



COVID-19 online diary

Weeks 7 and 8



Overview of the research

- 20 Londoners were recruited through Talk London to complete an only diary over the course of 8 weeks.
- **This report summarises key findings from weeks 7 and 8 of the diary (1st July to 15th July),** which explored the idea of a 15-minute city and aspirations for the future of London.



Summary

15-minute city

- Respondents were largely supportive of the idea of a 15-minute city, and Covid-19 has made this more of a reality.
- But they questioned how feasible this is for all Londoners.

The future of London

- Respondents generally want a more fair and caring society, a greener and less busy city, and a more local London.
- Respondents do not see these as new aspirations. Covid-19 has instead increased the appetite and urgency for change.



15-minute city

Respondents were introduced to the idea of a "15-minute city", where every Londoners should be able to meet their essential needs within a 15-minute walk or bike ride of where they live.

Respondents were largely supportive of the idea of a 15-minute city, and Covid-19 has made this more of a reality

- Many respondents readily see the benefits of a 15-minute city – less time spent travelling, fewer cars, quieter roads, less congested public transport, stronger local communities, and opportunities for local businesses.
- Covid-19 has made the idea of a 15-minute city a reality as respondents have got used to staying local throughout the outbreak. Many also cited that **their local area already meets their essential needs**, thanks to the number of high streets and town centres spread across London – online shopping has also helped. A few value how decentralised London currently is, for example when compared with other cities such as Paris.

“I am completely behind the idea. I actually think very little needs to be done for London to become a 15-minute city because of its inherent geographical structure, comprised of lots of neighbourhoods each with their own schools, cafes, shops, etc and so many parks and green spaces scattered across the city.”

But they question how feasible this is for all Londoners

- Although many reflected that their local area meets their essential needs, notably shopping and public services, few work within a 15-minute walk or cycle from where they live. Some do not see a 15-minute city being feasible whilst **a large proportion of Londoners have to commute for work**. Even among the new remote workers, there is an expectation they will eventually return to the office.
- There is also acknowledgement that **parts of London lack the facilities and infrastructure**, whether it's a lack of shops and services nearby or a lack of cycle infrastructure (e.g. Santander cycles), for people to meet their daily needs within a 15-minute walk or cycle. Some participants have to rely on cars for this.

"I think the biggest change would have to be in terms of work, as lots of people commute across London for their job."

"There must be more cycle highways and Santander bike stations especially in SW and SE London, where bike infrastructure is virtually non-existent."

"Parts like South East London are really poorly connected and need a lot of investment in public transport links and shops. My parents live in Shooters Hill and that's very remote, they really rely on their cars for their shopping and pretty much everything else - even for going to school and work.."



The future of London

We asked our respondents what kind of city they want London to be in 5 years.

1. A more fair and caring society

Throughout this research, many respondents have praised the role of low paid key workers and have reflected on the (lack of) reward and recognition for these essential jobs. The pandemic has also highlighted to them the precariousness of work for many Londoners, and how easy it is to fall through the cracks. Many respondents want a society based on a strong welfare system that protects and supports those most in need.

“I hope that we will not take our key workers for granted again, not just those that work within the NHS, but our shop workers, street cleaners, transport staff...we cannot forget that throughout this pandemic it was these people that kept this city running and in some cases at a great loss to lives.”

“I want our key workers to be valued, paid properly and fairly, and respected.”

“We've seen in the pandemic how easy jobs we're being given up and the need for backup employment...universal credit was overwhelmed, and a more prepared system could have handled the high influx of people.”

“I want it to be a kinder city, a city that supports the vulnerable. I don't want the homeless to be thrust back on the streets.”

2. A greener and less busy city.

Many respondents have enjoyed the quieter roads and appreciated the green spaces throughout lockdown. Although some think London's roads are returning to normal, respondents want a more environmentally friendly city and one that is less chaotic than before.

“Coronavirus made me realise a car-free city is easily achievable and even more beneficial than I'd thought. I also noticed how much better the city felt with fewer people.”

“I feel like London can really use this opportunity to reduce carbon emissions and use the pandemic as a sort of head start.”

“I'd like it to be a greener, less crowded city.”

“I enjoy the way the streets are now filled with people (you can still go out to places and see people walking on sidewalks, cycling, etc.. and even using public transport) but without the previous overcrowding and mess especially in central parts of the city, so in this sense the city is much more enjoyable and easier to appreciate.”

3. A more local London

Reflecting on the community spirit during lockdown, and having to stay local, some want to see more connected and empowered local communities as well as thriving local economies.

“I would like to live in a city where we engage with our neighbours and communities more...Although I have not personally felt the greatest sense of community from the neighbours on my street during lockdown, except that is during the clap for the NHS, being at home has alerted me to whom lives around me. I have noticed people and families I had never seen before.”

“These last few months have alerted me to the power of local communities.”

“I would love to see people enjoying more their local areas as I said before, which in my opinion are one of the greatest assets of London, also because now it's more important than ever to support the great local businesses in every borough that makes this one of world's greatest cities.”

Respondents do not see these as new aspirations. Covid-19 has instead increased the appetite and urgency for change.

“I think we saw that there was a possibility for change, that choices were being brought forward. There’s an opportunity, and I want that opportunity to be taken... It’s brought to light how urgent these changes are and how fragile our society is.”



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Weeks 7 and 8 (July 2020)

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