

**To:** Transport & Health Policy Makers, & Practitioners  
**From:** Prof Adrian Davis, TRI, Edinburgh Napier University  
**Date:** 3rd March 2022  
**Subject:** Essential Evidence 4 Scotland No.50: Impact of Covid-19 on lifestyles and re-location

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Top Line: With wider use of telecommuting since March 2020, more workers may choose to re-locate out of urban areas, commuting longer if the trip frequency reduces, which present challenges to transport sector de-carbonisation plans.

COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation in March 2020. The UK and Scottish Governments initially responded to the threat of COVID-19 by imposing a 'lockdown' to restrict everyday life activities to the essential minimum. Individuals' decisions to limit their travel, to reduce their own exposure to COVID-19, along with the Government imposed lockdown significantly affected transport and travel patterns. By the end of March 2020, people were ordered to stay at home. Many businesses and schools switched to virtual operations, which resulted in the wide emergence of telecommuting patterns disrupting the pre-pandemic travel behaviour. Since the pandemic's onset, for example, shopping has been the leading purpose of trips undertaken, followed by outdoor exercise replacing work related travel in Scotland. The trend continued to stay relevant during the second lockdown in December 2020.<sup>1</sup>

Given the subsequent trends of reduced frequency of commute trips, residential location may be more influenced by non-commute factors. Residential location preference changes may then influence mode share, urban expanse, land use and have long term consequences on demand for housing and transport infrastructure and services. These present fresh challenges for de-carbonisation strategies. TRI researchers collected data through an online survey administered during Scotland's second COVID-19 lockdown in February 2021, focusing on changes, perceptions, attitudes regarding lifestyle changes, travel behavior, and relocation preferences.<sup>2</sup> The survey, using a representative Scottish population sample, was completed by 994 Scottish residents aged 18 or above. The findings highlighted that with wider use of telecommuting, individuals may choose to commute longer if the trip frequency reduces. As a result, the extents of suburban settlements as well as definition of accessibility may change due to COVID-19 related relocations.

Overall, 40% of survey respondents expected to move from their current residence, with 27% intending to move in the next 5 years. Of those willing to relocate, 57% would like to stay in the same area, while 33% would like to move from their area, but stay in Scotland. Only 10% would like to move away from Scotland. In terms of psychological drivers of location decisions, people that contracted COVID-19 are more likely to make radical lifestyle changes, which can involve relocation. On the other hand, people who feel financially secure and those who consider their family to be a significant part of life do not intend to relocate. Those with high self-reported compliance of COVID-19 regulations are not inclined to relocate, possibly because they can accommodate regulatory changes in their lifestyle with relative ease. Those with low compliance are more likely to relocate due to potential unmet requirements from their present home.

The findings help explain increased demand for rural housing amidst the pandemic<sup>3</sup> emphasising the challenge for optimal public services provision including transport.<sup>4</sup> Relocations to rural areas combined with potential increases in commute distance and extent of suburbs may thwart de-carbonisation targets.

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<sup>1</sup> Transport Scotland, 2021. COVID-19: Scotland's transport and travel trends during the first six months of the Pandemic <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/covid-19-scotland-s-transport-and-travel-trends-during-the-first-six-months-of-the-pandemic/> (accessed 2.03.22).

<sup>2</sup> Fonzone, A., Fountas, G., Saxena, A., 2021. Residential Relocation After COVID-19. Proceedings of 10TH International Travel Demand Management Symposium, TINNGO & DIAMOND FINAL CONFERENCE ISSN 2811-5341. <https://doi.org/10.21427/yewc-rq34> Funded by the Scottish Funding Council.

<sup>3</sup> Zoopla. 2021. *Housing market on course for busiest year since global financial crisis* - Zoopla. <https://rb.gy/frtlos>

<sup>4</sup> See Essential Evidence - Impact of Covid-19 Transport series: No.1 Public Transport Use [Essential-Evidence-4-Scotland-No-49-Impact-of-Covid-19-on-Public-Transport-use.pdf \(napier.ac.uk\)](https://napier.ac.uk/essential-evidence-4-scotland-no-49-impact-of-covid-19-on-public-transport-use.pdf)