

“Free transport means everything to me”:
Understanding the impact of the suspension of
free travel on under-18s

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**Partnership
for Young
London**

Partnership for Young London believes in a future where every young person’s right to wellbeing is recognised and fulfilled. With young people making up a quarter of London’s population, we have to respect that they are crucial to its future.



Trust for London

Tackling poverty and inequality

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Introduction



Introduction

The removal of free travel will have an impact on how young Londoners access education, opportunities, culture, and society. However, certain groups will be hit harder than others.

This report is the result of speaking to over 2000 young Londoners aged 16 to 18 and explores their views on the suspension of free travel for under-18s. We wanted to know what free travel meant to them, and the impact it will have on how they get to school, their families, and how they access the places and opportunities London has to offer. We found that over 95% of those surveyed were against the suspension of free travel and that, for many, it is a lifeline to them and their families.

Young Londoners use free travel to get to school, college, access job opportunities and, if this were taken away, would have a significant impact on their future choices. Just less than half (43.8%) of those we spoke to said that losing free travel would change the college or school they are considering attending. They also told us they would visit libraries less, worried about how they would get to school now, and live too far to cycle instead. Groups like young people with experience of care would especially be hit hard by this, taking more journeys on average.

Making young people pay for transport would also have a significant equalities impact. Black, South Asian, and Asian young people were more likely to have to change how they get to school or college. They were also most likely to be deterred from visiting museums, and art galleries. Worryingly, while a majority (64%) said that they are worried that their parents would struggle to make ends meet if they had to pay for transport, South Asian and Asian young people were most likely to say that they were worried (78%).

For many young Londoners, free travel means having freedom. The majority (80%) told us they would not travel out of their areas unless they had to, while over half (55%) said that without free travel, they could not afford to go to the places they wanted to go. The freedom to explore other areas of their city is essential to their physical and emotional wellbeing, it will impact on their access to services, removing free travel will damage the futures of all young Londoners.

Matthew Walsham
Partnership for Young London

“This is an important piece of work to understand the impact of the suspension of free travel on under-18s. It’s very concerning that the loss of free travel will make it harder for young people to travel to school or college, and place a further financial burden on families that are already struggling. As we emerge from the pandemic, we need to do all we can to support young people and ensure that young Londoners aren’t shut out of education, jobs, training or sports and arts activities.”

Bharat Mehta, Chief Executive at Trust for London

“I read with interest this research from the Partnership for Young London, which highlights the concerns we have been expressing on behalf of London’s local authorities since learning about the proposed removal of free travel for young people in London as part of the TfL emergency funding agreement with Government.

I have personally written to Government Ministers seeking clarification about the proposal and sight of the promised equalities impact assessment. I hope this research will help inform the Mayor and Ministers’ future decisions on this matter.”

Cllr Peter John OBE, Chair of London Councils

“These new findings show just how important free travel is for children and young people in our capital. As the survey results make clear, the loss of free travel would have a serious impact on the wellbeing of young people- limiting their educational opportunities and choices, restricting their access to cultural spaces and sports clubs, and reducing their ability to maintain relationships with friends and family. In addition, what we’re seeing is that this change would disproportionately affect young people from minority ethnic groups and disabled young Londoners. Families have already suffered enough during the pandemic, and it simply isn’t right to pursue a policy that will clearly cause further damage, with 64% of young people worried that their parents would struggle to make ends meet if they had to pay for transport. It’s time to listen to what young people are telling us, and protect the Zip card.”

Alison Garnham, Chief Executive of Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)

“Suspension of the under 18 travelcard is a step backward for the capital, and we urge the Government to reconsider this in their negotiations with the London Mayor. The core focus of Partnership for Young London is to ensure that the voices of young Londoners are embedded in decision making for the capital.

Over 2,000 young people from across the capital have told us about the damaging impact suspension of the under 18 travelcard will have on their lives, their life choices, their families and carers.”

Keith Bottomley Chair Partnership for Young London

“Ten of the top 17 local authorities with the highest rates of child poverty in this country are in London, and in every one of these local authorities black and ethnic minority children make up over half of the school population. It is shocking that the government did not undertake a comprehensive equality impact assessment of their proposal to scrap free travel for children and young people in London before announcing this punitive proposal, given the devastating impact this policy will have on BME and other children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This policy will not only make it financially harder for children to travel to school in September - after months of missing school during lockdown - it will also mean that children from disadvantaged backgrounds will not be able to go to schools outside of their own areas. You can't have social mobility unless you create the conditions for young people to access equal opportunities.”

Dr Zubaida Haque, Interim Director, Runnymede Trust

“Today's report from Partnership for Young London lays bare the detrimental impact scrapping free travel will have on young people and their families. With 64% of young people worried that their parents would struggle to cover the cost of their travel, it is totally wrong to remove the Zip card, especially at a time when finances are already massively stretched for the poorest families.

A generation of young people will be shut out of education, training and jobs if this decision is implemented. With so many students using two forms of transport to access their college or school, we risk a real step backwards in ensuring that every young person has equal access to opportunities to better their lives and reach their full potential.”

Mary Vine-Morris, Director (London), Association of Colleges

Key Findings

- 1. An overwhelming majority of young Londoners (95.5%) said that they disapproved of the plan to cut free travel for under-18s, with two percent approving, and two percent unsure.**
- 2. An even larger majority of young Londoners (97.8%) said that free transport was either important, or very important to them, with less than one percent saying it was not very important or not at all important.**
- 3. Less than half of young people (43.8%) said that losing free travel would change the college or school they are considering attending, with thirty five percent saying it would not, and one in five (20.5%) saying that they were not sure. Young people who have care experience were more likely to say that suspension of free travel would change the school or college they were considering attending (56.8% to 40.1%)**
- 4. A majority of young Londoners (64.1%) said that they were worried that their parents would struggle to make ends meet if they had to pay for transport, with a small proportion saying were not worried (18.1%) or not sure (17.8%).**
- 5. Just over half of young Londoners (56%) said that if they lost free travel, they would not be able to afford to go to the places they want to go, with a small proportion saying they could afford to (17%), and around one in four not sure (27.1%).**
- 6. Less than half of young Londoners (42.8%) said that their mental health would suffer if they had to pay for transport, with a third (28.6%) saying it would not, and a third (28.4%) saying that they were not sure.**
- 7. A majority of young Londoners said that without free transport, they would no longer visit art galleries (52.8%), museums (49.4%), while over a third said they would no longer visit sports clubs (37.5%) or areas outside their local borough or area (30.4%).**
- 8. Most young Londoners (71.3%) take the bus to school/college, followed by the train (16.5%), walking (5.8%), tube (4.6%), and cycling (0.6%). Almost 50% take at least two modes of transport to get to school/college.**
- 9. Most young Londoners (72.5%) would change how they get to school or college if they had to pay for transport, with only twelve percent saying it would not, and fifteen percent saying they were not sure.**
- 10. Less than one in five young Londoners (17.3%) said that if they lost free travel, they would cycle instead to the places they want to go, with a majority (58.6%) saying they would not, and a quarter (24.2%) not sure.**
- 11. The majority of young Londoners (65.7%) said that they were worried that getting to school or around London is less safe without free travel, with only thirteen percent saying they were not, and one in five (21.3%) not sure.**

Methodology

This data was collected from a survey that ran in five days last week. It looks at how 16-18-year olds feel about the suspension of free travel, and possible impact paying for transport will have on them. Results were analysed on

- A total of 2020 young people filled it in.
- Slightly more young women (57%) answered our survey than young men (42%), with less than one percent as non-binary/third gender.
- The average age of respondents was 16.7, with forty six percent being 16 years old, forty two percent being 17-year olds, and eleven percent being 18 years old.
- Most of the sample (93%) said they did not consider themselves to have a disability, with one in twenty (4.5%) said that they did, and the rest preferred not to say.
- Over 350 young people (18%) said they were a care experienced young person.

Ethnicity data

We collected ethnicity data based on the ONS's guidance. The only addition was Latino and Arab, which was written in by young people putting in other in large enough quantities to create a separate category.

Ethnicity	Count	Percentage
White British	453	20.4%
Any other White background	268	16.3%
Mixed - White and Asian	69	3.1%
Mixed - White and Black African	37	1.7%
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	98	4.4%
Any other Mixed background	91	4.1%
Black or Black British - Black African	349	15.7%
Black or Black British - Black Caribbean	163	7.3%
Black or Black British - Any other Black background	39	1.8%
Arab	41	1.8%
Asian or Asian British - Indian	95	4.2%
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	203	9.1%
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	73	3.3%
Asian or Asian British - Any other Asian background	127	5.7%
Latino	24	1.1%
Chinese	16	0.7%
Other	7	0.3%

We then simplified the ethnicity data for analysis purposes.

Ethnicity	Count	Percentage
White	721	32.5%
Black	551	24.8
Mixed	295	13.3%
South Asian or Asian	514	23.2%
Other	31	5.8%
Prefer not to say	64	2.9%

Suspending free travel for under-18s



STOP

Suspending free travel for under-18s

We wanted to ask young people about the plans to suspend free travel for under-18s in London and look at what free travel meant to them.

A quarter of young Londoners (26.4%) told us that they had not heard about the plans to cut free travel for under-18s, with the rest (73.6%) saying they had.

This slightly changed between different groups of young people. Firstly, young women were more likely to have heard about the planned suspension than young men (77.1% to 68.8%), and Black young people were the most likely group (79.3%) compared to South Asian or Asian young people (69.8%), or White young people (72.4%).

An overwhelming majority of young Londoners (95.5%) said that they disapproved of the plan to cut free travel for under-18s, with two percent approving, and two percent unsure.

Disapproval of the plans was largely uniform across all groups of young people, with no significant difference between by ethnicity, age, care experience, or disability. There was a small difference in gender, with young women slightly more likely to disapprove (97.4%) than young men (92.8%).

An even larger majority of young Londoners (97.8%) said that free transport was either important, or very important to them, with less than one percent saying it was not very important or not at all important.

Most groups answered this question similarly, with the only exception again being gender, with young women slightly more likely to say it was at least important to them (98.6%) than young men (96.5%).

“(Free transport) makes me feel like the government is supporting my travel to school and therefore supporting my education and mental wellbeing when I use free public transport to see my friends.”

“Free transport means EVERYTHING to me. When I wake up to make a one hour long journey to college I don’t have to worry about topping up. I don’t work, so having free transport helps a lot. I don’t know how I’ll be able to get to college in September.”

Travelling to school or college



Travelling to school or college

We wanted to look at how young Londoners travel to school and college right now, and how this might change if free transport was suspended.

Most young Londoners (71.3%) take the bus to school/college, followed by the train (16.5%), walking (5.8%), tube (4.6%), and cycling (0.6%).

While all groups were most likely to get to school/college by bus, usage of other modes of transport differed by ethnicity, and age. Firstly, age mattered on how likely they were to cycle, with 18-year olds at least four times as likely to cycle (2%) than 17-year olds (0.5%) or (0.3%).

Ethnicity	Bus	Cycle	Train	Tube	Walk	Other
White	67.1%	0.8%	18.6%	6.4%	6.1%	1%
Black	74.8%	0%	18.1%	3.1%	2.5%	1.5%
Mixed-	70.2%	1%	11.1%	3.1%	5.4%	2%
South Asian or Asian	74.5%	1%	11.1%	3.1%	9.5%	0.8%

Secondly, while only around one percent of all young Londoners, not a single Black young person said that they cycled to school. Thirdly, with walking to school/college, South Asian or Asian young people were over three times as likely than Black young people (9.5% to 2.5%). Lastly, White young people were twice as likely to take the tube than South Asian or Asian, or Black young people (6.4% to 3.1%).

Half of young Londoners (47.9%) said they take two buses/tubes/trains to get to school or college, with one in four taking one, one in five (19.9%) taking three, and seven percent taking more than three.

We found that young people who said they have care experience took far more buses/tubes/trains to get to school/college than average, being over twice as likely to take more than three (13.1% to 5.3%), and almost half as likely to only need to take one (15.1% to 27%).

“As a child in a family of 6 kids it would be very costly for my parents to have to pay for my travels. I take three buses to school so it would be very expensive and there is no other way to get to my school because walking would take hours.”

Ethnicity	One journeys	Two journeys	Three journeys	More than three
White	27.5%	20.7%	46.2%	5.5%
Black	17.1%	50.1%	24.1%	8.7%
Mixed	23.4%	49.5%	18.6%	3.1%
South Asian or Asian	74.5%	1%	11.1%	8.5%

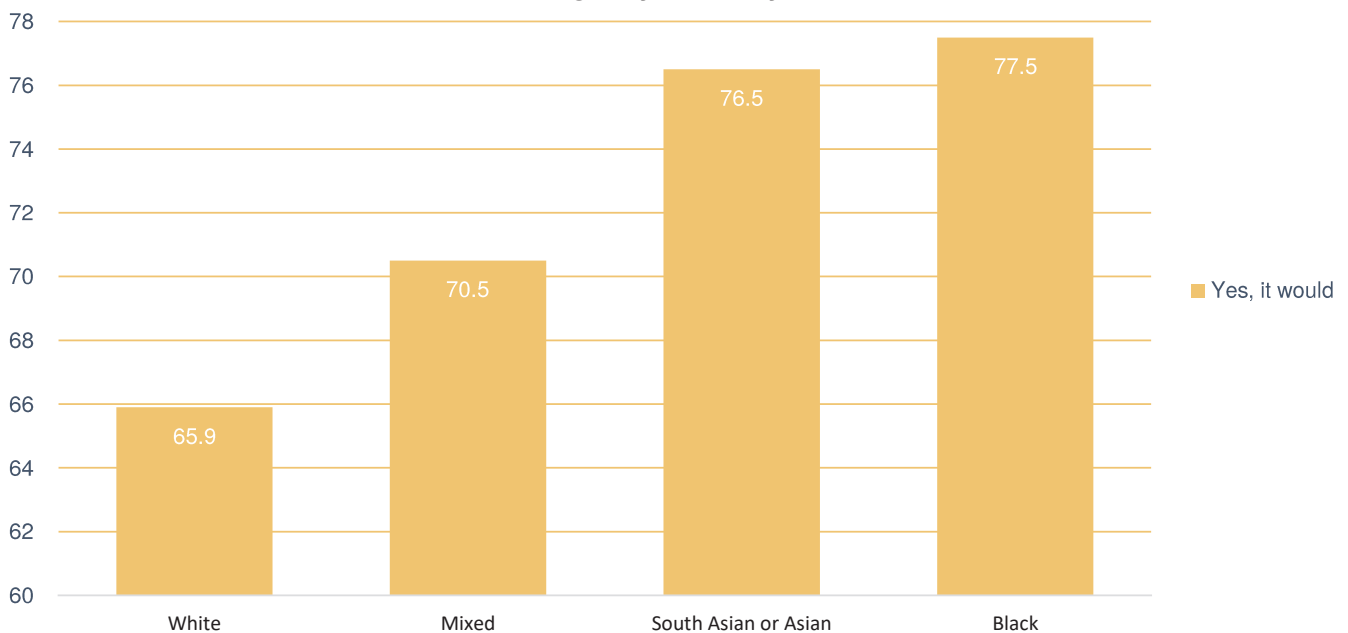
Black young people were more likely to have to take three, or more than three buses/tubes/trains to get to school/college than the average (32.8% to 27.1%). White young people were almost twice as likely to have to only catch one bus/tube/train than Black young people (27.5% to 17.1%).

Most young Londoners (72.5%) would change how they get to school or college if they had to pay for transport, with only twelve percent saying it would not, and fifteen percent saying they were not sure.

While a majority of all groups said it would change how they to school/college, the change would impact groups differently. Firstly, young people who have care experience were more likely to say that suspension of free travel would change how they would get to school or college than non-care leavers (80.9% to 70.2%).

“(Free transport) means not having to hijack tube stations twice a day, just to get to school. Or beg the bus driver. It means not being late for lessons and peace of mind in the morning. Not looking over my shoulder to see if the authorities are going to find you.”

Proportion who said that it would change how they get to school or college, by ethnicity



Secondly, Black young people and South Asian young people were the most likely to say that paying for transport would change how they get to school/college (77.5%, 76.5%), with White and Mixed young people the least likely (70.5%, 65.9%).

“Free transport allows me to get to school and back, to learn without having to pay.”

Of those who said the suspension would change how they travelled to school/college, they said they would instead walk (39.9%), catch the bus (23.6%), use the train (12.5%), cycle (12.4%), drive or catch a cab (9.1%), or catch the tube (2.4%).

How a young person would get to school/college if they had to pay for transport largely depended on what transport they currently used. Those who use train, or tube, were most likely to catch a bus instead (34.4%, 29.7%), while those using bus were most likely to walk instead (46.4%).

Young people from different ethnicities answered differently too, with Black young people twice as likely as White young people to say they would change to buses (22.1% to 12.8%). White young people were instead twice to three times as likely as other groups to say they would take up cycling (11% to Black, 6.4%, South Asian or Asian, 8.4%).

Lastly, while young men and women answered similarly, young men were three times as likely as young women to say they would cycle instead (14.5% to 4.5%).

The majority of young Londoners (65.7%) said that they were worried that getting to school or around London is less safe without free travel, with only thirteen percent saying they were not, and one in five (21.3%) not sure.

The only difference between groups was with young people with care experience, who were far more likely to say that they were worried than those without care experience (75.4% to 62.3%).

“I don’t feel safe walking or cycling, and my college is too far to do that.”

“We can barely afford transport as it is. My school is hours away by transport so having to cycle would take at least two hours each way. This would leave me with no time during the day to actually do my schoolwork and I would probably have to move school.”

“My boxing gym is too far and unsafe to get to on foot, without the bus I’ll have to give up my hobby especially since it’s the only gym in my area.”

“Free transport means that in the winter months when it gets dark earlier then I don’t have to walk through alleys and unlit streets.”

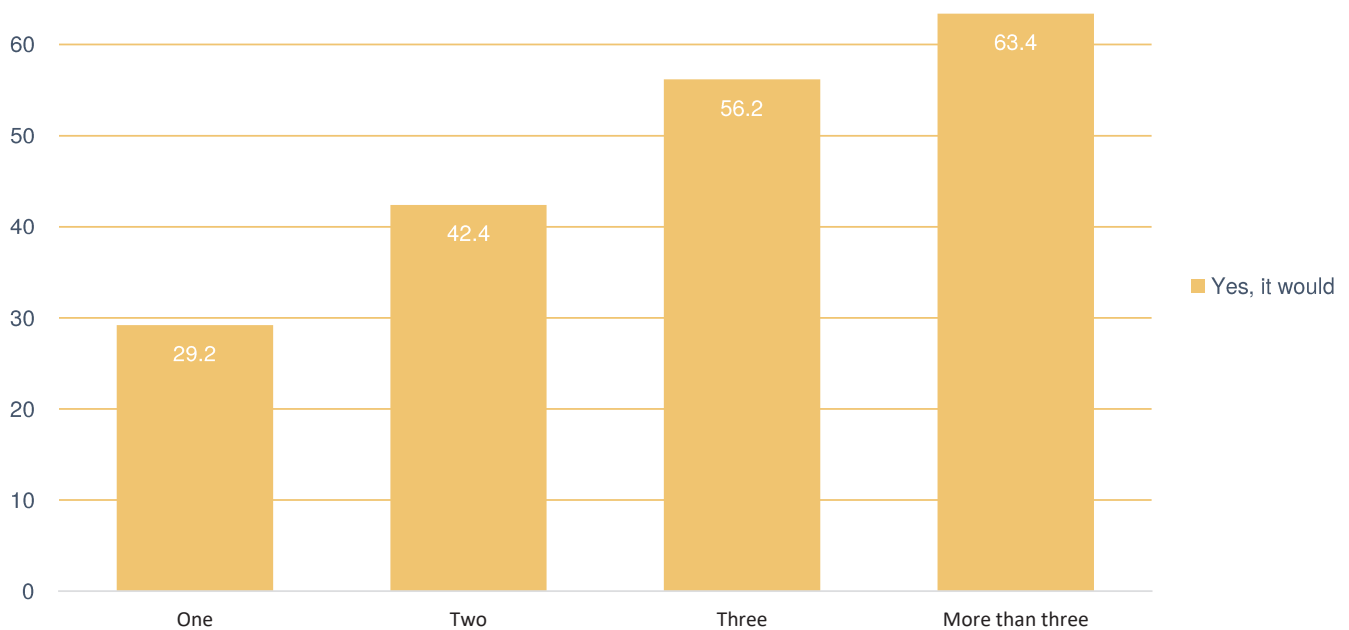
Less than half of young people (43.8%) said that losing free travel would change the college or school they are considering attending, with thirty five percent saying it would not, and one in five (20.5%) saying that they were not sure.

How young people answered largely depended on their current travel arrangements. Firstly, young people who currently used public transport were far more likely to say it would change the college or school they are considering than those who cycle or walk (43.6% to 25.2%). Secondly, the more buses/trains/tubes a young person caught, the more likely they were to say that it would change the college or school they were considering.

“I have the ability to go to a college I prefer instead of going to one just because it’s right near me.”

“(Free transport means) not being a burden on my family’s finances for having the audacity to go to school.”

Proportion that said that losing free travel would change the college or school they are considering, by number of journeys



As a result, free transport impacts the educational choices of those who spend more time travelling currently. Young people who have care experience, also more likely to take more buses/trains/tube, were more likely to say that suspension of free travel would change

“(Free transport means) not being a burden on my family’s finances for having the audacity to go to school.”

The impact on young people and families



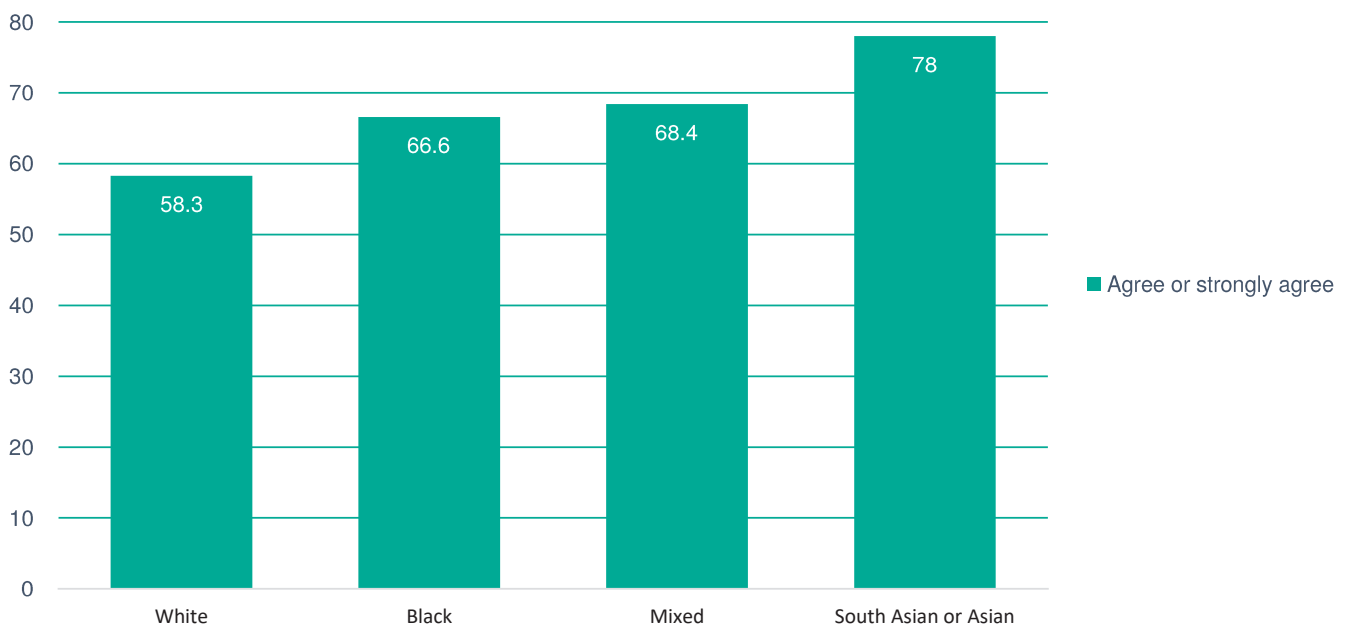
UNDERGROUND

The impact of the suspension on young people and their families

We wanted to look at how young people felt about the impact of paying for travel on their parents, and their own mental health.

A majority of young Londoners (64.1%) said that they were worried that their parents would struggle to make ends meet if they had to pay for transport, with a small proportion saying were not worried (18.1%) or not sure (17.8%).

“If I lose free travel, I am worried my parents would struggle to make ends meet”, by ethnicity



Different ethnic groups answered this question differently, with South Asian and Asian young people the most likely to say that they were worried (78%), compared with Mixed young people (68.4%), Black young people (66.6%), and White young people (58.3%). Furthermore, White young people were twice as likely to say they were not worried (11.8% to 6%). There was also a difference in gender, with young women more likely to say they were worried about this (68%) than young men (58.4%).

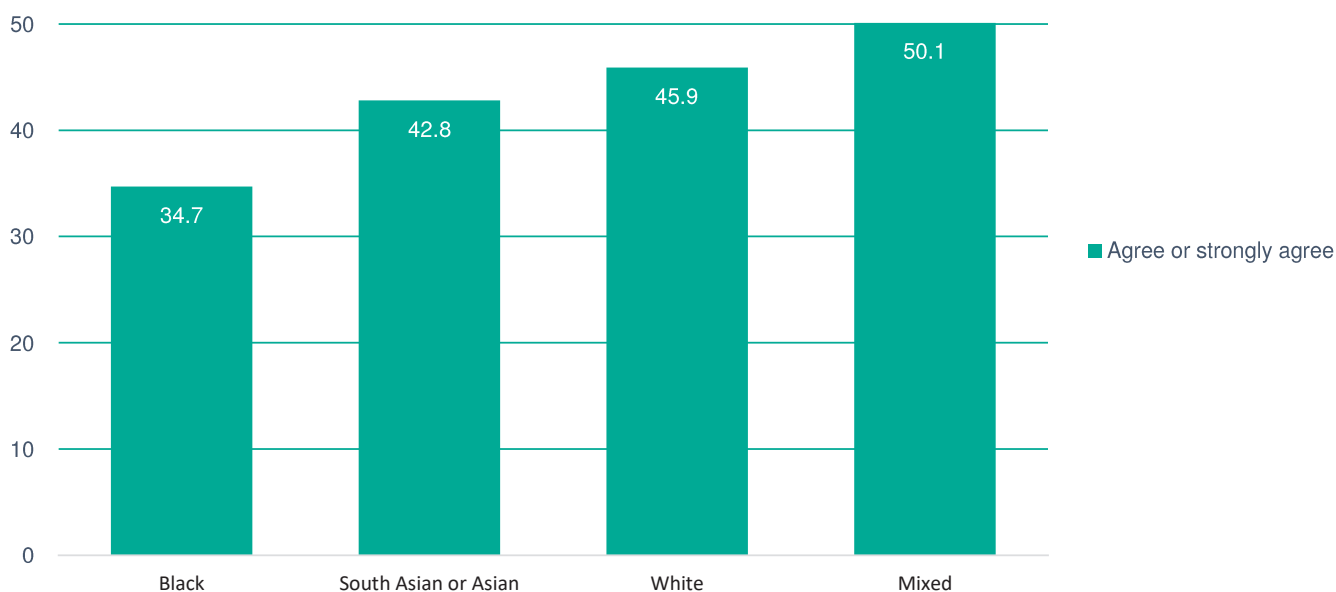
“I live in a relatively poor household so free transport meant more money for food.”

Less than half of young Londoners (42.8%) said that their mental health would suffer if they had to pay for transport, with a third (28.6%) saying it would not, and a third (28.4%) saying that they were not sure.

Firstly, young people who told us previously that the suspension of free travel would change how they get to school/college were more likely to say their mental health would struggle. Secondly, disabled young Londoners were more likely to say their mental health would struggle, compared to those without a disability (67.3% to 41%).

“It allows me to get to places to clear my mind without worrying whilst suffering from mental health issues and it also allows me to get to places such as groceries instead of my parents having to pay for travel.”

“If I lose free travel, my mental health would suffer”, by ethnicity



Thirdly, this also changed by ethnicity, with Black young people the least likely to say that their mental health would struggle (34.7%), followed by South Asian or Asian young people (42.8%), White young people (45.9%), and Mixed young people (50.1%). Lastly, young women were also more likely to say that they would struggle with their mental health than young men (47.1% to 36.3%).

“I would visit friends less as I could be saving transport money to go to school instead. This will take a toll on my mental health as I will be stuck at home more.”

The impact on travel



The impact of the suspension on travel

We wanted to look at how the suspension of travel would impact on young Londoner's ability to travel to places they wanted to go.

The majority of young Londoners (80.5%) said that if they lost free travel, they would not travel out of their area as much unless they had to, with only seven percent saying they would, and twelve percent saying they were not sure.

“(Free transport is) an easy option for me to get around London without relying on my parents to take me everywhere.”

Unsurprisingly, young people who said that free transport was important or very important to them were the most likely to say that they won't travel out of their areas as much. Young women were also slightly more likely to say they would not than young men (83.3% to 76.6%).

Just over half of young Londoners (56%) said that if they lost free travel, they would not be able to afford to go to the places they want to go, with a small proportion saying they could afford to (17%), and around one in four not sure (27.1%).

“(Free transport means) everything - I can't afford it without it, I would have to walk miles.”

Young women were more likely to say that they would not be able to afford to go to the places they wanted to go than young men (60.3% to 50.1%).

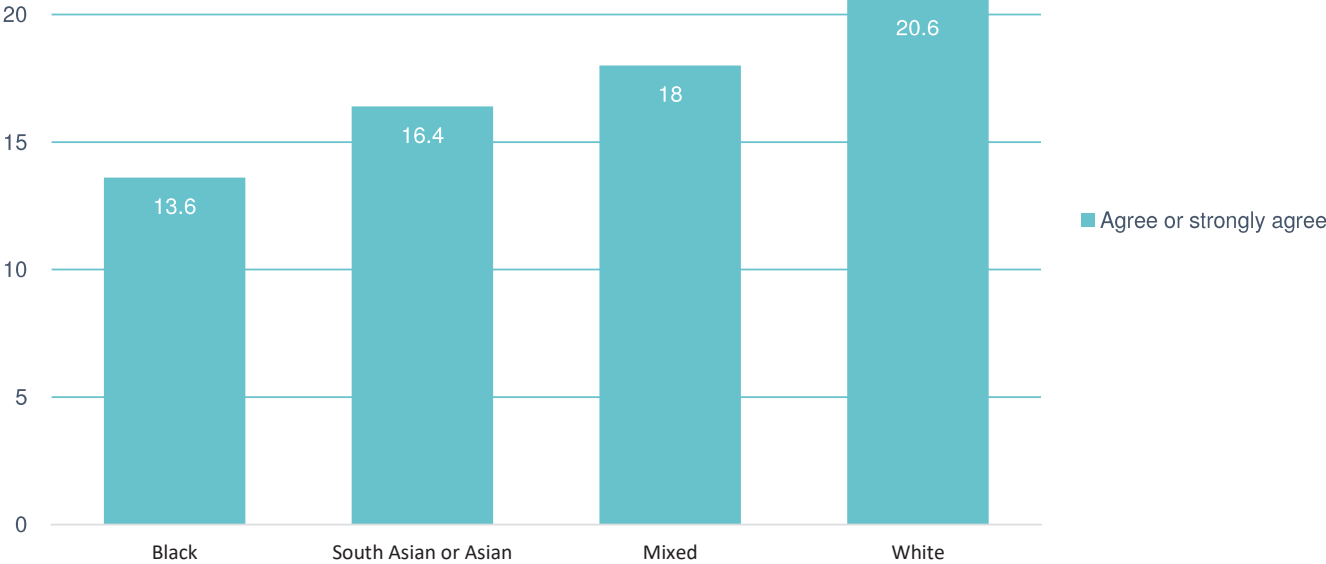
Less than one in five young Londoners (17.3%) said that if they lost free travel, they would cycle instead to the places they want to go, with a majority (58.6%) saying they would not, and a quarter (24.2%) not sure.

“Free travel allows adolescents in London to explore the city in less energy consuming ways such as cars or Ubers. It is also considerably safer and more disable friendly to people with disabilities who cannot walk or cycle everywhere.”

Certain groups were also more likely to say that they would cycle if they lost free transport. Firstly, young men were over twice as likely than young women (25.8% to 11%). Secondly, young people with an experience of care were slightly more likely to say they would than those with no care experience (19.1% to 17%).

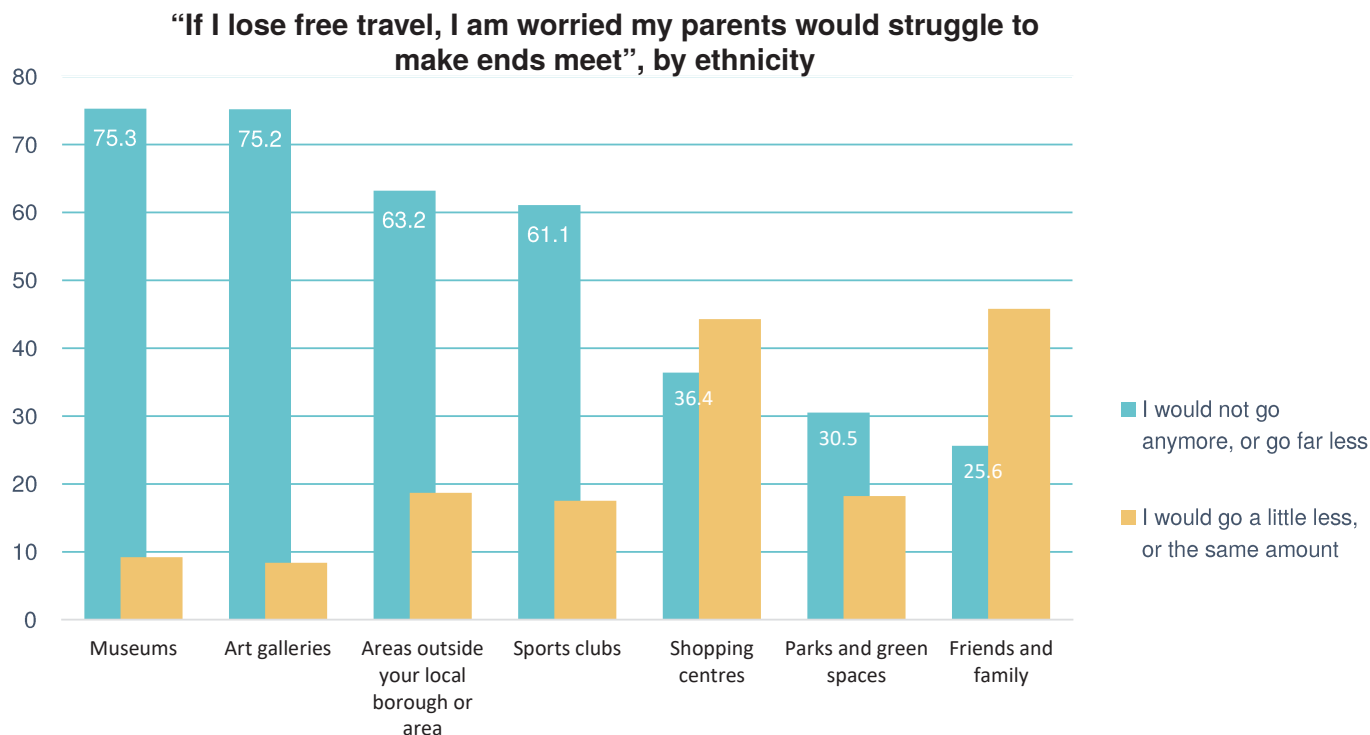
Thirdly, those who already cycle to school were most likely to say they would cycle instead to the places they want to go (15.4%), however of those using public transport, those currently catching the tube were twice as likely (11.4%) to switch to cycling than those catching bus (6.7%), train (4.9%), or walking (4.7%).

“If I lose free travel, I will cycle instead to the places I want to go”



Lastly, there were clear differences between ethnic groups, with White young people most likely to say they would cycle instead (20.6%), followed by Mixed-ethnicity young people (18%), South Asian or Asian young people (16.4%), and Black young people (13.6%).

A majority of young Londoners said that without free transport, they would no longer visit art galleries (52.8%), museums (49.4%), while over a third said they would no longer visit sports clubs (37.5%) or areas outside their local borough or area (30.4%).



We asked young Londoners to tell us, if they lost their free travel, how it would impact on how frequently they visited different places in London. We found cultural spaces like art galleries and museums were the most impacted, while shopping centres, and visiting friends and family the least impacted. However, more than one in five of all young Londoners said they would not go anymore to all spaces.

“(Free travel) means very much as I would have to limit how many different places I can go and experience. Even just going to a museum with my four siblings (who are all under 18 and would lose free travel) as it’ll be way too expensive for us to travel.”

Young people across all groups were largely similar in how they felt free transport would impact on their travel to different spaces, with few exceptions. Firstly, South Asian and Asian young people, and Black young people were more likely to say they would not go museums anymore without free travel (55.1%, 54.3%) than White young people (41.2%). This trend was also the case with art galleries, with South Asian and Asian young people, and Black young people again more likely (60.7%, 54.4%) than White young people (46.5%).

Secondly, in terms of gender, young women were more likely than young men to say they would not go anymore, or far less, to areas outside their local borough or area (68.2% to 56.7%), and sports clubs (69.5% to 49.5%). However, young men were more likely to say they would visit their friends and family the same amount than young women (21.9% to 14%), with more young women unsure (30.8% to 25.6%).

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