



Transport issues affecting healthcare appointments in Rotherham

April 2024

healthwatch
Rotherham

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About us

Healthwatch Rotherham is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Rotherham. We are here to make sure that those running services put people at the heart of care.

Our sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf. We focus on ensuring that people's worries and concerns about current services are addressed and work to get services right for the future.

Background to the study:

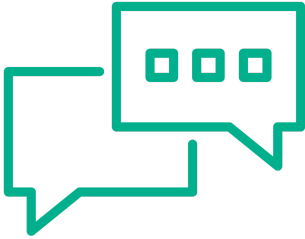
In 2023 we carried out some initial work in collaboration with other Healthwatch and Citizens Advice in South Yorkshire around transport issues in the region.

Following on from this, we decided to use some of the original planning to carry out further investigations into this subject, focusing on transport issues faced by Rotherham residents in attending healthcare appointments.

Transport problems are a recurring issue that are brought to us through our engagement and signposting work. Our work plan for 2024-2027 allows us the flexibility to focus our attention on and respond to issues that present themselves throughout the year. This enabled us to carry out this snapshot study which will be fed back to service providers and stakeholders.

This report will provide an overview of what some patients are experiencing, with the potential of any common themes that surface from this initial report being investigated in more detail in the future.

Why we did the research:



Through our engagement work with local communities in 2023/24, we heard about the issues people faced in getting to their healthcare appointments due to changes in public transport services.



A recurring issue that was raised was the lack of parking at Rotherham hospital which was causing extra worry and stress to those attending appointments.

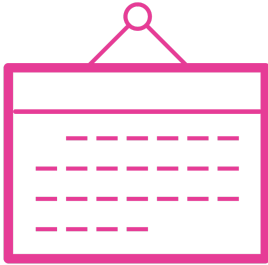


The cost of living crisis has affected many people and we wanted to find out if the price of parking and transport has impacted on people's ability to travel to their appointments.



People told us how they were having to allocate whole days to travel to appointments due to a lack of frequent and direct public transport services and availability of parking.

What we did:



We did not want this to be a large-scale report, so we conducted the study over 30 days during April 2024.



We produced an online survey which was shared on our social media pages, on our website and amongst local services and organisations.



We also held some in-person discussions through our engagements at various events around Rotherham. This allowed people to provide feedback and comments and share their experiences with us face to face.

We obtained **23** responses from our survey online and a further **12** responses from our face to face engagements.

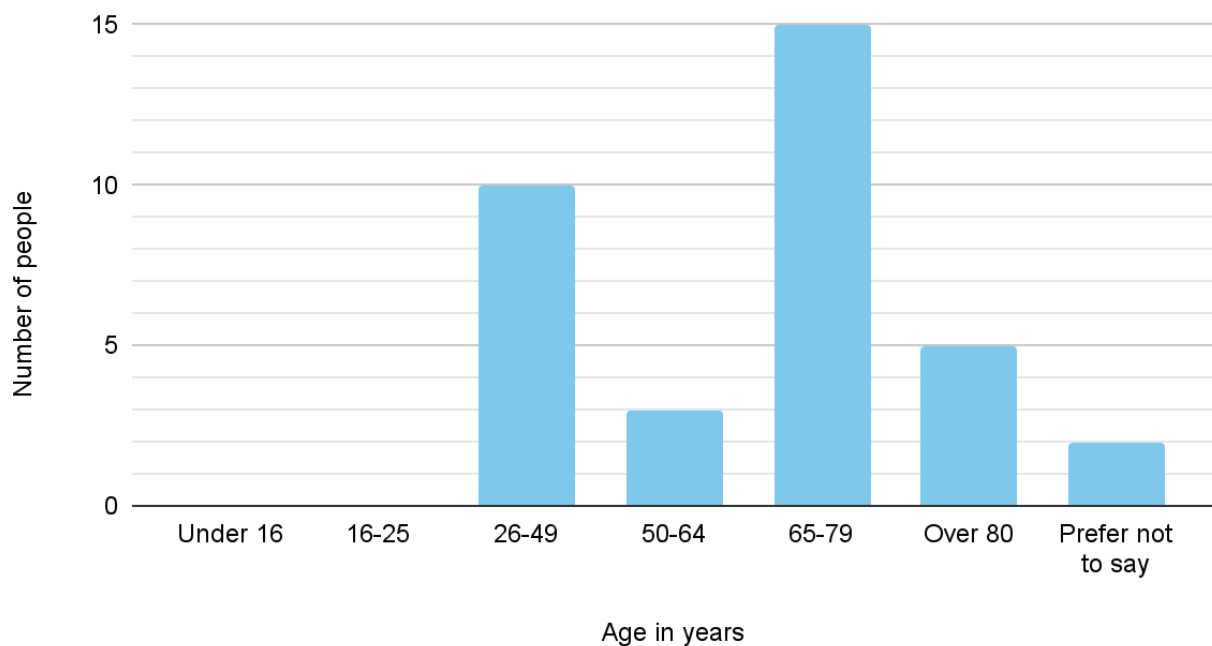


We worked with The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust to compare data to see if we could find any links between transport issues and appointments at the hospital where patients 'Did not attend' (DNA).

Findings:

Demographics:

Age of respondents



We had responses from a good mixture of age groups, although it is noticeable that we didn't hear from younger people in the area.

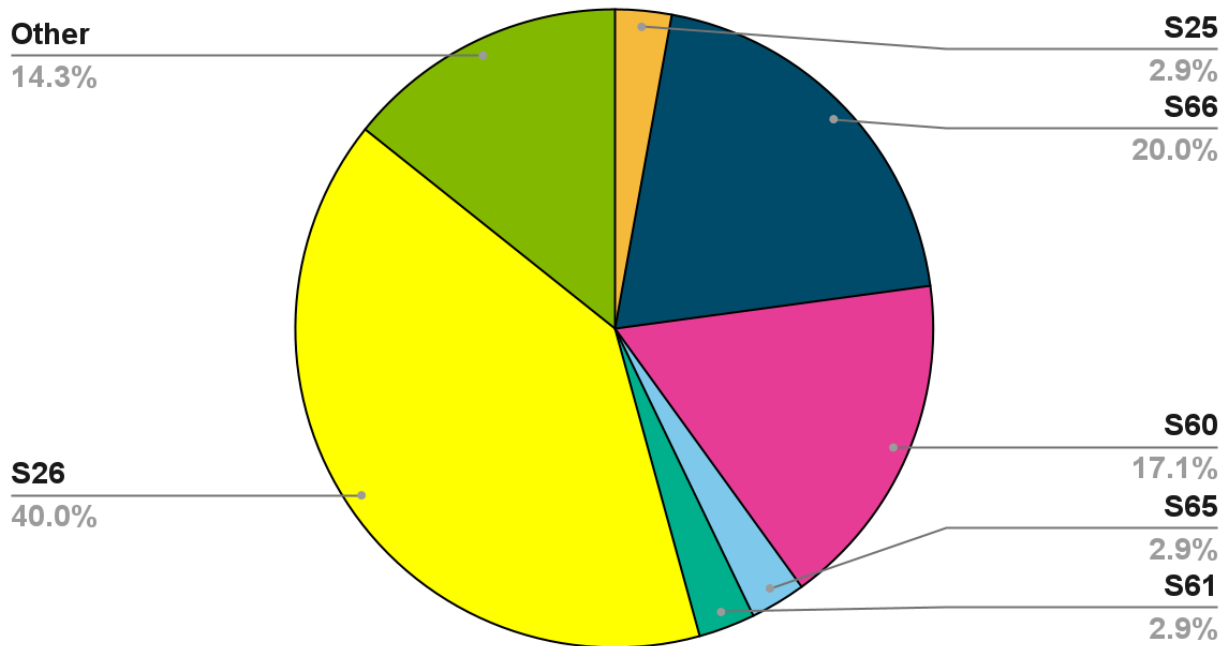
This may be due to under 16's relying on parents and guardians to transport them to appointments and those in the 16-25 category, either experiencing less issues with transport, or due to general better health, having to attend fewer healthcare appointments.

From the responses we got from those in the retirement age groups (65-79 years and 80+), some of the concerns they have centre around maintaining their independence as they get older.

One person told us:

“I get my husband to drive me everywhere at the moment, but what about in the future? I won't always be able to rely on him and I want to keep my independence as much as possible and not rely on others or pay an expensive price for a taxi”

Postcode of respondents



Postcode key:

S25 = Dinnington, North Anston, South Anston, Laughton en le Morthen, Thurcroft, Todwich, Brookhouse

S26 = Swallownest, Kiveton Park, Aston, Wales, Todwick, Harthill, Aughton, Ulley, Waleswood

S60 = Rotherham central, Canklow, Moorgate, Whiston, Brinsworth, Catcliffe, Treeton, Parkgate, Broom, Masbrough

S61 = Thorpe Hesley, Scholes, Parkgate, Nether Haugh, Kimberworth

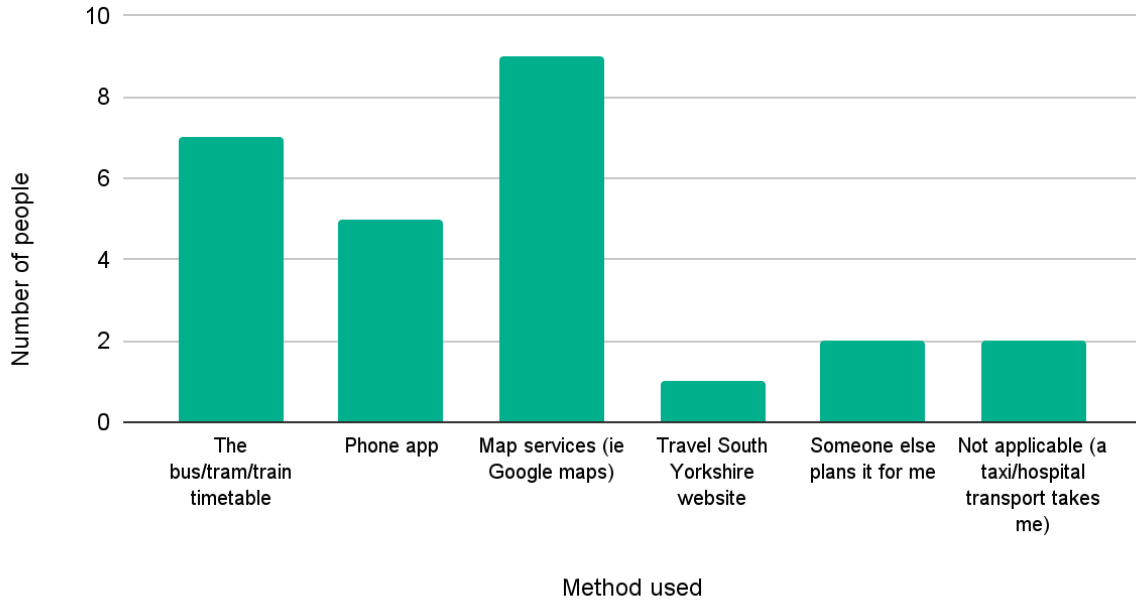
S65 = Dalton, Herringthorpe, Hooton Roberts, Ravenfield, Thrybergh, Rawmarsh, Aldwarke

S66 = Maltby, Wickersley, Bramley, Thurcroft, Braithwell, Morthen, Hellaby, Micklebring, Stainton, Stone

Although this is only a snapshot, we had responses from around the borough which has allowed us to see an overall picture, just on a small scale. The concentration of respondents in the S26 area is due to a focused engagement event in that area where we were able to get some face to face feedback.

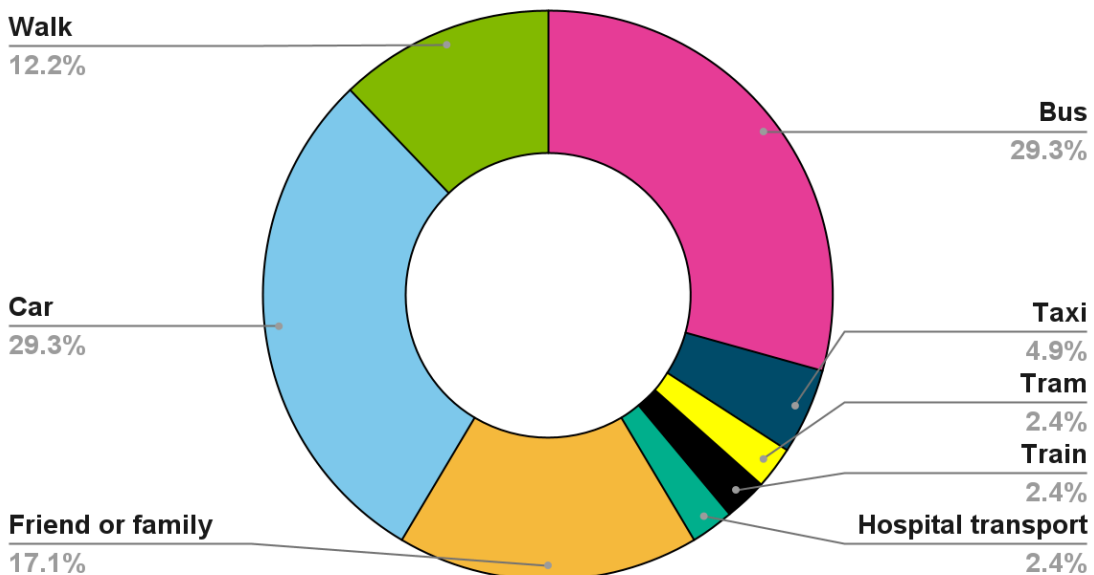
Survey responses:

How do people plan their journey?



We found the most common way that people planned their journey was either by using map services or by using the actual timetables for the transport option they were taking. This split is likely to be connected to the type of transport used to travel to appointments. Those driving to appointments are most likely to use map services and those using public transport most likely to use timetables.

Method of transport used



Travelling by bus or by car were the most common methods of travel which links to our findings on how people plan their journey's. However, the actual number of people using a car will be higher than the 29% shown. This is because those relying on family or friends to get them to their appointments are also likely to be using a car.

These two forms of transport raised the most concerns from those we spoke to.

10 people gave parking issues as their main problem when travelling to their healthcare appointments. Some of the comments we heard were:

"Parking for disabled is few and far between. More disabled bays are needed for the extra door width"

"If I drive, car parking can be difficult at the hospital"

"Parking fees"

"Parking at the hospital is dreadful"

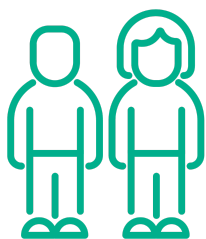
"Parking at Rotherham hospital is a nightmare! Unless you have an early appointment, all the spaces are gone and you have to allow for so much extra time in case you can't park. It adds so much more stress. I now park on side roads as it's easier but it must be a pain for local residents"

"Rotherham hospital is an absolute joke for parking - often I have to set off for any hospital appointments really early to ensure that I can find somewhere to park. The cost of parking is extortionate and most of the time at least one of the machines to pay is out of order"

"Parking is a nightmare at any hospital/GP surgery. No spaces, parking fees and takes ages to find a space"

"Some of my friends I know have missed hospital appointments due to not being able to park at the hospital, they've driven round and round and ended up leaving and missed their appointments"

"When I have driven there, I couldn't park nearby and had to leave"



8 out of **23** respondents told us they relied on public transport (most using buses) to get to their appointments.

Out of those **8** people using public transport, **6** had missed appointments in the last year because it was too difficult to travel to the appointment (compared to **1** who didn't use public transport).

Some of the comments we heard included:

"I worry about how limited public transport is and because of this I sometimes might struggle to get a seat"

"I think people drive/get lifts because the bus service just isn't good enough and not reliable"

"I am in Aston [but] the bus only goes through Swallownest which is no good to me. I cannot walk that far"

"I would like to get the bus but can't because they are so few and far between and I don't want to miss my appointment, so I rely on family members to take me to Rotherham Hospital"

"From our area (Aston/Swallownest) there is 1 bus an hour and at some times of the day, less than that, there is 1 every hour and 20 minutes"

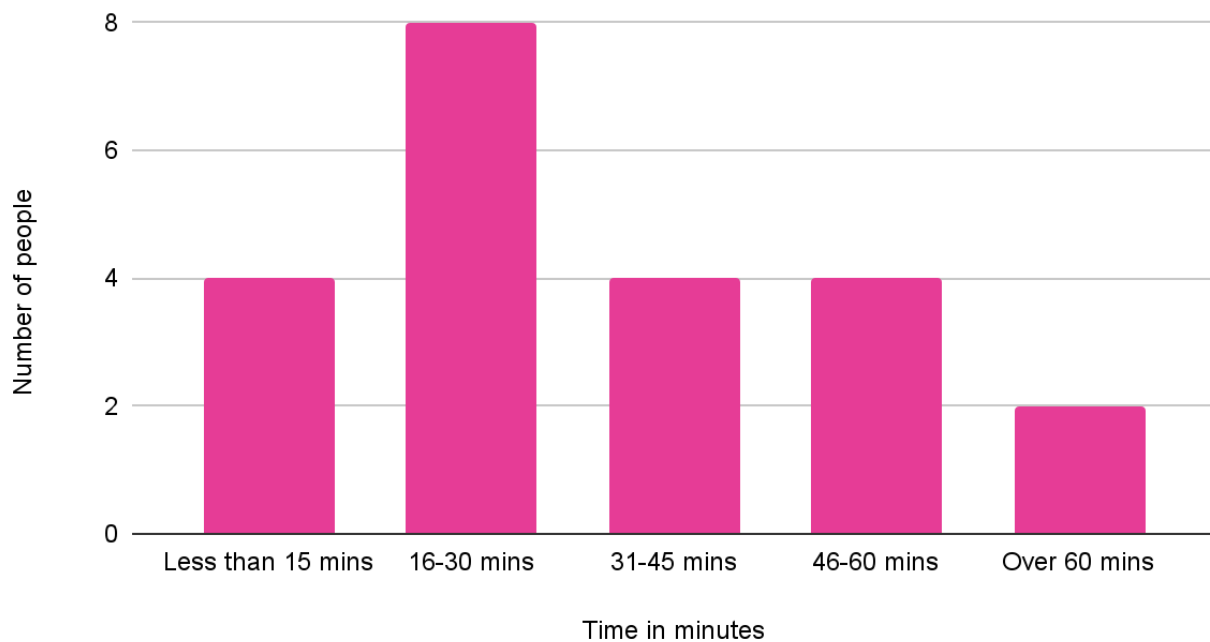
"If you are relying on buses to the hospital, you have to wipe out the whole day for this one trip due to getting to bus stops, waiting and hoping there is space on the bus as sometimes it can be a single deck bus, in fact in most cases it is and then attending your appointment, waiting again for the bus to arrive around your appointment time, then the journey and then the walk home from the bus stop, it's crazy!"

"The bus service from Maltby is poor - never on time"

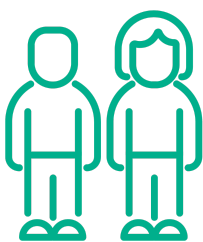
"I have been known to be standing at the bus stop for over an hour before with 2 missed buses. I often have to set off 2 hours early to appointments to avoid missing them"

"Not only are there not enough buses, but there aren't enough bus stops along the way. I have a friend who isn't very mobile and can't walk far, she has no family to rely on for lifts and therefore a taxi is her only way around as the nearest bus stop is way too far for her to walk to"

Length of journey from start to finish



We asked people how long it took them to get to their appointments, from setting off from home, to reaching where they were going. For most people, their journey was no longer than 30 minutes, however, we had 2 people tell us that it took them over an hour to get to their destination. Both of those people reported that in the last 12 months they had missed appointments because it was too difficult to travel there.

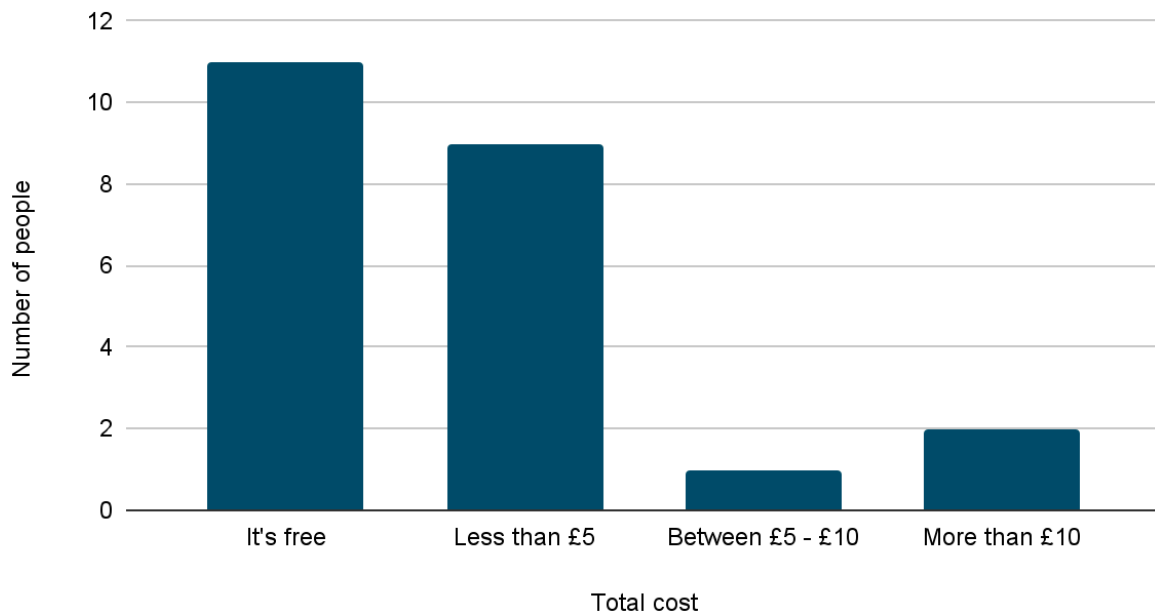


Our survey showed that out of the **6** people whose journey took over 45 minutes, **4** had missed appointments in the last 12 months due to difficulties travelling.

We also found that those whose journeys were the longest, were more likely to have to change transport at least once during their journey. This clearly has an impact on the length of time it takes to reach appointments.

3 people reported having to make 2 changes during their journeys. Of these, 2 told us they had health conditions that added to the difficulty of their journey.

Total cost of the journey



Although most of the people we spoke to considered their transport costs to be free* or less than £5, we still received several comments about how expensive parking at Rotherham Hospital was and in one case, we were told that a round trip there would cost the person about £40.

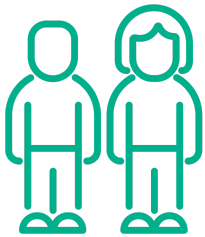
The higher costs are mainly linked to using taxis, but we are aware that this is the only option for some people. Those who have health/mobility issues, a lack of support from friends and family or restricted access to cheaper transport options, often face higher costs to access appointments. Some people are eligible for [help with the cost of travel to healthcare appointments](#) but not everyone is aware of this.

In Rotherham we also have access to a [Patient Transport Service](#) which is run by the Yorkshire Ambulance Service. This provides NHS funded transport for people who are unable to travel to their healthcare appointments by any other means due to their medical condition. However, this service is only available to people who meet the eligibility criteria and has to be applied for each time it is needed.

Only **1** person who responded to our survey said that they used hospital transport to get them to their appointments which may be due to eligibility, availability or awareness of the service.

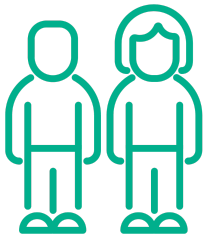
*petrol may not have been taken into account when deciding how much their journey cost.

Those using public transport, reported the cost of travel being a factor in attending their healthcare appointments.



Out of the **8** people using public transport, **2** had missed appointments in the last year because they couldn't afford the cost of travel (compared to **0** who didn't use public transport).

Does anything else make your journey difficult?



6 people considered that their own health issues made getting to healthcare appointments difficult.

Out of these, **5** used public transport to get there and all of them had missed healthcare appointments in the last 12 months.

This raises concerns that those with the greatest health needs face the most difficult journey's to get to their appointments.

"I am not very mobile"

"Cannot walk far, eyesight and hearing limited"

"I have health issues and just wish I could get to my appointments a bit easier"

"I have both mobility issues and sight impairments"

"My memory is not so good, which makes it difficult for me to get around"

"My husband always takes me to the hospital and drops me off at the front as I wouldn't be able to walk from the occasional space that might be available that is always at the very back of the car park"

If you could change one thing about transport services in your local area, what would it be?

The overwhelming majority of people said the one thing they would change would be a more frequent, reliable and available bus service, which would enable them to get to their appointments at Rotherham Hospital.

“More frequent bus services, especially to Rotherham Hospital”

“Better, regular, on time buses - more frequent services so that when a bus finally comes along, we are not packed inside like cattle”

“Ensure that [buses] are more regular so any delays can be countered by regular services”

“For the bus service to arrive at the time advertised”

“More frequent service (bus 19 past the hospital)”

“Regularity and reliability”

“The bus service used to be fabulous!”

“The bus services from this area used to be excellent - why is this not a priority anymore? Older people are living longer and we shouldn't be forgotten about!”

“More buses available to Rotherham Hospital, I think there are only 2 buses that go past there. There used to be a shuttle from the town centre that was always busy, that needs to come back!”

“Build a better public transport network and encourage people to use public transport as a means of travel”

“Make the hospital bus go down Lodge Lane”

“More buses to the hospital from all across different areas of Rotherham. There used to be a bus that went backwards and forwards from the town centre. This needs putting back on again! Find some funding, it's important!”

Rotherham Hospital is currently served by 4 bus routes (19, 19a, 20, 21 and 207) which cover the following areas*:

19/19a – Rotherham, Wickersley, Thurcroft, Dinnington, North Anston, Woodsetts, Worksop [19 route and timetable](#)

20 – Rotherham, Ulley, Thurcroft, Dinnington, Woodsetts, Firbeck, Throapham, Dinnington [20 route and timetable](#)

21 – Rotherham, Broom, Whiston, Aughton, Swallownest, Wales, Todwick, Harthill [21 route and timetable](#)

207 – Rotherham, Moorgate, Whiston, Brinsworth, Meadowhall, Carbrook, Sheffield [207 route and timetable](#)

*information correct on 14th June 2024

The frequency of these services differs considerably.

The 19/19a runs regularly at every 30 minutes during the day, although not every bus stops at every location.

Both the 20 and 207 only run 3 services per day, with the 207 only running in an evening during the week.

The 21 runs regularly during the day but those reliant on this route have to wait between 1 hour and 1 hour 20 minutes for the bus to arrive.

This clearly creates inequalities between people's ability to access regular, reliable public transport to attend their healthcare appointments.

A couple of people also raised parking issues as the thing they would like to change:

“More parking at the hospital and less expensive”

“Better parking”

Although Rotherham Hospital has a large car park, it fills up quickly and we regularly receive feedback that this causes extra stress and worry for those attending appointments. There is a waiting bay for those dropping off or picking up, which is free of charge for up to 30 minutes, as well as bays for Blue Badge Holders. There are concessions available for parking fees which can be found on their [website](#), along with the standard parking charges.

Transport issues and 'Did Not Attend' hospital appointments:

As part of our report, we worked with The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust (TRFT) to get information about the percentage of people not attending their hospital appointments. We wanted to find out if there were links between the transport issues highlighted in our survey and the number of people who did not attend their hospital appointments.

The main postcode areas in which people told us they had problems accessing public transport were S25, S26 and S66. These postcodes cover Swallownest, Aston and Maltby, all of which were mentioned on our surveys as areas with particularly poor bus services.

The information provided by TRFT, which covers January – March 2024, shows the patterns below:

- Swallownest has a **higher** non-attendance rate than the average.
- Aston has a **lower** non-attendance rate than the average.
- Maltby West has a non-attendance rate that is **average** for Rotherham.
- Maltby East has a **higher** non-attendance rate than the average.

The areas with the highest percentage of non-attenders were Rotherham East, Rotherham West, Dalton and Thrybergh, Hooper and Boston Castle.

This information suggests that non-attendance of hospital appointments may be linked closer to poverty rather than access to transport, with 3 of the most deprived areas of Rotherham (Rotherham East, Dalton and Thrybergh, and Maltby East), all having high non-attendance rates. This is further supported by the fact that in Aston, despite having relatively poor public transport services, people's attendance to hospital appointments is high. Although Aston has pockets of deprivation, it is generally one of the wealthier areas of Rotherham which suggests they are likely to have access to alternative methods of transport. This means they don't have to depend so heavily upon infrequent and unreliable public transport services.

Furthermore, Rotherham East, Rotherham West and Boston Castle have some of the most ethnically diverse populations in Rotherham. We know that those who speak little or no English face additional barriers in accessing healthcare. This is likely to also be a factor in the high rate of hospital non-attendance from these areas.

Conclusions

Although this is a small snapshot of people's experiences of travelling to their healthcare appointments, it has highlighted common areas of concern.

It is clear that the public transport system is failing to provide a reliable and frequent enough service to all areas of Rotherham. This leaves those with no alternative method of transport, having to allocate large amounts of their day to get to and from their appointments. From our survey, these individuals are also likely to be those who have additional healthcare issues that make travel even more difficult, and therefore longer journeys and travel times will have an even greater impact on them.

Furthermore, although we did not get survey responses from those living in the areas with the highest percentage of people who don't attend their hospital appointments, we know that these are areas of Rotherham where poverty levels are high. Those living in poverty are the most likely to have to rely on public transport due to the lack of any other alternatives. This means that although poverty could be considered to be the strongest link to hospital non-attendance, issues with public transport will also play a part.

Our survey showed a number of people were reliant on friends and family to get them to their appointments with some suggesting it was due to mobility issues or concern around parking. It is also fair to say that some will be due to a lack of access to a car or being able to drive. Those on lower incomes are more likely to face this issue, and without the support of family and friends, may find the cost of alternative transport prevents them attending appointments. This is supported by our analysis of hospital appointment non-attendance.

Reliance on friends and family has a wider impact on society as it may mean time away from work for those taking people to appointments. Also, there are concerns over the loss of independence in later life, as partners get older and can no longer take others to their appointments. Having a reliable, affordable and accessible public transport system would help ease concerns around maintaining independence in old age and also help reduce the reliance on friends and family in the short term.

The additional concern that was raised through our survey was that parking availability and charges also had an impact on how people travelled to their appointments. We heard how this had also led to people turning to friends and family for transport to avoid the stress of trying to find somewhere to park, particularly at Rotherham Hospital. Although parking charges at the hospital have remained the same since August 2019 ([The Star, 23rd January 2024](#)), they are still too expensive for some people and there is possibly a lack of awareness about the concessions available and/or the Healthcare Travel Cost Scheme. In the [Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust Green Plan 2022-2025](#), there were plans to introduce a new park and ride scheme in conjunction with local

supermarkets. This has not yet been introduced, but if it goes ahead, it will reduce demand on parking spaces at the hospital, potentially freeing them up for those with greater need.

Whilst our sample was only small, we received some detailed and insightful responses that have allowed us to highlight the ongoing challenges people in Rotherham face, when travelling to their healthcare appointments, and produce some recommendations that we will take to those with the power to make changes.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are:



NHS services should give consideration to travel arrangements when appointments are being made. Can the patient easily get to that appointment at that time - would a different time help? Is there somewhere else closer to the patient or easier for them to get to, where they can have the appointment?



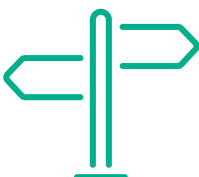
NHS services should make sure that people are aware of access to Patient Transport Services and the Healthcare Travel Cost Scheme when appointments are made.



Rotherham Hospital should advertise more widely the concessions available to help with parking charges.



Consideration should be given to reintroducing a free shuttle bus service between Rotherham Interchange and Rotherham Hospital.



The planned park and ride scheme for Rotherham Hospital should be introduced.

Responses

The report has been shared with The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust for their consideration.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to everyone who took the time to speak to us or complete our survey.
Thanks also to The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust for providing us with information to add to our report.

References

NHS services website for Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme information:

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/help-with-health-costs/healthcare-travel-costs-scheme-htcs/>

Yorkshire Ambulance Service website for Patient Transport Service information:

<https://www.yas.nhs.uk/our-services/patient-transport-service-pts/>

Rotherham Hospital website for parking information:

<https://www.therotherhamft.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/our-sites/rotherham-hospital/>

Travel South Yorkshire website for bus routes and timetables:

<https://www.travelsouthyorkshire.com/en-gb/timetabledetails/13f5f70a-0819-48f6-8a5e-47450abc647f>

[https://www.travelsouthyorkshire.com/TSY/media/Timetables/19-19a-Rotherham-valid-from-08-April-2024-\(PDF-656kb\).pdf?ext=.pdf](https://www.travelsouthyorkshire.com/TSY/media/Timetables/19-19a-Rotherham-valid-from-08-April-2024-(PDF-656kb).pdf?ext=.pdf)

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[https://www.travelsouthyorkshire.com/TSY/media/Timetables/21-Rotherham-valid-from-06-April-2024-\(PDF-620kb\).pdf?ext=.pdf](https://www.travelsouthyorkshire.com/TSY/media/Timetables/21-Rotherham-valid-from-06-April-2024-(PDF-620kb).pdf?ext=.pdf)

[https://www.travelsouthyorkshire.com/TSY/media/Timetables/207-208-Sheffield-valid-from-13-May-2024-\(PDF-519kb\).pdf?ext=.pdf](https://www.travelsouthyorkshire.com/TSY/media/Timetables/207-208-Sheffield-valid-from-13-May-2024-(PDF-519kb).pdf?ext=.pdf)

The Star, online article about parking at Rotherham Hospital:

<https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/people/rotherham-hospital-made-almost-ps600000-from-parking-charges-last-year-4489093>

The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust Green Plan 2022-2025:

<https://www.therotherhamft.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/Green%20Plan%202022-2025.pdf>

Ward information - Aston and Todwick

<https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/community-living/aston-todwick/2>

Ward information - Rotherham East

<https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/community-living/rotherham-east/2>

Ward information - Rotherham West

<https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/community-living/rotherham-west/2>

Ward information - Dalton and Thrybergh

<https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/community-living/dalton-thrybergh/2>

Ward information - Boston Castle

<https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/community-living/boston-castle/2>

Ward information - Maltby East

<https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/community-living/maltby-east/2>