

Disability discrimination on public transport in the UK

July 2012



Travel without obstacles

INTRODUCTION

The A2BForAll campaign was set up in March 2012 to highlight the issues that disabled passengers face daily when using public transport. We aim to reduce the discrimination that is taking place towards disabled people and are determined to put into place a long- term strategy that will improve the quality of service for not just disabled passengers, but for all who use public transport.

We conducted a survey into the issues that disabled passengers are facing when using public transport across the UK. Our research highlighted some very disturbing problems that appear to be endemic across the country. This report covers the key findings from the research together with example stories from people we have spoken to about their own personal experiences.

METHODOLOGY

Research was conducted online via SurveyMonkey.com from December 2011 to March 2012. 283 responses were collated. An additional 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with disabled passengers from February to April 2012.

Disabled passengers are classed as those with mobility, visual or hearing impairments, wheelchair users and people with learning difficulties.

A PERSONAL VIEW: BARONESS TANNI GREY THOMPSON

I have used a Wheelchair to improve my mobility since I was 7 years old, and the world was a lot less accessible in the 1970s than it is now. There were fewer lifts and drop curbs, no accessible toilets in public or anywhere else, and public transport was almost completely off limits.

Over the years, society and culture has changed, and the law has changed with it; not only to require better access but to give us the means to do something to improve things. And things have improved massively. In London, where I spend most of my working week, almost every single London Bus and Taxi is now wheelchair accessible.

For me, getting from A to B is a basic right for everyone, whether in a wheelchair, as a parent with a pushchair, or for people with sensory impairments.

Many of the survey responses leading to this report show how patchy accessible transport is in other areas of the country. Near where I live most of the local buses still have manual wheelchair ramps, making it a time consuming task for the drivers to board a wheelchair user and some of the feedback shows that sometimes the pressures of time lead drivers to drive by passengers altogether. Other examples of difficulties are of wheelchairs being cited as fire risks, and of difficulties accessing the wheelchair bays.

It doesn't take a great deal of effort to improve this, and I'm a great believer that education and training is the key. This campaign hopes to introduce minimum levels of training to ensure that all passenger-facing staff understand what it takes to make travelling with disabilities easier. I support the creation of an industry funded regulator to monitor compliance and with the powers to take action where needed. We want to encourage a change to the culture from within.

These are the hard yards, and this is the time it really counts. With the planned reforms to benefits there is a real risk that many disabled motorists may no longer be able to afford a car to get from A2B. For millions of disabled people looking to travel to work, the shops, or hospital visits public transport is, and will increasingly be, our lifeline, and now's the time to drive this change forwards.

I am proud to support the A2BForAll Campaign.



ABOUT THE A2BFORALL CAMPAIGN

Getting from A to B is supposed to be stand for the simplest, most direct route for a traveller. Yet, for a significant proportion of people in the UK, this isn't the case.

Hailing a bus, boarding a train, hailing a cab - these are all common everyday activities that help us get from A2B. But how would you feel if hailing a bus meant waiting while three drive past you because they don't want the hassle of picking you up, or seeing the train you had pre-booked leave without you because a staff member didn't have time to deal with you, or seeing a cab slow down ready to pick up a fare only to speed up and drive away?



It doesn't seem fair, and it isn't, but these are the sort of situations that disabled passengers face everyday in the UK.

At the heart of these issues is the fact that people still don't know how best to deal with a disabled passenger. As a result, discrimination is common, leaving passengers distressed, abused and, invariably, stuck.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 brought about much needed reform by introducing solutions to help with accessibility - from ramps to disabled toilets to lowered buses. The Equality Act 2010 built on that progress and often physical obstacles are being removed, not as fast as is ideal, but at least the right adjustments are underway.

However a major shake up is needed in changing the way people view and treat disabled passengers. Everyone has the right to travel - whether that is to get to work, to collect essential medicines, receive treatment, or just to see friends and do some shopping.

This report looks at the common issues that disabled passengers are facing every day on public transport. We have individual's private stories as well as a focus on two key city regions where work is underway to address these issues.

There is a lot happening, but not enough. The A2BForAll campaign is focused on bringing the problem to light on a national scale, and on pushing through changes to the system that will help to abolish the discrimination that is endemic across the UK.

We want to see the formation of a Regulator, funded by the industry, to:

- 1) ensure ongoing training to all customer-facing public transport staff;
- 2) regulate a minimum standard of compulsory training, and refreshers;
- 3) maintain a centralised register of complaints as an essential part of the process of awarding, regulating and renewing franchises, and policing poor performance.

We feel these changes will improve the quality of service not just for disabled passengers but for all who use public transport.

Thank you for your support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We conducted research amongst disabled passengers who are, or have been, users of public transport. The findings are worrying.

Key findings:

Two thirds (66%) have felt discriminated against by either the staff or passengers when using public transport – in half of these cases it was by both the staff and passengers. This is not a one-off occurrence. All passengers can feel ill-treated at times, for most it is a regular circumstance, with 45% of all disabled passengers reporting to experience discrimination regularly.

“66% have felt discriminated against when using public transport “

Difficulties in simply getting on and off the transport was the main cause of this discrimination (74% of respondents cited this reason). In nearly half of cases, however, these difficulties were of the most basic nature - in 46% of cases it was because the vehicle (most often a bus) would not stop to let them alight.

Lack of provision was also a key factor with 67% feeling discriminated against because of this. Less obvious discrimination in the form of verbal abuse from other passengers was felt by nearly a third of respondents (29%) and nearly a quarter (23%) had received verbal abuse from staff.

“Over a quarter have felt forced to find other ways to travel”

“I have had many buses refuse to let me board because of pushchairs who refuse to move despite the signs.” - survey respondent

There is substantial evidence of emotional barriers to using public transport as well. Nearly four in ten (39%) disabled travellers stated that the discrimination they have faced has been in the form of verbal abuse from staff and a similar amount (34%) from other passengers.

“I cannot use my powerchair on the London Underground at all. While some London bus drivers are fantastic, I have had some ghastly experiences with lack of deaf awareness and wheelchair access awareness, sometimes both together which has left me weeping.” - survey respondent

30% now travel less because of the treatment they have received on public transport, and a further 32% have given up on it completely, feeling forced to find other ways to travel. But simply avoiding using public transport is not always possible. One in five (21%) of respondents feel that they don't have this flexibility as they have no other options open to them.

3 out of 5 find using public transport a “horrible experience”

A shocking 73% of disabled passengers now say they feel nervous when using public transport and nearly three out of five (59%) find using public transport a “horrible experience”

Why public transport is necessary:

For many public transport is an essential part of life, using it for a range of reasons:

- days out (69%)
- shopping (66%)
- visiting friends and family (66%)
- travelling to work (44%)
- health appointments/treatment (13%)
- study/voluntary work (8%)

In other words, public transport is an important part of fulfilling the basic requirements of life - to be healthy and happy. For many it represents a way to retain an active social life. For others it allows them to get to work. In just over 10% of cases it's about essential health appointments - picking up medicines, getting treatment, seeing the doctor. These are not aspects of life that should be blocked on a daily basis by ignorance and miscommunication.

Rosemary's story

Rosemary is a wheelchair user, living in Oxford. Rosemary travels around the country for work, giving lectures and talks. The frequent discrimination that Rosemary has experienced using the public transport network has led to her giving up using public transport completely.

Some of the most common situations Rosemary found herself in were:

- Waiting for over an hour for a bus to stop for her, then watching as each bus stopped, only to tell her that she couldn't board because the wheelchair space was filled with pushchairs or luggage and the driver is unwilling to engage with the other passengers.
- Hailing a wheelchair accessible taxi only to watch it start to pull over, then turn off its 'for hire' light and speed away once they spot that she is in fact a wheelchair user.
- Booking train tickets two weeks in advance so that the right assistance can be provided at the station, only to be left behind on the platform or, on boarding, finding out that the one reserved space available was double booked and taken by another wheelchair user.

On one occasion, the train staff forgot to help Rosemary off the train at her end destination and it was only when the cleaning crew came round that she was spotted and helped off – a truly terrifying experience to feel so helpless, forgotten and left behind.

It is not just the public transport staff that treat disabled passengers an annoyance rather than as a fellow human being. Other passengers can be act cruelly through their ignorance. On one occasion Rosemary was travelling on a train at rush hour as she had just finished work. Being a crowded train another passenger felt the need to vent their frustration at Rosemary's 'temerity' of travelling at that time of the day by saying "There would be so much space if you weren't on here. How inconsiderate of you to take a train in rush hour!". Such behaviour demonstrates a complete lack of understanding and empathy for a fellow traveller.

John's Story

John is hearing impaired and a frequent user of the local bus network in Devon. John has middle frequency hearing loss, which means he finds it difficult to buy tickets and ask for information.

When using a route he is familiar with, the service works well for John, especially since the bus operator provides fluorescent orange bus pass holders, so passengers that might require additional needs are easily identifiable.

However when travelling outside of Devon, he frequently experiences impatience and aggressiveness from staff. This can be an extremely upsetting and frustrating occurrence for anyone, but for a disabled person it can make them feel isolated and dependent on other people.

John once needed a staff member at a train station to simply repeat what they had said so he could get the right information. They lost their patience, and, instead of speaking more slowly and clearly so John could lip-read, they started shouting out what they'd said. In the end John was given the wrong ticket and had to pay a substantial fee on top of the ticket price because of the ticket officer's behaviour.

This is a clear case of where better training would have made the difference for all concerned. By understanding that John needed the information repeated more precisely, the ticket officer could have ensured that John had the correct information and paid the correct fare, and they could have taken pride in doing their job well – which is to meet the needs of the passenger.

Tom's story

Tom has Asperger's Syndrome. The local bus route represents independence for him as he can travel to and from college by himself. For Tom routine is paramount. If the order of daily activities changes then Tom starts to feel distressed and agitated. One day the bus was very late to the bus stop. The longer the delay, the more distressed he was feeling. When the bus finally arrived Tom's frustration came across as aggression. Despite being a regular user of the bus route, the driver reacted badly and forced him to leave the bus. This left Tom very distraught and unable to use the service again for quite some time as he was frightened of receiving the same response. Suddenly his world was full of uncertainty and fear.

This could have been easily avoided. Bus drivers, unfortunately, often have to deal with passengers they consider to be in an ill mood, aggressive or abusive. In this case it was a mistaken assumption, but the fact remains that the driver didn't deal with the situation well. Better training on how to deal with passengers who are in a state of anxiety would not only have helped here, but would have given the driver more confidence in dealing with all passengers during their shift, improving their job satisfaction and the service provided. Instead, public transport staff try to ignore a situation than have to deal with it, creating a wholly unsatisfactory service all round.

FOCUS ON...MANCHESTER

There are four main modes of public transport into and around Manchester and Manchester City Region. There are trains, buses, trams (Metrolink) and taxis (often left off the list of public transport options). Manchester also has an international airport, but this is not considered here.

Manchester Disabled People's Access Group (MDPAG), with other disabled people's groups, has played a consultative role in the production of the Transport Strategy for Manchester City Centre. This covers all aspects of public and private transport, including cycling and pedestrian journeys. People may be surprised to know how many disabled cyclists there are. Some disabled people use tricycles as their main method of transport. The new bike racks that are springing up as part of the cycling strategy should be designed with the access requirements of disabled cyclists in mind, as well as the access requirements of disabled pedestrians.

The overall strategic plan focuses on reducing traffic congestion caused by journeys in private vehicles in central areas, and includes proposals for pedestrianisation of large areas of Manchester City Centre. This may mean that mobility impaired people will have to travel further to reach their destination and that visually impaired people may have difficulty in find their way around. Consultation and community engagement will be required from the start of the design process, in order to prevent these issues from arising.

Access for disabled people to bus services remains difficult, due to poorly designed vehicles, lack of access to written timetable information for visually impaired people, and poorly trained drivers. The implications of using Quality Contracts to improve bus services in Manchester are being considered, but no decision has been made. Legislation to improve access to buses has not yet been fully implemented. These factors force many disabled people to rely on cars, or taxis, or the door to door minibus services.

Train services and stations are undergoing major restructuring, including an £18 million upgrade to improve accessibility and provide step free routes to regional stations. The Northern Hub scheme will eventually lead to a new high speed rail line between London and the North.

Mobility scooters are increasingly evident in the region. Whilst they bring many benefits for mobility impaired people, they are perceived as problematic on our crowded narrow pavements and pedestrian thoroughfares, which are already cluttered with A-boards and pavement cafes. Visually impaired people have particular problems with untrained disabled people driving mobility scooters haphazardly around the pedestrian zone. Our local Shopmobility tests disabled people before letting them use their scooters, but there are problems with this approach. One well-travelled member of MDPAG is a member of 10 Shopmobility schemes nationally, and has taken 10 tests!



Local mobility scooter users are involved in a campaign against a blanket ban on mobility scooters on trams. Better design of platforms and tram interiors, to better accommodate mobility scooters, may be a more inclusive solution to this problem.

Manchester City Council has worked closely with disabled people's groups such as MDPAG and Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People (GMCDP) to educate black cab drivers, who seem reluctant to take wheelchair users and assistance dog users in their cabs. An inspection regime was introduced to make sure that drivers always had ramps available. Induction loops are fitted in black cabs. But still, the anecdotal evidence is strong that many black cab drivers don't stop for wheelchair users and refuse on occasions to take assistance dogs. This can have a serious impact on the safety of disabled people.

Some local authorities – in our region and elsewhere - are progressing towards charging full prices for blue badge car parking spaces in council car parks – whether or not ticket machines are made accessible. Once areas are pedestrianized, it is likely that on street parking spaces will vanish, leaving blue badge holders with no choice but to park in pricy car parks with inaccessible ticket machines and exit barriers.

Over the past 13 years, MDPAG has worked closely with our partner organisations such as Shopmobility Manchester and GMCDP to keep these issues on the agenda, ensuring that our members' views are fully represented in consultations undertaken by Transport for Greater Manchester and Manchester City Council's Transport Unit.

MDPAG is now proposing a transport subgroup to draw together all the different strands that make up public transport in Manchester and examine the implications of these developments for ALL disabled people using ALL forms of transport, whatever their impairment or background.

Ruth Malkin Access Coordinator MDPAG

FOCUS ON...LONDON



Lianna Etkind, Campaigns and Outreach Co-ordinator at Transport for All, one of the partners for the A2BForAll campaign puts forward her view for how accessibility on the London transport system has changed, and where we are today.

“More than twenty years after activists from the Campaign for Accessible Transport (CAT) brought Oxford Street to a standstill by locking their wheelchairs to an inaccessible bus, London’s transport has become vastly more useable for disabled people than it used to be.

However, inaccessible transport is still perhaps the biggest barrier to the full participation of disabled people in all areas of public life. The majority of the Tube system remains out of bounds for people who cannot use steps: the likelihood of one’s entry station, exit station and change all being step free is vanishingly small. In our view, door to door transport schemes simply do not meet the transport demands of a growing population of older and disabled Londoners; increasingly unwilling to submit to living life within a four-mile boundary. Simply put, journeys can be more stressful and take longer for disabled people than for everyone else.

Undeniably, London is ahead of much of the rest of the UK when it comes to transport access. The Disabled and Older Person’s Freedom Pass permits free travel on both buses and the London Underground, and is useable 24 hours a day in most parts of London. There are more step free Tube stations than ever before, and several stations have benefited from de-cluttering and redesign. Every London bus now has a wheelchair ramp and audio-visual information displays – even if they don’t always work.

However, we feel that there have been significant recent setbacks and accessibility measures have been the very first victim of cuts.

In 2006 Transport for London (TfL) announced that by 2012, a third of stations would be step free. However this is not the case. Several stations where lifts were planned (including Newbury Park, Ladbroke Grove and Shepherds Bush) had plans for access withdrawn. Today, just 23% of stations are step free.

Two out of five bus stops in London are not fully accessible, meaning that street clutter or broken or ill-places kerbs can prevent disabled people using





them. TfL has cut its target for making bus stops accessible, from 75% by 2018 down to 65% by 2018. When bus stops are inaccessible, it can mean that buses wheelchair ramps are not able to work.

Demand for Taxicard continues to grow, but increases to the Taxicard scheme have been frozen at the rate of inflation. Together with the resulting removal of double swiping in several boroughs we feel that this has halved the diameter in which Taxicard members in these boroughs can travel and live their lives.

We feel that cutting the total number of Underground station staff has reduced the amount of staff assistance available for disabled people. CCTV cameras and automated Help Points have not necessarily been proven to be a good substitute for trained staff.

There are 1.4 million disabled people in London. In its current state, we feel that the transport system will continue to exclude disabled people from London's culture, from the workplace and from civic life.

ACTIONS: WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Public transport operators across the country are consistently failing in their duty to provide an effective service for all passengers. Negative attitudes to disabled passengers, poor processes and systems and a lack of training are at the core of this failure.

We asked for respondents to put forward suggestions for how public transport could be improved for disabled passengers. Many focused on better training:

“Bus companies should fine bad drivers who discriminate against disabled people.”

“Involve disabled people in the design and implementation of an integrated access strategy including training and awareness raising of the issues.”

“Ensure there are legally enforceable rights that are not costly when seeking a remedy in Law.”

“Give drivers greater understanding of issues facing disabled people so that they are motivated and skilled enough to move awkward non disabled passengers from accessible seating / wheelchair spaces.”

“Equality training for bus drivers (so they can anticipate difficulties disabled passengers may face)”

“Train more Disabled people to use Direct Action against this so called public transport.”

“Have a code of conduct for all bus and train companies.”

Others were of a more practical nature:

“Take away the need to book an exact train 24 hours in advance at manned stations.”

“Improve the accessibility of information; having timetables available in easy read. “

“Trains - Announcements on platforms and in carriages to be visual.”

“Clearly indicate which routes have accessible vehicles.”

“Trains - have additional wheelchair spaces, so wheelchair users can travel together.”

“More audible announcements, especially at bus stops. Better signage to encourage other passengers to allow space for assistance dogs.”

“Educate Minister for Transport, County Councillors etc, put them in a wheelchair for a day!”

TAKING ACTION

There are two ways that we at A2BForAll are looking to take action: by targeting the transport operators directly, and by getting the issue debated in parliament to push long-standing change.

Taking direct action:

How do we take direct action? Simple. We use the legal system to channel the issue into something that they can't ignore. With the Equality Act in 2010 it was made clear that disabled passengers are legally protected from discrimination. The Act states:

“The Equality Act 2010 gives disabled people rights not to be discriminated against or harassed in relation to the use of transport services. This also covers access to travel infrastructure such as railway stations and bus stations. You also have a right to reasonable adjustments. This can include providing timetables or other information in an accessible format, where it is reasonable for the transport provider to provide it. There is protection from direct disability discrimination and harassment for people who are associated with a disabled person or who are wrongly perceived as disabled.”

We intend to use this to ensure that anyone who has been affected by discrimination on public transport can join forces to make the transport operators sit up and listen to the problem, rather than to ignore it or rebuff the few that try to complain.

Our legal partners, Unity Law, will come into effect here. We are asking them to provide free consultation for anyone who feels they have been discriminated against. Anyone with a case can then put it forward without anything to pay. For more info on this, please get in touch and we'll send you some more information.



Getting heard in Parliament

Direct action is not enough by itself. Although it will incentivise operators to make the necessary changes to their current services, it will only affect change on a piecemeal level. We need long-lasting change, across ALL operators, and that will only come via a national framework.

We already have a number of MPs who are supportive of the cause. We will spend the next few months bringing more influencers on board by briefing them on the key issues raised by A2BForAll and forming a cross-party working group to bring this issue to light in Parliament. We will also continue to push the A2BForAll ePetition across all areas to show the depth of the issue.

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

1) Tell everyone you know about the campaign, whether that's through word of mouth, twitter, facebook, local groups or the media

2) get in touch with us if you want to know more about how the legal process works. We understand it is actually quite a simple process and has worked very well so far with our first group in Darlington

3) Write to your local MP and make them aware of the issue and the A2BForAll campaign, putting us on copy

4) Keep letting us know of any stories or problems you encounter so we can continue raising awareness of what is happening on a day to day basis for disabled passengers across the UK

Together we can make a difference. We look forward to your continued support, and to a positive outcome!

Links for further information:

To find out more and to add your views visit:

- facebook.com/A2BForAll

- twitter.com/A2BForAll

Sign the ePetition at:

- <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/27905>

Visit out partners at:

Transport for All

T: 020 7737 2339

W: www.transportforall.org.uk

Disability Rights UK

T: 020 7247 8776

W: www.disabilityrightsuk.org

Unity Law

T: 0114 361 0011

W: www.unity-law.co.uk

Darlington Association on Disability

T: 01325 489999

W: www.darlingtondisability.org

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson

W: www.tanni.co.uk