

TfN research shows that transport issues are leading to social exclusion for North's most vulnerable residents

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New research published by [Transport for the North \(TfN\)](#) – [Transport and social exclusion in the North in 2023/24 report](#) – shows that more than two in five disabled residents, carers, and low-income residents (44 per cent) across the North of England are facing social exclusion due to inadequate and poorly performing transport systems.

According to TfN, analysis of [Department for Transport](#) statistics shows that bus service mileage in the North has been cut by almost a third (32.3 per cent) since 2010. It said that these cuts have significantly impacted the incomes, health, and everyday lives of residents across the region, and are key cause of social exclusion.

TfN added that its new survey of 1,407 disabled residents, low-income residents, and informal carers in

Leeds, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, York, and North Yorkshire reflects the depth of the impact that bus service cuts and other transport issues have on everyday life:

- 44 per cent faced at least one form of social exclusion specifically because of transport issues, and 21 per cent faced multiple forms of social exclusion.
- 26 per cent said that the money they spend on transport makes it difficult to afford other essential items, like utility bills and food shopping.
- 23 per cent said their everyday journeys caused them significant stress and anxiety. This was particularly common among disabled residents.
- 31 per cent of those with a disability that has a major impact on their everyday life had not travelled for leisure purposes at all in the last month, compared with 4 per cent of non-disabled respondents.

TfN said that its survey also demonstrates how the lack of viable local public transport options for everyday journeys adds to the strain on household finances and reduces independence. It pointed to many people having no alternative to car and taxi travel, but suffering major financial hardship due to having to run and maintain a car or take regular taxi journeys. Survey respondents told the sub-national transport body that:

- “The money I pay on public transport is ridiculous and impacts on my shopping bill, because that’s the only outgoing I have control over.”
- “I’m losing my sight and rely on taxis for everything. Leaves me little money. I have to limit what I spend on household items. I don’t go out.”
- “I’m late for work almost every day, without it being my fault. I even set off earlier – at 6am – and I’m still late for work at 9am. It impacts my mental health.”
- “Costs about £100 a month to run my car. I cut back gas, and food. I cut back electric, and don’t go out.”

Martin Tugwell, Transport for the North Chief Executive, said: “Local public transport is the foundation to grow economies, provide more sustainable travel choices, and deliver a good quality of life for all. This new research demonstrates the price residents pay when they don’t have access to decent quality public transport options – financial hardship, poor health, or social isolation.

“We need to change how we plan, develop, invest, and deliver transport improvements to benefit people and places. Buses are a lifeline, playing a vital role in everyday life across the country, enabling people to access services and opportunities. And we know that a better, more reliable public transport offer – including buses – can encourage more sustainable travel choices. More sustainable travel is essential to achieving the North’s ambition for near-zero surface transport emissions by 2045.

Dr Tom Jarvis, Principal Social Researcher at Transport for the North, said: “A decade of decline in local bus services across the North, combined with rapid increases in the cost of living, are forcing residents to make impossible choices between their work, health, caring responsibilities, and everyday essentials.

“Our research shows that those on low incomes, and informal carers are particularly likely to face severe financial hardship, poor mental health, and isolation because of the lack of suitable transport options in their neighbourhoods.

“For these residents, transport issues often compound the many forms of social disadvantage already faced in everyday life, creating a vicious cycle of social exclusion. The loss of local public transport means that basic transport needs can only be fulfilled by sacrificing other essentials to pay for taxis fares, or by depending on friends and family for lifts – at the cost of their independence.”