



## **TRANSPORT, EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY:**

A CITIZENS COMMISSION INTO TRANSPORT AFFORDABILITY  
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS OUR CITY

**JUNE 2026**

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## WHO WE ARE

Oxford Citizens is a growing alliance of schools, faith institutions and community organisations working together for the common good of all the people of our city.

We are a local chapter of Citizens UK, the country's biggest, most diverse, people-powered alliance, using community organising to achieve community-led solutions to local and national needs and problems.

We bring together people from diverse backgrounds and life circumstances to identify shared concerns, develop leaders, and take collective action to improve life across Oxford.

### Our campaigns begin with listening.

We believe that the people most affected by an issue should help shape the response to it. Rather than starting with policy proposals, we start by listening to the experiences of those living with a problem and identifying the changes they believe would make a difference.

### This publication is the result of that process.

Over recent months, Oxford Citizens member institutions have gathered evidence about the impact of transport costs on young people and families. We heard from students, parents and carers, community members and youth groups across Oxford and surrounding areas. The evidence presented in this publication reflects the experiences of young people and their families across our city.

## WHY WE ARE CAMPAIGNING

Again and again, across small-group conversations, individual testimonies and targeted surveys, hundreds of people expressed the same concern. Bus fares are not simply too expensive. The cost of transport creates barriers to educational access, participation and opportunity; strains family finances; and harms young people's wellbeing.

Transport cost is an issue of Oxford's fairness and future.

Three messages repeatedly emerged:

**Message 1:** Young people should not face barriers to education because of transport costs.

**Message 2:** Those barriers are often experienced as unfair because geography determines who pays.

**Message 3:** Cheaper transport would create opportunities for young people, families and communities.

These findings underpin Oxford Citizens' current transport campaign.

**Aim 1:** Because the high cost of public transport hampers young people's access to school and their city, we want the bus companies and Oxfordshire County officials to work with Oxford Citizens to provide cheaper options.

**Aim 2:** Because passengers often have to use more than one bus to get to their destination, we want the three major bus companies operating across Oxford to make tickets transferable from one company to another for young people in full-time education and training.

# YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD NOT FACE BARRIERS TO EDUCATION BECAUSE OF TRANSPORT COSTS

For young people, using public transport is not a lifestyle choice or an optional expense. It is the means by which they access education. Again and again, students and parents described transport not as discretionary spending but as a necessary cost incurred to attend school or college.

## **This distinction matters.**

Participants were not asking for cheaper travel so they could make additional leisure journeys. They were describing the challenge of paying to access something that UK society regards as essential.

Our son is still in full-time education, and getting to school is not optional, it's essential.

Students and parents repeatedly described situations in which attending school or college imposed significant household burdens and sacrifices.

Participants repeatedly described transport costs as unavoidable, recurring, difficult to absorb and increasingly expensive. Parents frequently described transport costs in the same language they used to describe food bills, energy bills and other household necessities.

**Nearly 70% of responding parents at one school described bus fares as “very expensive”.**

Students described the impact of transport costs on their own lives. Some reported covering transport from minimal wages earned through part-time work. Others described changing their behaviour and restricting their activities to cope with costs.

Very expensive as I pay for my own buses with money I earn from my job.

Leads to me picking up more shifts so I can afford to travel.

There have been days where I skip lunch or walk half the journey to save a bit of money.

The evidence suggests that transport costs are affecting more than household budgets. They are influencing educational participation, daily decision-making and young people's experience of education itself.

## **WHO IS MOST AFFECTED**

The evidence suggests that transport costs do not affect all families equally. Particularly affected groups include families with multiple children, students travelling longer distances, families without realistic alternatives to bus travel, households already experiencing financial pressure, and young people who need to travel independently because of family circumstances.

Participants repeatedly described situations where there was no realistic alternative to traveling by bus. Walking was too far. Cycling felt unsafe. Parents were working. Driving was impractical or car ownership unaffordable. In those circumstances, bus travel became not simply one option among many, but the only realistic means of getting to school.

Families living on Oxford's most deprived, outlying housing estates are often the hardest hit – many of them having to travel the furthest distance on the tightest budget. In their interplay with educational access and participation opportunities, transport costs can deepen the divide in our unequal city.

## **GEOGRAPHY DETERMINES WHO PAYS**

Across surveys, listening sessions and individual testimony, participants repeatedly framed transport as an issue of fairness rather than cost alone. Students and parents often compared themselves with others in very similar situations. They attend the same schools. They study the same courses. They live in the same city. Yet their transport costs were dramatically different.

This theme appeared repeatedly throughout the evidence. Participants frequently described a system in which geography determines who pays, how much they pay, and what opportunities are available to them. Many participants described the current system as “a postcode lottery”.

For many, the issue was one of fairness. Why should students in full-time education be treated differently simply because one is 15 and the other is 16? Why should access to education depend on where they live or their family's ability to cover transport costs?

### **Why our campaign focuses on young people in full-time education**

Many young people remain in full-time education after 16, yet are expected to pay adult fares despite still travelling to school or college. Participants questioned why transport support ends while education continues. The evidence shows people are calling for a fairer system, where educational opportunity is not limited by geography and the cost of getting to school or college.

It's unfair that just because I live further than my friends, they can come to school for free and I have to pay.

It feels unfair something as basic as a school journey carries such a high cost.

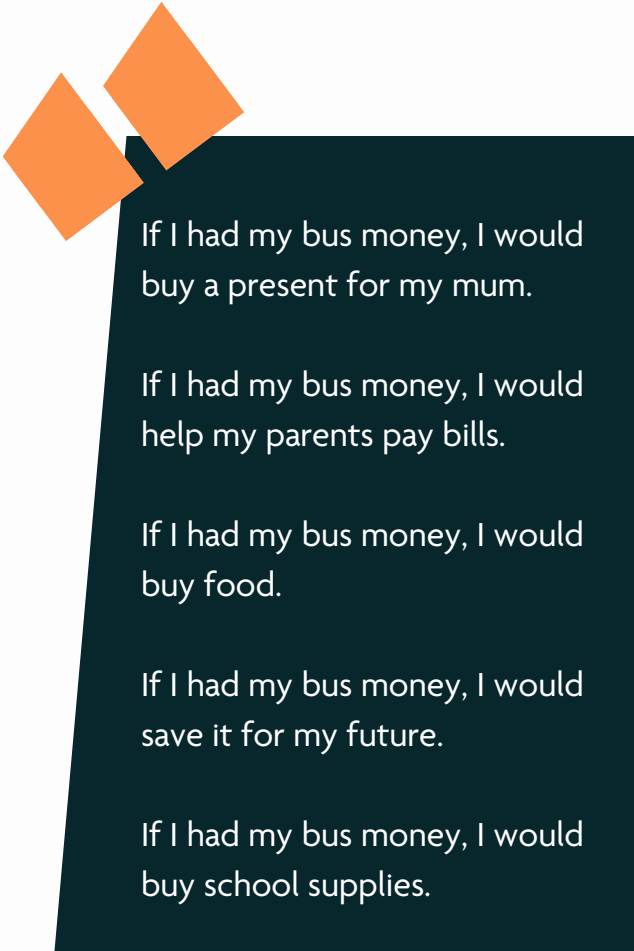
# **CHEAPER TRANSPORT WOULD** **CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG** **PEOPLE, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES**

When Oxford Citizens asked young people a simple question - "If I had my bus money, I would..." - their responses revealed something important.

Very few talked about luxury purchases or entertainment. Instead, they spoke about family, food, education and the future. Again and again, young people described practical, responsible and community-minded uses for money that would otherwise be spent on transport.

Many wanted to help their families. Others wanted to buy food. Some wanted to save. Others wanted educational resources. Taken together, the responses paint a picture of transport costs not as a minor inconvenience but as money that could otherwise support wellbeing, learning and opportunity.

What would young people do with their bus money? The answer was remarkably consistent: They would redirect that resource towards helping with household bills, buying food, investing in their education and future.



If I had my bus money, I would buy a present for my mum.

If I had my bus money, I would help my parents pay bills.

If I had my bus money, I would buy food.

If I had my bus money, I would save it for my future.

If I had my bus money, I would buy school supplies.

This pattern also appears elsewhere in the evidence. Parents frequently described transport costs as competing with other priorities. Many explained that money spent on bus fares was money that could not be spent elsewhere.

We have to reduce the amount of money available for school meals because of bus fares.

There have been days where I skip lunch or walk half the journey to save a bit of money.

They described money that could be redirected for books, tutoring, extracurricular activities, household essentials and utility bills. For some young people, transport costs also affect how they spend their time. One student explained that they had taken on additional work shifts simply to afford travel to school – cutting into their study time. Transport therefore creates costs that extend beyond money alone. It can affect time, energy, opportunities and educational support.

Participants described opportunities that would become available if transport were more affordable. Many spoke about being able to travel more freely. Others described greater participation in activities, social life and opportunities beyond school.

It would be much easier to travel around freely without having to spend a lot on bus fares.

Some young people described spending more on transport than on lunches, and others described walking long distances because bus travel was unaffordable. These examples reinforce a consistent theme across the evidence. Transport costs are creating hardship. They are also limiting opportunity and imposing emotional burdens.

This would make a huge difference to my family and take a lot of weight off my shoulders. It makes me feel guilty that my family pays financially just because of my choice of school for Sixth Form.

The evidence suggests that cheaper transport would create opportunities for young people, families, schools, colleges and communities. It would enable greater participation in education. It would reduce financial pressure and ease family stress. It would increase freedom and independence. It would allow household resources to be directed toward competing necessities and young people's enrichment and development.

Most importantly, it would help ensure that transport acts as a bridge to opportunity rather than a barrier to it.

# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

## WHAT WE HAVE HEARD

### PEOPLE ASKING FOR

The evidence gathered by Oxford Citizens points toward a clear conclusion. Young people and families want a transport system that supports educational access rather than creating barriers to it.

Across surveys, listening sessions and individual testimony, participants proposed a range of possible solutions.

Oxford Citizens has chosen to focus on two campaign asks that are strongly supported by the evidence and have the potential to benefit large numbers of young people.

#### **Ask 1: Cheaper transport options for young people in education**

This is the strongest and most consistently supported ask in the evidence base.

Participants repeatedly described transport costs as expensive, unavoidable, unfairly distributed and a barrier to educational access. Many specifically questioned why young people are expected to pay full adult fares despite continuing in education.

The evidence suggests that cheaper transport could reduce financial pressure on families, improve access to education, increase participation in community life, reduce stress and anxiety, and increase bus use.

Fares should be cheaper for children in education.

Young people in full-time education should be supported.

#### **Ask 2: Transferable tickets for young people in education and training**

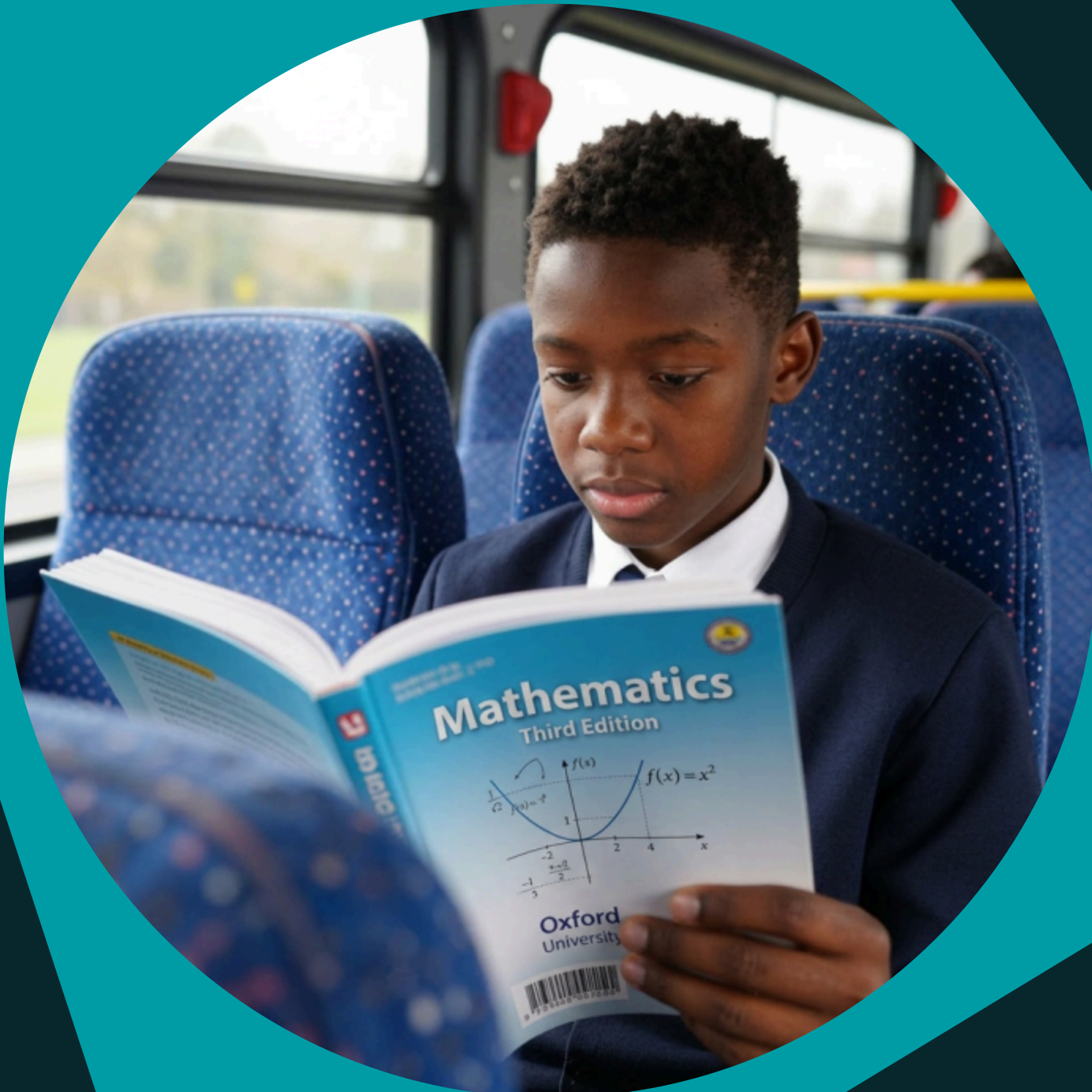
The evidence also identified a more specific problem. Many journeys require more than one bus.

Participants repeatedly described situations where multiple buses increased costs, different operators charged different fares, tickets could not be transferred between companies, and the removal of return-ticket options increased costs further.

The evidence suggests that better integration could make journeys simpler, cheaper and fairer.

Oxford Bus company does £1.30 fares but doesn't share tickets with Stage Coach.

There used to be a cap... they don't do return anymore.



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For more details about Oxford Citizens, contact:  
Dr Sebastien Chapleau, Lead Organiser  
[seb.chapleau@citizensuk.org](mailto:seb.chapleau@citizensuk.org) | 07970 527 622