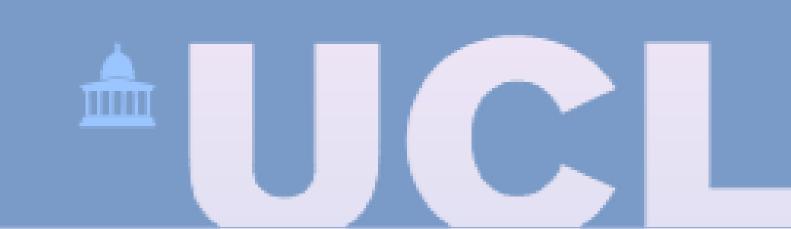# Reducing Travel Anxiety by Making Infrastructure and Services more Accessible

Roger Mackett
Centre for Transport Studies, University College London, Great Britain

UCL

INTRODUCTION

In England, 26% of all adults have been diagnosed with one or more mental illness, and a further 18% say that they have experienced a mental illness without being diagnosed. Having a mental health condition can affect the skills used when traveling such as interpreting information and remembering routes and so can affect the ability to travel.

The purpose of this poster is to discuss the difficulties faced by people with mental health conditions (for example, anxiety and depression) when they travel and ways in which infrastructure and services can be made more accessible to enable them to travel more based on the results of an on-line survey. The full results of the survey are presented in the report 'Mental Health and Transport'.

THE SURVEY

The survey was carried out on-line by distributing a link to a questionnaire coded in Opinio software. The link was distributed by eighteen organizations and three individuals using social media (mainly Twitter), websites and newsletters. Both mental health and transport organizations were involved including Anxiety UK, the Centre for Mental Health, the Mental Health Action Group, the Office for Disability Issues, Rethink Mental Illness, SANE, Transport for London and Transport for Scotland. Responses were received between May 15 and July 26, 2018. The survey had been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee.

The questionnaire was completed anonymously. There were 385 useable responses to the survey. Of the respondents, 24% were male, 72% female, and 4% preferred not to state their gender. There was a wide age range with 11 under the age of 18 and 2 over the age of 70. Over half of the respondents were in the range 18 to 40. The sample was a fairly good representation of the population of England with mental illness in terms of age, gender and mental health. Table 1 shows the mental health conditions of the respondents in the survey.

Table 1 The mental health conditions of those in the survey

	% of respondents
Anxiety (including social anxiety and panic attacks)	90
Depression	68
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	22
Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)	18
Agoraphobia	14
Bipolar disorder	8
Other conditions	22
Total	100

Total number of respondents: 385

Since 90% of the respondents have anxieties, this poster will concentrate on how these affect travel. The causes of anxiety when traveling that were reported in the survey are shown in Table 2, grouped into categories.

Table 2 Causes of the anxieties that the respondents have when they travel

	% of respondents
Wayfinding and obtaining help	
Feeling disorientated	48
Having to take decisions about where to go	37
Remembering where they are going to	20
Getting lost	39
Not being able to obtain help	35
Interacting with staff and purchasing tickets	
Having to talk to staff such as bus drivers	46
Using ticket machines	18
Handling money	14
The nature of the journey	
Failure of the bus, train or car	47
Finding suitable toilet facilities	40
Interacting with fellow travelers	
What other people think about me	69
Having to mix with strangers	67
How other people behave	52
Internal feelings	
Feeling claustrophobic and unable to escape	58
Feeling out of control	67
Something else	14

Total number of respondents: 385

INTERVENTIONS TO HELP REDUCE TRAVEL ANXIETY

There are various ways in which infrastructure and services can be made more accessible that may help to address these anxieties, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Transport interventions that may help to address anxieties about traveling

Cause of anxiety	Transport interventions to address the anxiety
Wayfinding and obtaining help	
Feeling disorientated	• Travel training
Having to take decisions about where to go	• Clearer bus or rail timetables and maps • Clearer websites
Remembering where they are going to	• Clearer information screens on board trains and buses • Better signposting on the street • Wayfinding apps • Better trained bus and railway staff • Passenger Assist schemes at railway stations
Getting lost	• More places to ask for help
Not being able to obtain help	• Better trained bus and railway staff • Better signposting on the street • Being able to contact a member of staff in person when on the train
Interacting with staff and purchasing tickets	
Having to talk to staff such as bus drivers	• Better trained bus and railway staff • Travel Assistance Cards
Handling money	• Travel training
Using ticket machines	• Travel training • Staffed ticket offices • Better design of ticket machines
The nature of the journey	
Failure of the bus, train or car	• Better trained bus and railway staff • Providing clear, relevant information
Finding suitable toilet facilities	• Providing more toilet facilities • Better signposting of toilet facilities
Interacting with fellow travelers	
What other people think about me	• -
Having to mix with strangers	• 'Please offer me a seat' badges • Providing more seats on trains and buses • Reducing overcrowding
How other people behave	• Better behavior by other travelers
Internal feelings	
Feeling claustrophobic and unable to escape	• Travel training • Better trained bus and railway staff
Feeling out of control	• More places to ask for help • Clear signposting to exits

Wayfinding and obtaining help Many of the respondents had anxieties about wayfinding and not becoming lost which can be addressed both before and during travel. 'Travel training' can assist people by increasing their travel skills. Clear information can be presented through maps and timetables on paper and on-line, including mobile phone apps and on-vehicle displays. Well-trained staff can provide help and route information as can schemes such as 'Passenger Assist' on railways. People who are lost can be helped through 'safe place' schemes and access to trained staff.

Interacting with staff and purchasing tickets Interactions with staff can be improved by training staff to understand the needs of people with mental health conditions. Other approaches include 'Travel Assistance Cards' to indicate the specific needs of people travelling, reducing the need to interact with staff by offering machine-readable tickets and better design of ticket machines.

The nature of the journey Transport operators should make every endeavor to provide sufficient information to help ensure that passengers can continue their journeys with confidence if the bus or train fails. Local authorities and transport operators should provide more public toilets and ensure that they are always available when people are traveling.

Interacting with fellow travelers It is hard to see what changes could be made to the transportation system to address issues about perceptions of others about oneself. Having to mix with strangers is evitable on many journeys and overcrowding is very common. When no seats are available, wearing a 'Please offer me a seat' badge may encourage others who are sitting to offer their seats. 'How other people behave' is a difficult issue to address but campaigns to improve awareness of the effects of behavior on others may help.

Internal feelings Some people who feel claustrophobic and unable to escape is often avoid using the mode. For those who do travel, there need to be well-signposted clear escape routes and trained staff around to provide support. 'Feeling out of control' may be assisted by travel training, having well-trained staff around and providing good quality wayfinding information.

THE IMPACT OF THE INTERVENTIONS

Table 4 shows what the respondents said about how some interventions would encourage them to travel more. Where the intervention is not specific to a particular mode, they have been aggregated across the modes with double counting removed. The largest increase would come from better behavior by other travellers, but that would be difficult to bring about. Clearer information, both on board the bus and train and in the form of timetables and maps would cause large increases. The other factors that would induce large increases are better trained staff, the opportunity to be able to contact a member of staff during rail journeys, travel training and more toilet facilities while travelling.

Table 4 Percentage of respondents who say that they would travel more as a result of interventions

	Bus	Train	Walk	Bus, train and walk
Wayfinding and obtaining help				
Travel training				38
Clearer bus or rail timetables and maps	47	36		52
Clearer websites	30	25		36
Clearer information screens on board trains and buses	50	37		57
Better signposting on the street			23	23
Being able to contact a member of staff in person when on the train		43		43
More places to ask for help			18	18
Interacting with staff and purchasing tickets				
Better trained bus drivers or railway station and on-board staff	32	41		48
Travel Assistance Cards	36			36
The nature of the journey				
More toilet facilities	27	33	25	45
Less noise on the street				39
Less traffic				36
Better sidewalks				31
Less clutter on the street				21
Interacting with fellow travelers				
Better behavior by other travelers	51	49	43	67
'Please offer me a seat' badges				22

CONCLUSIONS

This poster has shown that a large proportion of travelers have anxieties when they travel which are caused by a range of factors. There are a range of ways of improving infrastructure and services that could address these issues which would increase the amount of travel. The figures are based on stated intentions and so may not be realised in practice. In some cases, they would increase revenue for transport operators, and so may cover the costs of implementation. Others are relatively inexpensive. By introducing them, a significant proportion of the population should have an improved quality of life.

THE REPORT

The report on which this poster is based is shown on the right, and may be downloaded from https://bit.ly/2IviXbs

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Mental health and travel

Report on a survey

Roger Mackett

Centre for Transport Studies
University College London
London
WC1E 6BT
Great Britain
Email: r.mackett@ucl.ac.uk

Bus stop closed

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