

**What is the name of your organisation?**

Arts Students' Union

**What is the approximate total number of employees in your organisation?**

42 employees, but our organisation is a membership organisation that represents over 22,000 art students based in London.

**What best describes your organisation?**

Students' Union.

**In your opinion, how could the transport network be better “joined-up”?**

In 2024, we conducted survey research to understand how our members commuted to their place of study. We received 1181 responses to our survey on commuting. The findings from the research form the basis of this submission.

From our research, we have several recommendations that could lead to a better integrated and more “joined-up” approach to planning the transport network.

Our students often rely on multiple forms of transport to commute with large or delicate projects. Many of our students commute daily from outside London, for example from Essex, Kent, or even further afield (such as Bristol or Northampton). A case study example of this from our research found that a student reported needing to take a combination of a taxi to their train station, two separate national train lines, and then walking to their campus to complete their commute from Essex to London, which could take up to 2.5 hours each way.

Better coordination between National Rail and TfL services would reduce inefficiencies and delays for such complex journeys by ensuring timetables for National Rail and TfL services are better synchronised to minimise transfer times. For example, students commuting from areas like Essex or Hertfordshire often rely on connecting train and underground services; delays or mismatched schedules cause significant disruptions to their journeys.

For commuter students, more seamless ticketing would also ease the coordination of their commute. Expanding contactless payment and Oyster card zones to commuter hubs like Essex, Surrey, and Hertfordshire would simplify our members' commutes, eliminating the need to switch between payment systems. Alternatively, introducing a single category of travel pass valid for students across all modes of transport (including National Rail, TfL services, and local buses) for students commuting from outside London would simplify payment processes and reduce costs.

Offering regional student discounts that span across multiple transport operators, especially for students travelling long distances daily, would have a positive impact on students' ability to commute. Our research found that students who commute from outside London spend an average of £71–£100 per week on travel, with some spending over £100. A cross-regional discount would significantly ease this financial burden.

### **How could data be used to improve the transport network?**

From the findings of our research, many of our commuter students travel during specific time blocks (for example, early mornings to attend lectures). Sharing real-time data and utilising predictive analytics could help allocate additional capacity on peak services from areas like Surrey and Essex, where students frequently commute from. For instance, a case study from our research showed that a student commuting from Wolverhampton noted the lack of flexible and frequent services to London, often leading to overcrowding on the only available trains.

Art students carrying large or delicate projects face severe challenges when public transport is overcrowded. For example, a student studying at Chelsea College of Art shared that crowded trains forced them to leave projects behind to avoid damage. Providing consistent real-time crowding data on train apps would help students plan safer journeys for transporting artwork.

### **How could technology be used to improve the transport network?**

Students could benefit from apps providing integrated transport information, including details on luggage space, crowding, and accessible routes. For example, from our research, a student noted the difficulty of managing their commute when transporting photography equipment worth thousands of pounds. Alerts for less busy times would help safeguard such expensive equipment that our students cannot always afford to transport via safer transport methods, such as taxis.

Likewise, a student transporting large artwork during rush hour reported that crowded trains made it difficult to keep their work safe, with some fearing it could be damaged. A real-time crowding prediction feature in transport apps would help students avoid these busy periods, reducing the risk of damage. A solution to this could be developing tools within transport apps that integrate crowd data from TfL, National Rail, and buses, providing students with alternative routes or times to travel with more space, particularly for art students carrying valuable or fragile projects

In addition to this, a major concern for students uncovered in our research, especially when traveling alone at night, is safety on public transport. By utilising location-sharing technology, transport apps could offer students the ability to share their real-time location with trusted friends, family, or a designated university contact while traveling. This feature could also include a panic button that sends a student's GPS location to emergency services if needed.

Another key safety issue is the ability to quickly report incidents during travel. An app that allows students to report issues (such as harassment or accidents) directly to transport authorities could expedite responses and make the system more secure. 47% of students responding to our survey reported feeling unsafe on public transport. Providing a platform for direct and immediate communication with transport authorities would help address these concerns.

### **How, if at all, would you improve the way decisions are made about the transport network?**

Decisions about the transport network should involve students, including those who commute from outside London. Transport for London and the Department for Transport should collaborate with students' unions and universities to create advisory boards where students share their experiences and concerns about public transport. TfL already operates their Youth Panel, but not all students (such as mature students) fall within the remit of this advisory group. Creating a dedicated student consultation panel would ensure all student voices are represented in planning decisions around transport.

### **Any other comments?**

High travel costs force art students to make difficult decisions, such as skipping classes or extracurricular activities. For example, from our research, we found 66% of commuter students reported missing out on participation in sports clubs and societies, and 78% missed socialising with friends, due to the cost of travel, significantly impacting their university experience.

83% of commuter students have purchased a 16-25 or 26-30 railcard, demonstrating the necessity of such discounts in making transport affordable.

The Department for Transport should offer a free student-specific discount card, that students can use across transport providers, to ensure equitable access to education.

