

Rail workers hear from disability rights campaigners on how to improve accessibility of train services

February 16, 2021



East Anglia's train operator, Greater Anglia, has launched a series of webinars for employees aimed at improving rail journeys for disabled customers.

Hosted by Sarah Rennie, Equality Trainer, each webinar includes influential panel members all with lived experience of disability, who discuss issues such as why inclusion matters, how accessible the rail service is and how to improve customer service, with Greater Anglia staff able to ask questions and contribute during the webinar.

The first one welcomed two Shaw Trust top 100 disabled influencers, Alan Benson, Chair of Transport for All and Mike Adams OBE, CEO of Purple – an organisation which aims to change the disability conversation with businesses and disabled people – and a Greater Anglia customer, and Katy Bucknell, Greater Anglia's Human Resources Director.

Greater Anglia's Accessibility Manager, Rebecca Richardson, said: "I'm delighted to launch these webinars

and thrilled to have the contribution of such expert panellists and facilitators.

“These sessions, and our continued training and development programme, show colleagues how we all have a part to play in improving the customer experience for disabled people and those facing access barriers.

“At Greater Anglia we think everyone’s journey matters so we are looking at the entire customer journey from planning to the journey itself including disruption and rail replacement services.

“We recognise the industry has a lot of work to do to improve accessibility and to build a better relationship with our disabled customers and we think our disabled led training, new Accessibility Panel and our Diversity and Inclusion strategy is the start of real progressive change for our business.”

Mike Adams OBE, CEO of Purple, added: “Taking staff on the disabled inclusion journey is the right way and I am delighted Greater Anglia is making these issues so central to its future.”

Alan Benson, Chair of Transport for All, commented: “I was pleased to be able to take part in this series of webinars. Accessibility and inclusion have always been important on the railway but will be key as we build back over the forthcoming months.

“These conversations will give staff throughout Greater Anglia a real understanding of the positive difference their actions can have.”

Six webinars in total will discuss “Why does inclusion matter?”, “How accessible are our services?” and “Customer service: are we getting it right?” covering a range of topics around accessibility and inclusion, including personal experiences of travelling by rail.

Each webinar will welcome two top influencers and advisors in the field, to discuss the issues with host Sarah Rennie.

Future guests include:

- Rosemary Frazer, independent disability, equality and inclusion consultant and trainer named in the 2019 Shaw Trust Power list of Most Influential Disabled People;
- Olivia Renshaw, writer and accessibility advisor;
- Dr Lauren White, a research fellow at the University of Sheffield specialising in the social boundaries of common bowel condition irritable bowel syndrome and how those who live with it navigate everyday life;
- Joanna Wootton, age, disability and inclusion expert;
- Dominic Lund-Conlon, accessibility and inclusion manager at Rail Delivery Group with 10 years' experience working in transport policy;
- Kashmire Hawker who has recently joined the Ceremonies, Culture and Queen's Baton Relay Team at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games;
- Sam Renke, broadcaster, public speaker, disability campaigner and columnist for the Metro newspaper, she was named third most influential disabled woman in The Shaw Trust's Power 100 list of 2020 and shortlisted as Celebrity of the Year at the National Diversity Awards 2020,
- Dr Amit Patel, doctor and disability advocate who has recently published a book, 'Kika and Me', about his experiences with his guide dog, Kika.

Last year, Greater Anglia became the first operator in the country to implement accessibility and inclusion training courses that meet the rail regulator's new standards, a year ahead of the deadline to do so.

The course covers meeting and greeting disabled customers and how to discuss 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.

Current Government advice is to stay at home unless you need to travel for permitted reasons including work and medical appointments.

Greater Anglia continues to ensure 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 people with a disability or illness which means they cannot wear a face covering are exempt from wearing them.

Photo credit: Greater Anglia