

South Western Railway leads the way in industry-first sight loss assistance trial

August 4, 2022



South Western Railway (SWR) has embarked on a trial of new, cutting-edge technology which enables people with sight loss to navigate train stations with greater ease.

The train company is trialling the myEyes app, which uses Near Field Technology, the same technology that allows contactless payment by mobile phone, to provide audio directions. These directions guide customers from the station entrance to the SWR Assisted Boarding Points on platforms, where they can get help to board their train with as little as 10 minutes notice.

Once a customer activates the myEyes app, Bluetooth beacons installed across the station will 'track' the device in question. By identifying exactly where the customer is in the station, the app passes them from beacon to beacon, telling them which direction stairs or lifts are and other useful information such as where the ticket office is in.

The trial, which started on Monday 1 August, will run for three months at Vauxhall and Putney stations before potentially being rolled out at other stations across the SWR network.

You can watch a volunteer from the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) testing the app here:

The MP for Battersea, Marsha de Cordova, who is herself visually impaired, had brought the technology to the attention of SWR's Accessibility Team, who have since rolled out this pilot scheme.

Marsha said: *"I appreciated how quickly SWR acted on my request and that they recognised the value in ensuring that their train stations are fully accessible and inclusive for all users. Investment to improve access also boosts economic growth in our local economy."*

"I know this App could transform travelling for blind and partially sighted people, as ultimately, travelling and navigating around the city is probably one of the biggest challenges that we face."

Mike Adlington, SWR's Accessibility Manager added: *"Unfortunately, it is the case that many people still feel that the railway is too difficult to negotiate with a disability – whether visible or invisible."*

"At SWR, we're absolutely determined to change this and make rail travel more accessible for all. The roll-out of this new, cutting-edge technology trial marks a step change in the assistance available to those with sight loss and is one example of how we're working to make our network easier for everyone to use".

RNIB, the UK's leading sight loss charity, is supporting SWR's drive to make it easier for blind and partially sighted people to find their way around stations.

Robin Spinks, RNIB Senior Manager Inclusive Design and Innovation, said: *"Travelling independently is one of the biggest challenges for people with sight loss and any technology that can help to make navigating public transport easier can only be a good thing. RNIB is delighted that SWR are taking this step to improve accessibility at their stations".*

The myEyes technology has been installed by Self Energy Ltd as the second project of their Sustainability Development Goals programme to extend their sustainability focus to include inclusion and accessibility.

Miguel Matias, CEO of Self Energy Ltd said: *"It has been a privilege to work with South Western Railway – a company that already has a clear commitment to accessibility which we are helping to extend."*

"We hope this pilot will be a success and can be expanded to other stations in future, improving the travel experience for visually impaired people and promoting inclusion and accessibility"

The SWR Accessibility Team are actively encouraging customers to try the app and are asking for feedback to be submitted by completing a short survey at: <https://survey.alchemer.eu/s3/90378258/App-Survey> or directly via accessibility@swrailway.com.

Photo and video credit: South Western Railway