



To: Transport & Health Policy Makers, & Practitioners
From: Prof Adrian Davis, TRI, Edinburgh Napier University
Date: 17th March 2022
Subject: Essential Evidence 4 Scotland No.51: Impact of Covid-19 on transport inequalities

Top Line: Since the pandemic began in March 2020 there has been an uneven distribution of risk of infection through travel behaviours with higher professional and skilled workers including others who can work from home doing so. By contrast, low income and low skills households, including some key workers, and those with disabilities are more likely to use buses with little or no alternatives at a time when risk of infection and hospitalisation from Covid-19 was high.

People on low incomes, disabled people, people with chronic health problems, older people, women and those working outside normal working hours often have fewer transport options.¹ As part of TRI research exploring aspects of travel behaviour change due to the Covid-19 pandemic one of the areas of concern has been the potential for increasing inequalities.² Questionnaire responses from 994 Scottish residents were examined in determining changes in future public transport use in Scotland during and potentially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically this was to identify travel habits, attitudes and preferences during the different phases of the COVID-19 outbreak and travel intentions after the pandemic.³

The study confirms that pre-lockdown travel choices significantly affect post-lockdown travel choices. Those who drove their car frequently (at least three days a week) pre-pandemic were significantly more likely than infrequent car drivers to anticipate travelling less by bus or train in the future. Almost two thirds of those who indicated that they would use public transport less stated that they would do so also because of the possibility of getting infections carried by other passengers. Those with lower educational attainment (non-degree tertiary qualification or below) and those living in larger households were significantly more likely to reduce their bus or train use in the future. On the contrary, those with a long-term illness or disability that prevents them from working are significantly more likely than those in other employment categories to anticipate travelling the same amount or more by bus in the future, pointing to a potential captivity to public transport among certain groups.

TRI researchers carried out further research addressing travel behaviour for the purposes of outdoor exercise.⁴ The findings suggest that those with a health problem or disability, those who live in households where the main income earner is employed in a semi-skilled/unskilled manual occupation or is unemployed and ethnic minority groups (i.e., any mixed, Asian, or Black background) were significantly more likely to complete no weekly outdoor exercise trips in the initial stages of the pandemic. As a result, the researchers suggested that those who live in households where the main income earner is employed in a semi/unskilled manual occupation or is unemployed are more likely to suffer the mental and physical health issues associated with limited exercise.

¹ Teuton J, et al, 2020 Transport use, health and health inequalities: The impact of measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19. A rapid review of evidence in support of a health inequalities impact assessment. Public Health Scotland.

² Funded by the Scottish Funding Council.

³ Downey, L. et al, 2021 The impact of Covid-19 on the intentions to use public transport – the case of Scotland, 101st Annual Meeting of the Transportation Research Board, Washington, D.C.

⁴ Temple, T., Fountas, G., Fonzone, A. 2021 Trips for outdoor exercise at different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in Scotland, *Journal of Transport & Health*, 23: 101280.