

Greater Anglia Accessibility Awareness training rolled out to include replacement bus colleagues

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Greater Anglia is ensuring passengers with accessibility needs continue to receive high levels of customer service, even when trains have to be replaced by buses, by extending its accessibility awareness training scheme to rail replacement teams.

Four Abellio Rail Replacement team members have already received the virtual training programme and a further 10 team leaders will take the course this month.

The team leaders will then cascade the pioneering training to Abellio Rail Replacement's 100-strong staff.

The training – all delivered by professional disabled trainers – aims to improve customer service for disabled passengers.

Tony Bowen, Abellio Contract Manager, said: "It's great that my rail replacement teams can take advantage of Greater Anglia's virtual course, giving them additional skills and knowledge to keep

accessibility in the forefront of their minds over the Christmas period when there will be more rail replacement services in operation because of engineering works.

“We are always keen to help staff develop in this area and better understand the communities that we serve and we will be doing everything we can to help passengers get from A to B during the holiday period if they need to travel.”

Greater Anglia was the first operator in the country to implement accessibility courses that meet the rail regulator’s new standards, ahead of new rules that come in in 2021 requiring all train operators to undertake such training.

The programme is also ‘disabled-led’ – as the sessions are all delivered by disabled trainers, after Greater Anglia last year commissioned Equality Trainer, Sarah Rennie, to put together a team.

Sarah comments: “Online training has been a real success. The teams are pleased to see each other via video calling and take the opportunity to reflect on really topical disability equality issues such as face coverings and lip reading. As a trainer, it’s a privilege to be in the (virtual) room.”

The course covers meeting and greeting disabled customers and how to talk to them about their access needs, language and terminology, communication, body language, etiquette and practical examples of assisting customers with different impairments, as well as the business and legal case for why it’s important to understand the issues.

At the end of the course, delegates are invited to make an ‘Inclusion Promise’, naming one thing they plan to do differently to improve accessibility and inclusion for customers.

Greater Anglia’s Accessibility Manager, Rebecca Richardson, said: “I’m delighted that the Abellio Rail Replacement team was keen to take advantage of this training. It will really help disabled customers with their journey experience as staff are better able to understand what they need to do in order to support somebody through their journey and to provide a good passenger experience.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Greater Anglia is ensuring that rail travel is safe for staff and passengers with an enhanced cleaning regime, on stations and trains, concentrating on high-touch areas such as push buttons, grab rails and door handles.

The train operator has also introduced a wide range of measures to make it easier for customers to maintain social distancing at stations and on trains – including floor markings, one-way systems, new signs and queuing systems.

It is now mandatory for customers to wear a face covering when using public transport, to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. Children under the age of 11, and disabled people or those with a medical condition which means they cannot wear a face covering, are exempt from wearing them.

Photo credit: Greater Anglia

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