

£20 million fund marks one year on from the Inclusive Transport Strategy

July 8, 2019



Disabled rail passengers across the UK are set to benefit from a raft of accessibility improvements with the opening of a £20 million government fund today (8 July 2019).

It marks a year since the launch of the Inclusive Transport Strategy, the government's flagship accessibility programme.

Key commitments delivered in the last 12 months include the introduction of the first ever impartial independent Rail Ombudsman, to make sure passengers get a fair deal when train companies fall short, and the launch of a £2 million fund to bring Changing Places accessible toilets to more motorway service areas.

And last month, guidance was issued to local authorities in England for extending the Blue Badge scheme – the biggest change in 50 years – making it easier for people with non-visible disabilities to travel.

Nusrat Ghani, Accessibility Minister, said:

While many take for granted the ability to travel easily from A to B, access for the fifth of people who identify as disabled can be far from straightforward.

We want disabled people to travel easily, confidently and without extra cost, which is why it is fantastic to be opening this fund today.

I look forward to seeing what ideas the industry has for accessibility improvements as we work towards a more inclusive rail network.

The £20 million fund will be open for applications from stations in need of accessibility improvements, leading to small-scale enhancements such as tactile paving, handrails and Harrington Humps, which increase platform heights. Taken together, these improvements will open up journeys for disabled passengers, allowing them to travel with confidence.

John Welsman, Policy Business Partner at the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, said: "Guide Dogs welcomes the additional funding as independent train travel is a real challenge for people living with sight loss.

"Elements like tactile paving on platform edges and steps, better signage, improved lighting and colour contrast will make stations easier to negotiate confidently and more safely.

"However, train travel is still a very complex environment for people with sight loss and we will continue to work to find solutions so that no one with sight loss is left out of life."

This follows the announcement in April that 73 stations will benefit from accessible routes to and between every platform, as part of the government's £300 million Access for All fund.

The Access for All programme was first launched in 2006 and has so far delivered more than 200 accessible routes into stations along with smaller scale improvements at a further 1,500 stations.

Previous projects funded through the programme include the installation of Harrington Humps at 77 stations to help reduce stepping distances from the platform to the train; accessible toilets installed at 18 stations – including a Changing Places toilet at London Paddington – and a new footbridge and 4 lifts installed at St Neots Station, Cambridgeshire.

The government is also proposing a number of measures to be delivered in partnership with industry to improve the flying experience for disabled passengers and those with reduced mobility as part of its Aviation 2050 Strategy.

The work is all part of the government's aspiration that by 2030 all major transport hubs and terminals on both public and private transport networks will meet the needs of disabled people, including toilet and changing facilities, straightforward signage, audio and visual messaging and space to navigate.