GOCRP YOUTH TRANSPORT REPORT

July 2025

GO! CRP CIC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young people across the UK – particularly those in rural and semi-urban areas – face significant and persistent barriers to accessing reliable, affordable, and inclusive public transport. These barriers limit their access to education, employment, and social participation, contributing to wider social and economic exclusion.

In response to these barriers, GoCRP established the Youth Transport Forum (YTF) to provide a platform for young people to share their lived experiences and co-create solutions. This evaluation report synthesises insights from YTF workshops and a survey conducted by GoCRP of 913 young people aged 13-25, supported by wider evidence from UK transport research. Survey questions were based on insights from the workshops, ensuring they were relevant and youth-led. Three key themes emerged:

Theme 1:

ACCESSIBILITY

Physical, informational, and emotional barriers continue to restrict transport access, particularly for disabled and rural youth. Participants called for multi-modal integration (e.g. bike and bus travel), and proposed installing external bike racks on buses, particularly for rural routes, citing successful implementations in the US, Canada, and Switzerland. They also advocated for inclusive, multi-format journey information (visual, audio, multilingual), better lighting, live updates, and visible staff to address safety concerns. Notably, safety perceptions varied across demographic groups, with younger, female, non-binary, and White British respondents reporting lower feelings of safety, especially on buses. These findings underscore the need for gender-sensitive, intersectional planning.

Theme 2:

EDUCATION

Young people want earlier, age-appropriate transport education and better visibility of careers in the sector. Workshop participants proposed a curriculum-linked, graduated transport education programme with sessions at Years 5, 8, and 11 to build confidence over time. One group proposed a campaign and app to raise awareness of careers in transport, combining school engagement with a digital platform offering role profiles, progression routes, and ambassador content. Another group called for earlier and more consistent travel education to tackle real-world knowledge gaps and build long-term confidence.

Theme 3:

AFFORDABILITY

Cost is the most frequently cited barrier. Young people proposed structural reforms, including group-based discounts and multi-use passes. One workshop group proposed a Business Group Ticket scheme, similar to Cycle to Work, where employers bulk-buy rail passes via salary sacrifice. Another group proposed a flat-fee, multi-use travel pass valid across all regional forms of public transport, designed to streamline access and reduce transport poverty. Both proposals aim to shift responsibility from individual budgets to broader, systemic pricing solutions.

Young people provided practical, forward-thinking recommendations. Their ideas emphasise the importance of structural reform, meaningful youth engagement, and cross-sector collaboration to ensure transport systems meet the needs of the next generation. Implementing these youth-driven changes could lead to far-reaching benefits including improved social mobility, greater equity in access to opportunities, and enhanced health and wellbeing.

The report provides recommendations co-produced with young people that can be used by organisations to address the most important transport gaps and barriers for young people today. Following the Introduction and Evaluation Design Section, the report presents a literature review summarising recent research on young people's transport experiences. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of GoCRP's findings from the Youth Transport Forum and accompanying youth survey.

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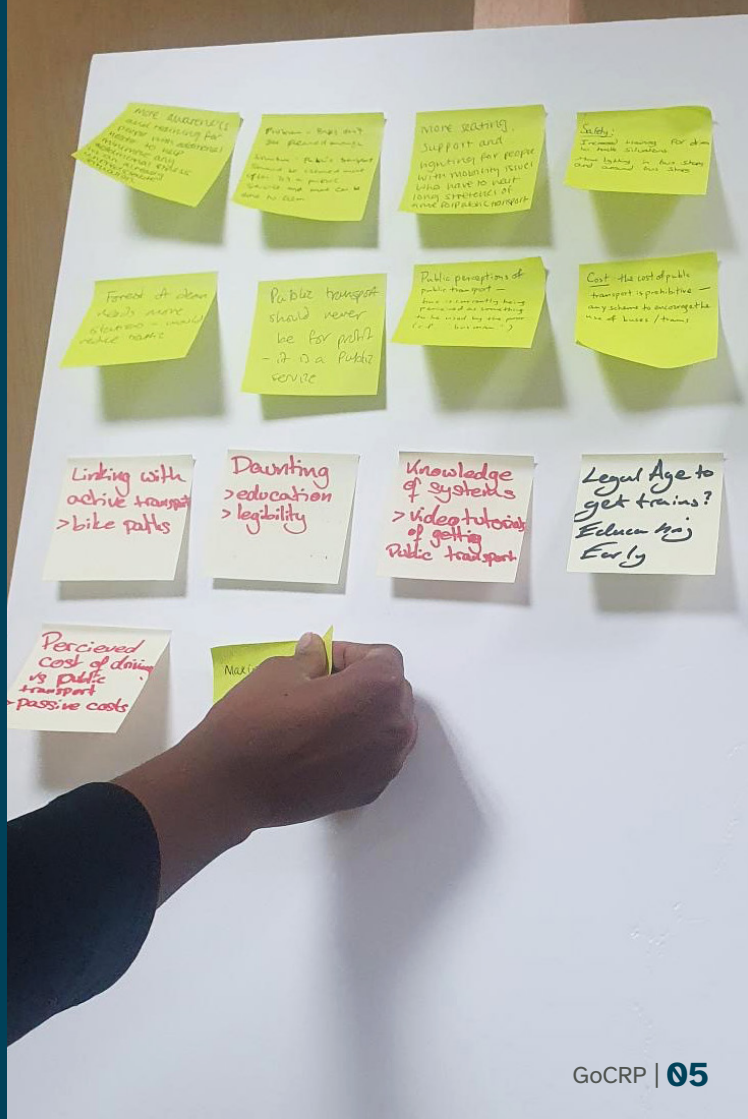


INTRODUCTION

Young people across the UK face significant barriers in accessing reliable, affordable, and inclusive public transport. These challenges are particularly acute in rural and semi-urban areas, where limited services and infrastructure can impede access to education, employment, and social opportunities (Lucas et al., 2019). Research indicates that 16–24-year-olds make 21% fewer trips compared to other working-age adults, with this gap widening over the past two decades (Collings et al., 2023).

Research also highlights that availability and cost of public transport are the primary barriers to travel for young people. Young individuals without access to a car are more than twice as likely to have low mobility levels compared to their peers who are licensed drivers with cars (Chatterjee et al., 2019a). Additionally, young people from the lowest income households are more likely to experience low mobility (Collings et al., 2023). These transport challenges contribute to broader issues of social and economic exclusion. A lack of affordable and accessible transport options can limit young people's ability to participate fully in society, affecting their independence, social connections, and opportunities for personal development (Chatterjee et al., 2019b).

In recognition of these issues, and as part of a commitment to youth engagement and insight, GoCRP formed The Youth Transport Forum (YTF) in 2025 – providing a platform for young people to share their experiences and propose solutions. This evaluation report captures key insights, concerns and ideas developed through a series of workshops held by the YTF from January-March 2025. It synthesises findings from the workshops and a survey conducted by GoCRP, drawing on wider evidence when relevant. It highlights the key barriers faced by young people in accessing transport and proposes potential solutions based on young people's own insights.

EVALUATION DESIGN

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach combining:

- **Youth-led workshop data from the sessions held by Youth Transport Forum** (see Figures 1-2)
- **Quantitative survey data from the survey** (see Appendix) **conducted by GoCRP which received 913 responses from young people aged 13–25, 92.6% of whom lived in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire**
- **Secondary evidence and regional transport research to contextualise and interpret findings**

This synthesis provides a comprehensive understanding of the key barriers young people face and highlights actionable ideas they have proposed.

Youth Transport Forum Workshops

Youth Transport Forum (YTF) was comprised of a group of 11 young people aged 16-25, who volunteered their time to attend the workshop sessions. The delegates all worked, studied, or lived in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. Workshops were facilitated by GoCRP but remained youth-led throughout, with the young people selecting the focus areas and workshop topics.

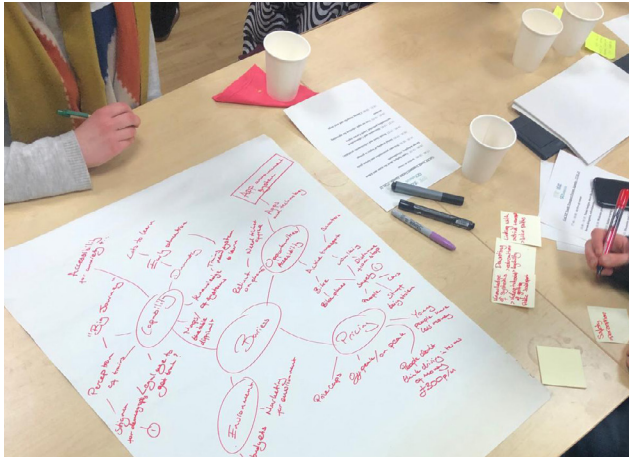
In Workshop 1, delegates worked together to identify the key transport gaps and barriers facing young people today. These discussions culminated in the selection of three topics to focus on over the next three sessions. Throughout Workshops 2, 3 and 4, participants worked in groups to identify specific transport gaps and barriers faced by young people within the workshop focus areas and designed innovative solutions to address these challenges. Participants researched best practice from other countries, conducted SWOT analysis on their ideas, and were consistently asked to keep their ideas realistic and implementable. At the end of each workshop, the groups presented their projects to all participants who were then able to ask questions and scrutinise ideas.

Figure 1. Details of YTF workshops

GoCRP Survey

The survey design was shaped by insights from Youth Transport Forum (YTF) workshops and wider research on young people's transport experiences conducted by GoCRP and others. YTF delegates were actively involved in shaping the content, proposing questions and highlighting priority topics, to ensure the survey was youth-led and grounded in their lived experiences (see Appendix 1 for a full list of survey questions).

Figure 2. Images of YTF workshops



RECENT RESEARCH ON YOUTH TRANSPORT EXPERIENCES IN THE UK 2019-2025

This section presents a literature review summarising recent research on young people's transport experiences.

Declining trip rates and the widening mobility gap

Analyses of National Travel Survey (NTS) data show that 16–24-year-olds make markedly fewer journeys than older working-age adults and that the gap has grown steadily since the early 2000s. A joint University of West England (UWE) Bristol–Sustrans study found that, in 2019, young people made 21% fewer trips than 25- to 64-year-olds, with the authors noting "the situation for young people is worsening". They link lower trip rates to lost education and employment opportunities (UWE Bristol, 2019). The Transport to Thrive report provides further insights: young people without access to a car are 2.1 times more likely to record "low mobility" (≤10 trips / week), and those in the lowest-income quintile are 1.4 times more likely to be mobility-poor than their highest-income peers (Sustrans, 2023). Compounding this issue is a continued decline in young people driving, which further limits their transport options and independence (GoCRP, 2022).

HIGH FARES OR INFREQUENT SERVICES FORCE MANY YOUNG PEOPLE TO TURN DOWN JOBS OR TRAINING. (UWE, 2019)

The latest NTS release (2023 data) confirms that overall trip-making has still not returned to pre-pandemic levels and documents continuing age-related differences in mode use and distance travelled (GOV.UK, 2025).

Cost and availability as primary barriers

Qualitative interviews in the UWE-Sustrans research highlight cost and service availability as the two barriers most frequently raised by young people, with many reporting that high fares or infrequent services force them to turn down jobs, training or social activities (UWE Bristol, 2019). The cost barrier is perhaps unsurprising; evidence suggests that the rising cost of public transport fares has outpaced wage growth, making travel increasingly unaffordable for young people. Since 2015, bus and coach fares have risen by 69%, while average wages increased by only 46% (Donkin et al., 2024).

The introduction of interventions aiming to alleviate some financial burdens have been received positively. For example, the Year-1 evaluation of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme in Scotland (free bus travel for under-22s introduced in January 2022) shows a marked increase in bus use "across a wide range of journey purposes", early signs of modal shift away from car, and clear household cost savings (Transport Scotland, 2024). England's national fare-cap policy (£2 single fare since 2023, rising to £3 from January 2025) provides some mitigation, but concerns remain that the higher cap will erode affordability gains for low-income youth (GOV.UK, 2024).

ONE IN FOUR COUNTY-AREA RURAL BUS ROUTES WERE LOST BETWEEN 2010/11 AND 2021/22. MPs NOTED THAT SERVICE GAPS DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECT YOUNG PEOPLE.

(UK Parliament, 2024)

Geographical Inequality: The rural and semi-urban penalty

Evidence to Parliament records a "worrying trend of decline" in rural bus provision, with one in four county-area routes lost between 2010-11 and 2021-22, leaving whole settlements without a daily service (UK Parliament, 2024). MPs noted that service gaps disproportionately affect young people who "cannot access work, education or leisure" without a car. Independent analysis by the County Councils Network and the Institute for Public Policy Research reached similar conclusions, warning that the combination of service cuts and high fares risks deepening transport poverty in rural and small-town Britain (Rural Services Network, 2024).

In addition to limited bus provision, access to rail services also poses challenges in many rural areas. Previous research by GoCRP (2023) found that some young people living in rural communities in Gloucestershire had never travelled by train independently before attending university, as services were simply too inconvenient. These transport limitations can restrict access to employment and leisure.

RESTRICTED MOBILITY IS LINKED TO REDUCED INDEPENDENCE, WEAKER SOCIAL NETWORKS AND POORER MENTAL HEALTH AMONG YOUNG ADULTS.

(Lättman et al., 2024)

Social-economic exclusion, education and wellbeing impacts

Across studies, restricted mobility is linked to reduced independence, weaker social networks and poorer mental health among young adults. Transport disadvantage acts as a gatekeeper to opportunity and compounds structural inequalities, disproportionately affecting young women, disabled young people, and those in precarious work or education (Lättman et al., 2024). In areas where public transport is unreliable, infrequent, or perceived as unsafe, young people face heightened exposure to social and economic exclusion.

Transport as a gatekeeper to learning is a prominent theme in rural England, where long journey times and high travel costs narrow choices of subject and institution, effectively limiting aspirations and attainment. Recent House of Commons debates have drawn attention to how unreliable or time-consuming transport contributes to reduced attendance, lower engagement, and higher NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) rates in transport-poor areas. This is significant as educational access is closely tied to future life chances. The Youth Futures Foundation (2023) highlights how limited transport infrastructure exacerbates other rural disadvantages, such as fewer apprenticeships, weak careers advice, and digital exclusion. This creates a reinforcing cycle of reduced skills, stalled progression, and the out-migration of young talent from rural areas.

By contrast, interventions that remove cost barriers — such as free bus travel schemes — are beginning to reverse these trends. For example, in Oxfordshire, low-income families can access concessionary travel schemes, particularly for school transport and bus travel. Elsewhere, the Scottish Government's evaluation of its free travel scheme reported that the removal of fare barriers was "opening up new opportunities" for young people and helping to address transport-related poverty (Transport Scotland, 2024).

Accessibility challenges

Accessibility remains a significant barrier to mobility for many young people, particularly those with disabilities (Oxfordshire Community Railway Partnership (OxCRP), 2025) or limited resources. Research highlights that perceived accessibility is not equally experienced across population groups, with younger individuals reporting lower satisfaction levels due to their greater reliance on public transport and limited travel alternatives (Lättman et al., 2024). This disparity is further influenced by gender (GoCRP, 2024), reinforcing broader concerns around transport justice and equity in rural and urban mobility systems.

78% OF YOUNG PEOPLE IDENTIFIED SAFETY AS THEIR TOP PRIORITY. CONCERNS INCLUDE PSYCHOLOGICAL COMFORT, ENVIRONMENTAL FAMILIARITY, AND TRAVEL CERTAINTY. (GoCRP, 2024)

In addition to subjective perceptions of accessibility, physical infrastructure limitations also play a critical role. A major challenge is the lack of step-free access at many railway stations, which significantly restricts travel options for individuals with reduced mobility, including young disabled passengers. Indeed, the evidence suggests that disabled people take 38% fewer trips than their non-disabled counterparts (Motability, 2022). These accessibility issues not only limit independent travel but also contribute to wider social exclusion and educational and employment inequalities (Swift et al., 2021). The absence of inclusive design in transport infrastructure undermines broader commitments to accessibility and equal opportunity for all young people.

Safety is a core component of accessibility for young people and is frequently cited as a decisive factor in transport use. According to previous research conducted by GoCRP (2024), 78% of young people identified safety as their top priority when travelling. Safety concerns extend beyond physical security to include psychological comfort, environmental familiarity, and travel certainty. A significant proportion of young people reported

TARGETED EDUCATION, VISIBLE STAFF PRESENCE, AND INCLUSIVE SAFETY MESSAGING ARE CRITICAL TO INCREASING CONFIDENCE AND EQUITY IN TRANSPORT ACCESS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. (GoCRP, 2024)

not feeling safe on public transport – 41% overall, rising to 44% for girls and young women, and 59% for transgender participants. Feelings of unsafety were especially pronounced while waiting for transport, with 54.6% of respondents reporting they felt unsafe in these settings. The figure was notably higher among black respondents, 68.5% of whom reported feeling unsafe, highlighting significant disparities in perceived safety across demographic groups.

Qualitative data from the same study reinforced these findings, revealing that racial discrimination, fear of harassment, and discomfort related to appearance, such as wearing religious dress, can deter young people from travelling. These findings underscore the need to view safety through an intersectional lens, encompassing identity, experience, and perception. Based on the accounts of young people who participated in the research, targeted education, visible staff presence, and inclusive safety messaging are critical to increasing confidence and equity in transport access for young people (GoCRP, 2024).

This is echoed in recent research into the role of CCTV in public transport environments, which found that the presence of CCTV alone is insufficient to significantly improve feelings of safety (Pisier-Caillet & Ristea, 2024). A large survey of university students living in London revealed that perceptions of safety are influenced by a complex mix of personal experience, identity, and environmental factors. The authors argue that efforts to improve perceived safety must go beyond infrastructure by actively informing and educating the public about crime statistics, existing security measures, and how to report incidents. This supports a more holistic, community-informed approach to creating safer public transport systems for all users.

A further challenge related to accessibility – particularly in rural areas – is the lack of integration between different modes of transport. This includes limited co-ordination between bus, bike, and rail services, which can create significant barriers for young people who rely on multi-modal travel. For example, a case study from the Youth Travel Toolkit (GoCRP, 2022) underscores the importance of 'last mile' connectivity and highlights successful projects like the Slimbridge Shuttle Pilot in Gloucestershire, which linked rail services with local destinations to reduce car dependency and promote sustainable access to public transport. The study suggests that improving these connections is essential to enhancing travel experiences for young people and making rural areas more accessible without a car.

THE EVIDENCE IS UNEQUIVOCAL: AFFORDABILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF TRANSPORT CONTINUE TO CONSTRAIN YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY.

Together, these barriers underscore the need for transport systems to embed principles of universal design and transport justice, particularly in areas where young people have few alternative mobility options.

Evidence gaps

Despite progress, robust longitudinal data on how specific policy levers (e.g., fare caps, franchising, Mobility-as-a-Service pilots) affect different sub-groups of young people remain limited. The literature also calls for more evaluation in the devolved nations outside Scotland, and for intersectional analyses that capture gender, disability and ethnicity alongside age and income.

Evidence conclusion

The evidence is unequivocal: affordability and availability of transport continue to constrain young people's access to opportunity, with the sharpest effects in rural and low-income settings. Recent research demonstrates that targeted concessions and youth-led engagement can increase mobility and inclusion, but sustained investment and structural service reform are required if the UK is to close its widening youth mobility gap.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

This section discusses young people's transport experiences, concerns and proposed solutions based around the themes of accessibility, education and affordability. It draws on analysis of GoCRP's findings from YTF workshops and accompanying data from the GoCRP survey, it is contextualised with relevant literature.

Accessibility

Accessibility was identified as a significant concern among young people, with 18% of survey participants selecting it as the top factor influencing their decision to use public transport. This issue, one of three focus areas selected by YTF delegates, was explored further during Workshop 2, where participants raised multiple barriers that hinder accessibility, particularly in rural settings. A key theme that emerged was the lack of integration between different modes of transport, especially between cycling and public transit. One group of participants described the practical difficulties of combining bike travel with buses or trains, citing the absence of bike racks at bus stops and the inability to take bicycles onto buses as major obstacles. These concerns were echoed in the survey data, where 59% of respondents who owned a bike said they would be more likely to use buses if they were able to take their bike with them.

While this issue has received limited attention in academic literature, it has been lightly acknowledged in government strategy documents. The National Bus Strategy's Bus Back Better report (Department for Transport (DfT), 2021) references the earlier Gear Change (DfT, 2020) vision for walking and cycling, which recognised the potential for greater integration between cycling and public transport. Gear Change proposed enabling bicycles to be carried on more bus routes, particularly in low-demand rural areas where public transport is often infrequent. The strategy emphasised that allowing bikes on buses could expand travel options and reduce car dependency. However, despite these intentions, there has been little evidence of widespread implementation, and workshop participants noted that practical barriers – such as a lack of bike racks, inconsistent policies, and infrastructure gaps – continue to limit multi-modal travel for young people.

In response to these challenges, young people proposed practical and visible solutions, such as the installation of external bike racks on buses. This would facilitate integrated travel, particularly for rural-to-rural and rural-to-urban routes, which are less well served than inter-city journeys. They noted that this approach has been adopted successfully in countries such as the US, Canada, and Switzerland, suggesting it is both feasible and effective in increasing access. They also highlighted how installing external bike racks on buses was a more cost-efficient method of enabling integrated travel compared to redesigning or purchasing new buses with built-in bike spaces.

Accessibility was also discussed in relation to information provision on public transport. The second group highlighted barriers created by the lack of inclusive communication systems. For instance, bus announcements displayed only in English were seen as a limitation for non-English speakers, while audio announcements could be inaccessible for passengers with hearing impairments or those wearing headphones.

Young people advocated for a more comprehensive and inclusive information system. Their solution involved the development of a live journey announcement system that would be available in multiple formats, such as visual and audio, and in several languages. Visually, they proposed LED signs at each stop, as well as on buses. In terms of audio, they suggested more frequent announcements would help to make people aware where they are in their journey and where their stop is. They also recommended that journey information be shared across multiple platforms including apps, physical displays, tickets, and social media to maximise accessibility for different user needs (see Figure 3).

Perceptions of safety were closely tied to accessibility and emerged as a significant issue for young people. Although the survey results indicated that most young people do not feel overtly unsafe on public transport, there was a clear gap in safety perceptions between train and bus travel. Trains received an average safety score of 3.83 (out of 5), compared to 3.46 (out of 5) for buses. This may be because of a lack of real-time updates, inadequate lighting, and lower staff visibility on buses compared to trains.

Table 1 shows results from the survey about what young people thought would make them feel safer on public transport.

Table 1.

Survey Results for Safety

SAFETY SOLUTIONS	%
More real-time updates (e.g. tracking apps)	21
Better lighting	19
Cheaper fares for safer travel times	18
More CCTV	13
More staff presence	13
Better education about safe travel and how to use public transport	7

Figure 3.

GoCRP YOUTH TRANSPORT FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

Accessibility of Public Transport

Barriers:

- Lack of integrated travel, especially for bike users
- Audio, visual and linguistic barriers

Solutions:

- Multi-modal intergration such and installations of bike racks on buses
- Inclusive communication including live, multi-format journey announcements across buses, apps, and displays, available in multiple languages and formats (eg. visual LED, audio, screen notifications)

THESE FINDINGS REINFORCE THE VIEW THAT ACCESSIBILITY IS ABOUT MORE THAN JUST PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE - IT INCLUDES INFORMATIONAL, CULTURAL, AND EMOTIONAL DIMENSIONS THAT SHAPE HOW YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE AND USE TRANSPORT.

(Pisier-Caillet & Ristea, 2024).

Survey data also showed how perceptions of safety on public transport vary across different demographic groups. There was a positive correlation between age and feelings of safety, with a particularly strong correlation around safety on trains, implying that younger respondents are less likely to feel safe. Compared to survey respondents aged 19-21, those aged 13-15 felt 15% less safe when using or waiting for buses and 8% less safe when using or waiting for a train. Interestingly, and in contrast to previous GoCRP survey findings (2024), Black or Black British respondents reported the highest safety scores, while White British and non-binary respondents rated bus safety notably lower than their peers. Females reported feeling 12% less safe than males, and 6% less safe than non-binary people when using or waiting for a train. Similar findings were reported in Scotland where females and those who identified as either trans, non-binary or in another way were less likely to indicate that they felt safe using the bus at night. Those from black and other ethnic groups were more likely to indicate that they always felt safe using the bus during the day compared to those from white ethnic groups (Transport Scotland, 2022).

These findings suggest that perceptions of safety are shaped by lived experience, and solutions must be inclusive, intersectional, and community-informed. They also highlight the need for gender-sensitive transport planning, particularly around safety issues.

Education

Education emerged as a key theme throughout the evaluation, with young people identifying several ways in which learning could support more confident, informed, and equitable access to public transport. Education in this context spans a wide range of topics, including but not limited to:

- **Education about how to use public transport and travel safely and confidently**
- **Education about how public transport in the UK works/ governance/ background etc.**
- **Education about careers in transport**
- **Education about the environmental impacts of different forms of transport and the benefits of taking sustainable forms of transport**

The survey revealed a strong appetite for early engagement with transport education. When asked when young people should begin learning about public transport, the majority (54%) selected secondary school (ages 11–16), while 41% said it should start even earlier at primary school. This suggests a desire among young people for structured learning that builds travel confidence from an early age. These insights support ongoing initiatives by GoCRP, such as “Getaway” and “Access to Nature” travel confidence programmes and the Travel Proficiency Certificate (TPC). These initiatives aim to familiarise young people with public transport in real-world contexts, with the TPC specifically supporting young people with learning disabilities. Additionally, the fact that younger respondents to the survey were less likely to feel safe on public transport highlights the need for early, targeted confidence-building measures, including travel education for under-18s.

Workshop 3 further developed this theme, with participants working in groups to propose education-based solutions. One group focused on raising awareness of careers in transport, identifying a lack of knowledge and a degree of stigma surrounding jobs in the sector. Their proposed intervention had two strands: an educational campaign and a dedicated app. The campaign would partner with schools, career fairs, and guidance counsellors to promote the wide range of opportunities in transport- an approach echoed in Transport for London's Careers Outreach Programme, which highlights the need to challenge outdated perceptions and increase the visibility of transport sector careers among young people (TfL, 2022).

The accompanying app suggested by the participants would act as a one-stop resource for young people, showcasing career routes, salaries, progression opportunities, and day-in-the-life stories through engaging media such as videos and interviews. Participants envisioned that this app could be embedded within school and college career support systems to increase its accessibility and uptake. As one delegate put it, "public transport professionals become ambassadors for public transport careers" - emphasising the need to make these roles visible and aspirational.

The second group addressed a more fundamental barrier. Many young people do not feel adequately informed about how to use public transport in the first place. Their proposed solution was to embed a graduated transport education programme within the school curriculum, spanning key points in a young person's education. This would include sessions in Year 5, Year 8, and Year 11, covering topics such as booking tickets, understanding timetables, navigating safety and etiquette on buses and trains, and raising awareness of transport-related careers. This approach acknowledges that building travel confidence is not a one-off exercise, but rather a cumulative process that benefits from consistent, age-appropriate support over time (see Figure 4).

Figure 4.

GoCRP YOUTH TRANSPORT FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

Education about Public Transport

Barriers:

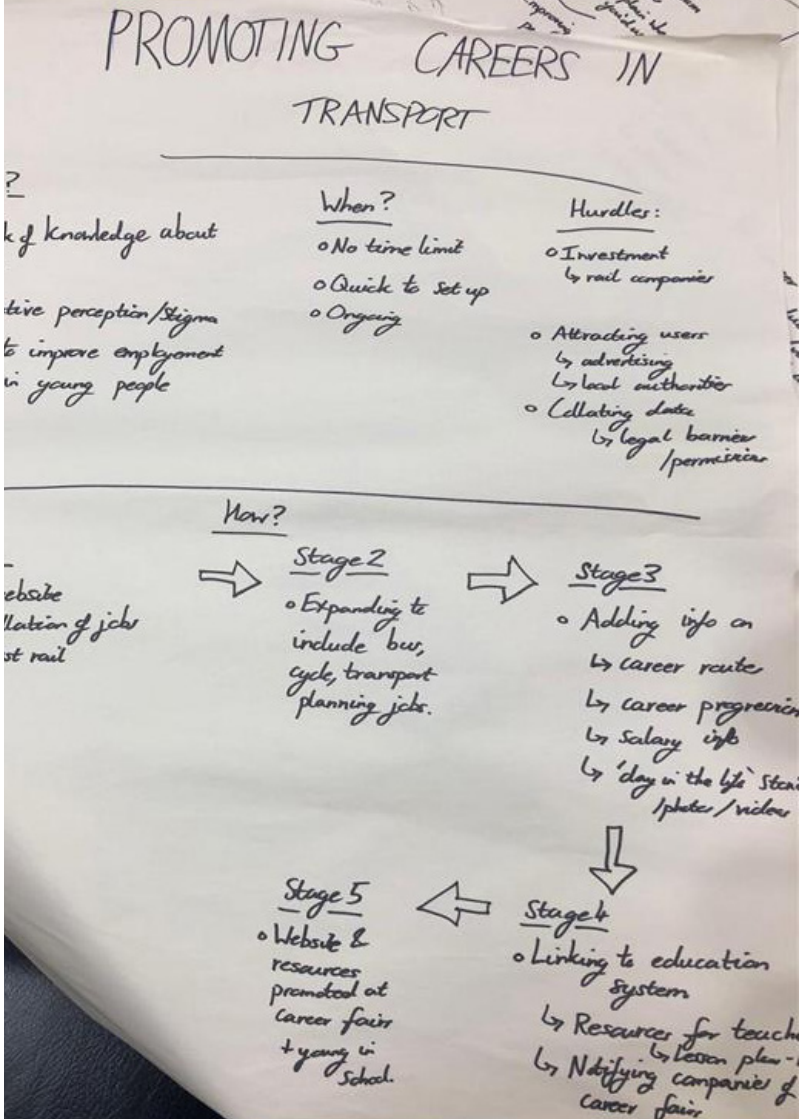
- Lack of information in schools
- Lack of awareness about careers in the transport sector

Solutions:

- Graduated transport curriculum, with sessions at Years 5, 8 and 11, covering basics such as how to use buses, safety, environmental impacts, and travel etiquette
- An educational app that profiles transport jobs, salaries, routes, and real-life stories

Together, these proposals underscore the importance young people place on having access to timely, relevant, and engaging transport education- both to improve current experiences and to open up future opportunities. By embedding transport learning into formal education and leveraging digital tools, the YTF participants have highlighted practical and forward-thinking ways to address knowledge gaps and build long-term confidence and engagement with the transport system.

HAVING ACCESS TO TIMELY, RELEVANT, AND ENGAGING TRANSPORT EDUCATION BOTH IMPROVE CURRENT EXPERIENCES AND OPEN UP FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES.



Affordability

Affordability emerged as the most significant barrier to public transport use among young people, according to both survey data and workshop discussions. When asked to identify the single most influential factor affecting their decision to use public transport, 44% of survey respondents selected cost. A deeper look at the data revealed further concerns about inconsistency in affordability: 50% of young people said public transport is “sometimes affordable,” 46% felt it is “not affordable – too expensive,” and only 4% described it as “affordable – good value for money.”

These figures reflect a general perception that current pricing structures do not adequately support the needs of young people, particularly those in education, training, or early-stage employment (Chatterjee et al., 2019b; Collings et al., 2023).

Table 2 shows what young people suggested would make public transport more affordable.

Table 2.

Survey Results for Affordability

AFFORDABILITY SOLUTIONS	%
More discounts for young people	29
Free travel for students/apprentices	28
Reward schemes	20
Flexible ticketing (eg. part-time passes	18

Other suggestions from young people related to general fare reductions, reduced fees based on group size or capping the fees payable per journey or distance. These suggestions reflect broader national trends and are supported by emerging evidence. For instance, Transport Scotland's (2024) evaluation of the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme reported increased bus usage for a variety of purposes, early indications of modal shift away from car use, and clear financial benefits for households. Similarly, England's £2 single fare cap (now raised to £3) has helped mitigate cost pressures (GOV.UK, 2024). These findings support the workshop participants' emphasis on structural affordability reforms such as fare caps, group-based discounts, and distance-based pricing models.

These ideas were expanded upon in Workshop 4, where the two groups developed practical and innovative proposals to address cost-related barriers. One group focused on employment and explored how high rail fares can act as a major obstacle for young professionals entering the workforce. Their solution was to introduce a Business Group Ticket scheme, modelled on the existing Cycle to Work scheme.

In this model, employers would bulk-purchase rail tickets using salary sacrifice schemes. By sacrificing part of their salary, workers could access discounted travel- benefiting from tax savings and reduced upfront costs. The group also suggested that government subsidies or tax incentives could support businesses in offering this scheme, with the potential for increased ticket demand to bring down costs across the board.

The second group turned their attention to ticketing flexibility and equity, proposing a multi-use transport pass that would be valid across all regional forms of public transport. Inspired by successful models in countries such as Germany, the proposed pass would operate on a flat monthly fee and serve as both a travel ticket and form of ID. The goal was to streamline access, simplify pricing, and enable travel for both leisure and employment purposes. Importantly, their model excluded long-distance or premium travel, keeping the focus on regional accessibility (see Figure 5).

Figure 5.

GoCRP YOUTH TRANSPORT FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

Affordability of Public Transport

Barriers:

- **Cost the most significant barrier to public transport use among young people, limiting access to education, employment and leisure**

Solutions:

Structural solutions prioritised such as:

- **Discounts for young people**
- **Free travel for students and apprentices**
- **Reward schemes**
- **Flexible ticketing**

Both proposals reflect how young people think practically and strategically when given the opportunity to address barriers themselves. By advocating for structural changes, rather than relying solely on personal financial support, participants highlighted the need for systemic solutions that better align transport pricing with the realities of young people's lives. These ideas point toward more inclusive and equitable approaches to funding, fare structures, and employer involvement in supporting mobility for early-career workers.

PARTICIPANTS HIGHLIGHTED THE NEED FOR SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS THAT BETTER ALIGN TRANSPORT PRICING WITH THE REALITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES.

FEEDBACK ON THE SESSIONS

Participants described the Youth Transport Forum as collaborative, informative, innovative, engaging, encouraging, and empowering. Feedback highlighted the value of working with peers from diverse backgrounds and the opportunity to share and develop ideas collaboratively:

"I've really enjoyed working with the other members of the youth forum, it's great to be able to work with like-minded people and some of the conversations we had really allowed me to take a different perspective on things that I maybe thought I was sure about." – *Participant feedback*

Many appreciated having a platform to voice their opinions and felt these would be genuinely considered in shaping regional transport strategies:

"[I enjoyed] being able to have an active voice in transport in the region and feeling like my opinions were listened to and will be actioned upon." – *Participant feedback*

Two-thirds of delegates reported an increased understanding of transport issues and improved confidence in their travel abilities as a result of participating.

Favourite sessions included the initial workshop, which was praised for fostering open discussion and idea generation, and the education-focused session, which resonated with delegates who felt well-positioned to contribute to change in that area.

Participants noted the benefits of engaging with like-minded individuals and acknowledged the forum's role in helping them reflect on and broaden their perspectives on transport challenges.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation highlights three interconnected areas – accessibility, education, and affordability – that continue to shape young people's ability to travel independently and equitably. The findings are grounded in the lived experiences of over 900 young people and provide clear, co-produced recommendations for improving transport outcomes. These insights can be used to ensure youth-informed solutions are embedded into future planning, funding, and delivery decisions.

Accessability

Young people face a range of access issues, from the lack of integrated travel options (e.g. combining bikes and buses) to inadequate safety measures and non-inclusive communication systems. These barriers are particularly acute for disabled, younger, and female passengers.

Solutions focused on structural fixes and inclusive design, including:

- **Integrated travel options:** delegates proposed installing external bike racks on buses, especially on rural-to-urban and rural-to-rural routes. 59% of bike-owning survey respondents said they would be more likely to use buses if they could bring their bikes with them.
- **Inclusive communication:** young people recommended live, multi-format journey announcements across buses, apps, and displays, available in multiple languages and formats (e.g. visual LED, audio, screen notifications).
- **Safety enhancements:** perceptions of safety were closely tied to accessibility and emerged as a significant issue for young people. Suggested safety enhancements included: better lighting, real-time tracking apps, more visible staff, and safety education.

Policy and design decisions must centre inclusive, youth-informed approaches to reduce mobility-related exclusion. These changes are vital not only to ensure equitable access, but also to build confidence, independence, and opportunity for young people in both rural and urban contexts.

Education

Transport education was seen as essential to building confidence, knowledge, and a pipeline into sector careers. Survey data revealed a strong desire for early engagement with transport education, with 54% of respondents believing it should begin at secondary school (ages 11–16), and 41% believing it should start even earlier at primary school.

Key solutions included:

- **Curriculum-linked learning:** workshop participants proposed a graduated transport curriculum, with sessions at Years 5, 8, and 11. These would cover basics like how to use buses, safety, environmental impacts, and travel etiquette.
- **Career pathways:** a second group focused on sector careers, proposing an app that profiles transport jobs, salaries, routes, and real-life stories. This would be supported by an in-school campaign to challenge outdated perceptions of transport work.

These findings support the ongoing importance of travel confidence programmes run by GoCRP and other CRPs.

Affordability

Cost remains the most significant barrier to accessing public transport for young people, with 44% of survey respondents identifying cost as the single most influential factor affecting their decision to use public transport.

To address this, structural, not one-off, solutions were prioritised:

- **Employer rail pass scheme:** a Business Group Ticket proposal suggested that employers bulk-buy season tickets via salary sacrifice, helping early-career workers manage costs.
- **Regional multi-use pass:** delegates proposed a flat-fee, multi-use transport pass that would be valid across all regional forms of public transport- simplifying access and promoting affordability.

These models align with positive results from similar schemes in Scotland and Germany, demonstrating their feasibility and impact.

Recommendations:

1. **Adopt integrated, inclusive design standards – including bike-bus solutions and multilingual real-time information systems.**
2. **Embed transport learning in school curricula – with age-appropriate sessions at key stages and links to career guidance.**
3. **Fund structural affordability reforms – such as capped, universal travel passes and employer-linked rail schemes for young workers.**
4. **Engage young people in co-design – through ongoing regional forums and youth advisory panels on transport policy.**
5. **Prioritise equity in transport planning – with greater focus on rural, disabled, and low-income youth through intersectional impact assessments.**

Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) are uniquely placed to act as trusted intermediaries between young people and decision-makers. Their local networks and grassroots engagement expertise enable them to reach underrepresented groups, build trust, and deliver place-based solutions that reflect real needs. Through initiatives like travel confidence programmes, youth forums, and participatory consultations, CRPs can support local authorities, transport operators, and national bodies to co-design and implement youth-led improvements. Strengthening collaboration with CRPs will be critical for ensuring that transport reform is inclusive, locally rooted, and sustainable.

The findings point to a clear mandate: youth-informed transport reform is not only possible, but essential to building fairer, more connected communities.

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Appendix:

2025 YOUTH TRANSPORT SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What is your age?

- 13-15
- 16-18
- 19-21
- 22-25

2. Where are you based?

- Gloucestershire
- Oxfordshire
- Other (please specify)

3. Are you?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

4. Which one of the following best describes your ethnic group or background?

- Asian or British Asian
- Black or Black British
- Mixed ethnic background
- White British
- White - Gypsy / Romany / Traveller
- White - any other background
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

5. What factor is most important to you when deciding whether to use public transport? (Select one)

- Cost – is it affordable
- Accessibility – how easy it is to get to or use
- Safety – how safe I feel
- Confidence – how confident I am to use it and knowing where the relevant information is
- Reliability – knowing it runs when I need it to
- Sustainability & Environmental Factors - knowing my choices are benefiting the environment
- Cleanliness - knowing that it will be clean and tidy
- I use public transport as often as I want to

6. At what age do you think young people should start learning how to use public transport? (Select one)

- Primary school (under 11)
- Secondary school (11-16)
- Sixth form/college (16-18)

7. If you could take a bike on a bus, would it make you more likely to use public transport?

- Yes
- No
- I don't have a bike

8. How safe do you feel when using or waiting for public transport?
(Scale of 1–5: 1 = Not Safe at All, 5 = Very Safe)

Bus: Train:

9. What would make you feel safer when using public transport? (Tick all that apply)

- More real-time updates (e.g. tracking apps, live train/bus times)
- More staff presence at stations and stops
- Better lighting at stations and bus stops
- More CCTV and security measures
- More people my age using public transport
- Cheaper fares for safer times of travel (e.g. evenings)
- Better education about safe travel and how to use public transport
- Other (please specify)

10. How would you describe the cost of public transport for young people?

- Affordable - good value for money
- Sometimes affordable - it depends on the journey
- Not affordable - it's too expensive

11. What would make it more affordable?
(Tick all that apply)

- More discounts for young people
- Reward schemes for regular users
- Free travel for students/apprentices
- Flexible ticketing (e.g. part-time travel passes)
- Other (please specify)

Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership (GOCRP) is a grassroots organisation, working to strengthen our community's relationship with train travel and public transport in our region. We do that by engaging with and listening to our community and visitors, to understand their needs, thoughts and opinions on travelling by rail and other sustainable modes of public transport. When we build trusting and confident relationships, we can bring about lasting change for the future. We also drive research-led initiatives, influence policy and work closely with industry partners, stakeholders and local government to create a system that is inclusive for all – today, tomorrow and for the future.

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