

TRAVEL & TRANSPORT

Where journeys start and travel preferences take shape



Introduction

Student Gen Z is in motion. This is a generation that travels widely, frequently, and with intention. Whether commuting to campus, heading home, planning weekends away or booking bucket-list breaks, students are always on the move. From the everyday to the aspirational, transport decisions are being made constantly by all those at university.

For transport brands, this isn't just a demographic opportunity, it's a moment to earn preference, shape behaviour, and build long-term loyalty. This generation is exploring, comparing and forming habits. They're booking their first independent journeys, discovering new routes, and choosing which services become part of their routine. The brands that show up now with relevance, reliability and value will be the ones who stay with them as they graduate into higher-earning, frequent-travelling adults.

Students Are the UK's Most Active Travellers

Despite rising costs, Gen Z Students represent one of the UK's most travel-engaged consumer groups. They travel frequently, taking an average of three leisure trips every year. 63% of Gen Z consumers have made travel purchases in the past 12 months, with 65% expecting to spend more on leisure travel year on year.



63% have booked travel in the last 12 months



65% expect to spend more on leisure travel year on year



76% are more interested in travel than they used to be

Sources: Travelperk 2024 [1], European Travel Commission [2]

This appetite for travel is only growing, with 76% of Gen Zs more interested in travel than they used to be, viewing it not as a luxury but as an essential part of their lifestyle. Gen Z spends almost half of their disposable income on travel, with 65% ranking travel and seeing the world as the most important way to spend their money. The numbers tell a compelling story: 45% of Gen Z travelers intend to purchase clothing, shoes, or luggage in the next month for their next vacation, showing how travel drives spending across multiple categories. When Gen Z travels, they don't just move – they engage with entire ecosystems of brands and services.



45% of Gen Z travellers intend to purchase clothing, shoes, or luggage in the next month for their next vacation

Source: Civic Science: Gen Z Travel Trends [3]

Transport Is Essential, Not Optional

For students, transport isn't just about leisure – it's woven into their daily lives. Nearly half of UK students now classify themselves as commuter students, driven by rising accommodation costs and financial pressures. This shift has made transport a critical part of the student experience.

The financial reality is clear. Students spend £65 per month on transport, accounting for around 6% of their total £1,104 monthly budget. For many this represents one of their largest regular expenses after accommodation and food. The high cost of accommodation, particularly in urban areas like London, has made living on campus unaffordable for many with commuting offering a more economical alternative.

**46%
of students commute to
campus vs. living there**

**£65 average monthly spend on
transport**

6% of total student budget

Sources: Guardian 2024 [4], Save the Student 2024 [5]

Flexibility and Value Drive Every Choice

Today's student travellers don't stick to one mode of transport. 50% of public transport trips involve more than one mode, showing high multi-modal use in everyday travel.^[6] Students mix and match options based on cost, convenience and context – taking the bus for daily commutes, ride-sharing for nights out, and trains or coaches for longer journeys home.

Value remains the ultimate decision driver. For Gen Z travelers, value for money is the top priority when selecting a destination (47%), followed by affordable flights (45%) and safe, secure locations (42%). [7] This cost-consciousness extends to all transport choices, with students actively seeking discounts, comparing prices, and switching providers for better deals.

Top factors influencing student transport choices:



Time
34%



Cost
30%



Convenience
28%

Sources: Sussex University Student Survey 2024 (617 students, 894 staff) [8]

Flexibility matters beyond just price. Students want options that adapt to their unpredictable schedules, last-minute plans, and changing financial situations. 35% of Gen Z travelers finalise their plans less than one month before departure, showcasing their spontaneous nature and desire for flexibility.



35% of Gen Z travelers finalise their travel plans less than 1 month before departure

Source: Mighty Travels, 2024 [9]

Digital Discovery Meets Real-World Decision Making

Gen Z Students move fluidly between feeds and physical spaces when making travel plans. While 88% follow travel influencers on TikTok and 89% discover destinations through social platforms, discovery doesn't stop at the scroll. A railcard promotion seen on campus, a coach deal spotted while grabbing coffee, or a new route noticed between lectures can all bring travel decisions into focus.

In a world of constant digital noise, physical presence holds attention. 57% of Gen Z took a social media detox in 2023, more than any other generation. Meanwhile 84% of Gen Z say they notice OOH advertising, giving real-world formats renewed power in trusted, high-attention settings like Students' Unions, with zero audience wastage.



84%
of Gen Z notice OOH
Advertising



57%
of Gen Z took a social
media detox in 2023

Sources: JCDcaux, Gen Z & OOH [10], Sprout Social 2024 [11]

Sustainability Matters, But Affordability Comes First

Gen Z is often called the most environmentally conscious generation, and their travel choices reflect this awareness. Over half say the environment is a key motivator for traveling sustainably, with 73% of Gen Z considering buying from online travel agents (OTAs) with sustainable travel offerings.

The commitment to green travel is significant. 6 out of 10 Gen Z travelers look for more environmentally friendly transportation once they arrive at their destination, and 56% prefer to stay in green or eco-friendly accommodations. Just over half of Gen Z say they would pay more to book with a travel provider that displays environmental responsibility.



56% prefer eco-friendly accommodations



60% seek environmentally friendly transport



73% consider sustainable travel agents

Sources: Travelperk 2024 [12], Global Sustainable Tourism Council 2024 [13]

However, the reality is more nuanced. While environmental awareness runs high, financial constraints often override green preferences. Many students want to travel sustainably, but not at the expense of accessibility or affordability.

This creates opportunities for brands that can deliver both value and values – sustainable options that don't require premium pricing, or clear value propositions that justify slightly higher costs through long-term savings or superior experiences.

Timing and Context Drive Transport Decisions

Student transport needs follow predictable rhythms that smart brands can anticipate and activate around. Fresher's Week sees spikes in journey searches as new students figure out campus connections. Reading weeks trigger mass movement as students head home. End-of-term creates bottlenecks as everyone travels simultaneously.

These moments aren't just high-volume, they're high-influence. Students making their first journey to university, booking their first independent travel, or coordinating their first group trip are forming preferences that can last years. Early positive experiences with transport services often determine long-term loyalty.

The academic calendar creates unique marketing windows. Services that align with these rhythms feel helpful rather than intrusive. To understand trigger moments and mindsets across the student year, download our [Campus Calendar](#).

From Habit to Loyalty: The Consistency Advantage

In the competitive transport landscape, the difference between success and obscurity often comes down to one factor: consistent presence. Students don't just need transport services – they need transport partners that understand their routines, anticipate their needs, and show up reliably across their university journey.

The most successful transport brands recognise that student loyalty isn't built through one-off campaigns or isolated touchpoints. It develops through sustained engagement that transforms from transactional necessity into habitual preference. When a rail company consistently offers student discounts during peak demand, they evolve from service providers into essential parts of the student experience.

This consistency creates compound value. Students who encounter a brand repeatedly in relevant contexts begin to associate that brand with campus life itself. The coach company that sponsors Freshers' events while advertising new routes becomes woven into daily routines. The airline that appears consistently in Students' Unions during reading week builds mental availability that extends far beyond university.



78% of students look at on campus OOH advertising at least a few times a week



80% prefer brands that "get" their lifestyle and what's important to them



66% say once they find a brand they like they'll continue to buy it for a long time

Sources: Refuel Agency [14], Kantar [15], Student Beans/Pion [16]

Students Expect Seamless, Connected Experiences

For Student Gen Z, transport isn't just about getting from A to B – it's about the entire digital experience that surrounds the journey. With smartphones in hand, they expect transport services to integrate seamlessly into their connected lives.

Students demand real-time information at every stage. From live arrival times and delay notifications to journey planning and mobile payments, they want control and transparency. 80% of Gen Z like the fast convenience of travel planning apps or social media to help them plan their journey, showing how fast thinking shapes their expectations. [17]

The booking experience matters as much as the journey itself. Students respond to platforms that offer intuitive interfaces, instant confirmation, and flexible payment options. Mobile-first design isn't optional, it's expected. When services integrate with digital wallets, student discount codes, and social sharing features, they become part of Gen Z Students natural ecosystem.

This digital fluency creates opportunities for transport brands that think beyond the transaction. QR codes for instant journey sharing, integrated loyalty programs, and seamless connections between different transport modes all resonate with students who expect their journeys to be as connected as their lives.



**47% of consumers agree
QR codes make life easier**

**Strong QR Code interaction results regularly seen
across Students' Union D6s due to high dwell**

Source: Scanova, Netimperative 2021 [18] and Eighteen24 Campaign findings

Location context matters equally. Students near major transport hubs develop different habits than those in more remote campus towns. Urban students mix multiple transport modes daily, while rural students might rely heavily on specific services for essential journeys. Understanding these contextual differences enables more targeted, relevant messaging. With DOOH it's easy to surface creative relevant to time, place and moment at scale with proven increased effectiveness as a result.



**+17% Uplift in Effectiveness
for DOOH creative that's contextually
relevant to the time, place, location in
which it's seen**

Source: Moments of Truth: Posterscope, Bauer Media Outdoor, JCDecaux [19]

Transport as Social Currency

Gen Z Students don't just travel – they share, review and recommend. Transport experiences become social content, whether it's posting stories about weekend getaways, sharing real-time journey updates with friends, or reviewing services that exceeded (or failed) expectations.

Group travel is particularly significant for students. They coordinate trips home for reading week, plan group outings, and travel together for events and festivals. Transport providers that facilitate group bookings, offer friend referral discounts, or enable easy journey sharing tap into these natural social behaviours.

Student word-of-mouth carries exceptional weight. When a transport service delivers a great experience, students amplify it across their networks. Conversely, poor experiences spread just as quickly. This makes student satisfaction a multiplier effect as one positive experience with a train or coach service can influence dozens of future bookings within a student's social circle.



Students coordinate group travel regularly



Positive experiences generate organic social amplification

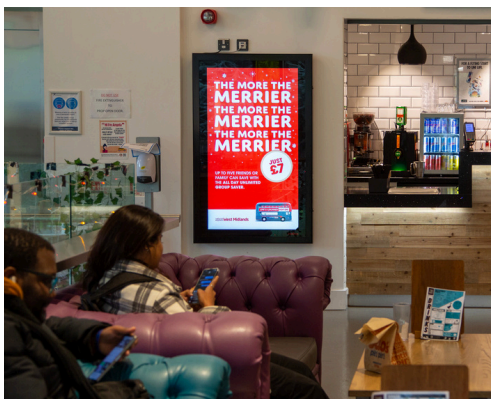


Word-of-mouth influences peer transport choices

Sources: Multiple student behaviour studies, social media influence research [20]

The most effective transport campaigns tap into the social nature of student travel – positioning themselves not just as service providers, but as enablers of the student experience. Limited-time student offers drive urgency and are easy to share. Services that simplify group bookings or reward referrals match how students already plan their journeys. Social media content that's amplified on high-visibility campus screens turns everyday moments into shared buzz.

When transport becomes part of the social experience – not just a means to an end – it builds stronger engagement and longer-term loyalty.



25% of Gen Z travelers prefer group travel

57% of Gen Z always upload pictures from their trips onto social media

Social UGC is easy to lift and repurpose onto portrait campus DOOH

Source: TravelPerk 2024 [21], Booking.com [22]

Meet Eighteen24, Specialists in Student Engagement

We help travel and transport brands connect with students in the spaces that matter most. Eighteen24 operates the largest DOOH screen network across UK Universities Students' Unions, reaching 70% of the UK's 3 million students in the heart of their campuses.

Our screens are located where decisions are made, plans are formed and conversations happen. The screens carry brand advertising alongside Students' Union content, so they're actively looked to for information. Brand campaigns sit alongside event listings, service updates and campus news, providing on campus utility.

Students visit their Union an average of six times a week, spending over 40 minutes per visit. This isn't passive exposure – it's engaged attention in a trusted environment. When transport messages appear here, they become part of the student conversation rather than interrupting it.

For transport brands, this creates unique opportunities to connect at the right moments. Rail operators can highlight student discounts during term transition periods. Ride-sharing services can promote group travel options when events are being planned. Coach companies can reach students planning weekend getaways or journeys home. The context makes the message relevant; the environment makes it trusted.



89%

say D6 screens feel relevant to them



61%

have discussed content with friends



50%

find screens more natural than social ads

Sources: Eighteen24 Student Survey 2025 (n=50) [23]



GWR inspired students with ideas for accessible trips using creative tailored to location



National Express matched creative to student mindset moment

Why E24 Delivers Standout for Travel & Transport Brands

We understand how and where Gen Z Students make travel decisions. Our network offers three key strengths that make it especially powerful for travel and transport brands looking to build awareness, consideration and preference.



WHERE JOURNEYS BEGIN

Students' Unions are where transport decisions start – from booking the coach home to planning group trips. Our screens reach students in moments of inspiration, planning and consideration; when transport choices are top of mind and peer influence is strongest.



CONTEXT CREATES CONVERSION

Transport messages appear alongside trusted student content, making them feel helpful rather than intrusive. Whether it's highlighting student rail discounts during term breaks, promoting group travel options for events, or showcasing new routes when students are planning trips, context drives relevance and action.



SEEN TOGETHER, SHARED TOGETHER

Our screens live in social spaces where students gather, plan, and decide as groups. Transport content doesn't just reach individuals – it becomes part of collective decision-making and organic peer recommendation.

Our Formula for Effective Gen Z Engagement:

Reach 70% of the student population nationwide with Eighteen24, that's over 2 million students across all years, courses and campuses. Connect where they plan, book, and travel. Show up meaningfully where their journeys begin.

Be where they **are**

2 million+ unique students passing our campus screens each week

Be where they **care**

Located within students' unions in the heart of campus

Be where they **share**

Positioned in high dwell areas
(Cafes, gyms, study areas etc)

Be where they **see you**

Premium full motion D6 screens in high impact environments

Don't Miss the Moment to Shape Travel Habits

These are the years when transport preferences are formed and travel loyalties begin. Students are mobile, curious, and open to new options – but they're also discerning, value-conscious, and influenced by peers.

Be visible where students seek inspiration, plan their journeys, compare their options, and make their choices. Show up meaningfully in the spaces where travel decisions happen, and your brand becomes part of their story.

From first-year commutes to final-year travel plans, Eighteen24 helps your brand move with them.

Talk to us about how your brand can be part of the student travel journey:

sales@eighteen24.com

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