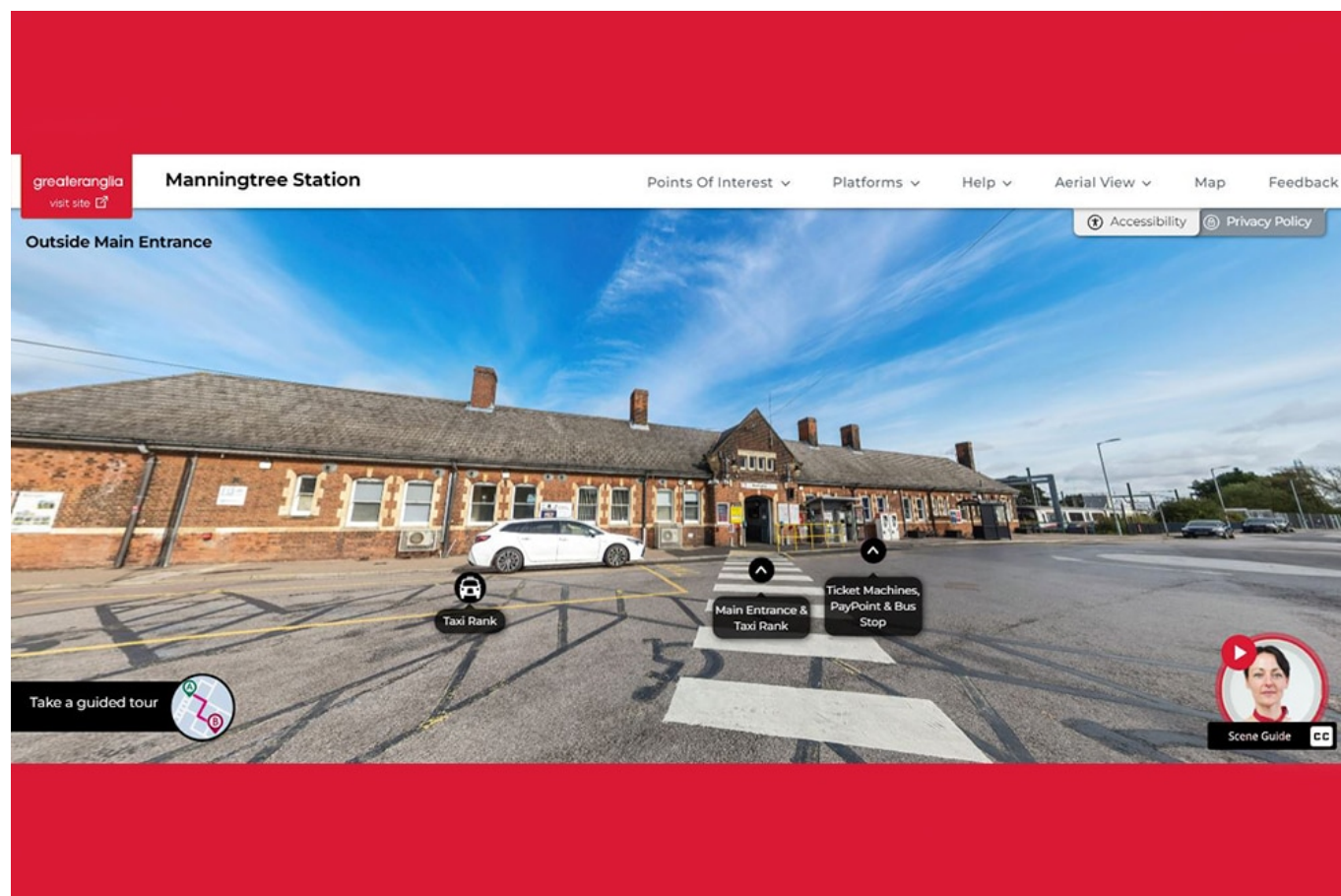


Greater Anglia launches online virtual tour of Manningtree rail station

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Train operator, Greater Anglia, has launched an online virtual tour of Manningtree rail station to help people travel with confidence – which is especially useful for disabled customers wanting to check how accessible their journey is.

The tour has been designed to support journey planning, give customers a clearer picture of the station before they travel and reduce anxiety about how they'll get around from car park to platform.

Using the virtual station tour, people can find out how to get to all public areas of the station including the toilets, customer service desk, platforms and anywhere else they might need to visit at the station such as car parks or drop off areas – making it easier for them to plan their journey in advance.

Detailed 360 degree photography has been used to map the station, capturing all public spaces, which people can navigate virtually even visiting the toilet or the waiting room before going to the platform. Aerial photography and an interactive map has also been used to show the location of all the customer facilities in relation to each other.

Members of Greater Anglia's Accessibility Panel, a group of disabled customers who meet regularly with the train company, offered feedback during the development of the project and have been supportive of the project.

The web-based online virtual tour offers autopilot or manual choices for navigating the station, an interactive map to see the entire station layout with 'hot spot' links to specific areas of the station.

There is an aerial view showing the car park, cycle parking, bus stop and taxi rank / drop off location.

Key features such as tactile paving – textured paving on the edge of platforms – assisted travel meeting points and toilets and individual platforms can also be navigated to directly through a drop-down menu system.

The 'autopilot' tool gives users the option of selecting their destination location within the station and being automatically guided to it or if preferred through a series of clicks.

The technology was provided by The Virtual Tour Experts and the tours software has been designed to be accessible.

A spoken scene guide with closed captions plays on the home page at the station entrance and it features an accessibility widget that enables the user to change to high contrast, large font size or audio transcribe. Future developments will look at incorporating British Sign Language videos as part of Greater Anglia's commitment to improving customer information.

The tours can be viewed at <https://www.greateranglia.co.uk/travel-information/your-journey/virtual-tours> on any device and the addition of more stations is planned in the future.

Greater Anglia's Accessibility and Inclusion Manager, James Bonehill, said, "The idea was to create a tool for customers to assist them with their journey planning and reduce the anxiety about whether the station would create any accessibility barriers. We want to give people who may not have travelled by rail for a while or maybe not at all, to do so with confidence.

"We are committed to making rail more accessible and providing quality information to enable more informed journey planning.

Neil Henderson, Managing Director of Virtual Tour Experts, said: "We've really enjoyed working on this project to create a number of industry firsts. The world of VR is developing fast but until now that development has not given due consideration to online accessibility.

"This tour is the World's first to incorporate an accessibility widget, guided tours, subtitled scene guides and there is much more to come. The user-first attitude of the team at Greater Anglia provided the perfect base for development and will ensure the platform continues to evolve."

360-degree virtual tours are now available for 14 of Greater Anglia's busiest stations – Bishop's Stortford, Broxbourne, Cambridge, Chelmsford, Colchester, Ely, Harlow Town, Ingatestone, Ipswich, Manningtree,

Norwich, Shenfield, Southend Victoria and Stansted Airport.

Photo credit: Greater Anglia