

Manifesto for Accessible Journeys

London Mayoral
Elections 2021

Transport for **All**

A woman with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a black puffer jacket with a 'Rab' logo, dark blue jeans, and white sneakers, is smiling while sitting in a wheelchair on a bus. The wheelchair is positioned on a platform with yellow handrails. The background shows the interior of a bus with windows and yellow handrails.

TfA

Introduction

This is an election like none we have ever seen.

Originally scheduled to take place in May 2020 and postponed due to the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic, this election follows a year that has upended London's transport system.

For disabled people, who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 - accounting for 60% of all COVID deaths and being among the hardest hit by impacts of lockdown, the pandemic – and the response to it – has both exposed and exacerbated the existing inequalities in transport.

With the fall in passenger numbers having a catastrophic impact on TfL's finances, an emergency revised budget was hastily drawn up. We were once again reminded of the fact that when money is tight, accessibility is always the first thing to go. **9 stations' step-free access projects were halted indefinitely** due to lack of funds available.

On the Underground, **Turn Up and Go services were scrapped** as TfL were unable to put practices in place to protect the health and safety of frontline staff while offering physical assistance and sighted guiding to disabled and visually impaired passenger. A Taxi service was instated in its place, but this was inefficiently communicated to staff, leading to many instances of **disabled people being turned away**.

Across the transport network, disabled people **unable to wear a face covering** have been victims of abuse and hate crime as a result of 'peer-policing' from fellow passengers.

Community Transport services such as **Dial-A-Ride and Patient Transport** have seen a surge in demand in a period where disabled people, many of whom are 'extremely vulnerable' to the virus and having to shield, are having to avoid public transport altogether. However these services have been chronically under-funded for years and are buckling under the strain of increased demand, with our members reporting delays and instances of being **unable to book any journey whatsoever**.

As individual journeys have adapted in response to the pandemic, **Active Travel (walking and cycling)**, and initiatives which promote it have gained more traction. Across the UK we have seen pop-up cycle lanes installed, pavements widened, pedestrian-only school streets implemented, and **Low Traffic Neighbourhoods** created. There are now 95 LTNs created by local councils using TfL funding - part of the Streetspace for London plan - totaling £6.9 million.

Many of these schemes were implemented at pace, and the consultation and engagement processes that we would usually expect to see were not done. **Equality and Impact Assessments (EQIAs) were often skipped altogether**, or written without the necessary expertise in accessibility to properly identify potential impacts. This was confirmed in the damning

High Court ruling on the Streetspace for London plan, which found that the needs of **disabled Londoners were “not considered”, and described parts of the EQIA as “perfunctory or non-existent”**.

While LTNs have positively impacted some disabled people, they have disproportionately and negatively impacted others, with **77% of participants in our research reporting an increase in their journey times** and associated issues of more money being spent on taxi fares or petrol, more exhaustion or worsening of impairment, or journey time leading to delays or reduction in the care and support they receive.

Further to the negative impacts, LTNs on their own do little to remove the **many barriers that make the pavements and streets unusable for many disabled people**. The lack of dropped kerbs along pavements, the abundance of street clutter, pavements that are steep, uneven, or bumpy, the lack of tactile signage – all barriers that prohibit some disabled people enjoying walking/wheeling. This isn't just an issue for disabled pedestrians: **inaccessible cycle infrastructure** is cited as the biggest barrier to cycling for disabled cyclists.

All of these changes, precipitated by the pandemic, have created deeper inequalities for disabled Londoners trying to get around the City. But let us be clear: normal – what we had before – was not accessible either.

There are **270 Tube stations in London, but only 81 of these are described by TfL as being ‘step-free’**. A further half of these do not have level boarding from platform to train and so require the use of manual boarding ramps, which often results in disabled people being stranded on a Tube train after a breakdown in

communication means staff are not ready to meet them with the ramp.

Disabled people, often visually impaired people with Guide Dogs, are **routinely turned away from Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles**.

There continues to be **issues accessing buses**, with disabled passengers consistently being put into positions of conflict with fellow Londoners when the priority wheelchair space is being used for other purposes.

Hazardous bus-stop-bypasses, Shared Space schemes and the total lack of regulation of micromobility services such as dockless bikes and e-scooters are putting disabled pedestrians in danger.

Disabled Londoners experience discrimination and inequality at every level of London’s transport system and streets.

This election comes at a precarious time, on the cusp of the multiple crises London is facing: the crises of the pandemic, the economic and unemployment crisis, the mental health fallout, and the ever-looming environmental disaster. When we discuss London’s recovery, we need to be bold, creative, and optimistic. But above all, we need to be inclusive, and **build a London that works for everyone, including the 1.2 million disabled Londoners**.

Our ultimate vision is for **disabled people to be able to travel freely and with independence door to door**, with the same options for modal or active travel as non-disabled people.

To do this will require **sustainable, seismic change in how London’s transport network and streets are designed, delivered, and run**. This is what we are asking of our next Mayor of London.

1. Put disabled people at the forefront of decision-making

Our Pave The Way report identified fundamental problems with the ways decisions are made and communicated to the local residents they affect. **3 in 4 of our participants expressed frustration at the way schemes had been communicated to them.** An issue that came up time and time again in our interviews was the lack of consultation: disabled residents felt that **they had no say in the changes being made.** It is not acceptable to bring disabled people on board at a late stage to confirm a decision that has already been made, instead consultations **must start out as a blank canvas** – learning from the conversations with people with lived experience and adapting accordingly.

Co-production: We ask that, for any new scheme, policy, or change to transport infrastructure, the authority or provider must submit proof that they have undertaken an EQIA in Action process. This proof must be included in any criteria for accessing funding. EQIA in Action is a process of:

Seeking out the viewpoints of disabled residents using a range of accessible channels

Asking, listening, and understanding concerns and ideas about the issues (this may involve guided walks, focus groups, etc)

Learning: a commitment to witnessing the lived experience – walk on the streets or take a train with your residents

Co-producing solutions with disabled people and organisations with expertise

Paying disabled experts for this expertise

Accessible communications: How can we begin to build back better, if we leave people out of the conversation? The Mayor of London, Local Authorities and Transport for London need to communicate changes to local residents clearly and thoroughly. Information must be jargon-free and easy to understand, and must acknowledge and address disabled residents' concerns. All communications must be available in a range of accessible formats – at a minimum to include:

For printed communications: large print versions

For online communications: Text-only word documents or static HTML (accessible to screen-readers)

EasyRead versions

British Sign Language translation

With disabled people disproportionately represented in the portion of adult internet non-users, it is vital that steps be taken to reach those who do not have internet access.

Transport User Groups: We recommend that all local authorities commit to setting up and consulting a paid group of disabled residents to shape and inform their planning.

We know that Transport For London relies heavily upon the **Independent Disability Advisory Group (IDAG)** for expertise in accessibility, and we understand that this is a paid and closed group – we ask for greater transparency and accountability: **minutes from these meetings should be published**, and there should be an **'open' seat** at every meeting where different organisations could be represented.



2. Remove barriers to public transport

We understand that accessibility progress is held back by Victorian infrastructure and inherited systems that do not and can not change overnight. What we are asking to see is a commitment to change, and meaningful steps taken to get there.

Step-Free Tube access: The Mayor's Transport Strategy established an ambition to bring step-free access to 40% of the Tube network by 2022. As part of these works, it was promised 12 stations would be made 'step-free' by Spring 2020. But a year past the deadline, and only 3 are complete. 9 stations' step-free access projects are currently halted indefinitely due to lack of funds available. We want to see step-free works prioritised in the budget and this work continued, in addition to further commitments made for future step-free plans. We are asking for a commitment of **50% step-free access by 2025**.

Level Boarding: Undertake feasibility study and establish commitments toward achieving level boarding across the Tube network and TFL Rail, to include a rolling programme of platform corrections, and introduction of a new procurement standard for new rolling stock of trains.

Tactile signage at station platforms: Following a recent report by the Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) into the death of a visually impaired man who was hit by a train after falling onto the tracks at a South London station, we support the call for full tactile paving installation along platform edges at all Tube and Rail stations.

Crossrail: In a number of the Central London stations, such as Whitechapel and Moorgate, the station works including the lift are already complete. Step-free access is possible at these stations, but they remain closed to the public. We'd like to see TfL open these station entrances to the existing Underground lines ahead of the full Elizabeth line launch to allow for new step-free access, rather than unnecessarily withholding this access until mid-2022 and beyond.

Buses: we would like to see TfL use its franchising powers to mandate bus operators procure future vehicles that are more accessible, to include: a second priority space for wheelchairs or assistance dogs, hearing loops, and audio signals for electric buses. We want to see all bus drivers receive **Disability Equality Training**, to be consistent across franchises.

Concessionary travel: Give Freedom Pass holders free travel for their companion. We also ask for a commitment that concessionary travel for disabled people will never be rescinded.

3. Pave The Way for inclusive street-space that enables more disabled people to make Active Travel journeys

Accessibility upgrades to pavements, cycle lanes and roads - as part of any and all streetspace initiatives - as a matter of urgency, and as a priority for all streets. These include: more dropped kerbs, flattened and tarmacked pavements, tactile signage.

Street clutter: Responsibility for keeping footways clear is divided between TfL and local boroughs, and the shifting of responsibility means powers are not enforced. We need a consistency of approach so pavements are kept clear of advertising boards, street furniture and other obstacles.

Pavement parking: despite the London ban on pavement parking, pavement parking is still permitted when councils create bays partially on the pavement. This needs to be rethought.

Cycle lanes: Develop, in conjunction with disability groups, an accessibility standard for cycle lanes that would offer a genuinely inclusive, safe and usable cycling environment for disabled and non-disabled cyclists and exclude the use of obstructions such as bollards.

Expanding the Santander Bike hire scheme to include widely available adapted cycles (handcycles, tandems, recumbent, e-bikes, cargo bikes, etc.)

Halt the rollout of hazardous streetspace architecture such as Shared Space, bus stop bypasses, and floating bus stops.



4 • Instigate a culture shift: prioritise accessibility in London's recovery

We want to see a culture shift in how accessibility is conceptualised, weighted and prioritised when it comes to allocating funding and deciding policy. Decision makers need to acknowledge that accessibility features are not a nice-to-have. They are a fundamental in designing a city that works for its citizens.

Disability Equality Training for all members of the London Assembly, senior TFL staff, and the entirety of the Mayor's team including all commissioners.

Publish the criteria for allocating funding and what weighting is given to accessibility. We want the business case criteria for all step-free works to be made public so that citizens understand by what measures these works are agreed, halted or rejected.

Foreground accessibility as a non-negotiable priority in designs, as with health and safety. Accessibility needs to be the baseline approach to all street and transport schemes.

