

South Western Railway opens its first Changing Place toilet with enhanced accessibility

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South Western Railway (SWR) has officially opened the first Changing Place toilet at one of its managed stations (Woking Station), a significant milestone in its commitment to making its network more accessible and inclusive for all its customers.

It was opened at a ceremony attended by the Member of Parliament for Woking, Jonathan Lord, who cut the ribbon alongside members of the local Woking Access Group and SWR colleagues. This included Service Delivery Director Lyndsey Robson-Malone and delegates from SWR's ABLE network that supports colleagues with visible and non-visible disabilities.

The new Changing Place at Woking station in Surrey, the result of £100,000 of investment by the train operator, is a larger and better equipped accessible toilet for customers with more limited mobility, as well as those who have a carer or personal assistant to support them with daily activities.

The Changing Place is equipped to provide greater comfort, convenience, safety, and dignity for the

customer and any carer or personal assistant they might have. According to the UK Government, more than 250,000 people in the country would directly benefit from access to such enhanced spaces.

The key features of the Changing Place are:

- An electric, adult-sized, and height-adjustable changing bench
- A tracked ceiling hoist system to help transfer a wheelchair user to and from their wheelchair anywhere in the room
- A 'peninsula toilet' with ample space around it for mobility
- A deployable privacy screen
- A height-adjustable washbasin
- A wide paper roll dispenser which can cover the changing bench
- A RADAR lock to ensure the toilet is used by those who need it

Following the official opening today, SWR station colleagues took part in training sessions to learn how to best support customers who may use the Changing Place and how to ensure it is maintained and ready to use.

Alongside the Changing Place, Woking station also has one of three new Calming Spaces at stations managed by SWR, alongside Salisbury in Wiltshire and Brockenhurst in Hampshire, following further investment in these stations by SWR.

Calming Spaces are waiting rooms which incorporate calming features to create a more inclusive space for customers who are neurodiverse or may have non-visible disabilities. These features include acoustic and green sensory panelling to the walls, ceiling perimeter lighting, planting, and new bench seating.

The Changing Place and the Calming Space, along with other accessibility features at Woking, now make it one of SWR's most accessible and inclusive stations.

The station has step-free access to all platforms, with ramps to help customers board and alight trains. There are wheelchairs available for customers who require one, and the step-free routes through the station are clearly marked with yellow signage to aid customer navigation.

In addition, following feedback from Dementia Friends, bespoke icons have been added to some signage at Woking to help customers with dementia recognise particular utilities, such as toilet icons to show them where the toilet facilities are, or bin icons to show them where the bins are.

Earlier this year, SWR announced that it was upgrading 10 station waiting rooms on its network. These investments are part of SWR's continuous programme of station improvements to modernise its network and enhance its customer experience for all customers.

Last month, analysis by the performance-tracking website On Time Trains ranked Woking as the best railway station for commuters into London based on on-time performance, frequency of services, speed of travel, and value by cost of a ticket per mile.

Lyndsey Robson-Malone, service delivery director for South Western Railway, said: “I’m delighted and proud that SWR has opened the first Changing Place toilet at one of our stations. This investment is a significant milestone for delivering on SWR’s commitment to making our network more accessible for all of our customers.

“It was a pleasure to have the Member of Parliament for Woking, Jonathan Lord, and members of the Woking Access Group, in attendance for the official opening, alongside colleagues who have worked so well to deliver this for our customers.”

Jonathan Lord MP, Member of Parliament for Woking, said: “Woking station is a vital transport hub for Woking residents of all ages. It is terrific to see SWR upgrading the station in this way, making Woking probably the most accessible station on the SWR network.”

Cliff Bush OBE, chairman of the Woking Access Group, said: “The Woking Access Group is elated at the opening of the much-needed Changing Place toilet at Woking station.

“It has been a real pleasure working with South Western Railway. On behalf of the Group, I would like to thank all involved in providing this facility.

“We look forward to continuing working with South Western Railway regarding accessibility at stations.”

Photo credit: South Western Railway