Collecting local views on the post-Covid future of flying: A snapshot from Bristol

SUMMARY REPORT: This is a summary report of the *Collecting local views on the post-Covid future of flying* project.[1] It is designed to give a snapshot of findings from both the survey and focus groups that form this project. For more information or detail, please email ed.atkins@bristol.ac.uk

Whilst many sectors have been hit by the pandemic, few have been hit as hard as the aviation and airline industries. Global Revenue Passenger Kilometres (RPKs)[i] in April 2020 were 94% lower than they had been in April 2019 (IATA, 2020a). It will take an estimated five years for the passenger demand to restore to pre-pandemic levels (IATA, 2020b). The domestic airline, Flybe collapsed in March 2020 – citing Covid-19 as a cause (BBC, 2020). More than 10,000 British Airways employees were reported to have been made redundant in August 2020 (Sky News, 2020). This has a knock-on effect – impacting manufacturers through cancelled orders and other subsidiary industries via reduced demand. This has led to increased financial strain for many households employed by the sector.

Polling in April 2020, across 14 countries, found that 65% of those surveyed wanted any economic recovery from Covid-19 to prioritise climate change mitigation (Ipsos, 2020). With the aviation sector estimated to be responsible for 2% of global, human-induced CO_2 emissions annually (ATAG, n.d), it represents a key site in contemporary discussions of climate change mitigation. The role of the aviation sector within any 'green recovery' from Covid-19 remains unclear. Across the economic stimulus packages enacted by governments in 2020, the aviation sector has enjoyed direct financial support across the globe. In some countries, such as France, financial support has been linked to decreasing greenhouse gas emissions (Ministère de l'Économie et des Finances, 2020). With the aviation sector reliant upon state aid (Gossling, 2020), making sectoral bailouts conditional on emissions reductions may well represent an important route in 'green' post-Covid policies. In his presidential campaign, President Joe Biden fuses pledged to support the sector in the wake of Covid-19 and develop low-carbon aviation technologies. The UK government have made efforts to stimulate the financial recovery of the aviation sector. This has including the planned introduction of a 'traffic light' system to allow international travel (from May 2021) and launching a consultation on reducing Air Passenger Duty on domestic flights to stimulate travel. The issue of 'vaccine passports' has also been widely discussed.

Whilst research has shown increased rates of car dependency during the pandemic (RAC, 2020), there has been limited exploration of whether – and why – passengers might return to flying in the future. Polling by YouGov in 2020 found that two-thirds of people would feel unsafe flying (YouGov, 2020) and many have voiced support for restricting travel to those who have been vaccinated (Sky News, 2020b).

SURVEY: This research explores how people might fly in the future – including how often they might fly, the reasons for such travel, and factors that might be put them off. To do so, we have used a snapshot online survey in the city of Bristol. In the context of Covid-19, online surveys provide a useful route to rapidly eliciting responses to events, policy, and change (Geldsetzer, 2020). Their use will also enable the provision of more-honest responses – with the anonymity of the internet (and the

survey itself) enabling respondents to be more direct ([van Selm and Jankowski, 2006](#)).The online survey – designed to be completed in no more than two minutes – was distributed via local media outlets, community groups and a targeted social media campaign. The survey received a total of 478 responses, across a variety of age ranges. A full breakdown of respondents by age can be found in the Appendix. We did not ask respondents to list their gender or ethnicity. This survey was not designed to identify the values held by respondents, nor to explore how values might influence patterns of behaviour. It is, instead, designed to provide a snapshot of potential trends in the wake of Covid-19. It aims to help start – and contribute to – the conversation of how the Covid-19 pandemic might influence people's flying habits in the future.

The headline findings are as follows:

57.7% of respondents stated that they would fly 'less' or 'much less' in the future[ii]. In response to the question 'Once vaccinated, will you fly as often as you did before Covid-19?', 30.9% of respondents answered 'Less' and 26.8% answered 'Much less'. 36.6% responded that they would use air travel at similar levels to before the pandemic. Only 5.7% of respondents stated that they would fly 'More' (4% of respondents) or 'Much More' (1.7%). There is some differentiation across different age groups in the responses to this question.

> 34.5% of respondents across the age groups of 18-24 and 25-29 stated that they would fly 'less' or 'much less' often than before the Covid-19 pandemic. 41.3% stated that they would fly at similar levels.[iii]

> 50.2% of respondents across the age groups 30-39, 40-49 and 50-59 stated that they would fly 'less' or 'much less' often than before the Covid-19 pandemic.

> 73.1% of respondents in the age groups 60-69 and 70+ stated that they would fly 'less' or 'much less' often than before the Covid-19 pandemic.

10.6% of respondents stated that they would use internal flights (within the United Kingdom) in the future[iv]. In response to speculation of changes to Air Passenger Duty, respondents were asked 'Once vaccinated, if you were planning to travel over 250 miles within the UK, what type of transport would you be most likely to use?' 35.1% answered 'Car'. 39.7% answered 'Train'. 3.2% answered 'Bus/Coach'. 11.4% answered 'Not Sure'.[v]

75.2% of respondents stated that they would fly for a holiday in the next two years [vi]. In response to the prompt 'Please tick all of the reasons that you might use aeroplanes in the next two years', 75.2% of respondents listed 'Holidays/Tourism' as a reason for travel in the next two years. 39.2% listed 'Seeing family' and 27.9% of respondents listed 'Seeing friends'. 26.8% listed 'Business/Work' and 5.3% listed 'Other'. Respondents could select more than one option for this question.

76.9% of respondents stated that concerns associated with Covid-19 might put them off flying in the future[vii]. In response to the question 'Which of the below reasons might put you off flying in the future?', 54% listed 'Covid-19 transmission' as a potential reason not to fly in the future. 22.9% cited measures to mitigate transmission, such as social distancing or wearing face masks.

In response to the same question, **73% of respondents reported that climate change might put them off flying in the future.** 9.8% selected 'Other'. Respondents could select more than one option for this question.

83.6% of respondents think that their personal use of air travel contributes to climate change[viii]. In response to the question, 'Do you think that your personal use of air travel contributes to climate change?', 83.6% of respondents answered 'Yes', 8% answered 'No'[ix] and 8.4% answered 'Not sure'.

What does it mean?
These survey results add further insights following results of a [YouGov poll](#) last July, which showed two-thirds (64 per cent) of Britons would not feel safe travelling by plane, a substantial jump from less than a third (31 per cent) the previous month, despite the first national lockdown beginning to ease. The study findings also echo a recent [Ipsos poll](#) which revealed

71 per cent of adults globally agreed that, in the long term, climate change is as serious as COVID-19 and two-thirds of respondents supported climate change being prioritised in the ensuing economic recovery. The survey findings detailed above lead to several preliminary conclusions:

1. With the majority of respondents reporting that they would fly either 'less' or 'much less' in the future, concerted policy action will likely be required to support potential repercussions for people and communities employed by or economically dependent on the aviation sector in the UK.
2. With three-quarters of respondents selecting a fear of transmission and/or mitigative measures as a factor that may put them off flying, further work is needed to explore the scope of this concern and how it might influence wider patterns of behaviour and travel.
3. Close to three-quarters of respondents stated that climate change would be a restrictive factor on future travel. Over 80% stated that they believed their personal use of air travel contributed to climate change. Both illuminate an important tendency in the perception of flying amongst the sample that is worthy of further and wider investigation.

FOCUS GROUPS:

To further explore the insights drawn from this survey, we held two online focus groups. The focus of these focus groups was to uncover people's thinking and decision-making around flying and their use of aviation. The goal was to explore questions of:

- Why do people get on a plane? Why fly? Why wouldn't you fly? What's involved in decisions to fly/purchase and what isn't? What influences decisions and what doesn't? What tensions might there be?
- Overall awareness and perceptions about how the business of aviation works. Whether/how this influences decisions, e.g., about air travel, shopping. In what ways do people make sense of use of aviation and its wider role in their consumption and lives?
- How do people envisage what could happen next? Will/how could the aviation sector shift, do people think; will behaviour change?

We worked closely with Lycia Harper of Glow Consulting to develop a tailored approach to eliciting participants own experience, opinions, and predictions on how they – and others – might fly in the future. Whilst a set of structuring questions were defined (included in the Appendix). We wanted to explore of important complexities of the aviation sector, namely:

- A focus on the sector as an industry exclusively used by passengers simplifies it. Whilst often seen as exclusively linked to tourism and work travel, aviation plays a key role in other modes and patterns of consumption (via air freight, for example).
- Air travel - for both tourism and work - is not evenly distributed. 70% of all flights in the UK are taken by around 15% of its population (Lucas, 2016).
- The central role of business travel in both air travel and the business model of the aviation sector.

A key element of these focus groups was to create a space in which participants could reflect on and detail what the aviation sector – and flying – means to *them*. As a result, a central question asked at the start of each session was "When you think about 'flying', what comes to mind?". This allowed the capturing of words and phrases to both explore the subjective links between participants and flying and reflexively structure the subsequent discussions.

Throughout the focus groups, the facilitator (Lycia Harper of Glow Consulting) was able to call on a member of the research team to provide information, reflection, statistics, or provocations on the topic of discussion. These might include statistics on passenger growth, the proportion of those travelling for business, information on air freight; discussions of the links between flying and inequality and climate justice, or detail on current tax regimes – and calls for a frequent flyer levy. These interventions were designed to reflect on previous statements, stimulate further discussion, or feed into existing conversations. They were called upon rarely but provided an opportunity for the focus

group to hear from the research team and reflect upon trends and statistics that illuminate the complexity of the contemporary aviation sector.

Focus groups took place online and were held on Zoom. Online focus groups increase the accessibility of the research process – reducing travel costs, providing more-interactivity, and appealing across generations (Fox et al., 2007; Tates et al., 2009). Additional time was set aside at the beginning of each session to test connectivity and audio/visual set ups. The online group setting does pose challenges – such as the limited availability of non-verbal cues. This can lead to meanings being misconstrued. Similarly, participants have more freedom due to a lack of immediate social pressure and, as a result, may speak with less tact. To mitigate this, this context was explained to participants at the start of the focus group and a set of ground rules detailed. Lycia Harper is an experienced facilitator, who has direct experience in online focus groups and their nuances.

Two focus groups were held. Participants who had previously completed the snapshot survey were invited to take part. Informed consent was provided by all of those participating in the focus groups. Focus groups were timed to take place at different times of the day and week – one took place on a Thursday morning (10am-11.30pm), another took place on a Monday evening (6-7.30pm). Each focus group took place over 90 minutes.

Seven participants attended each focus group. As with the survey, participants were primarily drawn from age cohorts above 60. Only three participants were aged less than 60 (one aged 18-24, one 40-49, one 50-59). The majority of participants (9 of 14) identified themselves as retired. Eight of the participants were men, 6 were women. Informed consent was provided by all participants. The focus groups were recorded for transcription purposes only. All participants have been given pseudonyms – drawn from the most popular baby names in 2019 - in transcripts and the discussion below. A list of participants is provided in the Appendix.

The headline findings are as follows:

The Covid-19 pandemic has prompted a **reimagination of flying:** Across both groups, when asked about flying meant to them, participants often present a dual-vision. First, they adopted negative terms to describe the *process of flying*, with the act of travelling via plane described as "an uncomfortable experience" (Noah), "hassle" and "siting in an aluminium tube" (Harry).

However, many presented a vision of flying as opening new opportunities and experiences that were described in positive terms – with participants reflecting on the "freedom" (Oliver) "convenience" (Amelia), 'great fun' (Harry) and "possibilities" (Arthur) afforded by air travel. For participants, the benefits of new locations and experiences outweighed negative experiences of flying.

> *"I enjoy sunshine. I enjoy nice weather and I enjoy the experience of being abroad… the food, the language. That's what flying brings to me – access to other places." (Harry)*

It is due to these positive connotations that several participants spoke of their excitement of flying again, of the locations that they wanted to go, and the trips that they were hoping to take. Several participants had – either previously or during the Covid-19 pandemic - decided not to fly in the future and spoke of a sense of loss of not being able to enjoy the opportunities afforded by such travel.

> *"I have Canadian cousins and they're always going on about coming over. And it's beautiful… Vancouver Island is one of the most beautiful places I've been… But I'm not going and I'm never going again" (Ava)*

> *"It's [not flying] altered our holiday plans, definitely… And it's altered our ability to visit friends. My sister lives in Holland… [and] you can't just pop in an aeroplane and it's an hour [to see them]. We've got friends in Germany, Austria, France and you just see them less often." (Jack)*

Many participants spoke of how the Covid-19 pandemic – and associated restrictions on travel – had created a moment in which their relationship with flying changed. This occurred in two ways. First, a local aspect related to Bristol Airport. Several participants lived on the flightpath and were opposed to

airport expansion in the region. They spoke of how the sudden drop in flying in 2020 had important benefits. For example,

> "It was just wonderful to be able to sleep beyond 6 o'clock and to have no nigh flights and to have you windows open…. We're in rural North Somerset and, under the flight path, you cannot hear the birds sing… I feel really, really emotive. The pandemic has brought back how life was [before]." (Olivia)

A second detected was based on how Covid-19 had led to a reappraisal of their previous flying habits or confirmed a previously-held decision. Whilst all were aware of the greenhouse gas emissions associated with aviation (and this had led to some to stop flying before 2020), Covid-19 presented an opportunity for several to appraise their travel habits and act in different ways.

> "Covid has sorted of hardened [my] views up a bit. In that, again, it has stripped away the rubbish" (Leo)

> "Covid, for me, stripped away a lot of extraneous rubbish that I had been amusing myself with and… I mean I'm scared o sitting in a small box getting infected (with Covid-19), yes… But the bottom line is… our grandchildren are completely in the mire. It is a climate emergency." (Ava)

Ava's point above suggests a significant overlap between the increased awareness of a climate emergency (with some difference of opinion within the cohort), greenhouse gas emissions and the need to act and the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst several participants had previously decided to stop flying – or fly less – before the pandemic due to climate concerns, Covid-19 was presented as an episode and experience that justified such a decision and emphasises the need for others to do the same. Covid-19 was broadly discussed as a trigger event that has allowed many participants to transition away from flying – to think more about staying in the UK and use alternative transport options, such as the train, when travelling abroad.

Whilst there was a variance in how participants discussed alternative transport options – with the train being the alternative most cited; a key theme detected is that rail travel represents the (re)emergence of a different type of travel. Aviation was described as a negative process that led to positive experiences (once arrived in your destination) but participants described numerous benefits of train travel and, more broadly, a 'slower' and now 'safer' form of travel.

> "We went to Sicily on holiday [in 2020]…[taking] a couple of sleeper trains from Brussels and through Italy to get there. The experience felt really biosecure… We were put on the train and didn't' have to interact with anyone [as] you are given your own compartment… It was a bit like travelling in the eighties…. In contrast, we flew back… and the airport was horrendous. There was no social distancing on the plane and it was really busy and people didn't seem to be bothered. There was no care. I think that, for me, that was the concrete evidence that I'm not getting on a plane anytime soon." (Oliver)

> "A lot of government policy assumes that time on trains is wasted and, therefore, they spend a lot of money trying to speed up the trains. [But] It's so productive on a train compared to the hassle of aircraft and flights where you're not productive." (Arthur)

For some participants, decisions not to fly had led to the need to navigating contrasting wishes and decisions by those closest to them and either leading to a degree of flexibility or a sustained commitment to not flying.

> "My husband of many years is less willing to stop flying [and] I don't want to stop him because that's his decision. But, of course, what it does mean I [that] when you plan holidays, how do you negotiate that?" (Isla)

> "When we go on holiday together, she doesn't fly because I said, 'I'm not flying. End off'. She has some friends in Spain and Portugal, I think she's going to see [them]. [And] She flew last

year to see her daughter in Australia. She feels a bit more guilty than she used to... I don't tell anybody what to do. I don't think it's right... that's not my job. My job is to say "I'm not doing it and these are the reasons... you make your own choices." (Leo)

Focus group participants broadly agreed that greater efforts must be made to address **how the costs of flying do not address its externalities and impacts** – and that addressing this has justice implications. Whilst many participants discussed the benefits of alternative travels, there was consensus that their ability to enjoy these alternatives was predicated on their freedom in terms of both finances and time. For many, buying flight tickets was too inexpensive and failed to properly internalise the costs of aviation.

"I hope [that], at some stage, you might come to the question about cost... And the reason we go is it is so cheap to go. It's too cheap to fly...My wife gets the gets the email from EasyJet that comes out every quarter with the new flights, you know, they issue their email at 7:30 in the morning. And by eight o'clock, we've got a couple of flights booked. And we worry about the rest in due course. Because they cost nothing!" (Harry)

"Aviation is heavily subsidised. It doesn't pay any tax on fuel. The leasing of its aircrafts is heavily subsidised. So, there are negative externalities [that] they simply don't pay for. So, it is cheaper, I admit." (Olivia)

A frequently discussed route of internalising these costs was changes to the current taxation regime, with increased taxes passed on to the consumer via price increases seen as a way to decrease potential demand in the future.

"Getting down to basics, we have to stop flying. And it's the over-privileged ones, who are flying for fun, who have to stop it. I'm totally pro-tax - a massive tax on leisure flying" (Ava)

"We need national action to make the consequences of specifically damaging business models more accountable. And that spreads beyond the airline fuel tax, it spreads to the companies using [airlines]..." (Leo)

Significantly, participants voiced a shared support for a **frequent flyer levy** – or the provision of a certain number of flights per person, per year with additional flights leading to an additional surcharge and higher cost.

"I'm in favour of frequent flyer taxing.... I'm not in favour of stopping people flying....I would want to see taxes heavily on people who fly more than once or twice a year." (Leo)

A call for a change in taxation was presented by one participant as a route to consolidate the forced behaviour change – in terms of reduced flying – that has occurred across the Covid-19 pandemic:

"You talked earlier about taxation. To me, that's... it's a good opportunity to actually use this [moment] in a positive [way]... this behaviour change in a positive way and to sustain that change in behaviour." (Amelia)

However, there did appear to be a disconnect between participants on where a frequent flyer levy should be applied. This, in turn, highlights a wider discussion around what 'reason' for flying might be deemed unnecessary, irresponsible, or 'taxable'. Several participants referred to travel that might be characterised as fulfilling short term desires and, with it, irresponsible.

"There's a difference between need and want. People want to go on holiday, they don't actually need to fly on holiday, at least. It has become the norm for 20 people to go to... God knows where in Eastern Europe on a stag or a hen do or to Dublin. This was not the norm, even 20 years ago." (Leo)

"Younger people who carry on flying and want to go to the stag party in Dublin are jolly well going to go if they're allowed to" (Ava)

> *"I do not want to hear about my son taking his wife on a jolly to Spain because it's their anniversary. I just don't want to hear about it because I think its grossly irresponsible…. [People] look forward to it as a treat. Loads of them are saying "Oh, I can't wait for lockdown to be lifted. And I'm going to nip off to wherever", you know? And there is a big problem, socially, where you have to hold your tongue." (Ava)*

In contrast, a far-broader focus of these discussions – present across both groups – was that the Covid-19 pandemic had demonstrated how business travel was no longer necessary or essential.

> *"I think it's in the business travel [where there will be change]… I think there are three things. One is the power of zoom and the fact that it can work. Secondly, that the CEOs are going to say 'we're not giving the budget for flights' because they have a carbon budget that they now have to report to shareholders'. And so that it's going to be much more difficult to negotiate flights than it than it was before. And particularly as there's huge investments… in trains and sleeper trains right across Europe" (Arthur)*

> *"I would think that a lot of business travel will now reduce because they found out Zoom and MS teams are viable alternatives and more cost-effective alternatives. And business was always looks to costs." (Isabella)*

> *"It's not people going on holiday flying which are the big problem. I think it [taxing leisure travel] is penalising people who work very hard, who want a holiday, when, in fact, the biggest polluters are business travel and conferences for business travel and that kind of thing." (Isla)*

It is this last quote, from Isla, that highlights a key narrative thread present across both groups – namely that future changes to flying have important dimensions in terms of justice and injustice. First, included a frequent reflection on the participant's own position – and what allowed them to change their behaviour or pursue alternatives, or may have prohibited it. This was focused on elements of time and finance.

> *"It's more expensive to jump on a train and go to Marseille than it is to jumping in a plane. Much more." (Jack)*

> *"We're comfortably middle class, like everybody in this conversation… We're comfortably retired, thank you very much. Those costs are not an issue." (Harry)*

> *"Time is something you've got when you're retired. It takes more money but that wasn't a specific issue." (Isla)*

> *"[I] have flown a lot on short hauls because I'm on my own down here and my only family live in Scotland…. Because I'm still working… I can't afford to take a long time off. So, I've traditionally had a lot of short haul flights from Bristol to Edinburgh. It's a very convenient service"(Isabella)*

Second, participants also discussed the accessibility of alternatives for others.

> *"For people are limited income with young families, holidays in this country are frankly unaffordable. And it seems unfair to take the rug from under them and say they can't enjoy things that I've enjoyed for years." (Isabella)*

> *"This whole debate is a bit of a luxury… some people really don't have the choice to make these decisions and they have to do it based on necessity" (Mia)*

Whilst intergenerational justice was discussed, such discussion were relatively limited – with participants focusing on the need to engage with younger generations. Significantly, the one participant under the age of 40 spoke in favour of flying. A trainee pilot, they highlighted the

importance of the sector – as well as how the act of flying expands horizons and represents an opportunity for young people.

> *"I take more of a different view, in that I view flying as a thing we're very lucky to have as a society, and I'm intending to make a career out of flying myself and I'm a student pilot."* (Charlie)

What does it mean? The discussions in these focus groups provide rich empirical detail of a process in which Covid-19 has triggered a moment for participants to reflect on flying habits – both their own and those of others. Several participants discussed how Covid-19 stripped various variables away (due to restrictions on travel, for example). For others, it justified a decision to fly less made before the pandemic. Whilst several participants did state a desire to fly again in the future – the focus on such activity was on *where* flying could take you. The act of flying is still seen as an instrumental process to take you to a destination – to friends, opportunities, culture, and new horizons.

Across both groups, air travel was discussed in terms that prioritised travel for certain reasons over others. Whilst some saw certain trips as frivolous and irresponsible, many focused ire on business travel. Within these conversations, a shared position was that the Covid-19 pandemic had demonstrated how business travel on a large scale was no longer necessary. The spread of online alternatives (i.e., Zoom), necessitated by the pandemic, had demonstrated that international business without frequent air travel was perceived as a possibility.

Within the snapshot survey, 32% of those surveyed listed business as a reason for travel in the past five years[x]. 26% of respondents stated they would travel for business in the next two years, after restrictions have been lifted.[xi] This complements recent polling, which found that four in 10 European business travellers is anticipating flying less after Covid-19 restrictions are lifted ([Sun, 2020](#)). Such a process will pose questions for many airlines, with business-class seats contributing heavily to revenues, and larger airports – for example, in 2019, 25% of those travelling at Heathrow airport were travelling for business ([DfT statistics, 2020 - TSGB0208](#)).

Focus group discussions often moved between the attribution of responsibility – such as highlighting how others fly or admitting their own hypocrisy or dissonance in flying or highlighting how people *should* use alternatives to the need for market incentives to increase costs and change behaviour. Whilst many participants spoke about market pressures related to cost efficiencies would lead to a decrease in business travel (with it being cheaper to engage online), a focus on discussion was broadly on the need for state action. Participants spoke in favour of financially penalising those seen as flying irresponsibly. This was both in terms of frequency of flying (i.e., a frequent flyer levy) and destination and reason for travel. Broadly, the act of flying was seen as too inexpensive and not properly internalising the associated environmental costs. In short, people fly because they can – it is easy, cheap and requires less time than the alternatives. Participants also spoke of a need to increase taxation on aviation to limit this ease and to ensure that the financial costs of flying truly match its environmental impacts. However, a need to subside alternatives, such as rail travel, was also discussed. As recent work by [Possible (2021)](#) has demonstrated cost continues to be an inhibiting factor in people adopting alternative means of travel.

The case of flying as a climate justice issue was prevalent across both focus groups. This was primarily with a focus on economic and intergenerational justice. Business class seats also represent an issue of climate justice – resulting in more emissions than those elsewhere in the plane, due to the greater amount of space occupied by a passenger. Those flying for business also fly more frequently ([Carrington, 2021](#)). Interestingly, one participant spoke at length at previously being a frequent flyer themselves and the difficulties they had in changing their behaviour whilst working within a sector that perceived travel as necessary and a society that may glamorise a 'frequent flyer' status.

Much of the discussion represented the relative financial position of those participating. However, the discussions highlight an important complexity – in which personal responsibility overlaps with broader structural factors and state-level policies. Whilst state action is required to internalise costs associated with flying, the use of air travel remains an individual choice – and responsibility is

attributed accordingly. It is perhaps from this tension where discussions of a *collective reimagination* of flying might stem, with participants highlighting the need to recalibrate collective understandings of time (in terms of what time is 'wasted' and what is 'efficient'), distance (how far should we travel?) and connection (what is 'necessary' or 'responsible' travel?). With the exception of one participant, less was said about the potential solutions to the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the aviation sector. The focus, instead, was often on both travelling less and travelling better. Across both groups, air travel was presented as a positive part of society – expanding horizons, providing opportunities and linking families and friends. People will continue to fly, and, within both groups, there was a broad agreement that they should continue to be allowed to do so. However, a continued reimagination of flying is required – with it becoming a luxury alternative to the 'slow travel' provided by alternatives.

ROUTES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH: This project was designed to generate a snapshot of how perceptions of flying might have shifted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, it should not be read as a generalisable set of conclusions related to a complex topic. We highlight several steps that could be explored further.

Widening the sample – Location: The distribution of the survey and, with it, the identification of participants for the focus groups, was focused on Bristol. This was to ensure focus in the sample and due to limits on available resources. Whilst findings have provided an interesting snapshot of Bristol, further work is necessary to develop broader findings and conclusion. Bristol is a city known for its green politics (the Green Party received a 31.8% vote share in the 2021 local elections, making it the biggest party in such terms). It is the site of significant dissent against the expansion of a regional airport – a topic discussed by numerous focus group participants. It is also a historic home of the aerospace industries – which continue to be an important employer in parts of the city. At the time of this work, Bristol holds both a rich heritage of aviation and is experiencing an important moment in defining such a relationship. More work is needed in other cities, towns, and regions of the UK to explore whether the findings detailed above are shared – or represent distinctly *Bristolian* trends.

Widening the sample – Age: Survey respondents were biased towards older age groups, with only 3.5% of respondents being age 18.24 and 8.6% aged 25-29. A similar gap is evident in focus groups, with only one of 14 participants being aged under 40. As a result, the findings detailed should not be understood as generalisable across all age groups. More work should be done to elicit the views and perceptions of younger age groups. Within the survey, 34.5% of respondents said that they will fly 'less' or much less' post-vaccination. When contrasted with the 73.1% of those aged 60 or above who responded to the question in the same manner, a cross-generational difference is suggested. How might this tie into the focus group discussed on the opportunities afforded by travel? Are younger people look to continue travelling by air to expand horizons, see friends and experience new cultures – just as has been praised by those in older cohorts within the focus groups? Or is this a case of different levels of risk-aversion and vulnerability to Covid-19 transmission? Or will youth climate movements, such as Fridays for Future, prefigure a decrease in flying?

In addition, it is notable that a number of participants in focus groups listed activities that might traditionally be seen as the pursuits of younger generations (i.e. stag dos) as irresponsible forms of air travel. The one participant present in the focus groups who was aged under 40 (aged 18-25) spoke in praise of the aviation sector, within which he was training to be a pilot, as one of opportunity and as a sector that was open to all. In what ways might these different forms of 'responsible', 'worthwhile' and 'taxable' air travel correspond or contrast across generations? How might younger generations see the travel habits of older generations? Exploring these questions will lead to important conclusions related to flying and intergenerational justice.

APPENDIX:

Number of survey respondents, by age group:

		% of responses
Under 18	0	
18-24	17	3.5%
25-29	41	8.6%
30-39	73	15.3%
40-49	64	13.4%
50-59	90	18.8%
60-69	117	24.5%
70+	73	15.3%
No age provided	3	0.6%

Number of focus group participants, by age group:

Under 18	0
18-24	1
25-29	0
30-39	0
40-49	1
50-59	1
60-69	8
70+	3

Focus groups participants, pseudonyms and demographic details:

Focus Group 1 - 13 May 2021, 10AM-12PM

Oliver – 40-49, M, non-profit
George – 60-69, M, retired
Amelia – 60-69, F, retired
Noah – 50-59, M, software engineer
Arthur – 70+, M, retired
Isla – 60-69, F, retired
Harry – 60-69, M, retired

Focus Group 2 - 17 May, 6-7.30PM

Olivia – 60-69, F, unknown
Leo – 60-69, M, retired
Ava – 60-69, F, retired
Jack - 70+, M, retired
Mia – 70+, F, retired
Charlie – 18-24, M, trainee pilot
Isabella – 60-69, F, NHS manager

Structuring questions, used in focus groups:

Getting the conversation started: what comes up first?

"When you think about 'flying', what comes to mind? ... What else?... What else?"

Capture words, phrases. Give them space to think. What's named up front? What's named most often? Where do people go next in their thinking? What is not mentioned?

Follow their thread eg "You mentioned XX first. Let's look at that in more detail," and come back to Q2 later in the conversation.

Alternate Q1 and Q2 to see if it seems to influence the path the conversation takes.

When you think about 'aviation', what comes to mind? ... What else?... What else?"

Capture words, phrases. Give them space to think. What's named up front? What's named most often? Where do people go next in their thinking? What is not mentioned?

Follow their thread eg "You mentioned XX first. Let's look at that in more detail," and come back to Q1 later in the conversation.

Looking in more detail at... flying for holiday/business

Tell me more about [flying for holidays/business]?"

Get facts and figs. Where do they go? How often do they fly? With whom?

"What matters to you [about flying for holidays/business]?"

What influences their choices and decisions? Who decides that they will fly? What rests on it? What would be the alternatives? What do they think is important?

What are the implications of these decisions? What/who is affected by their decision to fly or not? What are the pros and cons?

Can we summarise together any beliefs that emerge?

Looking in more detail at... food/other products

"You've said food comes up when you think about flying. Can you say more about this, why they are connected?"

(Same as above but tailored for products). What do they know (about the connection between food and flying) and how do they know it?

"What matters to you [about food in this context]?"

What influences their choices and decisions? Who decides what they will buy? What rests on it? What would be the alternatives? What do they think is important?

What are the implications of these decisions? What/who is affected?

Can we summarise together any beliefs that emerge?

Looking at the immediate future

"When you think about lockdown easing, in relation to flying/aviation, what do you think could happen next?"

"What might you do? What are you itching to do and why (what rests on it)? What will you resist doing and why?"

"What would be needed for these things to happen (or not happen)?" What could change their choices and decisions?

What do they think could happen further into the future?

What's happened in the past and how has this shaped their attitudes, beliefs, behaviours?

What's your personal history with flying and aviation?

How have their beliefs/what they have reported been shaped? What have been influential events, decisions, experiences?

In general how much have they flown/had impact on aviation? What about in the year before COVID; how many times did they fly? For what purpose?"

What's the shift they've had to make in lockdown? Will this experience, or anything about lockdown and Covid-19 change anything for them?

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[i] An industry measure for passenger demand.

[ii] 473 respondents answered this question, equalling 99% of total responses.

[iii] There might be several reasons for this, including the response rate of these groups to this survey (17 respondents were aged 18-24 and 41 aged 25-29) and further contextual factors, such as the current rate for these age groups to be vaccinated.

[iv] 473 respondents answered this question, equalling 99% of total responses.

[v] Respondents were also asked 'If you were travelling over 250 miles within the UK before Covid-19, what type of transport would you have been most likely to use?' 87 of 479 respondents (18.4%) answered this question. 35% of these responses reported using a car for such trips, compared to 30% using rail travel, 3.4% using a bus/coach, and 28.7% using air travel.

[vi] 436 respondents answered this question, equalling 91% of total responses.

[vii] 459 respondents answered this question, equalling 96% of total responses.

[viii] 476 respondents answered this question, equalling 99.5% of total responses.

[ix] Additional written responses from those who answered 'No' were requested. Responses included but were not limited to: "The planes are flying anyway", "Because I don't fly" and "structural/corporate causes of climate change much worse".

[x] In response to 'Please tick all of the reasons that you have used aeroplanes in the past five years'. Respondents could list more than one option. 461 responses were received.

[xi] In response to 'Please tick all of the reasons that you might use aeroplanes in the next two years'. Respondents could list more than one option. 436 responses were received.