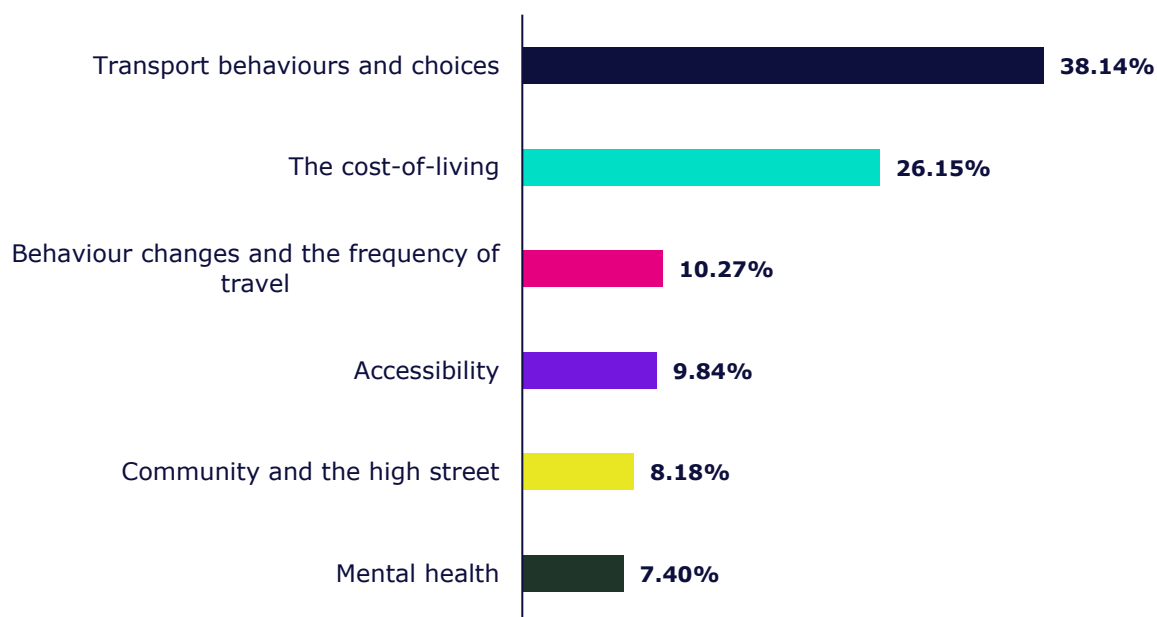
The impacts of the cost- of-living in the North

The impacts of the cost-of-living in the North

The previous section explains the impacts that the cost-of-living is having amongst different sections of our society, whilst applying the evidence to wider TRSE research. To build upon this, the following section explores the themes and issues raised by participants from primary research to further illustrate how the cost-of-living is impacting travel and those most at risk from TRSE in the North.

Participants of the focus groups were asked about their recent experiences in using public transport, what behaviour changes they have observed in light in increased costs-of-living, how this relates to their travel and transport use and what the impacts of these behaviours on their lives. The qualitative data reveals unique and shared experiences and outlooks on local transport, the coded themes from the data can be seen in the NVivo codebook (see Appendix 1). In addition to the codebook, hierarchy charts were produced which shows the coded data aggregated including any child codes (subsequent codes underneath the primary, or parent code) and how many times a piece of data has been associated to the code. These can be seen in tree maps 3.1 – 3.6. Graph 3.1 shows the how much each coded theme was mentioned and by the participants across both focus groups.

Graph 3.1 – code coverage share



Accessibility

On accessibility challenges with the cost-of-living, participants often spoke about digital exclusion that they have experienced (and continue to), or their sympathies for those who are excluded from services such as internet shopping or purchasing tickets online due to their lack of digital connectivity and fluency. As the cost-of-living is a far-reaching topic, the discussion often flowed into other topics such as the cost of utilities and food, but many participants noted

how all these costs were linked and identified a relationship between them. One participant disclosed an experience where they were unable to purchase a train ticket prior to boarding the train at an unstaffed station. They claimed the train was late and they were unable to get real-time information (RTI) on the location of the train and did not have confidence the train was going to arrive, therefore they did not purchase a ticket. The participant went on to feel intimidated by train staff as they tried to purchase a ticket onboard the carriage which the staff would not allow.

"I was going to Doncaster hospital to see my daughter... You can't buy a ticket on the train. You used to be able to be. You can't anymore. And I was threatened with... £100 fine. And they said someone would be waiting like as I went out to the station and I was very, very worried because I wasn't dodging [buying a ticket], you know, I've got my money. I just hadn't got the ticket, and I think the they probably expect everybody to buy it online now. But not everybody can get online... But I wasn't really sure whether the train would turn up or not. So, I wasn't going to buy the ticket. I just thought, it was it was very scary. It was very intimidating."
(Female, 65-74 years old, East Riding of Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire)

This participant's experience reveals the need for RTI of the public transport services, particularly for those who are using unstaffed stations, but also the need to be able to pay with cash for tickets, both whilst at the station but also when onboard. This was a consistent theme across the focus groups, particularly those from older age groups but was mentioned by those from younger age groups too. RTI could boost confidence for passengers which was a popular point made throughout the focus groups. Those with the digital and connectivity capabilities had an eagerness to be able track journeys so they can arrive at the station or stop to avoid long unnecessary waits. This would also afford them sufficient time to prepare and find alternative travel options when the journey cannot be fulfilled.

"...[It] would be good to know if the train is running because we've been stood at the train station waiting to get on and then ten minutes before it's due we've had the trains cancelled and you've just to give up on your trip then. But you don't get told that you know, prior it's just literally minutes before." (Female, 60-64 years old, Lancashire)

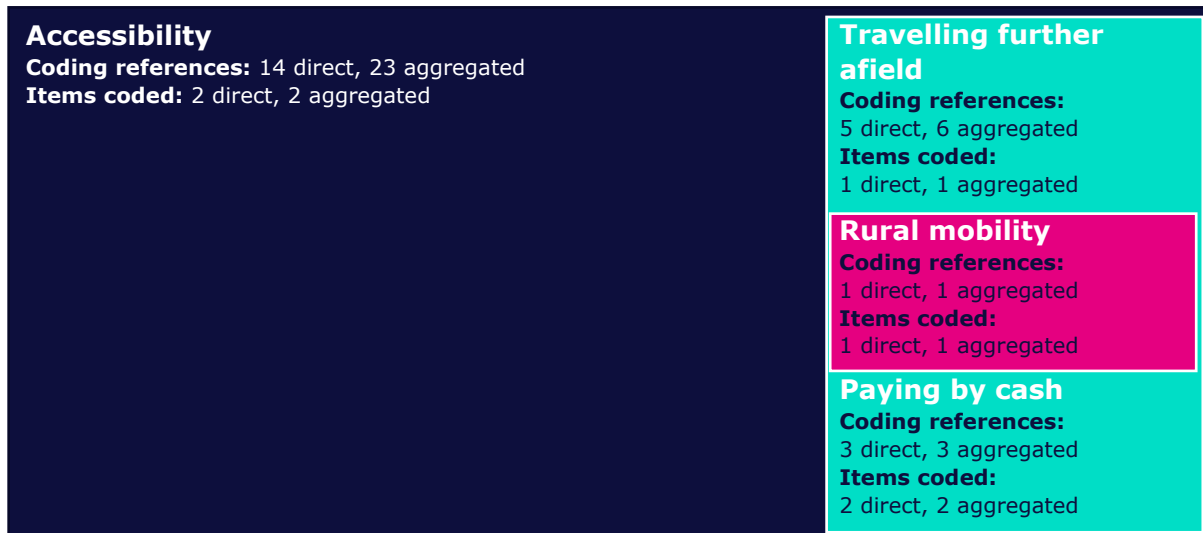
Throughout the sessions participants demonstrated how transport aids and allows inclusion and exclusion to take hold in communities. Some participants were keen to make links throughout and an example of this is within the theme of accessibility. Participants showed that cost is ultimately a big issue, but the reliability is just as important and with RTI passengers are given greater confidence.

"We've got to get the pricing affordable, but we have to get reliability there so people know when they go out, either to the bus stop, to the railway station, to the tram stop, [or] the metro station. They know that that the service they're going for is going to turn up. It's going to be

reliable, and it's going to be affordable for them to go. It's a joined up thing." (Male, 60-64 years old, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear)

Accessibility barriers were also raised regarding physically boarding public transport, especially when the service is busy with both able-bodied and those with wheelchairs or prams. The focus groups had a disproportionate number of people with disabilities and long-term conditions with a number of participants being open about their mobility issues and being a wheelchair user. Participants spoke about observing those in wheelchairs being refused access to board buses by drivers due to the service being full of people perceived as able-bodied and standing in the way of the designated wheelchair area of the bus. Others spoke about how drivers often have to be asked to lower their ramp for wheelchair users needing to board, suggesting that staff are not always accommodating and willing to help those in need.

Tree map 3.1 – hierarchy chart: accessibility



The above (and subsequent) hierarchy chart visualises the coded data, allowing for analysis of themes and comparison against other themes to infer their relevance, prominence and even importance amongst the participants.

The charts show the coded data as a set of nested rectangles of varying size which reflect whether the data was a parent code or child code. Parent codes are shown in dark blue and reflect the general theme. For the example above, accessibility was a general theme participants mentioned that can inspire other subtopics and did in fact do. Child codes are shown in teal and further segmented codes within a child code in pink.

Coding references refer to have many pieces of data have been assigned that specific code. The items coded refers to the number of documents uploaded into NVivo that codes were drawn from, i.e., there were two focus group sessions

which meant there were two transcriptions that were analysed for themes. For some child codes, the coding references were omitted due to their small number of references and refer to one participant mentioning a particular subtheme once.

Behaviour changes and the frequency of travel

Expectedly participants have reduced their travel significantly and many categorised themselves as not travelling anymore. Upon analysis of the responses, there is no evidence to show people truly are not travelling anymore, and instead they are travelling less often, combining trips with other trips, or even engaging with other modes of travel, such as active travel. Interestingly, there was mention from one participant that their travel behaviours before the pandemic never returned and the cost-of-living has added to this. Whether this is unique to this participant or not is unclear, however it is likely that for some, behaviours performed pre-pandemic have not returned post pandemic and lockdowns and that the cost-of-living is sustaining this.

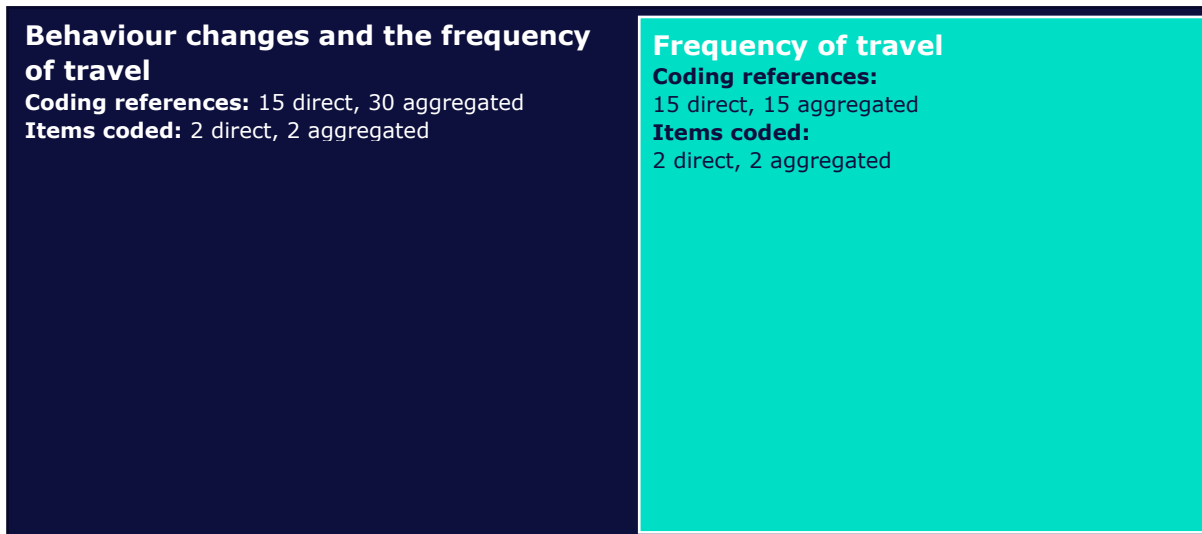
"I'm always flitting about, I've even got an electric bike now, I've started walking on certain occasions. I've tried to avoid paying [increased transport costs]." (Male, 30-44 years old, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear)

"Prior to Covid, we would make [the] trip at least twice a month with friends." (Female, 60-64 years old, Lancashire)

Where reductions in travel behaviours are cited, the purpose of the initial trip was for social or recreational activities, suggesting people are prioritising these types of activities less than travelling for work, shopping or other activities which are seen as more necessary to fulfil. Going to the cinema and the pub were common activities enjoyed by the participants and both have significantly reduced. However, the main reason given from the participants who have reduced their cinema and pub trips was not due to the cost of transport, rather the costs of seeing a film and the costs of drinks at the venue. Similarly, another participant found meeting up with friends at a café in their city was good for their motivation, but again due to the prices attached to the activity itself rather than transport, they do this less and they find this upsetting as it is something they would do regularly and helped their mental health and wellbeing.

"I used to go out quite a lot, you know, to [the] city centre or a pub or a café. It was like, you know, I kind of need an ounce of motivation to go out and about, because it's quite difficult for me, and, you know, having a coffee or having tea and meeting up with friends, that was quite a positive motivation for me. But recently, I kind of had to cut it down because, you know, the prices have just gone up, and it's just not sustainable long term... it's very upsetting that." (Male, 30-44 years old, Merseyside)

Tree map 3.2 – hierarchy chart: behaviour changes and the frequency of travel



Community and the high street

Concepts linked to the community were raised frequently during the focus groups, ranging from the use of foodbanks, support groups on social media and even the state of the high street. Amongst the participants and their respective communities, there appeared to be a greater sense of community and people were looking out for each other, with many noting this is happening to a greater extent than ever before in recent years.

"A young lady who I know, and unfortunately, her mother had died and left nothing for her, as in anything at all other than the house... she had had to actually crowdfund to have a mother's funeral and the community were fantastic and it was very, very genuine. But how sad in this day and age that someone has to do that." (Female, 60-64 years old, Lancashire)

The infrequency of travel, particularly for social reasons has led some to go on and speak about how this is impacting their local high street, which for one participant is their place of work too. This participant explained how their business is being affected because they are seeing less tourists visit their city with locals opting to not to shop in the city as the costs of parking is too high. This was later qualified with the participant explaining that opting for public transport to go shopping for families, or mothers with children as they explain, has dropped massively because the cost of using the bus to get into town is too high and then the cost of doing to the activity in town is not worth it.

"It's impacted our shop, I work in a retail shop that sells my crafts in York, and we've noticed a massive difference of like footfall, obviously with Covid... that was a nightmare, but since it's been like normal again... we've noticed less tourists which is a bit annoying because obviously

they're like our big buyers... We get a lot of like locals come in saying, we never come into town because we have to pay for parking... but I guess if transport was cheaper, they probably would come into town.” (Female, 30-44 years old, North Yorkshire)

“My sister, she’s got four Children. So, for her to get a bus, it’s cost her £16 to get a bus... that’s ridiculous... To go somewhere where all the kids will want to eat, they’ll all want to buy things, and it’s like, for me I only have to think about myself. It’s easy. For her... that must be really difficult.” (Female, 30-44 years old, North Yorkshire)

Another participant spoke about how shops were closing in Scunthorpe, an area where they would often go shopping and meet with friends. The closures were attributed to the cost-of-living and people having no disposable income to add to the local economy. They also briefly spoke about how the recent closure of Doncaster Sheffield airport is having a negative impact on the local area also. The closure of the airport for them was evidence that people are not using the airport because they cannot afford to go on holiday due to of the cost-of-living and the local economy is suffering.

“We had some shops and because [of the] cost of living, all the shops are shutting down. So, I’ve got this free bus pass, and [the] only thing I can really use it for is to go to the hospital, and our bus finishes at five o’clock.” (Female, 65-74 years old, East Riding of Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire)

“They’ve gone and shut Doncaster airport down so that that’s bad for us in this area. No one has any reason to come see us in this part of the country. Them going on holiday won’t come and use our hotels, our cafes, our pubs or anything... we’re just forgotten about and left.” (Female, 65-74 years old, East Riding of Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire)

Tree map 3.3 – hierarchy chart: community and the high street



Mental health

The cost-of-living has affected the mental health and wellbeing of some participants, and where a participant's mental health has not been impacted, they do recognise that increases in the cost-of-living are likely to have a negative effect on someone's mental wellbeing. One participant explored how business owners, particularly those with smaller businesses, were likely to suffer with mental health issues because people are unable to trade as much as they did previously, a point echoed earlier by a small business owner in a city centre. They sympathised with businesses in rural and remote areas too as they felt that less people are likely to travel to their business and with the threat of ever increasing bus cuts, they may have to close.

"People's mental health rather than just [physical] health, for example, local businesses are in a remote part of a town... the transport link all of a sudden gets stopped because it's not getting used enough. That person with that little shop... selling whatever obviously gets hit by that... is it going to affect people's mental health, also because people all of a sudden lose jobs." (Male, 30-44 years old, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear)

Having confidence issues were also raised a few times by participants when describing the instances they do travel. It was felt by some that prolonged absences from travelling to destinations that they previously visited often creates a sense of anxiety and leads to them either not travelling at all or travelling much less and being vulnerable to anxiety triggers that once were not triggers such as busy carriages, loud passengers or cancellations and delays. Along with confidence, one participant had feelings of guilt when travelling for social and leisure purposes. They felt that by going out and enjoying their free time, they were maybe doing something wrong or unnecessary, suggesting that by travelling somewhere to enjoy themselves is now a privilege and not a right and that all money should be saved for bills or food for example.

Those with mobility issues spoke about confidence issues when travelling. One participant who is a fulltime wheelchair user felt extremely anxious at the thought of travelling in a different town or city to the one they currently live in. In their current home town, they are familiar with the modes of transport, the routes they take and how much it costs for them. As they know the space available for wheelchair users on board their usual services in their hometown, they have been able to determine the best time of day to travel for them to secure the space on the bus without issues, which affords them comfort and calmness. If they need to travel outside their town and wider city, they tend to opt for taxis because they do not have the same knowledge of services elsewhere. They admit the use of taxis is much more expensive and is struggle for them, but the cost-benefit analysis for them is to pay more for the sake of their confidence and independence.

"I think it affects your confidence... the idea [of] going on a train to Blackpool would be terrifying for me, a few years ago, you just say, let's go to Blackpool, let's have a day out. You also feel guilty if you try and do anything extra than what you do [normally]." (Female, 45-59 years old, Greater Manchester)

"I used to be [anxious] when I [first] started going [out], that was like, 10 or 12 years ago... Because I did my research [on the best routes and times of day] and I have phone numbers of taxi of cab firms in my phone in case there is any difficulties, I don't feel anxious. If I was travelling to another city, for example, that would be a different case. But as long as it's within Liverpool, it's fine." (Male, 30-44 years old, Merseyside)

Loneliness and isolation were big themes mentioned by most participants either experiencing this themselves or knowing someone else who is. Many of the participants referred to themselves as never previously suffering with their mental health but feel that in recent years this has changed due to the pandemic and the cost-of-living, with some equating feelings of loneliness due to their reduced travel. A reduction of travelling via public transport has been explored previously due to their increased costs and other factors, but for some there has been an uptake in active travel which has lessened feelings of loneliness and isolation. One participant expressed their appreciation for being able to walk their pet dog and talk to people in the community who they see on these journeys, however they do admit this is still much less interaction than what they previously enjoyed when they would travel on public transport.

Another participant is unable to see their two daughters as they live in Manchester and Liverpool, which is around an hour and a half from where they live due to the high costs of rail tickets. As an alternative, they communicate by social media. Others felt that their lack of travel has made them withdraw from participating in society.

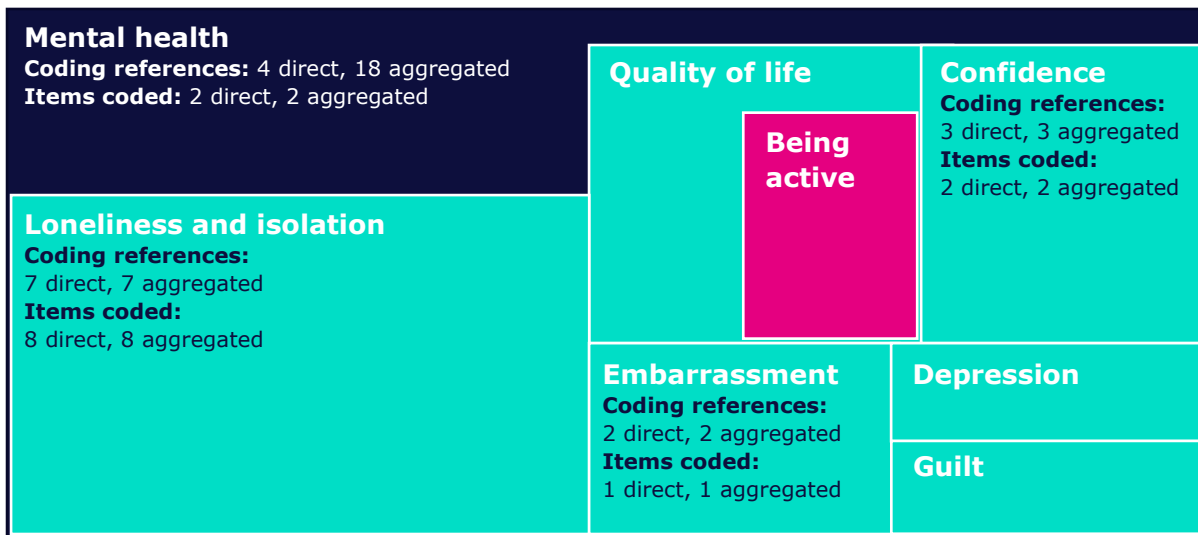
"You withdraw... you become institutionalised and... you don't want to see other people and that's mental health. I think it's worse in in villages." (Female, 65-74 years old, East Riding of Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire)

"I've got daughters in Manchester and Liverpool that I just don't see anymore because it's just a fortune... So, we just chat on Facebook, and that's it. Yeah, it's not quite the same. You can't hug them." (Male, 45-59 years old, West Yorkshire)

There was a sense from some participants, particularly those from older age groups that due to reduced travel, because of the cost-of-living, their mental health and wellbeing and ultimately impacted their overall quality of life. Words such as 'insular' and 'lifeline' were used in response to be asked what the impact of travel reduction behaviours had been. There was a sense for some that some of their purpose in life had been removed from them and there was very little they could do about this resulting in little societal participation.

"We haven't got the buses and we haven't got the trains. And when you're getting old, you need to be out and about and if you've got nowhere [to go and] can't get out and about, you know you haven't got [the] transport, you don't drive, your life is more or less it's dead, really, isn't it... It's affected quality of life from being able just to go out and experience things. People are becoming very insular and just in their own." (Female, 60-64 years old, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear)

Tree map 3.4 – hierarchy chart: mental health



The cost-of-living

As stated at the start of this section, the cost-of-living has not just impacted transport and has had far-reaching consequences. There were many discussions regarding issues that stretched beyond transport, however there were equally lengthy discussions regarding the cost of public transport itself, the importance of transport costs against other costs and even the environmental impact opting for cheaper modes of transport is having.

Views on the costs of public transport were largely split between positive and negative amongst the participants based off where in the North they lived and the mode of transport in question. There were some participants who were positive towards bus travel because they lived in areas where the government's £2 bus fare scheme is in operation on the routes they want to travel on. For those fortunate enough to be in these areas served with routes a part of the scheme, some had increased their bus travel where they may have travelled by car or not at all.

Others were unfortunately not able to enjoy the bus fare scheme as they claim it is not in operation in their local area on the services they would use. This participant lives a rural village with their husband, and they live 1.8 miles from their nearest town, and it costs them both £11.40 for a return trip for a

relatively short journey. In their opinion there is little incentive to use the bus when they can drive and pay less in fuel and parking.

"To travel to my local town, which is 1.8 miles away... it will cost £5.70 return. And if my husband came, it would cost us £11.40 to travel 1.8 miles there and 1.8 miles back, which is just ludicrous. That that's the only transport round here other than taxis." (Female, 60-64 years old, Lancashire)

Away from bus travel, participants were keen to discuss expensive rail travel and how for many, it is no longer economically viable for them to travel by rail anymore. To travel by affordably by rail, participants feel you must be able to plan the trip in advance to secure the cheapest tickets. Despite this, participants felt this is often not feasible as travel plans can be last minute and spontaneous and there is an increased fear in trains being cancelled last minute or called off due to the recent spikes in industrial action taken by many in the rail sector. To travel by rail, particularly for longer journeys outside the North of England, many are turning to air travel where it can be a significantly cheaper mode of travel.

"I was actually having a chat on Twitter with someone this morning about this, and I actually did a comparison, if I wanted to go, just for an example, if I had to travel to London tomorrow... if I was to go on the train [and] return tomorrow, [it] would cost me £166. The same journey travelling from Newcastle Airport on a plane, [would cost] £60." (Male, 60-64 years old, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear)

"I'm going to Newquay in in July on the plane. I know that's really bad and I feel [for] like the environment and stuff, but to get a train it would have cost over £100. But my flights were 30 quid." (Female, 30-44 years old, North Yorkshire)

Despite some opting for air travel due to its competitive prices on some domestic routes across the UK, there were feelings of regret when traveling as their journey will produce more emissions than alternative modes of travel. This implies people are aware to the necessity of travelling sustainably, but ultimately costs will form travel decisions and behaviours, even more so in times of higher costs-of-living.

The importance of the cost-of-transport compared with other costs was explored and proved that the cost-of-transport is less important than other costs across amongst these participants. For some, particularly those who are older and those with bus passes allowing them to travel for free or at reduced rates, the day-to-day costs of travelling was less important because overall, they have reduced their travel, but also because when they do travel, they can often do so for free.

"I have other priorities in terms of finances. I feel I have the ability to be able to compromise in terms of transport. I have to first get groceries and the, you know, the gas bill." (Male, 30-44 years old, Merseyside)

"Transport is one of the sort of flexible costs. A lot of my costs [are] quite fixed, like the rent, gas, telephone. So, the only flexibility and things like that [are] transport, which you can reduce if you have to, which I have a bit." (Male, 45-59 years old, West Yorkshire)

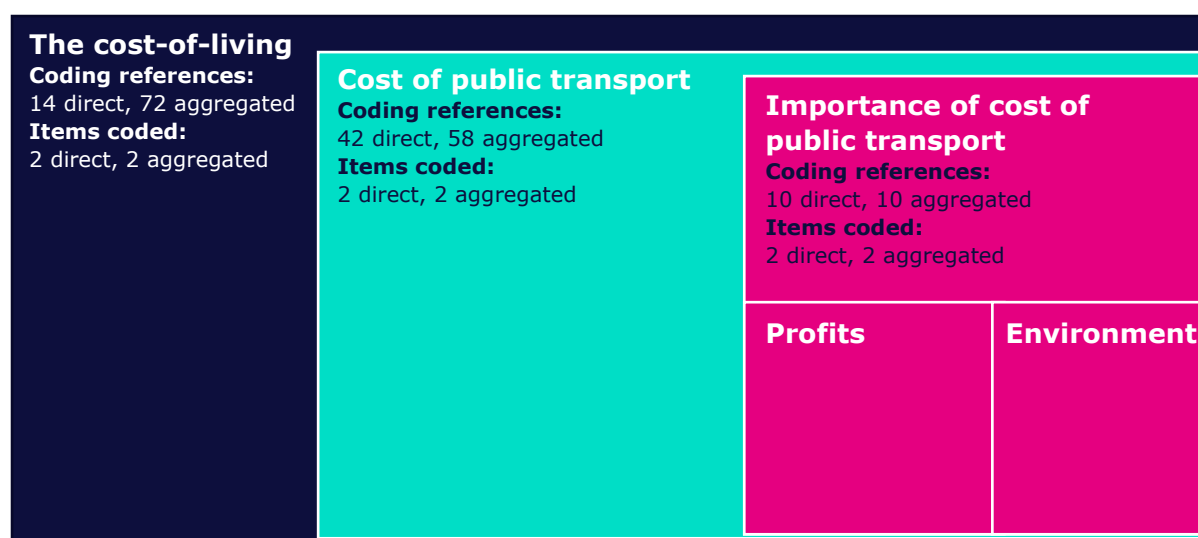
Perceptions of higher profits being enjoyed by transport operators were also raised by participants, implying that for some, higher costs within transport may not wholly be down to high inflation. This finding is likely to be felt more strongly by some as travel plans and behaviours have been impacted quite significantly, leading them to be unsatisfied with the transport sector more widely and feel cost decisions are not being made ethically.

Others took this further and called for public ownership of public transport services as they felt removing the need for profit would allow services to run at reduced costs and better serve their community.

"[If] it didn't have to make a profit, then the people might use it more. I would." (Female, 65-74 years old, East Riding of Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire)

"It shouldn't need to make big profits... You know, businesses pay taxes, people pay taxes so that should go into the transport." (Female, 65-74 years old, East Riding of Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire)

Tree map 3.5 – hierarchy chart: the cost-of-living



Transport behaviours and choices

Finally, the last theme that was coded was that of transport which encompassed discussions around the mode of transport participants use the most often, how busy the services are, the frequency of services amongst other topics.

Participants spoke at length about the frequency of services in their local area and on the whole, many reported that bus services had been cut or axed which has gone on to impact some, but not everyone. One participant was keen to stress that the bus services in their area were cut two years ago prior to any pressures in the cost-of-living and they feared how their communities would fare if more services were axed when operating costs are more of an issue now than they were two years ago.

"They've cut the local bus service down into the estate where I live which was predominantly used by elderly people, which must have used the[ir] passes. That's been cut about two years ago which is an awful shame for the elderly people that used it." (Female, 60-64 years old, Lancashire)

However, it was not just bus services that had been reduced for some participants. Rail has also been impacted and in this participant's experience, bus and rail is their only means to travel and would run hourly prior to being scaled back.

"We used to have a train every hour to Doncaster and the bus every hour to Scunthorpe, and that's the only transport we've really got. But both have dropped down with us [now] a year without a train, and they blamed it on different things." (Female, 65-74 years old, East Riding of Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire)

Another participant spoke about how an operator in their area had made significant cut backs earlier in the year and whilst it did not affect them and their travel patterns as they use a different operator, they did acknowledge that for those in the rural areas that operator served, the cuts could potentially have a major impact on their lives. Others noted that even in busier areas, services are reduced, particular at night which can create doubts about how to get back home.

"One of the major operators in our area Go North East, earlier in the year did cut back on some [routes] and actually remove quite a lot of their services throughout the whole area... If you're in the position of living in a more isolated area where public transport really is your only choice and if your service gets cut, that's obviously going to have a major impact on your life." (Male, 60-64 years old, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear)

"Even in busier places, they're cutting services off at night. Which means that if you're going out at [night] you can't guarantee getting public

transport back or you're just not going to bother going out.” (Female, 60-64 years old, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear)

Following on from the services themselves, discussions of reliability followed with participants having a sense that the bus services were generally reliable and on time for the most part, although RTI is something many would like as discussed earlier. Reliability issues were brought up when discussing train services, with some believing that buying a train ticket is now extremely difficult because if they purchase a ticket and the service is cancelled for whatever reason, the refund process is more hassle than its worth despite the cost of ticket sometimes being high.

The quality of transport was explored, both in terms of the overall service and experience as well as the physical mode taken, and some participants explained how in their area they had been able to enjoy new facilities such as new metro trains and interchanges. However, others relayed their experiences with problematic passengers which had made them regret travelling. One participant who travels with their autistic daughter often encounters passengers who are loud, disrespectful and cause distress to their daughter. Unfortunately for them, they feel that each time before the travel they must evaluate whether the purpose of the trip is worthwhile to overcome the potential obstacles they may face.

“My daughter's disabled. Uh, she's got autism, which all the sensory problems that that has with it learning problems. And she has some mobility problem problems as well. And using public transport is quite a challenge for her... when you're dealing with it [issues with passengers]... You don't want to kind of draw attention to yourself... Weighing everything up when there's so many obstacles in the way, you just think, well, we'll leave that we'll do that another time.” (Female, 60-64 years old, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear)

Others who did not recall any negative experiences with fellow passengers onboard do welcome and appreciate having members of staff on board who are there to provide security and assist with any issues onboard. Some participants claimed they will not travel if these members of staff are not present due to traumatic experiences where they witnessed a fight onboard. Others welcome their presence but do question their overall value as they feel for passengers who are engaging in antisocial behaviour, they have no respect and therefore these staff members need more power.

“On the metro, there's a kind of a really like disrespect... So whatever they're going to do needs to have a lot more power. Just a lot more presence, because the ones that have got at the moment, the kids don't care.” (Male, 30-44 years old, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear)

“I personally would never get on the train if there was nobody on, because at least you've got somebody to go and find which we did when they were fighting on the train.” (Female, 60-64 years old, Lancashire)

On the topic of public transport staff, this theme was explored when considering accessibility and how staff sometimes need to be prompted to assist those who require help. There was generally a mixed reaction towards members of staff with some praising the staff and appreciating gestures such as waiting until their passengers have sat down before driving onwards, with others stating this never happens on their routes and they wish it did.

Another participant mentioned how they had called up the customer services of a bus operator to query the prices of some journeys they wanted to take as they could not operate the website properly and wanted to ask about the £2 bus fare scheme and the member of staff had not heard of the scheme so was not able to assist them properly. The participant felt unsatisfied by this because they were unable to get the answers to their questions and did not want to just turn up for their journey unprepared and not know how much it would cost them.

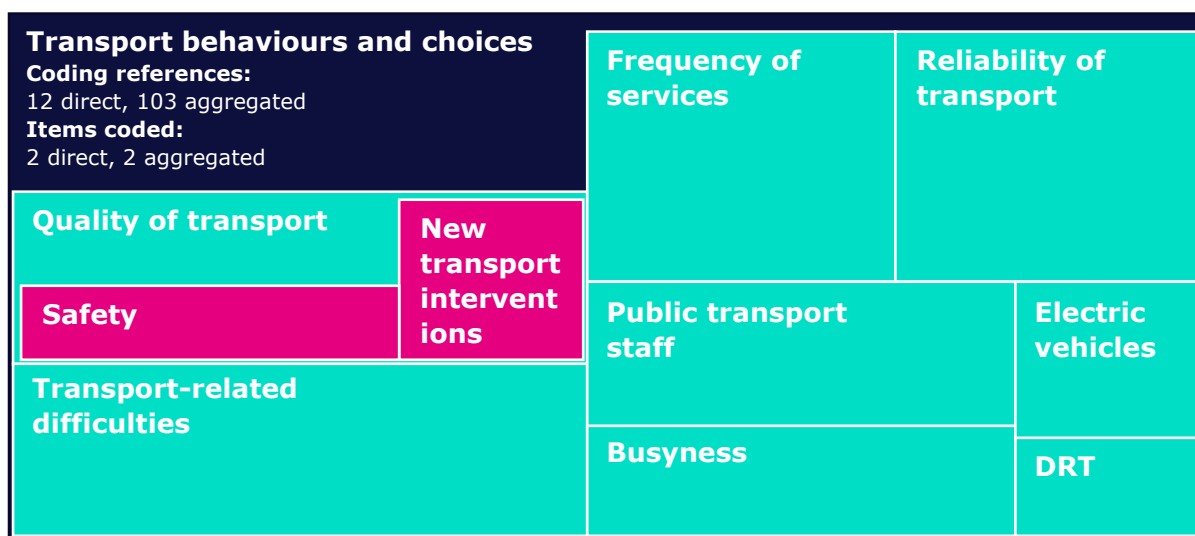
"In fact, yesterday I actually rang the customer service up to find out the cost of the fares of all the places I used to go regularly because on the site, I couldn't use it properly and find out what the fares were and she didn't even know about this £2 scheme. And I said to her, is the £2 service running with, you know, with local buses? And she [said she] didn't know anything about that. She worked for the company!" (Female, 60-64 years old, Lancashire)

Elsewhere, participants spoke about how they enjoyed that their local bus services were operated by brand new electric buses and are much more enjoyable to travel on than the previous vehicles used. This suggests, along with the previous point regarding air travel, that for some, passengers do want to see their travel be decarbonised and recognise the urgency in doing this.

Others spoke about their dissatisfaction with demand-responsive transport (DRT) interventions in their area. They spoke about how they have seen major service cuts and reductions and in their absence, there are now DRT services which in theory are good for them because when they work well, they are much quicker than the previous services used to get them to the same place. However, for this participant, the service is ineffective because more often than not, they are able to only book a place one way as the return journey is fully booked with no spaces for them. As a result, the participant will abandon their travel plans and remain home or consider more expensive forms of travel, such as taxis.

"We also have to book these buses and there's plenty of times if you try to book them and they're fully booked and they'll say, oh, well, we can fetch back or other way around. We could take you, but we can't take you back so it doesn't work." (Female, 65-74 years old, East Riding of Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire)

Tree map 3.6 – hierarchy chart: transport behaviours and choices



Summary: The impacts of the cost-of-living in the North

The qualitative data highlights that people are making conscious choices to avert unnecessary and high costs in their day-to-day lives now more than ever before, including the way they travel. The data is made up of the lived experiences of people who all fall into socioeconomic and demographic groups that are more likely to experience TRSE and many were able to recall recent experiences when travelling where they were socially excluded and able to identify that these experiences commonplace either for them personally, for people they know directly or wider in the community.

As a result of the cost-of-living, the frequency of travel has significantly reduced for many in the North for a variety of reasons: the increase in reduced and axed services, the cost of travelling itself, wider costs-of-living and wider deprivation in the community has limited the need to travel amongst others. The knock-on effect of less travelling is a decline in positive mental health and wellbeing. Feelings of guilt, isolation, anxiety and depression were all feelings that have been experienced by our Northern participants.

In addition to changes in travel frequency, changes in modes used have shifted in the name of cost saving so people can remain connected despite the current economic climate. However, accessing these alternative modes or accessing any mode of transport in the first instance is a key problem for some of our Northern participants which is contributing to the feelings of negative mental health. The section that follows goes deeper into the impacts of the cost-of-living in the North based on the research.



- 5 -

Decoding the cost-of-living analysis

This report has examined the impacts of the cost-of-living pressures being felt across different demographic sections of British society along with engaging with a section of impacted populations who reside in the North. The analytical approach was developed upon reviewing previous TfN TRSE research as well as the evidence gathered and presented in the earlier evidence review. The qualitative approach taken was able to be confronted with granular levels of data regarding the behaviours, effects and impacts that the cost-of-living is having on certain socioeconomic and demographic groups in relation to how they travel.

The primary data confirmed this paper's research aim in that the cost-of-living is having an effect on TRSE, more explicitly, a negative and damaging impact: the current cost of transport is unsustainable for many in the North which is leading to a reduction in travel and subsequently deteriorating mental health for many. In terms of the cost of transport, our qualitative research and evidence review shows that for many the cost of transport is often not a priority when compared against other household bills and outgoings such as gas and electricity and the food shop. When asking participants where they would rank the importance of the transport costs, it was usually ranked third or fourth in terms of importance – food was consistently ranked number one and given the high food inflation prices being felt, this was not an unexpected finding.

Despite the cost of transport being ranked as less important, participants still felt that the costs were unsustainable and even unjustifiable with an urgent need to be reduced. To navigate the cost of transport, participants reduced their travel significantly and only travelled when it was deemed necessary. Combining trips would also be another strategy adopted by some. Some older participants along with those who had a disability had bus passes, allowing them to travel for free in specified time frames which has been a much needed shield from some cost increases. However, where passes are enjoyed, participants are then met with bus service cuts which results in alternative travel options being explored which are often more costly than the initial mode.

Elsewhere in the data, it emerged that many were exploring other modes of travel in the first instance to try and combat high costs. Some are now engaging with higher levels of active travel, and whilst the physical of benefits of this are welcomed, this is simply not viable where active travel conditions are poor or where people have accessibility and mobility issues that prevent this. Travelling further afield to other parts of the North or the rest of the country has become harder, and participants are struggling with this. For many, travelling to other parts of the country, whether for work or leisure was possible, with many looking forward to. Now, this type of travel is not happening nearly as often amongst participants and where necessary, people are opting for cheaper modes of travel such as air travel, which is proving to be quicker, cheaper and more accessible despite the damaging environmental impacts this mode carries.

The £2 bus fare scheme was a welcomed intervention though and some of our participants revealed they were adopting bus use more often and for various travel reasons, i.e., for work and leisure. This was a positive outcome from the

data and is in line with current research into bus usage off the back of government help, which shows that the scheme has helped in increasing bus patronage, particularly in the North.⁸⁰ However as mentioned earlier, this can only work effectively where bus routes are fully serviceable of all area and community types and not at risk from being cancelled.

Mental health has been significantly impacted by the cost-of-living and where transport is concerned, it is aiding exclusion. The reason for this is the overall reduction in travel, showing just how important it is for our communities to be connected. Participants spoke about a range of feelings connected to their mental wellbeing:

- **Confidence:** A reduction travel has led to some feeling anxious when they do travel. This was particularly prevalent among participants who may have accessibility and mobility issues where they require the assistance of onboard staff and crew. There were more general feelings of anxiety experienced by some by just being out in the community, which is likely to result of a Covid legacy and pandemic restrictions, which imposed behaviour changes that have not subsided for some. The option to not travel and remain home in comfort and without stress, was unfortunately a reality many opt for.
- **Depression:** The cost-of-living has taken many things away that were once considered a necessity for some. Participants, particularly those in older age groups spoke about their depression they experienced during the winter season due to having no money for heating and were cold. They attribute their depression to their economic reality as they had never previously suffered with depression.
- **Embarrassment:** Participants revealed that people are more honest about how they are struggling due to the cost-of-living, implying that feelings of embarrassment are lesser now. Interestingly, participants did not attribute this attitude shift to themselves and observed this in others within their community. This could begin to imply that despite this group of participants being deemed as high risk and vulnerable to TRSE and cost-of-living pressures, there are others unfortunately suffering to a greater extent.
- **Guilt:** When travelling for leisure or recreational purposes, some will experience feelings of guilt. The perception that leisure is not important and should not be engaged in and any available money should be put towards bills and household goods.
- **Loneliness and isolation:** Due to the reduction in travel, people are feeling lonelier and having less interactions with others. The cost of travel is limiting people seeing their friends and family who may live further away. People feel that they are withdrawing from society due to their lack of interactivity with others and there are feelings of hopelessness attached to

- this. Previously, people would be more mobile and able to travel to suit their social needs, even interacting with strangers on their travels, but for many where travel has become harder due to the cost-of-living, there is no alternative for them resulting in fewer interactions.
- Quality of life: Transport is a valuable public commodity amongst participants and the inability to travel has meant that many see their only lifeline as being removed from them, particularly those in rural communities where connectivity is typically harder.

This study has the advantage that it was able to engage with impacted populations in the North where levels of TRSE are of some of the worst in the country. In doing so, it was able to understand the feelings and lived experiences of those from lower socioeconomic groups where cost-of-living pressures are experienced and felt greater along with intersecting demographics such as gender, disability and age. This contrasts with other studies and research reviewed which took a national perspective, and whilst this is necessary and invaluable evidence, taking a regional approach allows TfN to understand whether there were any region-specific insights which we could understand and pass on to our local partners and stakeholders. A second advantage of conducting this research was that we were able to enhance our current TRSE evidence base. TfN is fully committed to combating TRSE within the North, and this can only be achieved by engaging with impacted populations and understanding how other factors, such as the cost-of-living and high inflation could interact with social exclusion and therefore TRSE. In addition to building upon our evidence base, this paper explores themes and other work streams that TfN is invested in and can be used as further supporting evidence on other policy positions and strategies that TfN create, such as in the rural mobility space and our work in supporting local bus service improvement plans.

The analysis does come with some caveats, which should be considered in future research. The primary research came from a small sample of ten which makes applying the findings to the wider population and other socioeconomic and demographic groups difficult and not truly reliable. The sample featured only those from white communities, which we know from previous research into the cost-of-living that ethnic minority communities are disproportionately impacted by economic inequalities compared to those from non-white communities. The sample had positive representation for those with disabilities and long-term health conditions and as such, many themes raised were done so from an accessibility and mobility gaze. Despite this, a more equal split between those who are not disabled could have added more benefit to the research and its applicability. Sexuality was not screened for in this project due to this information not being asked for in the Northern Transport Voices community project. Having people from the LGBTQ+ community could add real value to this kind of project as previous research shows this community are exposed to unique challenges within transport. Finally, better representation of younger people, particularly those under the age of 30, would also add value as the recruitment process did not produce suitable candidates from this age range.

As an incentive to participants, a voucher or charity donation was offered to ensure good participation and engagement was had throughout the focus group sessions. Research projects that involve a reward or incentive are at risk from a range of biases, not least than that of maximum reward-per-hour bias or satisficing behaviours. This occurs when participants provide sufficient answers rather than investing their time to provide high quality, optimal responses that really benefit the research. To minimise satisficing behaviours, it was ensured that ability, motivation and difficulty of the focus group sessions were all carefully considered as these have been observed to create satisficing behaviours.⁸¹ Fortunately, there were no clear signs of satisficing behaviours and all participants engaged well with the discussion topics.

Despite these caveats, there is confidence in presenting this project; the primary research is robust and compliments the literature put forward in the evidence review. It has allowed TfN to investigate the cost-of-living in relation to transport which has not be done previously. It lays out the foundations to take this research area further in the future if there is a need to do so for our local partners and stakeholders.



- 6 -

Concluding remarks

Based on primary qualitative data and a review of external evidence, this paper has provided an evidence base on how the cost-of-living impacts socioeconomic and demographic groups most at risk from TRSE, sustaining or creating further social exclusion in communities. The literature reviewed presents evidence that the cost-of-living has similar effects that TRSE ultimately has and therefore a synergistic relationship has been established whereby the cost-of-living is a mechanism in which social exclusion, and TRSE can be maintained.

In May 2023, TfN published the Connecting Communities strategy which sets out TfN's regional vision for reducing TRSE. This strategy comes off the back of pioneering work revealing the extent of TRSE across North and allowed us to set ambitious and measurable 2050 targets we will work towards with our local partners. Connecting Communities committed to a range of actions which will work towards meeting our 2050 ambitions and this paper is the first step in this by addressing action 2.1.

The UK finds itself grappling the effects of high inflation and these effects have far-reaching and potentially long-term consequences for some of the most vulnerable people in our society. These consequences extend to transport and the fundamental ability to be connected, mobile and accessible. The inability of being connected can result in poor mental and physical health with a poor quality of life whilst also being more expensive.

This report was able to speak directly with some impacted populations and understand their day-to-day experiences of their travel behaviours during cost-of-living pressures. These conversations led to us to the findings that people are travelling less, spending more, finding cheaper, more carbon-emitting alternative modes of travel and impacting mental health. Thinking to the future, this paper has provided contemporary context for future research projects and has explored themes that feature in other TfN workstreams and research areas of interest such as rural mobility, inclusive decarbonisation and severance.



- 7 -

Appendix and references

Appendix 1: NVivo codebook

Code name	Code description
Accessibility	Thoughts on accessing transport, both physically on a day-to-day basis as well as more generally
Paying by cash	<i>Paying for public transport by cash as opposed to paying digital or with a credit or debit card</i>
Travelling further afield	<i>Mentions of using local transport to stay connected with the wider area, community, region and country</i>
Rural mobility	<i>How people in rural areas are staying connected and any issues with this</i>
Behaviour changes	Changes in travel behaviour
Frequency of travel	<i>How often participants travel</i>
Community	The sense of community in their local area
High street	<i>The state of high streets and town centres</i>
Mental health	The mental health impacts the cost-of-living is having
Confidence	<i>How the cost-of-living is impacting people's confidence</i>
Depression	<i>Feelings of depression due to the cost-of-living</i>
Embarrassment	<i>Feelings of embarrassment due to the cost-of-living</i>
Guilt	<i>Feelings of embarrassment due to the cost-of-living</i>
Loneliness and isolation	<i>Feelings of embarrassment due to the cost-of-living</i>
Quality of life	<i>How the cost-of-living is impacting quality of life</i>
Being active	<i>Challenges in remaining active during cost-of-living pressures with current transport services</i>
The cost-of-living	Community issues connected to the cost of living
Cost of public transport	<i>Thoughts on the cost of public transport</i>
Environmental concerns	<i>Concerns about the climate and environment</i>
Importance of cost of transport	<i>How is the cost of transport ranked amongst other price increases</i>
Profits	<i>Mention of profits made by public transport operators</i>
Transport behaviours and choices	The mode(s) of transport used by participants
Busyness	<i>How busy public transport services are</i>
Car dependency	<i>The use of private cars instead of public transport</i>
Demand-responsive transport	<i>Experiences of using DRT in the community</i>
Electric vehicles	<i>Mention of electric vehicles</i>
Frequency of services	<i>The frequency of public transport services in the community</i>
Public transport staff	<i>Interactions or perceptions participants have when interacting with public transport staff</i>
Quality of transport	<i>The quality of transport infrastructure and facilities, e.g., stations, stops, vehicles etc</i>
New transport interventions	<i>Interventions and measures that participants would ideally like to see to improve their transport services</i>
Safety	<i>Feelings of safety when using public transport</i>
Intimidation	<i>Feelings of intimidation when using public transport</i>
Reliability of transport	<i>The reliability of public transport</i>
Transport-related difficulties	<i>General issues when using public transport</i>

References

1. Transport for the North (2022) Transport-related social exclusion in the North of England. Available at: <https://transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/Transport-related-social-exclusion-in-the-North-of-England.pdf>
2. Transport for the North (2023) Connecting communities – The socially inclusive transport strategy for the North of England. Available at: https://transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/Connecting-Communities_SociallyInclusiveTransportStrategy_April-2023.pdf
3. Braun and Clark (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
4. Holloway and Todress (2003) The Status of Method: Flexibility, Consistency and Coherence. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249731119_The_Status_of_Method_Flexibility_Consistency_and_Coherence
5. Morse and Cheek (2015) Introducing qualitatively-driven mixed-method designs. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25947371/>
6. Lucas, K. (2000) Transport and social exclusion: Where are we now? Transport Policy. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0967070X12000145#bib11>
7. Oviedo Hernandez, D. and Titheridge, H. (2016) Mobilities of the Periphery: Informality, Access and Social Exclusion in the Urban Fringe in Columbia. *Journey of Transport Geography*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2015.12.004>
8. Lecompte, M. C. and Pablo, S. J. (2017) Transport systems and their impacts on gender equity. *Transport Research Procedia* 25, 4245-4257.
9. Baker, D. M. and Lee, B. (2017) How does Light Rail Transit (LRT) impact gentrification? Evidence from fourteen US urbanised areas. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0739456X17713619>
10. Delbosc, A. and Currie, G. (2011) The spatial context of transport disadvantage, social exclusion and wellbeing. *Journal of Transport Geography*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2011.04.005>
11. Office for National Statistics [ONS] (2023) Cost of living latest insights. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices>

12. Ofgem (2023) Ofgem announces latest quarterly price cap update. Available at: <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/ofgem-announces-latest-quarterly-price-cap-update>
13. Resolution Foundation (2022) In at the deep end: The living standards crisis facing the new Prime Minister. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2022/09/In-at-the-deep-end.pdf>
14. Office for National Statistics [ONS] (2023) Cost of living latest insights: Transport. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/costoflivinginsights/transport>
15. Urban Transport Group (2023) Public transport's funding crisis – and how to fix it. Available at: <https://www.urbantransportgroup.org/resources/types/briefing/public-transports-funding-crisis-and-how-fix-it>
16. Roberts, J.D., Mandic, S., Fryer, C.S., Brachman, M.L. and Ray, R. (2019) Between Privilege and Oppression: An Intersectional Analysis of Active Transportation Experiences Among Washington D.C. Area Youth. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6518066/>
17. Resolution Foundation (2022) An intergenerational audit for the UK. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2022/11/An-intergenerational-audit-for-the-UK.pdf>
18. Sutton Trust (2023) Student Voices: the cost-of-living crisis. Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/student-voice-cost-of-living/>
19. Royal Society of Arts [RSA] (2023) Young people and the cost-of-living crisis. Available at: <https://www.thersa.org/blog/2023/02/cost-of-living-crisis-young-people>
20. Standing, G. (2013) Why zero-hours contracts remind me of the horrors of 1990s Russia. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/09/zero-hours-contracts-1990srussia>
21. Royal Society of Arts [RSA] (2022) Age of insecurity. Available at: <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/foundation/new-site-blocks-and-images/reports/2022/12/age-of-insecurity-report-final.pdf>

22. Department for Transport [Dft] (2022) Statistical data set. Mode of travel. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/nts03-modal-comparisons#mode-by-age-and-gender>
23. Institute of Transport Studies (2013) Buses and the Economy II: Survey of bus use amongst the unemployed. Available at: <https://www.cptuk.org/media/jq3hg2xr/17.pdf>
24. Local Government Association [LGA] (2023) Thousands of bus routes at risk amid funding uncertainty. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/thousands-bus-routes-risk-amid-funding-uncertainty>
25. Collings, S. et al., (2022) Fair bus fares for young people. A policy briefing assessing bus fare support for young people across the UK. Available at: https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/10857/220719-fair-bus-fares-for-young-people-v14_d.pdf
26. Marmot, M. et al., (2020) Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On. The Health Foundation. Available at: <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on>
27. Age UK (2023) The real cost of living. Available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/discover/2023/february/the-real-cost-of-living/>
28. Centre for Ageing Better (2022) New data reveals impact of cost-of-living crisis as we brace for coldest December in a decade. Available at: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/news/new-data-reveals-impact-cost-living-crisis-we-brace-coldest-december-decade>
29. Chartered Institute for Housing (2022) UK Housing Review 2022 shows faster progress is needed to tackle poor energy efficiency of older homes. Available at: <https://www.cih.org/news/uk-housing-review-2022-shows-faster-progress-is-needed-to-tackle-poor-energy-efficiency-of-older-homes>
30. The Guardian (2022) Woman who rides bus to stay warm is tip of pensioner poverty iceberg. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/may/03/stories-like-elsies-highlight-pensioners-plight-and-the-inadequate-help>
31. Raymond, A. et al., (2021) Our ageing population: how ageing affects health and care need in England. Available at: <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/our-ageing-population>

32. Hemingway, A. and Jack, E. (2013) Reducing social isolation and promoting well being in older people. Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Reducing-social-isolation-and-promoting-well-being-Hemingway-Jack/f1adfb55698a8a1d4b5221f56432dd80aece240>
33. He, S. He. et al., (2018) Travel mobility and social participation among older people in a transit metropolis: a socio-spatial-temporal perspective. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0965856417316245>
34. Currie, G. and Delbosc, A. (2010) Modelling the social and psychological impacts of transport disadvantage. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11116-010-9280-2>
35. Cresswell, T. and Uteng, T. P. (2008) Gendered Mobilities: Towards a Holistic Understanding. In Gendered Mobilities, edited by T. P. Uteng and T. Cresswell. Aldershot: Ashgate.
36. Tiikkaja, H. and Liimatainen, H. (2021) Car access and travel behaviour among men and women in car deficient households with children. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590198221000749>
37. Women in Transport (2019) Why is a lack of gender balance in transport planning an issue we must address to move forward? Available at: <https://www.intelligenttransport.com/transport-news/88953/why-is-a-lack-of-gender-balance-in-transport-planning-an-issue-we-must-address-to-move-forward/>
38. ONS (2022) Gender pay gap in the UK: 2022. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/genderpaygapintheuk/2022>
39. Engender (2022) The cost of living crisis and women: read our new report. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/news/blog/the-cost-of-living-crisis-and-women-read-our-new-report/>
40. Legal & General (2022) Women more vulnerable to cost-of-living crisis, according to new report. Available at: <https://group.legalandgeneral.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/women-more-vulnerable-to-cost-of-living-crisis-according-to-new-report>
41. Living Wage Foundation (2022) Low paid work and cost-of-living crisis disproportionately affecting women. Available at: <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/news/cost-living-crisis-affecting-women>

42. Women's Budget Group [WBG] (2019) Women, Employment and Earnings. Available at: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/EMPLOYMENT-2019.pdf>
43. Lubitow, A. et al., (2017) Transmobilities: mobility, harassment, and violence experienced by transgender and gender nonconforming public transit riders in Portland, Oregon. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320085947_Transmobilities_mobility_harassment_and_violence_experienced_by_transgender_and_gender_nonconforming_public_transit_riders_in_Portland_Oregon
44. Government Equalities Office (2018) National LGBT Survey Research Report. Manchester: Government Equalities Office. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-lgbt-survey>.
45. Weintrob, A., Hansell, L., Zebracki, M., Barnard, Y. and Lucas, K. (2021). Queer mobilities: critical LGBTQ perspectives of public transport spaces. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2021.1958249>
46. Meyer, D. 2008. "Interpreting and Experiencing Anti-Queer Violence: Race, Class, and Gender Differences among LGBT Hate Crime Victims." *Race, Gender & Class* 15 (3/4): 262–282.
47. Home Office (2022) Hate crime, England and Wales, 2021/22 data set. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1121680/prc-hate-crime-open-data-021222.ods
48. Mason-Bish, H. (2014). We Need to Talk About Women: Examining the Place of Gender in Hate Crime Policy. In *Responding to Hate Crime: The Case for Connecting Policy and Research*, edited by N. Chakraborti and J. Garland. Bristol: Policy Press.
49. Berrill, K. T. (1992) Anti-Gay Violence and Victimization in the United States: An Overview. In *Hate Crimes: Confronting Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men*, edited by G. M. Herek and K. T. Berrill. London: Sage.
50. Fogg-Davis, H. G. (2006) Theorizing Black Lesbians within Black Feminism: A Critique of Same-race Street Harassment. *Politics & Gender* 2(1): 57–76.
51. People Management (2019) LGBT+ staff earn on average £6,700 less than straight workers. Available at: <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1744726/lgbt-staff-earn-6700-less-than-straight-workers>

52. Trades Union Congress [TUC] (2022) 1 in 5 workplaces do not have any policies to support LGBT staff – TUC poll. Available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/1-5-workplaces-do-not-have-any-policies-support-lgbt-staff-tuc-poll>
53. Moran, L. J. and A. N. Sharpe. (2004) "Violence, Identity and Policing: The Case of Violence against Transgender People." *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 4 (4): 395–417.
54. Mumsnet (2021) Mega survey of UK parents shows that childcare is failing families. Available at: <https://www.mumsnet.com/news/mega-survey-of-uk-parents-shows-that-childcare-is-failing-families>
55. Lucas, K. (2019). A new evolution for transport-related social exclusion research? Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2019.102529>
56. Child Poverty Action Group (2023) Education costs UK parents – typically at least £39 per week for secondary school kids, £19 for primary. Available at: <https://cpag.org.uk/news-blogs/news-listings/education-costs-uk-parents-%E2%80%93-typically-least-%C2%A339-week-secondary-school-kids>
57. Carers Trust (2023) New Carers Trust survey reveals devastating double whammy of cost-of-living crisis and increasing intensity of caring responsibilities on children and young adults. Available at: <https://carers.org/news-and-media/news/post/243-new-carers-trust-survey-reveals-devastating-double-whammy-of-cost-of-living-crisis-and-increasing-intensity-of-caring-responsibilities-on-children-and-young-adults>
58. Family Fund (2023) The cost of caring. Available at: <https://www.familyfund.org.uk/impact/research-reports/the-cost-of-caring/>
59. Carers UK (2022) Under Pressure: Caring and the cost of living crisis. Available at: <https://www.carersuk.org/reports/under-pressure-caring-and-the-cost-of-living-crisis/>
60. Greenwood, N., Mezey, G. and Smith, R. (2018). Social exclusion in adult informal carers: A systematic narrative review of the experiences of informal carers of people with dementia and mental illness. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2018.03.011>
61. Innes, A., Page, S.J. and Cutler, C. (2016). Barriers to leisure participation for people with dementia and their carers: An exploratory analysis of carer and people with dementia's experiences. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1471301215570346>

62. Motability (2022) The Transport Accessibility Gap: The opportunity to improve the accessibility of transport for disabled people. Available at: https://www.motability.org.uk/media/iwaidhvk/motability_transport-accessibility-gap-report_march-2022_final.pdf
63. AbilityNet (2019) Businesses are missing out on the purple pound, says Scope. Available at: [https://abilitynet.org.uk/news-blogs/businesses-are-missing-out-purple-pound-says-scope#:~:text=The%20research%20shows%20that%2C%20on%20average%2C%20disabled%20households%20are%20overspending%20\(as%20a%20proportion%20of%20income\)%20on%20personal%20transport%2C%20and%20personal%20care%20products%20and%20services%20\(%2B23%25\)](https://abilitynet.org.uk/news-blogs/businesses-are-missing-out-purple-pound-says-scope#:~:text=The%20research%20shows%20that%2C%20on%20average%2C%20disabled%20households%20are%20overspending%20(as%20a%20proportion%20of%20income)%20on%20personal%20transport%2C%20and%20personal%20care%20products%20and%20services%20(%2B23%25))
64. Purple [no date] Disability and Inequality – Infographic. Available at: <https://wearepurple.org.uk/disability-and-inequality-infographic/#:~:text=Less%20productive%20>
65. Sense (2022) Complex Disabilities and the cost of living. Available at: <https://www.sense.org.uk/about-us/statistics/complex-disabilities-cost-of-living-sense-natcen-research-briefing/>
66. Equality and Human Rights Commission (2013) Barriers to employment and unfair treatment at work: a quantitative analysis of disabled people's experiences. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-88-barriers-to-employment-and-unfair-treatment-at-work-disabled-peoples-experiences.pdf>
67. Independent (2017) Disabled people have to apply for 60% more jobs than non-disabled people before finding one. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/disabled-people-jobs-applications-more-able-bodied-stats-before-employment-a7970701.html>
68. Intelligent Transport (2023) We need to think differently about transport. Available at: <https://www.intelligenttransport.com/transport-articles/145054/we-need-to-think-differently-about-transport/>
69. Churchill, S. A. (2020) Ethnic diversity and transport poverty. Transportation Research part A: Policy and Practice. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2020.07.012>
70. Kauppila, J. (2011) Ten stylised facts about household spending on transport. Available at: <https://trid.trb.org/view/1148784>

71. Mattioli, G., Lucas, K. and Marsden, G. (2017) Transport poverty and fuel poverty in the UK: From analogy to comparison. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tranpol.2017.07.007>
72. Department for Transport [DFT] (2022) Car or van ownership. Available at: [https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/culture-and-community/transport/car-or-van-ownership/latest#:~:text=Black%20people%20\(40%25\)%20were,and%2017%25%20of%20White%20people](https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/culture-and-community/transport/car-or-van-ownership/latest#:~:text=Black%20people%20(40%25)%20were,and%2017%25%20of%20White%20people)
73. Mattioli, G. and Scheiner, J. (2022). The impact of migration background, ethnicity and social network dispersion on air and car travel in the UK. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tbs.2021.12.001>
74. University of Leeds (2022) Cost of living crisis highlights racial inequalities. Available at: <https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/sociology/news/article/1623/cost-of-living-crisis-highlights-racial-inequalities>
75. Joseph Roundtree Foundation [JRF] (2022) UK Poverty 2022: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2022>
76. GOV.uk (2021) Unemployment. Available at: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/unemployment-and-economic-inactivity/unemployment/latest>
77. Lewis, D. (2011) Economic perspectives on transport and equality. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5kg9mq4dwzg1-en>
78. Mott MacDonald (2013) Valuing the social impacts of public transport. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/226802/final-report.pdf
79. Gates, S., Gogescu, F., Grollman, C. and Cooper, E. (2019). Transport and inequality: An evidence review for the Department for Transport. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/953951/Transport_and_inequality_report_document.pdf
80. Transport Focus. (2023) £2 bus fares – spreading the word. Available at: <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/blog/2-bus-fares-spreading-the-word/>
81. Hamby, T. and Taylor, W. (2016) Survey Satisficing Inflates Reliability and Validity Measures. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5965608/>



- 8 -

Report information

Citation

Transport for the North (2023) The cost of staying connected: An investigation into the cost-of-living for those most at risk from transport-related social exclusion. Available at: <https://transportforthenorth.com/reports/>

Author

Tom Mace, Social Research Officer
Strategy, Analysis and Communications, Transport for the North

Transport for the North research team

Brian Sloan
Tom Jarvis
Emanuela Orsolic
Tom Mace
Rebecca Harbinson



Transport for the North
2nd Floor
4 Piccadilly Place
Manchester
M1 3BN

 0161 244 0888

 info@transportforthenorth.com

