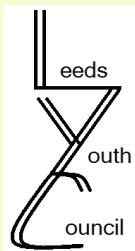


Draft

# Young People's Scrutiny Forum

# Catching the bus



Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)  
April 2007





# Summary

# Draft

We were given the opportunity to do a scrutiny review of a topic of our choice.

We chose bus services in Leeds.

We wanted to help remove some of the barriers young people face when using buses.

We thought the barriers were:

- ☞ The cost of travel
- ☞ The reliability of buses
- ☞ The routes buses take and the frequency of service
- ☞ The cleanliness and condition of buses
- ☞ Feeling unsafe catching buses
- ☞ The relationship between bus drivers and young people

We sent out a questionnaire asking young people what they thought and 309 responded by our deadline.

We found out that the cost of travel was by far the biggest barrier young people experience. 89% of young people said that cheaper fares would make them catch the bus more often and 61% of them said cost was the most important factor. This was true for all young people but particularly for those from Inner Leeds.

We discovered that young people in London got their bus travel free of charge and that parents reported that this had led to 59% of 14 and 15 year olds using the bus more often.

We spoke to officers from Metro, First Bus, Leeds City Council's Development department and Children's Services Unit.

We made lots of recommendations for change to improve things but think that unless big changes are made many young people's lives will be limited by transport barriers. As a result and in line with pensioners, disabled people and young people in London, we would like bus travel for all young people to be free of charge.

This is our main recommendation:

**That the Youth Council and ROAR lead a campaign with one aim - to achieve free bus travel for all young people - and that everyone who works with and for young people joins with and supports them in achieving it.**

## Background

- 1 In June 2006 Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) asked the Youth Council to suggest a topic of importance to young people which could be the subject of a scrutiny review under taken by young people on behalf of the board.
- 2 The Youth Council chose transport.
- 3 A Young People's Scrutiny Forum was then created to carry out this inquiry.
- 4 In order to involve as wide a range of young people as possible, it was decided to invite young people from ROAR to join the forum. ROAR (Reach Out and Reconnect) is the Children Leeds partnership of services providing the opportunity for children and young people to influence strategic decision making.
- 5 As a result the Young People's Scrutiny Forum consisted of young people who had volunteered from both the Youth Council and from ROAR.

## What we did

- 6 At our first meeting in September 2006, we, the Young People's Scrutiny Forum, decided to concentrate our inquiry on bus services in Leeds.
- 7 The aims of our inquiry were:
  - To find ways of increasing the number of young people catching the bus across the city by identifying the barriers they encountered
  - To work in partnership with service providers and others to identify solutions
  - To ensure the voices of young people in Leeds were heard with regard to transport issues
- 8 We decided to focus our inquiry on a number of themes and prioritised them into the following order:
  - The cost of travel
  - The routes, reliability and frequency of bus services
  - Feeling unsafe
  - The relationship between bus drivers and young people
  - The cleanliness and condition of buses, including graffiti
  - The extent to which young people's views were taken account of in decision making
- 9 So that as many young people's views and opinions were included as possible, we decided we needed to consult with other young people in Leeds.
- 10 We created three versions of a questionnaire, each with exactly the same set of questions: an electronic version available over the internet, a paper version and a paper version designed to be filled in by group exercise.
- 11 The questionnaire was sent to all Leeds Secondary Schools, all Leeds City Council Youth Groups and to all members of Leeds Youth Work Partnership. The questionnaire was also promoted via a number of articles in the local press and through our own friends and contacts.

- 12 309 young people responded to the questionnaire by our deadline:
- # The responses came from both male and female young people:
    - 99 male
    - 145 female
    - 65 no gender given
  - # There was a good variation in age:
    - 59 were 10-13
    - 88 were 14-15
    - 95 were 16-19
    - 67 no age given
  - # The responses came from all over Leeds:
    - 128 from Inner Leeds, defined as post codes LS1-LS13
    - 168 from Outer Leeds, defined as post codes LS14-LS29, BD3, BD11 & WF3
    - 13 gave no post code
- 13 There is a separate report with a fuller analysis of the questionnaire and its findings available on the internet at [www.leeds.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.leeds.gov.uk/scrutiny).
- 14 We then requested written information from First Bus and Metro:
- # First Bus is the main company operating bus services in Leeds
  - # Metro is the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority (PTA) and Executive (PTE): its principal duty is to secure or promote the provision of a system of public transport which meets the needs of the area.
- 15 We considered this information before meeting with officers from First Bus and Metro along with officers from Leeds City Council's Development department and Children's Services unit to discuss our concerns.



*Team Metro (Left) take on Team First (Right) in a transport quiz which helped focus our discussions when we met with them on 22nd February 2007.*



*The fantastic Ladell with the scores on the doors.*

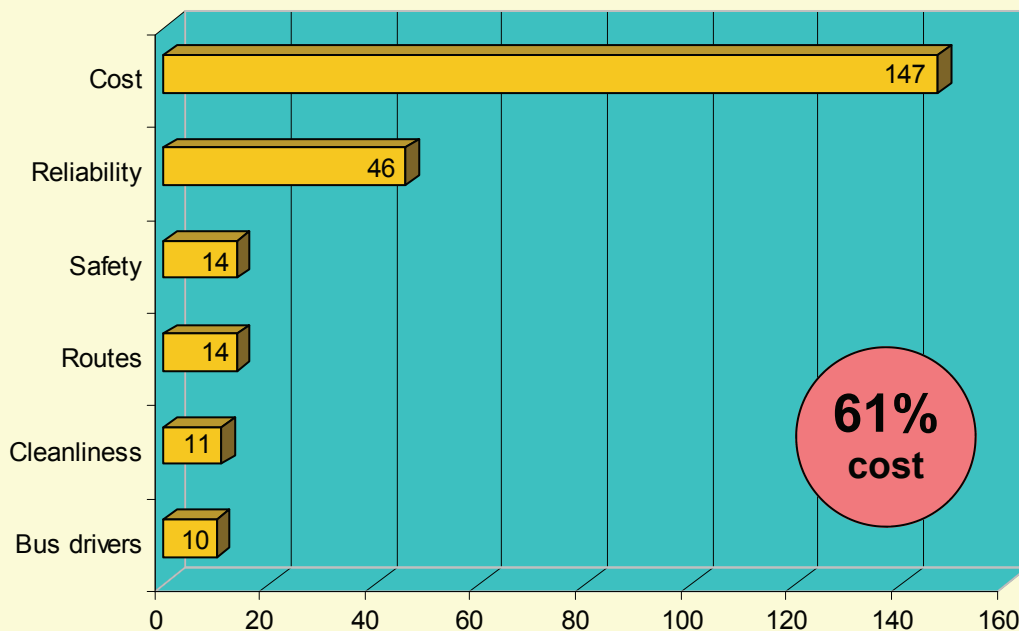
- 16 This is the final report of our inquiry, its findings and recommendations.

# The cost of travel

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Bus fares are very poor value for money - they are very expensive for youths, they use all my pocket money.

- 17 The cost of travel turned out to be by far the biggest barrier to catching the bus facing young people.
- 18 Our survey asked: What would make you catch the bus more often? Young people were given the following options:
- ☐ Cheaper fares (Cost)
  - ☐ If the buses were more reliable (Reliability)
  - ☐ More buses going to more places (Routes)
  - ☐ Cleaner newer buses (Cleanliness)
  - ☐ If I felt safer catching the bus (Safety)
  - ☐ Friendlier bus drivers (Bus drivers)
- They were asked to choose three from the list, then rank them in order of importance.
- 19 61% of the young people put cheaper fares as the number one factor that would make them catch the bus more often. This was significantly higher than other factors.

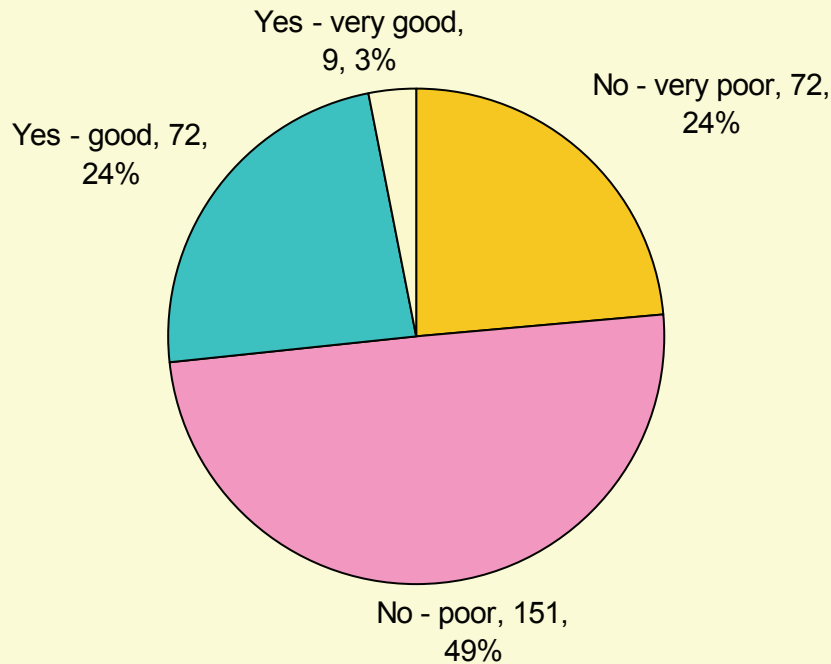


242 young people answered this question

61% cost

- 20 Cost was an issue for young people from all over Leeds but more so when we looked at young people's responses from Inner Leeds:
- ☐ Inner Leeds 66% of young people put cheaper fares first (57 of 86)
  - ☐ Outer Leeds 57% of young people put cheaper fares first (85 of 150)
- 21 In fact 89% of young people put cheaper fares in the top three.

22 Also, when we asked, 'do you think bus fares in Leeds are good value for money?', 73% of young people said no, they were poor or very poor value for money.



23 We asked First Bus what could be done to reduce the cost of bus fares for young people.

24 First Bus said that it could not do much as it was a commercial company answerable to its shareholders, and that it must maintain its fares at a rate which could maintain the company's profitability.

25 They said that although bus fares had risen faster than retail prices in recent years, this was due to rising costs such as fuel prices, insurance and wages. On top of this the profitability of bus services had been hit by increased congestion and reducing numbers of people using the buses. Finally, revenue support from Government was contributing less than it had done 20 years ago.

26 First Bus said that they had recently introduced a £1.50 all day unlimited travel fare for young people and that they believed that this was very good value for money.

27 Metro said that they offered a school plus Metro card for £6.75 per week for county wide unlimited bus travel and that this represented a good deal for young people.

**28 We feel that adults who work and earn a regular income need to appreciate that despite the concessionary schemes and passes available, these 'up front' prices still represent a significant barrier to many young people, who often don't have any form of income.**

29 We were also informed that in Greater London the Mayor had introduced free travel on buses for under 16s. In fact, over 40% (£420m) of the support for bus fares nationally was spent in London.

30 We noted that there seemed to be one set of rules for the bus services in London where they had decided to invest a lot of money, and a different set of rules for outside London where they have not.



I think the fares are too expensive and travelling short distances by bus can cost similar to going all the way across Leeds

31 This comment is typical of many which were received as part of the consultation. First Bus provided us with a table of bus fares, an extract from which is shown in the grey table below:

Table of bus fares			
Stages	Miles	Child peak fare	Child off peak fare
1	0.5	35	35
2	1	50	50
3	1.5	75	75
4	2	75	75
5	2.5	75	75
6	3	75	75
7-10	5	105	80
11-13	6.5	105	80
14-16	8	105	80
17-22	11	105	80
23-25	12.5	105	80
26-29	14.5	105	80
30-33	16.5	105	80
34-37	18.8	105	80
38-41	20.5	105	80
42-45	22.5	105	80
46-50	27	105	80

32 Clearly those travelling short distances are paying significantly more for their transport per mile.

33 So we asked First Bus: Why is there so little difference in price between a half mile journey and a 27 mile journey? This seems very unfair to us.

34 The officers did not think that there was a good logical reason for it. They said that if they were starting a new bus service today, they would have to charge more for the first section, but not as much more as they do at the moment.

35 In fact we found out that 80% of bus journeys are between 1 mile and 3 miles. This was one reason why longer journey prices were left as they were as they only brought in a small proportion of the money received from fares.

I can chair this meeting with my eyes closed



### Recommendation 1

That First Bus review its fare structure so that the fare paid better matches the distance travelled. That First Bus review its fare structure in the light of the forum's findings on the barrier cost represents to young people. And, that First Bus report its conclusions/intentions to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.

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- 36 We noted that most of the concessionary travel tickets available provided for unlimited travel county wide, on a particular day or for a specified time period. They also required young people to pay for the ticket up front.
- 37 We think these arrangements fail to take account of the fact that most journeys as already noted are short in distance, from A to B and back again, that many young people struggle to find enough money to pay 'up front' for one of the weekly or monthly passes, and that most young people do not spend whole days travelling around West Yorkshire. They also do nothing to encourage the less regular traveller to take the bus more often.

## Recommendation 2

**That Metro should investigate the possibility of developing a concessionary scheme whereby young people pay for the first few journeys in the usual way and then get one/two free (buy four, get one free for example but avoiding the need to pay up front) and report their findings/actions to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.**

- 38 We also noted that in South Leeds, for example, where you have two main operators, you cannot use a First Bus ticket on an Arriva bus. This meant that if your journey involved taking two buses from different companies, you would need to pay twice, even if you had purchased an all day unlimited travel ticket on the first bus you got on. In Greater London where the buses were regulated, this was not a problem.
- 39 We appreciate that bus companies are in competition with one another. However, it is in all bus companies' interests to encourage young people to use public transport and ensure it is easy and cost effective for them to do so.

## Recommendation 3

**That Metro and the bus companies should co-operate to develop a day pass which can be used on all buses and that Metro report progress to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.**



*Above - The forum considering evidence provided by First Bus and Metro on 1st February 2007.*





*Obviously a very serious bit of our meeting with Metro and First Bus on 22nd February 2007.*

- 40 Our research found that 46% of the young people surveyed did not have a young person's pass of any kind. Also, in our experience young people are not always fully aware of the concessionary schemes currently available.
- 41 The officers from Metro informed us that they advertised widely with leaflets and information available at bus stations, schools, libraries, hospitals and over 500 outlets in West Yorkshire.
- 42 They informed us that from 2003-05 they carried out six market research surveys and found that awareness of the School Plus MetroCard amongst 14-15 year olds was 71%. This figure dropped, however, to only 41% of 16-24 year olds. Awareness of the Student Plus MetroCard amongst 16-24 year olds, the most relevant product for that age range, stood at 57%.
- 43 We were surprised to find out that Metro's concessionary schemes were not advertised on buses themselves, the most obvious place to do so.
- 44 We were not convinced that there was sufficient awareness of the concessionary schemes available to young people.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**That Metro reviews the effectiveness of its marketing strategies with regard to young people's concessionary schemes and report its progress to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.**

# The routes, reliability and frequency of bus services

- 45 45% - Less than half of young people who responded to our questionnaire described buses in Leeds as reliable.
- 46 Also, in response to the question, 'what would make you catch the bus more often?', more reliable buses was the second most popular answer.
- 47 72% of young people said it was easy or very easy to get to where they wanted to go by bus.
- 48 'More buses going to more places' was the third most popular answer when the young people were asked what would make them catch the bus more often.
- 49 First Bus told us that their business in Leeds depended on the bus service being high quality and reliable. They informed us that in recent years, the company had worked hard to create a commercially viable network that could be easily understood by customers, and to ensure that as many buses as possible ran and matched their timetables as closely as possible. To do this company and depot wide action had been required.
- 50 However, in order to further improve the quality of its operations, First Bus had created their 'Bringing the Routes to Life' programme. This meant that changes to bus services would be implemented by route managers who worked in the depots, each responsible for one or two routes and in charge of the drivers who worked on them. As the route manager normally dealt with all the complaints about that route, they were in a much better position to decide what was best for the travelling public.

**Buses in Leeds are very unreliable – and you never know when they are not going to show – sometimes drive straight past.**

**Buses in Leeds are very unreliable – they stop running too early and are never on time when you need them.**



*The forum deciding what questions to ask the officers  
- 1st February 2007 -*

- 51 First Bus informed us that they would be using reports from the Customer Comments system, recorded 'lost mileage' for each route (that is the number of timetabled services which do not run) and 'Real Time' punctuality data to establish priorities for investigation and action. Routes with a lot of customer complaints, high lost mileage and poor punctuality performance would be dealt with first.
- 52 We didn't think it was very clear on a bus how to make a complaint/customer comment so we asked First Bus, 'how do you make a complaint/customer comment?'. And, 'what are you doing to encourage customers to use these ways of providing you with feedback?'
- 53 First Bus admitted that they did not have a notice on the buses at the moment. However, they said that a large number of comments were made through Metroline which was advertised widely, that their name and address was on the side of the bus, that they had a website and that they were in the telephone book.
- 54 We felt that additional efforts needed to be made if young people were to be encouraged to make their views known and have them taken into account as part of the 'Bringing The Routes to Life' programme .

### **Recommendation 5**

**That Metro develop a text messaging comments and complaints system, promote this amongst young people and report progress to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.**

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*It was not all reports, meetings and work. Occasionally we had some fun.*



## The relative importance of other factors

55 Our survey asked: What would make you catch the bus more often? The young people were given the following options:

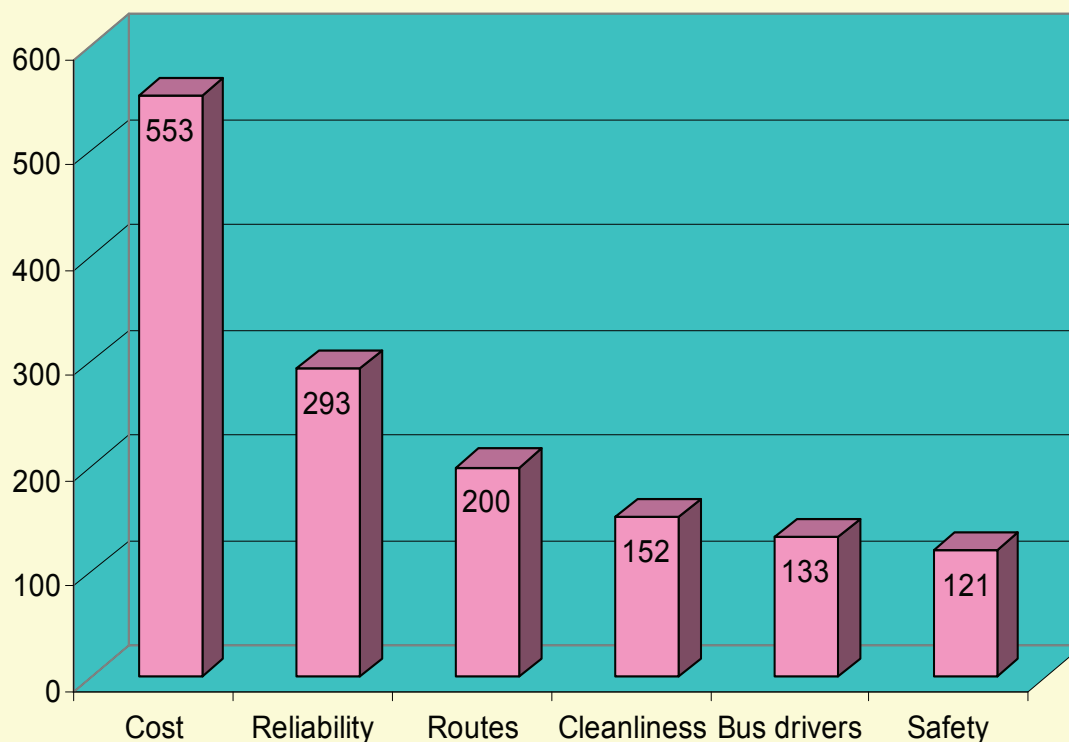
- # Cheaper fares (Cost)
- # If the buses were more reliable (Reliability)
- # More buses going to more places (Routes)
- # Cleaner newer buses (Cleanliness)
- # If I felt safer catching the bus (Safety)
- # Friendlier bus drivers (Bus drivers)

They were asked to choose three from the list, then rank them in order of importance.

56 The results in full are set out below.

	Cost	Reliability	Routes	Cleanliness	Safety	Bus drivers
Placed first	147	46	14	11	14	10
Placed second	43	59	64	38	18	20
Placed third	26	37	30	43	43	63
Total	216	142	108	92	75	93

57 If we give each answer a numerical value (1<sup>st</sup> = 3 points, 2<sup>nd</sup> = 2 points and 3<sup>rd</sup> = 1 point), we can more easily compare the relative importance the young people gave each factor overall. The results of this are set out in the chart below:



58 It seems to us that after cost and reliability, the importance of other factors as barriers to young people catching the bus more often is relatively low. Even with regard to 'more buses going to more places' (Routes) which was in third place, when asked how easy it was to get to where you want to go in Leeds by bus, 72% of young people said it was easy or very easy to get to where they wanted to go by bus.



# The relationship between bus drivers and young people

59 Our survey showed that:

- # **only 21%** of young people thought bus drivers were mostly or always friendly
- # **only 23%** of young people thought bus drivers were mostly or always helpful
- # **only 25%** of young people thought bus drivers were mostly or always polite

60 Bus drivers scored badly on our questionnaire with regard to all three criteria. In addition, they also attracted by far the largest number of negative comments.

**Some are very helpful and polite whereas some are rude and blame youths for everything. Some youths do misbehave but it isn't nice when others are sometimes blamed.**

**When they can see people struggling with baggage/children in buggies running for buses they don't stop which is unfair.**

61 However, when asked what would make you catch the bus more often, 'friendlier bus drivers' only came fifth out of the six options quite some distance below the others.

62 This indicates that although young people have a poor opinion of bus drivers they do not consider these problems as a particularly big barrier to increased bus use.

63 We asked First Bus: Our experience and our research show that bus drivers are all too often rude and unhelpful. What are you doing to improve the behaviour of this significant minority of drivers who let down the rest?

64 First Bus acknowledged the problems we were highlighting. They also pointed out that there was a small percentage of young people who caused problems on buses. In fact, we were told, the relationship between young people and bus drivers had been difficult for a long time.

**A large number of them are rude, discriminating against teenagers and not at all helpful when I ran into a problem involving a half-fare pass, for example.**





- 65 They said that bus drivers got just six weeks of training including a full day of customer care. They said that when faced with poor behaviour from customers on a regular basis, often people tended to lose their cool and did not respond as they should. They said that being a bus driver was not an easy job and not one with very high status, so it was difficult to get top quality bus drivers.
- 66 They said that if bus drivers were found to have behaved badly they were sent for more training and/or would be dealt with using First's disciplinary procedures. We were informed that CCTV had helped as if something did happen you could take the disk and identify the culprit, whether it was a young person or the driver.
- 67 We discovered, however, that the CCTV systems on buses did not record sound. As a result a lot of poor behaviour from both young people and bus drivers would be missed. In addition, we feel young people and bus drivers would be less likely to speak inappropriately to one another if they knew they were being recorded.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**That Metro and First Bus investigate the possibility of developing CCTV systems on buses to record sound as well as pictures and report their findings to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.**

- 68 First Bus informed us that they employed 1100 bus drivers with a 20% annual turnover. This meant that there would be over 200 new drivers every year and there were bound to be some problematic ones within that number. They said that they did need assistance from customers to find out which ones.
- 69 We were informed that all complaints were logged onto a database from which they could pull out information about a particular driver. Specific drivers could be traced via the ticket or vehicle and if necessary referred to disciplinary procedures for continuous customer complaints.
- 70 We believe this strengthens the need to make sure bus companies have an accessible complaints and comments system young people are more likely to use.

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## The cleanliness and condition of buses, including graffiti

- 71 First Bus informed us that the fleet was washed daily and swept out each evening. Graffiti was removed on a daily basis where possible and every four weeks each bus was cleaned by hand inside. First Bus was investing £57 million in 2007/2008 in new buses and some of these would be coming to Leeds.
- 72 Although cleaner newer buses was the fourth most popular factor chosen that would make young people catch the bus more often, only 11 young people placed it first in their list and it scored significantly lower than the top 3 factors.
- 73 We concluded that the cleanliness and condition of buses was not a significant barrier to young people catching the bus more often.

## Feeling unsafe

- 74 Our research showed us that most young people usually or always felt safe on the bus and at the bus stop nearest their home (81% and 80% respectively).
- 75 Most young people usually or always felt safe at the bus station in Leeds (71%).
- 76 Young people felt least safe at a bus stop in Leeds city centre (60% usually or always felt safe).

**In Leeds city centre**

**'I don't often feel safe – lots of drug addicts, drunks and tramps.'**

**I do feel safe most of the time because there are cameras on most of the buses now but there are often kids on the buses shouting and spitting and swearing. It's not nice to see but I don't really feel that threatened.**

- 77 If I felt safer catching the bus was the least popular answer when the young people were asked what would make them catch the bus more often. Only 31%, 75 of the 242 who answered this question placed it in their top 3.
- 78 We concluded that fears regarding their safety are not a significant barrier to young people catching the bus more often.



## **The extent to which young people's views are taken account of during transport decision making**

- 79 We believe that our inquiry has produced a very clear message: Cost is by far the most significant barrier to catching the bus young people face. This is particularly true of young people from inner city areas of Leeds.
- 80 We would like this message to be disseminated to all decision makers involved in developing and running services for children and young people. We would like to ask Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) to help us ensure this report is distributed widely and given appropriate consideration.
- 81 Decision makers need to check out the availability of affordable transport when planning their services. Ideally services need to be put in accessible places so that transport issues are not a barrier to young people accessing them.
- 82 We heard that the Council had adopted a Child Impact Statement model to ensure the effect on children and young people was always considered when new policies and developments were being considered.

### **Recommendation 7**

**That the Director of Children's Services ensures that the barriers young people face with regard to transport are taken into account by ALL decision makers and that they are a key part of the Child Impact Statement process. We ask that she report back to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.**

## **The wider context**

- 83 We were concerned to learn that Britain got the lowest overall score in the recent UNICEF report on Children's Welfare in the 21 richest countries of the world. In particular Britain ranked worst in terms of young people's relationships with family and peers and how likely they were to be involved in damaging behaviours such as drug and alcohol misuse.
- 84 In addition we heard that many policy makers now believed that they had, in recent years, given too much attention to narrow measures of achievement such as the 5 A\*-C GCSE results. They were now thinking that as a country we need to have fuller aspirations for children and young people. In particular, this meant making sure young people had access to positive, fun and varied leisure time activities.
- 85 We learned that recently there had been a decline in the number of young people owning bicycles and becoming licensed drivers. This meant that young people were increasingly likely to depend on public transport or family vehicles to access leisure time activities.
- 86 Most importantly we heard that in the first six months (up to March 2006) since the Mayor's introduction of free travel on buses and trams for under 16s across London, parents reported that 59% of 14 and 15 year olds used the bus/tram more often and that 83% of them were doing so to access leisure activities.

- 87 In Leeds, we learned that it was the responsibility of the Director of Children's Services to see that everyone works together ensure every child has the support they need to:
- # Be healthy
  - # Stay safe
  - # Enjoy and achieve
  - # Make a positive contribution
  - # Achieve economic well-being

88 It seems to us that access to affordable transport is important to all of these.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**That the Director of Children's Services investigates adding travel concessions to the other benefits of the Breeze card and reports back to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.**

89 We also learned that the Government was changing the rules on how the money it provided for school buses could be spent. In particular it might soon be possible for young people to use the passes provided for home to school transport for other journeys.

#### **Recommendation 9**

**That the Director of Children's Services orders a review of how school transport monies are being spent in Leeds to see if there is a better way in which it could be spent and reports back to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) in July 2007.**

## **Conclusion**

90 Whereas we would obviously like to see all our recommendations implemented - for improved concessions, fairer pricing structures, better information and the rest - we believe that for many young people this will not be enough.

91 As a result and in line with pensioners, disabled people and young people in London, we would like bus travel for all young people to be free of charge.

#### **Recommendation 10**

**That the Youth Council and ROAR lead a campaign with one aim - to achieve free bus travel for all young people - and that everyone who works with and for young people joins with and supports them in achieving it.**

## **What happens next**

92 We are grateful to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) for giving us the opportunity to do this inquiry and we are pleased that they have agreed to work with the Youth Council and ROAR to follow up progress with our recommendations.

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## **The Young People's Scrutiny Forum were:**

Asma Rehman	Leeds Youth Council
Becky Duerden (Chair)	Reach Out and Reconnect
Charmaine Reynolds	Reach Out and Reconnect
David Birtle	Reach Out and Reconnect
Gurdeep Barath	Leeds Youth Council
Josh Hunt	Leeds Youth Council
Kennedy Elwen	Leeds Youth Council
Ladell Smith	Leeds Youth Council & Reach Out and Reconnect
Leanne Rivers	Reach Out and Reconnect
Matthew Jackson	Leeds Youth Council
Poppy Johnson	Leeds Youth Council & Reach Out and Reconnect
Rebecca Duerdan	Reach Out and Reconnect
Sarah Martin	Leeds Youth Council
Teresa Birtle	Reach Out and Reconnect
Thomas Martin	Leeds Youth Council