

Vaccine/Confidence Research

Qualitative Research
Research report



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1. Executive summary

1.1. Key insights

1.1.1. Public transport

The pandemic has had a significant impact on people's use of public transport with many people stopping using altogether. Those who have continued to use public transport during the pandemic (and expect to continue), have done so because of necessity (e.g. travelling to/for work, no other choices available) rather than choice (e.g. for leisure). Whilst some who have used public transport during the pandemic have found the experience less negative than they had expected many remained uncomfortable, even anxious e.g. about hygiene and other people's behaviour with regard to face covering use and social distancing. These were often the reasons cited for not having returned to public transport during the pandemic, as well, as the need to follow Government restrictions on travel.

When it comes to considering whether to use public transport factors such as estimating how many other people will be travelling, journey time (i.e. duration of risk) and access to fresh air were key considerations.

The vaccination programme was generally viewed positively and optimistically. However, a lack of clarity, knowledge or understanding about the impact of vaccination on transmission was a concern for many participants and a barrier to use of public transport. Most felt that their personal safety (and their risk of spreading Covid) would be unaffected by the Phase One roll-out alone as they would not personally be vaccinated, did not know whether/how vaccination affected transmission and did not expect to travel at the same time as those who would have been vaccinated. They wanted to see a more general improvement in the pandemic (e.g. lower deaths rates, hospitalisations, new cases) which would give them greater confidence that travel would be safe for them/others.

In future phases of the roll-out there was a sense that people might be more likely to consider using public transport again; however, their concerns about transmission and vaccination would remain until their travel confidence was boosted by the more general pandemic situation improving as vaccinations continue to be rolled-out.

Possible measures such as vaccinating transport staff or having different rules for vaccinated people were not felt likely to impact short term behaviour. Similarly, operator announcements could potentially be ignored by people used to filtering out e.g. in-station communication.

Participants expected both continued and extended use of Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs, such as mask wearing and social distancing) on public transport, during and beyond the Phase One roll-out period. When asked what interventions they would like to see from Operators and Government, people focused on their key concerns around social distancing, hygiene and fresh air and so wanted to see measures/communication that reassured them on these issues e.g. limiting passenger numbers, more visibility of hygiene measures, improving ventilation and physical barriers to enforce social distancing.

1.1.2. Aviation & Maritime

The pandemic has curtailed use of aviation, ferries and cruising through both Government restrictions and because of reluctance/fears on behalf of participants themselves, especially in relation to the challenge of social distancing on planes and ferries. Participants who had

continued to fly during the pandemic had done so mainly for business, to see family and for leisure, the latter only when infection levels were low. Experiences were mixed with some reassured by the relative absence of other travellers but others reporting that passengers on aircraft were failing to comply with social distancing and face covering rules.

International ferry using participants were cautious about using ferries mainly because of the likelihood of mixing with other potentially infected people. Domestic ferry participants were less worried about travelling and indeed a number had continued during the pandemic, albeit out of necessity. Their experience had been relatively positive because of the opportunity to travel outside and the low numbers of fellow travellers. Participants who had previously taken cruises had not done so since the start of the pandemic.

The vaccination programme provided hope with some people (e.g. business flyers) keen to be vaccinated if it was necessary for them to be able to fly again. Knowledge of the Phase One roll-out was also relatively high. However, key barriers to travel confidence remained: the question of what effect vaccination has on transmission; the estimation that those who will be vaccinated first, are not the people they would travel with on flights and ferries. Participants who had been taking cruises were generally older and more likely to be personally vaccinated in the Phase One roll-out, yet remained cautious because of the perceived continued risk as well as the likely poor/reduced experience of a cruise with Covid safety measures in place.

Confidence in a more general reduction in the severity of the pandemic, coupled with confidence that measures such as social distancing and hygiene remain in place and are complied with by other passengers are pre-requisites for confidence to resume travel. Almost everyone expected NPIs to remain in place during the Phase One roll-out and indeed beyond.

Response to a range of suggested measures was mixed. For aviation, only allowing those who had been vaccinated to travel was cautiously welcomed by some, but its perceived unfairness was questioned by others. Measures such as destination countries requiring vaccination or having no quarantine for those vaccinated were not popular due to uncertainty about transmission when vaccinated. Similarly, for maritime users, mandatory vaccination and different quarantine duration for people who had been vaccinated, were not popular because participants were uncertain about the relationship between transmission and vaccination. However, when it came to cruises, participants welcomed the idea of compulsory vaccination.

For aviation participants suggested pre-boarding temperature checks, limiting capacity on flights and mandatory testing prior to departure. For maritime use, participants suggested being able to remain in vehicles on ferries, guaranteed access to outside space and pre-travel testing for longer/international journeys. For cruises, participants suggested adding compulsory testing to the range of possible interventions.

Finally, when it came to communication requirements from Operators and Government, participants focused on messaging to continue to explain and enforce NPIs, information about cleaning and education on the measures in place to make travelling safe.

1.2. Implications for policy and communication

The general sense of anxiety amongst many participants we spoke to around the peak of the January increase in cases and deaths and with a strict lockdown in place, significantly impacted their consideration of use of the various different modes of transport. In addition, participants had formed new habits and workarounds which also had a dampening effect on

their likelihood to consider. This is why many participants were more concerned with the wider pandemic situation improving before they would actively consider travelling again.

This has an implication for timing of communication as much as content. Whilst communication focuses on encouraging restrictions to everyday activity (including travel) it will be hard to simultaneously communicate reassurance of the safety of transport. It is important to continue to communicate the growing proportion of the population who have been vaccinated, as although participants do not fully understand the impact of the vaccination they do see the vaccination programme as a positive marker of progress in the pandemic: more people vaccinated equals progress towards safer everyday life when use of transport can resume.

The research showed that the nature of the experience of using public transport, flying, using ferries, going on cruises is such that the risks presented by Covid are easy to imagine hence participants' emphasis on NPIs. Interestingly, participants who had continued to use the various different modes of transport were warmer to the idea of using them once lockdown restrictions had been lifted, albeit often for necessary reasons (work, business, emergencies).

Thus, it is important that NPIs remain in place for the foreseeable future. Communication (by Government and by operators) should clearly and visibly set out the importance of following rules and measures partly to encourage compliance but also to reassure. Communication - once restrictions are eased, cases have reduced, and the general mood has improved - should also aim to show, as well as tell, people that use of various different modes of transport can be safe, to compete with their more negative visualisations.

All of these factors contribute to the way that the vaccination roll-out in and of itself had a less overt impact on participants' apparent readiness to consider travelling by the various modes again compared with the noise of the general pandemic situation and participants' cautious imagination about what the experience of different transport modes would be like. However, equally significant is the lack of understanding of the impact of vaccination on transmission. Because participants are unsure about whether people (they or others) can still transmit the virus after they have been vaccinated, they struggle to make a reasoned connection between the vaccination roll-out and the safety or otherwise of use of different modes of transport.

The implications of this are that Government should make as clear as possible, the link between vaccination generally and transmission so that people can make a more informed judgment about theirs and others' risks when travelling. Addressing the fact that participants see a disconnect between those who are included in the Phase One roll-out and the people that they believe use the various different modes of transport needs addressing.

When it comes to additional measures that could be adopted in relation to vaccination (e.g. restricting access to those who have been vaccinated, vaccinating staff etc.) there was lukewarm support in part because participants did not understand the impact that vaccination has on transmission, which underlines the need for that to be communicated as clearly as possible.

2. Background and Objectives

2.1. Introduction

Background

Throughout most of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on the use of public transport, aviation, ferries and cruise travel as demand has fallen dramatically. Now that the Covid-19 vaccination programme is being rolled out, the Department for Transport (DfT) needs to understand potential demand for transport services during the roll-out, any risks around non-compliance with mitigation measures, and the policy/communications measures that need to be put in place.

Context

Fieldwork was conducted between Wednesday 20th January and Monday 25th January. At this time, the UK was in a national lockdown and concern levels amongst our participants were high as daily deaths from Covid-19 were reaching some of the highest numbers of the pandemic and there was a threat of new variants such as the UK (Kent) strain, the South African strain and the Brazilian strain. On the other hand, the first phase of the Covid-19 vaccination roll out was well underway, with almost 5 million people having received their first dose by the 20th January, with many participants having anecdotal experience of someone they know being vaccinated. Inevitably, this context will have implications for the research findings.

2.2. Research objectives

There were two strands to the research with distinct objectives: public transport confidence and aviation / maritime confidence.

Public transport confidence

The objectives of the research were to explore:

- The public's confidence, willingness and intention to use public transport (PT) during the roll-out of the vaccination programme.
- The likelihood of compliance with other mitigation measures on PT (e.g. social distancing, face-coverings) during the roll-out.
- The policy measures / communications messages that could increase public confidence in PT and compliance with mitigation measures during the roll-out.
- Vulnerable passengers' experience, confidence and willingness to use PT

Aviation / maritime confidence

The objectives of the research were to explore:

- Public confidence in using air travel / ferries / cruises while vaccines are becoming more widespread and being affected by other factors.
- Views on potential policy measures (e.g. vaccine stamps, vaccine checks at borders).

2.3. Methodology

To address the research objectives, BritainThinks spoke to a range of members of the public in England, from the North, West Midlands, South and London, delivering a total of 16 online focus groups and 12 depth interviews. All participants were frequent users of particular modes of transport prior to the pandemic. Please refer to the breakdown of the audience types below.

The specific audiences spoken to were:

- **General public: 16 x focus groups, with 6 participants per group**

The groups were split by mode of transport used prior to Covid-19, and further by different kinds of passengers or by demographics:

- **4 x aviation** (mix of genders, spread of locations across England, spread of BC1C2¹ socioeconomic grade per group)
 - Long-haul travellers, premium – leisure or business, aged 30-70
 - 3 unlikely to travel abroad by plane in the next 6 months, 3 likely
 - Short-haul travellers, budget airlines – leisure, aged 18-60
 - 3 unlikely to travel abroad by plane in the next 6 months, 3 likely
 - Business travellers, aged 30-70
 - 2 unlikely to travel abroad by plane in the next 6 months, 4 likely
 - Leisure travellers, aged 25-70
 - 2 unlikely to travel abroad by plane in the next 6 months, 4 likely
- **3 x ferries** (mix of genders, spread of locations across England, aged 18-60, spread of BC1C2 socioeconomic grade per group)
 - Travellers carrying out short crossings
 - 2 used ferries once a quarter pre-Covid, 4 at least two times per year
 - Travellers carrying out international ferry trips
 - 3 used ferries at least 6 times a year pre-Covid, 2 at least once a quarter, 1 at least two times per year
 - Travellers carrying out domestic or international ferry trips
 - All participants used ferries at least 6 times a year pre-Covid
- **1 x cruises** (mix of genders, spread of locations across England, spread of BC1C2 socioeconomic grade)
 - Cruise-travellers from UK ports, aged 40+
 - All participants had taken at least one cruise in the year leading up to Covid-19
- **8 x public transport** (mix of genders, spread of locations, spread of BC1C2 socioeconomic grade across the groups)

¹ For a breakdown of the socio-economic grades please refer to the appendix (section 6).

- General population, aged 18-30, socioeconomic grade BC1
 - Half had stopped using public transport during the pandemic, half had continued
 - Mix of confidence using public transport
- General population, aged 35-55, socioeconomic grade BC1
 - Half had stopped using public transport during the pandemic, half had continued
 - Mix of confidence using public transport
- General population, aged 18-30, socioeconomic grade C2D
 - Half had stopped using public transport during the pandemic, half had continued
 - Mix of confidence using public transport
- General population, aged 35-55, socioeconomic grade C2D
 - Half had stopped using public transport during the pandemic, half had continued
 - Mix of confidence using public transport
- Non-compliant public transport users, aged 20-55
 - All had broken rules on public transport i.e. not wearing a face covering or not social distancing from others
 - All had continued to use public transport during the pandemic
- Very anxious public transport avoiders, aged 55+, socioeconomic grade C1C2
 - 2 identify as vulnerable to Covid-19 due to long-term health conditions such as asthma, cancer, and diabetes
 - None had continued to use public transport during the pandemic
 - None were concerned about Covid-19
- Commuters who have continued using public transport as normal, aged 25-45, socioeconomic grade BC1C2
 - All commuting by public transport at least 3 times a week during the pandemic
 - Mix of concern about Covid-19
- Younger at-risk individuals (with vulnerable characteristics), aged 18-30, socioeconomic grade C1C2
 - 4 BAME participants
 - All identify as vulnerable to Covid-19 due to long-term health conditions such as asthma, immune disorders and heart conditions
 - Half had stopped using public transport during the pandemic, half had continued

- **Vulnerable passengers: 12 x depth interviews**

Depth interviews were conducted with participants who consider themselves vulnerable to Covid due to the more sensitive nature of these discussions. In order to ensure a clear read on such participants, the focus of all discussions was public transport. The sample consisted of:

- A mix of genders, socioeconomic grades and locations
- A spread of ages, including representation for over 60s and 70s
- 4 BAME participants
- All identifying as more at risk / vulnerable from Covid-19. Our participants had a variety of long-term illnesses / conditions / impairments / disabilities, often more than one at a time:
 - Long-term health conditions including diabetes, multiple sclerosis, heart problems, suppressed immune systems, and asthma
 - Mobility impairments including muscular dystrophy, spinal stenosis, hypertonia and sensory impairments including deafness
 - 3 relying on assistance at transport hubs
 - Mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder
- Half had stopped using public transport during the pandemic, half had continued

3. Public transport

This section sets out how the pandemic has impacted public transport use, and in turn, how this might be affected by phase one of the vaccination rollout programme, personal vaccination and once the vaccine rolls out to the rest of the general population.

3.1. Pre-Covid public transport use

All participants were frequent users of public transport before the pandemic, using a range of methods: train, bus, tram, tube, metro. Many used public transport every day – for example, commuting into the city on working days and travelling to see friends on the weekends. Participants who used public transport to get to work tended to use it the most, while others used public transport at least once a week or month for leisure or for essential reasons such as healthcare.

The most important factor impacting public transport decision-making was convenience, which could mean making the least number of changes in a journey, doing the least amount of walking to stops or stations or anything else that made the journey easier for an individual. Other important factors were speed of the journey and cost. For some, particularly rural participants, their choice of public transport mode was the only feasible option for a particular journey.

“I had a card from work for the Metro, so I didn’t need to pay. It was also convenient – a walking distance from my home.”
(General population, 18-30, C2D)

“My sons live in London and it wasn’t always convenient to drive – trains are reliable and convenient. I used to use the bus to visit friends when my husband was using the car.”
(Very anxious public transport avoiders, 55+)

The type of journey – leisure, work, other essential purposes – was a factor mainly in determining the destination. Although some complained about crowding on public transport on the way into work for example, convenience, speed and cost were still largely the determining factors in transport choice.

Bus

This is most likely to be used by rural participants with few other options or for shorter journeys in cities. For many, it was the most convenient option for certain destinations where the bus takes them almost door to door.

Tube / metro / tram

In cities with tubes, trams or metro services, this is often seen as the most efficient option for travel to avoid traffic. Crowding, especially during rush hour, was the biggest concern mentioned by participants about this mode of transport, even when thinking about pre-Covid times.

Train

This is most likely to be used by commuters or for long-distance journeys, which for most were leisure journeys to see friends or family across the country, but for some involved travel for

work. Trains are seen as the alternative to a car for such journeys, and often a quicker and more convenient alternative.

Specific findings from depth interviews with vulnerable participants

Decision-making on public transport modes was similar for vulnerable participants and non-vulnerable participants, with convenience, speed and cost coming out again as the most important factors. However, participants with mobility issues placed even more emphasis on the element of convenience due to difficulties walking long distances to take public transport.

“The tube stops literally outside where I work so I don’t have to walk much and it’s across from my house too. So, it’s easy. When I’ve got my MS flares, sometimes it’s quite hard to do a lot of walking.”

(Depth, 37, long-term physical health condition and mental health condition)

Participants with mobility issues and/or who require travel assistance also had to factor accessibility and the availability of assistance into their decisions, for example choosing tube stations based on step-free access. For these participants, buses were often the preferred mode of transport due to the proximity of the driver and their availability to help.

“We used to use the buses mainly in London and the tubes. I don’t like using tubes, it takes too much planning as there are a few that are not accessible, with nobody there to help at the end of it – even though they should be step free. The last line I used, I could not have got off as there was a huge gap, and I am scared about wheels from my wheelchair going down the gap.”

(Depth, 27, long-term physical health condition and mobility impairment)

3.2. Impact of Covid on use of public transport

3.2.1. Impact of Covid

During the pandemic, public transport use has reduced significantly due to fewer opportunities to use it as most people have fewer places to be, and due to concerns about Covid. Many of our participants had paused their public transport use or limited it to essential journeys, and those who had continued to frequently use public transport did so for work.

The factors influencing decisions on public transport mode have largely stayed the same with travel during Covid – namely, convenience, speed, and cost – although some have been prioritising the speed and efficiency of the journey more, in order to minimise the length of time spent with strangers in an enclosed space. As before, however, sometimes a particular mode of transport is the only viable option for a journey.

It must also be noted that most participants make their own judgements about what is safe or not safe, with different people prioritising different safety concerns, leading to some mixed conclusions about which modes are safer. For example, some participants felt trains were safer than buses because they felt they were cleaned more frequently, while others felt trams were safer than trains as they were perceived to be less busy. Additionally, experiences of modes of transport vary by location, time of day, actions of others on the transport, and so on, but can lead individuals to make generalised assumptions about what public transport use during Covid is like. For example, a participant felt that the train was riskier than the tram as in their experience it was busier.

"The tram was absolutely fine... Even though it felt riskier because of the pandemic there was less people using it. I didn't feel less safe. On the tram, I felt 6/10 in terms of confidence. The train felt riskier – more people but every seat wasn't socially distanced. When you're on the train and somebody takes their mask down to sneeze that is when I feel uncomfortable."

(Younger at-risk individuals, 18-30)

"On a bus on a route all day, it wouldn't be cleaned throughout the entire day. Whereas a train may be cleaned before it sets off. Going forwards, I will only use a train if I need to."

(General population, 35-55, BC1)

Bus

Buses continue to be the only viable option for some participants, for example those living in rural areas, while others have opted for alternative modes of transport that are seen as more efficient to spend less time near strangers. On the other hand, some saw buses as the safest environment, with more access to ventilation, shorter journeys, and more noticeable NPIs in place.

"Bus is the only viable option around me because of where I live, I do feel that it's more convenient because there are less people on buses – they have restricted the numbers."

(General population, 18-30, C2D)

Tube / metro / tram

As urban modes of transport and ones which carried concerns about overcrowding even before Covid, these caused the most worry of catching Covid due to perceptions of overcrowding and lack of cleanliness and for underground services, a lack of ventilation. However, as often more efficient forms of transport, these were also sometimes seen as the safest option in minimising time spent with strangers.

"My last journey was the tube for work. It was quickest way to do it... But you are in a tube underground with little to no ventilation. Inhaling people's breath, there is nowhere for it to go other than your lungs, which means the risk of Covid is very high."

(Depth, 56, long-term health condition)

Train

With fewer long-distance journeys being made, only a handful of participants had travelled by train during the pandemic. Those that had used trains generally noted how empty they were, which made them feel more comfortable using them.

"I don't drive so trains are the only way to get to work. I have no choice, but the trains are absolutely fine, empty and clean. I would worry if it was the tube or bus, I would use hand gel more."

(Commuters who have continued using public transport as normal, 25-45)

3.2.2. Reasons for changes in behaviour

The main reasons for an overall reduction in public transport were because of Government guidance advising people not to travel for non-essential purposes, being able to work from home and safety concerns about Covid-19.

"As I don't have a need, I am happy not taking public transport."

(General population, 35-55, C2D)

"It's [not using public transport] is just what the government were asking you to do, I will see what happens but not using the tube has become normal."
(General population, 18-30, C2D)

Many participants mentioned that they no longer have a need to use public transport, because they're able to work from home or are not going out for leisure purposes. Therefore, public transport use during the pandemic was primarily by participants who are unable to work from home and/or for essential reasons such as healthcare.

"I last used the tram to take my son to hospital last year."
(General population, 35-55, C2D)

However, at times when restrictions have been loosened, there was an increase of public transport use. For example, the 'shift in emphasis' in the government's working from home guidance or the opening of hospitality venues like pubs or holiday accommodation. Our participants who were more concerned about Covid were more likely to mention using public transport once or twice in those points in the pandemic.

"I last used public transport to get to the pub before the latest lockdown."
(General population, 35-55, C2D)

Further, the spread of Covid was top-of-mind, and led many to make their own assessments about the safety of public transport use during the pandemic. As a result, some participants stopped using public transport or restricted its use to essential journeys, particularly at points in the pandemic when infection and death rates had been high. However, as previously mentioned, some participants continued to use public transport due to necessity, such as not being able to work from home,

"At the moment there is no need to travel as I can work from home. The infection rate is slowing, but my assessment of my risk is if I don't need to I won't."
(General population, 35-55, BC1)

The three main factors influencing perceptions of safety from Covid for many of the participants were:

- **Amount and proximity of people:** The more people, the greater the chance someone has Covid. And the closer the people to an individual, the more chance that individual has to catch it from them.
- **Duration of journey:** The more time spent on public transport with strangers, the greater the potential exposure to Covid and therefore likelihood of catching it.
- **Access to open/fresh air:** The more enclosed a space is and the less ventilation there is, the more likely the spread of Covid in that space is.

Of course, these factors exacerbate each other. For example, a small space with no windows and a lot of people or a long journey sat close to someone are perceived as even more unsafe.

"I never liked taking the tube, it always felt wrong to be underground, not having fresh air around. Some lines don't have any overground stations. I don't think I'll go back to using the Tube after the pandemic, I think I'll just use the train and bus from now on. In the bus you have air coming in from outside, but you don't get that underground."
(General population, 35-55, C2D)

The above factors were more top-of-mind for participants who hadn't been using public transport during the pandemic compared with those who had, suggesting that these factors were more related to thought processes around the safety of public transport than experiences of it. Although, it should be noted that some participants who had experience of using public transport also shared these concerns. Please refer to section 3.2.4 for additional detail.

"It's been so long without taking it I have realised how busy it was to take public transport. I would be standing up the whole way, it would be dirty as everybody is so close and crammed together breathing the same air. I can't imagine when it's cleaned as it's always being used. I remember on the bus when somebody used to put a bag down there would be a big cloud of dust – that's what I imagine the seats being like on trains and tubes."
(Younger at-risk individuals, 18-30)

3.2.3. Alternative modes of transport

There was no single alternative mode of transport that participants who had stopped using public transport switched to, and many did not feel they needed to switch to anything as they were going out much less anyway. Those who have been avoiding public transport due to safety concerns about Covid were most likely to find an alternative mode of transport.

Some noted they were walking or cycling more, while other participants were using cars more as it was seen to be safer, and a few had even bought a car during the pandemic. Several participants had used taxis more often as it was seen to be safer to be close to one person than many.

"I use my car now as it's just me in my car and I keep it clean... I do a lot of walking anyway, so I just use the car if I need to do three people's shopping. It's just the car and my feet."
(Very anxious public transport avoiders, 55+)

"I don't need to use public transport; I have found different ways of getting around. I cycle more and I hadn't cycled for 10 years."
(General population, 18-30, BC1)

3.2.4. Continued use of public transport

In our sample, we recruited half of our participants to have continued to use public transport frequently throughout the pandemic. The majority of the other half had used public transport a small number of times since the first lockdown, while the minority, generally older and more vulnerable participants, had not used public transport at all since then. As has been explored, the continued use of public transport has been based on opportunity first and motivation second, both of which fluctuate with the severity of the pandemic but have been particularly lacking in the heights of the pandemic, such as the point during which this fieldwork was conducted.

The majority of those who have used public transport during the pandemic did not feel completely comfortable doing so, especially vulnerable and/or elderly participants. Concerns arose mostly from worries about hygiene and overcrowding, a perceived difficulty of social distancing on public transport, as well as lack of ventilation and concerns about others not wearing face coverings.

"The transport is fairly empty at the moment, but there's always a couple of people with no masks on, touching everything. That makes me really angry, and people that wear the mask not covering their nose."
(General population, 35-55, C2D)

Many participants who had used public transport, felt more comfortable than they had assumed they would be using public transport during the pandemic, noting that it seemed cleaner or emptier than usual, which helped to build confidence. For many participants, the more they used public transport, which was still mostly only when there was a real need, the more confident they felt using it.

"I felt nervous using the tube and buses. I decided to take shorter journeys. But the more I used it, the more comfortable I got."
(General population, 35-55, C2D)

When using public transport and safety concerns did arise, the main considerations were more immediate and direct, such as considering hygiene when having to touch shared surfaces on public transport or considering the proximity of other people if another passenger was close by. For a smaller proportion, lack of access to fresh air also came to mind when travelling. In contrast, participants who had paused public transport use and were imagining what public transport would look like considered slightly less immediate and direct safety concerns, thinking less about hygiene and more about the idea of being in an enclosed space with many people (often imagining pre-pandemic passenger levels) for a long journey with no access to fresh air.

"I always knew that public transport is not clean, so I always washed my hands before, so now it was giving me an OCD in a way, not wanting to touch buttons."
(Non-compliant public transport users, 20-55)

There was some spontaneous awareness of NPIs on public transport, specifically those mentioned below.

Cordoning off seats on buses

This was seen to allow for social distancing and was perceived positively, with some suggesting that this could be done on other modes of transport.

"They block off the seats between people and that's reassuring on the bus."
(General population, 35-55, BC1)

Keeping windows open

Some noted windows being open, making them feel more confident that the space was ventilated, while some others noted that windows were not open, making them feel more nervous. Although a few participants felt they would not be confident enough opening the windows themselves for fear of complaints from other passengers.

"Ventilation too – some train companies open windows and also some buses."
(General population, 18-30, BC1)

Hygiene measures

Hand sanitising stations were welcomed and reassuring when seen, but some complained that they had not seen enough of these, particularly on buses. Others also complained that they had not seen an increase in cleaning in general, which several mentioned would be reassuring, but some felt would be difficult in practice. Such hygiene measures were seen as a way to show that Covid safety concerns were being taken seriously by providers.

"What about hand sanitisers on the buses as we don't see them now?"
(Commuters who have continued using public transport as normal, 25-45)

*"The more things you have in place to show the companies are taking it seriously the better...
All the measures like social distancing, face masks, sanitisers."
(General population, 35-55, BC1)*

Even amongst the sample of public transport users who weren't compliant with NPIs, hygiene measures were a popular intervention, and criticised when not seen. For this group, keeping hands clean was most important in the pandemic, compared to making space or wearing face coverings.

*"At Charing Cross Station, they make no efforts in the toilet to make more soap available for
example."
(Non-compliant public transport users, 20-55)*

Covid safety messaging

There was general awareness of signs, posters and announcements about Covid, but few recalled the specifics of what they had seen or heard. Participant reactions to operator announcements about Covid suggested they may be switching off from messaging in relation to the pandemic.

*"There's definitely more announcements and signs on the buses and trains, and signs on the
seats to tell people where to sit."
(General population, 18-30, C2D)*

For a significant proportion of passengers, when thinking about how to increase their own confidence using public transport, they took matters into their own hands first, such as using services at less busy times. This was also partly due to the perceived lack of credibility of some interventions, for example not trusting providers to limit crowding and therefore deciding to avoid crowding in a different way.

*"Sometimes [during the pandemic], I would stay later in the office because public transport got
busier in the evening and I didn't want to be around too many people."
(Younger at risk-individuals, 18-30)*

Specific findings from depth interviews with vulnerable participants

Vulnerable participants reported being impacted similarly by Covid. Despite being vulnerable, some participants also had to continue using public transport during the pandemic for work or health appointments. In addition, while a few participants found alternative modes of travel, they continued to assess the risk that this posed on them. Further, some had to choose another mode of travel as it was the only viable way to reach their destination without using multiple modes of transport.

"I felt more safe taking the bus than the tube. But I can't take it for most things, so I have to take the tube unfortunately."

(Depth, 37, long-term physical health condition and mental health condition)

However, vulnerable participants were more likely to be concerned about safety from Covid when using public transport, as well as when imagining using it, with concerns about people being too close by, cleanliness and lack of fresh air.

"My last journey was the tube for work. It was quickest way to do it... But you are in a tube underground with little to no ventilation. Inhaling people's breath, there is nowhere for it to go other than your lungs, which means the risk of Covid is very high."

(Depth, 56, long-term health condition)

"I would feel unsafe [taking the bus]. The close proximity of other people, all mixing together. You don't know where they've been or what their attitude to whole thing is either."

(Depth, 35, sensory impairment)

Therefore, these passengers were less likely to use public transport unless needed - for example for health appointments.

"I took the bus to the hospital for an appointment. That was the only time I've used public transport [during Covid]."

(Depth, 22, mobility impairment)

It should be noted that a few participants experienced additional issues specific to their health condition when travelling by public transport during the pandemic, for example extra concern about hygiene in relation to having to hold onto poles due to mobility issues or one hard-of-hearing participant who spoke about difficulty lip-reading when everyone, including travel staff, are wearing face coverings.

"I use a stick and have a back condition so getting to a seat I have to put my hands on a pole with other people, which concerns me."

(Depth, 71, mobility and sensory impairments)

"It has become a lot harder for me during a pandemic to get on the buses because I have to wear a mask which is fine, I don't mind, but if other people are wearing masks it's hard because I can't lipread. Telling a bus driver that I can't understand him because I can't lipread is hard. There have been times where I've had to pull down my mask and someone has asked why I'm not wearing my mask."

(Depth, 24, sensory impairment)

3.3. Vaccination programme

Participants were shown and taken through the following information about phase 1 of the vaccination programme rollout during the online focus groups.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation have advised that priority groups 1-4 will receive the vaccination in phase 1 of the vaccination rollout and should be vaccinated by Easter:

- *Priority group 1: Care home residents, residential care workers*
- *Priority group 2: 80+, healthcare workers, social care workers,*
- *Priority group 3: 75-79*
- *Priority group 4: 70-74, clinically extremely vulnerable (under 70)*

Whereas priority groups 5-9 will receive the vaccination afterwards and should be vaccinated by the summer.

- *Priority group 5: 65-69*
- *Priority group 6: At risk (under 65)*
- *Priority group 7: 60-64*
- *Priority group 8: 55-59*
- *Priority group 9: 50-54*

Phase 1 is around 43% of the population.

Participants were then asked to discuss how this would impact their confidence and intention to travel during phase one of the rollout programme. Following this discussion, participants, were asked to consider what impact roll-out of the vaccine to the general population would have on their confidence and intention to travel. Finally, they were asked to consider potential measures and communications that could reassure the public about using public transport during the vaccination rollout.

3.3.1. Opinion of the Covid-19 vaccine

Overall, the Covid-19 vaccine was viewed optimistically as a potential way out of the pandemic, but there was also caution about the extent to which this is a 'silver bullet' solution. Largely, this was due to unknowns around the impact of the vaccine on Covid transmission. Another important concern was around the efficacy of the vaccine on new Covid variants. In this way, participants were relatively well-informed about the vaccine and the questions that surround it.

"I think the fact that there's three vaccines available, it fills you with confidence. I know that there's different mutations, and we don't know whether they are susceptible to the vaccine, but we should just focus on the fact that there's three vaccines out there. It gives you confidence and makes you feel that hope is around the corner."
(General population, 35-55, C2D)

"I don't think the vaccine means there will be an end. I don't think it prevents or stops you from getting it – I don't know how it works. It stops you having really bad effects, but it doesn't stop it."
(General population, 35-55, BC1)

Most participants were personally keen to get the vaccine as they felt it would make them feel 'safer' and pave a road back to normality. However, there were two groups that were especially sceptical of the vaccine: non-compliant public transport users and Black and South Asian young people in lower socioeconomic groups we spoke to in the general population (18-30, C2D) group.² Notably, all participants in the non-compliant public transport users' group were either unsure or unlikely to get the vaccine. This group in particular felt the pandemic had been overblown and were not concerned about catching Covid, which led to a lack of interest in getting the vaccine.

While the lower socioeconomic grade, young, Black and South Asian participants were slightly more concerned about Covid (in terms of more vulnerable loved ones rather than themselves), both groups were generally distrustful of the government and other authority figures in the pandemic, which was another key element of the scepticism of the vaccine and how effective it would be.

Concerns raised about the vaccine were the short timeframe the vaccine has been developed, what the vaccine contains, side effects of the vaccine and distrust surrounding the motives of authority figures in relation to pushing the public to get vaccinated.

"I don't trust the vaccination. If they can find a cure for this so quick, how come they couldn't find one for other things? Also, what is in it? I wouldn't take it as I don't know what's in it."
(General population, 18-30, C2D)

"I just don't trust the pharmaceutical companies, that's why I'm not so sure. I'm also unsure about the WHO.... I just don't trust what we're getting told."
(Non-compliant public transport users, 20-55)

3.3.2. Awareness and opinion of vaccination roll out programme

While participants were aware of the vaccination roll out programme, most knowledge about it was limited to mentioning one or two of the broader priority groups: the elderly; the vulnerable; or frontline workers. Those who fell under the Phase 1 priority groups were more likely to have more detailed knowledge about the roll out programme.

"I know it's for the elderly, and for priority workers."
(General population, 18-30, C2D)

A few participants had already received the vaccine or were scheduled to do so soon, many were in one of the priority groups and others mentioned close family members who were in priority groups. These groups were most likely to know more and feel positively about the vaccine. These groups are also already most likely to be acting cautiously and be concerned about the personal impact of Covid.

"I am in priority group 5 and have to wait until the summer. I would like it done earlier but I don't think it will be likely."
(Very anxious public transport avoiders, 55+)

² This particular focus group had 4/6 Black and South Asian participants. However, other focus groups had fewer BAME participants and therefore this finding cannot be generalised. It's important to note that the younger at-risk (from Covid) focus group also had 4/6 Black and South Asian participants. However, they were not sceptical of the vaccine and were more optimistic.

Participants generally agreed that the prioritisation of the roll out programme was fair. For example, young people who were not at risk were keenly aware that they will not be receiving the vaccine early in the rollout but were still supportive of this approach.

“For us young people, we won’t get it for a long time. For us it’s not a pressing issue, but it will make a massive difference for the elderly.”
(General population, 18-30, C2D)

However, later on in discussions, some participants asked why other frontline workers such as transport staff, teachers, and so on, are not in Phase 1 of the roll out when they are most exposed to Covid. This was not a top-of-mind concern, but instead one that emerged during conversations about the impact of the vaccine roll out on confidence using public transport, and which will be discussed in more detail in section 3.4.2.

Overall, the roll out programme, like the vaccine, was seen as a route back to normality as those most at risk will be protected, but with caveats again around the efficacy of the vaccine and its impact on Covid transmission. As above, those closest to being personally impacted by the vaccine (e.g. vulnerable passengers) were most likely to know more and feel positively about it.

“I think when it’s rolled out to more people, it will make us freer to mix socially.”
(Very anxious public transport avoiders, 55+)

Specific findings from depth interviews with vulnerable participants

Vulnerable participants were more likely to be personally impacted by Phase 1 of the vaccination roll out due to being in one of the priority groups, and therefore awareness of the roll out was slightly higher than the general public, and support similarly high.

"I have heard about the priority groups. People who've got health conditions, frontline workers and people over 70 get the vaccination first."
(Depth, 22, mobility impairment)

"I have seen the priority list and I am in category 4 – over 70s."
(Depth, 71, mobility and sensory impairments)

Likely due to higher concern about their own health risk from Covid, and the fact that a vaccine is closer on the horizon for them than others, many vulnerable participants were particularly keen to get the vaccine, expecting it could cautiously pave the way back to some normality for them. However, a few participants had concerns about how the vaccine would interact with their health condition or medication.

"For the safety of my family and myself and to feel reassured I would get it. But I would want to research them and get the vaccine I feel is most right for me."
(Depth, 43, mental health conditions)

"Absolutely yes, I'd get the vaccine, I've no qualms about it or worries. I'd encourage others to get it."
(Depth, 35, sensory impairment)

3.4. Impact of Phase 1 vaccination roll out on likelihood of using public transport

3.4.1. Overall impact

Overall, most people felt that Phase 1 of the vaccination roll out will have little impact on the likelihood of using public transport, particularly during periods of high infection rates in the pandemic. However, if the roll out lowers infection rates, death rates and the pressure on the NHS, public transport use will likely increase. Generally, it is these other signs of the spread of Covid slowing that help build confidence to use public transport during the pandemic, rather than the vaccination roll out.

"If I don't think I have to use public transport [during Phase 1], and I don't right now, then I won't."
(General population, 18-30, C2D)

The handful of participants who did feel that Phase 1 of the roll out would make them more likely to use public transport tended to be either people who fell into those priority groups themselves or some cautious younger people who were concerned about spreading Covid to more vulnerable people. Even for these participants, however, when imagining the impact of the roll out, other factors outside of the vaccine *per se* played a role, such as infection rates falling.

"I would be slightly more likely [to use public transport while priority groups 5-9 are being vaccinated] because the most vulnerable groups would be vaccinated. And the weather is a factor, the numbers should fall in the summer."
(General population, 35-55, C2D)

However, the vast majority of participants who aren't currently using public transport did not feel Phase 1 would impact their confidence or willingness to use it. As before, this is due to concerns about mixing with others in enclosed spaces, uncleanliness, and non-compliance from other passengers. If they were not part of one of the priority groups, participants struggled to make the connection between their own behaviour and perceptions of risk, and the roll out programme.

"My circumstances haven't changed due to the groups 1-4. Looking at the plans that have been released my vaccine will be in September as I will be in phase 2."
(General population, 35-55, C2D)

Similarly, the different stages of the Phase 1 roll out had little impact on likelihood to use public transport, although a small minority of participants mentioned they would be slightly more likely to travel once priority groups 5-9 are being vaccinated if this coincides with a drop in infection cases and deaths.

3.4.2. Perception of the role of Public Transport use in transmission of the virus to vulnerable groups

Participants who felt the vaccination roll out would have an impact on their likelihood to use public transport made the link between their public transport use and the transmission of the virus beyond those travelling with them, which many others did not. They therefore understood that vaccinating the most vulnerable groups meant that even if they transmitted Covid through their use of public transport, if that chain of transmission reached a vulnerable person, that person would be less likely to suffer severe symptoms from the virus.

However, most participants struggled to make this link, and were instead focused on the immediate and often personal impacts of travel. For example, concerns about catching the virus themselves and either being personally severely impacted or passing it to vulnerable loved ones. Those that are not greatly concerned about Covid in the first place said they will also not be impacted by the vaccination roll out as they will continue to travel regardless.

"The only thing that would impact me is that we have parents that are in one of those priority groups."
(Non-compliant public transport users, 20-55)

"I would start travelling again [after lockdown] because I feel like I'm not putting anyone's safety at risk, just myself."
(General population, 18-30, C2D)

This thought process was best demonstrated by the question of non-healthcare key workers getting vaccinated, which several participants brought up during the discussion. These participants questioned why those that are more likely to travel are not at the top of the priority list, compared to those who are less likely to travel, such as elderly or at-risk groups. In this way, participants were often unable to get past the immediate consequences of travel on themselves and the passengers around them to see how their behaviours played a role in wider community transmission.

"A small part of me feels that people who are still travelling for work should have it – maybe it is 10% in addition to priority – then the feeling of security would be higher as elderly, and those who are sick are not going to be the ones who are transmitting the virus as they won't be travelling."

(Commuters who have continued using public transport as normal, 25-45)

"Are [the priority groups] the age groups who travel? It's not the age group that I feel you would get herd immunity from. Will they even come out of the house? They aren't the type of people who are on the train in the mornings."

(General population, 35-55, BC1)

3.4.3. Understanding and perception of the effectiveness of the vaccination and impact on transmission

Questions surrounding the impact of the vaccination on transmission and its efficacy against the new variant made it even less likely that the roll out would have an impact on an individual's travel. Many participants questioned why they might increase their travel during the vaccination roll out if they – or other people – were still able to transmit coronavirus. A smaller number raised concerns that even if the vaccine is being rolled out, they cannot be sure that it is working against new variants. Older and more at-risk participants were particularly likely to raise such questions.

"I'm not sure whether I can still carry the virus once I've had the vaccine."

(General population, 35-55, C2D)

"She mentioned about the different variant, we don't know how well the vaccine is working with this. I don't feel safe with all of these new things."

(General population, 35-55, BC1)

3.4.4. The importance and impact of wider pandemic status on likelihood to use public transport

The below elements of wider pandemic status generally had a greater impact than the vaccination roll out itself on likelihood to use public transport.

Infection / death rates going down substantially: Many participants mentioned these factors as indicators that it was safe enough to travel again.

"Once I see the amount of deaths going down, that's when I'd feel more comfortable using public transport on a regular basis."

(General population, 18-30, C2D)

"I just want to see the number of deaths going down. The whole world could be vaccinated, but if the numbers are still high then I'd still be cautious."

(General population, 18-30, C2D)

Strain on the NHS decreasing: A handful of participants mentioned this as an indication that it would be safer to use public transport.

"I would want to hear that the NHS is reducing its intake and that it's coming to a halt."

(Very anxious public transport avoiders, 55+)

Lockdown ending: For most, this meant they would have more things to do and places to go using public transport, thereby increasing the opportunity to travel. However, for a small

minority, this increased worry about overcrowding on public transport and decreased likelihood to use it until other signs (such as the indicators above) suggested it was safe enough.

"It's more about lockdown being lifted than the vaccine. I don't think I'd be willing to get on the bus until I think the summer of 2022, because it'll be too recent."
(General population, 35-55, C2D)

"If the lockdown is lifted it would just be mental. People would start using the bus more and I think it starts creating a false sense of security. A lot of people would still go into hospital."
(General population, 18-30, C2D)

Thus, there is a need to link the signifiers of the pandemic easing with the effect of the (phase 1) vaccination roll out where possible to provide confidence in using public transport more/again in the short term.

3.5. Impact of future phases of vaccination

3.5.1. Impact of being personally vaccinated

For most, particularly older and more vulnerable groups who are more concerned about catching Covid themselves, being personally vaccinated increases the likelihood of using public transport. This is because people generally conceptualise Covid risk in an immediate and personal way, and so participants felt they would be unlikely to experience serious health risk from the virus if vaccinated. However, for those most concerned about catching Covid, there was still caution around returning to public transport, and several noted that they would wait until the second dose or until some time had passed to feel completely comfortable.

"The risk of catching it is still there but the effects of it are lessened – I'd be ill, but I wouldn't have the death from it. When I get my second dose, I would be more likely."
(Very anxious public transport avoiders, 55+)

Questions around the efficacy of the vaccine and its impact on transmission remained, and this meant that several were unsure whether getting personally vaccinated would change their views on travel. For some, getting the second dose would provide reassurance about the efficacy of the vaccine and be a catalyst for returning to public transport.

"I'd still use it, but still feel cautious. You just never know, there's always a risk. Even if I'd had the vaccine, it's still new, you don't know how effective it is, so that keeps me at a 4 out of 5 [a confidence scale of 0-5, where 0 refers to not at all confident and scores of 5 refer to totally confident]."
(General population, 18-30, C2D)

3.5.2. Impact of majority of population being vaccinated

Once the Phase 1 priority groups have been vaccinated and the roll out has moved on to the general population, a larger proportion of our participants felt they would be more comfortable returning to public transport, if the vaccine is a success and case numbers have reduced. Potentially, part of this is due to the increased likelihood that the research participants who were not in scope of Phase 1 would be getting the vaccination themselves. However, measures and rules are expected to continue to be in place during this period, which would increase confidence for most.

“With measures in place, and most of the vulnerable people being vaccinated and the rest of the population getting it, that would be safer. I don’t think that I’ll go back to the same patterns as before, I’ll be more cautious and choose carefully which mode I’ll take. But in this scenario, I’d be more comfortable. I’d still wear a face mask and wash my hands, but with those measures in place I’d be more likely.”
(General population, 35-55, C2D)

“I want to see a big difference in cases before I take it again. I am lucky as I don’t have to use public transport. I think when the news starts coming on that most people are being vaccinated and once most people have – you should be able to see the risk coming down.”
(Very anxious public transport avoiders, 55+)

Often, participants made calculations in their heads as to what percentage of the population would be vaccinated at each stage. Several had the figure of 75% of the public vaccinated in their minds as a point at which the vaccination roll out will have had a substantial impact – depending on how effective it is.

“I wouldn’t change any of my travel habits [during Phase 1]. I think you need 75% of the population to be vaccinated before it would help. I’m not worried about myself catching it. I know that there are people that are not in phase 1 – the 57% - are still at risk. That’s the majority, so none of my habits would change.”
(General population, 18-30, C2D)

Some participants found it difficult to have a long-term view, assuming they would never return to the same public transport habits as before. Often, this was because they had found alternative modes of travel in efforts to avoid public transport, and so may have changed their habits more permanently. The idea of using overcrowded public transport in the future was a particular source of fear for participants who couldn’t see a return to normality, but it is unclear how long-lasting this fear will be. Nevertheless, the majority felt hopeful that the current period of the pandemic is the last hurdle and that the vaccination roll out will hopefully pave a path to normality.

“It depends if there’s another lockdown, but I think this will be the last one with all the vaccines rolling out.”
(General population, 18-30, C2D)

Specific findings from depth interviews with vulnerable participants

Vulnerable participants were likely to imagine an increase in confidence using public transport once they had personally been vaccinated, as they were more likely to be concerned about the health risk of Covid to themselves.

However, safety concerns in relation to Covid also means that despite the personal likelihood to get the vaccine imminently, there is a lingering caution for participants around returning to public transport for those who have stopped using it. Some mentioned they may wait until their second dose to reassess the situation and/or until they know more about the efficacy of the vaccine in relation to the virus and its impact on transmission.

"It offers no real extra protection for first 3 weeks... but even then, you're not 100% protected until your second vaccination."
(Depth, 56, long-term health condition)

"Scientists are still unsure as to whether it protects from transmission or whether it gives you enough protection."
(Depth, 61, long-term health condition and mobility impairment)

As with the general public, half of the vulnerable participants had continued to use public transport during the pandemic, due to work or essential healthcare needs. Most of these participants had safety concerns when using public transport and felt the vaccine would provide them with reassurance to a certain degree. Although, similarly to those who stopped using public transport, this was alongside Covid-19 rates reducing.

"I probably won't feel as scared travelling to work. Once everything opens and I get the vaccine, I'll feel comfortable. I'll be making up for all this lost time, but [Covid] rates would have to be down."
(Depth, 30, long-term health condition and mental health condition)

3.6. Attitudes to NPIs during vaccine rollout and new measures that might be required, from operators and Government

3.6.1. Importance of NPIs

Almost all participants expect NPIs to continue for the duration of the phase 1 roll out and indeed for the duration of the pandemic, with most finding the idea of an end to the pandemic difficult to conceptualise partly because they do not know when it will end and also because of a feeling that the impact of Covid-19 on everyday life and their sense of safety/risk will persist for some time. While there was only some spontaneous awareness of NPIs from those who had used public transport, NPIs such hand sanitising station, cordoning off seats and limiting passengers were generally popular and increased confidence on public transport. Those same NPIs were expected to continue to be in place throughout the roll out.

3.6.2 Importance of enforcement of existing rules

Almost all participants expect existing rules on social distancing and face coverings to continue throughout the pandemic, and some even suggested that changes may be here to stay.

"If the UK and most of the world adopted the Asian way of using face masks, I'd be very happy with that... Inevitably Covid will cycle into the range of viruses that anyone can get at any time of the year."

(General population, 35-55, C2D)

Most participants said that they will continue to follow these rules during the pandemic, but some were concerned that others would not, whether that is people who are already not doing so, or people who would begin to comply less as the Covid risk decreased.

"The people that have always done it will carry on following the rules, those that don't do it will carry on not following the rules."

(Very anxious public transport avoiders, 55+)

"I'm worried that as more people are vaccinated and the restrictions are lifted, people are going to start taking the mick with it and people are going to start breaking the rules again. I know relatively sensible people who are already breaking the rules."

(General population, 18-30, C2D)

Many would therefore feel more confident if the rules were enforced more stringently on public transport. However, a minority who do not comply with such rules on public transport strongly pushed back on this idea as this was seen to remove active choice.

"I expect the rules to stay in place. My dad has had both of his jabs and he has been told he still needs to mask up and follow the rules because potentially he could pass it on or still get a mild dose of it. I think it has to stay as it is now until the majority have been vaccinated."

(Very anxious public transport avoiders, 55+)

"I don't see any of the rules being dropped soon. I think we're becoming an increasingly regulated society. Those in power are getting a power trip."

(Non-compliant public transport users, 20-55)

3.6.3. Response to possible measures

During the research hypothetical scenarios were tested with participants. It should be noted that these were created for research purposes and did not represent government policy.

Participants were prompted with some potential NPI measures to gauge their likely impact on the public's travel confidence. The measures suggested to participants were operator announcements around actions that have been taken to make public transport safer, vaccinating staff and different rules for vaccinated people such as different rules on face coverings, social distancing and handwashing. The first two did not come up spontaneously for participants, suggesting they were not front-of-mind. Once suggested, responses were mixed. While different rules for vaccinated people did come up spontaneously, it sparked debate and views were also mixed, with participants often undecided themselves.

Operator announcements: Some participants who continued using public transport during the pandemic along with those who did not felt more communication of the measures put in place would reassure them, while others admitted that they may zone out and that it would be more effective to see the measures being put in place.

"Yes, any way to put it in the public eye or ears, even on the station platform."

(General population, 18-30, BC1)

"I find it extremely patronising, like okay fine, tell us every now and then, but I'd rather see people actually doing it than hearing an announcement."

(Non-compliant public transport users, 20-55)

Vaccinating transport staff: Views on this were mixed, while some thought this might be a 'nice to have', this would not necessarily make them feel safer (in part due to uncertainty about the impact of vaccination on transmission) and brought up questions about whether non-healthcare sector key workers should be prioritised in the vaccine roll out.

"They can still carry it so no difference – they are safe but there's no difference to how I would feel."

(General population, 18-30, BC1)

Different rules for vaccinated people: Participants were asked whether there should be different rules on face coverings, social distancing and hand washing for those who have been vaccinated. This suggestion was the most controversial, with few completely supportive, and many unsure of their own view.

Considering questions surrounding the impact of the vaccine on the transmission of Covid, many were concerned that vaccinated people would still be able to transmit Covid and therefore should continue to follow the rules. Some were concerned about the practicality of enforcing these different rules, with a minority bringing up the impact on civil liberties if vaccine statuses were checked and people were encouraged to get the vaccine through this relaxation of rules.

"If there's then a huge amount of people wanting to travel, people may be worried, should people be allowed to travel if they haven't been vaccinated? Or does this lead to fascism? I think there should be a badge to show you've been vaccinated – though that could open up a can of worms."

(General population, 35-55, C2D)

"No there shouldn't be different rules – they may not get it, but they can carry it and pass it on to somebody else."

(Very anxious public transport avoiders, 55+)

3.6.4. Participant suggestions

The findings here were consistent between the online focus groups and the depths with vulnerable passengers.

When thinking of new measures to be put in place during the phase 1 roll out (and beyond), two suggestions were most popular. Limits on passenger numbers were popular among both those who have continued and paused public transport use during the pandemic, while visibility of hygiene measures were more popular among participants who have continued to use public transport during the pandemic. As has been explored, participants who had used public transport during the pandemic often had more immediate concerns such as hygiene, in addition to overcrowding, while participants who had paused their travel focused on overcrowding as one of the key safety concerns when imagining using public transport during the pandemic.

However, there was uncertainty about the credibility of some interventions. Participants couldn't see, thinking about practicality as well as cost, how numbers of passengers could be sufficiently limited or how vehicles could be cleaned as frequently as they would like.

Limits on passenger numbers on services: Participants felt this would help with overcrowding, a key concern for passengers in terms of social distancing. However, there was some uncertainty about the feasibility of this intervention. For example, some participants

couldn't see, thinking about practicality as well as cost, how numbers of passengers could be sufficiently limited on any mode of public transport without impacting convenience and journey time.

"Run more services so that you can choose to go onto a less crowded bus."
(General population, 18-30, BC1)

"Reducing the amount of people would be most effective."
(Depth, 56, long-term health condition)

"Perhaps if there were measures in place to limit the number of people in a carriage, but I can't see how that would work. There are so many people at rush hour. So, if there was a limit to the number of people in a station, or on the carriage, even then I might not feel safe."
(General population, 35-55, C2D)

More visibility of hygiene measures: Operator announcements in relation to cleaning made some participants feel more confident travelling, but most would prefer to actively see more cleaning happening. Increasing the number of hand sanitising stations was a popular measure, including for non-compliant public transport users.

"Hand sanitiser, more information about cleaning methods – letting the public know what sort of products they are using, and it would help if people knew how much they were cleaning buses and underground carriages, handrails etc. If that was communicated, then it would alleviate a lot more fears."
(General population, 35-55, C2D)

A few other measures were suggested less frequently by participants, but particularly by those who had used public transport and seen similar measures implemented, which are detailed below.

Cordoning off certain seats: This was seen to make social distancing more possible as passengers would not have to sit immediately next to each other.

"I'm worried that they will get rid of measures like taped up seats on buses [during Phase 1]."
(General population, 18-30, BC1)

Opening up windows where possible: This was seen to help by ventilating the space, especially if passengers do not have to open the windows themselves and face potential complaints from others.

"I would love there to be more windows open and the fresh air circulating. Obviously, in the winter, people won't appreciate having the whole window open, but ventilation will be good."
(General population, 35-55, BC1)

Putting up screens between seats to prevent the spread of Covid in the air between passengers.

"The tram in Manchester, you could put screens up between those two seats."
(Younger at-risk individuals, 18-30)

3.6.5. Communication needs from operators and Government

The findings here were consistent between the online focus groups and the depths with vulnerable participants.

There is an appetite for more information on the key questions surrounding the vaccine and Covid: transmission and efficacy. While participants also say they would like as much information and communications about Covid and measures taken as possible, there is a danger that they could feel that they have seen the information before, whilst vaccine-specific communication is less familiar, more of a current concern and thus potentially more likely to cut through.

"It's advertised everywhere – there are signs on the floors – it's everywhere. People know what they have to do – just wear a mask."
(General population, 35-55, BC1)

One other potential area for communications is the topic of opening windows, as windows being open made participants feel more confident using public transport due to fresh air coming in. However, several participants were worried about opening the windows themselves due to fear of complaints from other passengers. Some guidance or reassurance about opening windows on public transport may be useful for such participants.

"If you opened the window for fresh air you sometimes felt like you were holding your life in your hand as somebody would shut it, it would be good to know that it's okay to do this."
(Very anxious public transport avoiders, 55+)

Perceived over-crowding is a concern for people as services become busier again after travel restrictions have eased. Therefore whilst they were not spontaneously requesting information, as people who have not used public transport during the pandemic become aware of more people using public transport (and indeed those who have, observe increases in passenger numbers) there is a potential need for communication to explain how capacity and demand is being managed, how services are being organised to mitigate the potential for over-crowding.

4. Aviation and Maritime

4.1. Past aviation and maritime transport use

Aviation

Before the pandemic, air-travel was used for business/and or leisure fairly frequently with this mode of transport chosen for speed and convenience. A small minority of premium flyers also appreciated comfort and space in the aircraft.

Almost all travelled by air for leisure, with most flying at least two to four times year. The commonly cited reasons for short/long haul journeys were to spend time with friends and/or family, to have a break, explore a new country, or to attend festivals (a minority). The most commonly cited destinations were the UK, Europe, Switzerland the Caribbean and America.

The frequency of trips for participants who travelled for business varied, with some flying for business three times a year, while most travelled at least every two months e.g. for client meetings, to teach, or to manage their employees outside of England. Those travelling for business typically travelled within the UK, Europe or Asia.

Almost all mentioned it would be unfeasible to use another mode of transport as air-travel is the only viable option to reach their destination in the quickest time possible.

Ferries and cruises

The research drew on those who were travelling domestically (frequently for work, and for leisure) and also internationally for holidays, family visits and work/business with destinations and routes ranging from the Isle of Wight/Southampton/Portsmouth to various UK ports/France using shorter and longer ferry routes.

Those who went on cruises did so relatively frequently – at least annually and several more than once a year pre-Covid with a range of shorter and longer cruises to different destinations from the Scottish Islands to the Caribbean.

Ferries were often chosen, especially domestically, as the only viable route to and from an island, for example. When used internationally they are used by those who want or need to drive at their destination country and/or by those who do not live near to a UK airport. The break in a long journey that ferries offer can also be a factor/benefit.

Participants who used cruises did so for the experience of both destinations and the cruise itself, often citing sociability of entertainment and catering as core benefits of the experience.

4.2. Impact of Covid on flying, use of ferries and cruising

4.2.1. How Covid affects/affected use

Aviation

During the pandemic, aviation use has notably reduced due to the primary concern of catching and spreading Covid-19, alongside perceptions that it's an unnecessary activity. A few leisure and business participants also noted that travel plans are at risk of cancellation and mentioned

it was difficult to keep up to date with the changing nature of travel restrictions and quarantine rules.

While a handful travelled abroad to spend time with their loved ones during 2020, at times of the year when infection rates had decreased, a couple of participants had opted to take a short-haul flight to minimise the risk of Covid-19. Almost nobody travelled for leisure after the second lockdown in that England begun on November 5th, 2020.

Further, while a minority of business travellers have continued to travel by plane during the pandemic, and even after the second lockdown in England, they expressed this is due to necessity as they're unable to adequately manage their employees or client relationships virtually.

Consequently, while some participants reported they are eager to get back to normality and travel by air once the travel restrictions are lifted, they mentioned they would be unlikely to resume air travel until more stringent measures have been put in place and the pandemic is under control. Further, due to concerns about being unable to successfully manage business relationships virtually some participants mentioned they would need to continue / restart workplace travel before they consider leisure travel.

"I will not travel until I feel 100% safe. I would prefer to not travel until I feel safe to do so. I need clear information about the risks and rules need to be in place."
(Female, long-haul premium leisure traveller)

"I have only travelled because I have to manage my factory workers – I can't do that over Zoom. If I didn't have to I wouldn't!"
(Male, business traveller)

We can summarise the most important barriers for the reduced uptake of air travel since the pandemic:

Safety concerns about the perceived lack of stringent rules at airports or on aircrafts are top of mind for almost everyone

- Most participants are concerned about being unable to socially distance, with some fearful of being in close proximity to strangers in an enclosed aircraft. Further, many participants cited being concerned about the lack of compliance from other passengers in relation to wearing face coverings and adhering to social distancing rules.

Although less frequently mentioned, a minority of participants also raised concerns about Covid-19 spreading faster due to the air filtration systems used in aircrafts.

"A couple of people didn't have their masks on properly and this wasn't pointed out [by staff]. It was concerning."
(Female, leisure traveller)

"It would worry me if other people don't wear masks or socially distance [on planes]."
(Male, business traveller)

Fears about catching or spreading Covid-19 are most salient

- Many participants have not travelled since before the pandemic. As a result, participants feel they lack sufficient knowledge about the safety measures that been implemented in airports and on aircrafts and tend to rely on their own sources of information or word of mouth.

"There should be rules. One of my friends in America said the plane was full in December – I wouldn't travel. There needs to be rules for people."
(Female, long-haul premium business traveller)

The unpredictable nature of the pandemic has resulted in a lack of desire to travel

- A few participants mentioned they have had their flights cancelled, with a very small minority having been turned away when they arrived at the airport because they had not been contacted about changes to their flight. However, it's important to note that these trips were either booked before the pandemic or when infection rates reduced.
- A few also mentioned their circumstances have changed, with some conducting business meetings virtually or no longer needing to travel for work because they have lost their job.
- A couple of business users said the duration of their business trip(s) can sometimes be shorter than the quarantine period, which deterred them for travelling.

"It's difficult to make value judgements – you don't know if your plans will remain or if there will be a change at the last minute. It's better not to take the risk – especially when it's not safe."
(Male, long-haul premium leisure traveller)

Ferries and cruises

There was a clear distinction between those using ferries domestically and those travelling by ferry internationally.

Participants who travelled domestically and short crossing users feel reasonably confident travelling by ferry, and so are keen to travel, or continue to travel as soon as restrictions are lifted, in many cases due to a lack of choice of alternative modes. However, some domestic ferry travellers have reduced their use of ferries or stopped due to not wanting to take unnecessary risks and travel when it isn't necessary.

"I had to take it [the ferry] to come back and move out of my student home as the lease was up in June. Using the ferry was really good [...] it felt relaxing and nice to be travelling."
(Female, short crossing ferry traveller)

"I'm not taking any risks beyond going to the shops so wouldn't travel without it [the vaccine]. As we're in home stretch it's not really worth me doing anything until the vaccine is here as it's so close."
(Female, short crossing ferry traveller)

Those travelling internationally raised more concerns about using ferries in the near future, particularly with the emergence of new variants of Covid-19. Many international ferry users also expressed being worried about travelling abroad while Covid-19 is not under control in overseas destinations such as France.

While some business users expressed a desire to travel internationally in the near future, most leisure users are less likely to resume travel until the pandemic is under control. Some questioned whether it would be safe to use a ferry due to fears of mixing with others/sharing public spaces while onboard. Some also mentioned that they would be anxious to use the bathrooms on ferries whilst others had concerns about how clean public spaces would be.

"I normally travel to France to visit my friend, but there would be no point as I wouldn't want to mix with others."
(Female, international ferry traveller)

Due to the restrictions on cruise ships during the pandemic, all participants had not been on a cruise since the pandemic took hold in the UK. Most highlighted that they had major reservations about going on a cruise in the near future, with some finding it hard to imagine how cruises could even operate during the pandemic and others describing themselves as 'nervous' or 'frightened' about the prospect.

Some participants also referred to the events that gripped cruise ships at the beginning of the global pandemic, such as people being "trapped" on cruise ships, cruise goers being "imprisoned" in cabins, even mentioning that they had heard of some cruise staff committing suicide.

"I will be the last one to go at the moment – if there was an outbreak on a ship it would become a prison so imagine being confined to a cabin for weeks on end it would be very difficult – some cruise staff took their own lives because of being confined to cabins for so long."
(Cruise traveller from UK port)

What is more, the inherent nature of cruise ship journeys – when onboard and when visiting multiple destinations – means pandemic-related rules and measures, whilst seen as necessary, could also act as a deterrent for potential travellers. Some participants outlined that cruise ships are about "togetherness" in relation to eating at buffets, seeing shows, and enjoying other activities onboard. However, there appears to be a tension between NPIs and the inherent purpose and nature of leisure cruises. For example, with social distancing, face coverings, and other hygiene and cleanliness requirements, participants felt these activities would no longer be possible or provide the same level of enjoyment.

In addition, cruise holidays generally entail visiting multiple holiday destinations in a short period of time. Quarantine rules and the situation regarding the pandemic in other countries has made cruises feel unrealistic for most participants.

"Cruises are all about people coming together – eating, going to shows and everything else, and if you have to cut the numbers with social distancing then it would take the fun out."
(Cruise-traveller from UK port)

The whole point of a cruise is to see different places but how can you do that – will you be strictly herded and ferried in your own bubble?"
(Cruise-traveller from UK port)

4.2.2. Continued use of aviation and ferries

Aviation

A few participants had travelled for leisure during the pandemic – particularly when restrictions had relaxed, and the rate of infection had reduced in the summer. These participants mentioned they wanted to resume a sense of normality after a challenging few months, and were looking forward to spending time with their loved ones. Although, since the second lockdown in England and the emergence of the new variant(s), most who travelled for leisure said they will wait until Covid-19 infection rates, hospital admissions and deaths have dramatically reduced and social distancing on aircrafts along with mandatory Covid tests and temperature checks have been implemented.

While a minority continued travelling for business purposes during or throughout the pandemic, many others had not used air travel for business or leisure since before or after the start of the pandemic, with both younger and older participants being concerned about their own safety and/or the safety of their loved ones.

"With the new strain, I am more nervous than I was before since the last lockdown."
(Female, leisure traveller)

A minority who had continued travelling for business mentioned this was due to necessity: concerns were expressed about being unable to manage clients and/or employees virtually.

"You can't really continue working in this way, I can't manage my clients over Zoom in the same way I did in person. I used to travel every six weeks for work before this [Covid-19]."
(Female, business traveller)

There were mixed views on the experience of air travel during the pandemic. Some mentioned they were reassured and comforted as the airports were generally quiet, there was a clear one-way system, and face coverings were generally abided by. At the same time, some participants spontaneously voiced they would feel anxious if airports and aircrafts were busier as they may be unable to socially distance. Although they were aware empty aircrafts and airports would be economically unviable in the long-term.

"I went to Gatwick it was empty. It was fine checking in and going through security, the flight out was fine. It was quiet and people wore masks."
(Male, business traveller)

In contrast, some had a less positive experience on aircrafts. Concerns developed from a lack of hygiene or face covering use from others, the inability to socially distance, and being in an enclosed space for a long period. To mitigate these concerns, there is an expectation for providers to enforce stricter measures around face coverings, and limiting the number of passengers on aircrafts. A minority also revealed that they felt nervous during their journey, due to concerns about the virus spreading faster as a result of the air filtration systems utilised in aircrafts.

"On the way back, 3-4 youngish boys sat behind us, but they had masks hanging off their chin. One of them had a bit of a cough. We just got up and moved to another seat as there were loads of spaces. I didn't want to sit for two and half hours with someone coughing as you're already in a restricted space. It wasn't the best experience."
(Male, long-haul premium leisure traveller)

Ferries and cruises

Whilst almost no international ferry users had continued to use ferries in the recent months, several domestic ferry travellers reported that they rely on using the ferry for routine or necessary travel – particularly if they live in an area with limited transport links, e.g. young participants living on the Isle of Wight, (who were particularly looking forward to socialising, seeing friends and going into the city again).

The restrictions that have been put in place by ferry providers during the pandemic were perceived positively and increased confidence to travel for some domestic ferry travellers. Participants welcomed the fact they are able to socially distance as fewer people are able to use the service at the same time – indeed, one short crossing participant highlighted that there were few passengers on the ferry they travelled on. Others said they felt safe during their journey via ferry, with the ability to occupy a private cabin making them feel more at ease and able to socially distance onboard.

"I felt fine – there were about 8 people on a massive ferry. I didn't have any concerns."
(Short crossing ferry user, Female, 18-64)

Due to the restrictions on cruise ships during the pandemic, nobody had been on a cruise since the pandemic took hold in the UK.

4.2.3. Alternative forms of transport

Aviation

Aviation users had not sought alternative methods of travel as generally speaking, flying was the only viable method to use to get to their destination in a timely manner and/or without using multiple modes of transport.

Ferries and cruises

Some ferry users explicitly contrasted the safety of ferry travel with plane travel, with the latter deemed less safe due to the enclosed nature of the space and length of journey – one user described air travel as feeling claustrophobic and worried about the transmission risks on planes. Some ferry users also highlighted their concerns about travelling by plane and train due to the likelihood that social distancing would not be possible, unlike on ferries. Alternative travel suggestions were proposed by some international ferry users, such as travelling via the Eurotunnel to remain inside the safety of one's own vehicle. Some participants also expressed they would prefer to use the plane for short haul journeys due to the shorter time period they would be on a plane vs a ferry.

“I would be more concerned travelling by planes and trains. On a boat you can avoid being too close to people even on busy routes. That is unavoidable on a plane.”
(Male, Short crossing ferry traveller)

“Being in the luxury of your own vehicle would be safer, especially compared with taking a budget airline.”
(Female, International ferry user)

Some participants contrasted the safety of planes with cruise ships. Indeed, one cruise goer mentioned that planes have better air circulation and high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters, whereas cruise ships do not – highlighting concerns about being trapped with potentially infected passengers.

“The air in planes is filtered – the same as operating theatres so it’s constantly being cleaned – that would make me feel safe.”
(Cruise-traveller from UK port)

4.3. Vaccination programme

Views and knowledge of the Covid-19 vaccines and rollout programme were unanimous across aviation and maritime travellers, with no clear difference between aviation, ferry and cruise participants.

4.3.1. Opinion of Covid-19 vaccines

Aviation, ferries and cruises

Whilst the vaccine programme provides a glimmer of hope to most in terms of “getting back to ‘normal’”, concerns about whether the vaccine actually stops somebody from catching and spreading the virus and whether the vaccine will be able to protect participants from the new Covid-19 variant(s) were top of mind. However, the likelihood of taking the vaccine was

relatively high. Although, it's important to note that participants emphasised they will continue to be cautious and adhere to NPIs until they know about more the efficacy of the vaccine in the long-term.

A minority of participants were also undecided about whether they would get the vaccine due to the speed in which it has been developed. Further, a minority of aviation business travellers mentioned they would only get the vaccine if it was required to travel for business trips.

"If there's a vaccine I would get it as soon as I'd get my call to, I am fed up with living in isolation. It's a step in the right direction, but I'd still be careful like now as it can still be transmitted."

(Female, aviation leisure traveller)

"I'd only get the vaccine if I was required to get it to travel abroad for business."

(Male, aviation business traveller)

"Everyone is in a rush for it [the vaccine] and it has been rushed – but the time frame for producing it is so much shorter than in the past – we can remember Thalidomide and look what happened there."

(Cruise-traveller from UK port)

4.3.2 Awareness and knowledge of roll out programme

Aviation, cruises and ferries

Generally, most participants were well informed about the roll out programme with some mentioning the different vaccines and the effectiveness of the first and second doses. In addition, many were also able to note that the vaccine was being rolled out to frontline healthcare workers and elderly/vulnerable priority groups first. However, some had a limited connection towards the roll out programme. This was because these participants did not know anybody in the priority groups and/or they feel it will be at least half a year (or more) until they receive the vaccine themselves.

"I know they want to roll it out in different stages to older people and the vulnerable and you have the two doses, I have heard a lot about it."

(Female, aviation leisure traveller)

Apparently, I am next. I am patiently waiting. I have lost 2 friends to Covid-19 and can't wait to get it [the vaccine] with my husband, and we can carry on travelling like we used to."

(Cruise-traveller from UK port)

4.3.3 Personal impact

Aviation, ferries and cruises

A few participants said that they are or would be relieved when their elderly / vulnerable relatives have been vaccinated in case they, themselves, are carriers of the virus and are asymptomatic. However, they mentioned they would remain cautious due to the amount of uncertainty surrounding the vaccine.

Lastly, a few who were in the priority groups felt fairly positive about receiving the vaccine while a very small minority had already had their first dose of the vaccine. However, similarly to others, they mentioned they will still continue to comply with NPIs until case numbers have significantly reduced and the majority of the population have been vaccinated.

"My dad is shielding and had his vaccine last week. I have not seen my dad for a while now, but my dad being vaccinated is positive in a pretty bad year. It kind of gives me piece of mind."
(Male, long-haul aviation premium business traveller)

"I have already had the Pfizer one. I am waiting for my second dose, but I know I have to be careful for some time even when I have it."
(Female, aviation leisure traveller)

"I'm looking to be more free when I get the vaccine. I can see clients again, as my job is people facing so there is a huge social side. I'm looking to be able to travel to people's offices."
(International ferry user)

4.3.4. Opinion of the roll out programme

Aviation, ferries and cruises

While almost all participants agreed that healthcare workers and the elderly/vulnerable groups should be prioritised, a minority were surprised that younger age groups are not included in the initial roll out – including those who were included in the priority groups. This was mostly because younger people tend to socialise the most, in addition there were also concerns they could be asymptomatic and transmit the virus to others.

However, concerns about transmission and the gap between the first and second dose remained top of mind for many regardless of which priority groups were included within the programme.

"I agree that these people should be vaccinated first, but young people make up a big part of the population too."
(Female, short haul aviation leisure traveller)

"Everyone else having it first is great, I'm not that worried about the impact Covid would have on me. I would much rather all the vulnerable people and those on the front line have it first. It will let everything get back to normal as quickly as possible."
(Cruise-traveller from UK port)

4.4 Impact of Phase 1 vaccination programme on future use

4.4.1. Overall likelihood of use of aviation and maritime transport

Aviation

The vaccination programme was perceived positively overall. However, at the same time, the rollout had little apparent impact in terms of encouraging participants to resume travel or increase uptake of air travel. Almost all participants mentioned that people within phase one of the rollout programme are not the 'typical' audience that they travel amongst, therefore this made little impact on their intention to travel.

"The nine groups are over 50 years old. A large % of frequent flyers are under 50. It's in the right order but I don't know how many of these people would be flying frequently anyway, so I don't think it will make a difference to those who do fly."
(Male, long-haul premium business traveller)

In addition, many participants, regardless of their age, gender or socio-economic grade expressed uncertainty about whether the vaccine actually stops transmission which made the rollout programme feel less relevant – especially in combination with other safety risks related to the pandemic and air travel. While most were aware that the vaccine stops people from experiencing severe symptoms, they were also conscious that individuals who have been vaccinated might still be able to catch and therefore transmit the virus to others. As a consequence, most felt that NPIs need to continue and/or be enforced to encourage participants to fly (alongside other suggested measures).

The vaccine seems to bring us back to square one. The reason I wanted to be vaccinated is so I couldn't spread it or catch it.

(Female, short-haul budget leisure traveller)

The majority that stopped travelling during the pandemic are unlikely to travel, regardless of the vaccine, especially while infection cases are high. Therefore, while the impact of transmission is a concern, there remains a safety risk posed by the virus. While a few participants made a connection between individual behaviour and the priority groups in the rollout programme, being somewhat 'protected' after the vaccination, this did not provide them with the confidence to travel.

"I'm not worried for myself, but one thing that puts me off travelling or going out is that I'd be asymptomatic, and I could pass it on. I am not sure I'd fly though."

(Female, short-haul budget leisure traveller)

Similarly, to those who have stopped flying, participants who had continued to travel by air during the pandemic mentioned resuming travel for leisure will be reliant on a general sense of reduction in cases, deaths and the effectiveness of the vaccine rather than the specifics of the rollout. In particular, the inability to socially distance in an enclosed space, and a lack of compliance from others remains a primary concern.

"I wouldn't get on a plane [for leisure] any time soon even though my girlfriend lives in Sydney. I don't feel safe at all because of other people around me and only time will tell if the vaccine will be effective. You need to see case numbers reduce first."

(Male, business traveller)

Those travelling for business said they need to travel regardless of phase one of the rollout. While this makes little difference to their confidence levels, they would feel more reassured if NPIs were strictly monitored in airports and aircrafts. In addition, they felt all flyers should have a negative Covid-19 test before flying and called for temperature checks at airports.

"I will fly for business because I need to but will hold off going on holiday until things get better."

(Female, business traveller)

Ferries and cruises

Among domestic ferry users, a few participants felt that Covid-19 could still be transmitted despite being vaccinated, and that this was a cause for caution when discussing the vaccine and the need to continue following NPI measures.

"If you have been vaccinated can you still transmit the virus? I would still be concerned about that?"

(Female, Short crossing ferry traveller)

Some highlighted that the vaccine roll out would help ensure an eventual return to “normal” and allow them to travel again in the future for leisure and particularly for business, with one person mentioning that the vaccination programme might enable them to travel and see clients again in the near future.

However, despite the positive impact of the vaccine, some participants highlighted the need to still be cautious for the foreseeable future and follow guidelines given their concerns about the high number of cases of the virus in the UK.

“I will have the vaccine, but I will still be cautious. I won’t just think I am OK – especially this lockdown which has scared everyone as it has come back so big.”
(Male, International ferry traveller)

Thus, the phase 1 vaccine roll-out potentially makes little difference to the majority of domestic and international ferry users’ intentions to travel, although this means that domestic uptake will resume with international users more cautious.

“It doesn’t [make a difference]. So less a fear for my own safety as I feel I can make them [ferry journeys] quite safe, but I’m never really 100% clear about how essential that travel needs to be.”
(Male, Domestic ferry traveller)

In relation to cruises, most participants continue to feel uncertain about the prospect of going on a cruise ship and some do express uncertainty about the Covid-19 vaccine’s effectiveness on the virus and transmission. Consequently, almost all have no desire to go on a cruise ship in the near future. A small minority indicated that being personally vaccinated might start to have an impact on consideration of cruising, but the potential for measures being in place which might restrict the cruise experience (e.g. social distancing, reduced capacity, restrictions on destinations visited etc.) are likely to be off-putting.

“I would be happy to travel, but less inclined on a cruise ship.”
(Cruise-traveller from UK port)

“I will be [getting vaccinated] at the end of the year– so I would want to have the vaccine before travelling.”
(Cruise-traveller from UK port, 40-64)

4.4.2 Importance of NPIs alongside vaccination roll out

Aviation

Almost all emphasised that current rules and measures should remain in place, if not be further enhanced during and after the phase1 vaccine roll out by airline providers and staff at airports. Most were particularly concerned about social distancing, and called for stricter measures, such as limiting the number of passengers on flights (although some were unsure how feasible this would be in reality). While wearing face coverings causes discomfort to some, they highlighted the importance of wearing these in enclosed spaces. Some also mentioned that that face coverings should be enforced throughout the duration of the journey, with a small minority spontaneously mentioning that food and alcohol should be banned on aircrafts to increase compliance. In addition, most emphasised that hand sanitizers should be readily available throughout the airports and on aircrafts. Participants mentioned that they want and expect these measures to stay in place during and after the vaccination rollout programme, particularly while infection rates, deaths and the uncertainty of transmission are high.

“Social distancing and face masks still need to be in place during phase 1 and sanitizing for the foreseeable. Once numbers reduce maybe the end will be in sight.”
(Male, leisure traveller)

Ferries and cruises

Many ferry users highlighted the importance of continued measures such as the wearing of face coverings, social distancing, hand washing, and sanitisation. One short crossing ferry user called for “enforcement” of face coverings on transport, similar to the enforcement seen in supermarkets. Restricting capacity and the number of travellers in order to prevent overcrowding and enable social distancing was also suggested as a necessary measure for ferries to have.

“Masks and sanitise, distance – the same stuff – at the end of last year what concerns me is they were running ferries with more people so would you be able to distance? There is nothing else you can do apart from the 3 rules. They would need to promote their diligence.”
(International ferry traveller)

Participants expect these measures to be needed for a long period of time.

“There will still be a need and desire to continue to want to and feel obliged to wear masks. I think it will be another year to get back to where we were in terms of proximity to others and not wearing masks.”
(Male, Short crossing ferry traveller)

Similar to ferry users, cruise users feel social distancing is particularly important for cruise ships, with some suggesting reducing the number of travellers and capacity to 30% or 50%. Social distancing when checking in is also seen as necessary, with passengers highlighting how “frighteningly” crowded such areas used to be prior to the pandemic. However, some measures, like face coverings, are perceived by some to reduce the inherent appeal of cruising and would be inconvenient when enjoying leisure time on holiday.

“People should follow all the rules. Washing hands and social distancing to a point is fine for me. It is the mask that I struggle with – I do everything I am supposed to do, I’ll wear the mask but not on holiday all the time.”
(Cruise-traveller from UK port)

4.4.3. The importance and impact of wider pandemic status on likelihood to fly, use ferries and cruise

Aviation

The pandemic status was top of mind for the majority of participants in our sample, particularly because the fieldwork was conducted at a time where the country was in a third national lockdown, Covid-19 infection rates were extensive and there was widespread media coverage on the vaccine.

While the vaccine provides hope, as previously outlined, having the confidence and willingness to resume travelling in the same frequency as before is dependent on a general sense of reduction in cases. Therefore, while the rollout programme is perceived fairly positively for most, participants (besides a minority who need to travel) do not feel confident to travel until they know how successful the vaccine is and/or the general pandemic situation improves – which the majority think will take at least six months to a year.

"I think it will take at least a year for us to see any changes. Time will tell. I think flying is a risk when so much is still going on."
(Male, business traveller)

Ferries and cruises

Across ferry and cruise focus groups, many participants highlighted that the overall situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK – in terms of the high number of cases and deaths – was more important than any consideration of the Covid-19 vaccine. It was difficult for many to imagine a short-term future time when travel would be realistic, particularly when it came to journeys for leisure purposes or going on a cruise.

"I think it will be a while before I travel for leisure again – I would want to see a big reduction in infections before I would think about using the ferry again."
(Female, International ferry traveller)

4.5. Impact of future phase of vaccine on use of aviation, ferries and cruises

4.5.1. Impact of being personally vaccinated

Aviation

Although the likelihood of taking the vaccine was relatively high, the probability of resuming air travel solely based on personal vaccinations was low and is not what participants are basing their travel decisions on. While some expressed that they may reassess the situation after being vaccinated, this was alongside primary concerns such as the pandemic being under control, low case numbers, the effectiveness of the vaccine and additional measures being implemented (in addition to existing NPIs) in airports and aircrafts.

"Even though I would take the vaccine, it depends on what's happening with the rates and numbers before I consider flying again. If the numbers are still going up the vaccine doesn't make any difference."
(Female, short-haul budget leisure traveller)

Ferries and cruises

Some younger ferry users who are more likely to be vaccinated later in the roll-out highlighted that they will have to travel before then, so their personal vaccination won't make much difference to their behaviour.

In contrast, some (younger travellers) in the cruise focus group mentioned they would cautiously reassess the travel situation when they receive the vaccination at the end of the year and would be unlikely to travel before then. This was due to them assuming they would have received the vaccine, that vaccination would be widespread later in the year and infection rates would be under control.

"I'd travel anyway – that [vaccine roll-out] is irrelevant to me. My vaccine won't be until September."
(Female, Short crossing ferry user traveller)

"I guess it does [make a difference] but I am not in the age range to get it – I will be at the end of the year. I would want to have the vaccine before travelling."
(Cruise-traveller from UK port)

4.5.2. Impact of majority of population being vaccinated

Aviation

While some participants mentioned they may be more likely to use air travel after the majority of the population have been vaccinated, this was dependent on how successful the vaccine is in relation to transmission and reducing case numbers. Until this is known, there is an expectation for NPIs to remain in place and for temperature checks to be mandatory (alongside limiting the amount of passenger on aircrafts as cited previously).

“After everybody has been vaccinated, I might think about travelling again but that would have to come with rates drastically reducing and people being safe.”
(Female, leisure traveller)

Ferries and cruises

As outlined previously, the vaccine roll-out is perceived to make little difference to most domestic and international ferry users, with some mentioning concerns about transmission risk regardless of whether someone is vaccinated. However, some participants did express more confidence in the idea of travelling once most people, if not everyone, are vaccinated. For example, some participants expressed the possibility of going on a cruise in December 2021 or in 2022 but were still highly uncertain about this – with one participant outlining that “only time will tell”.

“Not until everyone gets vaccinated and we know more about how people are getting on with different strains – I wouldn’t travel by cruise ship but might travel in a different way.”
(Cruise-traveller from UK port)

“If everyone travelling is vaccinated it feels safer.”
(Male, Short crossing ferry user)

4.6. New measures that might be required from operators and Government

4.6.1. Response to possible measures

During the research hypothetical scenarios were tested with participants. It should be noted that these were created for research purposes and did not represent government policy.

Aviation

Only those vaccinated allowed to travel: While some said this would potentially make them feel safer, this was only considered viable if people had been administered both doses of the vaccine and it was accessible to all. While a very small minority were open to this during rollout, most participants mentioned they would prefer pre-departure tests to be mandatory, especially while there is still so much uncertainty surrounding efficacy and transmission rates. In addition, others raised concerns about removing ‘freedom of choice’ and forcing people to have the vaccine.

“I think it should be strongly advised, it would make me feel safer, but I think it’s morally wrong to make people do that. You have to respect people’s autonomy and you can’t force people to have the vaccine.”
(Male, short haul budget leisure traveller)

Countries requiring vaccination: While most felt it was fair to restrict access to individuals who have not been vaccinated, there were concerns about how effective the vaccine would be in practise. Further, a minority said they may think twice about travelling to these countries as they are undecided about being vaccinated themselves.

“They have the right to choose that and have every right.”
(Female, business traveller)

No quarantine for those who have been vaccinated: The majority mentioned this felt counterintuitive as the effectiveness of the vaccine and transmission rates remain unknown. Some felt infection rates would need to decrease and further research about the efficacy of the vaccine would need to be conducted, before this is considered. It should be noted that a couple of business flyers said they would not travel abroad if they had to quarantine—particularly if the length of their business trip is shorter than the quarantine period.

“We don’t know how effective it is, until we know that I’d say quarantine is essential.”
(Male, business traveller)

Staff being vaccinated: This was considered to be a ‘nice to have’ with some participants suggesting that they should be vaccinated, although this was not mentioned spontaneously. However, they were not considered to be a priority when compared to the groups included in phase 1 of the rollout plans. That being said, while this is considered to ‘mitigate risk’ this measure would do little to encourage participants to travel.

“It’s a good idea but they shouldn’t be prioritised. It may mitigate risk but there are still other people around you.”
(Female, leisure traveller)

Ferries

Perceptions about suggested measures in relation to the vaccine were mixed among ferry users.

Due to concerns about the efficacy of the vaccine and its uncertain impact on Covid transmission, rules like **mandatory vaccination** as a travel requirement were perceived with caution. While some felt vaccinations being necessary for travel would make them feel safer, others were concerned that the virus could still be transmitted in this scenario or that individuals shouldn’t be forced to get the vaccine if they don’t wish to have it.

For domestic ferry users, other countries requiring vaccinations for travel was more understandable than the UK government requiring vaccinations for travel of its own citizens.

The majority think that **quarantine** should still be necessary if travelling, whether vaccinated or not. However, a minority said this would discourage them from travelling.

There was uncertainty among ferry users when asked about those being **vaccinated not being required to quarantine for the same duration** as those who are unvaccinated. Some were uncertain whether being vaccinated meant that you could not transmit the virus, and the lack of data on the vaccine’s effectiveness also caused hesitancy about vaccination exempting some from fully quarantining.

“Although I’d be more comfortable, it doesn’t sit quite right with me that it should be mandated to have a vaccine that’s been developed in a year – we don’t know side effects and death rate is low in young people. Young people shouldn’t have to have it.”
(Male, Short crossing ferry traveller)

Cruises

Nobody in the cruise focus group had heard of the Covid-19 Cruise Framework.

Introducing a **vaccine requirement** as a prerequisite to travel was welcomed by most. Some support mandatory vaccination to travel on cruise ships, highlighting that just one positive case would cause everybody to quarantine. In addition, **combining mandatory vaccination along with a negative Covid-19 test** prior to boarding was suggested as an enhanced measure given some uncertainty about the vaccine's effectiveness. Some participants also cited SAGA's announcement for all passengers on their cruises to be vaccinated in the future. Therefore, they felt this could be inevitable regardless of whether the UK Government introduce such a policy.

There was also some support for other **countries requiring vaccinations** in order to gain entry. Indeed, some compared it to the same way in which certain countries already require vaccines for other diseases.

Regarding **quarantine** requirements, there was uncertainty about such requirements and exempting those who are vaccinated. One participant highlighted that it wouldn't be a pleasant experience to quarantine on a cruise ship and being confined to your cabin. Such ideas were seen as a significant deterrent to getting onboard a cruise ship.

"I would prefer that [vaccination requirement] – it should be a necessity in the future, for any travel. Only needs one and then the whole ship would be quarantined."
(Cruise-taker from UK port)

"Yes, why not? It's like travelling to Africa when you have to get a Malaria jab. Covid is going to be one of those things where it is standard"
(Cruise-taker from UK port)

4.6.2. Participant Suggestions

Aviation

Most importantly, participants want and need to know how effective the vaccine is, how many people have been vaccinated and consequently how this relates to how safe it is to travel by air. Most participants expect this information to be communicated by the Government.

As mentioned throughout, there was a widespread recommendation for temperature checks before entering the airport and boarding the aircraft, to increase people's confidence and encourage air travel in the future. There was a general consensus that the UK are lacking behind other countries, such as in Asia.

As previously outlined, limiting the number of passengers on flights was extremely important to increase confidence around social distancing. This included those who have and haven't continued using air travel during the pandemic.

Further, some participants also recommended that passengers should be tested prior to departure, with this system felt to be more reliable than the Covid-19 vaccine. Although, a few participants were aware that there have been cases where people have tested positive when they do not have the virus or test negative when they do. Therefore, some feel that self-isolation and quarantine requirements should remain in place until Covid rates and deaths have significantly reduced and the pandemic is felt to be under control.

"You need to have temperature checks upon arrival at the airport and before boarding the plane. Asia have been doing this for years, I am not sure why we haven't been."
(Female, business traveller)

“There needs to be capacity management on the planes. The government need to support airlines as planes will be running at a loss, but it’s important to have distance between people.”
(Male, long-haul premium leisure traveller)

Ferries and cruises

Travelling by ferry but being able to stay inside one’s own car was suggested as a potential incentive to use ferries and potentially overcoming transmission concerns. For participants travelling by ferry without a car, access to an outside space could also settle concerns about catching Covid. Although, as some outlined, this may not be practical in bad weather and with the need to ensure the security of your possessions.

Many international ferry users believe all passengers should be tested prior to departure, with a robust testing system considered to be more reliable than the relatively new Covid-19 vaccine for some. Most domestic ferry users whose journeys are shorter and more routine, on the other hand, felt that although testing all passengers would be a “nice to have” it was unlikely to be practically possible.

Other suggestions included temperature checks for passengers prior to boarding, taping some seats off to ensure social distancing is more likely, and for ferry operators to employ more staff to enforce social distancing.

“Ensure that the policy includes that people have to have Covid tests within 24 hours of travelling or as rapid as possible.”
(International ferry traveller)

“Would rather someone say that someone has had a negative test than say they have been vaccinated – especially as they have stretched the time between doses 1 and 2.”
(International ferry traveller)

Measures such as face coverings and social distancing (as mentioned previously) were suggested spontaneously by cruise goers alongside other ideas like improved air circulation and quality onboard cruises and in cabins. Some highlighted that there were issues with illnesses spreading on cruises before the pandemic, underpinning the need for extra measures to stop the spread of disease.

Some cruise participants also spontaneously suggested requirements for staff and passengers to have vaccine certificates before being allowed onboard. The closed community nature of a cruise, the duration of trips and the importance of being able to freely socialise to have the full cruise experience contributed to the positive view of vaccination certification.

“Do something about the air quality in the cabin. You could have relaxed and taken the mask off and someone up the corridor could be carrying it [Covid-19] and the air would be circulating.”
(Cruise-traveller from UK port)

4.6.3. Communication needs from operators and Government

Aviation

Participants felt the Government need to ensure people know why they need to continue complying with NPI measures during and after the vaccination rollout, as this may minimise non-compliance by other passengers. Many participants mentioned this information would need to be clear and concise with information about why this is happening, what is expected from passengers, and what consequences people can expect if they do not comply. In

addition, all participants expect additional information about the vaccine – particularly in relation to transmission, how many people have been vaccinated, how effective it is, how this relates to air travel and NPIs.

Some also want to be informed about the cleaning regimes that have been implemented in airports and aircrafts, so they can make an informed decision about whether they feel safe to travel (in addition to the other factors). Participants said that this could be communicated via announcements but also through in-situ posters and tick sheets.

“The government need to be more precise in their commands as they’re not covering all of the aspect. They have to get the public to know why this is a risk and tell them more about the vaccine and what will happen if they don’t follow the rules.”
(Male, long-haul premium business traveller)

“I’d like to see more about cleaning and how often it’s being done – it just makes you aware that things are being done to keep these spaces clean.”
(Male, leisure traveller)

Ferries and cruises

Ferry users were unsure what communications would help to encourage them to feel confident about travelling with some suggesting more general information about the vaccine, its “risks”, and its effectiveness rather than ferry-specific information/messaging.

Some did suggest that operators could ensure travellers are informed about what was being done to make ferry journeys safer during the pandemic, to be told and shown what cleaning measures were in place, as well as for there to be signs and posters reminding users of rules like social distancing.

“I would like more Government advice on any risks associated with the vaccine, because we hear news reports from sensationalist reporters.”
(Male, International ferry traveller)

A few cruise goers offered suggestions for communications, although few were open to the idea of cruising for some time, e.g. one participant asked for more information from the UK Government about the potential restrictions and measures that would be in place for cruise ships to operate. As outline previously, nobody was aware of the Covid-19 Cruise Framework. Calls for information tended to be at the more general level of the status of the pandemic.

“I need statistics to show that Covid is slowing down, going down. I need to see that it is effective, but right now there is nothing to prove that – cases are still high.”
(Cruise-traveller from UK port)

5. Conclusions and implications on policy and communications

The general sense of anxiety amongst many participants we spoke to around the peak of the January increase in cases and deaths and with a strict lockdown in place, significantly impacted their consideration of use of the various different modes of transport. In addition, those who have not travelled have formed habits, workarounds or simply have less familiarity with the modes of transport they had been using pre-Covid which also has a dampening effect on their likelihood to consider. This is why many participants were more concerned with the wider pandemic situation improving before they would actively consider travelling again.

- This has an implication for timing of communication as much as content. Whilst communication focuses on encouraging restrictions to everyday activity (including travel) it will be hard to simultaneously communicate reassurance of the safety of transport.
- There is also an implication for continuing to communicate the growing proportion of the population who have been vaccinated, as although participants do not fully understand the impact of the vaccination (see below), they do see the vaccination programme as a positive marker of progress in the pandemic; thus, a higher proportion of people vaccinated could equate to a greater likelihood of a return to normal life when use of transport can resume.

The research showed that the nature of the experience of using public transport, flying, using ferries, going on cruises is such that the risks presented by Covid are easy for participants to imagine hence their emphasis on NPIs and effective enforcement being critical. Interesting, as a general rule, participants who had continued to use the various different modes of transport were warmer to the idea of using them once lockdown restrictions had been lifted, although they tended to suggest this would be for necessary reasons (work, business, emergencies) rather than leisure.

- Thus, it is important that NPIs remain in place for the foreseeable future.
- Communication (by Government and by operators) should clearly and visibly set out the importance of following rules and measures partly to encourage compliance but also to reassure.
- Communication - once restrictions are eased, cases have reduced and the general mood has improved – should also aim to show as well as tell people that use of various different modes of transport can be safe, to compete with their more negative visualisations.

All of these factors contribute to the way that the vaccination roll-out in and of itself had a less overt impact on participants' apparent readiness to consider travelling by the various modes again compared with the noise of the general pandemic situation and participants' cautious imaginations about what the experience of different transport modes would be like. However, equally significant is the lack of understanding of the impact of vaccination on transmission. Because participants are unsure about whether people (they or others) can still transmit the virus after they have been vaccinated, they struggle to make a reasoned connection between the vaccination roll-out and the safety or otherwise of use of different modes of transport.

- The implications of this are that Government should make as clear as possible, the link between vaccination generally and transmission so that people can make a more informed judgment about theirs and others' risks when travelling.
- Addressing the fact that participants see a disconnect between those who are included in the Phase 1 roll out and the people that they believe use the various different modes of transport needs addressing.

When it comes to additional measures that could be adopted in relation to vaccination (e.g. restricting access to those who have been vaccinated, vaccinating staff etc.) there was lukewarm support in part because participants did not understand the impact that vaccination has on transmission, which underlines the need for that to be communicated as clearly as possible.

6. Appendix

6.1: Socio-economic grade breakdown

A	Higher managerial / professional / administrative (e.g. established doctor, solicitor, board director in a large organisation (200+ employees) top level civil servant/public service employee)
B	Intermediate managerial / professional / administrative (e.g. newly qualified (under 3 years) doctor, solicitor, board director small organisation, middle manager in large organisation, principal officer in civil service/local government)
C1	Supervisory or clerical / junior managerial / professional / administrative (e.g. office worker, student doctor, foreman with 25+ employees, salesperson), student, homemaker
C2	Skilled manual worker (e.g. skilled bricklayer, carpenter, plumber, painter, bus/ ambulance driver, HGV driver, AA patrolman, pub/bar worker, etc.)
D	Semi or unskilled manual worker (e.g. manual workers, all apprentices to be skilled trades, caretaker, park keeper, non-HGV driver, shop assistant)
E	Any of the following casual worker – not in permanent employment, retired and living on state pension, unemployed or not working due to long-term sickness, full-time carer of other household member