

# **Left behind Londoners**

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January 2023

## **Digital Exclusion and Disadvantage in London's Transport**

Prepared For: London Travelwatch

Prepared By: Yonder

# Who we are

London TravelWatch (LTW) is the official independent transport watchdog which campaigns to improve journeys and advocates for all people who travel in and around the capital. LTW is sponsored and funded by the London Assembly, which is part of the Greater London Authority, and is independent from transport operators.

LTW promotes integrated transport policies aimed at raising the quality, performance and accessibility of transport services, while continuing to ensure they are affordable and safe for all who use them. We liaise and work closely with transport operators, providers, regulators, and local authorities. In turn, transport operators consult us on proposed changes to services and closures of lines or stations.

We cover all forms of Transport for London (TfL) services, National Rail in and around London, and those who walk, cycle or wheel in the capital.

You can find out more about us at  
[www.londontravelwatch.org.uk](http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk)

# Foreword

From websites and laptops to smartphones, mobile data and apps, digital technologies are playing an increasingly important role in the way people interact with London's transport services. Where it once was the default for a paper ticket to be purchased from a ticket office or bus driver, or information for journey planning to be sought from a poster or customer advisor, now digital options are available to carry out these tasks.

While this trend brings undoubted benefits to many people who use transport, for many others it can also create barriers. For example, we already know there are 260,000 adults without bank accounts in London. They would find it difficult, if not impossible, to pay for things online where cash isn't accepted. For those who cannot or will not access the internet, the relative lack of access to information undermines their ability to travel with confidence – or, indeed, to travel at all.

At London TravelWatch, we were keen to understand the extent to which some Londoners are being left behind as transport providers in the capital pursue a digital-first approach. We commissioned Yonder Consulting to identify who are the digitally excluded and disadvantaged, how they might be affected as people who use transport in London, and what action is needed as a consequence. Their approach incorporates desk research, online and telephone interviews, as well as stakeholder and in person interviews.

Their findings make for interesting reading. Typically, digitally excluded and disadvantaged people are older, white, more likely to be Disabled people and have a lower income. Often, some or all of these characteristics can interplay, for example, in the case of someone who is both older and Disabled, in

which case they face multiple barriers as people who use transport.

Worryingly, 1 in 6 Londoners who answered our online survey said they had been unable to buy a ticket without a smartphone or internet connection, which had stopped them from travelling – the equivalent of more than 1.5 million Londoners being digitally excluded from transport.

This research is very much an initial review of the problem of digital exclusion in London transport, and more work is needed to develop our collective understanding of this topic. Nevertheless, transport providers should be doing more now to provide the digitally excluded and disadvantaged with the tools and support that give them the same degree of access to fares, tickets and information as the digitally included. As the official independent watchdog for transport in London, we will be looking to operators to strengthen their commitment to tackle this important issue.

Michael Roberts  
Chief Executive, London TravelWatch

# Executive summary

## Who are the digitally excluded and disadvantaged?

**A digitally excluded person is somebody who either is unable to, or chooses not to, ever go online, whether using mobile data, Wi-Fi or cabled internet, on any device.**

**A digitally disadvantaged person is somebody who does fewer than five activities online and uses mobile data once a week or less: they may use some online services but be excluded from others.**

Digitally disadvantaged or excluded people fall into two broad categories: those who cannot go online because of the barriers they face, and those who do not want to do so. Ofcom's Technology tracker 2022 found that most (75%) of those without internet access said they were unlikely to get access within the next 12 months: the key reason was a perception that they just do not need the internet.

Digitally disadvantaged or excluded people typically are older (55+) (55%), are white (68%), are more likely to be Disabled people (48%) and have a lower income (47%). Our qualitative research found that these elements often interplay, so a digitally excluded or disadvantaged person may be both older and Disabled, meaning they face multiple barriers.

In their 2021 UK Consumer Digital Index, Lloyds Bank estimated that 270,000 Londoners are offline (3%) and nearly 2 million (20%) have very low digital engagement.

## How are they affected when using transport in London?

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1 in 6 Londoners (17%) who answered our online survey said they had been unable to buy a ticket without a smartphone or internet connection, which had stopped them from travelling, the equivalent of more than 1.5 million Londoners being digitally excluded from transport.

1 in 5 of Londoners (20%) who responded to our online survey said they had paid more for travel because they could not buy tickets online or digitally.

Only 1 in 5 digitally excluded and disadvantaged people agree that the increased use of technology has made it easier to get around London, and nearly 4 in 10 (37%) in that group say it has actually made things harder. Older people (27% of those 65+), people on lower incomes (18% of C2DE) and Disabled people (18%) are more likely to feel this way.

This digital exclusion and disadvantage has a negative impact on people's wellbeing, independence and confidence in managing activities in many aspects of their life, and can leave people feeling left out from society. Any resulting limitation on travel has profound consequences for the quality of life of individuals, especially those who are already excluded or already face barriers.

Digitally excluded and disadvantaged people are likely to make fewer journeys across London. They mostly use the bus, walk or use the Underground to travel to their destination.

Digitally excluded and disadvantaged people have less access to tools and services which facilitate travelling around London –

particularly planning information, payment platforms and up-to-date information on timetables and disruptions.

Support from staff (22%) and information from ticket offices (21%) are the top two ways that digitally excluded and disadvantaged people access help for getting around London. Digitally excluded and disadvantaged people especially rely on TfL staff to travel confidently – be it for journey planning, purchasing tickets, advice, or the knowledge that help is there if they need it.

Even among digitally included Londoners, over half (53%) use non-digital assistance to help them when travelling – showing it is not only the digitally excluded or disadvantaged who rely on these forms of support.

## **What needs to be done?**

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Given the scale of digital exclusion and disadvantage, and the serious impact it can have on the people affected, the transport industry should take steps to tackle it as a priority, by adopting the following recommendations:

1. Transport providers should commit, where possible, to make sure that those who are digitally excluded and disadvantaged are not financially penalised when they travel.
2. Train companies and TfL should make sure staff are visible and in accessible locations and are confident to support people.
3. Where train companies are seeking to reduce ticket office opening hours or staff levels, the impact on those who are digitally excluded and disadvantaged must be considered and published in an Equality Impact Assessment.

4. All train companies should implement a travel mentoring service that supports people who are digitally excluded and disadvantaged.
5. TfL should update and regularly assess their travel mentoring service so that it continues to support those who are digitally excluded and disadvantaged.
6. When planning changes, transport authorities, operators and policing bodies need to work with specialists in digital inclusion and impacted groups to make sure information is as accessible as possible.
7. Transport operators should make sure they are providing services and resources in a way that is easy to use and more accessible.
8. Transport authorities and operators should maintain non-digital options to allow freedom of travel for digitally excluded and disadvantaged Londoners, wherever possible.
9. Transport authorities, operators and the Department of Transport should commission more research into digital exclusion and disadvantage, to explore in more detail who is impacted by the issue and how, and what measures are needed to make sure the digital exclusion gap is closed.

## **Methodology and definitions**

The research programme consisted of three phases:

1. Secondary (consultancy/desk) research to explore existing knowledge of internet access in London and current measures of digital poverty.



2. Quantitative surveys both online and on the telephone to measure digital use travel habits and demographics. The online survey spoke to a London representative sample of 1,009 people. The inherent drawback of using an online survey to explore digital exclusion and digital disadvantage is that an online sample only reaches those who are online (although they may still face barriers). The telephone survey was used specifically to access the opinions of those who are either entirely offline or digitally disadvantaged, with a sample size of 100.
3. Qualitative interviews with six stakeholders from organisations that advocate for impacted groups, and with twenty Londoners who feel that the increasing use of digital options in London transport has impacted them. This allowed us to further explore the barriers that the digitally excluded and disadvantaged face, and how this impacts their lives and travel around London .

## **A note on terminology and definitions**

A person may be digitally excluded and disadvantaged for a range of reasons. This includes a lack of interest in being online, a lack of digital skills or confidence, being unable to afford digital technologies (devices or internet access) and inaccessible services (e.g. a website not compatible with screen readers), amongst other reasons. An individual could have one or multiple reasons for being digitally excluded and disadvantaged.

For the purposes of this research, we have not differentiated between the different reasons a person may be digitally excluded to understand a broad range of experiences. Within the sample of people we spoke to, multiple barriers to going online were reported. Further research would need to be carried out to understand the impact of specific barriers different groups experience going online.

## **The social model of disability**

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Our quantitative research found that Disabled people are more likely to be digitally excluded and disadvantaged than other Londoners. When discussing this topic, the report has been written in line with the social model of disability, rather than the medical model.

Please note that where direct quotations from participants are used, the language may not reflect the social model of disability. This has been done to accurately reflect the language used by Disabled participants when talking about their own experiences.

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