



THE CONSUMER COUNCIL

Covid 19 - Barriers To Transport Recovery

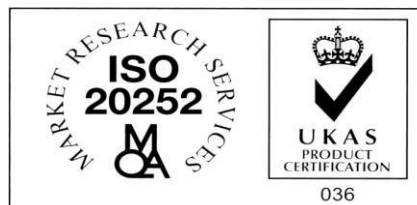
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Twelve focus groups were undertaken with consumers to hear their views on real and perceived barriers to rebuilding consumer confidence in public transport within, and to and from, Northern Ireland.

A total of 96 consumers participated in the focus groups having been selected to agreed quotas on geographical area, gender, socio-economic group and disability. All focus groups were undertaken by ZOOM between 29th March and 14th April 2021.

Key findings

- Staying safe from COVID-19 was an important priority for consumers in relation to public transport, but not always the most important. Older consumers were generally more conscious of COVID-19 safety and gave it higher priority than those who were younger. Amongst those for whom COVID-19 safety was less important, accessibility, cost and convenience, were the most frequently mentioned priorities in relation to public transport.
- The main reasons given by consumers for using public transport less during the pandemic were that shops and entertainment venues were closed. Whilst most consumers will resume their use of public transport to get to entertainment venues after Covid, some said that they may entertain at home more and use public transport less.
- Fear of contracting COVID-19 was the second most frequent reason given by consumers for changes to their use of public transport since the pandemic, and changes to working patterns was the third.
- The main risks of contracting COVID-19 on public transport were perceived as touch point contamination, proximity to others, and fellow passengers not wearing masks.
- Consumers place great importance on deep cleaning and sanitisation of buses and trains and they would like to see customer sanitiser points made available on board. They want to see greater compliance and enforcement in the wearing of face masks.
- Many consumers are concerned about the number of passengers being carried on buses and trains during COVID 19. They want capacity to be limited for some time yet, with some of the seating blocked off.
- To retain the environmental gains brought about by lower emissions during the pandemic, consumers suggested that fares should be reduced to encourage more use of public transport, and that public transport fleets should go electric or hydrogen-powered as soon as possible.
- Consumers are generally avoiding taxis during the pandemic for the same reasons that they avoid buses and trains. Some feel that taxis are safer than buses or trains, but others think the opposite is true. When the pandemic ends and entertainment venues open again, most will go back to using taxis as before.
- Some have concerns that there will be fewer taxis around after the pandemic because many drivers have ceased to operate during the lockdown.
- Whilst some consumers have started to walk or cycle more since the pandemic, this was generally because there was so little else for them to do. Most consumers are unlikely to walk or cycle as an alternative to public transport after the pandemic, though many will continue to do so for health and fitness reasons.
- Most consumers used their cars less during the pandemic because they were working from home, were furloughed or had nowhere to go. Most will go back onto public transport again after the pandemic, but some will stick to their cars because of convenience or COVID-19 safety concerns.

Consumers favour persuasion rather than extra charges to encourage people to use their cars less.

- For those who do return to the workplace after periods of furlough or home-working, attitudes to car sharing may have changed. Drivers may no longer wish to share the interior of their car with others. Some say that they will stop car sharing altogether and expect to see more commuter cars with just a single occupant.
- Some consumers intend to use public transport instead of commuting by shared car because they feel that the spaces on buses and trains can be made more Covid safe than a shared car space.
- The majority of consumers in the focus groups are looking forward to getting back to shopping in stores again. Those who used public transport for shopping trips prior to the pandemic are expecting to return in roughly the same numbers.
- Travelling by aircraft raises the highest level of COVID-19 fears and most consumers are wary about flying in the next few months.
- Consumers' main concerns about being on an aircraft are the proximity of fellow passengers for a prolonged period of time, a distrust of airlines' cleaning and sanitisation procedures, and the potential for COVID-19 transmission when boarding and exiting a plane.
- Consumers want to see fewer passengers on each flight, spaced adequately. They also need assurances that planes are being sanitised effectively. Lengthening turnaround times to allow for effective sanitisation would help to build the confidence of potential flyers.
- Consumers are unlikely to travel to holiday or leisure destinations until there is a much lower risk of having to quarantine upon return. The risk of losing money or having problems getting it back are major deterrents to booking a holiday at this point in time.
- From a COVID-19 perspective, ferry travel is considered by consumers to be much safer than airline travel. Consumers have confidence that they will be able to have enough space onboard to avoid the dangers of COVID-19. Sanitising is less of an issue on ferries than it is on planes and passengers feel they can take sanitising responsibility for themselves.
- Compared with airline travel, there is much less worry amongst consumers about losing money if ferry arrangements have to be changed or cancelled. Ferry companies are seen as having more flexible policies on changing bookings and offering refunds.
- With so much uncertainty about restrictions and the fear of contracting COVID-19, some consumers in the focus groups are looking closer to home for leisure travel and holidays.
- Some consumers report spending their holiday budget on their homes and gardens during the pandemic and indicate that they have further plans to invest in their homes in the next few years, redirecting travel money to pay for it.
- Most consumers do not want to see public money used to subsidise airlines or ferry companies, but they are more relaxed about Translink receiving public investment aimed at ensuring that services remain and are improved after COVID-19.
- Many consumers think that taxi drivers need further financial support to make their services financially viable in the short term and to ensure that taxi services continue to be available in the longer term.
- Consumers want to see commitments to improving bus and train services if a "pandemic subsidy" is to be given to Translink.
- With uncertainty and worry about financial losses high on the agenda for consumers, greater publicity about the rights and protections available to them is likely to be needed as part of confidence building in the transport and travel sectors.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context and Key Drivers

Background

Government advice encourages people not to travel at the moment unless absolutely necessary. Whilst the impact of this is felt right now on passenger numbers, confidence may take some time to recover.

Furthermore, commuting and traveling patterns may not recover to their pre-COVID-19 state once lockdowns are lifted. One reason for this concerns home working. Working from home reduces demand for commuter services. An unknown percentage of people currently working at home may continue to do so even after the pandemic resulting in a permanent loss of commuter passengers.

At the moment, Government is actively encouraging people to walk or cycle for short journeys, behaviours which may become permanent. In this regard, policy to encourage healthy physical activity may be running counter to the use of public transport for short journeys. This may impact, in particular, on bus journeys and taxi passenger numbers

Changes to services or routes as a result of the pandemic may lead to confusion amongst consumers as to what is available and when.

Furthermore, there are some restrictions on the numbers of passengers that vehicles may carry. This may lead to uncertainty amongst potential passengers as to whether they will be able to board when a bus or train arrives and may lead to a reluctance to book or use public transport.

On the wider front, the close confines on board aircraft and the difficulties of social distancing on boarding and exiting ferries and planes are prominent in the media. These may well provide a continuing chill factor to national and international transport. A further chill factor is the worry about losing money because of fears that travel booked and paid for may be cancelled or delayed because of future restrictions.

The Need for Research

Against this background, the Consumer Council wishes to understand consumer views on the perceived barriers to using public transport. This qualitative research will also act as a check on survey material being gathered by Translink

Research objectives

The research objectives are:

- To undertake a minimum of six focus groups of consumers to hear their views on real and perceived barriers to rebuilding consumers' confidence in public transport within, and to and from Northern Ireland.
- For the focus groups to have with participants that represent geographically and demographically the population of Northern Ireland.
- To design a topic guide to focus the groups.
- To use the groups to 'sense check' the findings of a quantitative survey on the same subject undertaken by Translink.
- To produce a report of publishable standard on the findings of the focus groups.

2 Methodology

2.1 The focus groups

Twelve focus groups were undertaken with consumers to hear their views on real and perceived barriers to rebuilding consumers' confidence in public transport within, and to and from Northern Ireland. The focus groups were conducted using a protocol based around a PowerPoint presentation. A copy of this is given in Appendix 2.

All focus groups were undertaken by ZOOM between 29th March and 14th April 2021.

2.2 The sample

A total of 96 consumers were selected to take part in focus groups. The profile of the sample is given in Table 1, below.

		%	n=96
Sex	Male	50	48
	Female	50	48
Age	16-34	29	28
	35-59	42	40
	60+	29	28
Social Class	ABC1	36	35
	C2DE	64	61
Disability	Yes	20	19
	No	76	81
Urban/rural	Urban	68	65
	Rural	31	31
Local Authority Area	Antrim and Newtownabbey	8.3	8
	Ards and North Down	8.3	8
	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	8.3	8
	Belfast	8.3	8
	Causeway Coast and Glens	8.3	8
	Derry and Strabane	8.3	8
	Fermanagh and Omagh	8.3	8
	Lisburn and Castlereagh	8.3	8
	Mid and East Antrim	8.3	8
	Mid Ulster	8.3	8
	Newry, Mourne and Down	8.3	8
	All Northern Ireland group	8.3	8

2.3 Analyses

All focus groups were digitally recorded. The main points from each were drawn together and content analysis was carried out to identify themes and issues.

3 Results

3.1 Consumer priorities in relation to Public Transport

COVID-19 safety.

Staying safe from COVID-19 was an important priority for consumers, but not always the most important. Older consumers were generally, but not always, more conscious of COVID-19 safety and gave it higher priority than those who were younger. Consumers of any age who worked in a health field, who had an underlying health condition or who were shielding unanimously put COVID-19 safety at the top of their priorities.

"Covid safety would be the big thing for me, some people don't worry, but it makes me worry. Since Covid I am frightened to take the bus." (Antrim and Newtownabbey, female.)

"I'm avoiding public transport altogether and I only use local shops now. I had Covid back in March." (Fermanagh and Omagh, male).

"Covid safety would be the highest priority for me. I am on a Covid testing team and I am aware of the dangers." (North Down and Ards, male).

"I have to be extremely careful as I have an underlying condition. For that reason, Covid safety is the most important thing to me." (All N.I. group, female).

"I am a nurse working with vulnerable people. Covid safety is at the top of my list both to protect myself and to protect vulnerable patients." (Belfast, female).

"The most important is probably Covid safety because I had Covid myself a few months ago and it's on my mind I could catch it again wherever I go." (Newry and Mourne, female)

"I would be worried about Covid safety and the number of people on public transport and how it is managed. People let their guard down very easily." (Mid and East Antrim, male)

"Covid Safety would be the most important thing to me, social distancing and people not wearing masks. I don't have good health, so I was to get Covid it probably kill me." (Lisburn and Castlereagh, male)

Some consumers, despite being in a vulnerable group, had fewer COVID-19 fears and did not consider Covid safety as such an important factor in relation to public transport.

"I had Covid and would be vulnerable, but it doesn't put me off taking the bus." (All NI group, male)"

"I'm in a vulnerable group, but I take the train when I have to go to a hospital appointment, just wear the mask and wash your hands. The cost of the train is more important to me than Covid safety." (Belfast, male).

Accessibility, cost and convenience

Amongst those for whom COVID-19 safety was less important, accessibility, cost and convenience were the most mentioned priorities. For these consumers, accessibility was about having a bus or a train service that they could get to quickly and easily without having to walk too far, drive or take a taxi to a station. Convenience was about having services that were frequent and which took the consumer where they wanted to go without having to change to another service or another mode of transport.

"The only place the bus goes from here is Cookstown so if you are going to Cookstown it's alright but you would need to study the times as they go different times every day." (Mid Ulster, male)

"For me, where I live, accessibility and availability are the most important. Buses run every three hours where I am so you have to make time for them whereas they should be there to help you go where you need." (Newry and Mourne, male)

"I only use public transport very seldom, occasionally I use my bus pass to go into Belfast maybe once a month. I am rural and availability is very poor out here. I have to drive to get to a bus station so it's a pointless exercise to park and get the bus, I just drive on." (Mid Ulster, female)

"We need more accessible routes for people to get buses and trains otherwise people won't use them. Taxis are more accessible than the buses and a lot cheaper especially if there is a family being carried." (Derry and Strabane, male)

"Convenience is the most important consideration for me, sometimes my shifts don't match up to what is available on public transport." (North Down and Ards, female).

"Cost is the big thing for me, much more than Covid. It is very costly for ordinary people if you don't have a concession of some kind." (North Down and Ards, male)

"For me it would be cost as we have adapted to Covid; you wear a mask and sanitise and get on with it. Cost is the big thing. I'm a student. I don't want to fork out a serious amount of money for transport." (Newry and Mourne, male)

"Availability for me. There are only a couple of buses a day. I didn't use it very often as they weren't very reliable. You could get one running in the morning and it wouldn't be running in the evening." (Mid and East Antrim, male).

3.2 Public Transport: Changes in usage since COVID-19

Shops are shut.

Usage of public transport had changed for all consumers in the focus groups. The main reason given by consumers was that shops and entertainment venues are closed due to the pandemic. Many of these consumers will resume their use of public transport as soon as the regulations and openings allow.

"I used to holiday a lot and used the buses a lot to go to Belfast, but not now, but just because there is nowhere open not because of Covid." (Fermanagh and Omagh, male)

"I use the bus and train less because there is nowhere to go. If there was somewhere to go, I would use it like a shot." (Antrim and Newtownabbey, male)

"St George's Market, I used to go there every Friday, but now it is closed. As soon as it (the market) opens again, I will be there, on the train first thing." (All N.I. group, female)

"My daughter is saving £500 a month by not shopping for clothes and so on, she is not buying so much. She will probably not go back to the same level of spending after Covid so she will not be taking the bus into town so much." (Causeway Coast and Glens, female)

Entertainment venues are shut

Whilst most consumers will resume their use of public transport to get to entertainment venues after Covid, some said that they may entertain at home more in the future and use public transport less.

"I would have used taxis to get to and from entertainment before Covid, but I don't know. If things were open now I would go and use the taxi again, definitely. (Derry and Strabane, male)

"I used to go out for meals and to the cinema, using a taxi to get there and back and I will go back to that as soon as this is over." (Derry and Strabane, male)

"Nowhere is open. I used to go up to Belfast and have six pints and come back on the train, but I can't do that now. I can't wait for that to start up again, that was my social life." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

"I don't think the nightlife will all come back, maybe for the young ones, but older people will maybe

socialise at home more in the house or garden instead of going out.” (Derry and Strabane, female)

“During Covid people haven’t been using public transport because the necessity to use it there’s no reason to go out and have a meal or a few drinks and take bus or train home.” (Causeway Coast and Glens, male)

“There’s not really much you can do at weekends. In normal times you’d get a bus to Belfast or if a bit later a taxi, obviously you can’t do that anymore.” (Newry and Mourne, male)

Fears about COVID-19

Fear of contracting COVID-19 was the second most frequent reason given by consumers for changes to their use of public transport since the pandemic.

“I’ve avoided public transport altogether as I have been shielding.” (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

“My use of public transport has reduced since Covid. I don’t want to be in a confined space with someone who is not wearing a mask. (North Down and Ards, female).

“I used to use the ferry to go to Scotland to visit my mother, but I wouldn’t at the moment because I am shielding.” (Belfast, female)

“I take buses regularly and a lot of people don’t wear masks, a lot don’t take it seriously.”

Working patterns have changed

Some consumers’ use of public transport had changed because their working patterns were different to what they were before COVID-19. Most of these consumers said they would be, or were already, back on public transport when they had to go back into work.

“I’m not working at the minute and I haven’t been on a bus for ages because I have nowhere to go and the town’s not open and I’ve just been in the house. I don’t think of getting on the bus anymore, but I will when the time comes.” (Causeway Coast and Glens, female)

“I was working from home for most of Covid, but I’m back now and I use the bus again to get to work.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

“My use of public transport has greatly decreased. I would have used it for my work but now I work mostly from home, but I’ll be going back into the office soon and I will use the bus, no problem.” (Derry and Strabane, female)

Walking or cycling more

Some consumers said that they walk or cycle more than they did before the pandemic. However, new walking and cycling behaviours occurred mainly because there has been so little to do during the pandemic and not because they are a considered alternative to public transport

“I do power walking at night and I try to walk to local shops more than I did before.” (North Down and Ards, female)

“I do a lot more exercise now as there is not much else to do; I can’t swim anymore as the pools are closed.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, male)

“I walk more but it is out of boredom, I’m a taxi driver and I am only working a couple of hours a day so I get out of the house because my head is melting.” (Derry and Strabane, male)

“My son bought a bicycle so he could cycle into work rather than take public transport because he didn’t feel safe using the buses or trains.” (Mid Ulster, female)

"I'm doing more walking. If I need to get something I'll walk into the town instead of waiting and getting a lift. I've noticed people walking more instead of using public transport and I think people will continue to do that." (Newry and Mourne, female)

"I used to always just jump into the car when I wanted to go anywhere but I have started walking more just for exercise and to do something different from sitting around in the house, I will definitely continue with that." (Lisburn and Castlereagh, male)

Very few consumers had noticed new cycling lanes or pedestrian spaces and opinion on them was mixed.

"There should be more cycle lanes because cyclists are too dangerous on the roads." (North Down and Ards, female)

"This is rural Fermanagh, there are no cycle lanes or pedestrian zones here and there is no need for them." (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

"There's a place for cyclists, I know thousands of people are on bikes when roads are quiet but no way in the world would I agree with more cycle lanes because all you're doing is back tailing traffic." (Causeway Coast and Glens, male)

"These new schemes are too Belfast-centric and Nicola Mallon announced that scheme and it's not seen here in Newry anyway." (Newry and Mourne, male)

3.3 Trains, buses and taxis: Why are consumers avoiding them?

No concerns about using buses, trains and taxis.

Some consumers said that they had no problem at all using public transport during COVID-19 and had no reservations doing so.

"I'm not avoiding transport or afraid of Covid but you can't go anywhere, if everything opened I would go but nothing is open and you can't go anywhere that's the only reason I'm not taking the train or bus or anything else." (Newry and Mourne, female)

"I don't have any problem with using buses or trains or even taxis for that matter. Just wear a mask and get on with it." (Belfast, male)

"I wouldn't feel unsafe in a taxi, as the taxi driver is in the front and you are in the back." (Mid and East Antrim, female)

"I would feel perfectly safe in a taxi as it's a controlled environment. You are only in it on your own or with someone from your immediate household." (Mid Ulster, female)

"The Covid instructions on public transport are very good. If you get on a bus now they're well laid out, for example, you can only use window seats and everything is well laid out." (Causeway Coast and Glens, male)

"I had to use the train to go to hospital. There were very few on it and most were wearing masks, I have no problem with it." (Belfast, male)

"I think there is more people about since the vaccine started rolling out but to be honest I have had good experiences so far and I have travelled on the bus and train every day." (Lisburn and Castlereagh, female)

Some concerns about using buses, trains and taxis.

About a third of consumers would be happy to use public transport at the moment but had some reservations about it.

"As long as people aren't actually coughing all over me I am okay about travelling on any form of public transport." (Belfast, female)

"It wouldn't really bother me, but if someone sat beside me, I would ask them to move." (Antrim and Newtownabbey, female)

"I would be happy to travel on trains buses or taxis as long as all the measures are in place like masks and gels and everyone follows the rules." (Derry and Strabane, male)

"I've had the jab so I am not overly worried, but I would expect people to wear their masks." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

"I'd rather pay the money in a taxi so I'm on my own other than the driver possibly behind a screen with a mask on instead of sharing the same air as whoever else is on the bus with you." (Causeway Coast and Glens, female)

"Why can they take your money and can't give you change. If my bus fare is £3.60 and I give the bus driver a fiver and he says he can't give me change. I now need the exact money why is that? Is that because of Covid?." (Lisburn and Castlereagh, female)

Major concerns about using buses, trains and taxis.

Around a further third of consumers had major reservations about using public transport at the moment. Most of these expressed fears about the hygiene or mask wearing behaviours of others, which they saw as a threat to their COVID-19 safety.

"I feel very unsure about traveling on public transport, people just don't stick to the rules. They just don't comply." (Lisburn and Castlereagh, male)

"If I was in amongst a lot of people, I would feel very unsafe. All the people I work with are immunocompromised, so I have to be very careful not to pass anything on to them." (Belfast, female)

"Being in an enclosed space with other people and not enough air circulating? Definitely not." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

"I got the bus once at Christmas and there were too many people not wearing a mask, I wouldn't do it again." (Belfast, female)

"I've used buses and trains during Covid and I found a lot of people ignored the safety rules and that wouldn't encourage anyone to use public transport. Three out of five people without masks and they didn't care and the staff seemed to have no power to enforce it." (Causeway Coast and Glens, female)

"I would still avoid all forms of public transport because of other people's hygiene or the lack of it. I need to keep myself safe." (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

3.4 Trains, buses and taxis: What would bring consumers back?

Just open the shops.

For some, the issue was not about what needed to be done to make public transport safe. For them, it was simply a matter of opening up society again and they would be back on public transport straight away.

"Open up the shops and I will be back on the bus and in the town shopping again." (Derry and Strabane, female)

"If it was possible to go on holiday, I'd use public transport and planes in the morning." (Derry and Strabane, male)

"Open the shops up and people will go and use public transport again, especially if there are good Covid measures in place." (North Down, male)

"Once shops start opening again, people will want to use public transport again. We just have to live with Covid; we have to mask up, sanitise and get on with it." (All N.I. group, male)

Ensure good sanitisation measures

Some emphasised the need for continuing good hygiene. They stressed the need for good cleaning practices on public transport and the availability of sanitiser at boarding and exit points.

"I think there is a feeling that the buses and trains cannot be really clean so no matter what you do there is always going to be a risk." (Mid and East Antrim, male)

"It would be good if they kept on sanitising trains and buses and make people follow all the guidelines." (Derry and Strabane, male)

"Proper sanitising and cleaning should continue after this; we shouldn't be going back to dirty buses and trains." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

"I think if they had something on the trains, like that fogging system they use to deep clean vehicles, it would give people some reassurance." (Mid Ulster, female)

"If they wanted you to put hand sanitiser on or make you wear a mask I wouldn't mind because you'd be safer doing that anyway after Covid, I would do it no problem." (Newry and Mourne, male)

"There should be hand sanitisers available on-board buses and trains as you enter and leave." (North Down and Ards, female)

"We are all very aware of our health in public places now, I'll use public transport, but I will sanitise and make sure I keep my distance." (Fermanagh and Omagh, male)

"I think it will be there for a long time as all we hear about is how long Covid can live on hard surfaces. It's something you don't have control of; you wonder who has been there before you and are they as hygienic as you." (Lisburn and Castlereagh, female)

Bus and train capacity and social distancing

Some consumers were concerned about the number of passengers being carried and did not want a return to buses and trains being filled up to capacity. Instead, they wanted capacity to be limited and some seating to be blocked off.

"At peak hours the buses are packed, buses should be limited on capacity, I want social distancing to continue on buses and I don't want someone sitting beside me." (Fermanagh and Omagh, male)

"There should be stricter enforcement of social distancing and mask wearing rules on buses."

If they don't stick to the rules, they should be put off the bus.” (Lisburn and Castlereagh, male)

“There should continue to be restriction on the numbers in buses and taxis, for example, no front passengers in taxis.” (All N.I. group, male)

“Certain seats should be blocked off on buses so that no-one can sit too close to you.” (North Down and Ards, female)

“I don't think people will ever go back to traveling on public transport the way they used to. I don't think they will accept the same level of overcrowding as before” (Mid Ulster, female)

“I'd be okay about using it, depending on how distanced things were. But if a packed bus came along, for example, I wouldn't get on it, they need to keep people well-spaced.” (All N.I. group, female)

“I wouldn't get on a crowded bus and that would cause me hassle so I think there needs to be limits on numbers. We all haven't been out for so long so being in spaces with so many more people will be overwhelming, it's the sheer panic of that many people you're not used to.” (Causeway Coast and Glens, female)

Confidence that everyone is obeying the rules

Seeing other people flaunting the rules or not wearing masks is an issue for some. These consumers felt that the rules needed to be enforced and people not obeying them needed to be challenged.

“I would expect everybody to follow the rules, but not everybody does. Some people don't wear masks and it is difficult to enforce.” (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

“It's scary to use the buses, not everybody wears masks. I haven't been on public transport since Covid, I walk or use the car.” (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

“The risk factor does put me off, it really annoys me that people are not sticking to the rules on mask wearing. I have seen inspectors get on the buses and not enforce it.” (All N.I. group, male)

“If everybody wore their masks like they are supposed to do and kept their distance you wouldn't be afraid to go back, but this is not the case, so people are anxious.” (Mid Ulster, male)

Confidence that everyone has been vaccinated

As the roll out of vaccination continues, some consumers felt that they would be more confident about using public transport again.

“I think when people get their second jab they will be more confident and will go out and about again, use the buses and taxis and so on.” (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

“I've had my vaccinations and, as times go on and more people get vaccinated the more confident I will be.” (Antrim and Newtownabbey, male)

“If everyone has had their vaccinations, I don't see a problem.” (Mid Ulster, male)

“I think a lot of older people will never use public transport again because they will be that afraid of catching something even with the vaccine.” (Mid and East Antrim, male)

COVID-19 safety on different forms of public transport

Consumers had different views on which forms of public transport they would feel most comfortable on after the pandemic. Some of the views are contradictory.

“Taxis would be the last thing I would use. It's too small a space and you don't know who has been in before you.” (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

"I will probably use taxis more after Covid because it's safer, just me and the driver and you can keep the window open." (Antrim and Newtownabbey, male)

"The train is safer because there is more space." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

"I'd get on a ferry but not on a plane." (All NI group, male)

"I had four years of flying to London and back weekly and you were nose to nose and I wouldn't be doing that again." (Causeway Coast and Glens, male)

Antisocial behaviour

Finally, in terms of what would get people back using public transport again, anti-social behaviour was an issue for some.

"I'll not feel safe until passengers are monitored for drunkenness before they board a train. As a woman I feel vulnerable on my own especially at night." (North Down and Ards, female)

"My problem with public transport is not so much Covid as anti-social behaviour, people don't respect others. There were young people urinating at the back of the bus the other day." (All N.I. group, male)

3.5 Planes: Why are consumers avoiding them and what would get them back?

Nowhere to go

The main reason given by consumers for not flying at the moment is that there is nowhere they can go. However, when destinations open up, many will fly again. Some have concerns about COVID-19 safety both on the flight and at the destination. Others fear that their travel may be disrupted by cancellation or quarantine.

No concerns about being onboard planes.

A small minority of consumers said that they are not avoiding air travel and would fly again immediately if they had somewhere to go. For some, being vaccinated gave them the confidence to fly, whilst one said that he had no fears about COVID-19 at all.

"I'd be on one in the morning as I've been vaccinated and I would not be afraid to fly." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

"I've no problem getting on a plane as long as people are tested beforehand." (Derry and Strabane, female)

"I have no worries about getting on a plane at the moment. I have flown since Covid and people were well spaced in the airport and going through security. We were disembarked row by row." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

"I would fly again in the morning, I have no fear about catching Covid, it doesn't bother me. I think there is too much made of it, I won't bother getting the jab." (Belfast, male)

Concerns about hygiene

Many said they would fly again when destinations open up, but they did have some concerns. For some this was just a general nervousness, for others it was about maintaining social distance and keeping Covid safe.

"I wouldn't touch the trays, planes are not properly cleaned they are filthy at the best of times, I wouldn't risk catching Covid." (North Down and Ards)

"I would like to see confirmation that safety/cleaning checks have been carried out by an independent body that can validate that the airport is being run correctly. Not just a

tick list exercise like the cleaning schedules in the public toilets.” (Mid and East Antrim, female)

“I’d be a bit nervous. As long as you sanitise and use your mask you just got to do it.” (All N.I. group, female)

“As long as it was under your own control, the proximity doesn’t bother me, but I am concerned about ensuring mask wearing and sanitisation.” (Derry and Strabane, male)

“I think it will be very hard going through security as you will need to take off your shoes and your belt and throw them into a basket. How can this process ever be hygienic or Covid safe?” (Mid and East Antrim, female)

Proximity

For many, the very thought of boarding a flight was discomfiting. Consumers have had experience of fully booked flights during COVID-19 and of the close proximity to others when boarding. For these consumers, proximity to others was their biggest fear.

“Social distancing is impossible on a plane for economic reasons so it’s really proximity to other people that worries me and I don’t know how you overcome that.” (Mid and East Antrim, male)

“Stuck in an airtight box for hours with recirculated air and no social distancing, no thanks.” (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

“The ventilation isn’t good and it circulates the same air around everybody.” (North Down and Ards male)

“I cancelled a holiday today, my son in law travels a lot and he says there is no spacing between seats.” (North Down and Ards, male)

“I’d love to get away and I probably will when things open up, but I’d not like anyone sitting beside me on a plane.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

“Space is an issue; I would need to be confident that there is not someone unwell on the plane.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, male)

“It’s the people on the flight more than anything, you don’t know where people have come from or what they could have.” (Mid Ulster, male)

“They would have to improve the queuing system when you board a plane. I don’t understand why they insist on keeping you in a big queue after they check your ticket before they allow you to board. I think that is where the biggest problem is.” (Mid Ulster, female)

Bad experience in the recent past

Some consumers reported recent bad experiences that put them off flying in the near future.

“I went on a flight last September and I was very concerned about the proximity of people. There was no seat spacing. The airport wasn’t full, but there was no distancing, it looked just like it always did. (Antrim and Newtownabbey, female)

“I would not go at the moment at all. Using planes last year, it was bedlam boarding and exiting, the plane itself was okay but the airport part of it was badly controlled.” (All N.I. group male)

Fear of cancellation

One of the fears amongst consumers is booking a holiday and then finding it is cancelled because of restrictions at the destination.

“I love the idea of getting away, but my fear is that my holiday might be cancelled and I might not get my

money back.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, male)

“I would be booking through a reputable travel agency to minimise the risk in case something happened. I wouldn't want to be in a position where I had to sort everything out myself if anything went wrong.” (Mid and East Antrim, female)

“I would definitely use a travel agent if I was booking a holiday as you would have more chance of getting your money back if anything went wrong.” (Mid and East Antrim, female)

Fear of quarantine

Many consumers fear that they might have to quarantine on arrival at their holiday destination and/or quarantine upon returning home. The uncertainty and the speed at which restrictions are imposed was a further worry.

“I'd go on a plane on holiday, but I'd be frightened of getting stuck abroad. Quarantine and testing puts me off going anywhere.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

“The traffic light system would worry me that whilst you are away if it changed to red you'd have to quarantine in a hotel at your own cost when you came back.” (Antrim and Newtownabbey, male)

“A lot of European countries are in lockdown and I just wouldn't have the confidence in booking even just a month in advance.” (Antrim and Newtownabbey, female)

“Unless the government said it was okay to go, I would be very fearful. Also, the rules change very quickly, so I'd be worried about cancellation at the last minute or getting stuck abroad or quarantining when we came back.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

“I wouldn't fly foreign as there is a two-week quarantine in most countries at the moment so there is no point. When I go on holiday, I don't want to be worrying about going into quarantine.” (Lisburn and Castlereagh, male)

What would get you back on a plane?

Addressing the issues raised above would begin to build passenger confidence again. Consumers also made the following points in relation to flying in the future.

“I think some of the regulations in place at the minute are good like the temperature when you enter the airport, the mask everything else. If I could get somewhere it would be great, I'd do it tomorrow.” (Causeway Coast and Glens, male)

“Lengthen plane turnaround times to make sure they are properly cleaned.” (North Down and Ards, male)

“Fogging should be done after each flight.” (North Down and Ards, male)

“A lot fewer people on the plane would get me back. The seats are too close.” (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

“I wouldn't want to sit beside someone else breathing in the same air, so better spacing is needed.” (Belfast, female)

“I would want to see more Covid safety measures introduced at the airport in terms of social distancing at squeeze points like going through security and boarding the plane.” (Lisburn and Castlereagh, female)

Testing and vaccine passports

Whilst some welcomed the idea of vaccine passports and the testing of passengers before boarding a flight, others were concerned about the costs involved and the potential for discriminating against some travellers.

"Some people are so against the passports, but what's the issue? If you got the vaccination what's the problem? If you got it, you're obviously happy enough to have it so why not show it on a piece of paper?" (Causeway Coast and Glens, female)

"The cost of PCR tests is prohibitive, so that needs to be cheap or free to enable me to fly." (All N.I. group, male)

"Stop the requirement for the PCR test as the cost is crippling, just give us a vaccine passport. All Testing is way too expensive, free tests would be good." (Antrim and Newtownabbey, female)

"If I had to take a one-off test, I'd be happy to pay for it, but they are talking about multiple tests which I couldn't afford and I'd be afraid of having to quarantine when I came back." (Derry and Strabane, male)

"I don't agree with the vaccine passport because if you don't get the vaccine you won't be able to go anywhere. I am seventeen so it will be a long time before I will be able to get the vaccine. I don't really agree with the tests either as you get false positives and negatives." (Mid Ulster, male)

3.6 Ferries: Why are consumers avoiding them and what would get them back?

The majority of consumers in the study did not use ferries. Of those who did, most said that ferries are much safer, from a COVID-19 point of view, than planes because of increased distance between passengers and the possibility of going out on deck. However, there were similar reservations to those expressed regarding planes when it came to booking future travel and the possible restrictions at destinations.

"I'm a ferry user, three times a year normally, but not since Covid. I'd be happier than on a plane because you can have your own space in a cabin if you want and sterilise it for yourself." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

"I'd go on a ferry no problem. You have a much better chance of getting space and you can go outside on a good day." (Belfast, male)

"I wouldn't have any problem using the ferry at the moment. I would probably try to travel in off peak times maybe catch the 3am sailing." (Lisburn and Castlereagh, female)

"Even though I'm shielding I would go on a ferry." (Belfast, female)

"You can always go outside on a ferry to get a bit of air and you have so much more room on a ferry than you do on a plane it's not an issue." (Mid Ulster, male)

"My employer gave us the option to fly or take the boat and I said the boat for more space, comfortable in our own vehicle and in a larger space where you could go outside." (Newry and Mourne, male)

"I'm happy enough to travel, but there is no point when everything is closed at the other end, I'd also be afraid of having to quarantine on return." (Derry and Strabane, female)

"Ferry companies are used to reorganising travel if they can't travel due to bad weather, so they have a much more flexible approach to rescheduling travel arrangements or issuing refunds than airlines." (Lisburn and Castlereagh, female)

"I think ferry companies on the whole are more flexible when you have to reschedule a trip compared to airlines so the same fear of losing money is not there." (Mid and East Antrim, male)

3.7 What Consumer protections will you need when you use transport in the future?

Some consumers did not know that advice and help is available from The Consumer Council or Advice NI if things go wrong. Some would seek advice on their rights and on how to get started making a claim. In relation to consumer protection, the majority of comments were about getting full and proper redress if they had their travel cancelled through no fault of their own.

Protection if something is cancelled

"We need protections for cancellations on flights and ferries, but the rest of public transport is okay." (Derry and Strabane, female)

"If I had a problem I'd go to CAB (Advice NI) if I couldn't solve it myself, I would want them to take up the case for me." (Derry and Strabane, male)

"If we go and book something and there's another wave or a reason you can't fly you should have assurance by the carrier that you get the money back within 30 days." (Newry and Mourne, male)

Advice on how to make a claim oneself

"I'd need help on my rights, the processes and who to contact. An advice agency would be good to go to directly to help me get started making a claim." (Fermanagh and Omagh, male)

"It would be good to have clarity from an advice centre on what you can reasonably expect in compensation." (Belfast, male)

"FAQs on the Consumer Council website would be good and something to back up your questions when you have to call the tour operator." (Antrim and Newtownabbey, female)

"Help is needed in breaking down the jargon when you go to claim, also an outline of what I can do to appeal and all the steps in the process." (North Down and Ards, female)

Someone to make sure you get proper redress

"A lot of places offer vouchers only, but if you've paid money for your holiday you should get your money back not vouchers." (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

"I'd a JET2 holiday that was cancelled last year. They offered vouchers but we insisted that we had our money back and we got it without a problem. If they had still refused I would have wanted the Consumer Council to take it up for me." (Derry and Strabane, female)

"EasyJet cancels at very short notice. For my outbound flight I got a refund but for the return leg I only got vouchers. I couldn't use the vouchers to book online and had to phone instead. Over the phone the price was £120 more than if it was booked online. That's not right, the Consumer Council should do something about that, it's a scam." (All N.I group, male)

"Tui cancelled my holiday. Tui insisted that I go to the local travel agent where I booked the holiday to make a claim, but that was shut because of Covid. It took 12 months to get my money back. Someone needs to look into that sort of thing." (All N.I. group, female)

"There should be greater flexibility in departure and destination when having to change a flight. You can change destination but not origin." (All N.I., male)

"Last summer I booked a trip to Oz and it was cancelled. The company wouldn't play ball with a refund and I had to go through my credit card to get it back. They would only offer me vouchers or rebooking, but I wanted my money back and got it in the end. Not good that they gave me so much hassle, this is something that consumer groups need to look into." (Antrim and Newtownabbey, male.)

"We need to be assured that if travel is cancelled, you'll definitely get your money back, not be fobbed off

with promises or vouchers.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

3.8 Private car usage during and after COVID-19

Most consumers used their cars less during the pandemic because they were working from home, were furloughed or had nowhere to go. Most will go back onto public transport again after the pandemic, but some will stick to their cars because of convenience or COVID-19 safety. Consumers favour persuasion rather than extra charges to encourage people to use their cars less.

Levels of usage

“I haven't used my car for 3 months. Last time was because I wanted to go to a restaurant (Christmas) that I couldn't take public transport to.” (All N.I. group, male)

“I am definitely saving on fuel at the moment as there is nowhere to travel, the car has sat at the house for a year.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

“I used to drive to work, but not now that I'm working from home. I do use the car sometimes, but I try to limit it because fuel is expensive.” (Belfast, female)

“I've been using the car a bit less, but I'll go back to using it as normal when this is over.” (Derry and Strabane, male)

Preference for going back on public transport

“I prefer the bus; you can switch off when you are on it and you don't have to find a parking place.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

“I'll be more likely to use park and ride when things get back to normal again. I have got used to not taking the car into town”. (Belfast, male)

“I see empty double decker buses going around, people should be using them it seems such a waste. I will definitely be using the bus again after Covid. (Belfast, female)

“I don't like driving and I like the bus and train and want to get back to using them.” (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

“Covid has changed the way I feel about my car, I don't really need it, I want to get on a train now and go anywhere I can.” (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

Sticking with the car

“I use my car much more now as I wouldn't use public transport. I feel safe in my own car and I'll keep on using it instead of public transport.” (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

“I love using my car and now I am back at work I will continue to use it. It's cosy and safe.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

“I'll only use the bus for longer trips after Covid, I'll use my car locally where I would have used the bus before. It's my safe space away from other people.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, male)

“I consider public transport good for leisure and will use it sometimes after Covid, but where you have to be somewhere on time like appointments, the car is best.” (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

“I use my car as a taxi and I'll be back in 10 hours a day after this.” (Derry and Strabane, male)

“People won't want to go back to car sharing because of Covid, they will stick with their own car. So they need to invest in more park and ride as there will be more cars in the rush hour.” (Antrim and Newtownabbey, male)

"I will probably use the car more especially when places start to open up again as there is so many places I want to go and visit. I do want to go back to using the trains as well but the car is just so much more convenient for a lot of trips." (Lisburn and Castlereagh, female)

"For sheer convenience I'll continue with the car, driving up to the front door of where you need to go. If you want to get public transport and have to get two or three buses, you're coming into contact with how many other people." (Causeway Coast and Glens, male)

"I found before Covid that we were finding it cheaper to use the car rather than public transport as we have 5 kids so it's just more economical to take the car if we need to go somewhere, so we will stick with it." (Lisburn and Castlereagh, female)

Cycling or walking more after COVID-19

"I will cycle more and will walk more so I will use public transport less." (All N.I., female)

"I'm working from home and use the car less. I'll maybe walk more and use the car less after Covid." (Derry and Strabane, female)

"I 'hoked' out my bike from the back of the shed and have started to use it. I'll probably continue with it after Covid." (Antrim and Newtownabbey, female)

Discouraging car use after COVID-19

"Don't apply congestion charges or taxes, encourage people without threats." (All N.I., male)

"I don't think taxing people is the answer in my eyes it hurts working class people, people who are more affluent or wealthy will. We need better investment, lumping that onto working class people is never a solution." (Newry and Mourne, male)

"Encourage people through education and environmental messaging not by charging them." (All N.I., male)

"People should be encouraged and persuaded to use public transport more with lower fares and better services." (North Down and Ards, female)

"They should use any income raised using these additional taxes to make public transport almost free; it would really pressure on people to get out of their cars." (Mid Ulster, male)

"Congestion charging might work, but it is inherently unfair, just another means of taxing us." (All N.I., male)

"Make it harder to park and advertise to highlight green issues." (Belfast, female)

"More services and incentives to get children to walk to their local primary school. At the moment it's not safe for my children to walk to school." (Mid Ulster, female)

3.9 Shopping after the pandemic

Shopping: will go back to the shops

Consumers report doing much more online shopping during the pandemic. Most, however, want to get back to a more hands on shopping experience, especially for clothes and footwear shopping.

"I love going to the shops and feeling and touching the clothes, I just want to get back into the shops again." (North Down and Ards, female)

"There's nothing like 'dandering' round the shops, I want to do that again." (All N.I. female)

"I would want to go to clothes shops. I like to look and try on, it's an experience." (All N.I. female)

"If I order something online and it does not fit, I cannot be bothered with the hassle of returning it, so I am very much looking forward to getting back into the shops." (Mid Ulster, female)

"I'd go back to the old way rather than online, I want it to resemble the way it was before, browsing and comparing in the shops." (Antrim and Newtownabbey, female.)

"I bought shoes once online from a local shop during Covid and I am not interested in buying clothes online. I am keen to get out once the shops open again." (Mid Ulster, female)

"I will abandon online shopping once I can go back to the shops." (Mid and East Antrim, female)

Shopping: getting back to the social experience

Some consumers, especially females, miss the social aspect of shopping and want to get back to shopping with friends again.

"I am looking forward to going into town and socialising more. I like to browse the shops and look at things in reality and sit down with a friend for a coffee." (Belfast, female)

"The social side of going into town will be important especially for the older generation, it is a social outing and a way of people meeting, hopefully that will continue as it was before Covid." (Antrim and Newtownabbey, female)

"Wee parcels come every day to my house, but when the shops open, I can't wait to get back and meet my friends for shopping and coffee." (Omagh and Fermanagh, female)

"I am looking forward to getting a good day's shopping done in Belfast along with some friends." (Omagh and Fermanagh, female)

Shopping: will do more online

Some, particularly males, have discovered the ease of shopping online and will not return to shopping in person to the extent that they did previously. This was particularly the case for shopping for small electrical items and things that are harder to get on the high street.

"Online will continue for me it is too convenient, you hit a button and your new gadget will be here tomorrow, hassle free." (North Down and Ards, male)

"You name it I bought it, today's deliveries were socks and earphones. I've discovered Internet shopping for small things like that." (Belfast, male)

"I buy online but I feel sorry for the shops in town and we should support them when they open again." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

"I have discovered Amazon Prime so I probably will not be back at the shops again." (Fermanagh and

Omagh, male)

"I would shop online more afterwards, because it's worked for me during the pandemic and I didn't like shops anyway." (Causeway Coast and Glens, female)

"My experience of online has been very good, but I will go to the shops again and mix it with online, maybe more online than before." (Derry and Strabane, female)

"I will happily continue to shop online after Covid, it's just handier." (Mid and East Antrim, male)

3.10 Public transport and the environment after the pandemic

Whilst most consumers were simply looking forward to getting back to normal after the pandemic in terms of transport, some were interested in holding on to the environmental gains that arose as a result of less travel. Consumers suggested that fares should be reduced to encourage more use of public transport and that public transport fleets should rapidly go electric or hydrogen.

"Carbon emissions are a concern of mine. I like local and I would encourage people to step away from online shopping, especially from other countries." (North Down and Ards, female)

"During the lockdown, the recovery of the environment was so quick that people reported seeing wildlife that hadn't been around for a while. This was a big gain, being in touch with nature, we need to hang on to it even if that means not flying away for holidays or using the car so much." (North Down and Ards, female).

"I see a lot more wildlife about and I would like it to stay that way. But will people be prepared to change their habits to keep the green gains? Probably not." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

"I will try to use public transport more because it's obvious from an environmental point of view that air quality has improved since there have been fewer cars on the road." (Mid and East Antrim, female)

"Translink should take possession of hydrogen buses. That's not to do with Covid that's just the way it is." (Causeway Coast and Glens, male)

"We need to make the vehicles cleaner rather than telling us not to use them. I believe that Wrightbus are developing hydrogen buses, they need to get those on the streets of Belfast. It's a bit ridiculous that all that money was spent on the glider buses and they are not electric." (Belfast, male)

"People have got used to not driving their cars and we have made environmental gains, so we need to take steps to stop them going back to old ways. Reduce the train and bus fares to make it all more attractive to people, that is the way to make more people leave the car at home and use public transport instead." (Derry and Strabane, male)

"It shows how much unnecessary travel there was before, for example, this focus group is taking place by Zoom instead of us all driving our cars to someplace to meet in person." (Derry and Strabane, male)

3.11 Holiday travel after the pandemic

Ready to go

There is a pent-up travel wish amongst some consumers, with those who have lower levels of COVID-19 fear being particularly vocal about wanting to get away on holiday. Amongst this group, however, there is still some concern about restrictions and quarantine.

"I am raring to go, I've worked all my life and travel is the one pleasure I enjoy in my retirement." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

"I've taken stock of my life during the pandemic and I'm going to take every opportunity to travel." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

"Hell, yeah, I'm raring to go. My bags are packed and waiting already." (Belfast, female)

"I would definitely go straight away on a foreign holiday if you didn't have to quarantine when you got back." (Belfast, male)

"My husband has been shielding but if we can get away in June we will go. As soon as the restrictions are over we are booking a week in Donegal." (Antrim and Newtownabbey, female)

Not quite ready to go

Some would like to go on holiday again and travel as normal, but do not feel that the time is right in 2021.

"I am going to leave it next year or maybe the year after until Covid settles down completely." (Derry and Strabane, female)

"It's too uncertain to travel abroad at the moment, so definitely not this year." (Derry and Strabane, female)

"The time is not right yet, but it has to come, it has to be safe at the other end." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

"A lot of people are not in a financial position to go on holiday after Covid. Holidays might go up in price next year putting it out of reach of many." (North Down and Ards, female)

Staying local instead of travelling abroad

The costs of foreign travel and the uncertainties surrounding travel restrictions are leading some consumers to think about holidaying nearer home in 2021. Some of this group are considering buying a caravan or tent, which might mean that their commitment to holidaying locally might last for some years.

"I want the holidays back but might holiday at home like a staycation." (All N.I group, female)

"There will be no foreign travel this year, we might travel around Ireland because of Covid uncertainty abroad." (Derry and Strabane, female)

"I'm looking forward to travelling around our own country for a change." (Belfast, female)

"There are lot more things to consider before thinking about going away on holiday, cancellation, testing, quarantine and changes in government policy, just buy a caravan or a tent!" (Fermanagh and Omagh, male)

"Holidays away are going up in price and people are thinking more and more about buying caravans for going away at weekends or just local B&B." (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

"I plan to go on holiday but not very far, more like a staycation." (Mid Ulster, female)

"I am verry happy for a staycation instead of going away, I'll go abroad again in the future, but not yet." (Lisburn and Castlereagh, female)

Spending the travel and holiday money in another way

Some consumers thought there had been a trend during the pandemic for consumers to spend the money that they saved on travel on their homes. This trend, they thought, could well continue resulting in a delay to them returning to pre-Covid levels of travel.

"More people will probably stay at home for the next few years and do more to their houses rather than risking Covid." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, male)

"We will probably get a new kitchen in this year instead of going on holiday, it will be a few years before I

would think about going away again.” (Omagh and Fermanagh, female)

“Yes, we will stay at home this year instead of going away and spend the money on the house and garden, it will be a few years before we go away again.” (Derry and Strabane, female)

3.12 Public Subsidy for Public Transport

Support for a subsidy to buses and trains

There was a low level of support for giving subsidy to ensure that private transport companies survive beyond the pandemic. Some supported a greater subsidy to Translink because it is seen as a vital public service, but others thought that Translink got enough already and needed to improve services.

“Buses yes, they need subsidy to keep going as these are unprecedented times, but they need to provide a better service in rural areas especially.” (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

“Translink is already publicly subsidised, it’s a public service so I guess it is okay to offer greater subsidy in the short term.” (All N.I group, female)

“They are already subsidised for over 65 years they should extend this to lower age groups to get people back on public transport.” (Mid Ulster, male)

“Translink should get more subsidy but in return the fares for the public should be reduced.” (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

“Translink already gets a lot of subsidy and they give a poor service in return, they would be looking to ordinary people to get that money back.” (Derry and Strabane, male)

“I’d be happy enough for the trains to be subsidised but only if they reopened up more lines or put on more services.” (Lisburn and Castlereagh, female)

Subsidy for airlines and ferry companies

The majority were opposed to airline and ferry companies receiving public subsidy, except where it was to support the wages of staff.

“Big private companies like the airlines or Stena should not get anything. They make a profit from us when times are good, so they should be able to weather the bad times.” (Derry and Strabane, male)

“Airlines have made a lot of staff redundant and have not cared for staff so why should they get public money.” (All N.I. group, male)

“Individuals working for those big companies like EasyJet should be compensated if they are not able to work, but I don’t believe that the companies themselves should get public money.” (Omagh and Fermanagh, female)

“Subsidise airline staff, they need the money and lots of them have been laid off, but not the owners or shareholders.” (Antrim and Newtownabbey, female)

“If airlines get subsidy, they should be required to reduce environment impacts of their transport as a condition.” (Derry and Strabane, male)

Subsidy for taxi drivers

The highest level of support for subsidy, but still a minority view, was for taxi drivers. Some said that the losses faced by individual taxi drivers during the pandemic needs to be addressed, though others pointed out that the government’s various support schemes should already cover most of their losses. One thing that consumers did agree on is that any subsidy should go directly to taxi drivers and that they should be protected against taxi companies clawing back the subsidy through higher depot charges.

"Taxi drivers are not taking as many fares and still have their overheads to pay. Many are looking for new jobs so there may not be as many about after Covid. If we are to have taxis in the future, individual taxi drivers need more financial support right now." (North Down and Ards, male)

"As a taxi driver myself, I haven't earned a wage for more than a year. I got £3000 in grants which was okay, but I didn't really benefit from the grants because I have to pay the tax and insurances and depot charges of £100 a week." (Derry and Strabane, male)

"Any money given to taxi drivers needs to be subject to the firms not taking it back in depot tax, money must go to taxi drivers." (All N.I group, male)

3.13 The needs of specific groups:

Consumers gave opinions on specific groups in Northern Ireland society and the extra help they need in relation to public transport.

People on low incomes

"I think people on low incomes should get additional help but only if they are in receipt of sickness or other benefits." (Lisburn and Castlereagh, male)

People with disabilities

"Disabled people need close contact to get on a and off public transport so they have specific needs that need to be catered for." (North Down and Ards, female)

People in rural areas

"More routes are needed; services have been cut back and rural areas we have all become more isolated because of that". (All N.I. group, female)

"Yes, we need to get people into towns, so they can shop and bring things back to life again, we need more frequent services on existing routes." (North Down and Ards, female)

"A lot of people can't get into towns because there is a lack of buses. There needs to be a more flexible service in rural areas." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

"They need to think outside the box. Use smaller buses and a route that goes round without designated stops, maybe the postman should drive a bus, deliver the post and people at the same time." (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, female)

"People in rural areas rely on public transport more and services have been reduced during Covid and often the bus is at Covid capacity when it arrives at a stop." (Fermanagh and Omagh, female)

"Make public transport more accessible in terms of routes like the old Busy Bee buses that were small and serviced the estates and so on." (All N.I. group, male)

4 Summary of Discussion and conclusions

4.1 Attitudes to using buses and trains during COVID -19

COVID-19 safety is an important consideration for consumers when they are thinking about using public transport. Only a few consumers in the focus groups said that they gave Covid no thought at all. Whilst it is something that the great majority consider, there is a great deal of variation in how COVID-19 actually affects the choices that consumers make around public transport.

For some, the perceived risk of contracting COVID-19 is sufficient for them to avoid public transport altogether. This is the predominant view amongst older or vulnerable people, but even amongst these groups there were examples of consumers undertaking essential travel during the pandemic, for example, to attend hospital appointments or to travel to work.

Younger consumers tend to perceive less COVID-19 risk to themselves when travelling on public transport but are still cautious about those risks. Consumers in the middle age groups present a mix of opinions, but many have fears about contracting COVID-19 on the bus or train.

One of the major risks that consumers perceive is touch point contamination. For this reason, consumers place great importance on deep cleaning and sanitisation. The second major risk is proximity to others when travelling on public transport. Consumers want to see seats closed off and the number of passengers on buses and trains limited. The third perceived risk comes from other passengers not wearing masks and consumers were vocal about the need for greater compliance and enforcement.

Consumers also expressed reasons for not using public transport that were unrelated to COVID-19 and, for many, these were their primary concerns. In rural areas, and to a lesser extent in towns and cities, the frequency of service and the accessibility of routes were the major factors for many consumers not using public transport, both before and during the pandemic. Consumers from rural areas were concerned about insufficient frequency and the cancellation of routes. Those in more urban areas, especially those outside Belfast, expressed dissatisfaction that bus routes did not go sufficiently far into housing estates or areas of dense rural population, leaving potential passengers too far to walk to catch a bus.

Some consumers don't use public transport because they have experienced antisocial behaviour by fellow passengers both onboard and at stations and stops. Regardless of the status of COVID-19, consumers expressing these views are unlikely to use public transport after COVID-19 unless these issues are addressed.

4.2 Getting people back on buses and trains after COVID-19

Whilst the fear of contracting COVID-19 put many consumers off travelling on public transport, the fact that shops and workplaces were closed meant that most had no need to travel. Whilst consumers who feared contracting COVID-19 are relieved that they did not have to travel out to work or had no reason to go to entertainment venues, there are consumers who have stopped using public transport simply because there is nowhere to go. Those who stopped because there is nowhere to go comprised the larger group and they are likely to return quickly to using public transport when businesses and entertainment venues open again. Those in the former group, which is much smaller, are likely to need a great deal of persuasion and reassurance if they are to use public transport to their former extent after the pandemic.

Many consumers have begun walking or cycling during the pandemic. This is mostly for recreation and exercise and not as an alternative to public transport. Most are using their cars more for the journeys that they would have taken by public transport before the pandemic, though overall car usage has gone down because of changes to shopping, work and entertainment patterns. Some consumers will retain these new habits after the pandemic, but most will return to using public transport at the same level as previously, but only when they feel safe to do so.

The Translink Covid Brand Tracking Survey, carried out in 2021 on behalf of Translink (see Appendix 1) found that half of respondents said they would be happy to travel by bus or train when the restrictions are lifted. As discussed above, however, those with a greater COVID-19 fear will take longer to return to their previous levels of usage. Some have experienced a feeling of Covid safety when travelling by car and, after the pandemic, will continue to use it for journeys where they would previously have taken the bus or train.

The consumers in the focus groups expressed views that are very much in line with the findings of the Translink Covid Brand Tracking Survey; building confidence amongst those who are most fearful of contracting COVID-19 public transport operators will need to address sanitisation, distancing and mask enforcement.

4.3 Car usage and COVID-19

Whilst some consumers who previously used public transport will continue to use their cars in preference after COVID-19, others are minded to dispense with their cars. Some see this as their contribution to lowering emissions, whilst others have enjoyed not driving during the pandemic or have discovered that they do not need a car.

Many consumers have noticed positive environmental impacts as a consequence of fewer journeys being taken either by car or public transport. Many consumers would support action designed to discourage car use but are opposed to measures that are punitive. Encouragement, education, expansion of park and ride, an improvement in public transport services and a lowering of fares were all suggested as positive measures that could be taken to reduce car usage especially in towns and cities.

Many consumers think that Translink has an opportunity to contribute more fully to the reduction of greenhouse gases by rapidly changing their fleets to electric or hydrogen power. Such a move, consumers argue, would create a greater commitment to using public transport and thereby discourage car use. Such a move could well bolster the 55% in the Translink Covid Brand Tracking Survey who claimed they would consider the option of using public transport as a sustainable or more environmentally friendly mode of transport in future.

4.4 Attitudes to taxis

There were opposing views on how safe taxis have been during the pandemic. Some consumers feel safer in a taxi than they do on a bus or train because they are sharing the space with just one other person. Others feel unsafe in a taxi because of the size and volume of the space and because they have fears that the previous occupants may have contaminated the touch points or the air. After the pandemic, most say that they will return to using taxis if they are going out for entertainment. Some families will return to using them for short trips where they consider a taxi to be cheaper than the combined fares of parents and children if they were to take a bus or train.

Consumers were largely united in having sympathy with taxi drivers and the loss of business that they have experienced during COVID-19. Taxi drivers who took part in the focus groups pointed out that, whilst they had received some help from government schemes, their overheads, including depot charges, still had to be paid. Some consumers were supportive of taxi drivers receiving further support or subsidy, provided that it went to the drivers themselves and not to the operating companies.

4.5 Attitudes to air travel.

The thought of travelling by aircraft raises the highest level of COVID-19 fears and most consumers are wary about flying in the next few months. Consumer attitudes towards plane travel are fluid, however, and many of those in the focus groups said that there were too many unknowns for them to express a definitive opinion on whether it is safe to travel in the near future or not.

Consumers' main concerns about being on an aircraft are the proximity of fellow passengers for a prolonged period of time, a distrust of airlines' cleaning and sanitisation procedures, and the potential for COVID-19 transmission when boarding and exiting a plane. With fear of COVID-19 transmission being high, many consumers would like to see assurances that fellow travellers have obtained negative tests before boarding.

Potential flyers would like to see the cost of PCR tests drastically reduced. Whilst tests are generally favoured by those who would like to fly, vaccine passports have a lower level of support. Some think that vaccine passports will be obligatory in the future, but others argue that they discriminate against those who have not yet had a vaccine.

As well as testing for COVID-19, responding to consumers' fears will need to focus on reducing the numbers of passengers on flights and ensuring that they are spaced adequately. Potential passengers also need to be convinced that planes are being sanitised effectively. Adopting the fogging of aircraft interiors and lengthening turnaround times to allow for effective sanitisation would help to build the confidence of potential flyers.

Consumers also distrust the level of sanitisation when going through security checks at airports. They would like to be sure that there is proper social distancing at security and that touch points, particularly security trays are fully sanitised. Consumers also need assurances that security "pat downs" can be done in such a way as to minimise the transmission of COVID-19.

There is a further set of concerns about airline travel that are related to restrictions at destinations and possible quarantine. Consumers are wary of booking flights in case their destination gets put on the government's red list and they are unable to fly. Fear of losing money is the biggest worry in this scenario. Consumers also worry that they will not be able to fully enjoy the benefits of their destination because of local restrictions or closures. Consumers also worry that they may have to quarantine when they return home, a worry that is exacerbated by the possibility that a destination that is "green" when they depart might get put on "red" whilst they are away. Until there is greater stability about the rules for quarantine upon return and a higher level of confidence that destinations are restriction free, many consumers are unlikely to risk booking flights.

4.6 Attitudes to ferry travel.

From a COVID-19 perspective, ferry travel is considered by consumers to be much safer than airline travel. Consumers have confidence that they will be able to have enough space onboard to avoid the dangers of COVID-19. Sanitising is less of an issue than on planes and passengers feel they can take sanitising responsibility for themselves.

Most potential ferry travellers are not booking crossings at the moment unless there is a necessity to do so. Uncertainty about COVID-19 restrictions at the destination and government restrictions on travel are the major factors in dissuading consumers from booking at this time.

Compared with airline travel, there is much less worry amongst consumers about losing money if ferry arrangements have to be changed or cancelled. Ferry companies are seen as having more flexible policies on changing bookings or offering refunds.

4.7 Consumer protections.

Given the uncertainties around travel during the pandemic and as restrictions are lifted, consumers need the protection of organisations like the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland if their travel is delayed or cancelled. Most consumers in the focus groups were happy to initiate claims for reimbursement or redress themselves but take comfort from the knowledge that there are organisations to take up their case if something goes wrong. Being able to get reliable advice from such a trustworthy source on consumer rights and protections is important to consumers as is advice on the steps and stages of making a claim.

However, not all the consumers in the focus groups knew of the existence of advice and support organisations and some thought that they were on their own when making a claim. Others thought that protections like those offered by ABTA accredited travel agents were sufficient protection. With uncertainty and worry about financial losses high on the agenda for consumers, greater publicity about the rights and protections available to them is likely to be needed as part of confidence building in the travel sector.

4.8 Travel and the "new normal."

It is clear from the above that there is some way to go before there is sufficient confidence for consumers to book airline travel. As UK and other destinations open up again, consumer opinions suggest that they will return to ferry travel much as they did before. However, some of the opinions expressed in the focus groups suggest that the pandemic will change their travel behaviours in the foreseeable future.

With so much uncertainty about restrictions and the fear of contracting COVID-19, some consumers in the

focus groups are looking closer to home for leisure travel and holidays. In part this seems to be a “wait and see” attitude, with some determined to return to foreign travel eventually, but not in the next few years. Others are intending to explore Ireland and Northern Ireland and some have indicated that they will buy caravans or motorhomes. Consumers making a capital purchase such as this are likely to redirect their leisure and holiday activity away from airline travel for a considerable period of time.

Commuting patterns may have changed permanently for some. The evidence from the focus groups is that some people will have to return to their workplaces as before, but some have been told by employers that working from home for at least part of the time will continue after COVID-19. For those who do return to the workplace, attitudes to car sharing, some suggested, may have changed permanently. Drivers may no longer wish to share the interior of their car with others. This may lead to two different outcomes. Firstly, some say that they will stop car sharing and expect to see more commuter cars with just a single occupant. Conversely, some intend to use public transport instead of commuting by shared car because they feel that the spaces on buses and trains can be made more Covid safe.

Consumers also report that they have spent more money on their homes and gardens during the pandemic, money that they might otherwise have spent on travel. Whilst some of these consumers will resume travel immediately when restrictions are lifted, others indicate that they have further plans to invest in their homes in the next few years, redirecting travel money to pay for it.

Shopping behaviours changed during the pandemic when only essential shops were open and consumers moved online for many purchases. The majority of consumers in the focus groups are looking forward to getting back to shopping in stores again, though for some their new online shopping patterns will continue. The aspiration to browse once again in shops and the wish to do so in the company of others, to socialise and shop at the same time, is likely to encourage those who used public transport for shopping trips to return in roughly the same numbers.

Consumers would like to see transport operators survive the pandemic so that they can avail of travel opportunities as before. Most consumers do not want to see public money used to subsidise airlines or ferry companies, but they are more relaxed about Translink receiving public investment aimed at ensuring that services remain after COVID-19. Many consumers think that taxi drivers need further financial support to make their services financially viable in the short term and to ensure that taxi services continue to be available in the longer term.

Consumers want to see a return on investment if a “pandemic subsidy” is to be given to Translink. Some would like to see the frequency of bus and train services increase on existing routes and the introduction of new routes in return for any public subsidy. In particular, consumers would like to see better services to rural communities and greater penetration of bus routes into housing estates or areas of dense urban population.

Appendix 1. Translink Covid Brand Tracking Study.

Translink Covid Brand Tracking Study

During February 2021 Translink undertook a Covid Brand Attitudinal Research survey. The survey was conducted on-line with over 1,000 NI respondents, both PT users and non-users. The survey was representative of the Northern Ireland adult (16+) population in terms of age, gender, socio-economic grouping and geographical coverage. The survey was independently undertaken by Cognisense.

- Aims and objectives of the research were to evaluate consumer behaviour and attitudes during Covid towards:
 - *Usage of public transport*
 - *Awareness, importance & satisfaction with range of safety measure implemented*
 - *Perceptions of Translink during Covid*
 - *Future intentions post Covid*

There was a very robust perception that Translink had represented Northern Ireland, our community, and consumers very positively during the pandemic. **Throughout the pandemic, almost 4 in 5 agreed that Translink had helped keep passengers safe (79%) and had taken its responsibility to passenger safety seriously (79%).**

There was good agreement that Translink had tried to keep the NI economy moving (75%), had done all it could for travellers in challenging times (72%), implemented safety measures that gave consumers' confidence to travel (71%), and had helped keep communities connected (70%).

Other Key Findings:

- Of those currently in employment, 79% anticipate they will have returned to their place of work by the end of 2021 (either on a full or part-time basis)
- **Half of all respondents (50%) claimed they would be happy to travel by bus or train as soon as restrictions were lifted.**
- **The vast majority (85%) were aware of some of the safety measures that Translink had introduced on buses, trains and at stations.** Those most frequently cited measures included wearing of face coverings (75%), social distancing at stations and on-board buses and trains (43%), screens fitted in stations and on bus drivers' cabs (42%), limiting numbers of passengers on-board (38%) and sanitisers at stations (37%).
- In all of the attributes referenced above, trends were significantly stronger amongst consumers who claimed to be public transport users pre Covid, however, it is also worth noting the strength of sentiment amongst non-users too.
- There were a plethora of measures that respondents claimed would encourage them to use public transport more regularly, such as the continuation of wearing face coverings (42%), more personal space on-board (42%), lower fares (39%), hand sanitisers on-board buses and trains (39%), and enforced Covid-friendly conditions (35%).
- Interestingly, over a half (51%) of non-users cited measures that would encourage them to use public transport, with lower fares proving to be the most prevalent influencer (29%).
- **Over two thirds (69%) of respondents agreed that public transport is a sustainable mode of transport, which is better for the environment and air quality.**
- Almost 2 in 5 (39%) claimed they had been considering using a more sustainable or environmentally friendly mode of transport in the future, it is worth noting that some 44% of

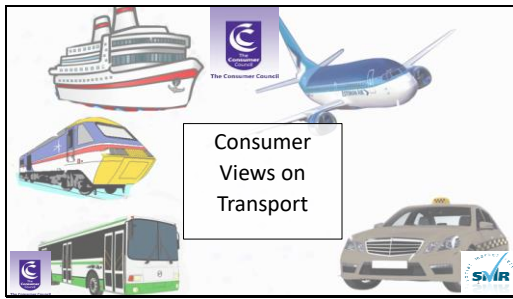
car owners, and almost a quarter (23%) of non-users of public transport agreed with this sentiment.

- **Encouragingly, over half (55%) claimed they would consider the option of using public transport as a sustainable or more environmentally friendly mode of transport in future.** Strength of agreement was driven by younger respondents, those who had access to a car, and users of public transport prior to Covid. Over a quarter (27%) of non-users also claimed they would consider this as an option.

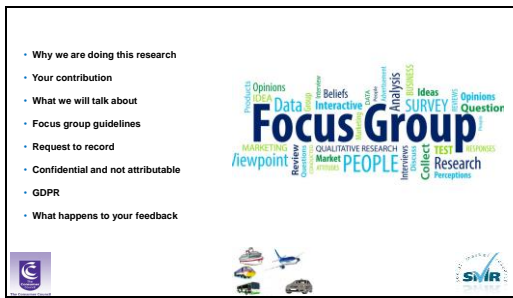
Importance of Measures Overview – all respondents		
	Fairly Important	Very Important
Wearing of face covering	12%	82%
Enhanced Cleaning programme	16%	79%
Social distancing at stations and on-board	19%	76%
Sanitisers at stations	20%	75%
Screens fitted in stations and On-board driver's cabs	23%	70%
Limited number of passengers	28%	66%
Promotion of cashless payment	36%	48%
Messaging to avoid peak times	41%	41%
No change policy on – buses and trains	35%	32%

Appendix 2. Focus group protocol.

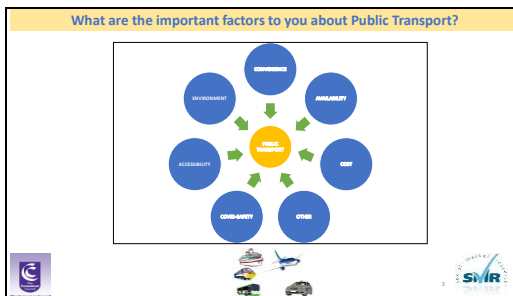
Slide 1



Slide 2



Slide 3



PROMPTS

- Which of these are important to you when it comes to choosing or using public transport?

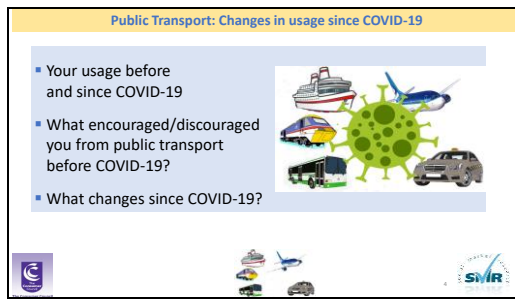
What is the most important factor out of these

- How important is Covid safety in relation to the other factors
- When the pandemic is over will covid-safety disappear as an issue or will you be more aware or things like touch-points or crowding that you were before.

Slide 4

Public Transport: Changes in usage since COVID-19

- Your usage before and since COVID-19
- What encouraged/discouraged you from public transport before COVID-19?
- What changes since COVID-19?



PROMPTS

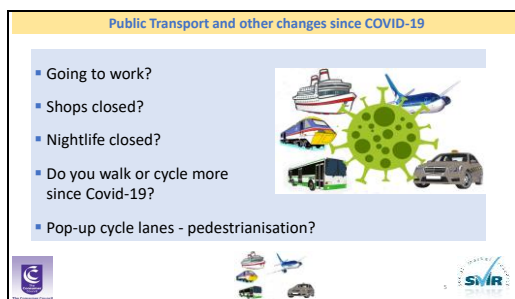
How has your usage of public transport changed since COVID-19?

What barriers were there to you using public transport before COVID-19?

Slide 5

Public Transport and other changes since COVID-19

- Going to work?
- Shops closed?
- Nightlife closed?
- Do you walk or cycle more since Covid-19?
- Pop-up cycle lanes - pedestrianisation?



PROMPTS

Have your work patterns changed, how?

Do you go shopping less or in a different way?



Do you walk cycle more?

- Do you go out less for entertainment?
- Do any of the above affect your use of public transport?
- What do you think of changes like pop up cycle lanes or new areas of pedestrianisation?
- Have you noticed them, should they continue after covid?

Slide 6

Trains, buses taxis : Why are we avoiding them?

- Fear of COVID?
- Proximity of other people?
- No change given for fares?
- Government advice?
- Other reasons?

PROMPTS

Do people feel unsafe on public transport and why?



Is it mainly unwillingness to travel in close proximity to others what would it take for you to have enough confidence again to travel safely on PT

- How much effect has Government advice on not travelling, does it add significantly to the fear of covid itself?
- how much will the fear of public spaces or transport continue after the pandemic.
- Probe on whether compliance varies by age.

Slide 7

Trains, buses taxis : What would bring us back?

- Using the bus and train again
- Using taxis again
- Biggest assurances needed?

PROMPTS

Should social distancing on public transport continue after the pandemic?

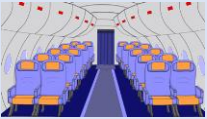

Should mask wearing or sanitising/cleaning continue after the pandemic.

- What else needs to be done to ensure that people feel safe on public transport
- How long will it take for you to feel safe using public transport again.
- What would public transport look like for you to want to use it/use it again?

Slide 8

Planes: Why are we avoiding them?

- Fear of COVID?
- Proximity of other people?
- Fear of losing money?
- Government advice?
- Other?

PROMPTS

Would you feel safe getting on a plane at the moment?



Unwillingness to travel in close proximity to others what would it take for them to have enough confidence to get on a plane.

- What about queueing or boarding or going through security are these problems greater/lesser than fears about being close on board
- Heeding Government advice on not travelling, how much will the fear of public spaces or transport continue after the pandemic.
- Would you book national or international travel at the moment
- Do you fear of losing money,
- What would it take for you to have enough confidence to book flights.

Slide 9

Ferries: Why are we avoiding them?

- Fear of COVID?
- Proximity of other people?
- Fear of losing money?
- Government advice?
- Other?

PROMPTS

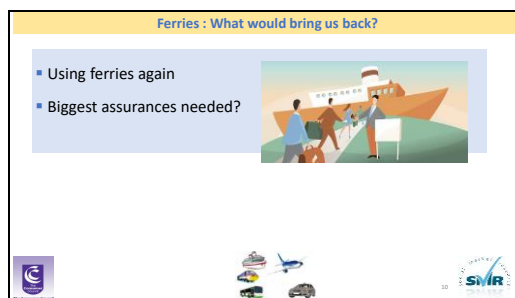
Would you feel safe getting on a ferry at the moment?

What would it take for you to have enough confidence to get on a ferry.

- What about queueing or boarding or going through security are these problems greater/lesser than fears about being close on board
- Would you book a ferry at the moment
- Do you fear of losing money,

- What would it take for you to have enough confidence to book a ferry.

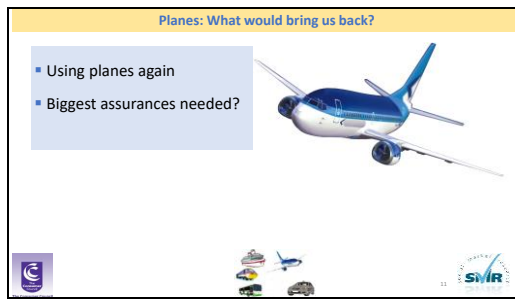
Slide 10



PROMPTS

- What would it take to get you using ferries again
- Would ferry health checks encourage you to travel again or would the inconvenience, time cost, put you off.
- Would independent checks on COVID sanitisation etc encourage you to travel?
- Would some kind of guarantee against financial loss on holidays or holiday insurance encourage people to travel intra-nationally or internationally again?
- To what extent is the unknown a factor in booking travel (independent of potential financial loss)?
 - I.e. not just potential loss of travel/accommodation charges, but just the thought that the trip remains uncertain compared to trips at home?

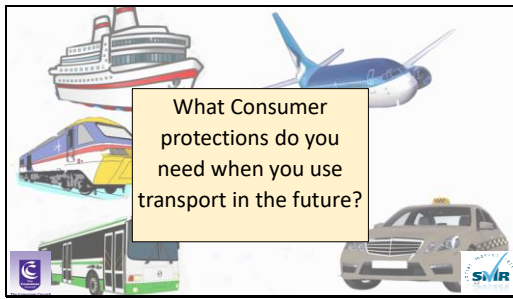
Slide 11



PROMPTS GIVE THIS SLIDE MORE TIME THAN THE OTHERS

- What would it take to get you using planes again (short haul, long haul)
- Would airport checks encourage you to travel again or would the inconvenience, time cost, put you off.
- Would independent checks on COVID sanitisation etc encourage you to travel?
- Would some kind of guarantee against financial loss on holidays or holiday insurance encourage people to travel intra-nationally or internationally again?
- To what extent is the unknown a factor in booking travel (independent of potential financial loss)?
 - I.e. not just potential loss of travel/accommodation charges, but just the thought that the trip remains uncertain compared to trips at home?

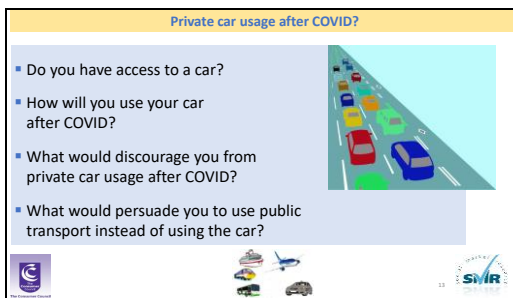
Slide 12



PROMPTS

- Safety?
- Someone to protect standards?
- Someone to hold companies accountable?
- Support with claiming if things go wrong?
- Help with getting your money back if claim refused or if it takes a long time to get it sorted.?
- Independent advice?

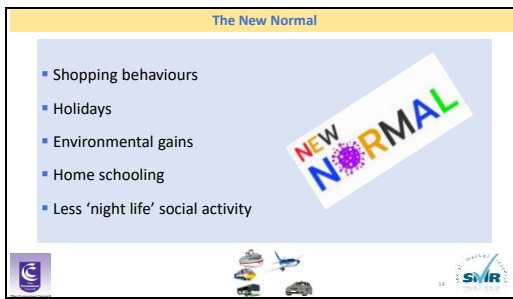
Slide 13



PROMPTS

- Do you have access to a car at the moment?
- Will you use the car more/less after the pandemic than you did before?
- Will the convenience of the car will keep you using the car instead of public transport?
- Will you let their children go to school on public transport or is there likely to be more school runs in private cars?
- Should people be discouraged from the increased car usage?
 - Should we tax vehicles going into towns and cities to encourage people onto PT?
 - Would that work?

Slide 14



PROMPTS

Will there be more online shopping after the pandemic and less going to the shops?

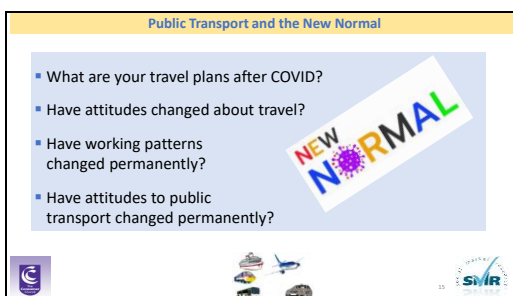
Will being forced to holiday at home or spend holiday money on alternative things persist into the post-pandemic era with consequences for ferry and airline travel?

How should we ensure that we hold on to environmental gains e.g. lower emissions from airlines, cleaner air?

Will you continue with things like home schooling (and therefore use transport less)

AND HOW WILL THIS NEW NORMAL AFFECT YOUR USE OF TRANSPORT

Slide 15



PROMPTS

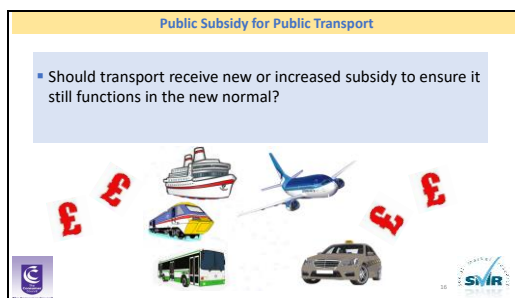
Is there a pent-up travel desire?

Have you been working from home?

- What is the likelihood of going back full time to a place of work?
- Would you prefer to keep working from home?
- How would that affect your public transport usage?

- If you have to use public transport in the future, are you more likely to use it at off peak times?
- Are these behaviours likely to continue and for you to use public transport less as a consequence?

Slide 16



PROMPTS


- What would the world look like if there were no planes, boats, trains, taxis or buses?
- We rely on public transport when we need it, but what would happen if the companies weren't able to survive financially?
- Should public money be used to support companies so that public transport survives the pandemic. If so, which types of transport should receive subsidy
 - Buses
 - Trains
 - Taxis
 - Airlines
 - Ferry companies
- How should public money be injected? (loans, guarantees, subsidies etc.)

Slide 17

The needs of specific groups:

- People on low incomes
- People of pensionable age
- People in rural areas
- People with disabilities
- Young people

Discussion What are those needs?



PROMPTS


Are there groups in Northern Ireland that need special support or have special needs when it comes to PT? How should these needs be provided for?

Who should lobby for those needs or ensure that they are catered for?

Slide 18


Final discussion:

- Have you learned anything from the FG discussion?
- Overall, what are the top things transport wise that will change for you after COVID?
- Who needs to act to give you the support that you need?
- What role should the Consumer Council play in supporting consumers in public transport?



Slide 19


Evaluation



Slide 20

How useful did you find this group for giving your views?


1. Very useful
2. Useful
3. Not very useful
4. Not at all useful



Slide 21

How enjoyable did you find this group?


1. Very enjoyable
2. Enjoyable
3. Not very enjoyable
4. Not at all enjoyable



Slide 22

The Consumer Council is keen to engage with consumers. How effective do you feel this approach is to engaging with you?

1. Very effective
2. Effective
3. Not very effective
4. Not at all effective



Slide 23

