

Accessibility Minister visits South East London to mark first anniversary of government's Inclusive Transport Strategy

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Network Rail and Southeastern welcomed the Accessibility Minister, Nusrat Ghani MP, to Hither Green and New Eltham stations on Monday (8 July) to mark the first anniversary of the government's Inclusive Transport Strategy.

Also in attendance was prominent campaigner and Southeastern passenger, Dr Amit Patel, who provided insightful feedback on the daily challenges he faces and how the industry can better support users with accessibility requirements on the network.

The group was also joined by Anthony Smith, Chief Executive of Transport Focus, which acts as a consumer watchdog for the industry, together with representatives from Network Rail and Southeastern, including managing director, David Statham.

Robert Sue, route enhancement manager for Network Rail, said: “It was a pleasure to welcome the Minister and Doctor Patel to our patch on Monday to mark the first anniversary of the Inclusive Transport Strategy. Improving access at stations can transform lives and it was fantastic to hear about the benefits that improvements at stations like New Eltham can bring. It was motivating too, to hear first-hand from Dr Patel how much more we still have to do to make the railway truly accessible for all.”

The Minister’s visit began at Hither Green station, which has been earmarked for funding under the government’s Access for All programme. With more than 3 million entries and exits each year, it is one of the busiest stations on the Southeastern network but also one of the most challenging to make fully accessible due to the unusual topography of the station premises.

The visit then continued on to New Eltham station to see the transformation that a previous Access for All scheme has brought. Passengers using this station now benefit from a fully accessible station interchange and step free access to every platform via two lifts. The work undertaken here has also seen the addition of a wider footbridge and new dual-height ticket office windows, providing further accessibility improvements for New Eltham’s users.

On Monday, the Minister announced that £20 million additional funding would be made available for mid-tier stations and the government has invited the rail industry to nominate eligible stations which would benefit from further funding for accessibility improvements.

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.