

Paralympian Andy Barrow to lead panel ensuring Southeastern trains are accessible to all

February 10, 2021



- Paralympian Andy Barrow to lead new panel to continually review and improve policy and practice
- New accessibility app will use inclusive design principles
- Innovative features added to customer information systems will provide automatic updates of toilets availability on trains and lift availability at stations
- New highly trained roving Mobile Assistance staff to be deployed at stations

A host of new measures are coming in this year that have been designed to improve the travel experience on Southeastern services for anyone who has a disability or mobility issue. They are part of the operator's new Accessible Travel Policy that is now available following approval by the Office and Rail and Road (ORR).

Around 11% of rail passengers declare that they have some form of disability. Thanks to improvements in trains and at stations over the last 25 years, a large proportion can still travel unaided or without booking assistance.

But many people do need help and Southeastern is always looking at how it can improve its service for them. The new policy and specially-designed passenger leaflet – **Making Rail Accessible, Helping Older and Disabled People** – sets out the arrangements and assistance the operator will provide for people who want to use their trains.

The key measures in the new policy include

- **Introduction of a new roving Mobile Assistance role** – specially trained personnel will provide extra help onto trains and around unstaffed stations.
- **Launch of the brand new Southeastern app** – built with inclusivity in mind allowing for travel assistance to be booked directly on Southeastern trains. Further innovations have also been added providing automatic **updates of toilet availability on trains and lift availability at stations**, helping passengers with disabilities better plan their journeys. *(This follows the launch of the industry-leading SeatFinder service that uses train loading information to let passengers know how busy services are likely to be at each stop.)*
- Network roll out of **Sunflower Lanyards and Just a Minute (JAM) cards** – passengers with a Sunflower lanyard or a JAM card lets station staff know discretely that they have a non-visual disability and may need some extra help.
- Creation of a new **bespoke disability awareness training program** developed in consultation with disabled people and includes their lived experience of using the railway – this will be undertaken by all of Southeastern's 4500 staff
- Setting up of a **Passenger Accessibility Panel** – led by triple Paralympian Andy Barrow – to continually review and improve policy and practice.
- From April, disabled passengers will be able to make **bookings for assistance up to six hours before a journey** and then from April 2022, it will then reduce to two hours. (Currently bookings can be made 12 hours in advance or from 22.00 the night before travel)

Southeastern Passenger Services Director, David Wornham said: “We are committed to providing a safe and comfortable journey for everyone and I’m very proud of the new measures we are putting in place to support that aim. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis Southeastern, along with the rest of the rail industry, has kept vital train services running for everyone who had to travel for work, education, shopping, or medical appointments. As we start to come out of the lockdown restrictions and passenger numbers pick up we want to be sure that we are doing everything we can to make our services equally accessible to everyone in the communities we serve.”

Andy Barrow, Triple Paralympian, Access Consultant and Chair of Southeastern's Passenger Accessibility Panel said: “I’m passionate about people with any kind of impairment having full parity when using the rail network. I’ve been working closely with Southeastern to help their staff empathise with the day to day challenges that people can experience when travelling by train. Our new accessibility panel will also improve understanding when it comes to the assistance needs of their customers. So when we act on our findings the changes we make will have a lasting and meaningful impact.”

During its current direct award contract with the Department for Transport, which runs from April 2020 to

October 2021, Southeastern will be investing in a range of accessibility improvements. This is focused on four key areas; improving access to information, physical accessibility improvements at stations, upskilling it's 4,500 strong workforce, and engaging with passengers about the improvements they value most and others they would like to see implemented.

The new accessible travel policy and passenger leaflet is now available on the Southeastern website: www.southeasternrailway.co.uk/accessible-travel-policy

Photo credit: Southeastern