

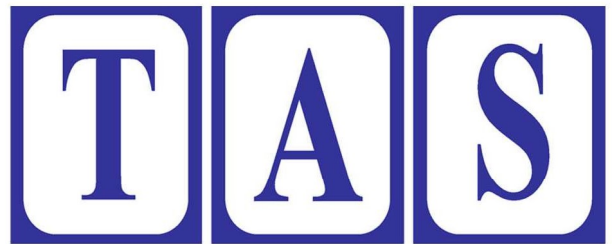
Manchester to Birmingham Transport Options

TravelWatch
NORTHWEST

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The TAS Partnership Limited
Passenger Transport Specialists

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1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The TAS Partnership Ltd (TAS) has been commissioned by TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) to undertake a small scale study to look at public transport options for travel between Manchester and Birmingham. The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of the various modes of transport available, their offer and how they compare on a number of factors for a range of journey types.
- 1.1.2 The critical question for TWNW is - Do the general public give sufficient consideration to Coach as a travel option? The general consensus is that Coach Travel is not always considered as a viable option, but why?
- 1.1.3 Even though Coach Travel could be a cheaper option, it is the perceived longer journey time that puts people off. Are people prioritising getting from A to B in the quickest time rather than at the cheapest price? Or are there other obstacles?

1.2 Objectives

- 1.2.1 The objectives for this report are:
 - To detail all of the research undertaken and data gathered;
 - To provide a direct comparison where possible and a weighted comparison where necessary of the three main modes of travel (Coach, Rail and Private Car) between Manchester and Birmingham, by journey purpose;
 - To offer insight and commentary on the positive and negative elements of each mode, highlighting failings, perceptions and areas for potential improvement;
 - To include any recommendations for public transport operators that we have identified, with consideration of how they might be taken forward;
 - To highlight any additional areas of investigation, or anything that appears to merit more in depth exploration that presents itself.

1.3 Our Approach

- 1.3.1 Our approach to this study has involved desk-based research looking at, and comparing, the main transport offerings – Coach, Rail and Private Car. Additionally, we explored fixed price taxi fares and potential 'disruptors' such as lift shares (both established and more informal offerings).

- 1.3.2 Within this report, we have created a selection of realistic journeys between Manchester and Birmingham considering various purposes for travel including: work, education, leisure, tourism and social/visiting. This has included appropriate consideration of seasonal trends and holidays (particularly for tourism) as well as large scale events.

1.4 Report Structure

- 1.4.1 When considering the best option to travel, the following areas and questions are taken into account:

- a) **Cost** – How Much Does it Cost to Travel from Manchester to Birmingham and Vice Versa?(How much is it going to cost in total? Is it cheaper elsewhere?)
- b) **Time** – How Long Does it Take Each Mode of Transport to Travel from Manchester to Birmingham?(How long is it going to take? Is there a quicker option?)
- c) **Reliability and Predictability** (Is it going to depart and arrive on time?)
- d) **Information Provision, Advertising and Accessibility** (Where is this information?)
- e) **Convenience and Comfort** (How easy is it to purchase a ticket? What is the most comfortable option?)

- 1.4.2 The above headings (In bold) form the basis of this report along with **Customer Feedback, Journey Samples** and **Conclusions and Recommendations**.

1.5 Data

- 1.5.1 The research and data collection for this study took place between 29/04/2024 and 12/07/2024. The data included within this report has been collected from various sources and websites including (But not limited to):

- Google Maps: <https://www.google.com/maps/>
- RAC Mileage Calculator: <https://www.rac.co.uk/route-planner/mileage-calculator/>
- Advisory Fuel Rates: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/advisory-fuel-rates>
- Trainline: <https://www.thetrainline.com/>
- Cross Country: <https://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/>

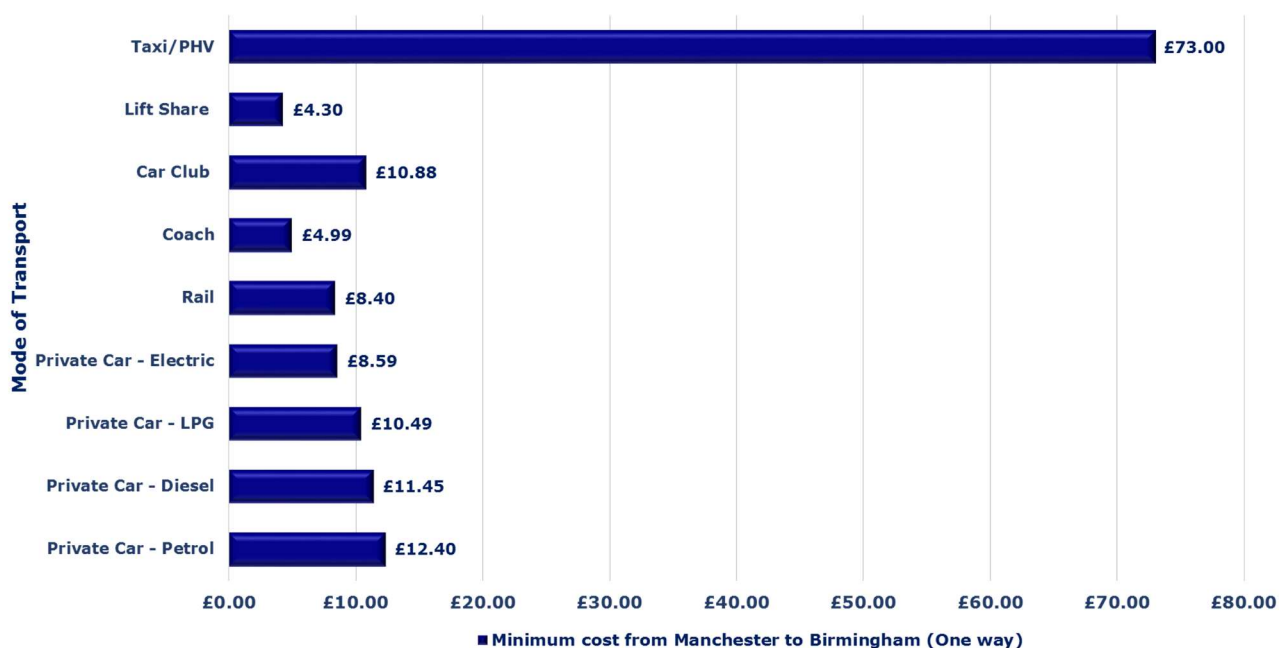
- FlixBus: <https://www.flixbus.co.uk/>
- Megabus: <https://uk.megabus.com/>
- National Express: <https://www.nationalexpress.com/en>
- Tripadvisor: <https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/> and
- Trustpilot: <https://uk.trustpilot.com/>

- 1.5.2 Few people make trips that are purely city centre to city centre, there is likely to be a start and end away from the city. To reflect this, we selected a postcode and example 'home' address for both Manchester and Birmingham to act as a fixed start and end point for each Private Car example and where appropriate for the additional trip from 'home' to the Rail or Coach Station for some of the journey examples.
- 1.5.3 For Manchester, we used 193 Bury New Rd, Salford, Manchester M8 8DU and for Birmingham we selected Unit 1, Century Park, Garrison Ln, Birmingham B9 4NZ. Both addresses in reality belong to car dealers but they were selected as they are approximately fifteen minutes away from Manchester Piccadilly and Birmingham New Street stations respectively by car; and within close proximity to a bus stop to access public transport that would stop within 0.4 miles walking distance of the above stations. The distance between the two postcodes is **95.4 miles** via the M6.
- 1.5.4 For each private car example, we have based costs on a **Ford Fiesta** (The most common used vehicle type purchased in the UK in 2023 and 2024) with an engine size up to **1400cc** (<1.4 litres). We selected **petrol** as the fuel type and took an average of **49 miles per gallon** (mpg) fuel consumption, **145 pence per litre** fuel cost and **13 pence per mile** mileage rate. We used the RAC Mileage Calculator available at: <https://www.rac.co.uk/route-planner/mileage-calculator/> to work out the fuel costs.
- 1.5.5 An additional charge of **£8.00 per day** applies to any vehicle (except for motorcycles/mopeds) that do not meet the emission standards for the Birmingham Clean Air Zone (CAZ). Within our examples, this charge has been applied to any car journey that would have passed through the Birmingham CAZ. Where this has not been stated, this charge will not have been applicable as alternative routes outside of the CAZ will have been used.
- 1.5.6 For Rail, the direct route between Manchester and Birmingham is provided by Cross Country, therefore we have selected this operator as our Rail option for this comparison. For Coach, we have explored the offer of FlixBus, Megabus and National Express.

2.1 Cost – How Much Does it Cost to Travel from Manchester to Birmingham and Vice Versa?

- 2.1.1 A quick glance at prices for each option provided a variety of answers depending upon the source of information, departure times, booking in advance or booking last-minute. Below are the lowest prices publically available for each mode of transport based on analysis during May, June and July 2024.
- 2.1.2 Note Figure A indicates the minimum cost for one person based on our research. Although Lift Share is the cheapest above, it is based on two people travelling in an Electric Car using the averages in Private Car
- 2.1.3 (Taken from <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/advisory-fuel-rates>)

Figure A: Minimum Cost from Manchester to Birmingham (One Way)



- 2.1.4 Figure B indicates the average cost for one person. The Taxi/PHV average is based on ten fixed price quotes and the coach average is based on ten prices available for the following three operators: Flixbus, Megabus and National Express. The **£34.87** for Rail is the average of ten single journey prices available over the course of one week - See 2.3 below for the breakdown and the car averages are based on the average totals indicated in <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/advisory-fuel-rates> including an average parking fee of **£12.29** (For 10 – 12 hours) and an **£8.00** CAZ Charge

applicable in Birmingham. Note that Rail and Car become less competitive with Coach based on the averages above.

Figure B: Average Cost from Manchester to Birmingham (One way)



2.2 Private Car

(Taken from <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/advisory-fuel-rates>)

Totals (In brackets) based on an average of 95.4 miles via M6:

- Petrol from 13 pence per mile (**£12.40**)
- Diesel from 12 pence per mile (**£11.45**)
- LPG from 11 pence per mile (**£10.49**)
- Electric from 9 pence per mile (**£8.59**)

2.2.2 In essence, these are the minimum costs and more likely to be higher depending upon type of car, engine size, mileage, price of fuel, fuel consumption and efficiency of the car. Additional costs such as: journey specific charges (car parking fees/congestion and CAZ charges) and general annual costs (car tax/car insurance/general maintenance fees) would also need to be considered with this option.

2.3 Rail

Taken from Cross Country, Trainline and National Rail websites the lowest (limited availability) single fare available on Trainline was **£8.40** as indicated

in Figure A above but travellers would be lucky to get this price for a single trip between the two cities.

- 2.3.1 Train ticket prices were explored in more depth as part of the Journey Samples section but the above average indicated in Figure B is based on the following ten prices available for a single journey from Manchester to Birmingham: £17.20, £19.80, £22.80, £25.60, £31.50, £37.40, £43.30, £46.80, £49.20 and £55.10.
- 2.3.2 A Standard Advance Single is **£22.80**, an Off-Peak Single is **£46.80** and an Anytime Single is **£55.10**. The remaining prices in 2.3.1 above are 'Limited Availability'. However, with Off-Peak Return tickets priced at **£48.30**, it could be argued that an average single fare is half the price of an Off-Peak Return, therefore £48.30 divided by 2 = **£24.15**, but even taking this price or the **£22.80** Advance Single, Rail is still significantly more expensive than Coach. It is worth noting that on Cross Country an Advance Single can be purchased up to 15 minutes before departure for **£22.80**, after which only Off-Peak and Anytime tickets are available. Between Birmingham and Manchester the Off-Peak falls under Restriction V2 valid at any time except 0430 to 0930 Monday to Friday.
- 2.3.3 Travellers can also save money through Split-ticketing, i.e. Instead of buying an Advance Single ticket from Manchester to Birmingham for **£22.80**, they could buy separate tickets, e.g. an Advance Single from Manchester to Stoke-on-Trent for **£7.20** and then another Advance Single from Stoke-on-Trent to Birmingham for **£12.40** thus saving **£3.20**. This can be done using the main rail ticket websites such as Trainline, operator specific websites like Cross Country or official split-ticketing websites such as: <https://www.splitmyfare.co.uk/> or <https://www.mytrainpal.com/split-ticket>. This is only one example and reporting all of the split-ticket options would add to the complexity of this report.

2.4 Coach

- FlixBus tickets from **£5.99**
- Megabus tickets from **£3.99**
- National Express tickets from **£4.90**

2.5 Reduced Fares

- 2.5.1 Here we have only looked at fares for 'adult' travellers. The definition of 'adult' changes by operator.
- Child fares are offered by all coach operators and rail. A child is aged under 16 on Rail and National Express, 15 on Flixbus and Megabus;

- Further discounts are available on National Express for 16-26 year-olds and those aged over 60 by purchasing a 'Coachcard';
- We found no evidence of other discounts on FlixBus or Megabus;
- Rail gives discounts to those over 60, aged 16-17; aged 17-25; aged 26-30; serving members of the armed forces and veterans; and 'friends and family' by purchase of the appropriate railcard. Only lone travellers aged 31 to 59 have no discount option.

2.6 Alternative Options

Car Club

- Enterprise Car Club from **£8.63** (Hourly Rate) and **£71.59** (Daily Rate)
- Co Wheels Car Club from **£7.25** (Hourly Rate) and **£52.00** (Daily Rate)

Lift Share

- 2.6.2 Splitting the cost of fuel with someone travelling in the same direction would work out cheaper. This could be agreed mutually between friends or co-workers or through accessing websites such as:
<https://liftshare.com/uk/search/from/manchester-united-kingdom>

Fixed-Priced Taxis

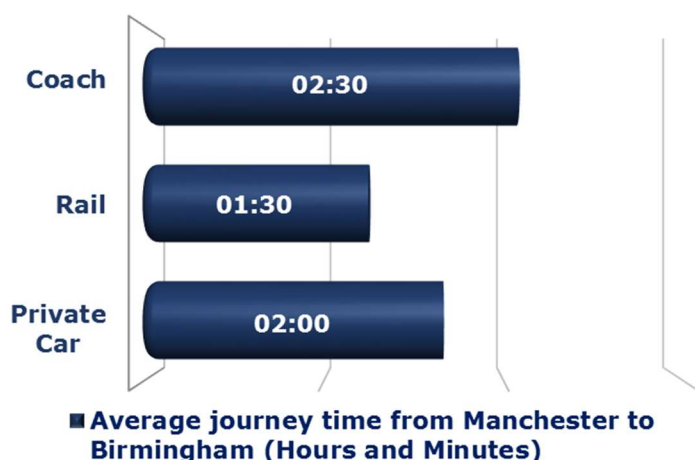
- 2.6.3 Prices vary but most fixed-prices were in excess of **£100** one way and considering people do not simply go from A to B, they will need to return to A at some point which makes this very expensive unless travelling in a group. The cheapest one-way price we found was **£73.00**. The high price of taxis is mainly because they are based in one centre and a quoted fare must cover the added cost of the empty return trip.

Flight

- 2.6.4 There are no direct flights between Manchester and Birmingham.

2.7 Time – How Long Does it Take Each Mode of Transport to Travel from Manchester to Birmingham?

Figure C: Average Journey Time from Manchester to Birmingham



2.7.1 The figures above are averages but there are variations:

- **Private Car** - Depending on traffic, departure times and start/end points, it can take anything between 1 hour 30 minutes and 2 hours 30 minutes.
- **Rail** - A direct train will take around 1 hour 30 minutes.
- **Coach** - 2 to 3 hours

2.7.2 On paper, Rail is the fastest option, with Coach taking at least 30 minutes longer and car journeys likely to take longer than 1 hour 30 minutes due to traffic. Taking away potential strikes, cancellations or delays, Rail may be the preferred option for those who live in close proximity to a rail station based on time.

2.7.3 However, Rail is predominantly the most expensive option out of the three and travellers would also need to take into account the distance between home and the nearest station and their destination in relation to the alighting station, as that could include another form of transport in addition to the train journey.

2.7.4 On the above basis, Private Car may well be the fastest option from getting from A to B and those who do not mind driving on busy motorways may prefer this option, as it provides them with an element of control, rather than relying on public transport. Ultimately, personal preference comes into play here and people may sacrifice time for other factors such as cost, convenience or comfort.

2.8 Reliability and Predictability

- 2.8.1 How reliable is each mode of transport? Is it possible to predict what is going to happen in advance? Ultimately, issues can arise with all three modes of transport.

Private Car

- 2.8.2 If someone travels by private car, they are solely responsible for departure times if they are the driver and any delays are down to them. However, once the journey has started, there are many factors that can affect reliability and predictability.
- 2.8.3 If someone travels during peak times, they can allow for the extra traffic and allow more time to get from A to B by setting off earlier. Something that is out of their control is a road traffic accident, road works or diversions that cause delays on their route, which can be frustrating if trying to get somewhere for a particular time. Another thing to consider is the reliability and predictability of the car – a tyre puncture or engine failure could happen to anyone!

Rail

- 2.8.4 Trains are generally effective when they run to schedule but how reliable are they? With ongoing industrial action and engineering work, cancellations and delays have become the norm with trains, so trying to plan a trip is far from straightforward; not to mention the complexities of knowing when trains are running.
- 2.8.5 As outlined in <https://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/about-us/key-business-performance-indicators> trains arriving on time have not surpassed 52.5% in the last 12 months and the proportion of trains cancelled by Cross-Country reached a high of 10.1% in Period 10 of 23/24. It is worth noting that all northbound Birmingham to Manchester Cross Country trains come from either Bournemouth, Bristol or even Plymouth which is bound to have a knock-on effect.
- 2.8.6 Travellers should be able to predict a minimum of two trains travelling direct between Manchester and Birmingham each hour as indicated in the Cross Country rail timetable¹ if not clock-face half hourly. However, they cannot always rely on their selected train to depart or arrive on time. This can become particularly distressing for a traveller who needs another form of public transport to continue their travel once their train has departed. Trying to predict the arrival time for the train is not easy.
- 2.8.7 Cross Country has also implemented several temporary timetables which have reduced the level of service between Manchester and Birmingham. Cross Country's short trains are prone to overcrowding and on departures expected

¹ There is a third hourly option changing at Crewe.

to be especially busy, both National Rail and Cross Country websites will incorrectly display 'no tickets available for this service' when Off-Peak and Anytime tickets continue to be available and, indeed, continue to be sold by Trainline and others, and at ticket offices.

Coach

- 2.8.8 How reliable is the 08:20 from Manchester if it started in Aberdeen at 00:20? Not all coaches go from A to B and previous drop off/pick up points can cause delays. There are some direct express coach services but they will experience the same traffic and disruption as cars.
- 2.8.9 For the three coach operators that we have analysed (FlixBus, Megabus and National Express), there are between 10 – 16 coaches each day but travellers cannot rely on a coach being available when they wish to travel and need to check the timetable in advance. FlixBus for example, does not have any coaches that travel from Manchester to Birmingham between 03:00 and 07:00, 09:30 and 13:30 or 19:00 to 23:30. Likewise, Megabus has no coaches from Manchester to Birmingham between 08:00 and 10:30 or 17:30 – 20:00.

Delays – On the Road (Private Car and Coach)

- 2.8.10 Although we have not included extensive research of disruption and delays within this report (due to the scope), according to Highways England in their 'Managing delay on the strategic road network' study, available at: <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/media/wdopybqy/managing-delay-on-the-strategic-road-network.pdf> the average delay was 9.5 seconds, of the 62.1 seconds (average time) it is predicted to take to drive a mile as indicated in Figure D: below (based on a breakdown of average travel time between March 2019 and February 2020):

Figure D: Average Delays on the Road



- 2.8.11 However, according to the Accredited Official Statistics recently published by the DfT, the average delay is now estimated to be 10.6 seconds per vehicle per mile on the Strategic Road Network (Motorways and 'A' roads managed by Highways England) for the year ending March 2024. This is said to be an increase of 11.6% on year ending March 2023. The average speed is estimated to be 56.9 mph for year ending March 2024, down 1.7% from March 2023.
- 2.8.12 In the year ending March 2024, motorway traffic was higher than the previous year and similar to pre-pandemic levels. 'A' road and 'minor' road traffic was also higher than the previous year but below pre-pandemic levels.

Delays – On the Track (Rail)

- 2.8.13 According to the 'Rail Delays and Compensation 2023' report issued by the Department for Transport, available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/654e4ae06a650f000dbf4812/dft-rail-delays-and-compensation-2023-full-report.pdf> 87% of the 4,744 people who experienced a delay, reported that their most recent delay was under one hour. Of that 87%, 36% stated that their delay was between 15 and 29 minutes and 51% indicated that their delay was between 30 and 60 minutes. Based on this research, the overall proportion of rail passengers delayed has decreased slightly compared to 2020, but the proportion delayed by 30+ minutes has increased. As indicated in <https://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/about-us/key-business-performance-indicators> 88.2% of customers experienced some form of disruption in period 4 2024.

2.9 Information Provision, Advertising and Accessibility

- 2.9.1 This section provides an overview of the information available on each operator's website with a focus on ease of booking, advertising and accessibility. It is important to note that not all travellers will book tickets directly through the operator's website or App. People can purchase tickets at the station, over the phone or through websites such as National Rail (<https://www.nationalrail.co.uk/>) or Trainline (<https://www.thetrainline.com/>). Trainline is now the majority online rail ticket seller.
- 2.9.2 Trainline and comparison websites such as <https://www.omio.co.uk/> can be used for both Rail and Coach and for Coach, people can use <https://www.checkmybus.co.uk/> to compare departure times and ticket prices of the coach operator's running services on their selected route.
- 2.9.3 A quick Google search for 'Manchester to Birmingham train' displays Trainline as the top result, followed by Northern Rail and then Cross Country Trains. 'Birmingham to Manchester train' displays Avanti West Coast higher than Northern Rail behind Trainline and Cross Country Trains.

- 2.9.4 A Google search for 'Manchester to Birmingham coach' displays the websites for: National Express, Megabus and FlixBus in that order, whereas 'Birmingham to Manchester coach' displays Trainline ahead of FlixBus in the above list.
- 2.9.5 Timetable availability is actually poor, with the exception of Cross Country whose timetable booklet can be downloaded – it is, however a complex 77-page booklet (<https://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/media-vnext/jrja0s33/june-24-book-1-v4-web.pdf>) containing all services north to south across Birmingham. National Express timetables for each service can be downloaded (<https://timetables.nationalexpress.com/routes>) but clicking on a service number only shows that service – if, like Manchester to Birmingham, your journey is covered by several service numbers, it is more complex, although a summary can be downloaded. Neither Megabus nor FlixBus show timetables. We don't believe any of the operators produces printed publicity.
- 2.9.6 Table 1 below displays a comparison of qualitative factors relating to the online booking experience for a customer looking to travel with one of the operators mentioned in 1.5.6 above. Note that these opinions are subjective and they have been made based on the customer's perspective and experience using each operator's website. It is also important to note that the online booking experience using the website may differ from the experience using the app or alternative ways of booking.
- 2.9.7 Each operator has been given a number of ticks for each qualitative factor based on how easy it is to do or access something using the key below the table as a guide.
- 2.9.8 Although the scoring is relatively close, the outcome indicates that Cross Country provides a better online experience just ahead of FlixBus and Megabus with National Express somewhat behind. Again, this is purely based on opinion and variable dependent upon individual circumstances and preferences.
- 2.9.9 Below the table is a summary of what customers are likely to see and access whilst using each operator's website.

Table 1: Comparison of Website Quality Factors by Operator

Qualitative Factors relating to Online Booking Experience	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Ability to find a suitable journey	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Ability to see a clear cost of each journey	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Ability to find the cheapest price	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Access to return journey times	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Ease of booking	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Ability to track a journey	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Ability to find service updates	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Ability to make amendments to journey	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Ability to find luggage specifications	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Access to a route map	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Access to timetable	✓✓✓	X	✓	✓
Ability to reserve a seat	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Access to Frequently Asked Questions	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Ability to find information about destination city	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Ability to attract travellers	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Ability to access online support	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Ability to request travel support	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Ability to amend online accessibility features	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓
Ability to find out about on-board services	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
TOTAL	50	46	46	42
	88%	81%	81%	74%
Key ✓✓✓ = very good / very easy ✓✓ = reasonably good / reasonably easy ✓ = moderate / possible / difficult X = Not possible / not available				

2.10 Cross Country Trains

- 2.10.1 It is relatively straightforward to find and pay for suitable trains on the Cross Country website. The home page allows a traveller to type in the departure and destination station along with their preferred date and time of travel. The next four suitable trains are then displayed based on the selected departure time along with prices for standard and first class tickets.

- 2.10.2 If selecting a return trip, the cheapest price is displayed, e.g. if the train times that have been selected qualify for an off-peak return, a traveller will have the flexibility of travelling on any off-peak train for £48.30. The off-peak train times available are shown when selecting this option. Travellers are made aware of the expected travel time and if they need to change trains.
- 2.10.3 The simple definition of what constitutes the off-peak, however, is notably lacking. The Cross-Country off-peak page of its website gives a generic definition including evening peak restrictions. Attempting to book an off-peak return on Cross-Country or National Rail may exclude certain afternoon trains, but the railway ticket restriction code is shown as 'V2' which is a simple restriction barring travel between 0429 and 0930. Both seem reluctant to offer open tickets. Even the Cross-Country 'off peak' page is headed by input of start and end stations which links to purchase of Advance tickets.
- 2.10.4 Trainline, conversely, adopts the 'V2' definition and offers off-peak tickets on any train after 0930 as well as more obviously advertising open return tickets.
- 2.10.5 On the Cross-Country home page, travellers can plan ahead by booking Advance tickets or even search for last-minute tickets and they can get service updates, check for any disruption to services and identify when engineering work or industrial action is planned.
- 2.10.6 Rail tickets can also be purchased, of course, at the station ticket offices and from self-service ticket machines. The latter, however, are known not to always sell the full range of tickets. In theory, they can also be purchased from the train conductor but passengers are not admitted to the platforms at either Piccadilly or New Street without a ticket.
- 2.10.7 By clicking on the 'Routes and Destinations' tab, there is a page dedicated to the Manchester to Birmingham route under the 'Routes' tab available at: <https://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/routes/manchester-to-birmingham> which states that Cross Country trains run 30 times a day on this route based on the scheduled timetable.
- 2.10.8 Travellers can view and book tickets from Manchester to Birmingham on this page which also includes information on travelling to Birmingham and what to expect when they arrive. Under the 'Destinations' tab, a traveller can select 'Birmingham' and/or 'Manchester' and they will be presented with a page of things to do in each city. For Birmingham: (<https://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/stations-destinations/destinations/birmingham>) and for Manchester: (<https://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/stations-destinations/destinations/manchester>) there is information on shopping, places to eat and drink, culture, events and information on how to get to each city by train.

- 2.10.9 The Cross-Country site lacks any form of train tracker. This is available through Real Time Trains but not widely advertised to the public.
- 2.10.10 For travellers who require additional assistance with accessing information on the website, there is an 'Accessibility Menu' button available which (if clicked) allows them to alter the font size, line spacing and utilise the screen reader tool amongst other accessibility settings. Travellers who require a British Sign Language (BSL) Interpreter can benefit from the 'InSignLanguage' BSL Interpreter when contacting a member of the customer relations team and travellers can utilise the 'Signly' tool in the bottom right hand corner of the page if they are deaf and/or favour sign language over written English.
- 2.10.11 Travellers who require travel assistance when making their journey, can request an assistance booking in advance, up to two hours before departing. Information on how to book passenger assistance is available at:
<https://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/customer-service/travel-assistance>.

2.11 FlixBus

- 2.11.1 A simple search of Manchester to Birmingham on 'said day' will display all FlixBus coach times for that particular day (10 in total) with 9 results for that day plus the first available coach after midnight. For Manchester, each coach indicates in brackets whether it departs from Shudehill Interchange or Stand NN on Shudehill and all Birmingham coaches depart from Birmingham Summer Row – Great Charles Street. Total journey time and prices are indicated for each coach and if a traveller clicks on the drop down arrow next to 'Direct', they will be able to see each place the coach stops at.
- 2.11.2 On the home page, travellers can easily manage their booking if they need to edit passenger or contact details, cancel or reschedule bookings or add seats or additional luggage to their booking. Travellers can also track their coach using the 'Trip Tracker' feature.
- 2.11.3 The website states that travelling between Manchester and Birmingham takes approximately 2 hours but in reality it only takes exactly 2 hours for travellers boarding the 02:45 from Manchester or the 23:55 from Birmingham with all other coaches taking longer.
- 2.11.4 FlixBus states that travellers should expect to travel '...in comfort and style' with 'on-board hospitality' to keep them occupied. Most coaches include: free Wi-Fi, toilets and power sockets. Each traveller can bring one carry-on piece of luggage up to 7kg and one check-in piece of luggage up to 20kg at no extra cost but additional luggage allocation can be purchased. Travellers can also reserve a specific seat at an additional cost of £0.99 - £1.99 or travel 'neighbour free' by booking two seats together for £2.50 extra.
- 2.11.5 In addition to online purchasing channels there are two Flixbus ticket agents in Manchester, at Piccadilly and on Bridgewater Street. Tickets may also be

purchased from drivers but the ability to do this is not immediately obvious from the website. <https://www.flixbus.co.uk/service/book-bus-ticket>

- 2.11.6 Under the 'Plan your Journey' tab, travellers can search for their destination city by clicking on 'Timetables and Stops' and selecting their chosen city. Timetables, however, are not timetables but journey planners. In doing so, travellers are taken to a page dedicated to that particular city which includes information about bus stations and stops, frequently asked questions and a 'top things to see in ...' section. For Manchester, this is available at: <https://www.flixbus.co.uk/coach/manchester> and for Birmingham: <https://www.flixbus.co.uk/coach/birmingham>.
- 2.11.7 There are pages dedicated to Travel Assistance and Accessibility by clicking on the 'Passengers with Disabilities' section under the 'Help' tab. Travellers who require to use a wheelchair are advised to contact the customer service team at least 36 hours before their preferred departure time to ensure there is sufficient space for their wheelchair.

2.12 Megabus

- 2.12.1 Megabus claims to be the 'market-leading value coach operator in England, Scotland and Wales, with the aim of making travel simple for customers.'
- 2.12.2 Finding a suitable coach is easy on the Megabus website. By typing in the departure and destination stations, travellers are presented with all the coaches available on their chosen date with simple navigation between days.
- 2.12.3 Megabus has a ticket sales kiosk at Shudehill but none in Birmingham. Shudehill also has Megabus ticket machines. The website also adds that tickets can be bought from 'customer service advisors' without saying where these might be found. The implication is that tickets cannot be bought on the coach except on Scottish services (<https://uk.megabus.com/help/bookings> 'Can I buy a ticket on the coach?'). It also has a telephone booking service, but through a premium charged line at 65 pence per minute.
- 2.12.4 For Manchester, coaches depart from Shudehill Interchange (Stand G) and for Birmingham, coaches depart from Brunel Street. On each ticket, the journey time and price is indicated for each coach and travellers can see information such as: the full route itinerary, 'need to know' reminders and any service alerts for their chosen journey by clicking on 'Show journey' drop-down menu. Travellers can access the 'Track my coach' feature by clicking on the tab at the top of the page where they can also get service alerts. Travellers can find answers to frequently asked questions under the 'Help' tab such as – 'What is the luggage policy?'
- 2.12.5 On the home page, travellers can find further information about their destination city by clicking on the 'City guides' image where they can select 'Discover Birmingham with Megabus' available at:

<https://uk.megabus.com/city-guides/birmingham> and 'Discover Manchester with Megabus' available at: <https://uk.megabus.com/city-guides/manchester>. On each page, travellers can access information about their chosen city such as: Top 3 things to do, getting around, best places for nightlife, best places for shopping and the top 3 free activities.

- 2.12.6 Travellers who use a wheelchair need to scroll to the bottom of the page and click on 'Passengers requiring assistance' for information about wheelchair specifications and how to seek assistance. Travellers are advised to contact Megabus at least 36 hours in advance of their intended journey as Megabus coaches can only carry one seated wheelchair subject to size and weight limits. Travellers with collapsible wheelchairs or mobility scooters, who are able to climb up a couple of steps and sit down in one of the coach seats, can have their wheelchair or mobility scooter stored in the luggage hold.

2.13 National Express

- 2.13.1 Again, the National Express website is reasonably easy to navigate. A simple search displays the next four coaches based on the time selected for the outbound journey. Earlier and later coaches can be found by clicking on the arrows (Similar to the Cross Country website).
- 2.13.2 For Manchester, coaches depart from Manchester Coach Station, Chorlton Street and for Birmingham, coaches depart from Birmingham Coach Station, Mill Lane. Both locations have dedicated ticket offices.
- 2.13.3 Journey time and ticket prices are indicated for each coach and then travellers can choose whether they would like a 'Restricted', 'Standard' or 'Fully Flexible' ticket. The initial ticket prices shown are for 'Restricted' tickets which if bought, cannot be changed and travellers will not get a refund if they wish to cancel. There is also no refund or cancellation for 'Standard' tickets but travellers are able to make changes to the date or time of their booking at an additional cost. 'Fully Flexible' tickets can be cancelled up to 24 hours in advance with a full refund given and changes can be made to the booking without additional fees.
- 2.13.4 National Express drivers do sell tickets on the coach but at major stations such as Manchester and Birmingham intending passengers are likely to be redirected to the ticket office. National Express also has ticket vending machines in some locations but we have not established if this includes either Manchester or Birmingham.
- 2.13.5 National Express markets itself as 'The UK's Number 1 Coach Company' and one of the tabs on the home page is dedicated to explaining why it is 'No. 1' where travellers can explore what it is like to travel with National Express, how it is committed to looking after the environment as well as on-board safety and accessibility information.

- 2.13.6 There is a page entitled 'Accessibility and Inclusion' available at: <https://www.nationalexpress.com/en/help/accessibility> which can be found by clicking on the 'Accessibility' link at the top of the page. Travellers who require assistance with their travel are advised to contact the Assisted Travel Team or email using the Assisted Travel Form.
- 2.13.7 This page includes detailed information and guidelines for wheelchair users, a list of accessible stops where the lift can be deployed, information about digital accessibility, a code of practice for disabled customers as well as a link to download journey assistance cards with statements such as: please be patient, I am visually impaired; please help me find a seat and please tell me when we reach my stop.

2.14 Convenience and Comfort

- 2.14.1 When it comes to convenience and comfort, people generally opt for the travel option that best suits their own particular needs and personal preferences but can be influenced by what they read online.
- 2.14.2 What do the operators say?

Cross Country Trains

- 2.14.3 Standard seating on Cross Country trains is 'designed for comfort, with ample legroom and reclining options.' According to <https://www.railforums.co.uk/threads/british-railways-seat-legroom.36190/> the seat pitch on a Cross Country Voyager is 28 inches for Standard, 33 inches for Priority and 36 inches for First Class. Many trains offer 'free Wi-Fi, power outlets and spacious luggage storage areas to enhance the journey.'
- 2.14.4 Cross Country claims that if travellers want to travel in comfort, 'travelling First Class can be well worth the upgrade' where travellers can 'enjoy a multitude of perks, including reclining seats, extra table space, and complimentary food and drink on most services.' With 'ticket types tailor-made for all kinds of journeys' travellers should be able to find tickets convenient to them. However, First class tickets start at **£57.10** for single trips between Manchester and Birmingham and reach as high as **£110.40** for an Advance Single (First Class) and **£132.30** for an Anytime Single (First Class). There is potential to travel First Class at lower cost by using the 'Seatfrog' app to upgrade Standard Class tickets or, similarly, by paying the 'Weekend First' £12 supplement.

FlixBus

- 2.14.5 FlixBus states that it has 'coach routes and timetables to suit your schedule' which will be explored more in the sample of example journeys section below. FlixBus claims to have 'reliable coach schedules, and comfy modern coaches.' FlixBus 'makes buying coach tickets a breeze' with its 'convenient e-ticket

system' and 'not only prioritise comfort and convenience for your journey, but also ensure you can travel with all of your necessary luggage.' Travellers should expect to 'travel in comfort and style with FlixBus.'

Megabus

- 2.14.6 Megabus wants the journey to be 'as comfortable as possible' and claims that their seats are indeed comfy. Megabus boasts that it can now offer some seats on their coaches with 'a whopping 38 inch seat pitch' which allows extra leg room for travellers willing to spend a little bit extra. All Megabus coaches are air conditioned, meaning that travellers can 'travel in comfort.'

National Express

- 2.14.7 National Express states that the reason why it is 'UK's No.1 Coach Company' is because it is 'reliable, comfortable and convenient.' It claims that it provides 'more comfort thanks to comfy seats, loads of legroom, free-Wi-Fi, power sockets and unrivalled safety' and 'more convenience because we operate right across the UK with more stops and services than any other coach company.'
- 2.14.8 An additional level of value can be identified in terms of the ability of the traveller to undertake peripheral activities during the journey. In Table 2 below, we have considered qualitative factors relating to the journey experience for each mode of transport. The outcomes for each mode are subjective and will of course vary between travellers but based on our results being a passenger in a car is the preferred mode of transport taking each factor into account.

2.15 Security

- 2.15.1 Security is a key issue when travelling for many types of passenger. This applies particularly to the location of and perceived safety of pick up points where passengers wait. Circumstances vary widely across the country but limiting our sample journey to Manchester to and from Birmingham we comment thus:
- People perceive a private car as a secure 'cocoon', if not always with justification.
 - Taxis and PHVs have an element of perceived risk because of the proximity of unknown driver and possibly lone passenger within the confines of a small vehicle over which the driver has sole control.
 - Ticket barriers are in place at both Piccadilly and New Street stations and, in theory, no-one should be present on platforms without a valid ticket. There is, however, perceived risk when travelling alone at quiet times when staff are not always visible.

- Coach travel is reasonably safe during travelling with the driver always within access but the concern with coach travel is related to stopping points. For this journey, National Express has coach stations with security patrols and both Flixbus and Megabus use an established bus terminus with security patrols in Manchester.
- Birmingham is different, Flixbus uses a layby on a dual carriageway outside university buildings without any passenger facilities other than a standard bus shelter while Megabus uses two dedicated bus shelters without other facilities in Brunel Street, an unattractive side street at the rear of a multi-storey car park. It is doubtful if any intending Megabus passenger feels secure at that location waiting for a late night or early hours departure.

Table 2: Comparison of 'Soft' Journey Quality Factors by Mode

Qualitative Factors relating to Journey Experience	Rail	Bus	Coach	Taxi or Private Hire Vehicle	Car (as driver)	Car (as passenger)
Ability to enjoy privacy / undisturbed by others	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Ability to be assured of personal safety & wellbeing	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Ability to travel in comfort (seating / legroom / personal space)	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Ability to avoid exposure to weather (i.e. during legs of journey)	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Proximity to home / destination address	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Minimise any luggage / baggage handling	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Ability to travel with dogs / cats etc.	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Ability to travel with young children or those needing care	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Access to screen-based comms, entertainment or reading matter	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	X	✓✓✓
Access to sound-based comms, entertainment or listening matter	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Access to hard copy reading materials	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	X	✓✓
Ability to undertake manual activities (e.g. knitting)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	X	✓✓✓
Ability to take comfort breaks / access to toilet etc. when required	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓
Ability to eat and drink (non-alcoholic)	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓
Ability to adjust heat / ventilation / temperature etc.	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Ability to travel under influence of alcohol / drugs / medication	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	X	✓✓✓
Ability to sleep / doze / relax	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	X	✓✓✓
Ability to recharge electronic devices	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Ability to access Wi-Fi	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓
TOTAL	37	32	34	38	34	47

Key: ✓✓✓ = very good / very easy / can be assured

✓ = moderate / possible / not always assured

✓✓ = reasonably good / reasonably easy / usually assured

X = completely impractical, unassured or not legally permissible

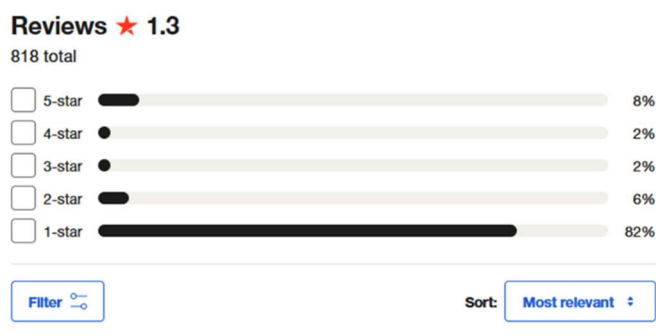
3.1 Reviews

- 3.1.1 Some people are influenced by what they read online such as other traveller reviews. It is important to note that people generally feel the need to write a review when they have had a 'bad experience' over when they have had a good experience. However, on the flip side, many '5 star reviews' are from travellers who have been asked directly by the operator to give them a 'good review.' Below is a selection of reviews taken from Trustpilot and TripAdvisor for each operator.

3.2 Cross Country Trains

Sourced from Trustpilot on 05.06.2024

Review 1: Cross Country Trains (Trustpilot)



- 3.2.1 Mostly poor reviews, with no feedback from the company and a constant barrage of negative feedback over the site. However, we should not judge too much as this is only taken from one sample portal and the authenticity of comments cannot be verified. In the digitised age of computer generated methodology we must keep in mind that negative feedback can be bought, and sourced to play corporates off against each other.

Review 2: Cross Country Trains (Trustpilot)

 Feb 22, 2024

If I could give zero stars I would

If I could give zero stars I would. Cross country gives railways a bad name and is undoubtedly encouraging more people to drive rather than use public transport. Avoid at all costs.

Date of experience: February 21, 2024

 Useful 1  Share 

 **Laura Brown**
4 reviews  GB

 Nov 23, 2023

Delayed train and then cancelled whilst...

Delayed train and then cancelled whilst on the train, left a single female stranded at 1am after promise of a taxi. Still waiting refund for ticket and an acknowledgement

Date of experience: November 02, 2023

- 3.2.2 Constant delays and cancellations are common reasons why travellers feel that it is an inconvenience to travel with Cross Country. An interesting point in Review 2 above, inferring that more people are being encouraged to drive rather than use public transport. Being described as 'all the comfort of a strait jacket' when using these 'sardine cans on wheels' creates a comical image but the travellers' review on 23rd May 2024 (Review 3 below) does make a valid point that if the train is overcrowded, it can create a very uncomfortable journey.

Review 3: Cross Country Trains (Trustpilot)

 23 May 2024

All the comfort of a straight-jacket

I sometimes have no choice, but to use Cross Country Trains for work and I just wish there was a choice.

Positive points:

Trains are generally punctual

Negative Points:

Awfully overcrowded trains. If you don't have a reservation, assume you'll be standing for your journey.

The trains are old and of a very uncomfortable design. There is very limited personal space and it feels like your in a straight-jacket for your entire journey.

Expensive - for the quality of experience, the ticket prices are very high. LNER charge less and they have nice new trains with abundant space and seats.

Overall, an experience to dread, each time you have to use these sardine cans on wheels.

Date of experience: 23 May 2024

- 3.2.3 Although there are not many '5 star' reviews on Trustpilot for Cross Country, some of the ones that have given 5 stars have referred to the 'exceptional' level of service they received in First Class as indicated in Review 4.

Review 4: Cross Country Trains (Trustpilot)

 **susan etheridge**
3 reviews · GB

 18 Mar 2023

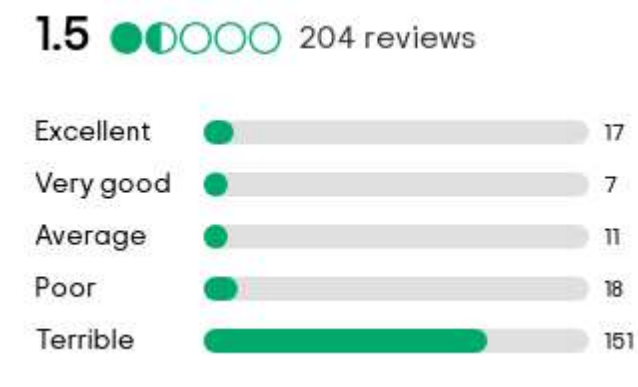
I boarded a Cross Country train this...

I boarded a Cross Country train this morning approximately 9.36am, Newcastle to Birmingham New Street, arrival 1.06pm. I was expecting delays due to strikes for which I purchased a return open first class ticket in advance to assure as comfortable journey as possible due to tiredness. I have to say that the service I experienced with both Paul (until Leeds) and Alex (thereafter) was exceptional, the best to date. A particularly rude passenger boarded who didn't hold a valid ticket I thought that Alex dealt with the situation respectfully and impeccably. Alex understood the fact that first class is solely for those with valid tickets. Albeit my destination was Leamington Spa which was cancelled, the service I received until then was exceptional - Full credit to your team - wonderful service by very professional and friendly staff. Thank you

Date of experience: 18 March 2023

- 3.2.4 A similar outcome was found on Tripadvisor, with the vast majority of reviews being 'terrible.'

Review 5: Cross Country Trains (Tripadvisor)



Review 6: Cross Country Trains (Tripadvisor)

**Helen B**
Sunderland, UK • 9 contributions



Alright
Feb 2024 • Family

The other option. Just average seats weren't comfortable WiFi wasn't too awful but not necessarily too bad of a journey

Written 19 February 2024

This review is the subjective opinion of a Tripadvisor member and not of Tripadvisor LLC. Tripadvisor performs checks on reviews as part of our industry-leading trust & safety standards. Read our [transparency report](#) to learn more.

**Billhook67**
Exeter • 4 contributions



Cross Country trains - are they going out of their way to make rail travel awful?
Feb 2024 • Business

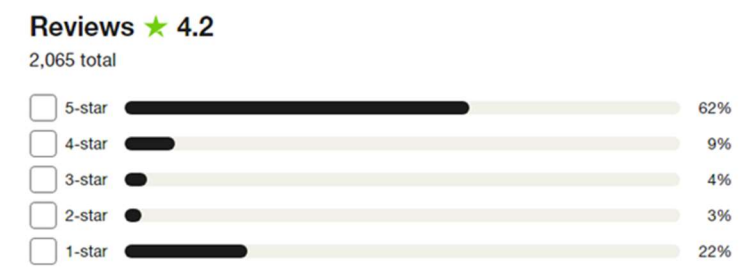
Probably the worst train journey I have had for a long while. The seats are the most uncomfortable ever, it's almost like they have been designed to be like that, it must take a special skill to make them so bad. The most restricted leg room on any train I have been on, overcrowded, seat reservations out the window, no catering, and a short train meaning lots of standing passengers. If anyone is interested it was the 15.52 from Cheltenham Spa to Plymouth on February 14th 2024. Wretched experience.

- 3.2.5 Both reviews in Review 6 mention uncomfortable seats, with one stating that they had the 'most restricted leg room on any train' they had been on. We have established that legroom available in a standard airline seat on Cross-Country is only 28 inches, so there is some justification here. Overcrowding was another common theme amongst the Tripadvisor reviews.

3.3 FlixBus

Sourced from Trustpilot on 05.06.2024

Review 7: FlixBus (Trustpilot)



- 3.3.1 62% of the reviews have given FlixBus 5 stars.

Review 8: FlixBus (Trustpilot)

**Mr. J Tham**
1 review · JM

3 days ago

It was my first ride on Flixbus and it...

It was my first ride on Flixbus and it was okay. The first transfer was delayed and the bathroom on the bus was not in the best condition but it was comfortable, the driver kept us notified and we reached our destination safely and made up time. On the way back on March 29, the driver did not keep us as notified on the route but we reached our destination.

Date of experience: 27 May 2024

 Useful  Share 

Review 9: FlixBus (Trustpilot)

**Christine Osborne**
5 reviews · GB

3 days ago

Stoke to Manchester by Flixbus

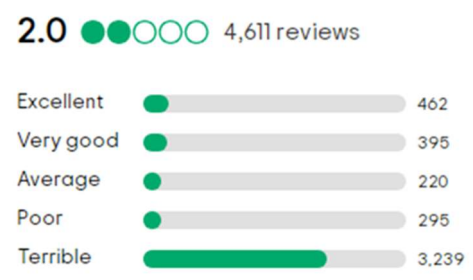
I booked a return journey with Flixbus to get to Manchester for a concert (because of concern about train strikes). I'm glad I did, the bus was punctual and the seats were comfortable. The driver was polite and informative. Altogether a great experience at a good price as I booked early. An added bonus was that I found out there was a stop at Manchester airport which is worth knowing for future trips.

Date of experience: 31 May 2024

 Useful  Share 

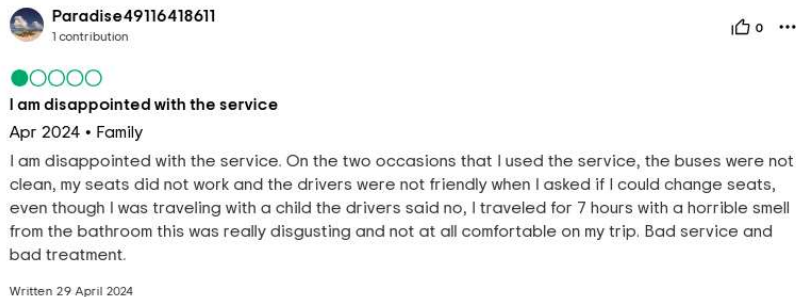
- 3.3.2 Review 8 and Review 9 above indicated that the seats were comfortable and the drivers were informative.

Review 10: FlixBus (Tripadvisor)



- 3.3.3 Tripadvisor reviews for FlixBus were not as positive as the Trustpilot ones with the majority of reviews rating FlixBus as 'terrible.' Below is an example of one of the reviews on Tripadvisor:

Review 11: FlixBus (Tripadvisor)

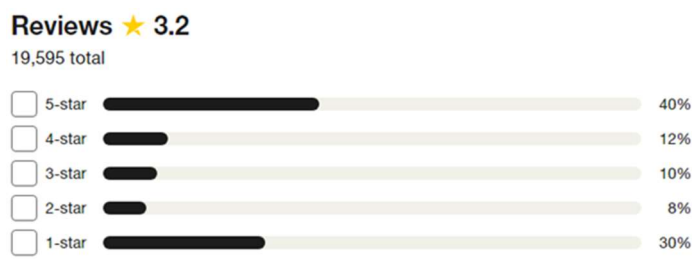


- 3.3.4 Review 11 above addressed a few common themes for FlixBus around the cleanliness of the bus and on-board toilet, drivers being rude and the journey not being comfortable.

3.4 Megabus

Sourced from Trustpilot on 05.06.2024

Review 12: Megabus (Trustpilot)



- 3.4.1 40% of the reviews have given Megabus 5 stars.

Review 13: Megabus (Trustpilot)

**TraceyP**
1 review · GB

  7 days ago

Comfy journey

Comfy journey. An hour late going because of an accident but 2 minutes early on the way back. Very comfortable. Very pleased. The price is excellent.

Date of experience: 16 May 2024

 Useful  Share 

 **Reply from megabus UK** 7 days ago

Hello,

We really value passenger feedback, so we are delighted to hear you have had a good journey with us.

We look forward to welcoming you on board again soon!

Review 14: Megabus (Trustpilot)

**Mrs Margerrison**
16 reviews · GB

  21 May 2024

What a service and price great

What a service and price great. The drivers, assistants everyone involved do such a good job, nothing was too much trouble. Helping with luggage, assistance, if required getting on and off. Steps are very steep for elderlies like ourselves but managed it.

Date of experience: 11 May 2024

 Useful  Share 

 **Reply from megabus UK** 21 May 2024

Hello,

Thanks for the feedback, it's great to hear you had a good journey.

We look forward to seeing you on board again soon.

- 3.4.2 Plenty of positive feedback on Trustpilot for Megabus and a customer service team who are proactive in responding to customer reviews as indicated in Review 13 and Review 14. Despite the late journey in the review dated 16th May 2024, this traveller still gave 5 stars and were clearly happy with the level of comfort.

- 3.4.3 Tripadvisor reviews for Megabus were generally either 'Excellent' or 'Terrible' with very little in between.

Review 15: Megabus (Tripadvisor)



Review 16: Megabus (Tripadvisor)

 **Joseph**
90 contributions

1👍 0 ...

●○○○○○
Avoid!!!

Apr 2024 • Solo

Bus was late by 30 minutes from Birmingham and late by 50 mins getting into my destination. There were no updates on the coach or anything. I will never use them again. Flixbus all the way.

Written 22 April 2024

Review 17: Megabus (Tripadvisor)

 **Alvanley Arms**
5 contributions

1👍 0 ...

●●●●●
Excellent Service

May 2024 • Couples

We had travelled on a major Coach Competitor for years from Manchester to Taunton, we decided to try the Megabus due to a dissatisfaction with our previous provider. We were not sure where Shudehill Bus Station was and on finding it we went to the reception for Megabus. Callum and David were behind the counter, they could not have been more helpful if they tried, the coach was on time and our journey was second to none. I would recommend Megabus and I have read the reviews and I disagree with a lot of them, from personal experience. I would recommend you try them as every experience is different, for each individual. I praise the customer service at Manchester Shudehill and I have saved so much money traveling with Megabus, compared to a well-known competitor. Thankyou.

[Read less](#) ^

Written 31 May 2024

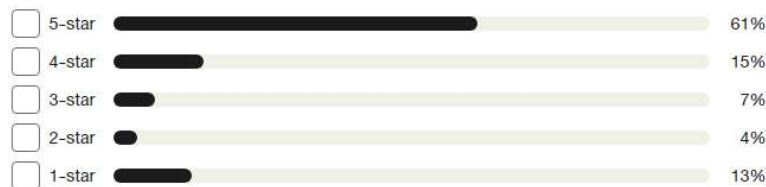
- 3.4.4 Coaches arriving late was a common problem for those who gave Megabus one star however, as stated in Review 17 above, 'every experience is different' and this couple were clearly satisfied with the customer service that they received.

3.5 National Express

Review 18: National Express (Trustpilot)

Reviews ★ 4.1

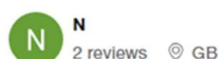
62,374 total



Sourced from Trustpilot on 05.06.2024

- 3.5.1 61% of the reviews have given National Express 5 stars. There were plenty of 5 star reviews that made reference to the coaches being clean, comfortable and punctual with friendly and helpful drivers. Like Megabus, National Express also seems to have a good customer service team who respond to customer reviews.

Review 19: National Express (Trustpilot)



N

2 reviews

GB



10 Jun 2024

Excellent all round

The booking was easy and prices great. Both coaches were spotlessly clean and comfortable and left on time before reaching both destinations slightly early. All the drivers were friendly and courteous and drove smoothly and safely. I couldn't really ask for a better service. Thank you.

Date of experience: 08 June 2024

Useful Share



Reply from National Express Coaches

11 Jun 2024

Hi N!

We're so happy to hear you've had a great experience with National Express. We always try to offer the best prices and the highest quality travel! Thanks so much for your kind feedback.

Kind regards,
Josh

Review 20: National Express (Trustpilot)

CH

Christopher Hawkins
7 reviews · GB

★★★★★

10 Jun 2024

Pleased I chose National Express to Manchester

Have just enjoyed a two day break to Manchester and used National Express instead of the train. The service I found was excellent. No delays. Departure on time. A very comfortable journey. An almost door-to-door service. The return the next day was the same. Will be using National Express again.

Date of experience: 08 June 2024

👍 Useful

🔗 Share

🚩

↩

Reply from National Express Coaches

11 Jun 2024

Hi Christopher!

Thank you for rating National Express and for recommending us to other customers. It was a pleasure to have you on board. We hope to see you again soon. Regards!

Josh

3.5.2 Again, the vast majority of reviews have given an 'excellent' score on Tripadvisor.

Review 21: National Express (Tripadvisor)



Review 22: National Express (Tripadvisor)

 **Carol Tredget**
Gosport, UK • 16 contributions

 0 ...



Excellent Choice.

Jun 2024 • Couples

Price right, convenience of times. Very happy, friendly & seemly safe drivers.
Comfortable journey. You can travel all over The British Isles.

Written 8 June 2024

This review is the subjective opinion of a Tripadvisor member and not of Tripadvisor LLC. Tripadvisor performs checks on reviews as part of our industry-leading trust & safety standards. Read our [transparency report](#) to learn more.



National Express... L

...

Hi, Thank you for your wonderful feedback! We're thrilled to hear that you found our prices right and our schedule convenient. It's great to know that you had a comfortable journey with friendly and safe drivers. We take pride in offering convenient and comfortable travel options throughout the British Isles, and we're delighted that you enjoyed your experience with us. We appreciate your kind words and look forward to welcoming you on board again soon. Best regards, Funmi

Written 9 June 2024

Review 23: National Express (Tripadvisor)

 **ednith h**
1 contribution

 0 ...



Bus travel from heathrow

Jun 2024 • Family

Good prompt service .and very cheap for the length of distance .driver very polite .comfortable seats .Will definitely consider this again

Written 8 June 2024

This review is the subjective opinion of a Tripadvisor member and not of Tripadvisor LLC. Tripadvisor performs checks on reviews as part of our industry-leading trust & safety standards. Read our [transparency report](#) to learn more.



National Express... L

...

Hi there, Thank you for taking the time to share your positive experience with us! We're delighted to hear that you found our service prompt, affordable, and comfortable. We're also glad to hear that our driver was polite and that you enjoyed the comfort of our seats. Your feedback means a lot to us, and we're thrilled to know that you would consider traveling with us again. We look forward to welcoming you on board in the future. Best regards, Funmi

Written 9 June 2024

- 3.5.3 Many of the reviews on Tripadvisor make reference to how comfortable the seats are and how convenient the schedule is. Plenty commented on how the coaches are prompt and how friendly and polite the drivers were.

4.1 Sample of Example Journeys between Manchester and Birmingham

- 4.1.1 Below is a sample of realistic journeys that the general public may have taken between Manchester and Birmingham. These examples have considered both Manchester and Birmingham as the starting point and departure times relate to the purpose of travel. For each example, we have compared the main transport offerings of Coach, Rail and Private Car for the bulk of the journey and whether travellers would have required additional public transport from 'home' or 'work' to the coach or rail station.
- 4.1.2 The departure times relate to the time a traveller would have needed to leave their 'home' or 'destination' address considering how long it would have taken them to walk, get a taxi/PHV or use public transport. The total travel time indicated in each table includes the time that a traveller would have had to wait for the next available train or coach.
- 4.1.3 The total cost in each example refers to the amount it would cost one traveller (apart from the Leisure/Tourism examples which are based on a family of four) to use the specified mode of transport. Additional taxi/PHV or public transport costs have not been included.

4.2 Commuting for Work/Education

- 4.2.1 The examples below were based on a 08:00 – 16:00 and 09:00 – 17:00 working day (Monday to Friday). Suitable departure times and costs have been recorded in both directions however those commuting for Education purposes may have required earlier return trips. For the 'work' destination, we selected the Manchester Arndale Centre, Market Street, New Cannon Street Mall Manchester, Greater Manchester M4 3AQ and the Bullring and Grand Central Shopping Centre, Moor St, Birmingham B5 4BU.
- 4.2.2 We must cast doubt that there is much daily commuting between Manchester and Birmingham due to the time and distance but these times apply equally to a one-off meeting or a weekly trip.

Table 3: Commuting for Work/Education – 08:00 Start (Manchester to Birmingham)

Journey Timings and Total Cost Per Day	Private Car	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Depart (From home)	05:00 – 06:10	05:15 – 05:47	No suitable times available	No suitable times available	No suitable times available
Total travel time (Outbound)	1hr 50 – 3hrs	1hr 50 – 2hrs 22			
Arrive (Work)	06:50 – 08:00	07:37			
Return (From work)	16:00	16:00		16:00	16:00
Total travel time (Return)	2hrs 10 – 3hrs 10	2hrs 15 – 2hrs 44		2hrs 46 – 2hrs 59	2hrs 58 – 3hrs 21
Arrive (Home)	18:10 – 19:10	18:15 – 18:44		18:46 – 18:59	18:58 – 19:21
Total Cost	£47.85	£80.70 – £101.90		£4.99 (one way)	£6.90 (one way)

Table 4: Commuting for Work/Education – 09:00 Start (Manchester to Birmingham)

Journey Timings and Total Cost Per Day	Private Car	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Depart (From home)	05:50 – 07:10	06:18 – 06:43	No suitable times available	05:51 – 06:08	No suitable times available
Total travel time (Outbound)	1hr 50 – 3hrs 10	1hr 52 – 2hrs 17		2hrs 39 – 2hrs 56	
Arrive (Work)	07:40 – 09:00	08:35		08:47	
Return (From work)	17:00	17:00	17:00	17:00	17:00
Total travel time (Return)	1hr 50 – 2hrs 50	2hrs 19 – 2hrs 44	4hrs 21 – 4hrs 34	2hrs 46 – 2hrs 57	2hrs 53 – 3hrs 16
Arrive (Home)	18:50 – 19:50	19:19 – 19:44	21:21 – 21:34	19:46 – 19:57	19:53 – 20:16
Total Cost	£47.85	£96.00	£4.99 (one way)	£9.98	£6.90 (one way)

Table 5: Commuting for Work/Education – 08:00 Start (Birmingham to Manchester)

Journey Timings and Total Cost Per Day	Private Car	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Depart (From home)	05:30 – 06:20	05:24 – 05:49	No suitable times available	No suitable times available	No suitable times available
Total travel time (Outbound)	1hr 40 – 2hrs 30	1hr 54 – 2hrs 19			
Arrive (Work)	07:10 – 08:00	07:43			
Return (From work)	16:00	16:00	16:00	16:00	16:00
Total travel time (Return)	1hr 50 – 3hrs	2hrs 08 – 2hrs 33	3hrs 06 – 3hrs 38	2hrs 44 – 3hrs 14	3hrs 43 – 4hrs 04
Arrive (Home)	17:50 – 19:00	18:08 – 18:33	19:06 – 19:38	18:44 – 19:14	19:43 – 20:04
Total Cost	£44.58	£45.40 – £69.60	£4.99 (one way)	£5.99 (one way)	£12.70

Table 6: Commuting for Work/Education – 09:00 Start (Birmingham to Manchester)

Journey Timings and Total Cost Per Day	Private Car	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Depart (From home)	06:10 – 07:10	06:24 – 06:47	No suitable times available	05:06 – 5:36	No suitable times available
Total travel time (Outbound)	1hr 50 – 2hrs 50	1hr 56 – 2hrs 19		2hrs 35 – 3hrs 05	
Arrive (Work)	08:00 – 09:00	08:43		08:11	
Return (From work)	17:00	17:00	17:00	17:00	
Total travel time (Return)	1hr 50 – 2hrs 50	2hrs 10 – 2hrs 33	2hrs 51 – 3hrs 23	2hrs 34 – 3hrs 04	
Arrive (Home)	18:50 – 19:50	19:10 – 19:33	19:51 – 20:23	19:34 – 20:04	
Total Cost	£44.58	£96.00	£4.99 (one way)	£9.98	

4.3 Social/Visiting

4.3.1 For social/visiting, we looked at weekend departures and returns to and from Birmingham and Manchester on Saturday 18th May. For these scenarios, we assumed a Saturday morning departure between 08:00 – 09:00 (or closest available) and considered options of a late same day return. We used prices available on the day of departure.

Table 7: Social/Visiting (Manchester to Birmingham)

Journey Timings and Total Cost	Private Car	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Depart (From home)	08:30	08:18 – 08:47	08:51 – 09:04	08:01 – 08:14	08:04 – 08:27
Total travel time (Outbound)	1hr 30 – 2hrs 10	1hr 58 – 2hrs 52	2hrs 47 – 3hrs 37	2hrs 50 – 3hrs 33	2hrs 41 – 3hrs 25
Arrive	10:00 – 10:40	10:45 – 11:10	11:51 – 12:28	11:04 – 11:34	11:08 – 11:29
Return	21:00	20:22 – 20:47	18:57 – 19:29	19:26 – 19:56	19:31 – 19:52
Total travel time (Return)	1hr 30 – 2hrs 10	1hr 59 – 2hrs 53	2hrs 42 – 3hrs 27	2hrs 50 – 3hrs 33	2hrs 51 – 3hrs 35
Arrive (Home)	22:30 – 23:10	22:46 – 23:15	22:11 – 22:24	22:46 – 22:59	22:43 – 23:06
Total Cost	£25.82	£50.29	£25.98	£12.98	£16.80

Table 8: Social/Visiting (Birmingham to Manchester)

Journey Timings and Total Cost	Private Car	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Depart (From home)	08:30	08:22 – 08:47	09:27 – 09:59	07:46 – 08:16	08:31 – 08:52
Total travel time (Outbound)	1hr 30 – 2hrs 10	1hr 58 – 2hrs 52	2hrs 42 – 3hrs 27	2hrs 50 – 3hrs 33	2hrs 41 – 3hrs 25
Arrive	10:00 – 10:40	10:45 – 11:14	12:41 – 12:54	11:06 – 11:19	11:33 – 11:56
Return	21:00	20:40 – 21:09	16:36 – 16:49	20:01 – 20:14	19:49 – 20:12
Total travel time (Return)	1hr 30 – 2hrs 10	2hrs 02 – 2hrs 56	2hrs 42 – 3hrs 27	2hrs 50 – 3hrs 33	2hrs 51 – 3hrs 35
Arrive (Home)	22:30 – 23:10	23:11 – 23:36	19:31 – 20:03	23:04 – 23:34	23:03 – 23:24
Total Cost	£25.82	£50.29	£14.98	£16.98	£17.80

4.4 Leisure/Tourism

4.4.1 For the scenarios below, we selected an Old Trafford Stadium tour (Manchester) and a visit to Cadbury World (Birmingham) based on a family of four (2 adults, 2 children). We selected Wednesday 7th August 2024 as the day of travel for each scenario with an 11:00 arrival and 15:00 departure at/from each attraction.

Table 9: Leisure/Tourism (Manchester – Birmingham – Cadbury World)

Journey Timings and Total Cost	Private Car	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Depart (From home)	08:10 – 09:10	07:40 – 8:09	06:41 – 06:54	06:21 – 06:34	07:49 – 08:12
Total travel time (Outbound)	1hr 50 – 2hrs 50	2hrs 34 – 3hrs 03	3hrs 49 – 4hrs 02	3hrs 37 – 3hrs 50	3hrs 39 – 4hrs 02
Arrive	10:00 – 11:00	10:43	10:43	10:11	11:51
Return	15:00	15:14	15:05	15:05	15:05
Total travel time (Return)	2hrs 10 – 3hrs 50	2hrs 28 – 3hrs	6hrs 11 – 6hrs 24	4hrs 41 – 4hrs 54	3hrs 53 – 4hrs 16
Arrive (Home)	17:10 – 18:50	17:42 – 18:14	21:16 – 21:29	19:46 – 19:59	18:58 – 19:21
Total Cost	£33.84	£264.04	£51.56	£49.56	£66.29

Table 10: Leisure/Tourism (Birmingham – Manchester – Old Trafford)

Journey Timings and Total Cost	Private Car	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Depart (From home)	08:50	07:51 – 08:16	09:22 – 09:54	06:46 – 07:16	07:16 – 07:37
Total travel time (Outbound)	1hr 30 – 2hrs 10	2hrs 43 – 2hrs 18	3hrs 04 – 3hrs 36	3hrs 18 – 3hrs 48	3hrs 09 – 3hrs 30
Arrive	10:20 – 11:00	10:34	12:58	10:34	10:46
Return	15:00	15:27	15:27	15:27	15:27
Total travel time (Return)	1hr 40 – 2hr 40	2hrs 20 – 2hrs 45	3hrs 39 – 4hrs 11	3hrs 17 – 3hrs 47	4hrs 16 – 4hrs 37
Arrive (Home)	16:40 – 17:40	17:47 – 18:12	19:06 – 19:38	18:44 – 19:14	19:43 – 20:04
Total Cost	£24.02	£250.89	£41.92	£43.92	£65.10

4.5 Events

4.5.1 The following four scenarios were created based on performances by Peter Kay and Take That who both held events (separately) in Manchester and Birmingham in May 2024.

Table 11: Events – Scenario 1 – Manchester to Peter Kay at Birmingham Utilita Arena (Friday 3rd May)

Journey Timings and Total Cost	Private Car	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Depart (From home)	15:40 – 16:50	15:40 – 15:59	15:12 – 15:24	14:08 – 14:24	14:35 – 14:49
Total travel time (Outbound)	1hr 40 – 2hrs 50	2hrs 14 – 2hrs 33	2hrs 49 – 3hrs 01	3hrs 04 – 3hrs 20	3hrs 41 – 3hrs 55
Arrive	17:20 – 18:30	18:13	18:13	17:28	18:30
Return	22:15	22:15	22:15	22:15	22:15
Total travel time (Return)	1hr 40 – 2hrs 20	3hrs 28 – 3hrs 57	3hrs 56 – 4hrs 09	2hrs 51 – 3hrs 04	3hrs 18 – 3hrs 41
Arrive (Home)	23:55 – 00:35	01:43 – 02:12	02:11 – 02:24	01:06 – 01:19	01:33 – 01:56
Total Cost	£41.88	£50.29	£13.98	£9.98	£26.10

Table 12: Events – Scenario 2 – Birmingham to Peter Kay at AO Arena Manchester (Friday 17th May)

Journey Timings and Total Cost	Private Car	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Depart (From home)	15:00 – 16:40	15:53 – 16:04	12:12 – 12:38	14:37 – 14:54	14:34 – 14:46
Total travel time (Outbound)	1hr 50 – 3hrs 30	2hrs 16 – 2hrs 27	2hrs 48 – 3hrs 14	3hrs 25 – 3hrs 42	3hrs 10 – 3hrs 22
Arrive	16:50 – 18:30	18:20	15:26	18:19	17:56
Return	22:15	22:15	22:15	22:15	22:15
Total travel time (Return)	1hr 40 – 2hrs 10	7hrs 24 – 7hrs 49	5hrs 21 – 5hrs 53	4hrs 29 – 4hrs 59	4hrs 23 – 4hrs 44
Arrive (Home)	23:55 – 00:25	05:39 – 06:04	03:36 – 04:08	02:44 – 03:14	02:38 – 02:59
Total Cost	£36.73	£50.29	£13.98	£10.98	£22.90

Table 13: Events – Scenario 3 – Birmingham to Take That at AO Arena Manchester (Saturday 11th May)

Journey Timings and Total Cost	Private Car	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Depart (From home)	15:30 – 16:20	15:24 – 15:33	12:12 – 12:38	13:27 – 13:35	13:04 – 13:17
Total travel time (Outbound)	1hr 40 – 2hrs 30	2hrs 17 – 2hrs 26	2hrs 48 – 3hrs 14	3hrs 21 – 3hrs 29	2hrs 56 – 3hrs 09
Arrive	17:10 – 18:00	17:50	15:26	16:56	16:13
Return	23:00	23:00	23:00	23:00	23:00
Total travel time (Return)	1hr 30 – 2hrs 20	No trains available after the event	4hrs 36 – 5hrs 08	3hrs 44 – 4hrs 14	3hrs 38 – 3hrs 59
Arrive (Home)	00:30 – 01:20		03:36 – 04:08	02:44 – 03:14	02:38 – 02:59
Total Cost	£36.88	£46.80 (one way)	£12.98	£10.98	£24.30

Table 14: Events – Scenario 4 – Manchester to Take That at Birmingham Utilita Arena (Saturday 18th May)

Journey Timings and Total Cost	Private Car	Cross Country Rail	FlixBus	Megabus	National Express
Depart (From home)	15:50 – 16:30	15:17 – 15:37	14:00 – 14:14	14:00 – 14:24	13:45 – 14:00
Total travel time (Outbound)	1hr 30 – 2hrs 10	2hrs 13 – 2hrs 33	3hrs 14 – 3hrs 28	3hrs 04 – 3hrs 28	3hrs 30 – 3hrs 45
Arrive	17:20 – 18:00	17:50	17:28	17:28	17:30
Return	23:00	23:00	23:00	23:00	23:00
Total travel time (Return)	1hr 30 – 2hrs 20	No trains available after the event	3hrs 11 – 3hrs 24	3hrs 36 – 3hrs 49	2hrs 33 – 2hrs 56
Arrive (Home)	00:30 – 01:20		02:11 – 02:24	02:36 – 02:49	01:33 – 01:56
Total Cost	£42.05	£22.80 (one way)	£13.98	£15.99	£26.10

Table 15: Comparison of Overall Experience Factors by Mode of Transport

Qualitative Factors relating to Overall Experience	Private Car	Taxi/PHV	Rail	Coach
Cost	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓
Time	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
Reliability/Predictability	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
Information Provision/Advertising/Accessibility	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Convenience/Comfort	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Security	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Commuting/Education	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓
Social/Visiting	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Leisure/Tourism	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Events	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓
TOTAL	27	16	22	18

In Table 15, we have compared the overall experience of a traveller based on each section within this report with the addition of 'Security' which refers to a travellers' ability to be assured of their own personal safety and wellbeing. Again, it is important to note that these results are subjective and opinions will differ.

Key

✓✓✓ = very good / very easy

✓✓ = reasonably good / reasonably easy

✓ = moderate / possible / difficult / expensive

X = not possible / not available

5.1 Conclusions

- 5.1.1 Going back to the critical question - Do the general public give sufficient consideration to Coach as a travel option? The answer, in short - No, but there are many reasons for this, some not justified.
- 5.1.2 There is an element of the 'unknown' and 'uncertainty' about coaches. Many people will not consider Coach as a viable option, simply because they have never tried it.
- 5.1.3 Traditionally seen as the home of pensioners and students, the hurdle for coach operators is getting new people on board. Across the industry generally, the customer retention rate, as reported in: <https://pressdispensary.co.uk/ext/1928/docs/2017-cta-coach-tourism-research-analysis.pdf> is quite high due to the focus on retaining certain age groups e.g. over 60's for coach holidays. Coaches excel in providing tours that include famous landmarks, places of interest and specific events and they are popular holiday options for millions of people in the UK with more than 18 million people taking day trips and over 5 million people going on short breaks or longer holidays by coach each year as indicated by CTA. Inter-city coach travel is a very different market, however.
- 5.1.4 There is also an image problem to overcome in that the boom years of coaching following the removal of express service licencing was characterised by low fares but basic quality. Even the Megabus network was built up initially using available low quality vehicles.
- 5.1.5 Coaches do not always have attractive or safe picking up points, in our example here in Birmingham both Megabus and FlixBus use bus shelters with no other facilities nearby, especially toilets. National Express here has coach stations at either end but this is not always the case. In many towns coaches have been relegated to 'back streets' after smaller, replacement bus stations decree that there is no room for coach services. Security is certainly an issue for lone travellers.
- 5.1.6 The fact that there is no recognised 'central coach station' used by all operators in either Birmingham or Manchester increases the unknown and dilutes the coach offer.
- 5.1.7 It is clear from our research that Coach is the cheapest option for a single journey between Manchester and Birmingham compared to Private Car and Rail. In a climate where 'every penny counts' this cheaper option should be at the forefront of the minds of the general public, yet it is not the 'go to' option for most. In reality, many people are deemed to be 'too busy' to waste time

travelling somewhere and would happily spend a little bit extra if it means they get to where they want to go more quickly.

- 5.1.8 There is, of course, the element of additional travel and transport which needs to be considered for any journey. Coach may well be the cheapest option but how far is home or the intended destination to the coach stop? Potentially it could be the best mode to interchange, for example at Shudehill.
- 5.1.9 If additional transport is required, Coach will then become less appealing as the cheaper option. Likewise, Rail may not be the fastest option if public transport is required at either end of the train journey. In both cases, if the overall journey becomes complicated, people may opt to drive if they are able to or seek alternatives such as Lift Share. Driving removes the time penalty incurred going into and out of city centres.
- 5.1.10 A major disincentive to rail travel is the complexity of ticketing. On comprehensive ticket information websites we found 71 different fares between Manchester and Birmingham. It has the advantage of being the fastest and most frequent mode between Manchester and Birmingham but this is largely negated if prospective passengers are persistently signposted to Advance tickets, which remove any freedom and commit travellers to a specific departure. Our struggle to establish when off-peak tickets are valid is an illustration of this.
- 5.1.11 If someone needs to be in a particular place at a specific time, i.e. for work/business purposes then Coach is not going to be the best option. As indicated in Table 3 to Table 6 in Journey Samples, there are no suitable coach departures that arrive in Manchester or Birmingham before 08:00 unless travellers board a coach between 02:45 – 03:45 and out of the three coach operators that we have looked at, only Megabus has a suitable coach that arrives in both cities for a 09:00 start with the 05:50 from Birmingham and the 06:20 from Manchester.
- 5.1.12 Coach suits people who are flexible with departure and arrival times and travellers may need to plan their activities around the coach timetable rather than trying to select suitable coaches for their already planned day. Examples of the aforementioned can be found in Leisure/Tourism e.g. An 11:00 booking at Cadbury World would not be suitable for anyone travelling with National Express from Manchester but a 12:00 booking would be ideal as indicated in Table 9. Likewise, FlixBus would struggle to get travellers from Birmingham to Old Trafford for 11:00 but would be able to get them there for 13:00 as shown in Table 10.
- 5.1.13 Returning home from events that finish late is a problem that arises for both Coach and Rail travellers. Having transport available to take travellers home after a big event is something that needs to be considered as indicated in Table 11 to Table 14. Travellers in these instances may have to weigh

up whether to leave an event earlier to guarantee they get the coach or look to stay the night and travel back the next day.

- 5.1.14 We looked at the ability of passengers to 'turn up and go'. After all, those intending to drive have no time restrictions nor have to commit to a precise departure time. Rail is growing increasingly unwilling to acknowledge it is a turn up and go mode, even if such passengers are penalised by paying higher fares. It promotes Advance tickets above all else and we find it ironic that it is the third party retailers which promote open tickets.
- 5.1.15 Coaches seem to generally cater for the turn up and go passenger but certainly do not actively promote it, perhaps more understandably than with the rail industry given the fixed capacity of a coach.
- 5.1.16 The perception of the impact of delays (amongst the general public) is something to consider. People may perceive delays on modes like Rail as more impactful or more of an inconvenience than potential comparable delays on the road network. The idea of having to stand on a cold platform for an extra 30 minutes waiting for a delayed train as opposed to sitting in heavy traffic on the M6 for the same duration may well be perceived differently.
- 5.1.17 Being able to carry out additional activities such as: scrolling through a mobile phone, reading, drinking alcohol or even having a nap whilst travelling may seem more appealing to travellers than being the designated driver. Other people may prefer the element of control that comes with being a driver.
- 5.1.18 Ultimately, choice of transport comes down to individual preferences and it will depend on the journey purpose e.g. If a traveller needs to attend an important business meeting, the duration of the journey becomes more of a priority than the cost. In this instance, Coach would be ruled out (or not even considered) and the traveller may consider Private Car as the preferred option based on journey time and level of control or they may opt for Rail as this would allow them to work on their laptop for the duration of the train journey.
- 5.1.19 Alternatively, if a traveller is travelling for leisure purposes, Coach may become the preferred option as the money that can be saved on the cost of transport may be utilised elsewhere when a traveller reaches their destination.

5.2 Recommendations

So how can Coach close the gap?

- a) **Marketing** is certainly something that needs to be improved in the Coach industry with a focus on attracting new customers.
- b) **Improved Timetables and Routes** that take purpose of travel into account, considering more appropriate departure/arrival times.

- c) **Improved Passenger Facilities** at pick-up points in major cities
- d) **Convince Local Transport Authorities** that coach travel is important and a key part of the public transport offer
- e) **Tackle Coach Driver Shortages** with a focus on attracting younger people to the industry.

- 5.2.2 Coach operators need to promote their services more in order to compete with Rail. Coaches do well at retaining existing/returning customers but there is a feeling that there is an opportunity for Coach to cast its net wider beyond its traditional markets.
- 5.2.3 Collaboration between Coach, Rail and Public Service providers seems like something people can only dream of but it would certainly improve transitions as would multi-operator ticketing.
- 5.2.4 Timetables and route maps that are easily accessible, easily understood and journeys which depart and arrive in the major cities at suitable times would be the ideal model.
- 5.2.5 Driver retention has been an area of need post-Covid as indicated in <https://www.rha.uk.net/Portals/0/Coaches/Coach%20Policy%202023.pdf?ver=2023-05-24-110946-157×tamp=1684922971996> and the coach industry would benefit from government funding to invest in drivers and driver training.