

# Ribbon cutting event marks official opening of new assisted travel lounge at Reading station

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The assisted travel lounge at Reading station was formally opened at a special event earlier this week.

The travel lounge, which aims to provide a safe, calm and pleasant space for passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility to wait for their train, was officially opened at a special ribbon cutting event attended by representatives from Network Rail, GWR and Reading Borough Council.

The event was opened by Bernadette Sachse, Network Rail's Stations Transformation Insights Lead, who welcomed guests and gave an overview of the assisted travel lounge before handing over to Mike Gallop, Network Rail's Western route and strategic operations director, who thanked those in attendance and shared a few words of support.

Councillor Tony Page, Deputy Leader of Reading Borough Council & Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, was then invited to give a short speech and formally mark the official opening of the assisted travel lounge by jointly cutting a ribbon with the Mayor of Reading, Councillor David Stevens.

The assisted travel lounge first opened in July and since opening has welcomed more than 500 passengers.

Following £180,000 of investment from Network Rail, an empty retail space was transformed into the assisted travel lounge offering passengers with reduced mobility seating at higher levels, an accessible interactive information screen, phone and electronic device charging facilities, and plenty of space for mobility aids and wheelchair users.

Now fully operational, the assisted travel lounge is open daily between 10am and 6pm and is operated by a member of GWR's customer ambassador team who are always on hand to help any passengers requiring assistance.

Bernadette Sachse, Network Rail's Stations Transformation Insights Lead, said: "I have had the privilege of working on this project since its infancy as an idea through to a fully operational assisted travel lounge we have today.

"We set out to create a safe, light, calm, pleasant space for our passengers to feel safe and comfortable and receive a high standard of customer service.

"It has been rewarding to see the assisted travel lounge being used so well and how it is clearly benefitting passengers as part of their journeys."

Councillor Tony Page, Deputy Leader of Reading Borough Council & Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, said: "It is heartening to see the new travel lounge at Reading Station so well used and making a real difference to people with disabilities and reduced mobility many of whom, quite understandably, may find travelling intimidating or challenging.

"Reading Station has been transformed in recent years into a modern, purpose-built station, befitting of the town. That includes directly outside the station where modern new interchanges have been built by the Council on both the town centre side and Caversham side, making getting to and from the station easy. Inside the facilities are also hugely improved, both on the station concourse and at platform level itself. The new travel lounge is a welcome addition to the offer for rail passengers in Reading."

Councillor David Stevens, Mayor of Reading, said: "Here in Reading we are extremely proud of our iconic railway station. The new assisted travel lounge forms part of that distinctiveness and demonstrates Network Rail's commitment to providing first class facilities to every traveller, whatever their needs. It is extremely welcome and much appreciated."

GWR Mobility and Inclusion Manager Neil Craig said: "Previously over 160,000 people a year successfully used our assisted travel service, but we are always looking at how we can improve upon what we offer, to help reduce barriers for those with disabilities to travel by train.

"We hope this new waiting area will allow even more people to take advantage of our train services and will be monitoring its success closely."

*Photo credit: Network Rail*