

National strategy to boost accessibility for disabled passengers

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Disabled passengers will have better access to public transport and a bigger say in how they travel, under a new strategy which will boost inclusivity across the entire network.

The Department for Transport is today (Wednesday 28th of July) unveiling a range of initiatives to remove barriers and improve confidence for disabled people as they return to trains, buses and taxis after the pandemic.

An audit of all UK train stations, originally pledged in the [Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail](#), is now underway – helping to identify improvements and highlighting existing areas of excellence. The findings will form a new public database so people can better plan their journeys and, along with input from disabled passengers, will shape future investment in accessible rail travel.

DfT will also work with Network Rail to improve safety with a new programme to install all station platforms with tactile paving. This comes on top of work to develop a [Passenger Assist App](#) to simplify communication with rail staff and encourage better customer service.

The Government will bring forward new regulations to force bus companies to provide audible and visual announcements on board services. To help smaller companies achieve this, Government grants will be boosted to £3.5m. New research into the designs of bus-stops and stations will ensure they are accessible for all.

The Department will also support new legislation for taxis and private hire vehicles, protecting disabled passengers from being overcharged and to better ensure they get the right help from drivers.

Accessibility Minister, Chris Heaton-Harris, said: “Disabled passengers should be empowered to use all forms of transport with the same confidence as everyone else – whether by taxi, train, bus or ferry.

“Today’s measures will have a positive, real-life impact and double-down on our promise to building back fairer from COVID.”

There is also a boost to seaports, with new £1million funding to improve access at ports to the Isle of Wight and Isles of Scilly.

In addition, the Department will work with consumer groups to design more accessible chargepoints for Electric Vehicles, as the industry steers away from fuel burning cars.

Alongside local authorities, DfT will work to reduce parking on pavements to de-clutter our streets and free up paths, so vulnerable pedestrians can make journeys more safely and easily. An announcement on next steps will be made later this year.

And for longer journeys, new £450,000 funding will help deliver more accessible toilets, through the **Changing Places** programme, on top of the £2.2 million already invested, to ensure most motorway services have the right facilities for the quarter of a million people who cannot use standard accessible ones.

Anthony Smith, chief executive of the independent watchdog Transport Focus, said: “It’s important that transport operators seek the views of disabled people to make sure services better suit their needs as the country recovers from the pandemic.

“These measures will help remove barriers and improve access for all transport users.”

Robert Burley, Director of Campaigns, Care and Support at Muscular Dystrophy UK, said: “We regularly hear from people living with muscle-wasting conditions who have had to cancel or cut short days out, or don’t consider them at all, because of poor accessibility.

“The strategy announced today is a step in the right direction to helping tackle the exclusion that so many disabled people face on a daily basis.”

The measures are part of the Government’s National Disability Strategy – the most ambitious endeavour to remove barriers to disabled people’s everyday lives. It makes solid commitments and sets out immediate practical steps to create a society that works for everyone. These include building more supported

housing, providing £300m to improve accessibility in schools and improving access to cultural venues.

It follows the “**It’s everyone’s journey**” campaign, launched in 2020 to champion equal access across all forms of public transport and encourage people to be more considerate and supportive of others when using the transport network.

Responding to news, Jacqueline Starr, Chief Executive Officer at the Rail Delivery Group, said: “We want disabled people to feel confident on their train journeys and the measures to improve customer information and install tactile paving will help to achieve that. We will support the government’s strategy while continuing to develop our new Passenger Assistance app as part of our ambition to make train travel accessible and inclusive to everyone.”

Photo credit: Department for Transport