

Chelmsford Park & Ride Consultation on proposals for changes to services:

Key Findings

Introduction

During January - March 2019, Essex County Council ran a public consultation on proposals for changes to the ticketing options and fares offered at Chelmsford Park and Ride services and on Saturday opening at the Chelmer Valley site.

The consultation asked questions around the following:

- Closure of Chelmer Valley Park and Ride on Saturdays due to low usage. Sandon would remain open for customers wishing to use Park and Ride and would run on a loop route around the city centre.
- A discounted ticket offer when tickets are purchased digitally through a mobile app.
- Raise the child ticket age from 16 to 18 years of age.
- Remove the on-site ticket machines as they approach the end of their lifespan from 2019, but continue to allow cash fares to be taken on bus.

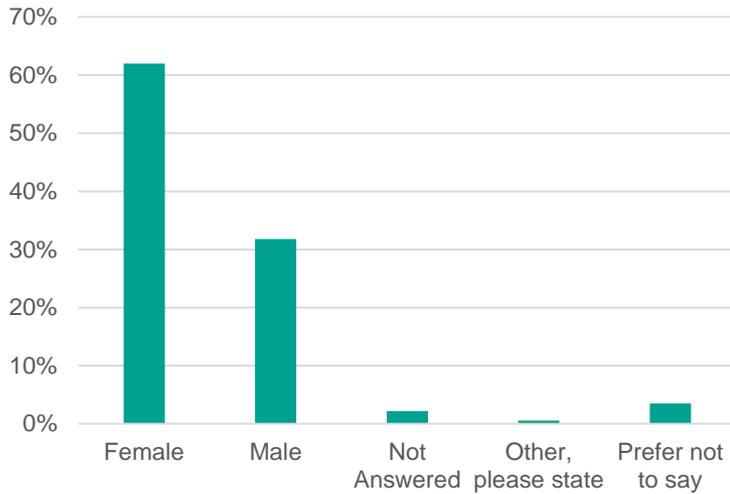
The consultation was available for residents to complete online via our consultation platform (Citizen Space), and paper copies were also available at both Park & Ride sites.

A total of **1,323** responses were gathered, as well as a small number of responses received directly from other local authorities.

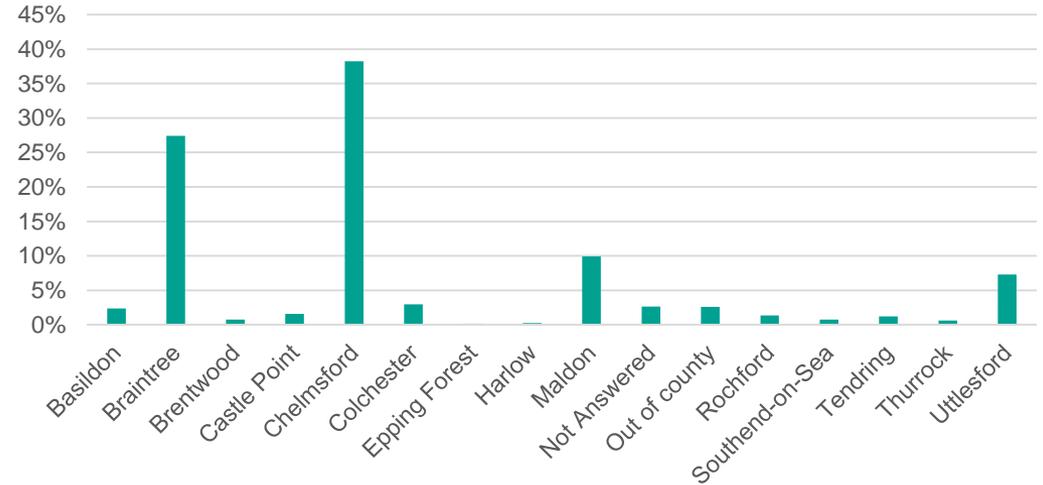
This report will present an overview of key findings from consultation responses, to help inform decision-making around the proposals.

Profile of respondents

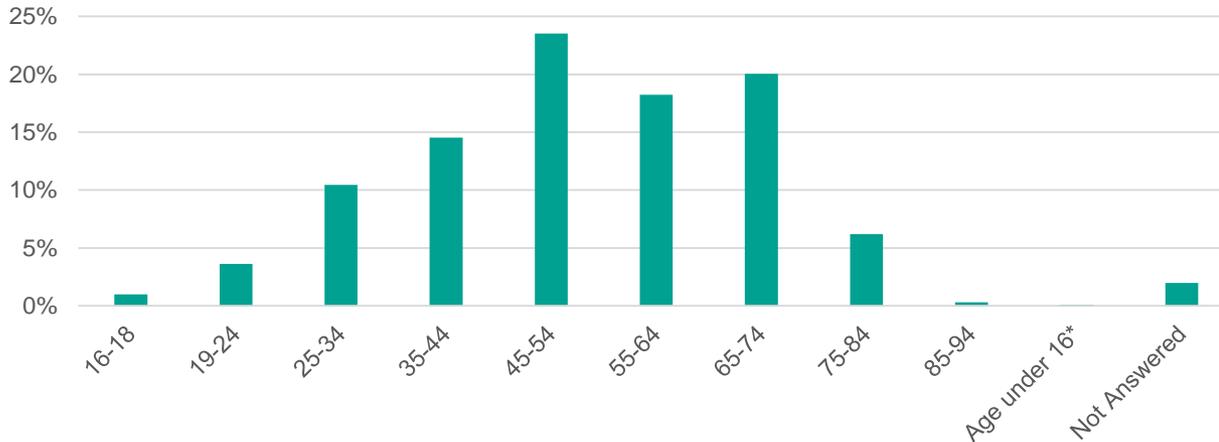
Gender of respondents



Where in Essex do you live?



Age of respondents

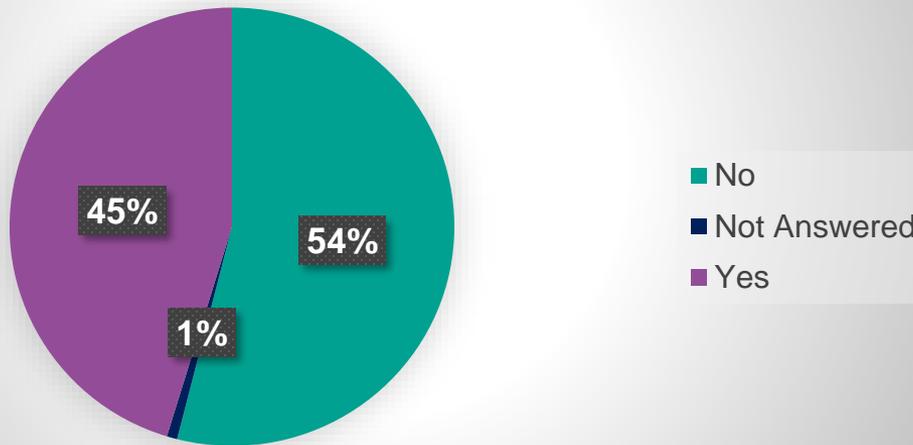


Over 60% of respondents were female.

The majority of respondents were aged 45-54, followed by those aged 65-74 and 55-64.

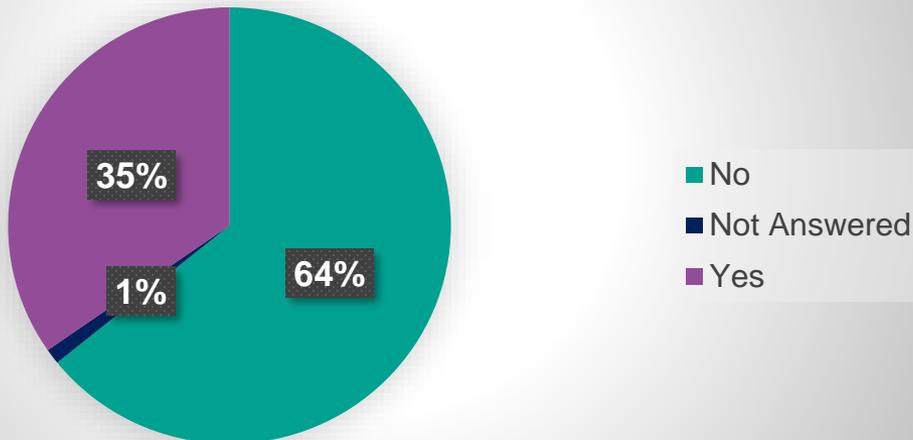
The majority of respondents live in Chelmsford, followed by Braintree.

Do you currently use the Chelmer Valley site on Saturdays?



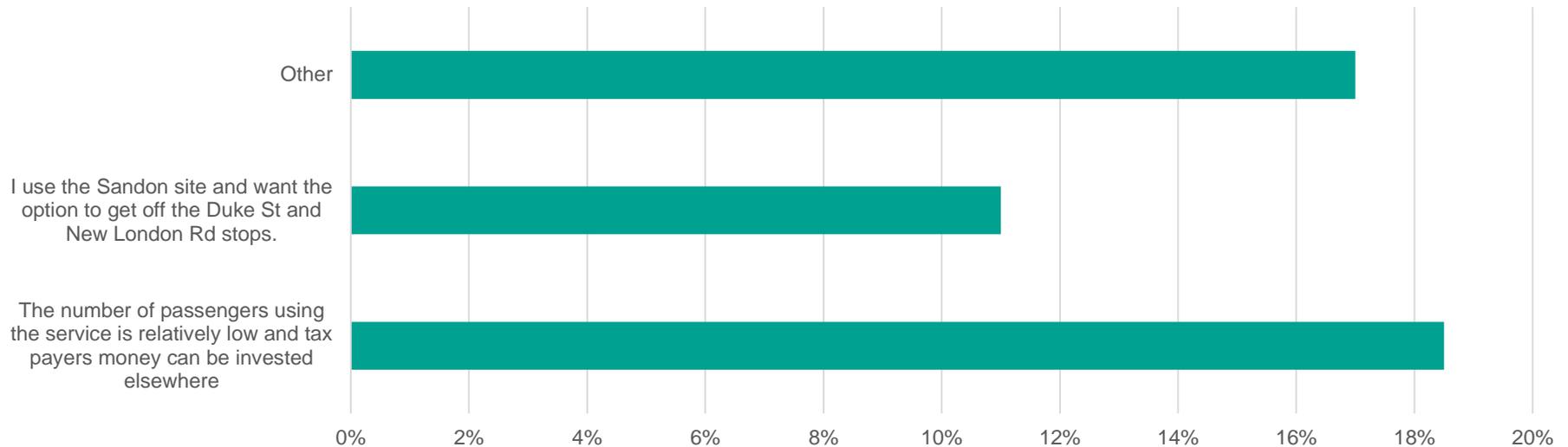
Just under half of respondents said they **currently use** Chelmer Valley site on Saturdays.

Do you support the proposed Saturday closure of the Chelmer Valley site?



35% of respondents **support** the proposed Saturday closure of the Chelmer Valley site.

Reasons for supporting proposed Saturday closure of Chelmer Valley site:

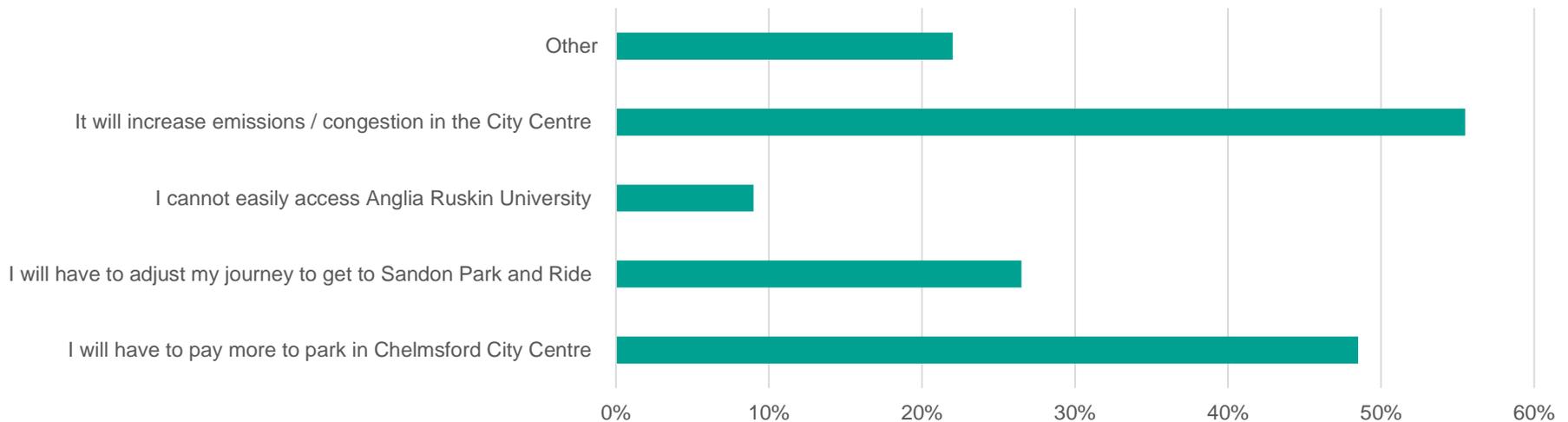


35% of respondents support the proposed Saturday closure of the Chelmer Valley site. The most common reason for supporting Saturday closure was 'tax payers money can be invested elsewhere'.

Comments under 'other' included:

- Don't use the service on weekends anyway
- Suggestions for the money saved through Saturday closure to be reinvested in reducing weekday fares, or extending evening hours
- Suggestions for the site to be hired on Saturdays to generate income (e.g. boot sales)

Reasons for NOT supporting proposed Saturday closure of Chelmer Valley site:

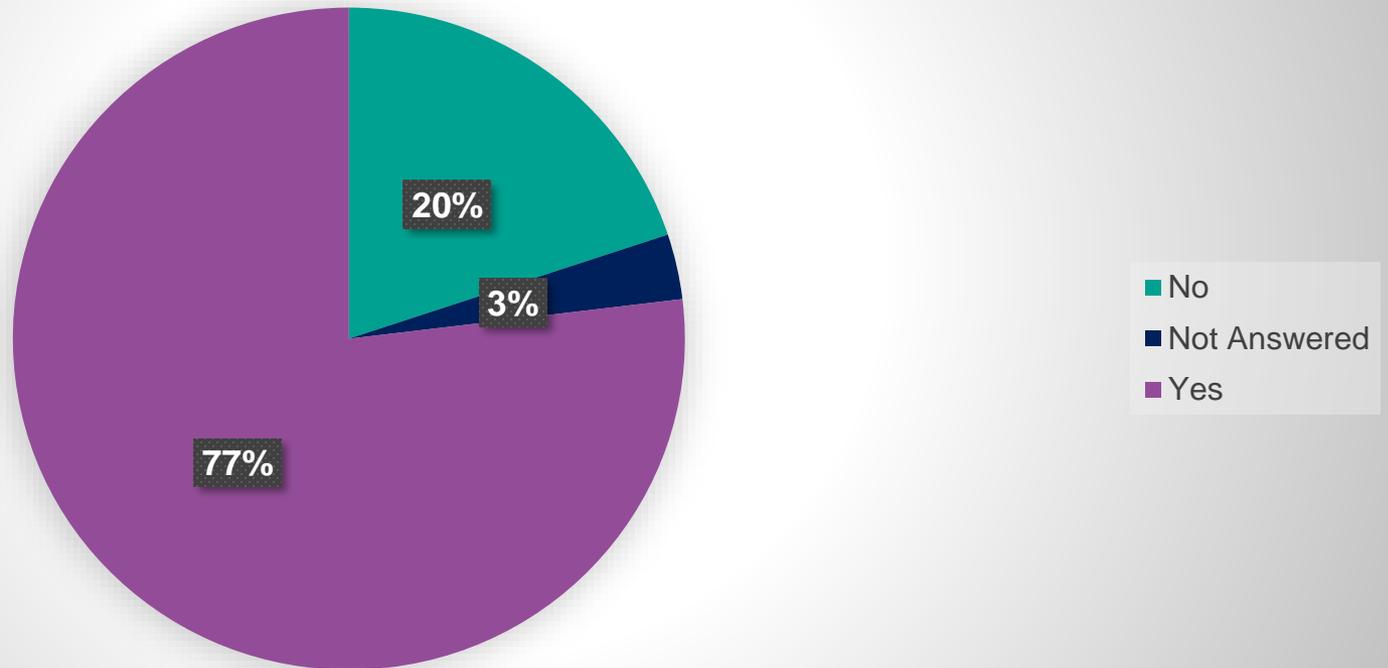


64% of respondents do not support the proposed Saturday closure of the Chelmer Valley site.

The top reason for this was 'it will increase emissions/congestion', followed by 'I will have to pay more to park'. Comments under 'other' include:

- Would have to go through the city to get to Sandon (e.g. from Braintree area) – not convenient
- Only option would be to park in the city, and parking spaces are very limited
- Would no longer come to Chelmsford on Saturdays/would shop online or elsewhere
- Beaulieu Park not yet complete, and likely to increase demand for Saturday service into the city
- Suggestions to explore options for reduced service first (i.e. peak hours only, reduced frequency buses)
- Suggestions to increase efforts of promotion to encourage usage on Saturdays
- A handful of comments said the site is currently used on Saturdays for youth cycling training/coaching

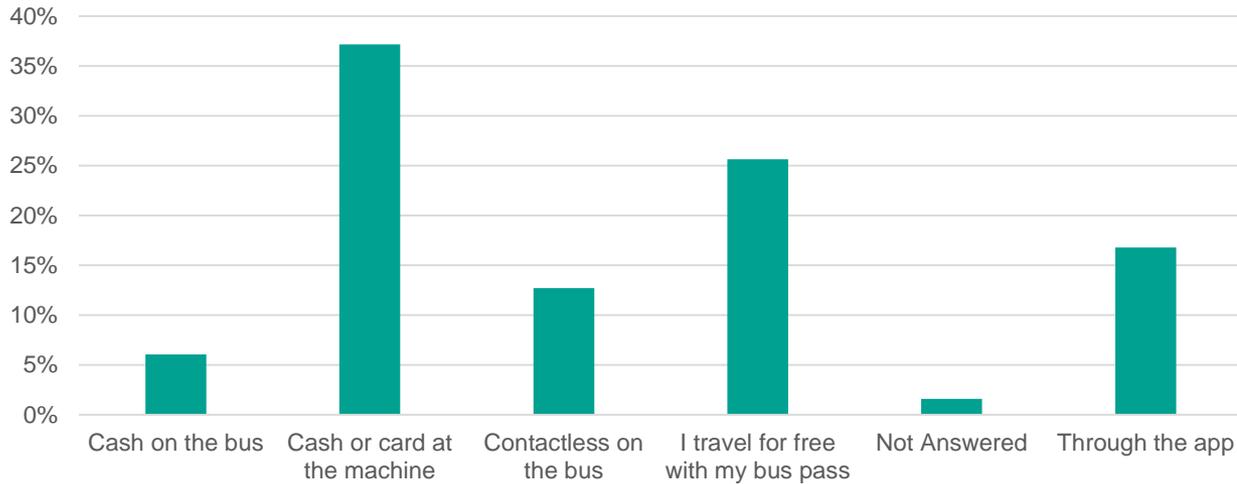
Do you support the proposed discounted ticket when purchased through the app?



77% of respondents support the proposed discounted ticket when purchased through the mobile app.

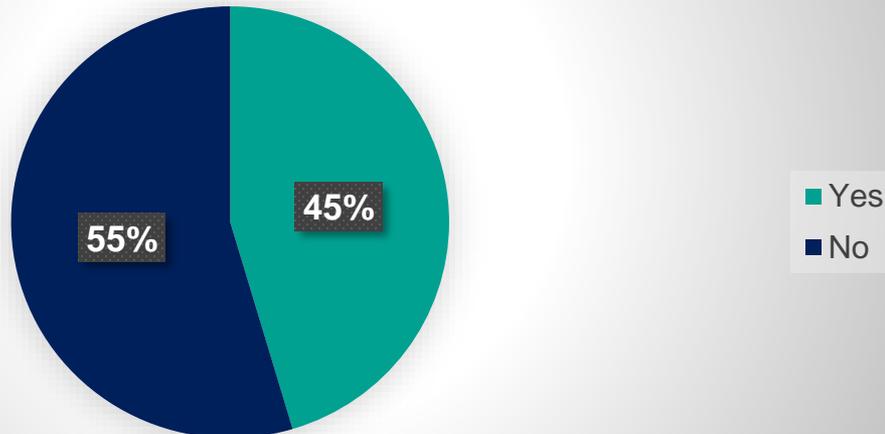
20% do not support this proposal.

How do you currently purchase your ticket?



Most respondents (**37%**) currently purchase their ticket with cash or card at the machine. Around a **quarter** of respondents travel for free with their bus pass, and **17%** currently use the app.

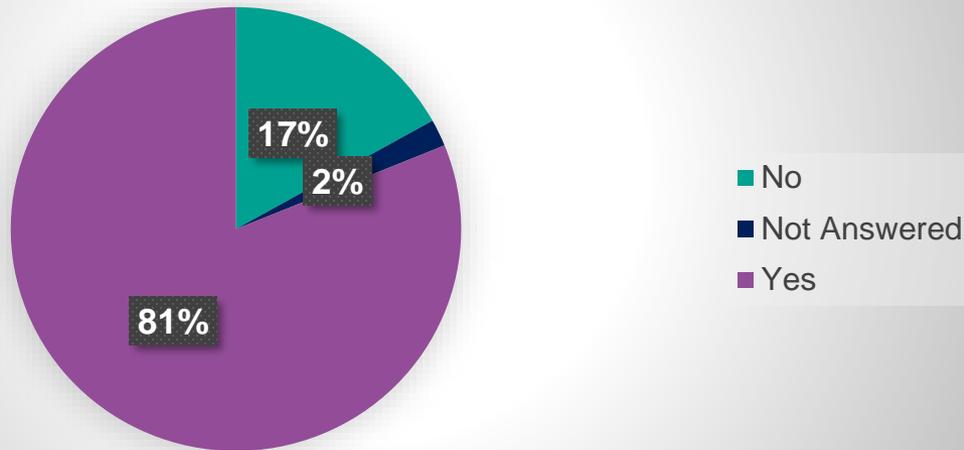
Will you change to buying a ticket through the app?



(This question was only asked of those who currently pay at machines, and by cash or card on the bus).

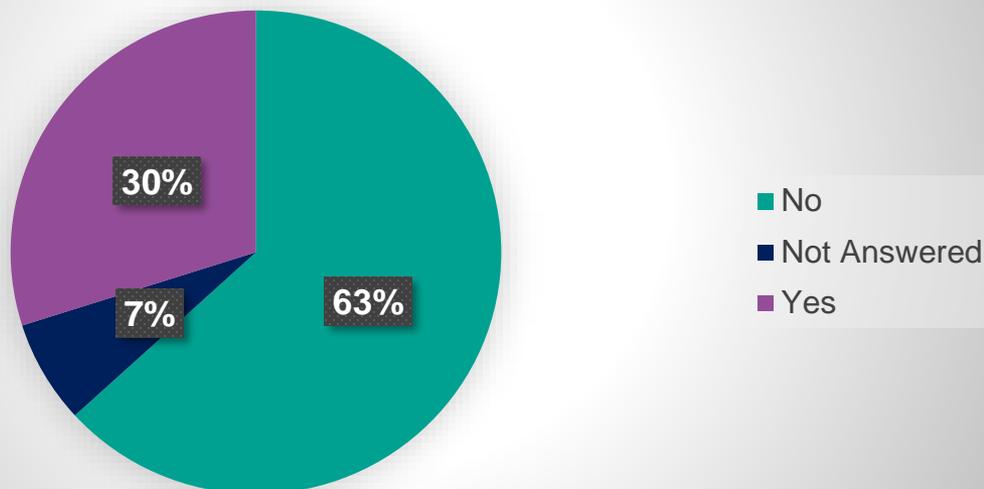
Of those who answered this question, **45%** said they would change to buying through the app, and **55%** said they would not.

Do you support the proposed raise in age for the child ticket from 16 to 18?



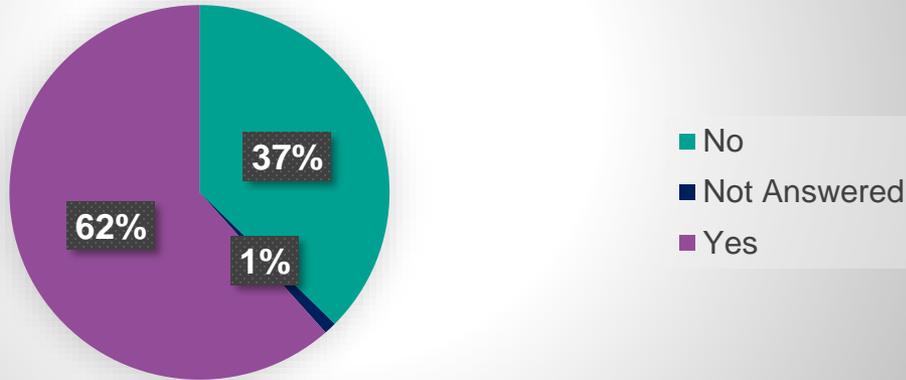
81% support the proposal to raise the age for the child ticket, and **17%** do not support this.

Will you change your mode of travel (or your child's transport) as a result of this change?



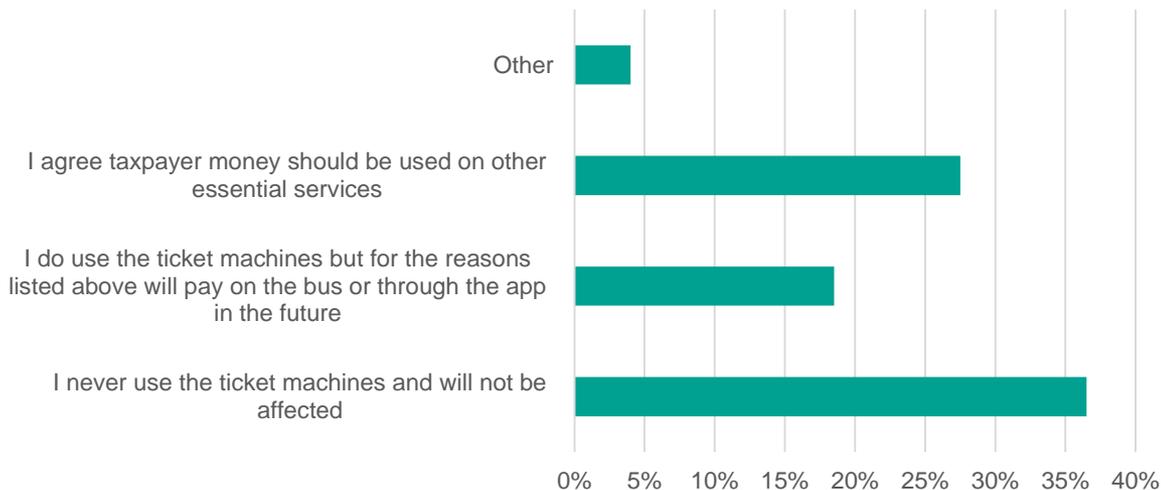
30% said they will change their own/their child's mode of travel as a result of this change, and **63%** said they will not.

Do you support the proposal to remove ticket machines from Chelmsford sites as they reach their end of life from 2019?



62% support the proposal to remove ticket machine, and **37%** do not support this.

Reasons for supporting the proposal to remove ticket machines:

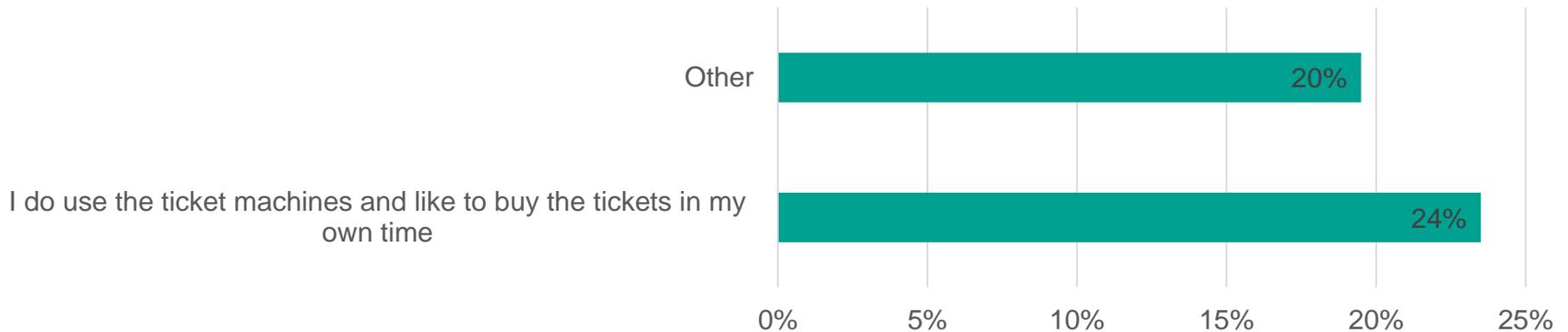


The most common reason for **supporting the proposal** to remove ticket machines, was ‘I never use the machines and won’t be affected’, followed by ‘taxpayer money should be used on other essential services’.

Comments under ‘other’ include:

- Machines are slow and unreliable anyway
- Machines do not take card payments for daily tickets
- Support proposal only if contactless payments on bus can be sped up to reduce queuing times
- Did not know you could pay contactless on bus – opportunities to promote this

Reasons for NOT supporting removal of ticket machines:



37% of people do NOT support the removal of ticket machines.

The vast majority of comments under 'other' related to **concerns about longer queues** and **slower boarding times** if people cannot purchase their ticket at the machines. Many comments suggested boarding times have increased significantly since the introduction of contactless payments on board, and that this would worsen with the removal of the ticket machines.

Other comments included:

- Not everyone has a smart phone or wants to use the app (many comments referred to elderly people in particular not owning phones or being digitally savvy)
- Suggestions to increase promotion of the app to encourage people to use this rather than buy on board
- There are problems with the app which causes delays when boarding (e.g. app crashing/slow to load)
- Questions about whether it will be possible to buy monthly tickets on board, and concerns about security risks of drivers having to carrying more cash as a result

Further comments

The consultation asked citizens to comment if they felt their personal situation means they would be particularly adversely affected by the proposals. **396 comments** were received in response to this question.

Key themes within these comments were:

- Current weekday fares are **too expensive** and many feel that they are being 'priced out' of using the service. Current users **value the weekend service as a cheaper alternative** to other buses or parking in the city centre.
- Removal of Chelmer Valley Saturday service would **increase traffic/congestion** in Chelmsford city centre.
- **Travelling to Sandon** would be expensive and time consuming (e.g. for citizens living in Braintree). Many are not willing to make this journey, instead suggesting they would **no longer visit Chelmsford on weekends**.
- Not everyone owns a **smartphone device** that is compatible with apps and some will not know how to use the app (comments often related to elderly people who may not own smartphones).

A number of suggestions about the P&R Service were received, including:

- Making savings through **introducing charges** for **concessionary bus pass holders** and **police staff** who currently use the Park & Ride free of charge, to help sustain the Saturday service. (A number of current concessionary pass holders indicated that they would be willing to contribute in order to maintain the service).
- Exploring options for **reducing the Saturday service** before taking the decision to remove it completely (e.g. running the bus every 30 minutes instead of every 10 minutes, or running during peak hours only).
- Increase usage of Saturday service through **charging per car** instead of per individual, given that people often car share on weekends (i.e. couples and families).
- **Increase promotion and marketing** of the service in order to increase usage of Saturday service.

Comments indicated that the Saturday closure of the Chelmer Valley P&R site would adversely impact certain groups who are heavily reliant upon the weekend service. This includes:

- Residents who use the Saturday service to get to their **place of work** in Chelmsford (e.g. retail workers).
- **Elderly people** who depend on the service to go into Chelmsford, and don't have alternative bus routes within easy walking distance. Comments suggested outings are important for older people to keep mentally and physically well.
- **People with disabilities** who find the service very convenient, and suggest they would find travelling to Sandon or parking in the city centre difficult.

Comments on proposals from other local authorities

In addition to the consultation responses, a small number of comments on the proposals were also received from other local authority councils. These responses are summarised over the following pages.

Response received from Chelmsford City Council (*publicly available*)

- **Support proposal to raise the child ticket age** from 16 to 18 years, and the discounted ticket offer when paying with an app since this will speed up boarding times.
- **Support removing ticket machines** from sites as this would reduce ongoing costs.
- **Support the proposed price increase** in line with inflation as this will help meet the costs of the services.

CCC strongly object to the proposed Saturday closure of Chelmer Valley P&R, with the following comments:

- Any commercial consideration to remove the Saturday service should be outweighed by the need to maximise opportunities **to promote sustainable modes of travel** across the city.
- The proposals **conflict with both ECC and CCC policy** on promoting sustainable development and modal shift, reducing congestion and improving air quality in the city, e.g: ECC's Future Transport Network (Feb 2017), ECC's Transport Strategy (2011 - 15 year plan), ECC's Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy (2018), Chelmsford's Local Plan (supported by ECC), Chelmsford's Parking Vision (2018).
- Park & Ride improves accessibility, **reduces congestion and pollution** in the city, and contributes towards sustainable transport. The proposal reduces sustainable transport options, and may increase **pressure on local roads**, thereby decreasing the attractiveness of the city centre on a Saturday to visitors and shoppers.
- Patronage is lower on Saturdays, but still a good number of users. **Patronage expected to increase with planned growth** in and around Chelmsford and beyond within Braintree, Brentwood and Maldon Districts.
- Chelmer Valley P&R site is **critical infrastructure** to Strategic Growth Site 4, North East Chelmsford, being promoted as a new sustainable Garden Community in the Pre-Submission Local Plan. Expected that opportunities for sustainable transport here are prioritised. An expanded P&R Service is central to meeting this objective.
- CCC urges ECC to reconsider the decision to close Chelmer Valley P&R on Saturdays. This would **give customers a choice** and would continue to **reduce traffic and pollution levels** in Chelmsford on Saturdays.

Comments on proposals from other local authorities

Responses were received from three other local authority councils. They were broadly supportive of the proposals to raise the child ticket age, introduce discounted ticket offers via the app, and remove on-site ticket machines. Some reservations were expressed about these proposals:

- **Discounted ticket offer** – support with reservations. No evidence that digital tickets speed up boarding. Other options should be considered – e.g. printed carnet of tickets with costs financed by advertising.
- **Raising child ticket age** – support with reservations. Line of reasoning should also apply to other services which are ‘in competition’ with ECC – how do we justify lowering P&R journeys which involve car travel, as opposed to journeys which are made entirely by bus?
- **Remove on-site ticket machines** – support with reservations. Use of cash would increase boarding times – would prefer the carnet ticket alternative.
- Aim should be to **streamline fare structure** and collection processes. Offer **discount packages at rounded prices**, e.g. 10 journeys for £15, to avoid pressure on change giving and increasing board times.

Two of the three councils object to the proposal to close the Chelmer Valley site on a Saturday, with one being supportive of the proposal. Comments included:

- The proposal to close services on Saturdays from Chelmer Valley Park appeared to be **regressive and harmful to the objectives** for the Park and Ride, with no justification and minimal savings. The proposal appeared to be against the ECC long term strategy and objectives.
- **Most measures seem reasonable** and are aimed at utilising new technology most effectively, but the closure of the Saturday service is due to lack of usage.
- Saturday closure **limits sustainable travel options** into Chelmsford, an important destination for work and leisure purposes for residents. Due to it’s location, Sandon P&R would serve limited function for residents within our district.
- Support the closure of the Chelmer Valley site on Saturdays – most of our residents find **Sandon more convenient**. Welcome the proposal to **rationalise overall service provision**, with a view to securing the best cost/benefit trade off.

Report by Research & Citizen Insight Team, Strategy, Insight and Engagement

