

May 2021

Guidance for frontline bus staff:

supporting disabled passengers



Image: Guide Dogs



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Key messages

- Be an advocate for your disabled passengers within your company. You can help make a difference.
- Remember that your disabled passengers may have non-visible impairments, and some may have more than one impairment. Don't make assumptions based on age or appearance.
- Focus on passengers' assistance requirements rather than their impairments. Ask 'Do you need any assistance?' and act on their response.

When communicating:

- Speak calmly, avoid raising your voice, use clear language, rephrase and repeat, and if necessary, try other methods of communication such as writing.
- Listen carefully to what your passenger is saying, and if you are not sure that you've understood then check and ask them to repeat themselves if needed.





During the COVID-19 pandemic, also bear in mind that:

- Disabled passengers may be exempt from wearing face coverings for a range of reasons, not just because of a respiratory condition.
- Some disabled passengers may need to remove their face coverings for short periods of time, for example to make communication easier or to move about safely if this is restricting their view.
- Some passengers, for example deaf passengers or autistic passengers, may find communicating with transport staff who are wearing face coverings difficult.
- Providing your company's policies allow, continue providing the assistance that disabled passengers need.
- Some disabled people may have difficulty seeing, understanding or following signs related to social distancing measures, so provide additional information or assistance where needed.



Image: Guide Dogs

About this guidance

Who is this guidance for and what is it about?

This guidance is for bus drivers, roadside staff and staff who work in bus stations in England.

It explains how you can help make Deaf, disabled and older people's journeys easier. We hope that having the right knowledge about how to help will give you the confidence and skills to provide the best service you can.

Guidance specifically relating to travel during the COVID-19 pandemic is also included. You can find this guidance in the yellow boxes.



This guidance does not replace Disability Equality Training. If you have not received Disability Equality Training from your company, ask your manager for it. The Department for Transport (DfT) has made a series of **Disability Equality Training videos** available on their website. However, face-to-face training developed and delivered by disabled trainers is recommended.

Who has helped to produce this guidance?

The guidance has been developed by Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations, national disability charities and Deaf, disabled and older passengers, in partnership with bus operators, the DfT and DPTAC (Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee), the DfT's independent disability advisors.



Image: Royal Association for Deaf people



Welcoming each other back

The COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions on movement that it has resulted in have been difficult for everyone. Many of you will have experienced illness or bereavement as a result of COVID-19, and many more will have found being in contact with large numbers of passengers during this time very difficult.

Many Deaf, disabled and older people will also have experienced illness or bereavement. Some will have been shielding for many months, which may have created feelings of isolation. Others will have had no option but to use public transport, leaving them feeling vulnerable and uncomfortable.

As the restrictions begin to lift and the numbers of COVID-19 cases begin to reduce, you will be welcoming more and more passengers onto your buses and into your bus stations, and they will be welcoming you, and the important role that you play in getting them to where they need to be, back into their lives.

Who are your disabled passengers?



Around 1 in 5 people (20%) in the UK are disabled people.



Some disabled people have more than one impairment.



Whilst many disabled people are older people, not all are – working age adults, young people and children may be disabled.

Talking to your disabled passengers

Some people are not sure of the right words to use when talking to a passenger about their access needs, or more generally about disabled people. If you take the time to learn the right words, listen to and learn from your Deaf, disabled and older passengers then you will be less likely to be worried about saying the wrong thing.

We have used the term 'Deaf, disabled and older passengers' in this document to recognise that some Deaf people identify as part of the Deaf community, which has its own culture and language (British Sign Language, or BSL), rather than as disabled people.

There is rarely a need to ask a passenger what their impairments are, your focus is on what assistance the passenger needs – if any – for their journey. Say 'Do you need any assistance?', allowing the passenger the opportunity to say no, or to ask for what they need. Focus on what help you can offer rather than the passenger's impairments, be guided by the words the passenger uses and if you get it wrong, apologise and move on.

Language is a personal choice and so it is important not to impose but to listen. For example, some individuals use 'disabled person' and others use 'people with disabilities'. Also bear in mind that some people with impairments don't identify as disabled, so take your lead on language from the passenger.

Whilst some language choices are subjective, there are some useful key principles:

- It's better to refer to someone as 'living with' or 'having' an impairment rather than 'suffering from' or 'a victim of' an impairment.
- There are lots of different words for different types of impairment. Be guided by your passenger. If you are not sure whether a word or phrase is offensive or not, don't use it.
- Be mindful of your choices. For example, say 'wheelchair user' not 'wheelchair bound'. No one is 'bound' to a wheelchair; wheelchairs represent mobility and freedom to the people who use them.

Talk to ME! Always communicate with the disabled or older passenger rather than anyone travelling with them, unless you are asked to direct your questions and information to a person who is supporting them.



Speak with passengers, and provide them all with the same level of help and support that you would wish for yourself or a member of your family.

Brighton & Hove Buses



Other useful terms and phrases

Non-visible impairment

Also sometimes called 'non-visible disability', 'hidden disability' or 'hidden impairment', this means an impairment that isn't obvious by looking at someone.

Examples of **non-visible impairments** are: mental health conditions; autism; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); cognitive impairment, such as dementia, traumatic brain injury, learning difficulties; sensory impairments; 'non-visible' physical health conditions such as chronic pain, respiratory conditions, incontinence or diabetes.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is about recognising that people have neurological differences that impact on the way their brain functions, and that this is a part of the normal variation between humans. Differences can affect the way people process information, behave and interact with others. Most people are 'neurotypical' but it has been estimated that 1 in 7 people are 'neurodiverse'. Commonly someone is considered neurodiverse if they are autistic or have ADHD, dyslexia, or dyspraxia, but there are also other reasons.

People who support disabled people

Some of your disabled and older passengers may travel with someone to provide them with support. They may use a number of different words to describe this person, including companion, carer, Personal Assistant or Support Worker. Carers may include unpaid carers such as spouses or young carers. Listen to the words that your passenger uses and use them too. Also, do not assume that every person travelling with a disabled person is their carer, they may be a work colleague, friend or family member.



Probably the most important thing you should do is to ensure that passengers have all the information they need to be able to prepare for and to successfully complete their journey. Clear communication is key.

Guide Dogs



Tips for successful communication



General tips

In normal circumstances, one of the key tips would be to ensure that your mouth is not covered, as this makes it easier to lip read you. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, you may be wearing a face covering. Guidance on this situation is outlined in the box on page 11.

- Make and reciprocate eye contact. Remember that some passengers may find this uncomfortable, so if the passenger does not make eye contact, mirror this.
- Make sure that your body language and facial expressions match what you are saying so that your meaning is clear.
- Speak calmly and avoid raising your voice.
- Be patient. Give people time to process what you have said.
- Try using clearer language if you have not been understood.
- Avoid ambiguous phrases, as some passengers will interpret what you say literally. For example, if you say 'There will be another bus along in a minute' some passengers may think that the next bus will be there in 60 seconds, and become distressed if it is not.
- Don't give up on attempts to communicate.



Passengers who are deaf or have hearing loss

It is important to remember that people who are deaf or have hearing loss are all different, have individual communication needs and use different methods of communication.

General tips include:

- Make sure you are facing the person you are talking to and speak clearly – avoid shouting, speaking too fast or unnecessarily slow.
- Consider the lighting in your environment, especially if there is a screen between yourself and the passenger.
- If someone doesn't understand you, repeat what you said or phrase it differently, use clearer language.
- Please be patient. Avoid getting frustrated when you are asked to repeat yourself.
- Use simple gestures such as pointing or waving to get someone's attention.
- If you are in a noisy place, move to a quieter area or do what you can to reduce the noise, such as turning down your radio.
- In addition, writing things down may help – use pen on paper, text on device screens, or whiteboards.
- If the passenger asks you to, speak to a relative or friend.
- Some passengers may have a Video Relay Service on their smartphone, which provides access to a BSL interpreter. Follow the instructions given to you by the passenger or interpreter on how to respond.

Remember that not all the above tips will be useful for all deaf people. BSL has its own grammar and sentence structure, and people who use BSL may find it difficult to lipread spoken English or understand written English.

Passengers with cognitive impairments or learning difficulties and autistic passengers

- If you are speaking to an adult passenger, treat them as an adult.
- It may take longer for some passengers to process what you've said or find the right words. Be patient and encouraging and give them time to ask their question or answer you before you repeat yourself. Don't rush them.
- Listen carefully to what your passenger is saying. If you are not sure that you've understood, then check and ask them to repeat themselves if needed. Most people would prefer to repeat themselves than be misunderstood.
- If you are in a noisy place, move to a quieter area or do what you can to reduce the noise, such as turning down your radio.
- Bear in mind that some people may be completely non-verbal, and may communicate using writing, drawing or gesture. That does not mean that they cannot understand what you say, so continue to use speech unless you are asked otherwise.
- If using speech is not working, offer to use writing, drawing or gestures to get your message across.

Passengers with speech impairments

- Don't assume that someone with a speech impairment doesn't know, understand, or remember something.
- Always listen carefully to what any passenger says. Most passengers would prefer to repeat themselves if you haven't understood them. In this scenario politely ask the passenger to repeat what they have said. In some cases, it may help for either you or them to write something down.
- If you are in a noisy place, move to a quieter area or do what you can to reduce the noise.





Wear a face covering unless you're exempt



Face coverings during the COVID-19 pandemic



Transport staff

If you are wearing a face covering:

- Some passengers, for example deaf passengers or autistic passengers, may find communicating with transport staff who are wearing face coverings difficult.
- If a passenger needs you to remove your face covering for a short period of time to communicate with them, please do so where you feel able to. If you do remove your face covering briefly, remember to maintain a minimum 2 metre distance from the passenger – move back or ask them to move back if you can't.
- If you don't feel able to remove your face covering for a short time, ask the passenger if there's anything different you can do to make communication easier – for example, writing information down may be a suitable alternative for some deaf passengers.

- Bear in mind that some passengers may feel very uncomfortable being around staff not wearing face coverings. If you are not wearing a face covering and a passenger appears to be uncomfortable, give them extra space wherever you can.

Passengers

- Remember that some people will be exempt from wearing a face covering for various reasons, including medical or disability-related reasons. If a passenger tries to board without a face covering, politely ask them if they are exempt, and if they say yes then don't question them further.
- Medical or disability-related reasons for exemption from wearing a face covering can include:
 - Respiratory conditions

continued overleaf

- Where this would cause distress, for example for people with cognitive impairments, mental health conditions, or learning difficulties
- Where this would make it difficult to wear hearing aids or a cochlear implant processor securely

A full list of [exemptions from wearing a face covering](#) is available on the Government's website.

Additionally:

- Visually impaired people may need to remove their face covering for short periods if this impedes their vision when, for example, looking down to see stairs or steps or if their glasses steam up.
- Passengers who are travelling with a deaf passenger may need to remove their face covering whilst communicating if their companion is lip reading or they are using BSL.
- Passengers who are travelling with people with cognitive impairments, learning difficulties, or mental health issues may not be able to wear a face covering if their companion is distressed by this.

Also be aware that:

- Some passengers may be able to wear a face covering but find it difficult to understand when they need to do this.
- Some passengers will wear a face covering to avoid being challenged but feel extremely anxious about wearing it.



Other passengers

If a passenger complains that another passenger is not wearing a face covering, explain that this could be because they are exempt and have a non-visible impairment. If this then escalates and there is an altercation between passengers, follow the guidance on dealing with dispute resolution from your company. Bear in mind, however, that some passengers may feel very uncomfortable being around other passengers not wearing face coverings.

Barriers to accessible bus travel



Physical barriers

These are barriers to do with buildings, outdoor spaces or vehicles being designed or managed in an inaccessible way.

For example:

- A broken bus ramp will be a barrier for a wheelchair user.
- Escalators at a bus station may be a barrier for people with assistance dogs.
- Help Points without induction loops may be a barrier for deaf people who use hearing aids.



Communication and information barriers

These are barriers to do with someone's communication requirements not being met, or information being provided in an inaccessible way.

For example:

- Written signs are inaccessible to some visually impaired people.
- Bus timetables are difficult for some people with learning difficulties or cognitive impairments to understand.
- If there is no visual alternative to a PA announcement, some deaf people will not be able to access this.
- If staff are not able to communicate using BSL, Deaf BSL users will not be able to communicate in their first / preferred language.
- Passengers with cognitive impairments may find transport jargon such as 'terminate' and 'alight' difficult to understand.



Attitudinal barriers

These are barriers to do with other people's attitudes and the way they treat disabled people.

For example:

- A bus driver refuses to let a person with a speech impairment board the bus because they think the person is drunk.
- A person of shorter stature is made fun of by another passenger at the bus station, and no one intervenes.
- A blind passenger is grabbed by another passenger to help them off the bus without asking if the person needs help.

It's Everyone's Journey

The ['it's everyone's journey' campaign](#) from the Department for Transport and partners aims to enable more disabled people to travel with confidence through sharing the improvements being made on the ground and creating a more considerate and supportive travel environment. The campaign benefits everyone who uses public transport and aims to highlight that we can all play a part in making public transport inclusive. Simple actions like being patient, making space and being prepared to help when needed can make a world of difference to everyone's journey.



COVID-19 has created barriers to getting out and about for everyone, but these barriers can be more significant for disabled and older people.



People with specific types of impairment might be affected differently during the pandemic. For example:

- Wheelchair users might find that other passengers stand too close to them because they are at a different height. Some passengers may stand in the wheelchair space either to maintain social distancing or because they are unable to sit down. Encourage them to stand elsewhere whenever a wheelchair user needs the space.
- People with Tourette Syndrome who have a sniff or cough tic may be treated badly by other passengers who think they have COVID-19.
- Temporary schemes to widen pavements or restrict vehicle access in response to COVID-19 might make it more difficult for visually impaired people, people with learning difficulties or neurodivergent people to make their way to bus stops.

Assistance cards, badges and lanyards

Some transport operators and disability organisations have created free badges, cards and lanyards that can be used by Deaf, disabled and older people to easily communicate that they might need assistance. This can also help increase passengers' confidence to travel.

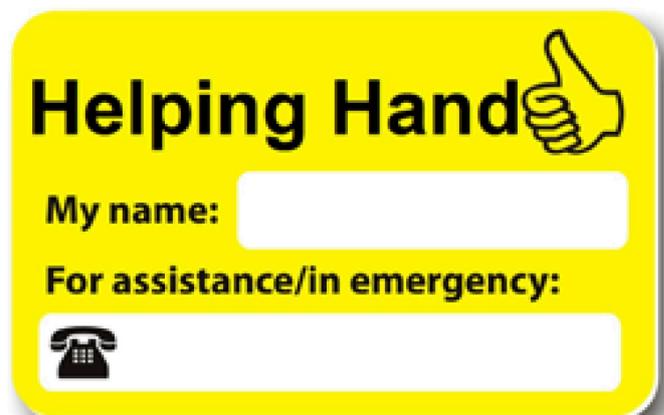
Below are some examples of these, but as a general rule, if someone shows you an assistance card, badge or lanyard, provide the assistance they need, even if you do not recognise the logo.

Remember that not all disabled people will want to carry a card or wear a badge, for a wide range of reasons, and that they don't need to carry one to receive assistance, which should always be provided if requested. You may want to tell passengers about the availability of these, but don't try to persuade them to get one.



The changing of various rules on buses (and other services) has meant people on the autism spectrum have stopped using them because of not knowing what to do or what to expect.

Transport for All focus group participant



Brighton and Hove 'Helping Hands' cards



Blackpool Transport Services cards



Sunflower lanyard, card and badge



Bladder and Bowel Community - Just Can't Wait Toilet Card

COVID-19 specific cards / badges 

Some transport operators are providing Face Covering Exemption cards or badges to give peace of mind to people who are exempt from wearing face coverings. These are available free of charge.

Please be supportive
I have a health condition and am exempt from wearing a face covering
Thank you!



Blackpool Transport Services cards



TFL - Face covering exemption card



COVID-19 specific cards / badges



The Government has also created [exemption cards and badges](#), downloadable from the Government website.

It is not mandatory for someone who is exempt to carry one, so if a passenger tells you that they exempt, accept this whether they show you a card or not.

Charities have also created '[Please give me space' cards and badges](#) for people who are concerned about maintaining social distancing – for example because they are unable to wear a face covering – or who may find it difficult to maintain social distancing and want to ask others to help by giving them space. These are downloadable from the Government website free of charge.



Please give me space.

Social distancing card for mobile phone

Image: Brighton and Hove Buses



I get challenged a lot about my mobility scooter and I get butterflies in my tummy now when I have to get on a bus because I just don't know quite what the driver's attitude is going to be.
Transport for All focus group participant



Access for mobility scooter users

Bus operators' policies in relation to whether passengers can bring a mobility scooter onto a bus, and in what circumstances, vary. It is really important that you find out your company's policy, and keep up to date with any changes to this. Also, remember that passengers may not know what the policy is, and may be using a mobility scooter for the first time on public transport. For example:

- Some companies allow any passengers using mobility scooters to travel on buses if their mobility scooter fits within the wheelchair space and / or is light enough to use the ramp safely.
- Some companies only allow passengers using mobility scooters onto buses if their mobility scooter has been assessed and they have a letter or card to show that it is permitted – this is free of charge.
- Some companies do not permit mobility scooters on buses.

If your company allows any passengers using mobility scooters to travel on buses if their mobility scooter fits within the wheelchair space and / or is light enough to use the ramp safely:

- Follow your company's guidance. This might include allowing the passenger on board to see whether their mobility scooter will fit within the wheelchair space.

- Ensure that mobility scooter users are treated in the same way as wheelchair users with regards to using the wheelchair space (e.g. first come first served).
- Some companies offer a voluntary assessment for mobility scooters to check whether their scooter is of a suitable size and / or weight, in order to build the passenger's confidence when travelling. If the assessment is voluntary rather than required, don't refuse access to passengers who have not had one.

If your company only permits passengers using mobility scooters onto buses if their mobility scooter has been assessed:

- Politely ask the passenger whether they have a letter or card issued by your company to show that their mobility scooter is permitted on buses.
- If they show you a letter or card, check that the mobility scooter it refers to is the same one that they wish to board with.
- If they have a suitable letter or card, and the wheelchair space is free (see page 24), allow them to board.
- Ensure that mobility scooter users are treated in the same way as wheelchair users with regards to using the wheelchair space (e.g. first come first served).
- If they do not have a suitable card, politely explain your company's policy to the passenger, remembering to recognise that this will cause them inconvenience, and give them information about how to get an assessment.

If your company does not permit mobility scooters on buses:

- Politely explain your company's policy to the passenger, remembering to recognise that this will cause them inconvenience.

What you can do to help make journeys accessible

For all staff



Communication

- When you are speaking to a passenger, follow the tips for successful communication on page 9.
- Glazed screens / assault screens can make it difficult for deaf people to hear or lipread you. If you are working behind a glazed screen and a passenger clearly cannot understand what you are saying, come out and speak to them directly – see below for guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Glazed screens / Assault screens



- As with face coverings, glazed screens can make communication difficult for some disabled people.
- If a passenger asks you to come out from behind a glazed screen for a short period of time to communicate with them, please do so where you feel safe and able to and if your company's policies permit this.
- If you also need to remove your face covering, ask the passenger's permission before doing so to check they feel comfortable with this.
- If you do remove your face covering briefly, and feel comfortable doing so, remember to maintain a minimum 2 metre distance from the passenger. You could move back or politely ask them to move back if you can't.
- If you don't feel safe and able to come out from behind a glazed screen or remove your face covering for a short time, ask the passenger if there's anything different you can do to make communication easier – for example, writing information down may be a suitable alternative for some deaf passengers.



Providing assistance

- If a disabled passenger asks for assistance to board or alight, provide this if you can. If you are a bus driver, you should always operate boarding ramps or lifts when required, and you may be able to give other assistance providing this follows your company's guidance.
- Remember that some impairments are not visible, so it may not be obvious what or why assistance is needed. Always ask what assistance your passenger needs rather than assuming based on age or appearance. However, if they appear to be unsure about what help they need, try asking specific questions, such as 'Would you like me to help you find your bus stop?'. You could also try writing this down.
- Everyone is different, so don't be offended if the passenger doesn't require your assistance. Always continue to sensitively ask others in the future.
- Never touch a passenger or their mobility aid unless the passenger has asked for assistance that requires you to touch them and have given you permission to do so.
- If you are helping a passenger who has an assistance dog, do not interfere with or make a fuss of the dog. Speak only to its owner.



Remember that not everyone has the confidence to ask for help because of the experience of having barriers throughout our lives.

Transport for All focus group participant



Providing close assistance



Disabled people who need assistance that requires physical contact or closeness, such as guiding or assistance with their wheelchair, worry that they won't get this now because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Providing your company's policies allow, continue providing the assistance that disabled passengers need. If you can't, explain why politely and recognise that this will inconvenience the passenger. If you can provide the assistance whilst maintaining social distancing then do.

If you do have to get closer than 2 metres, then:

- Follow general guidance in relation to hand-washing and wearing a face covering (if you can).
- Follow any specific guidance that your company has provided and use any PPE that you have been given by your company.
- Spend as little time as possible closer than 2 metres from each other.
- If you can, provide the assistance standing side-to-side rather than face-to-face.

Guiding visually impaired passengers

When asked to guide a visually impaired passenger make sure to:

- Say hello and ask how the passenger would like to be guided.
- Once you have set off, check they are happy with the pace.
- Communicate! Describe the route and say when you need to change direction. Always let them know when a step or slope is coming up.
- If the passenger has an assistance dog, do not interfere with or make a fuss of the dog and speak only to its owner.
- Before you leave the passenger, check that they know where they are, let them know of any obstacles nearby – for example benches or bins – and say goodbye before you leave.

Making PA announcements:

- When making manual announcements, speak clearly, at a slower pace, and use language that is easy to understand and jargon-free.
- Make announcements in good time to allow people who may react more slowly to do so.
- If you are aware that a passenger on the bus is deaf, make sure that they have received the information as well.

Social distancing measures

Be aware some passengers could require extra assistance as they may have difficulty seeing, understanding or following signs, especially in regard to social distancing – for example, visually impaired passengers may find it difficult to avoid a seat that has been taken out of use. Politely ask if the passenger requires assistance.



For staff working at bus stations:

- If you need to cordon off areas of the bus station, use physical barriers – tape or cones can be difficult for visually impaired people using canes to detect.
- If your bus station has a one-way system to ensure social distancing is being followed be aware that this may be difficult for some disabled people and be flexible if you are able to do so safely. For example:
 - If the route is longer, people with mobility impairments might find this difficult, painful or tiring.
 - Visually impaired people who regularly use the bus station may find it difficult to use an unfamiliar route.



Image: Brighton and Hove Buses

For staff working at bus stations



General

- Stand out! If you have been issued with a hi-vis jacket or vest, wear this to help passengers easily and quickly identify you as a member of staff.
- If you approach a passenger to offer information or assistance, introduce yourself and give your name and job title.



Being approachable, non-judgemental and sympathetic to different needs will really help those with anxiety when travelling.

Anxiety UK



Many customers may be feeling high levels of anxiety at the moment, it is important to remain sensitive and understanding.

West Midlands Combined Authority



Providing assistance

- Transport hub stations can be noisy and busy and often huge and complex. This can be difficult for lots of Deaf, disabled and older passengers. Some neurodiverse people and people with mental health conditions will find the sensory environment (noise, smells, brightness etc.), crowds and other passengers rushing around challenging. If you spot a passenger looking confused, lost or anxious, approach them calmly and offer assistance.
- Do what you can to assist your disabled passengers to interchange onto other services or modes at transport hubs. That might include:
 - Wherever possible, assist your passenger to board other services. If this is not possible, work closely with colleagues from other modes to ensure that assistance is seamless.
 - Provide clear and easy-to-understand information about other services, including directional information, timetable information or information about service accessibility.

- Wherever possible, provide information about changes to services in both audible and visual formats. Make PA announcements and use information boards to display the same information.
- If a passenger requests information in an alternate format like Braille, large print or BSL translation, follow your company's procedure for organising this, which may include contacting a customer service department.
- If a passenger wants to make a complaint, explain to them how they can do this.
- If the accessible toilet has a RADAR lock, ask your company to provide your team with the key. If a passenger asks to use the accessible toilet but does not have a RADAR key, unlock it for them – make sure that there is a RADAR key at the bus station and know where to find it. Remember that people might need an accessible toilet for lots of reasons, and this isn't always visible.
- Make sure that there is a sign outside the toilet advising passengers about how to request assistance if required.
- Keep accessible toilets clear, and make sure that bins are not kept in the large space next to the toilet – this is for wheelchair users to transfer onto the toilet from their wheelchair.

Access to toilets

Access to toilets will be important to many of your passengers. If there are toilets available at your bus station:

For bus drivers

Before you leave the depot

Are you ready? Your passengers are relying on you!

- Check that the boarding ramp is working and the destination blinds show the correct information – if not, the bus should not go into service.
- If your bus has other accessibility features such as bus kneeling device, induction loop, PA system and any automatic customer information systems, check whether they are working before you leave the depot – if not, follow your company's guidance.

Make sure that you follow your company fault reporting processes so that the issue can be rectified.



Image: Brighton and Hove Buses



Boarding and setting off

- When you pull up at the bus stop, make sure that:
 - You pull right up to the stop so that visually impaired people are aware that you have arrived, and people with mobility impairments don't have to walk to reach you.
 - None of your doors are obstructed by street furniture such as bollards and bins, including the door that the wheelchair ramp is deployed at.
 - You are as close to the kerb as possible, so that passengers don't have to step over a large gap to board, don't trip when stepping over the gap, and the ramp can be properly deployed if required.
 - Remember that some passengers won't be able to see your route number and destination. If a passenger asks which bus they have boarded let them know and check if yours is the bus they want.
 - Do not attempt to communicate with passengers with the bus doors closed. Glass doors can be hard for passengers to see through, especially if there is glare or poor light. This will be an extra barrier making it harder to communicate.
- If a wheelchair user or a passenger with an assistance dog is waiting to board, let them on first. Remember that if wheelchair users are boarding at an alternative door, other passengers may not realise what is happening. Either politely gesture to them that they will need to wait a short time, or open the main door briefly to explain and ask them to wait.
 - If you are driving a kneeling bus, always lower the step before passengers board.
 - Be aware that guide dogs are only one type of assistance dog. If a passenger wishes to board with an assistance dog, allow them onto the bus if the dog is identifiable as an assistance dog or the owner presents evidence or otherwise in accordance with your company's policy. Transport for London's [guide to assistance dogs](#) can help with understanding the types of dogs that passengers might have.
 - Be patient. Give people time to find the right method of payment when they are boarding or if they are checking route information.
 - Some passengers might not be able to see or reach the pass scanner. Find out what process your company has for recording passes manually if you are not able to scan the pass for the passenger.



If you have regular passengers, take the opportunity to say 'hi' and connect with them. You can be a lifeline to a person with dementia who is feeling isolated.

Person affected by dementia



Wheelchair spaces

- Priority for the wheelchair space should be given to passengers who rely on it, including wheelchair users and children using specialist buggies as a mobility aid. Other passengers should vacate the space or move their luggage when required.
- You should follow your company's guidance on what you can do to help ensure that this happens. This might include using automated announcements, making manual announcements or speaking to the other passenger directly. Do as much as you can as far as your company's policy allows.
- Make sure that other passengers move out of the doorway to enable a wheelchair user to reach the wheelchair space.

Seating

- Signpost priority seating to passengers who you feel may find that information useful.
- Make sure that passengers who are obviously looking for a seat are seated before setting off.
- If a passenger appears to be looking for a seat but none are available, make an announcement over the PA asking passengers to give up their seat if they don't need them. Remember that some people have non-visible impairments that mean they need to sit.
- Deaf passengers may want to sit facing forwards so they can see visual announcements or any gestures that you make. Again, provide assistance to get a suitable seat if required.



During the journey

- Avoid sharp braking and accelerating whenever possible.
- Remember that not all your passengers will be able to see or read your 'bus full' sign (if your company uses one). If you see a visually impaired passenger waiting, wherever possible stop and let them know that the bus is full and advise them as to when the next one will arrive - appreciating that there may be times that this is not possible to do without large numbers of other customers attempting to board.
- Be prepared to answer any questions that passengers have during the journey, and to repeat yourself if needed, as some passengers may forget what you have told them or need reassurance that they've understood correctly.
- When routes are disrupted or changed, let people know what is happening as early as possible and if you don't have the information they need, advise them where to go to get any help or support.
- If your boarding ramp, destination blinds or other accessibility features become faulty during the journey, make sure that you follow your company's guidance for fault reporting and / or taking the bus out of service.



Social distancing and seating

As part of the social distancing measures in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the seats in your bus may have been taken out of use. Bear in mind that this may impact on your disabled passengers in particular. Visually impaired people may find it difficult to locate a suitable seat. People with mobility impairments might find it more difficult to get a seat because fewer will be in use. Some disabled people will need to sit next to a companion to travel. Provide assistance where needed.



Image: Brighton and Hove Buses

Announcements

- If your bus has automated audio and / or visual announcements, keep these switched on.
- If your bus does not have automated audible stop announcements, make manual announcements instead.
- Make sure that the PA system is loud enough to be heard clearly. If the PA system is not sufficiently loud, either change the volume where you can, or if you can't, report this as a fault through your company's fault reporting process.
- Make announcements – manual or automated – to keep passengers informed when routes are disrupted or changed. Follow the guidance for making announcements on page 20.
- If a passenger has specifically asked you to let them know when you've reached their stop, don't assume that announcing stop names will be enough. They may not know or remember their stop name, so let them know individually.



If you've got a wheelchair passenger, check where they want to get off because they are travelling backwards.

Transport for All focus group participant



Drivers should understand the implications on people when they fail to stop. The awful feeling when you hear a bus go past and don't know if it's your bus.

Transport for All focus group participant



Alighting

- When you pull up at the bus stop, make sure that:
 - You pull right up to the stop so that visually impaired people know where they are, and people with mobility impairments don't have to walk further than they were expecting to.
 - None of your doors are obstructed by street furniture such as bollards and bins, including the door that the wheelchair ramp is deployed at.
 - You are as close to the kerb as possible, so that passengers don't have to step over a large gap to alight, and the ramp can be properly deployed if required.
- If a wheelchair user is planning to alight, let them off first. Remember that other passengers may not realise what is happening. Be prepared to explain and ask other passengers to wait.
- If you are driving a kneeling bus, always lower the step before passengers alight.
- Give enough time for passengers to alight before you set off again, remembering that some might take longer to do so. Bear in mind that some passengers with mobility impairments may not stand up to leave until the bus has fully stopped.
- If a passenger has asked you to advise them of their stop and you have forgotten to do so, make sure that they will be able to continue with their journey safely before leaving them.

Be an advocate for your Deaf, disabled and older passengers

Like all passengers, Deaf, disabled and older passengers don't always have the time or energy to make formal complaints when things go wrong during their journeys. You are the link between them and the decision-makers within your company. Be an advocate. Talk to your managers about the barriers that you see them face. Share ideas that you have for making accessibility improvements to the service. Encourage your company to engage with disabled passengers to hear their voices directly. If you have not received good quality Disability Equality Training from your company, ask for this. **You can help make a difference.**



Image: Brighton and Hove Buses

With thanks to everyone who has contributed to the development of this guidance, including:

Deaf, disabled and older passengers

Alzheimer's Society
Anxiety UK
DPTAC
Guide Dogs
MS Society
National Autistic Society
RNIB
RNID
Royal Association for Deaf people
Sense
Thomas Pocklington Trust

Blackpool Transport Services
Brighton and Hove Buses
Rotala Buses
West Midlands Combined Authority

