Bringing better bus services to East Swale

PROJECT
CENTRE

Swale
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Bringing better bus services to East Swale

In March 2021, the UK Government published the Bus Back Better strategy. It sets out an ambitious vision to improve bus services in England through greater local leadership.

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In March 2021, the UK Government published the Bus Back Better strategy. It sets out an ambitious vision to improve bus services in England through greater local leadership.

The strategy asks local authorities, together with bus operators, to work with local communities to plan and deliver fully integrated bus networks and grow passenger numbers.

As a result of the government's strategy, Project Centre Limited was commissioned by Swale Borough Council (SBC) to deliver an engagement programme to understand the needs of the local communities in East Swale, and report back these views to councillors on where improvements can be made when funding is made available.

The communities that are in question are as follows:

- Boughton Under Blean
- Doddington
- Dunkirk
- Eastling
- Faversham
- Graveney with Goodnestone
- Hernhill
- Luddenham
- Lynsted and Kingsdown
- Newnham
- Norton
- Oare
- Ospringe
- Selling
- Sheldwich
- Stalisfield
- Teynham
- Throwley
- Tonge

While there is no current funding available, the feedback gathered can be used to help Swale Borough Council understand the priorities of local people, so that if funds become available in future, improvements can be prioritised to shape a bus network that best meets the needs of the community.

There were four key methods used to inform the public about the consultation and gather their experiences and insights to support future decision-making about the bus network. These were:

1. Online survey
2. Dedicated project web page and social media
3. Meetings with community members
4. School workshop

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WHAT WE DID

A public consultation was launched on 24 March 2023 and closed on 27 April 2023. The consultation sought to better understand the public's views on what could be improved to create a more sustainable, efficient and comfortable bus service that meets the needs of the community.

There were four key methods used to inform the public about the consultation and gather their experiences and insights to support future decision-making about the bus network. These were:

1. Online survey

2. Dedicated project web page and social media
3. Meetings with community members
4. School workshop

Briefing sessions were offered to local councillors, however due to the pre-election period and public holidays, information was provided individually via email to inform councillors and share onwards with constituents.

Online Survey

The online survey comprised of 22 questions and sought insight from respondents on the following areas:

- Travel habits
- Fares and tickets
- Their last journeys
- What would encourage them to use bus services more (existing users) or begin using bus services (non-users).

The final section of the survey was designed to understand more about the demographics of people using and not using existing services. These questions were voluntary and sought to understand if members of the community have different needs based on their protected characteristics to deliver a more inclusive engagement process.

The online survey was shared on the dedicated project web page throughout the duration of the consultation, social media and via direct email with 45 community organisations. A total of 96 responses were received.

Dedicated project web page

Information about the consultation was hosted on the Council webpage, including the live survey link, for people to find out more about the consultation, how to respond and how their data is being used for the purpose of the consultation.
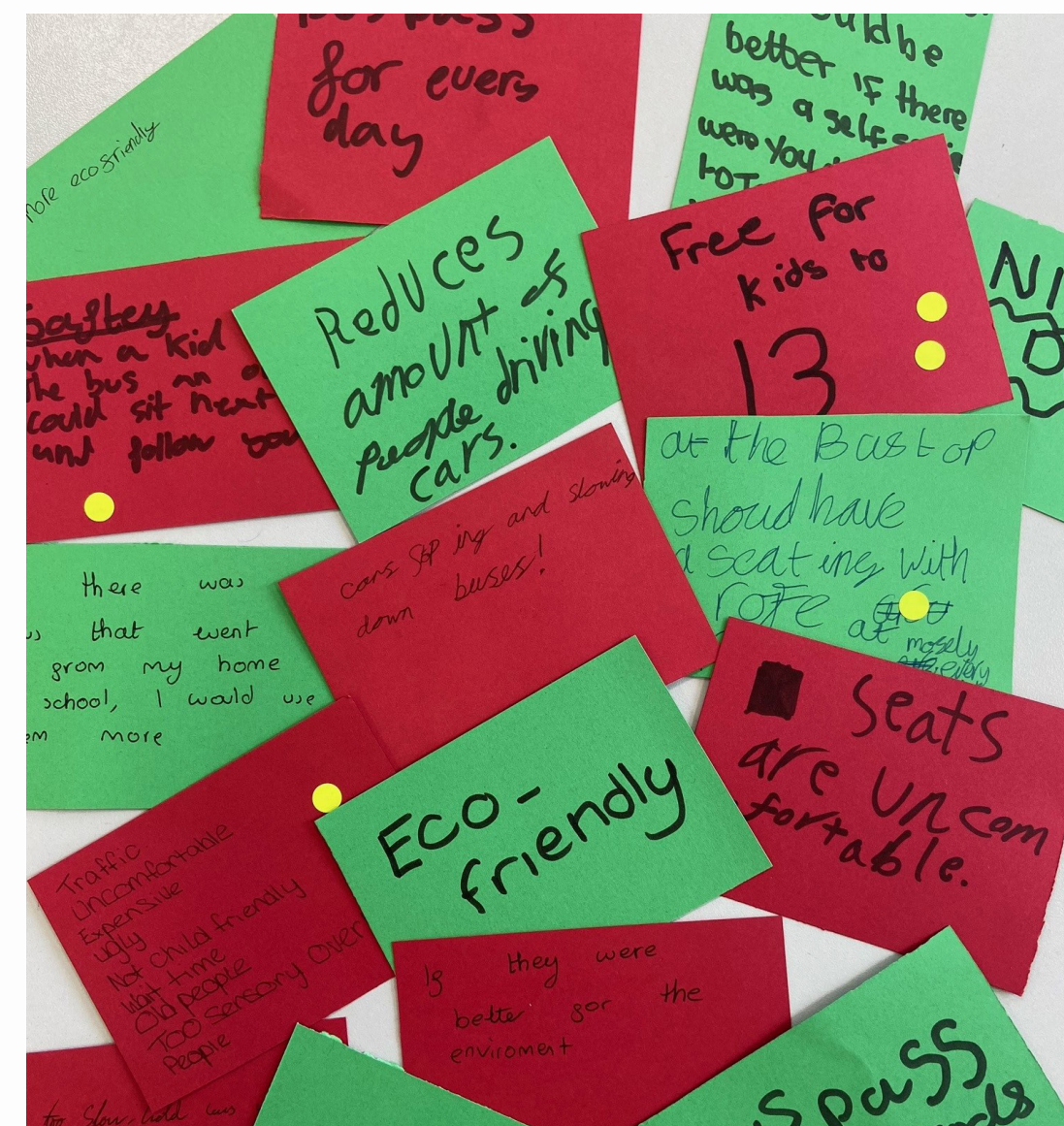
Image showing green and red cards from card storming exercise with Abbey School.

Information about the consultation, such as key deadlines, background and context and information on how to access the online survey were posted throughout the length of the consultation on social media. An example of the image that was used throughout the social media campaign can be seen on the left on the previous page.

Contact details for the Council were also posted on the website, to allow members of the public to contact the project team with any questions about the consultation.

Meetings with community members
Virtual community workshop sessions were designed to establish the key issues faced by the community regarding the local bus network, and what improvements could be made to encourage and enable more people to use bus services in Eastern Swale.

Two sessions were organised and a wide cross-section of the community were invited to participate including local businesses, transport stakeholders and disability and equalities groups.

The workshops included a short presentation to provide context for the consultation and SBC's ambition for the local bus network. A facilitated discussion about three specific elements of the bus network: 'level of service', 'fares' and 'on the bus'. There was also an opportunity for community members to ask any questions or provide feedback outside these categories to ensure all relevant information was captured.

School Workshop
We facilitated a workshop with students aged 11 – 16 at Abbey School in Faversham. The workshop sought to understand the experiences
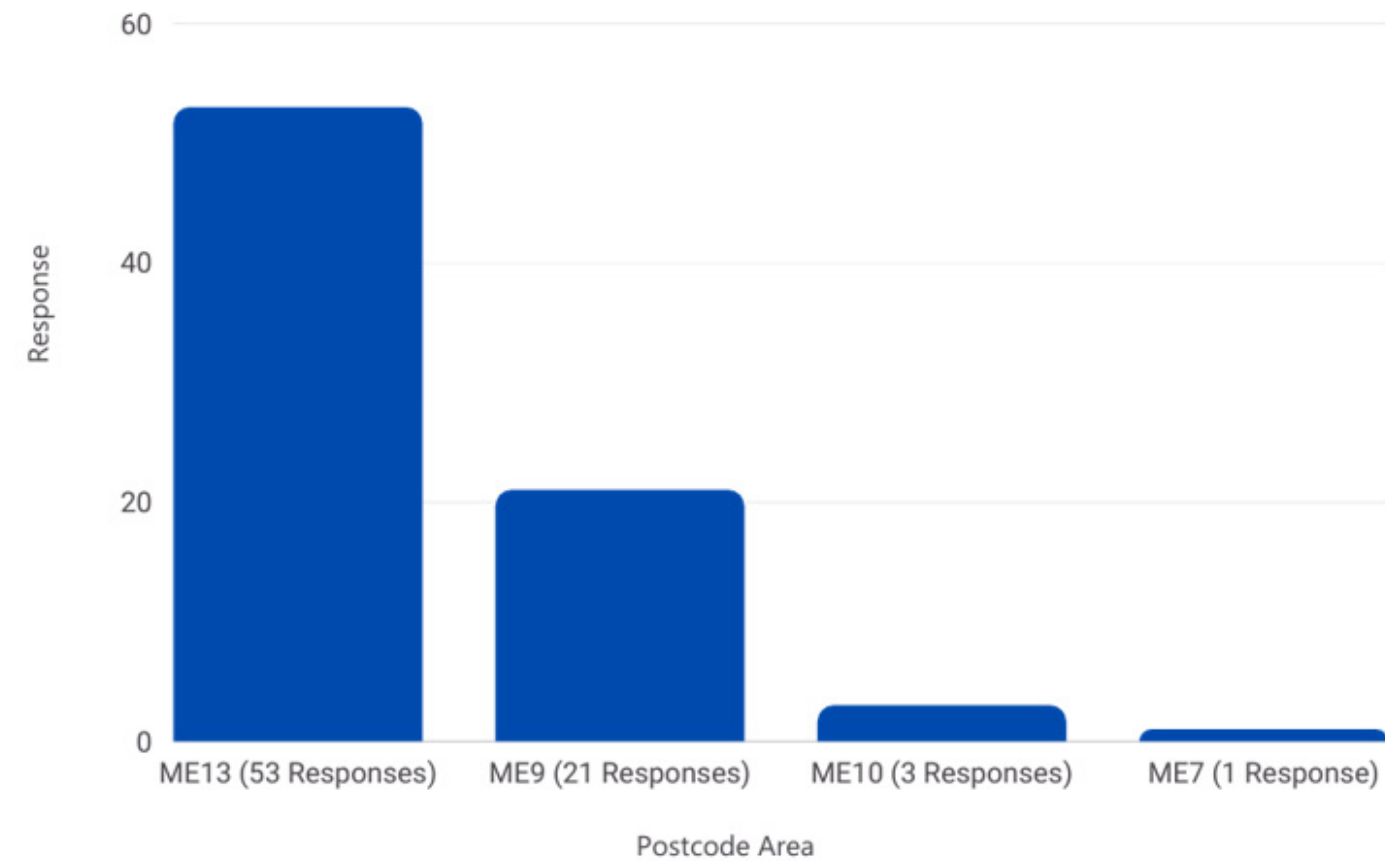
and opinions of young people, including what they liked and what could be improved on the local bus network.

A card storming exercise was conducted to identify positive areas of the existing bus network, areas that needed improving, followed by a discussion of key or reoccurring themes that were shared by young people. The exercise consisted of giving groups of students green and red cards for them to write their ideas on. This activity helped understand areas of the bus network they currently enjoyed, and those particulars they thought could be improved in relation to specific aspects of the service.
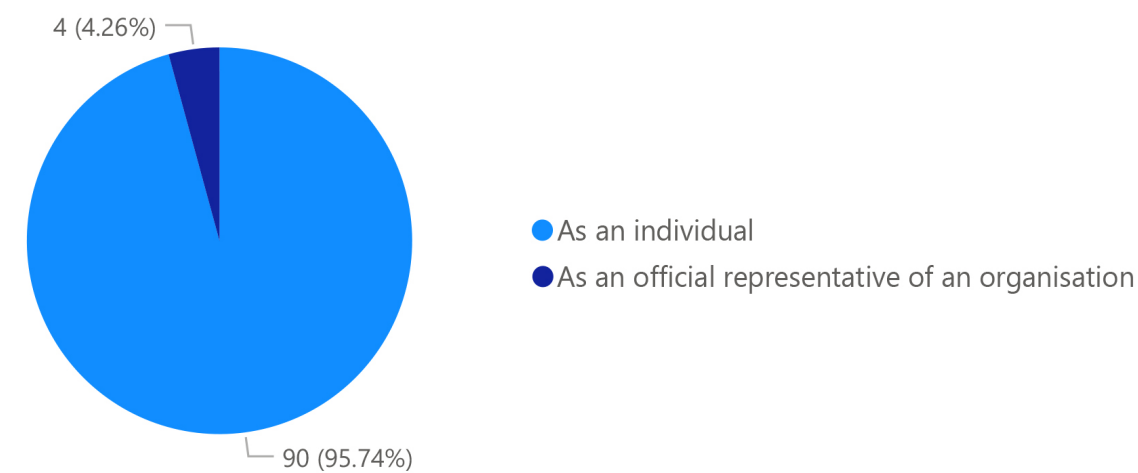
Participant profile

Respondent post codes

Response vs Postcode Area

- ME13 (53 Responses): ~53
- ME9 (21 Responses): ~21
- ME10 (3 Responses): ~3
- ME7 (1 Response): ~1

Are you registering as an individual or as an official representative of an organisation?

- 4 (4.26%)
- 90 (95.74%)

● As an individual
● As an official representative of an organisation

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WHAT WE HEARD

The online survey we conducted as part of the consultation asked the community the following

- Their participant profile
- Where they responded from
- How they travel around the borough
- How often they use the service
- Fares and tickets
- Their last journey
- What would encourage them to travel more on the service.

Each of the graphs that appear in this report contain the results for the questions asked in the survey, with some questions asking non users, bus users or both.

The most popular postcode for people to respond from was ME13 (53 post codes), where certain postcodes in this area had two or three responses. The second most popular area was ME9, where 21 postcodes were supplied. Other areas included ME7 and ME10, but these areas accounted for less than 5 total postcodes supplied.
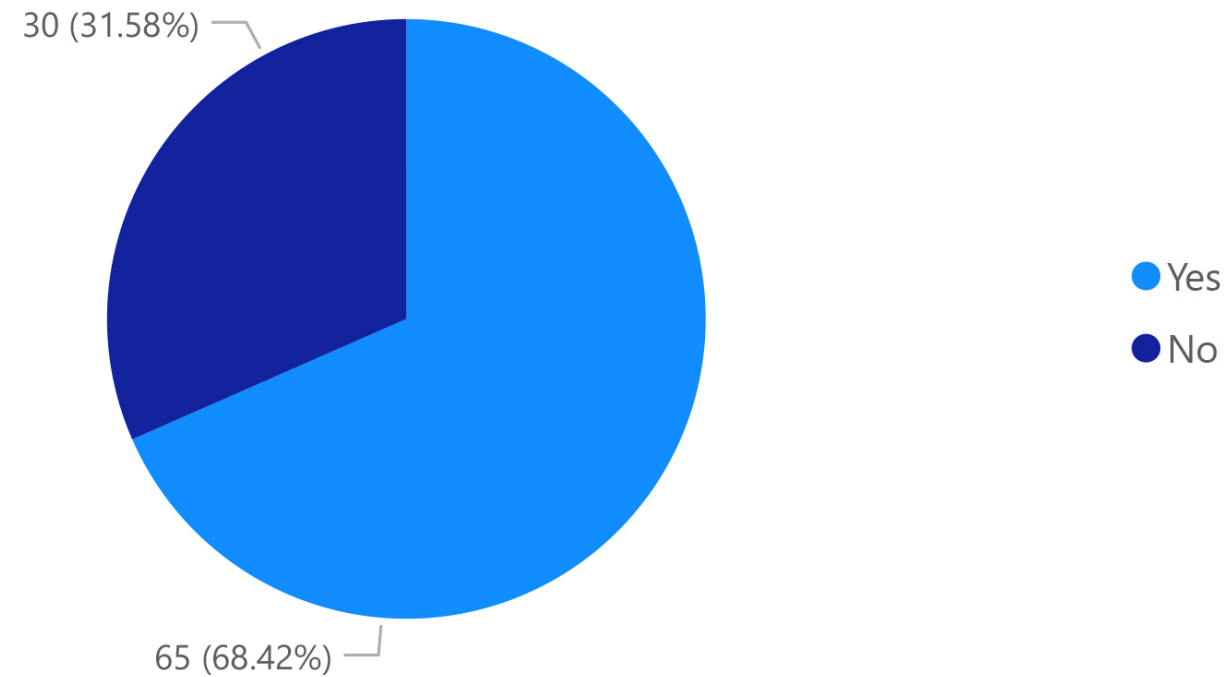
The most popular postcode area for people to respond was from ME13, with 53 individual cases covering areas which could include Aylesford, Chatham, Faversham, Gillingham, Maidstone, Queenborough, Rochester, Sheerness, Sittingbourne, Snodland, West Malling.
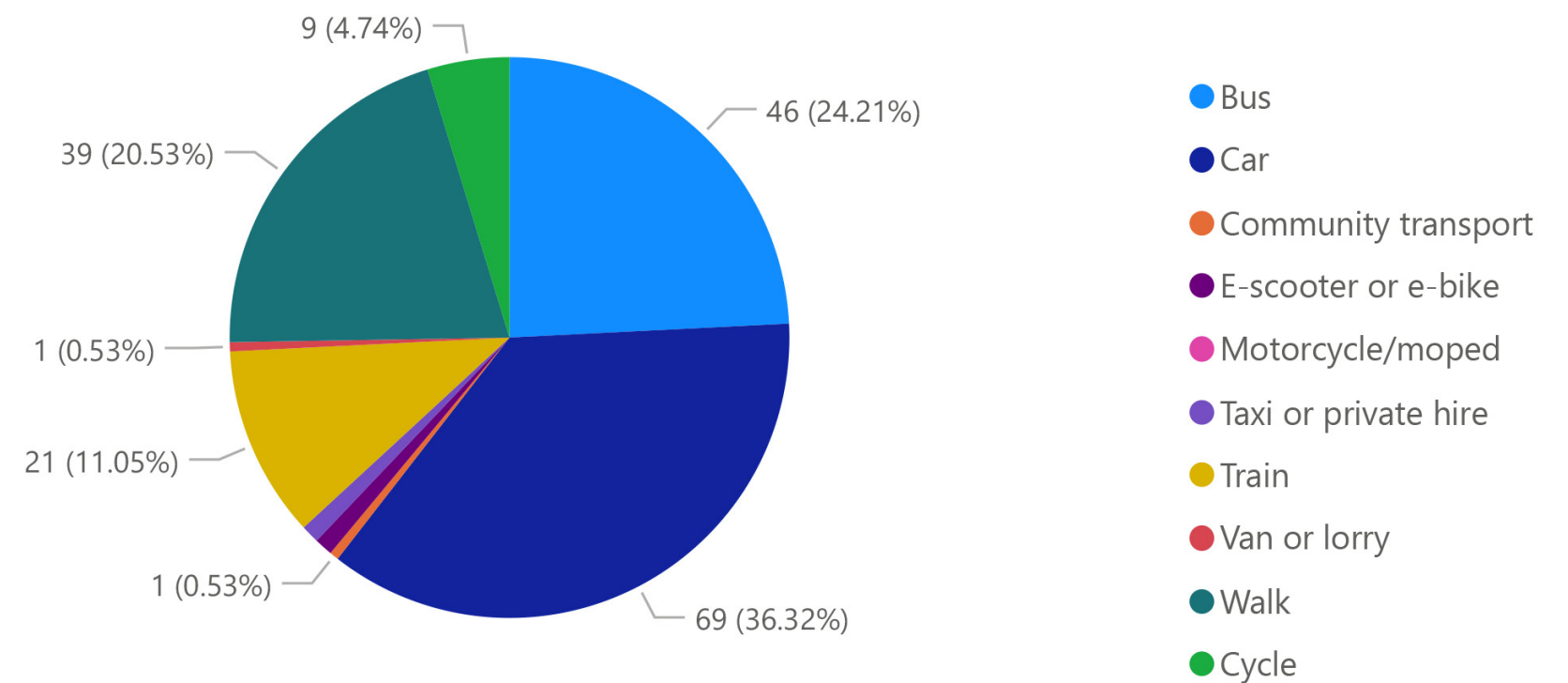
Travel Habits

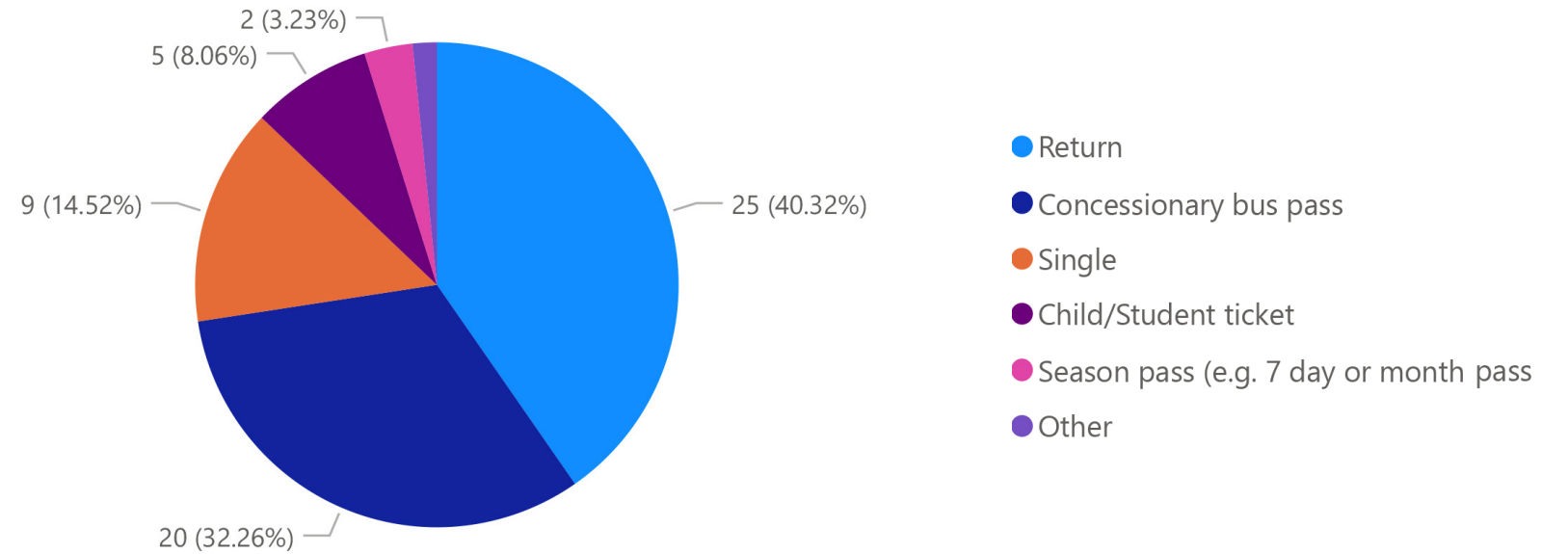**Most people who took the survey indicated cars were their main mode of travel around Swale, with buses and walking being the second and third most common options**

Do you use the bus services in East Swale?

30 (31.58%)

65 (68.42%)

- Yes
- No

What is the main way you travel around the borough?

9 (4.74%)

46 (24.21%)

39 (20.53%)

1 (0.53%)

21 (11.05%)

1 (0.53%)

69 (36.32%)

- Bus
- Car
- Community transport
- E-scooter or e-bike
- Motorcycle/moped
- Taxi or private hire
- Train
- Van or lorry
- Walk
- Cycle

Fares and tickets

When thinking about the price of your ticket, do you think it is:

12 (19.05%)
27 (42.86%)
24 (38.1%)

- About right
- Too expensive
- I don't know
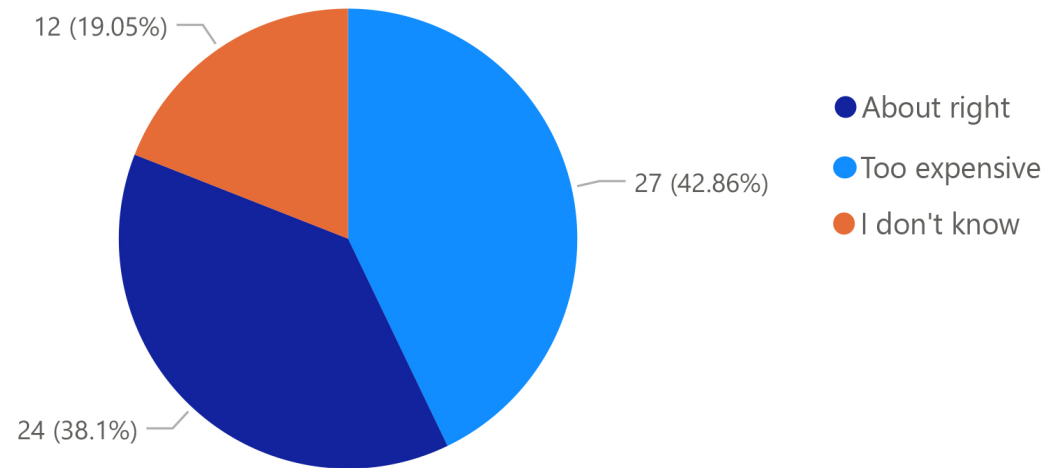
What type of ticket do you usually use?

2 (3.23%)
5 (8.06%)
9 (14.52%)
25 (40.32%)
20 (32.26%)

- Return
- Concessionary bus pass
- Single
- Child/Student ticket
- Season pass (e.g. 7 day or month pass
- Other

How do you usually buy your ticket (s)?

9 (15.52%)
49 (84.48%)

- When boarding the bus, from the driver
- Online or mobile app
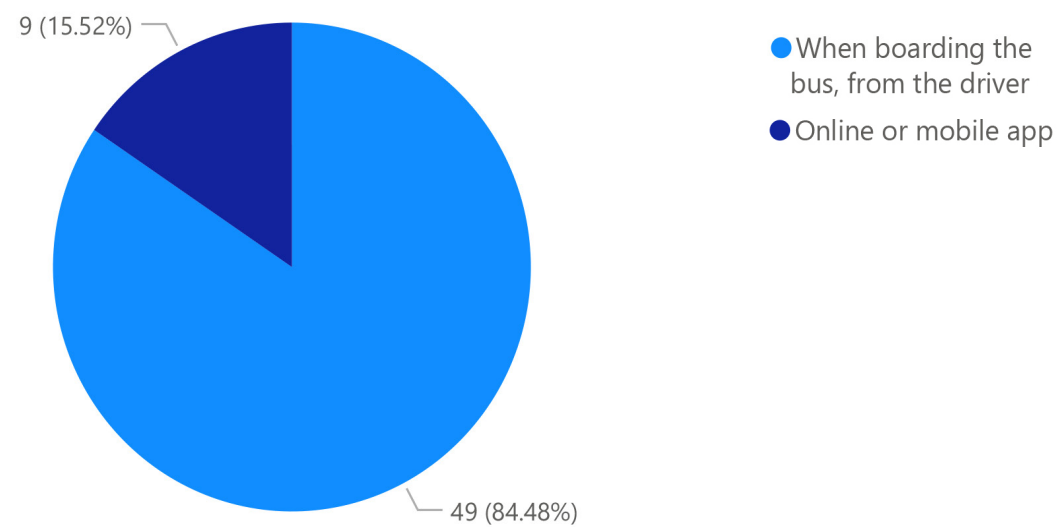
Do you think £2 bus tickets (for an hour journey) encourage you to use the bus more or less?

1 (1.56%)
7 (10.94%)
7 (10.94%)
11 (17.19%)
38 (59.38%)

- I would use it more
- I don't think it would change how often I use it
- I don't know
- My bus journey is not long enough to be affected by the £2 ticket
- I would use it less
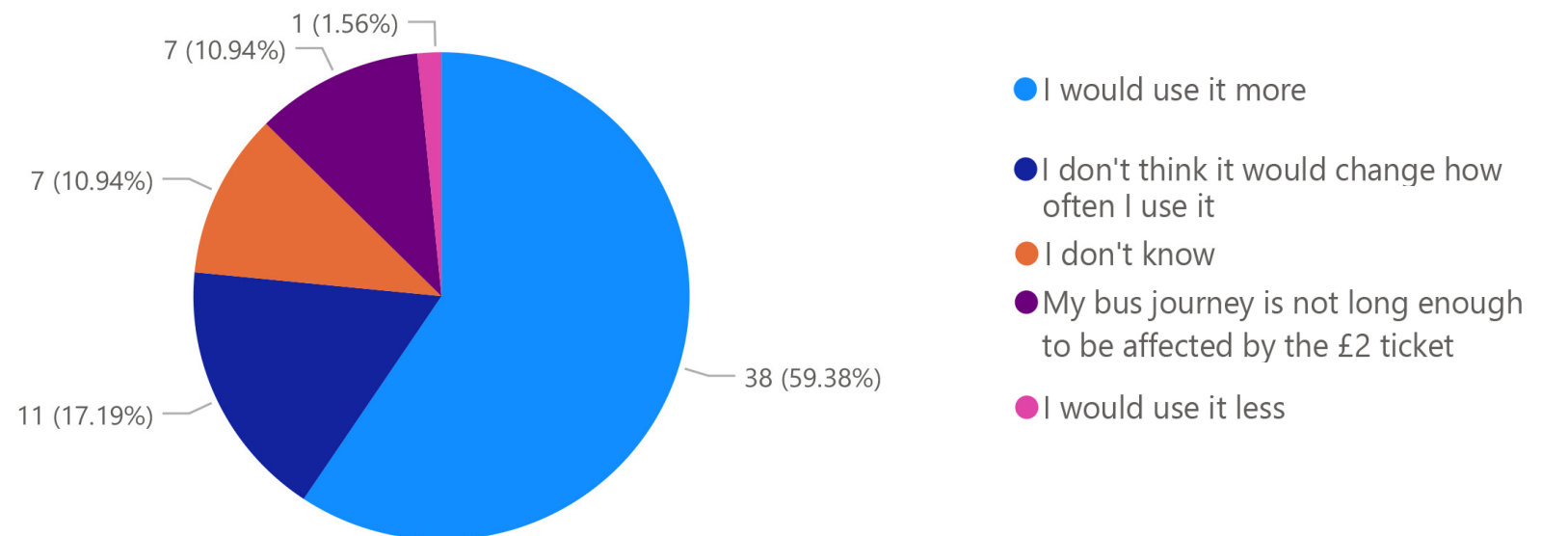
About your journey

Nearly 85% of all bus users mentioned they bought tickets when boarding the service, compared with 15% who bought them prior to their 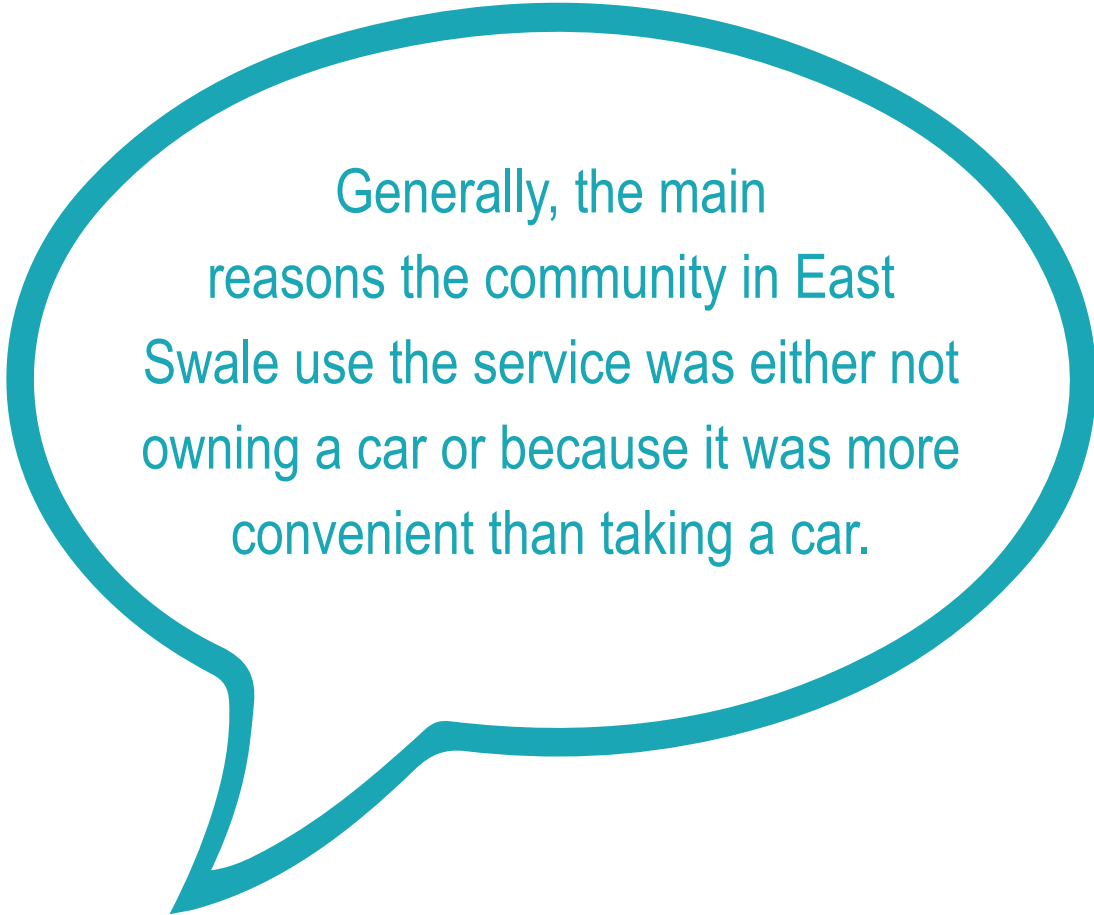journey online or through a mobile app. Based on the recent introduction and expansion of the £2 bus fares for an hour journey, nearly 60% of respondents have suggested they are more likely to use the service than at regular fare price, with less than 2% of respondents saying it would make them use it less.

Of the main reasons for taking the bus, the purpose of the visits taken was to either travel for shopping or leisure purposes. A large proportion of the community mentioned healthcare as the primary reason for travel, with commuting and education making up the smallest proportion of responses. Other reasons for travelling included visiting services such as funeral directors or going to the pub.

With regards to the variety of routes, there was no key indication of how respondents felt about this topic, however the largest proportion of respondents, at 29%, mentioned that the current variety of routes was 'fairly poor'. Respondents were asked about bus stops in terms of accessibility, maintenance, amount of stops in residential areas and amount of stops in town centres.

When asked about their last journey, most respondents, averaging 35%, rated these as 'fairly good' for all options.

With regards to the experience of the bus, most respondents noted that the cleanliness of the service and the level of comfort was 'fairly good', whereas the amenities on the bus and passenger capacity were considered adequate. Those who completed the survey rated the amenities neither good nor poor on their last journey.

> Generally, the main reasons the community in East Swale use the service was either not owning a car or because it was more convenient than taking a car.

Generally, what is the main reason you take the bus?

3 (4.76%)

6 (9.52%)

25 (39.68%)

7 (11.11%)

8 (12.7%)

14 (22.22%)
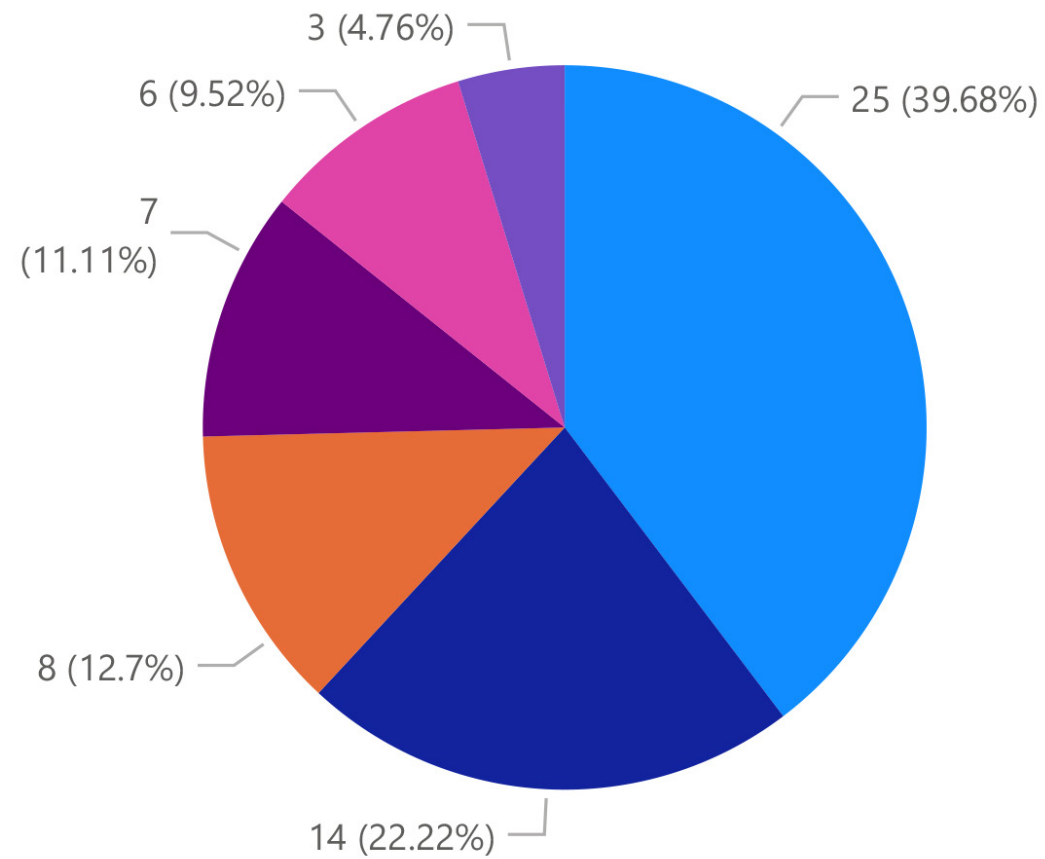
- I do not own a car
- It's easier or more convenient than driving
- I like to travel by bus
- It's better for the environment
- It's more accessible for me
- It's more affordable for me
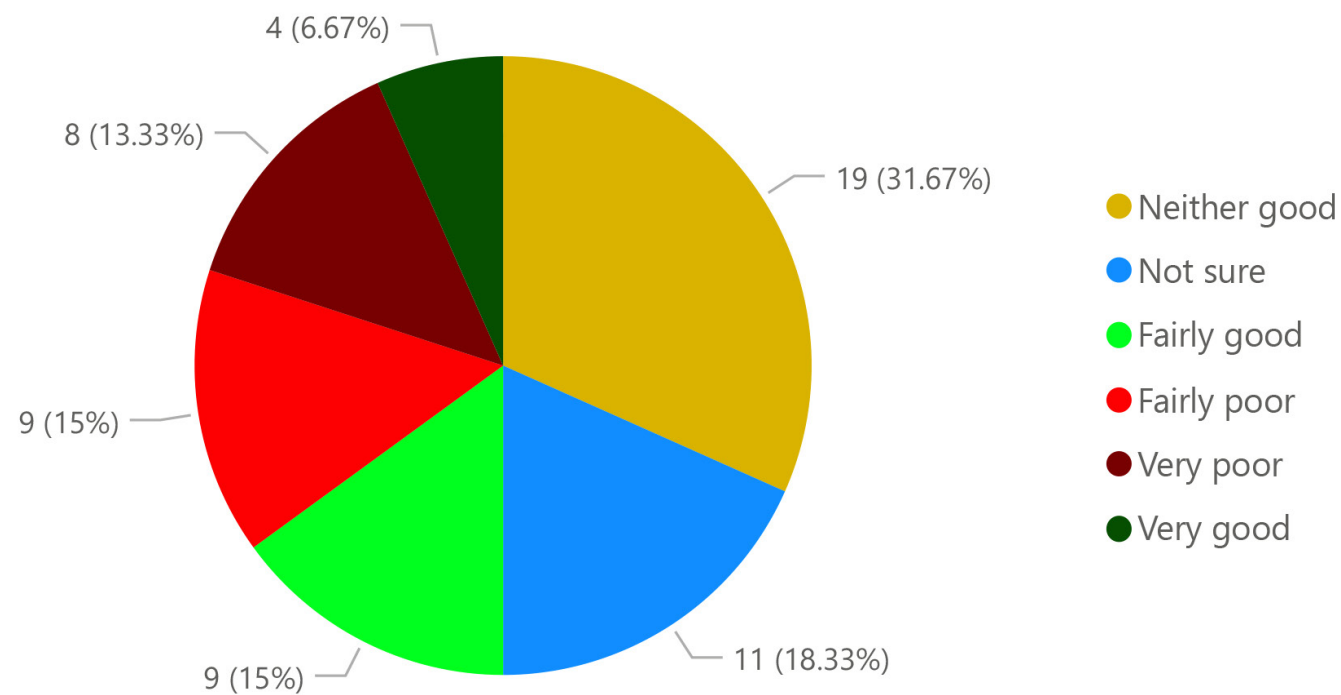
What is the main purpose of your journeys on the bus?

14 (9.66%)

32 (22.07%)

42 (28.97%)

13 (8.97%)

44 (30.34%)
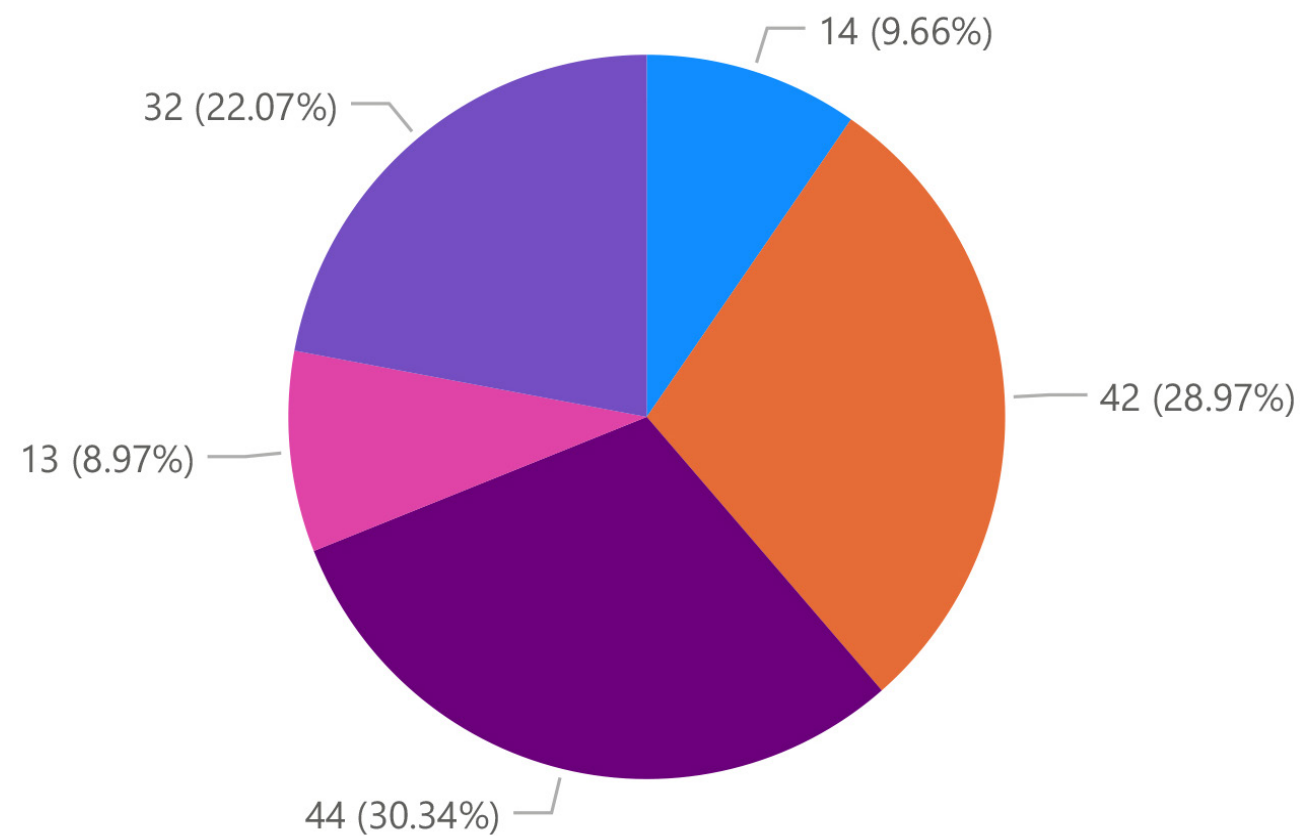
- Commuting
- Other
- Leisure
- Shopping
- Education
- Healthcare

Variety of routes

- 18 (29.03%)
- 14 (22.58%)
- 14 (22.58%)
- 11 (17.74%)
- 3 (4.84%)
- 2 (3.23%)

Legend:
- Fairly poor
- Neither good nor poor
- Very poor
- Fairly good
- Very good
- Not sure

Frequency of services at night

- 39 (62.9%)
- 10 (16.13%)
- 8 (12.9%)
- 3 (4.84%)

Legend:
- Very poor
- Fairly poor
- Not sure
- Neither good nor poor
- Fairly good
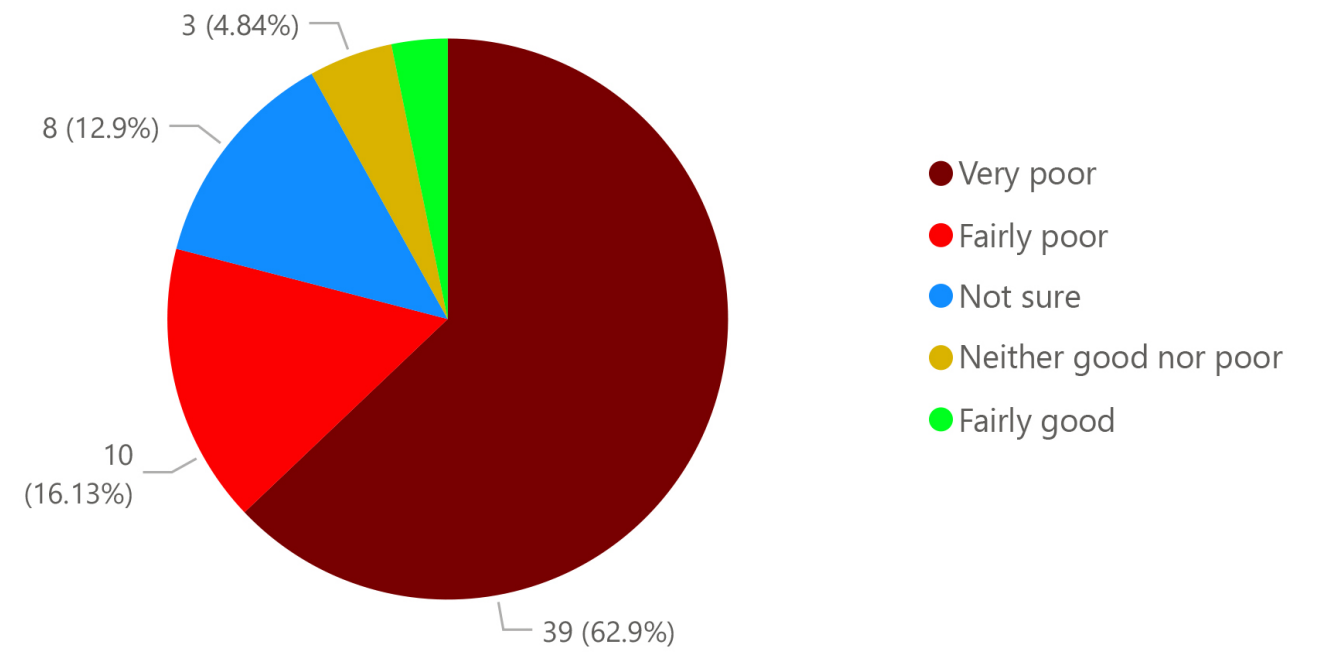
Frequency of services during the day

- 23 (35.94%)
- 14 (21.88%)
- 13 (20.31%)
- 9 (14.06%)
- 5 (7.81%)

Legend:
- Fairly poor
- Very poor
- Fairly good
- Neither good nor poor
- Very good
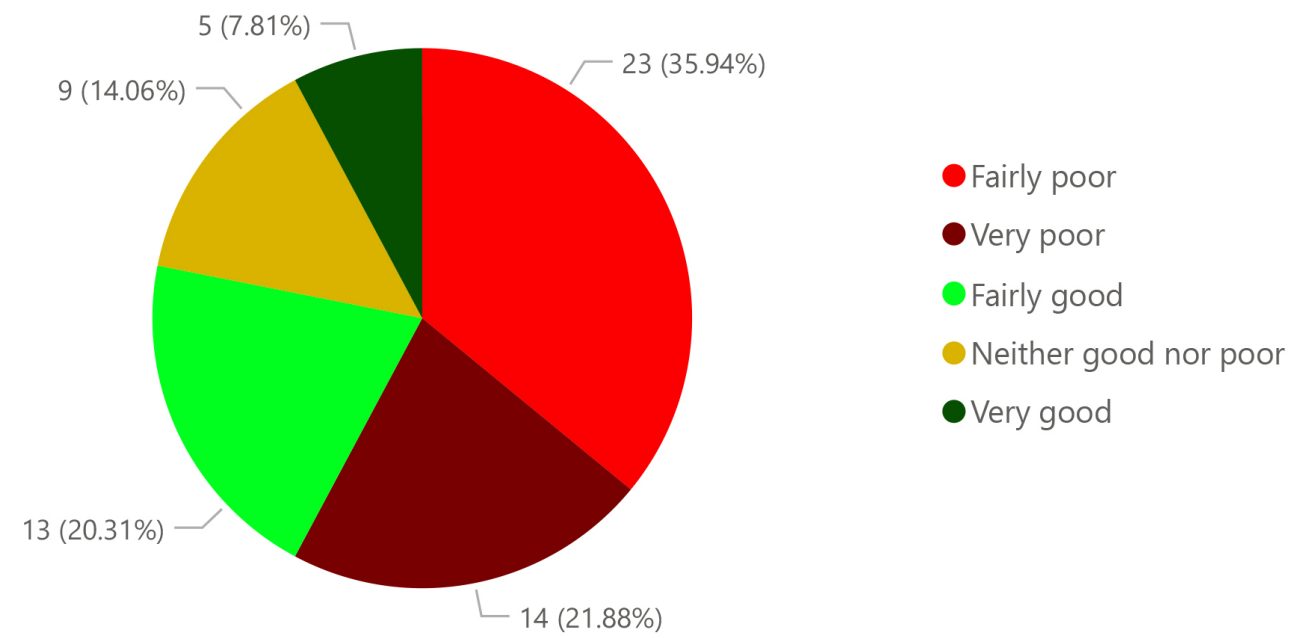
On the buses

Amenities on buses (for example Wi-Fi charging, seating)

- 23 (37.7%)
- 12 (19.67%)
- 11 (18.03%)
- 6 (9.84%)
- 5 (8.2%)
- 4 (6.56%)

- ● Neither good nor poor
- ● Fairly poor
- ● Fairly good
- ● Not sure
- ● Very poor
- ● Very good

Passenger capacity

- 19 (32.76%)
- 17 (29.31%)
- 11 (18.97%)
- 6 (10.34%)
- 4 (6.9%)
- 1 (1.72%)

- ● Neither good nor poor
- ● Fairly good
- ● Very good
- ● Very poor
- ● Fairly poor
- ● Not sure

Cleanliness of buses

- 25 (40.98%)
- 12 (19.67%)
- 10 (16.39%)
- 9 (14.75%)
- 4 (6.56%)

- ● Fairly good
- ● Neither good nor poor
- ● Very good
- ● Fairly poor
- ● Very poor
- ● Not sure
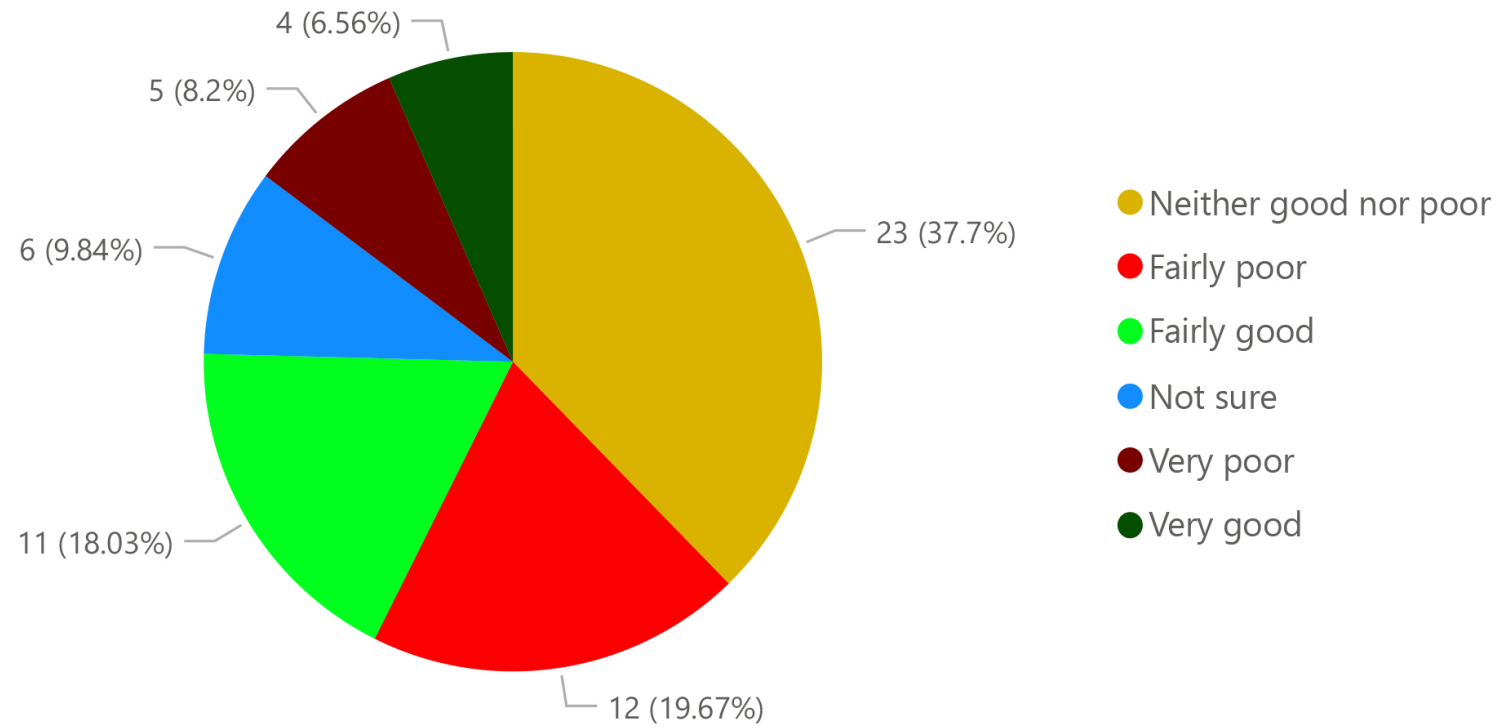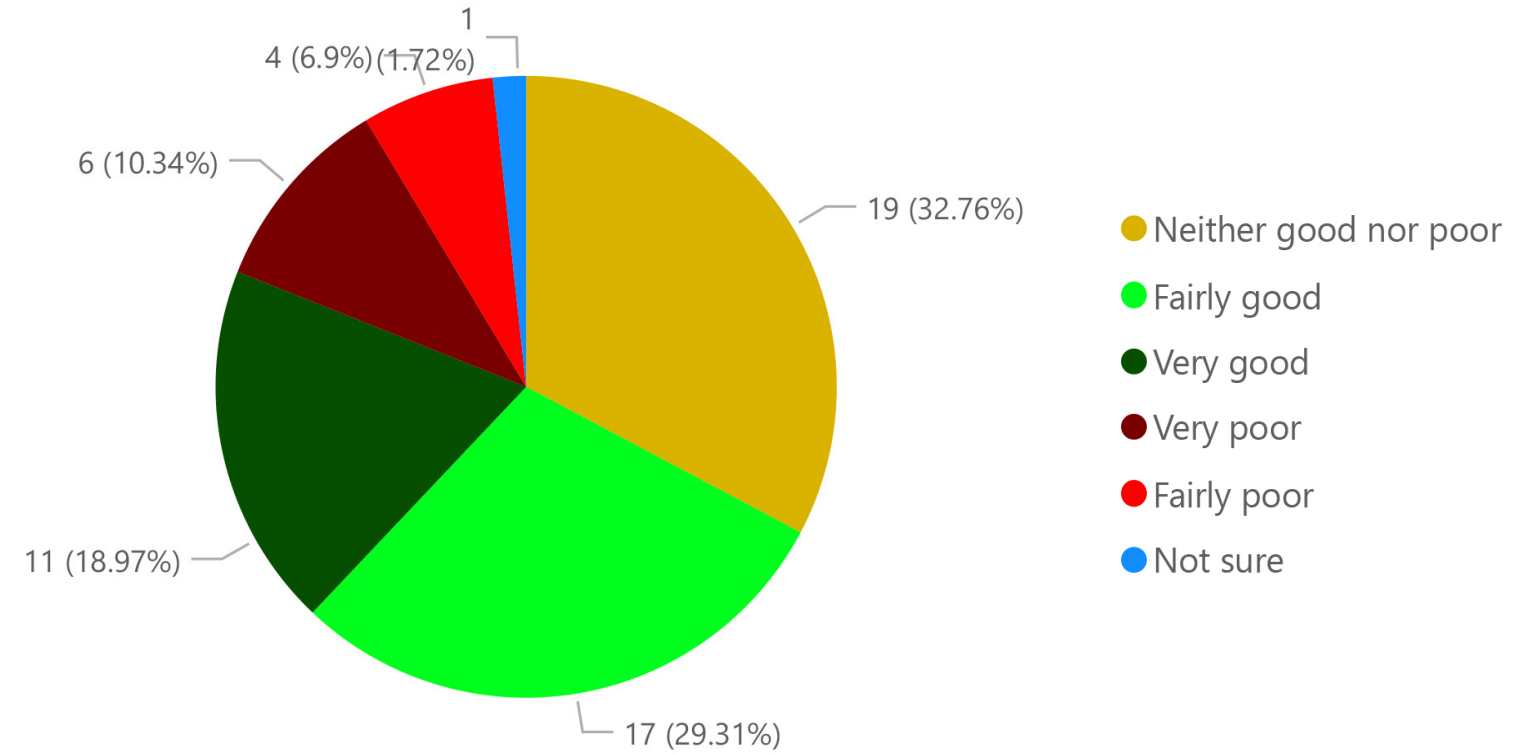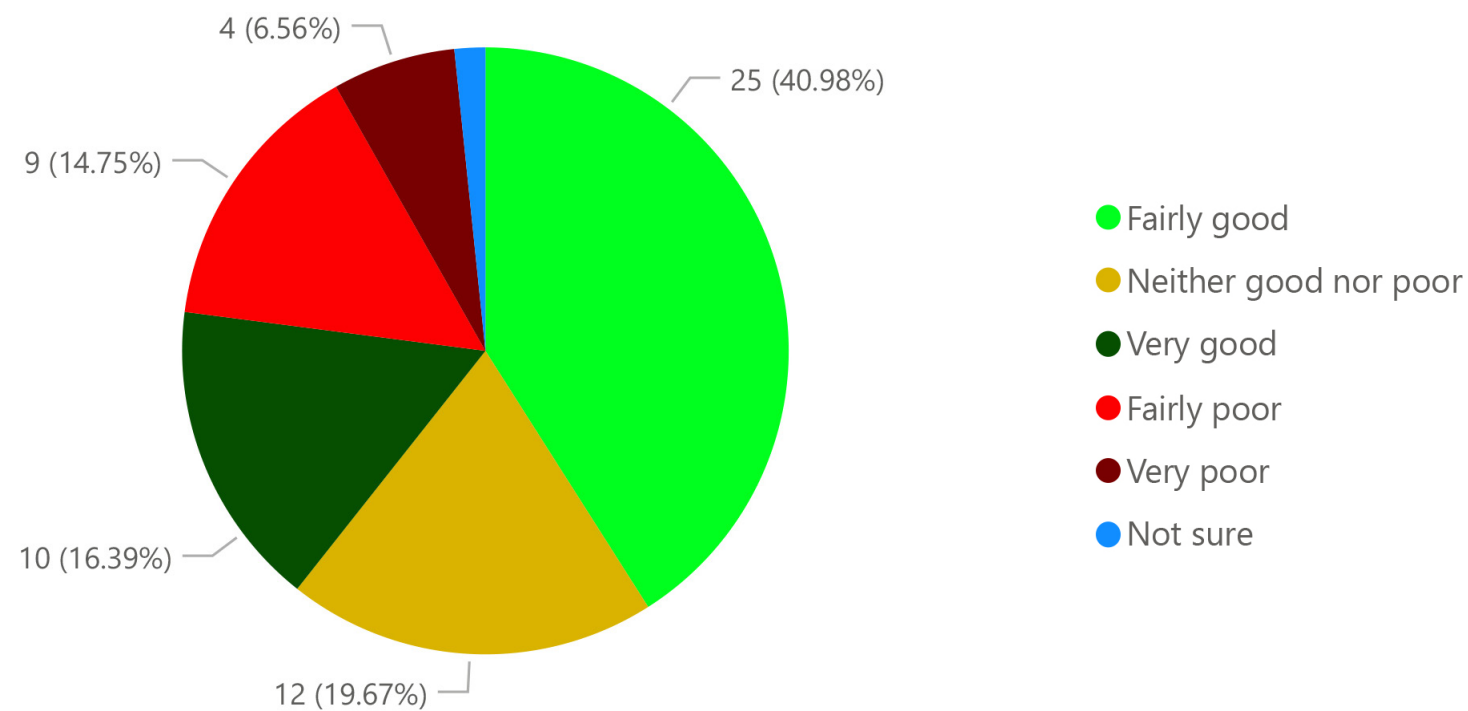
Level of comfort (for example seating and railings)

- 24 (41.38%)
- 18 (31.03%)
- 8 (13.79%)
- 3 (5.17%)
- 3 (5.17%)
- 2 (3.45%)

- ● Fairly good
- ● Neither good nor poor
- ● Very good
- ● Fairly poor
- ● Very poor
- ● Not sure
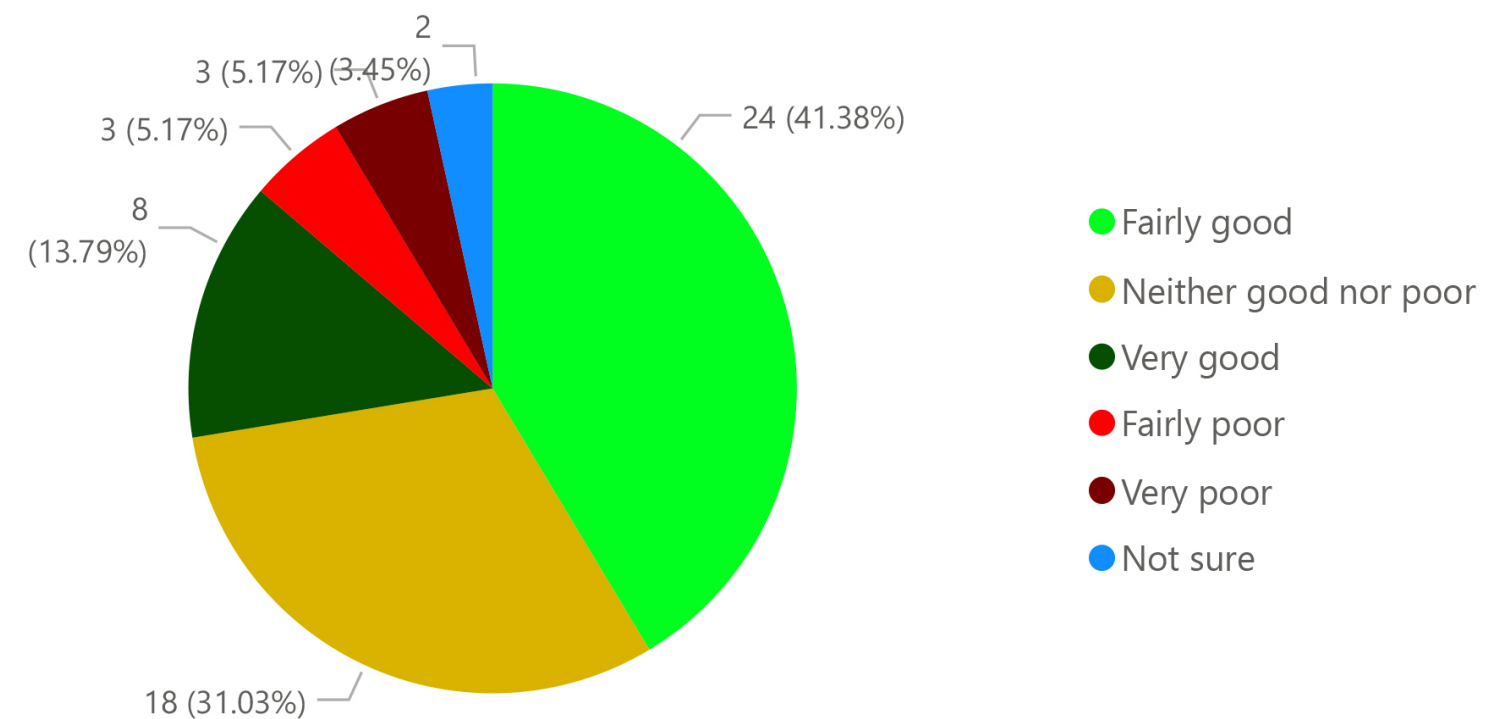
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KEY FEEDBACK

Based on the outcomes from the online survey, school workshop and meetings with the community, the following key findings have been identified:

Participants
- Of the 96 respondents to the survey, 90 were residents in Swale. Of those 65 residents who said that they use the bus services in East Swale (68%), the majority of people do so out of necessity or convenience.
- 96% of those who responded in the survey were either male or female, with the highest proportion of responses from those either aged between 16-20 (15% of all responses) or over 71 (24% of all responses).
- The community meetings and school workshop were made up a mix of

demographics, and reflected the demographics of the survey who reported using bus services in East Swale.

Fares and ticketing
- The current cost for using bus services and the variation of ticket types was considered acceptable, with only 11 survey respondents putting either of these options in their top five most important elements that would encourage them to take the bus more.
- During the community meetings, current fares were considered acceptable, but required more flexibility, especially when connecting with other services. Ticket types such as day riders and seasons tickets were offered as a solution for this.
- The national introduction of the capped £2 fare was considered successful, with many suggesting current fixed rates being useful, but more consideration is required regarding onward journeys and connectivity to other services.

- During the school workshop, free travel for under 13-year-olds and extended bus passes were identified as priorities to encourage more people to use bus services.

Amenities
- Students during the workshop suggested areas such as air conditioning, heated seats, Wi-Fi and charging points should be considered to improve services in future.
- During the survey, amenities were considered important in encouraging more people to travel on the services, but the current level of amenities provided was not considered unacceptable.
- When discussing general amenities on the bus during community workshops, this area was not considered an important issue needing improvement, with maintenance of existing amenities being referenced instead.

Safety
- Safety when travelling on the service and when waiting for the services

at the bus stops were mentioned consistently, however varied depending on the exercise undertaken.

- When asked in the survey, a high proportion of the community noted that personal security (26%) and safety concerns (28%) on their most recent trip was currently not considered neither good nor poor.
- When discussed in community meetings, services generally were deemed safe, but overcrowding created a risk, especially at night. Asking bus companies to send drivers on safeguarding training sessions was suggested to help improve the safety of the services in future.
- Students in the workshop suggested that older people being prominent on the bus, or being alone was a safety risk for young people.

Routes, availability, and connectivity

- The number of services that are connected and available, especially on routes where there is school pick-up and drop-offs were addressed as improvement areas across all the

exercises undertaken.

- Overcrowding and disruptions to the services based on the availability and connectivity of the current service was also considered an area of concern.
- The availability, reliability and frequency of services were key areas of concern across all exercises, including buses regularly being cancelled last minute and restricted operation.
- Bus speeds was consistently mentioned as an area for improvement, with suggestions that slow services held up traffic and caused congestion.
- When respondents were asked if there was anything further they would like to comment on, connectivity with other services was raised as one of the most suggested areas for improvement.
- 29% of survey respondents mentioned the variety of routes was poor and improvements could be made to create a better service

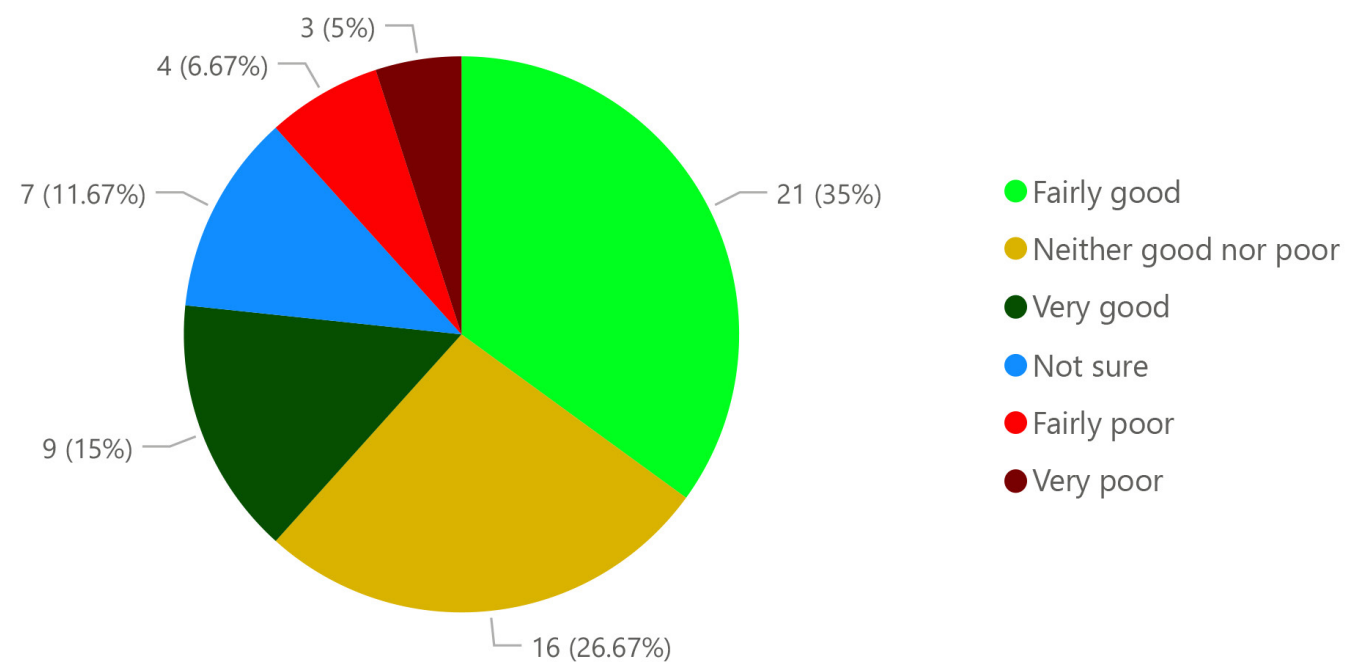**Other areas of improvement**

- Queries about whether there were any

plans to introduce electric buses as a part of the local improvement programme were raised.

- Some participants suggested regular community forums or meetings to discuss future transport improvements within the local area would be a useful way to continue engaging with the council in future.
- Mix use transport and exploring micro networks was considered a further area where improvements could be made to the local service.
- Working with the private sector to deliver improvements was mentioned a number of times, for example working with bus companies to improve safeguarding or bus stop locations and understanding required safety and maintenance standards.
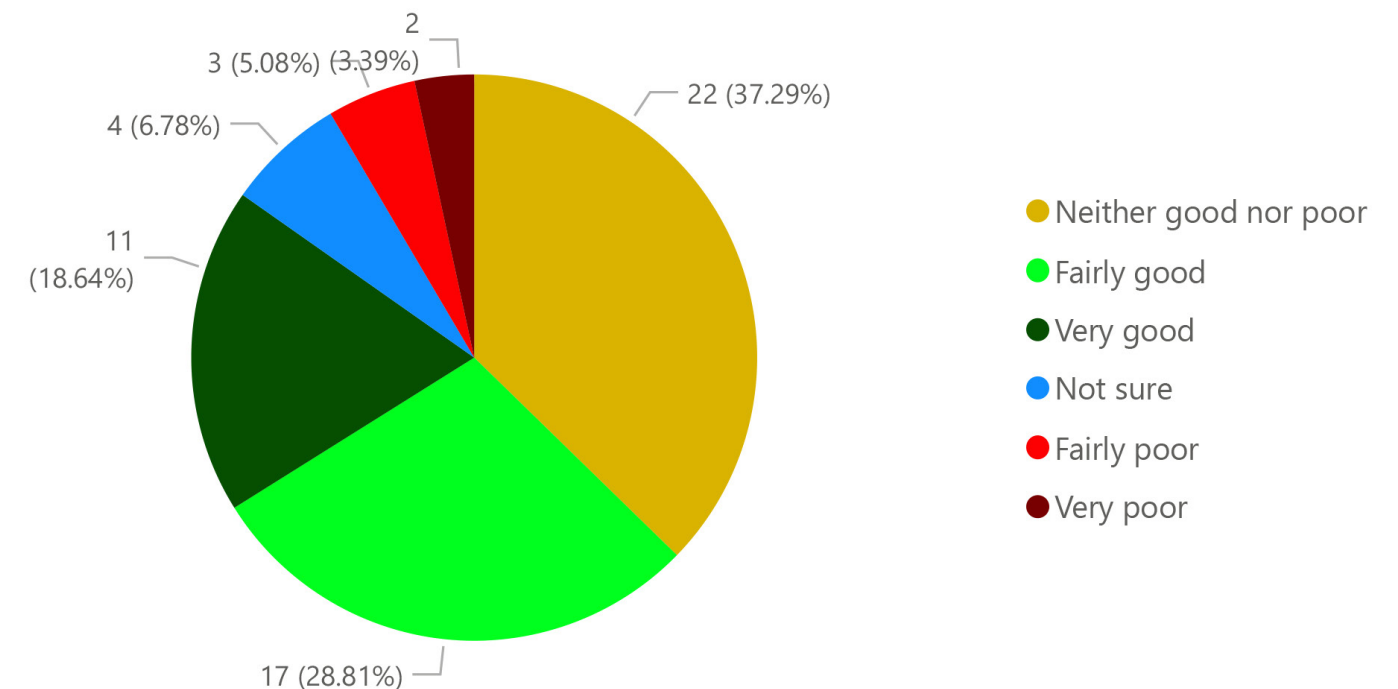
Safety and security

The majority of respondents noted that personal security on their most recent trip was 'fairly good', whereby in comparison to this, the highest proportion of respondents noted concerns of safety on their last trip were not noticeable, rating this area as 'neither good nor poor'.

Personal security

- 21 (35%) Fairly good
- 16 (26.67%) Neither good nor poor
- 9 (15%) Very good
- 7 (11.67%) Not sure
- 4 (6.67%) Fairly poor
- 3 (5%) Very poor

Safety concerns

- 22 (37.29%) Neither good nor poor
- 17 (28.81%) Fairly good
- 11 (18.64%) Very good
- 4 (6.78%) Not sure
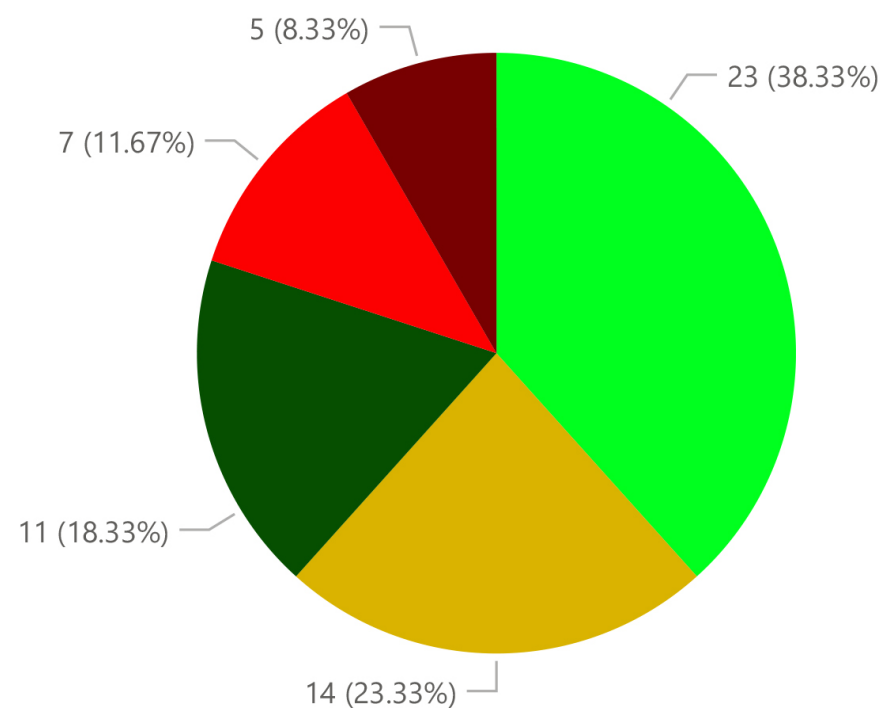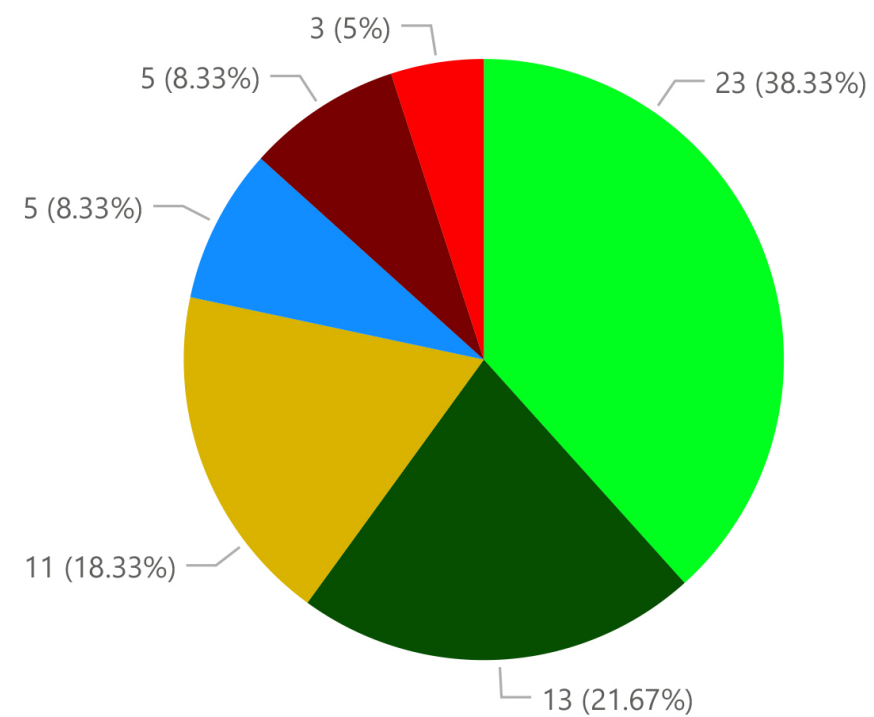- 3 (5.08%) Fairly poor
- 2 (3.39%) Very poor

Accessibility

Most people completing the survey noted both the accessibility of buses and bus stops were fairly good. Less than 20% of responses noted the accessibility of bus stops and buses was seen negatively.

Accessibility of bus stops

5 (8.33%)
23 (38.33%)
7 (11.67%)
11 (18.33%)
14 (23.33%)

- Fairly good
- Neither good nor poor
- Very good
- Fairly poor
- Very poor

Accessibility of buses

3 (5%)
5 (8.33%)
23 (38.33%)
5 (8.33%)
11 (18.33%)
13 (21.67%)

- Fairly good
- Very good
- Neither good nor poor
- Not sure
- Very poor
- Fairly poor

Journey improvements

Improvements to the frequency of services was selected both as the most common first priority, and within the top five priorities of all respondents. Following this, better reliability of services and reduced price of tickets were the second and third most prioritised improvements respectively.

Select the top five improvements that would encourage you to take the bus more often

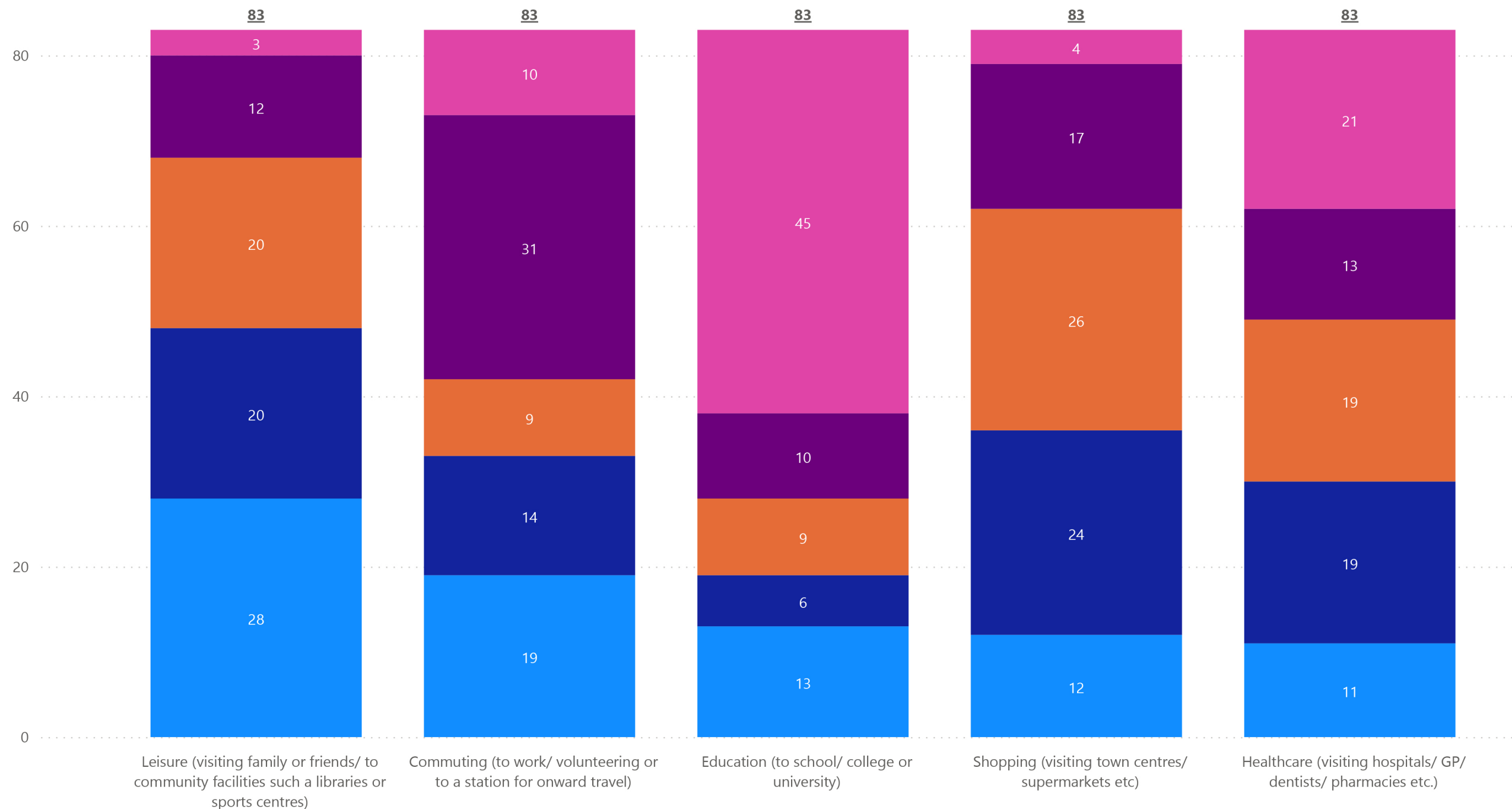● First ● Second ● Third ● Fourth ● Fifth
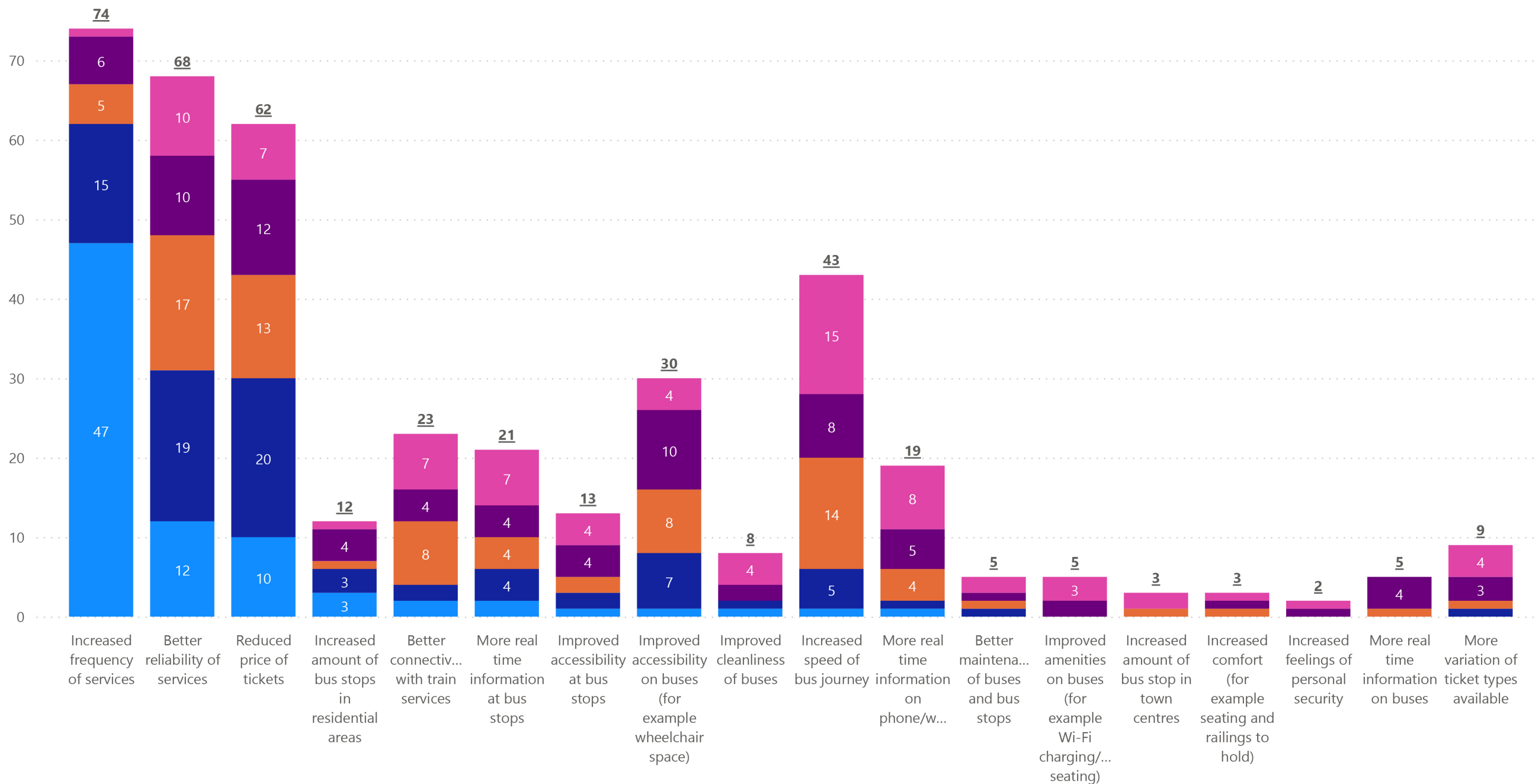
Journey improvements

On how likely the community would be to take certain journeys if these improvements were made, the most likely commutes included leisure visits and shopping. The option they were least likely to take out of the five provided was travelling for education purposes.

How likely would you be to make the following journeys by bus if these improvements were made?
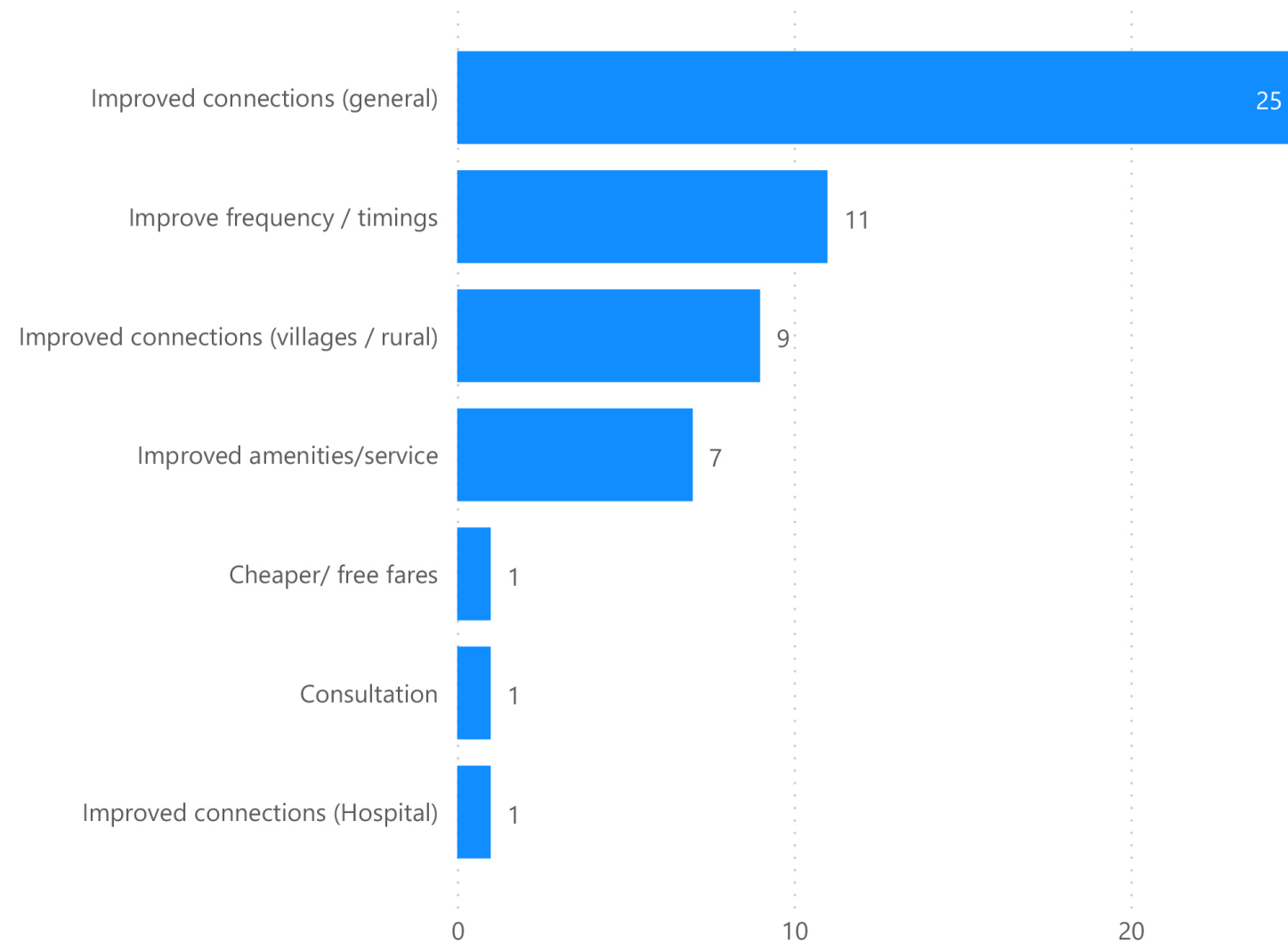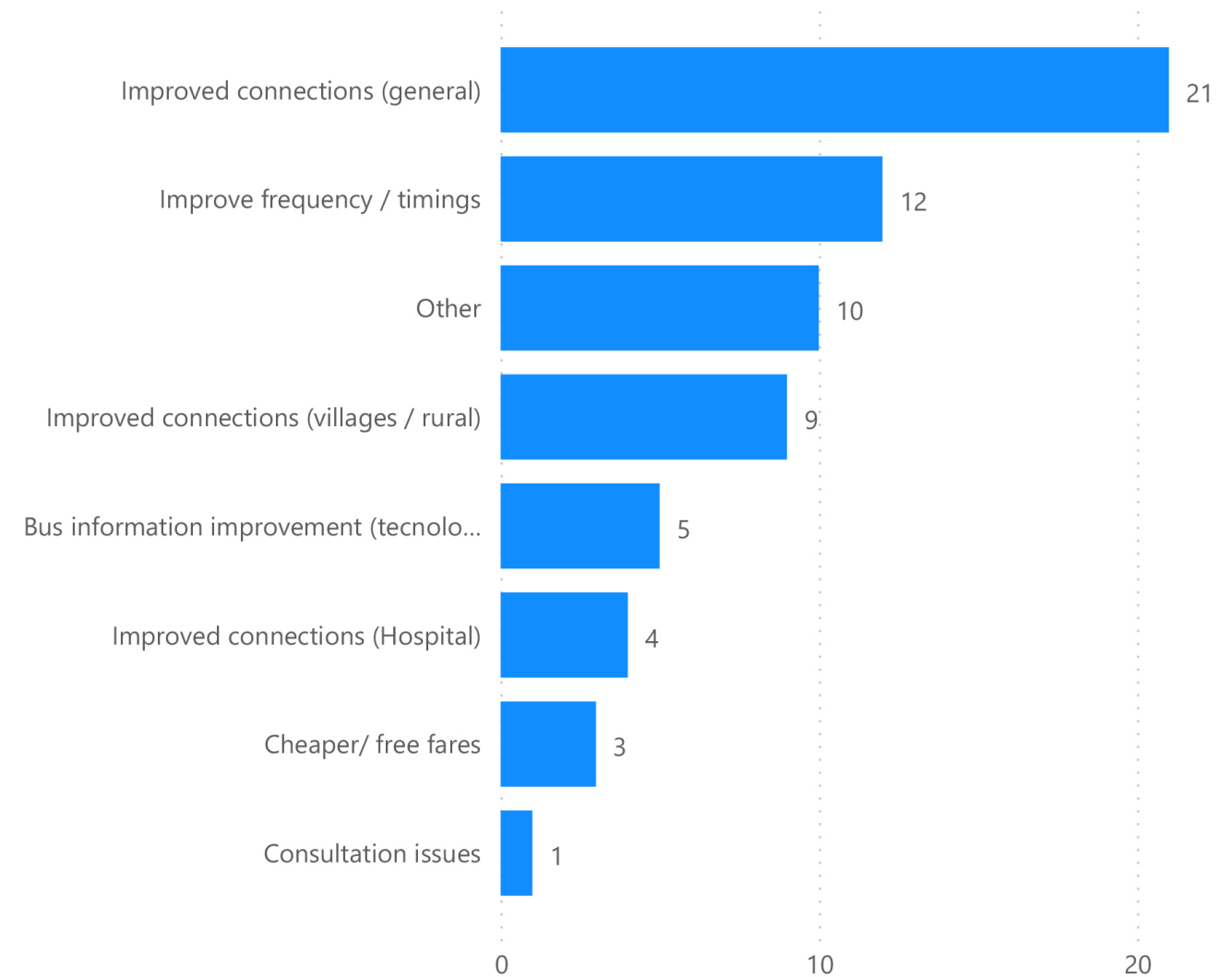
● First ● Second ● Third ● Fourth ● Fifth

	Leisure (visiting family or friends/ to community facilities such a libraries or sports centres)	Commuting (to work/ volunteering or to a station for onward travel)	Education (to school/ college or university)	Shopping (visiting town centres/ supermarkets etc)	Healthcare (visiting hospitals/ GP/ dentists/ pharmacies etc.)
Total	83	83	83	83	83
First	28	19	13	12	11
Second	20	14	6	24	19
Third	20	9	9	26	19
Fourth	12	31	10	17	13
Fifth	3	10	45	4	21

Journey improvements

At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to provide their comments in an open question. The comments shared were analysed and grouped into eight themes on either improvement areas (which were not covered in the survey) that would encourage people to take the bus, or general considerations to help improve bus services in the future.
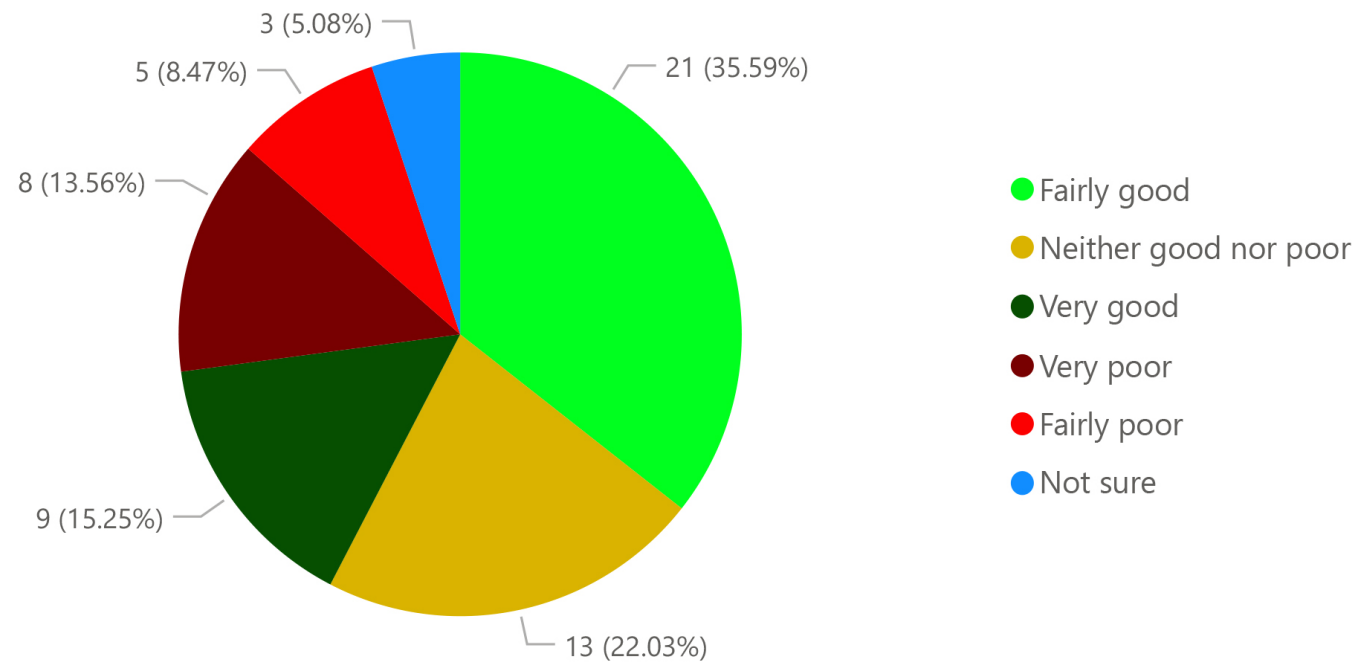
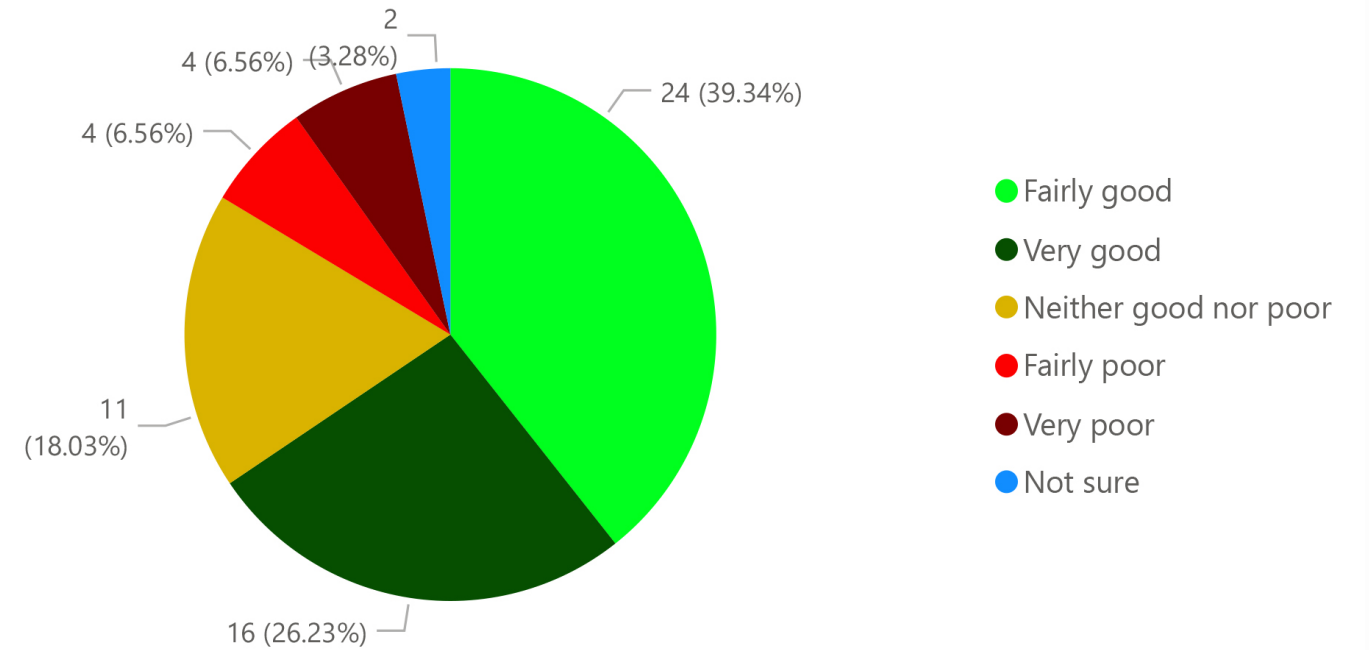**Is there anything else not listed that would encourage you to make more bus journeys?**

Theme	Count
Improved connections (general)	25
Improve frequency / timings	11
Improved connections (villages / rural)	9
Improved amenities/service	7
Cheaper/ free fares	1
Consultation	1
Improved connections (Hospital)	1

Is there anything else you would like us to consider as part of our work to improve bus services in future?

Theme	Count
Improved connections (general)	21
Improve frequency / timings	12
Other	10
Improved connections (villages / rural)	9
Bus information improvement (tecnolo...)	5
Improved connections (Hospital)	4
Cheaper/ free fares	3
Consultation issues	1

Bus stops

Amount of bus stops in residential areas

3 (5.08%)
5 (8.47%)
21 (35.59%)
8 (13.56%)
9 (15.25%)
13 (22.03%)

- Fairly good
- Neither good nor poor
- Very good
- Very poor
- Fairly poor
- Not sure

Amount of bus stops in town centre areas (There are enough bus stops in town centre areas)

2 (3.28%)
4 (6.56%)
4 (6.56%)
24 (39.34%)
11 (18.03%)
16 (26.23%)

- Fairly good
- Very good
- Neither good nor poor
- Fairly poor
- Very poor
- Not sure

Accessibility of bus stops

5 (8.33%)
7 (11.67%)
23 (38.33%)
11 (18.33%)
14 (23.33%)

- Fairly good
- Neither good nor poor
- Very good
- Fairly poor
- Very poor
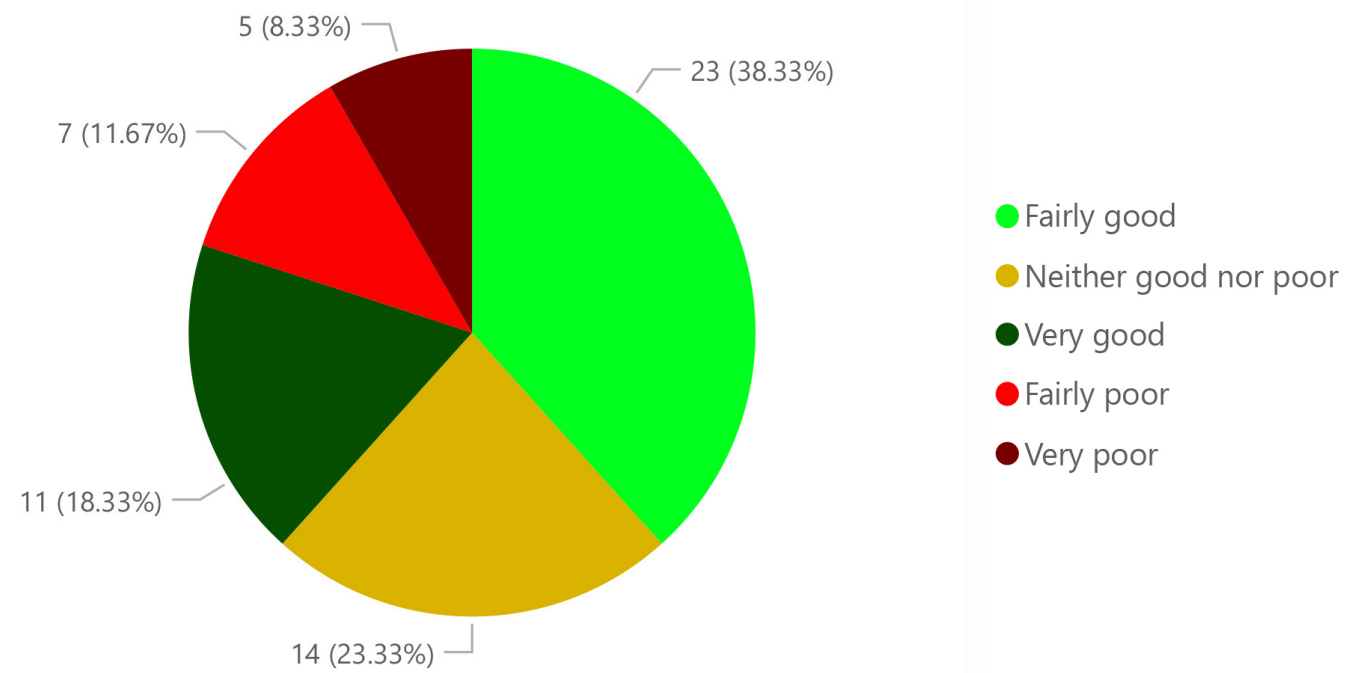
Maintenance of buses and bus stops

4 (6.56%)
6 (9.84%)
21 (34.43%)
6 (9.84%)
9 (14.75%)
15 (24.59%)

- Fairly good
- Neither good nor poor
- Fairly poor
- Very good
- Very poor
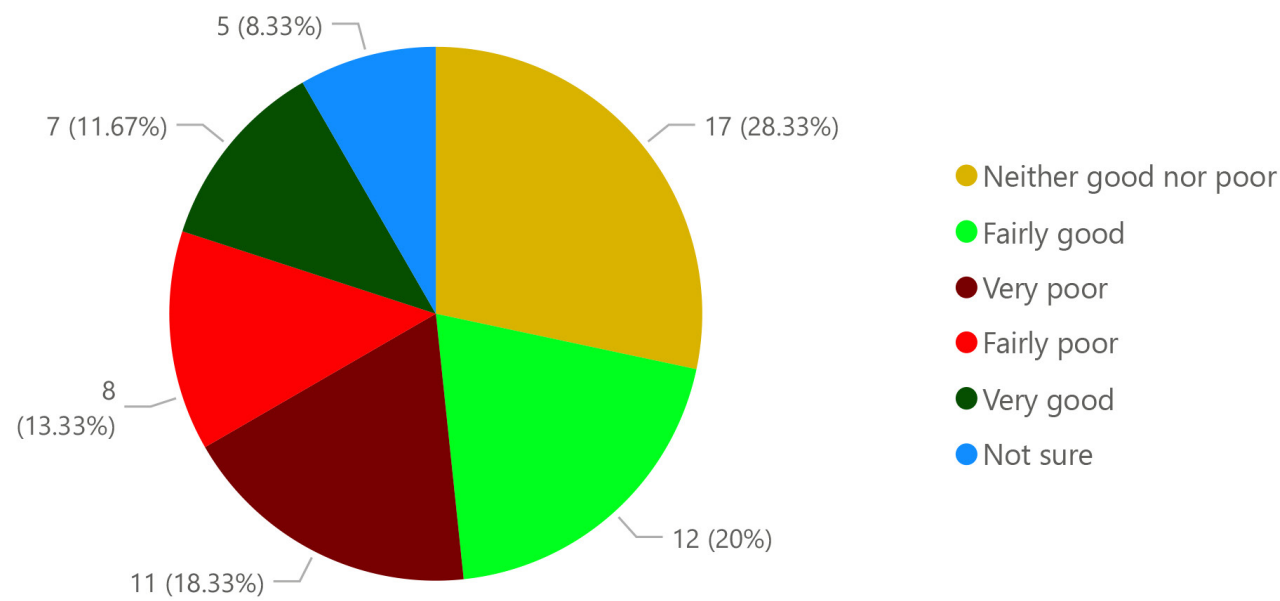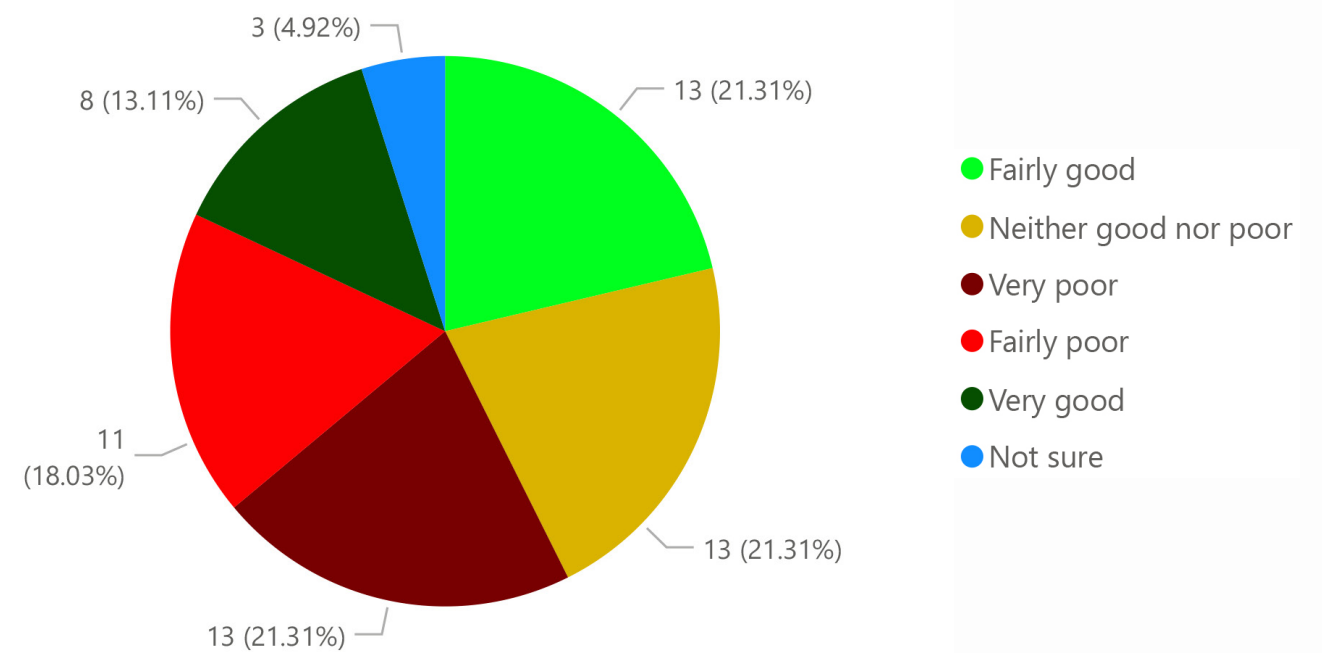- Not sure
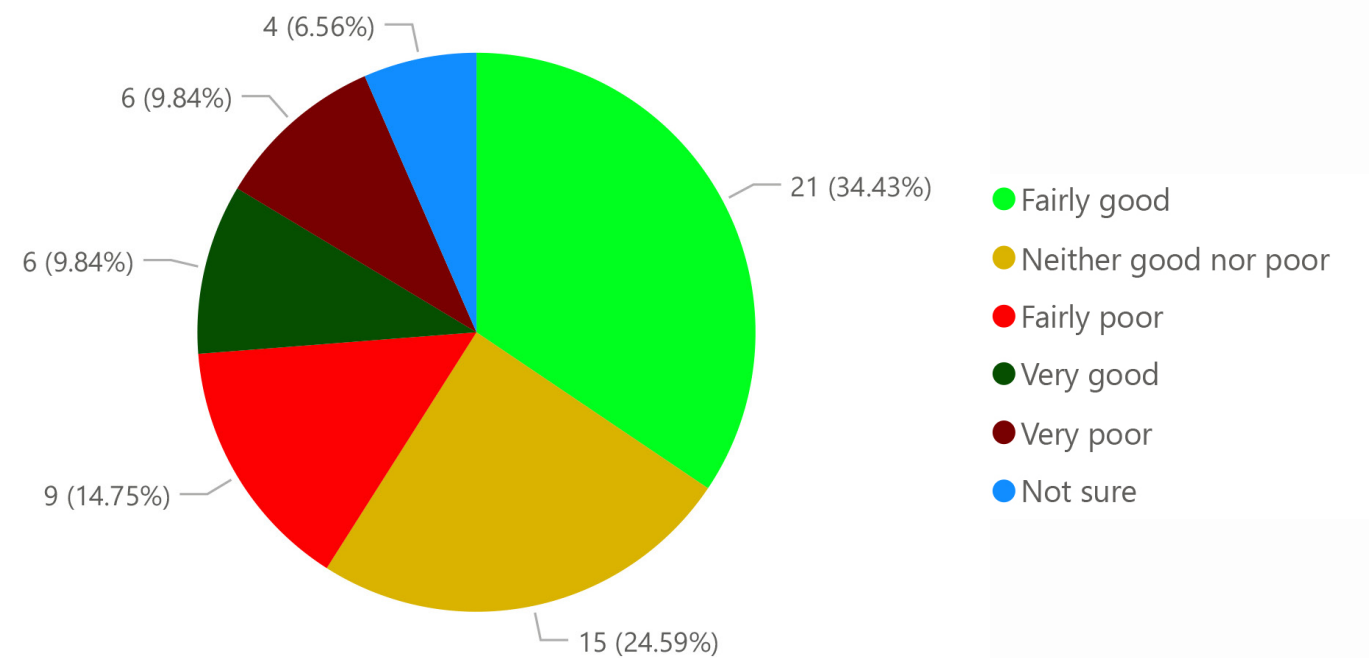
Connectivity and availability

With regards to the connectivity of the services and the availability of real time information, most respondents rated the service either 'fairly good' or' neither good nor poor'
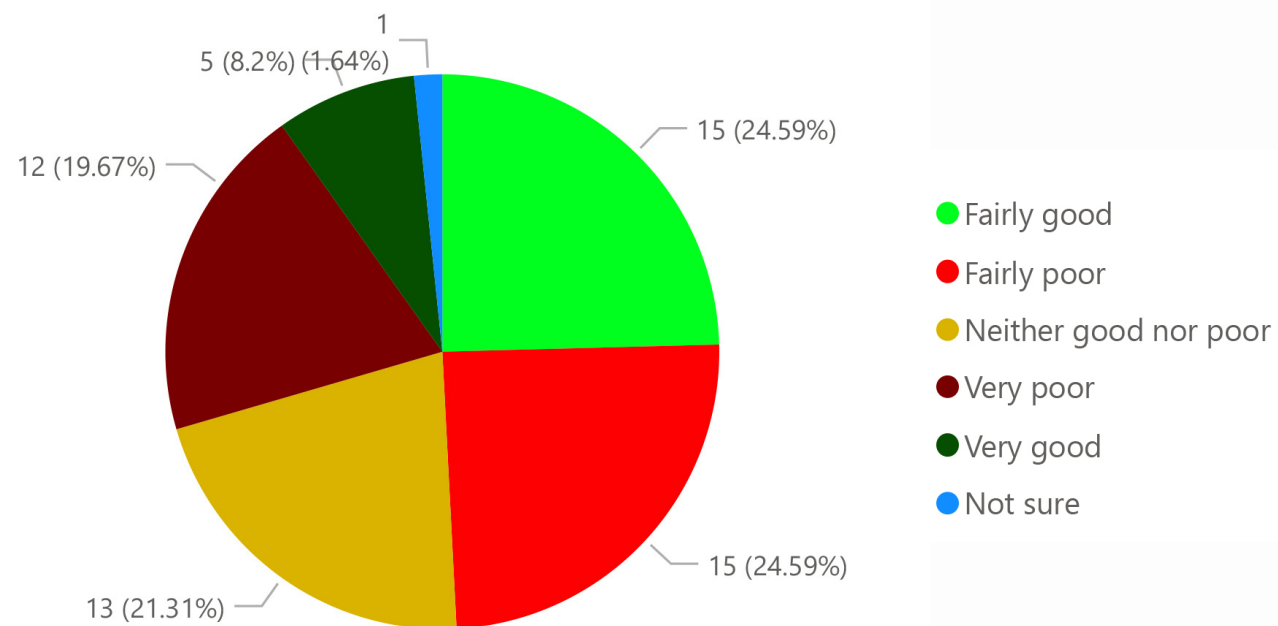
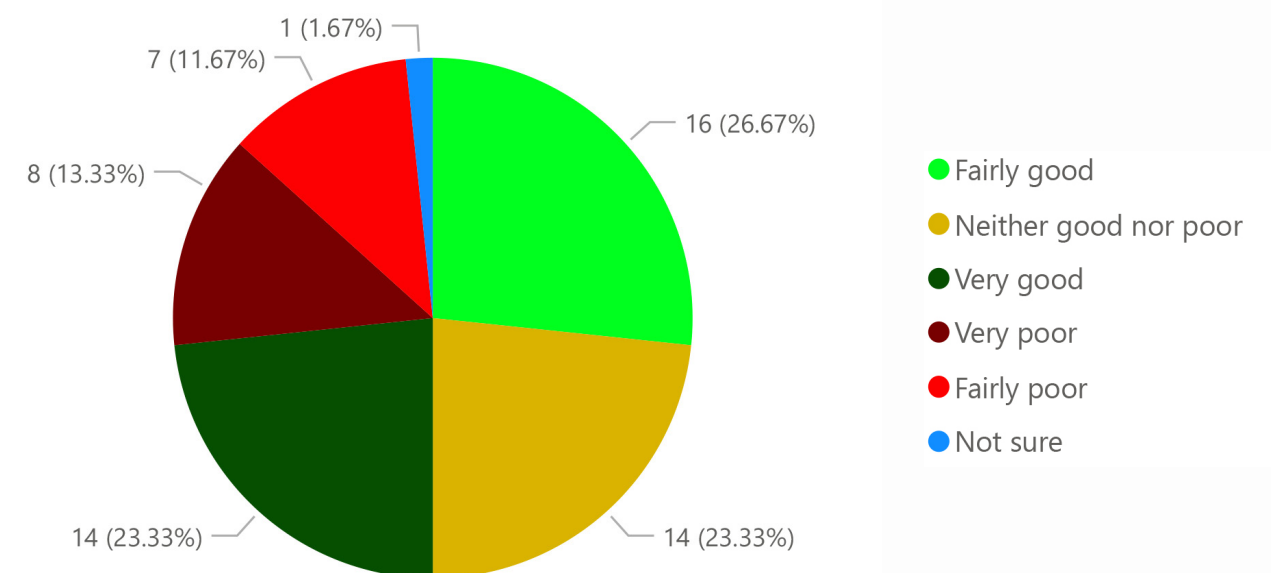### Connectivity with onward transport (for example trains)

5 (8.33%)
7 (11.67%)
17 (28.33%)
8 (13.33%)
12 (20%)
11 (18.33%)

- Neither good nor poor
- Fairly good
- Very poor
- Fairly poor
- Very good
- Not sure

Availability of real time information

3 (4.92%)
8 (13.11%)
13 (21.31%)
11 (18.03%)
13 (21.31%)
13 (21.31%)

- Fairly good
- Neither good nor poor
- Very poor
- Fairly poor
- Very good
- Not sure

Reliability of service

5 (8.2%)
1 (1.64%)
15 (24.59%)
12 (19.67%)
13 (21.31%)
15 (24.59%)

- Fairly good
- Fairly poor
- Neither good nor poor
- Very poor
- Very good
- Not sure

Speed of services

1 (1.67%)
7 (11.67%)
16 (26.67%)
8 (13.33%)
14 (23.33%)
14 (23.33%)

- Fairly good
- Neither good nor poor
- Very good
- Very poor
- Fairly poor
- Not sure

bsi.

Certificate of Registration

QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM - ISO 9001:2015

This is to certify that:

Project Centre Limited
12th Floor, One America Square
17 Crosswall
London
EC3N 2LB
United Kingdom

Holds Certificate Number: FS 77166

and operates a Quality Management System which complies with the requirements of ISO 9001:2015 for the following scope:

Central administration and specialist support for outsourced provision of multi-disciplinary consultancy & contractual services to the public and private sectors including feasibility studies, detailed design and implementation in the areas of traffic and transportation, traffic technology, parking, urban design, structural engineering and highways management.
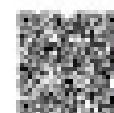
For and on behalf of BSI:

Matt Page, Managing Director Assurance - UK & Ireland

Original Registration Date: 2003-08-28   Effective Date: 2022-04-29
Latest Revision Date: 2022-04-25   Expiry Date: 2025-04-28

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