

Passenger Assistance app to help disabled rail passengers travel with confidence in first for public transport

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A new app available today will make it easier and quicker for disabled people to request assistance for their train journeys, helping people to travel with confidence.

The 'Passenger Assistance' app, developed with train operators, will offer passengers the choice to request assistance, update their profile and review their journeys from anywhere using their smartphone, a first for public transport anywhere in Great Britain. This can speed up assistance bookings and give customers greater confidence on their journeys as they can instantly amend accessibility requirements on their profile via the app.

The rail industry has already improved assistance for passengers by replacing back-end systems to improve calls, introducing user profiles to speed up bookings, and providing frontline staff with real-time information about assistance bookings through one central database.

The new 'Passenger Assistance' app is the latest step to give people more confidence as they return to the

railway following Covid-19 travel restrictions. Passengers can set up and update their profile, with no need to call to make changes and no need to repeat their requirements each time they request assistance. This saves time and ensures information is up to date, helping staff to tailor their assistance to meet individual needs.

Previously, calls to book assistance could take up to 40 minutes on the phone. Staff at stations then received a printed list of booked assistance each morning, which meant when plans changed, the list wouldn't be updated automatically and staff could end up in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The new system upgrades along with the app mean the booking process will be smoother for disabled people. Requests to book assistance are sent directly to the train operator who will confirm the booking by email with a unique booking reference. The train operator will arrange assistance by a trained member of staff who will be working from up to date information, adjusting their approach for a range of disabilities.

'Passenger Assistance' was built by Transreport, a UK-based tech company which focuses on accessibility and inclusion, in collaboration with rail companies and with input from an Accessibility Panel including disabled passengers and accessibility experts. The app supports screen readers and text to speech tools and is also compatible with mobile assistive support tools such as font re-sizing, contrast adjustment and screen magnification.

'Passenger Assistance' by Transreport is available to download on the App Store and Google Play from today. It is offered as an additional way to request assistance alongside the existing phone, email and basic web forms, and will evolve with new features over time.

Jacqueline Starr, Chief Executive Officer of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), said: "We want to make the railway more accessible to more people and this new app is a first step towards transforming the way disabled passengers request assistance, with greater control at their fingertips. To help all our passengers travel with confidence as restrictions ease, we're also providing effective ventilation on trains, continued cleaning and better information about busy services to help with social distancing."

Jay Shen, Founder and Managing Director of Transreport, said: "We're inspired by The Social Model that says people are disabled by the world around them, not by their impairment or difference. We want to use tech to remove the barriers that make life harder for people with impairments. 'Passenger Assistance' makes it much easier for disabled passengers to arrange assisted travel, giving them more control and independence."

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said: "Returning to public transport post-lockdown, we're presented with a unique opportunity to re-shape the transport network to ensure it works for everyone.

"DfT has supported and provided funding to develop this app since its earliest inception and it builds on brilliant accessibility improvements already made by the rail industry, simplifying disabled passengers' experience of the network and ensuring staff have the right tools to assist them."

Gemma Hope, Director of Policy at Leonard Cheshire said: "Giving people more control over their rail assistance is such an important part of inclusive travel, so we welcome this app. We look forward to

hearing how disabled people find using the app day to day across the network.”

Louise Rubin, Head of Policy and Campaigns at disability charity Scope says: “The current booking process is something disabled people have told us stands in the way of them using the rail network, so it’s great to see rail operators improving the assistance booking system.

“This app should play an important role in simplifying the process making the assistance people need to travel much easier to book.

“We hope this app is the first step on a journey that will see disabled people turn up and travel whenever they want.”

Photo credit: Rail Delivery Group