
LINK MONTHLY REPORT

November 2021



1. KEY ACTIVITIES

The LINK ATM network continues to operate to its usual high standard and remains well positioned to support UK consumers' access to cash needs through provision of a broad footprint of cash machines, effective risk management and high levels of operational resilience. LINK is working closely with its infrastructure provider and Network Members, all of whom continue to perform well.

The LINK Board met at LINK's offices in Harrogate in November with *Victoria Richardson, Chief Strategy Officer, Australian Payments Network* as an online guest to discuss changes to the Australia market and lessons for the UK. Other items on the agenda were the future role of LINK in access-to-cash and LINK's interactions with its regulators. The Board also carefully considered and approved reports on Operations, Risk, Finance and stakeholder management. The LINK Executive also presented its updated transaction forecasts for 2022.

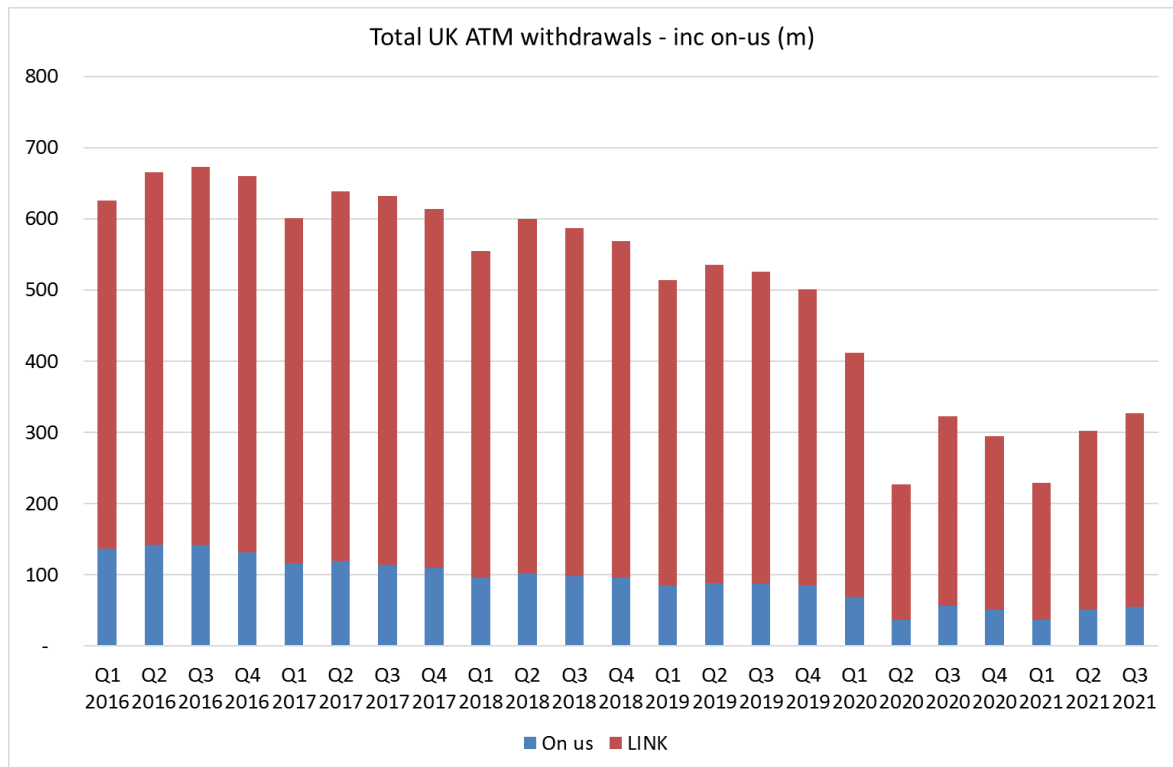
The LINK staff are working in the office on a staggered basis and this is allowing colleagues to meet face-to-face while continuing with effective remote working at other times. The LINK Executive is now holding more face-to-face meetings with key stakeholders, while keeping in line with government guidance and after careful risk assessment. LINK's field-based activity has now fully resumed, with all site visits risk assessed. COVID-19 compliant delivery of LINK's Financial Inclusion Programme remains steady and effective. There are no commercial or operational issues causing concern and LINK and its various service providers continue to perform to the expected very high standard.

2. QUARTERLY TOTAL ATM WITHDRAWALS

The chart below shows the total number ATM cash withdrawals by quarter for recent years. This includes on-us cash withdrawals where the customer uses an ATM belonging to their own bank or building society. These are not processed by LINK and this data is collected by Pay.UK.

Quarterly cash withdrawals normally follow a distinctive pattern and as can be seen, were showing a steady decline from 2016 to 2019 as many consumers moved away from cash and towards card and online payments. The coronavirus crisis has obviously had a huge impact on ATM use with large drops in use in Q2 2020 and Q1 2021 when the country was in lockdown. The intervening quarters showed some recovery in ATM use, notably Q3 2020 and Q3 2021. However, even the latest quarter is still down 38% on pre-pandemic Q3 2019.

The other marked trend is that on-us withdrawals form a much smaller proportion of the total, now 20% compared to 27% back in 2016. This is driven by changing consumer behaviour, an increased propensity to use remote, non-branch ATMs and ATMs not operated by their bank, itself driven by falling branch numbers and a marked reduction in the number of bank-owned remote machines.



3. LINK VOLUMES AND VALUES

Since the summer, ATM usage has remained consistent with the equivalent period in 2020 which is reflective of the broadly similar COVID-19 restrictions in place during these periods. However, it is a long way below pre-COVID levels. Generally, while some public behaviour has returned almost to pre-pandemic levels, footfall in high streets and shopping centres is still well below, as is daily commuting into the large city centres.

However, despite this, cash use remains stable, if at a lower level and there were still over 140 million LINK transactions in October were and over £7 billion was withdrawn.

LINK Transaction Volumes (millions)													
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2019	209	207	232	220	232	221	226	225	211	214	208	204	2,608
2020	185	181	155	91	110	117	139	141	139	138	118	129	1,643
2021	99	97	114	123	131	133	140	140	137	141			1,254

LINK Transaction Values (£millions)													
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2019	£8,788	£8,859	£10,211	£9,701	£10,354	£9,837	£10,070	£10,271	£9,336	£9,512	£9,494	£9,985	£116,417
2020	£8,182	£8,258	£7,450	£4,399	£5,664	£5,972	£7,076	£7,105	£6,903	£6,939	£6,016	£7,044	£81,010
2021	£5,062	£5,127	£5,995	£6,446	£6,809	£6,757	£7,242	£7,177	£6,928	£7,156			£64,698

Chart 1: LINK weekly transaction volumes (m)

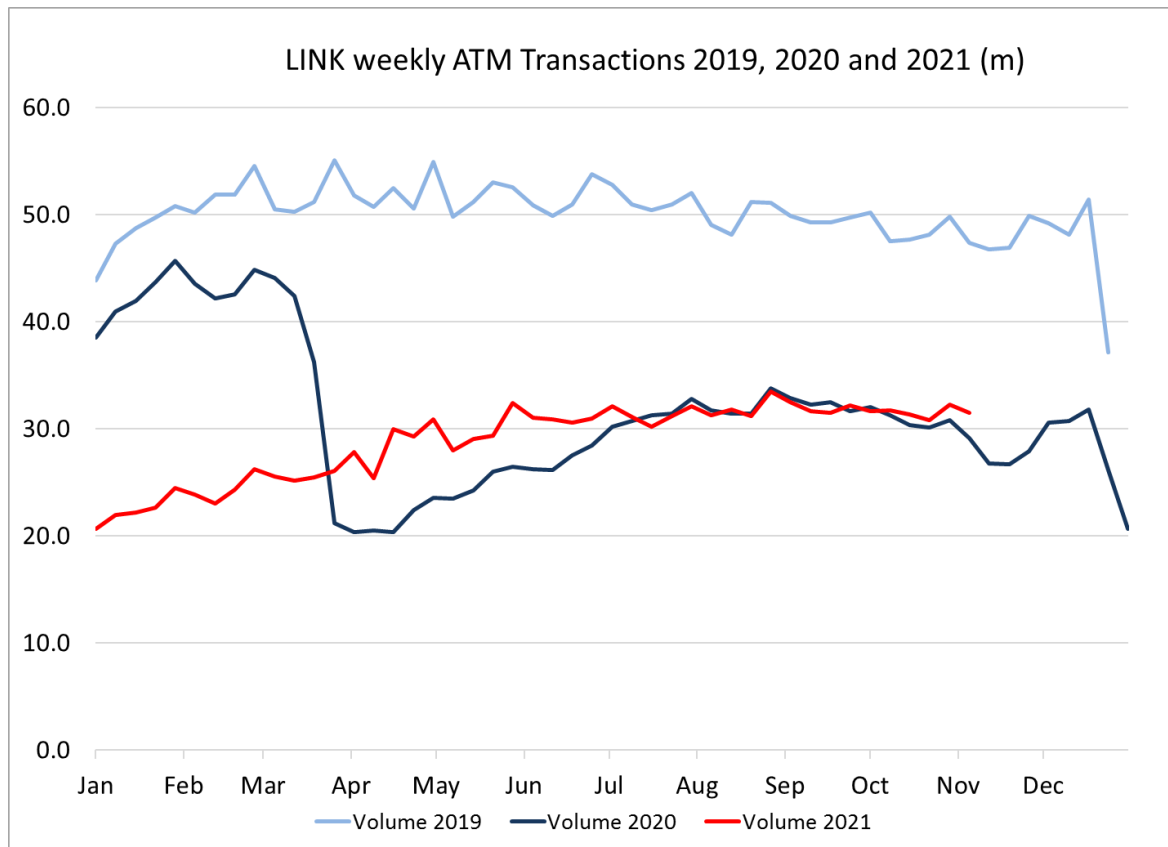
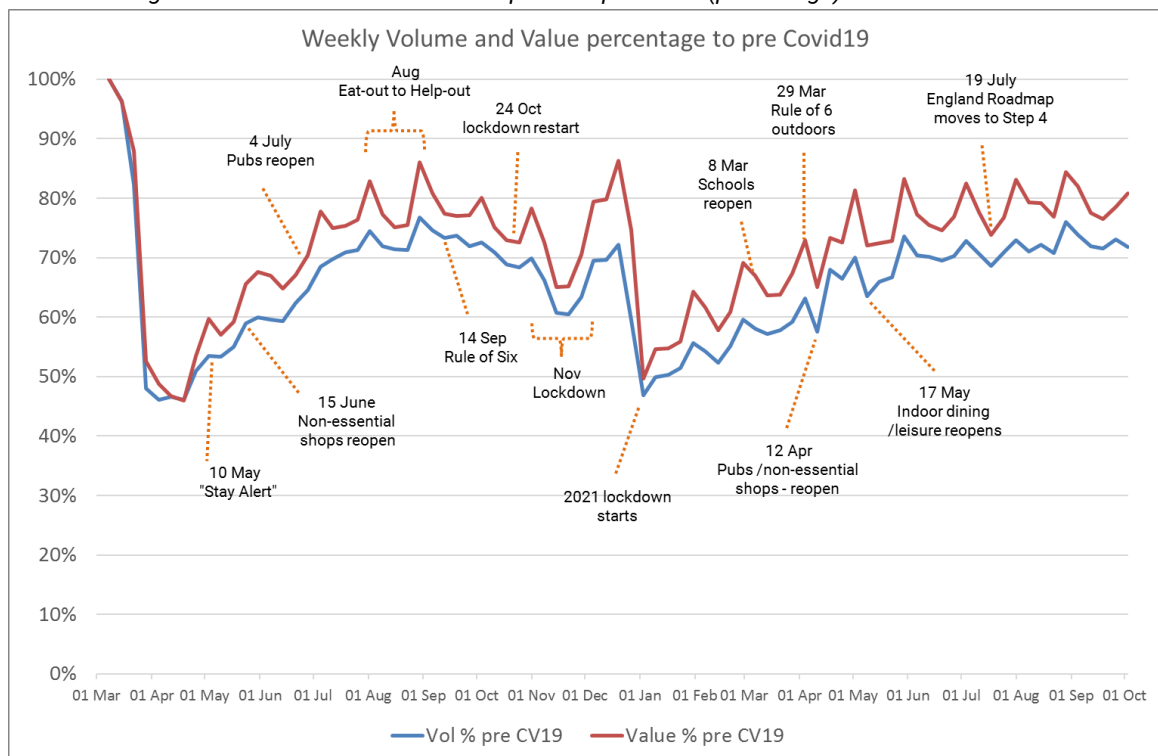


Chart 2: Changes to ATM volume and value compared to pre-Covid (percentage)



4. ATM NUMBERS

ATM coverage across the UK remains as planned and in line with LINK’s strategy and Financial Inclusion Programme objectives. Many ATMs closed during the pandemic due to social distancing or the closure of the premises which house them. As restrictions have eased, a number of these machines have reopened, although it seems likely that some locations, like pubs, where a lot of people used cash and used to have quite a few pay-to-use ATMs, are accepting cash less now and as a result no longer need on-site ATMs.

LINK ATM Numbers by Type and Owner 2020												
2020	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Branch	15,588	15,605	15,583	15,391	15,351	15,309	15,311	15,292	15,198	15,098	15,044	14,987
Free Remote	29,638	29,336	28,478	25,392	25,393	25,652	26,240	26,875	27,050	27,077	26,598	26,740
Total Free	45,226	44,941	44,061	40,783	40,744	40,961	41,551	42,167	42,248	42,175	41,642	41,727
Pay to use	15,323	15,307	13,745	12,412	12,549	12,814	12,999	13,398	13,426	13,373	12,780	12,847
Total ATMs	60,549	60,248	57,806	53,195	53,293	53,775	54,550	55,565	55,674	55,548	54,422	54,574
Bank and Building Societies	25,148	25,001	24,955	23,268	23,236	23,294	23,309	23,295	23,130	22,971	22,897	22,856
Non Card Issuers	35,401	35,247	32,851	29,927	30,057	30,481	31,241	32,270	32,544	32,577	31,525	31,718
Total ATMs	60,549	60,248	57,806	53,195	53,293	53,775	54,550	55,565	55,674	55,548	54,422	54,574

LINK ATM Numbers by Type and Owner 2021												
2021	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Branch	14,917	14,827	14,801	14,752	14,627	14,450	14,056	13,905	13,836	14,137		
Free Remote	26,541	26,233	26,038	26,229	26,747	27,061	27,078	27,205	27,280	26,720		
Total Free	41,458	41,060	40,839	40,981	41,374	41,511	41,134	41,110	41,116	40,857		
Pay to use	12,491	12,156	12,023	12,140	12,587	12,616	12,725	12,699	12,653	12,600		
Total ATMs	53,949	53,216	52,862	53,121	53,961	54,127	53,859	53,809	53,769	53,457		
Bank and Building Societies	22,801	22,660	22,614	22,456	22,287	22,109	21,752	21,654	21,584	21,484		
Non Card Issuers	31,148	30,556	30,248	30,665	31,674	32,018	32,107	32,155	32,185	31,973		
Total ATMs	53,949	53,216	52,862	53,121	53,961	54,127	53,859	53,809	53,769	53,457		

5. MAINTAINING ACCESS TO CASH

LINK’s Financial Inclusion Programme continues to be effective in maintaining free access to cash for consumers in rural, remote and deprived communities across the UK.

To-date, 75 lost free-to-use ATMs have been targeted for replacement and resolved, 28 through Direct Commissioning, 19 through Premiums and the remaining 28 by regular installation programmes.

Overall, over 3,500 ATMs get a subsidy as part of LINK’s work on financial inclusion. LINK is now using social media to further raise awareness of the initiative and continues to welcome requests for ATMs. Please see the LINK website for more details <https://www.link.co.uk/consumers/request-access-to-cash/>.

6. LINK FOOTPRINT REPORT

LINK is committed to maintaining free access to cash for many years to come through an extensive network of ATMs, which covers the same area as it did on 1st February 2018. This includes Protected ATMs which are machines 1km or more away from another free ATM and are therefore considered vital by LINK for their local community. These Protected ATMs are analysed every month and the changes are summarised below.

August 2021	ATMs	Monthly change
Total Protected ATMs	3,180	10
Live ATMs	2,776	6
ATMs No Longer Transacting	404	4
Temporarily out of action	27	-7
Investigations with operator underway	11	6
ATMs Confirmed as Closed	366	5
ATMs not being replaced (a)	307	6
ATMs Targeted for Replacement	59	-1
LINK Members offered premiums for replacement	0	0
LINK directly commissioning a replacement	27	-3
Resolution not Possible (b)	32	2
ATMs previously targeted for replacement and now resolved (c)	75	4

Notes - LINK Footprint Report

(a) ATMs are not replaced where consumers have free access to cash over the counter from a nearby post office, where the site was not accessible to the public, where there are security concerns, or where there is assessed to be no community detriment following a site visit by LINK.

(b) Where it is not currently possible to replace a *Protected ATM* for reasons such as no suitable premises within 1km, no willing site owners to host an ATM or no operator willing to deploy an ATM. LINK may still consider alternative actions and these sites remain on file.

(c) Sites which were targeted for replacement through the programme and now have free access to cash via an ATM, whether through Premiums, Direct Commissioning or through the free competitive market.