



# *Why free travel with the Zip Card matters: testimonies from young Londoners*

July 2020

# Background

- One of the terms of the financial settlement agreed by Transport for London (TfL) and the Mayor of London was that free (Oyster Zip Card) travel for under 18s would be suspended, with some exemptions made eg free travel to school if you live more than two miles away.
- The measure was justified on the basis that it would encourage children to walk and cycle more, as well as provide sufficient social distancing capacity during the pandemic period
- But there is a concern that the changes would adversely impact on young people's ability to get around London for a number of reasons
- We've been gathering the testimonies of young people across London who would be affected by this change and have summarised some of the key stories we have heard below.
- We've also picked out some of the key comments (mainly from parents) from the petition started by 14 year old Lewisham resident, Joshua Brown-Smith which has so far been signed by 180,000 people

# Young people's concerns

The concerns that young people told us about included:

- Not being able to afford to travel
- A loss of independence and having to rely on parents
- Threats to personal safety
- Not being able to walk or cycle

Some key quotes are included on the following pages.

## Many are worried about the additional cost of having to pay to travel

'We can't afford a laptop in our house so how will we afford a bike?'

J from Lewisham

If I had to pay more it would be really stressful trying to manage my money with stationary, meals etc. Member of Havering Youth Council

## E from Dagenham

I live in the Dagenham/Rainham area and the free under 18 travel makes it easier for when I have to head to school, or sometimes in case of emergencies to hospital. I've used public transport a lot, participated in all the TfL questionnaires and answered questions. Plus talking to passengers onboard the buses - people I don't know I get to connect with and have a conversation with. Kids like me depend on public travel to be free - especially kids in poverty or even families who could barely support themselves. Removing the free travel, will make it more difficult for families like mine, for every child who needs to go to school, or has an emergency and needs to go to a certain place urgently.

# Cycling's not an option for everyone.. and what about during the winter?

I have to go from Ilford to Chadwell Heath. Walking or cycling would mean I'd be late for school and that will affect attendance. If I cycled I'd be frightened of hitting pedestrians. It's unfair because of lots of us don't or can't go to our nearest school. A lot of parents will simply drive and that will be more polluting, and I don't think we should sacrifice the need to stop climate change.

Z – Redbridge

I won't cycle to school in the winter. If my mum has to drop me off that will result in an increase in CO2 emissions and create congestion. That might make people late for school. Member of Havering Youth Council

# D from Dagenham

I'm 16 years old and I'm currently studying at secondary school . I'm strongly against this decision which was made by the Government (on stopping free travel for under 18s), This is because this decision will have a very negative impact on my everyday life. Currently me and I believe other young people are able to go places such as school, clubs and many more thanks to the free transportation. Taking away this privilege will only have negative effects such as an increase in crime as not all young people come from a wealthy family, for example I've only got one parent who is taking care of me and 3 sisters. Preventing me and my 13 year old sister from free transportation means that my mum will have to spend more money on us meaning that the money will get tighter for us . This crime could be like bumping bus (getting onto the bus without paying ) . Another negative is restricting young people from visiting places this summer meaning that they will spend all summer indoors .

## Fears about freedom and independence

Young people were concerned about the loss of independence and increased dependency on parents or others able to drive. There was also concern that for 16-17 year olds this will affect their options for college in September, particularly as many will have not taken their GCSEs because of the pandemic, and their grades are being predicted.

Due to the removal of zip-cards, I will not be able to visit my family, who live in remote parts of London compared to me. Also, I won't be able to travel to most of my extra curricular activities. Nor will I be able to visit my friends, some of whom live very far away from me. Due to lockdown, my family and I's finances are already tight, and I fear this would make it even worse. There are a lot of under 16s in my family and without having a zip card, none of us will be able to travel to see each other at all or be able to visit others.

Member of Redbridge Youth Council

# A – Westminster Youth Council

I live close to my school but Zipcard gives me access to other sources of education e.g. Museums. My dad is on Universal Credit and is furloughed. We have a personal family problem: our extended family lives in Ealing and I have to help them by baby-sitting and care, such as taking food packages to them every Saturday. Removing free travel would increase our costs and make it difficult to support our extended family.

# A from Dagenham

Free bus fares ...allow us to grow as young individuals and learn how to get around freely without feeling pressured, without feeling like we are wasting our parents' money, without feeling as if we should restrict ourselves from travelling and exploring what the Government has put in place for us. This can range from things as simple as museums and galleries, to schools outside our borough, to our inspirations and emotionally fulfilling journeys that broaden our minds to what is being advertised to us in Geography lessons.

# Safety fears

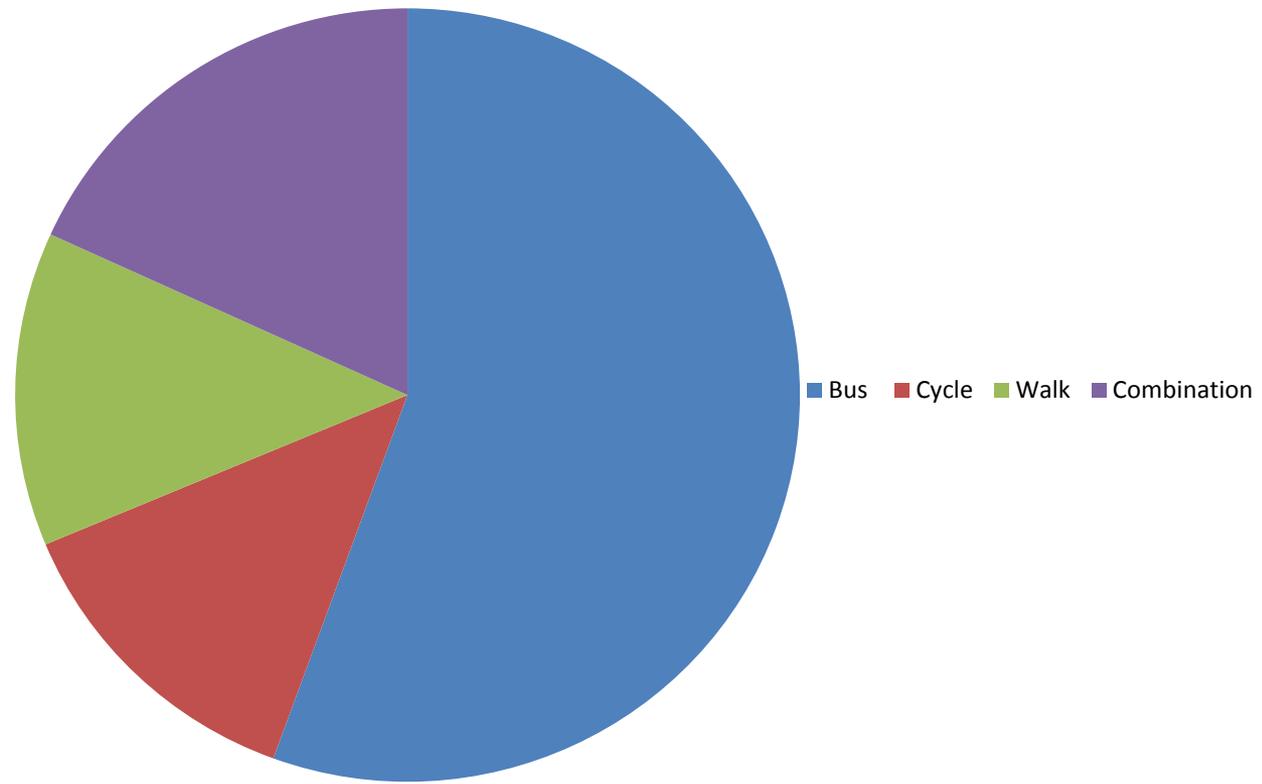
Young people felt that there was a danger of blackmail or that they needed to be friends with car drivers. They highlighted risks to personal safety whilst in other people's cars, both in terms of grooming and poor driving ability. They also worried about having bikes stolen.

There will probably lots more cars on the road as more parents and carers will be taking their children to school – could also make it more dangerous for people walking to school, as people park in places they shouldn't when dropping children off. Member of Havering Youth Council

'It will put more children at risk when it gets dark – walking at night is dangerous'.

Free transport is a protection against knife crime or being mugged. Sometimes gangs will G-check you to see if you are out of Borough and that can render you unsafe. L from Havering [the G-check: *when someone in a gang approaches someone to ask name, rank and post code.*]

## Poll of Redbridge Youth Council: How would you get to school if the Zip Card was withdrawn:



# Key comments from Joshua Brown-Smith's Zip Card petition

- The following pages capture some of the key points made in the submissions to 14 year old Joshua's petition, including:
  - Concerns about the increased costs of getting to school and leisure activities
  - A loss of choice when it comes to choosing a school
  - Threats to children's independence

## Cost

I have 2 children using these passes and I already struggle to pay for their school meals which I do not get free  
Michelle

This would mean extra financial stress for many families who have been financially hit by covid. Kids need to get to school more so now than ever!  
James

Many parents highlighted the additional costs to them if their children lost their free travel with one parent estimating it would cost her £2,400 a year and others saying they would have to cut back on extra curricular activities.

My son uses the bus to go to school everyday... my partner that works in a restaurant is more likely to lose his job... I have been living with a negative account, cancelled everything I could. Not going to enroll my son in any sports after school or clubs because we don't have money. And now this as well? ...Sadly things got really out of control... Carina

## Cost (continued)

It's not fair that we have to pay for children to go on buses. Will cost me an additional £2,400 a year for four children to travel to and from school. Vanessa

Being on a low income and barely scraping by free travel for my children has been amazing. Without it I'm not sure I'll afford it. So many rely on this to get their children to school especially as secondary school is more often not on their doorstep. Emma

# Choice and access to education

Children have the right to choose their school. That choice should not be dictated by the fact they can't use public transport to get there - Craig

Many parents were concerned about losing an element of choice in their children's education with children currently travelling large distances to school

My son benefitted hugely from the Zip card because his schools were always over 3 miles away - totally unfair this is being scrapped especially for those with a large family - Claire

We should be making it easier for children to get an education, not harder. And scrapping this will help widen the attainment gap between richer and poorer. Diana

I can't afford to send my kid to school now and we live more than 5 miles away. Sheena

# Independence

Many parents were concerned about a loss of independence for young people, drawing on their own experiences as young people of public transport giving them a sense of freedom.

- Young people need their independence and being able to get about without having ask parents for money is very important to their growing up. James
- My child needs to travel to school by bus to get there. I work and am unable to take her. Nicki

Free bus travel made this beautiful city so accessible to me when I was growing up. I'm so grateful I never had to pay to get to school or into Central London, and today's young Londoners shouldn't be denied that either. Kate