

**TRANSPORT  
FOR **ALL****



# ARE WE THERE YET?

**Barriers to transport for  
disabled people in 2023**

Large print version



# ARE WE THERE YET?

# BARRIERS TO TRANSPORT FOR DISABLED PEOPLE IN 2023

Highlight report: Large print text version

6 December 2023

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# Foreword

Access to transport is integral to a just society; it's how we access essential services, education and employment, healthcare, leisure, and our social lives. **Without the ability to get from A to B, the world stops at the front door.**

1 in 4 people in the UK are disabled<sup>i</sup>, and we do not have equal access to transport. We make roughly 30% fewer journeys per year than non-disabled people<sup>ii</sup>, the same figure as over 20 years ago<sup>iii</sup>. But it doesn't have to be this way. Indeed, it cannot continue to be this way. For disabled people to truly be equal members of society, this disability transport gap must be closed.

It is the responsibility of decision makers and transport operators to listen to the disabled community's experiences and to remove the barriers that stand in our way. Yet throughout our work campaigning for transport justice, a question we are often asked by decision makers is 'Where is the evidence?'

Data can be a powerful influencing tool, and there are clearly gaps in the current literature that can hinder change. Key information, such as which barriers to travel are the most significant, how experiences vary across different modes and demographics, and which interventions disabled people would most like to see, are not well documented in official statistics<sup>iv</sup>.

Where research exists, it can fail to interrogate the reasons behind travel patterns: do we use public transport less out of choice, or necessity, and what implications does this have for both policy development and the allocation of funding?

One of the foundational principles of the disability rights movement is ‘Nothing about us without us’. This is the belief that disabled people’s voices, lived experience, and expertise must be central in shaping the policies that affect our lives. Yet as a community, we are almost never given a real seat at the table when it comes to transport infrastructure and design and so, brick by brick, disabled people have been designed out of public life.

Therefore, when asked ‘where is the data’, we say this: disabled people have been speaking up about our experiences and the barriers we face for decades. The evidence of our lived experiences is there, but for change to happen we must be listened to and believed. Evidence of our experiences is no less valid if it comes directly from the community, instead of polling by a non-disabled research agency.

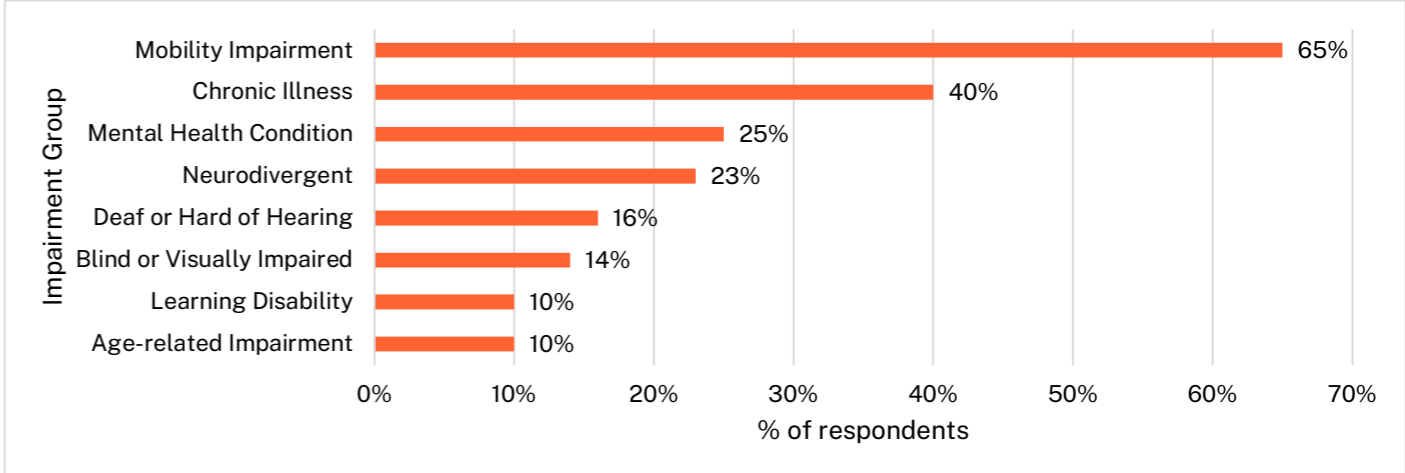
This new report is part of Transport for All’s sustained efforts to remedy this injustice by putting the spotlight on our community’s experiences and voices, and documenting the barriers we face and what needs to change. Now, the transport industry must listen and act to deliver transport justice for disabled people.

Caroline Stickland, CEO of Transport for All

# About this report

This report presents highlights of the findings from research carried out by Transport for All during 2022 and 2023. This included a literature review and a series of qualitative workshops, which were used to design a survey with 150 questions. The survey asked respondents to share their experiences of making journeys between September 2021 and September 2022. Following the survey, in July and August 2023 we ran a second series of qualitative workshops to test the policy recommendations and conclusions that had come from the survey analysis. The full research report is available on our website.

**Figure 1: Survey respondents by impairment type**



The scope of the report is trips made by disabled adults within England that involved leaving a house or place of residence for any purpose: for example, a trip to the shops, a journey to see friends, a commute to work or place of education, a trip to the doctor, or a trip with no destination (such as going for a walk or a drive). It covers public transport (bus, train, tram, metro, and light rail), private transport (car, taxi, or Private Hire Vehicle), and active travel (walking, wheeling, and cycling). Journeys made via door-to-door community transport, aviation, or maritime were not included in this research.

# Who do we mean by 'disabled people'?

At Transport for All we want to see progress for **all** disabled people. By disabled, we mean anyone who faces access barriers due to an impairment – including people who don't use the word 'disabled' to describe themselves. This explicitly includes those of us who are Deaf, neurodivergent, chronically ill, have a mental health condition, have age-related impairments, and people with both visible and non-visible impairments.

Our work uses the **Social Model of Disability**, the view that we are disabled by the barriers that exist in the world, rather than our individual bodies or minds. Those of us living with impairment or illness are not inherently 'disabled' – this is something that is created in addition through exclusion. In a truly accessible world where all barriers are removed, we would still experience the effects of our impairments (such as fatigue, muscle weakness, or blindness) – but living with these would not result in exclusion from society, as society would be built to enable us to live full, vibrant, meaningful, autonomous lives.

## A note on language

We use the term '**walking/wheeling**' to make explicit to policymakers and transport planners that pedestrian environments must be made accessible to those using wheelchairs and other wheeled mobility aids, not just those on foot.

We use the term '**cycling**' to acknowledge that many disabled people use adapted cycles which may not have two wheels. Cycling therefore refers to journeys made on any type of cycle, including trikes, handcycles, cargo-bikes, two-wheeled pedal bikes, e-bikes, recumbents, and tandems.

We use the term '**light rail**' to encompass local, light-weight train, tram, and metro services.

In this research we asked participants questions about their experiences with taxis and/or Private Hire Vehicles collectively, although there are differences between these two services. Taxis, also known as hackney carriages, are available for immediate hire, can be hailed in the street ('ply for hire') or via a taxi rank, and can accept pre-bookings. Private Hire Vehicles (PHVs), also known as minicabs, must be pre-booked and cannot use taxi ranks. Sometimes PHVs are booked through mobile apps, for example Uber or Bolt. We'll use '**taxi**' to refer to both.

Throughout the report, we use '**respondents**' to refer to people who answered a specific question, and '**participants**' to refer more generally to those who took part in the survey.

## About Transport for All

Transport for All is the disabled-led group breaking down barriers and transforming the transport system so disabled people can make the journeys we want, with freedom, dignity, ease, and confidence. We work with our members to campaign for change, to influence governments, industry, and the public, and provide peer support through our disabled-led casework service.

# FINDINGS

## Transport is largely inaccessible...

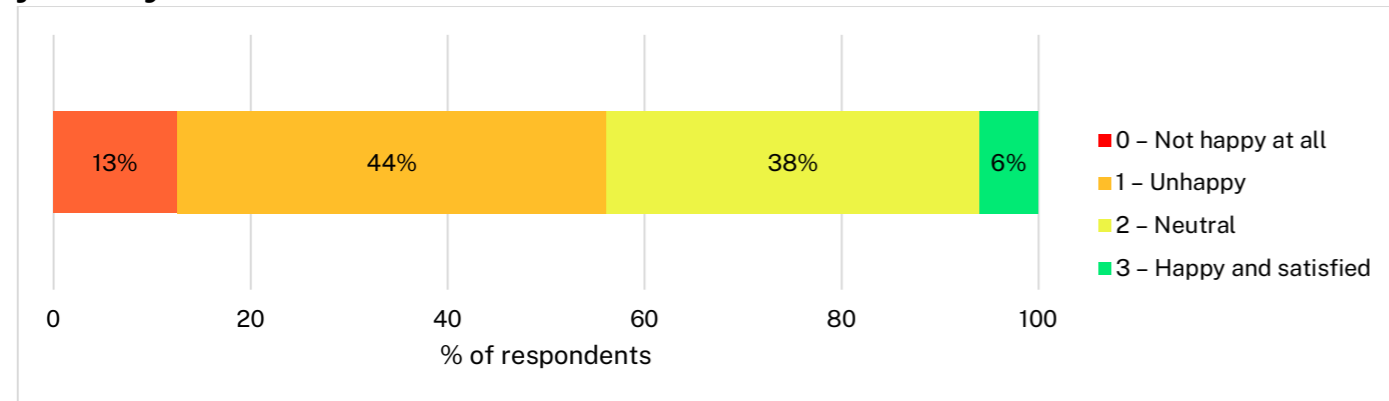
The findings of this research support what disabled people have been saying for a long time: we do not have equitable access to any mode of transport, and the impacts of this injustice can be felt in every corner of our lives.

My world has become very small. I rarely see other people or have social interactions. I feel very lonely and bored with life. I struggle to get more physically fit or expand my energy capacity back to where it was before the Covid-19 pandemic because the initial hurdles are so high. I often miss out on networking which could progress my career, because I struggle to get to in-person events and meetings.

It impacts absolutely all areas of my life. Journeys take me 2-3 times longer than non-disabled people, which eats into my free time. It means I have less time to spend on things I enjoy. Sometimes the journey to somewhere (i.e., a friend's house, or a pub), is so long and exhausting that I feel it's not worth doing (as I will be tired by the time I arrive). Sometimes I avoid doing things (working in the office, going out, seeing friends) because I can't deal with the journey, which makes me feel isolated and cut off from the world, impacting my wellbeing and mental health. I just wish I could teleport.

56% of respondents report being unhappy or extremely unhappy making journeys, with the average satisfaction rating being just 1.37 out of 3.

**Figure 2: On a scale of 0 to 3, how do you currently find making journeys?**



We found that disabled people make far fewer journeys than non-disabled people, with an average of just 5.84 journeys per week. This is a third of the national average of 17 trips a week according to the National Travel Survey<sup>v</sup>.

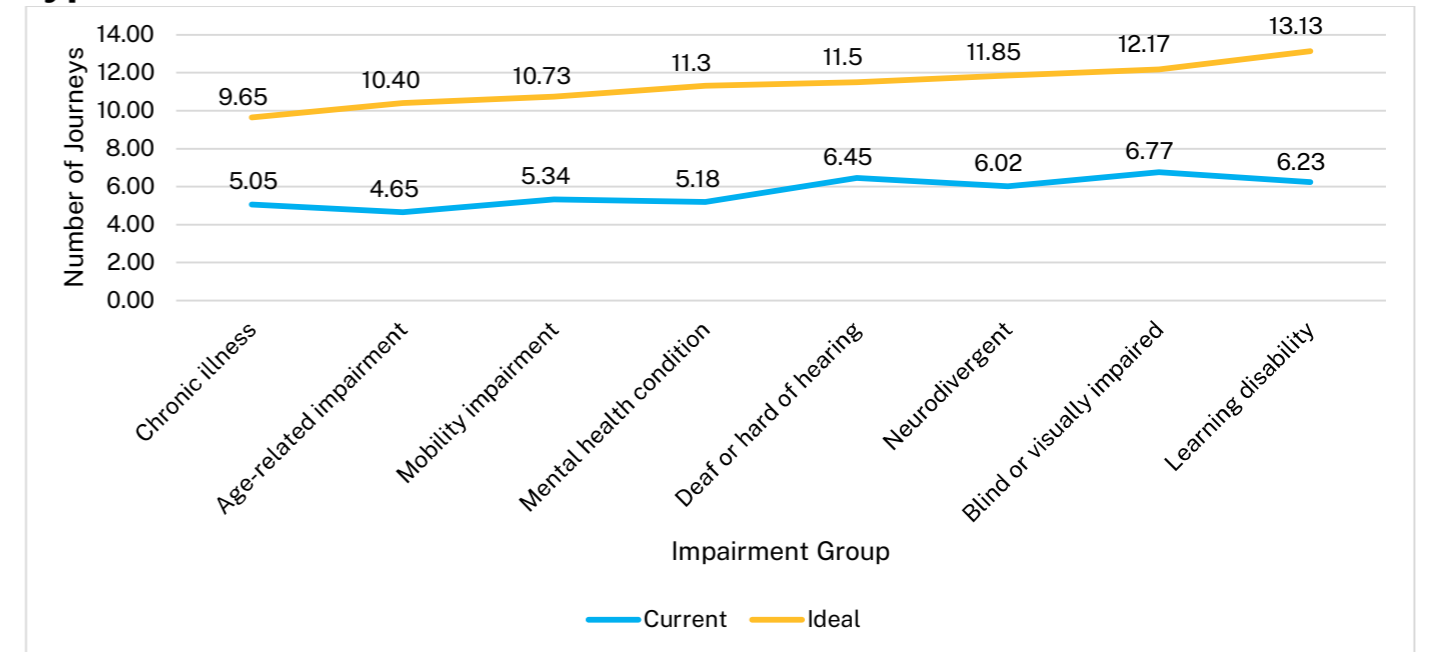
So, disabled people are largely dissatisfied with transport and make significantly fewer journeys than non-disabled people. What is the reason for this?

44% of respondents told us they wanted to make more journeys. Overwhelmingly, disabled people said that the main reason for not making as many journeys as they would like is down to external factors: access barriers. Importantly, this means that these barriers can be identified and removed.

When asked how many journeys they would ideally make if transport was fully accessible, the respondents who wanted to make more journeys told us they would make on average 10.84 journeys per week.

This suggests that across all participants removing barriers could mean disabled people making 50% more journeys.

**Figure 3: Average journeys per week (current vs ideal) by impairment type**



However, respondents told us they weren't confident that action would be taken to remove barriers. 44% of respondents told us they thought that the accessibility of transport and streets would get worse in the next 10 years, while only 28% felt things would improve and a further 28% said things would stay the same.

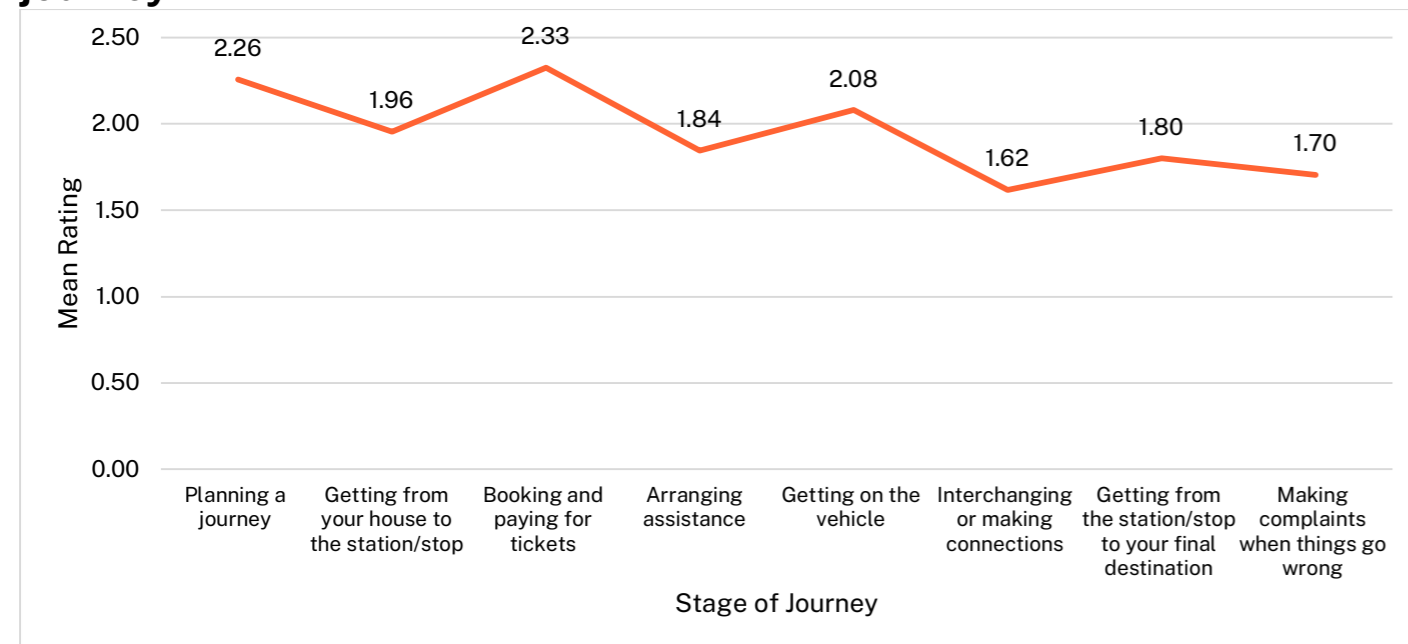
# ...at each stage of the journey

To achieve a truly accessible transport network, we must identify and tackle the various barriers that disabled people experience along an entire route (after all, there is no use having an accessible fleet of vehicles on a bus route if the route to the bus stop is impassable).

When thinking about a typical journey that they make, our participants rated 'Interchanging or making connections' as the most difficult stage of the journey (1.62) followed by 'making complaints when things go wrong' (1.7). Participants rated 'booking and paying for tickets' as the easiest stage (2.33).

It causes me undue stress. The stress of planning, of booking access, of the discrimination and distress when things go wrong on the journey, and having to complain about it afterwards and take action, means they take up an inordinate amount of my time, energy, mental health and executive function.

**Figure 4: Mean rating of respondents' experience of each stage of the journey**

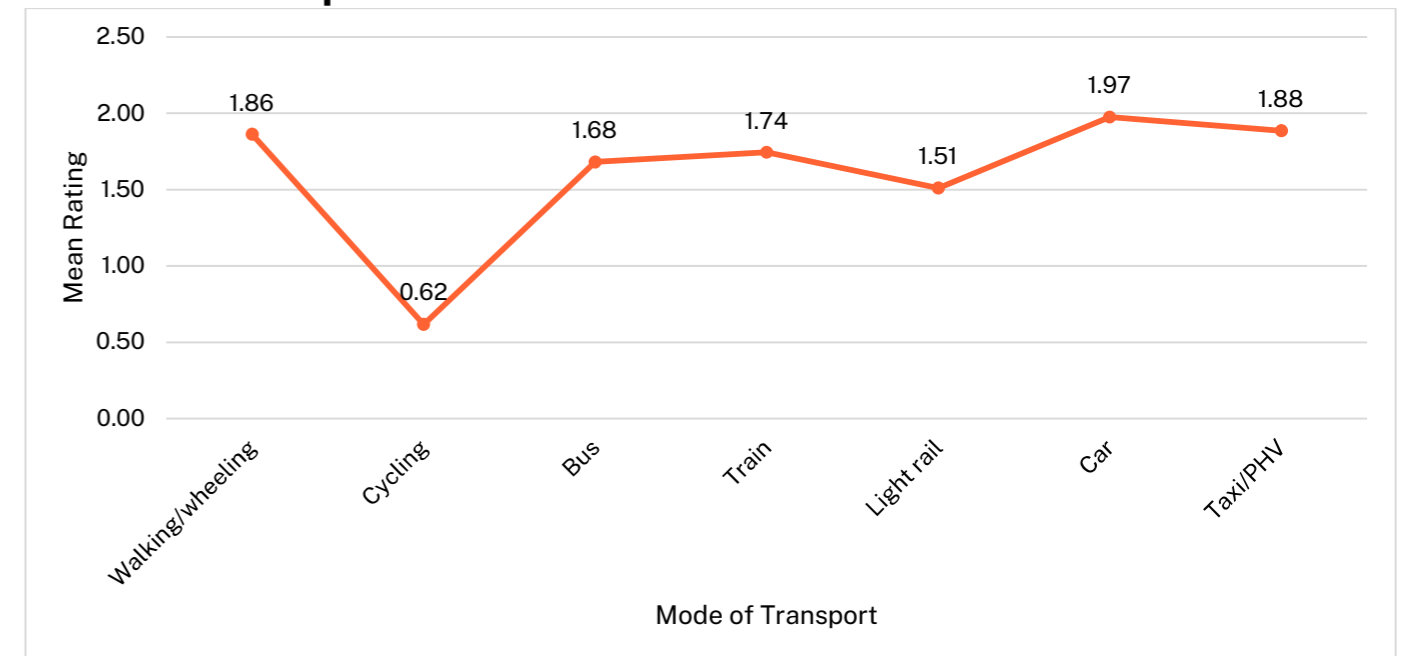


# ...and on every mode

Throughout this survey, we use a 0-3 scale to measure experience. It works as follows:

- N/A: It's not available to me or I have no reason/desire to use/do this
- 0 - I cannot use/do this at all
- 1 - I can use/do this, but with extreme difficulty
- 2 - I can use/do this, but with some issues
- 3 - I use/do this, with confidence and ease

**Figure 5: Mean rating of respondents' experience of using different modes of transport**



## Walking/wheeling

On average, respondents rated their experience of walking and wheeling as 1.86 out of 3. Only 21% of respondents said they can walk and wheel with ease, while 6% said they cannot do it at all.



## Cycling

Respondents rated their experience of cycling as 0.62 out of 3, making it the most poorly rated mode of any in the survey, by a large margin. Only 4% said they could cycle with ease, while 41% said they could not cycle at all.

## Bus

Disabled people rated experiences of using the bus at 1.68 out of 3. 52% said that they can use the bus with some issues, while 13% could not use it at all.

## Train

The average rating for experiences of using the train was 1.74 out of 3. Only 13% said they can use the train with confidence and ease, while 10% said they cannot use it at all.

## Light rail

The average experience rating for light rail was 1.51 out of 3. 11% of respondents said they can use light rail with confidence and ease, while 16% of said they cannot use it at all.

## Car

Respondents told us the car was the easiest and most accessible form of transport. On average disabled people rated their experience of using the car as 1.97 out of 3, with 32% saying they could use the car with ease and confidence, and only 13% saying they could not use it at all.

## Taxi / Private Hire Vehicle

Disabled people have a generally positive experience of taxis compared with other modes, giving taxis an average rating of 1.88 out of 3. 22% reported that they use taxis easily and with confidence, while 8% said they cannot use them at all.

# Active travel

## Walking/wheeling

Almost all journeys begin with some amount of walking/wheeling, if only to the vehicle, station or stop. It's a crucial mode of transport, and is the second most frequently used mode by disabled people, accounting for 28% of all journeys made<sup>vi</sup>. Despite this, disabled people take 30% fewer walking trips per year than non-disabled people<sup>vii</sup>.

Currently, the approach to delivering accessible walking infrastructure is limited to non-statutory guidance, including:

- Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (published 2017) which provides technical guidance for Local Authorities to aid with planning networks of walking routes and prioritising walking infrastructure improvements<sup>viii</sup>.
- The Local Transport Note 1/20 on Cycle infrastructure design (published 2020) which provides guidance for local authorities on designing various aspects of pedestrian streetspace including junctions and crossings<sup>ix</sup>.
- Guidance on the Use of Tactile Paving Surfaces (published 2021)<sup>x</sup>
- Inclusive Mobility (published 2022) which sets out best practice on improve access to pedestrian and transport infrastructure for disabled people<sup>xi</sup>.

Devolved transport authorities also tend to have their own pieces of guidance in place locally, which in some places deviate from national guidance:

- Transport for London publishes several design guidance documents including Accessible Bus Stop Design Guidance and Streetspace Guidance<sup>xii</sup>.
- Transport for Greater Manchester published its ‘Streets for All’ strategy, setting out requirements<sup>xiii</sup>.

While much of this guidance contains detailed steps to remove many barriers that exist to walking (for example, specification for gradients of dropped kerbs, provision of tactile paving at crossings, minimum pavement widths, etc) it is just that – guidance.

Furthermore, detailed guidance on the more complex and controversial elements of streetspace is lacking. For example, the measures set out in Inclusive Mobility<sup>xiv</sup> for making bus stop bypasses accessible are limited to the following:

1. “Engagement should take place with relevant groups of people from an early stage of the planning and design process. This should include organisations representing older and disabled people, as well as older and disabled individuals themselves. This will provide a forum to hear and address any safety concerns that they may have.” (p75)
2. “Crossing points should be controlled if cycle traffic speed is high”. (p90)
3. “It would be helpful if announcements on board buses included information on the of bus bypass or bus boarder stops.”(p90)

Walking/wheeling is an area that has been identified as needing investment; in England, the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS2) sets out the aim to increase the percentage of short journeys in towns and cities that are walked or cycled to 50% in 2030 and to 55% in 2035<sup>xv</sup>.

A new body, Active Travel England, was set up in 2022 with the aim of making walking, wheeling and cycling people’s preferred modes of transport<sup>xvi</sup>. However, in March 2023 the Government announced that funding for improvements was being reduced<sup>xvii</sup>.

## Barriers to walking/wheeling

**Figure 6: Which of the following barriers have you experienced to walking/wheeling in the past 12 months? (Tick all that apply)**

Barrier	Respondents
Quality of pavements (bumps, potholes, tree roots, cracked tiles, narrow)	77%
Street clutter (A-boards, bins, signs, bollards, outdoor dining, e-bikes and e-scooters)	65%
Pavement parking	57%
E-scooters/ bikes being ridden on pavements	50%
Lack of dropped kerbs	50%
Crossings are inadequate or hazardous for me to use (shared space, lack of controlled crossing)	44%
Environmental reasons (weather/slipperiness/ice and lack of gritting)	39%
Lack of public amenities (lack of rest stops, public toilets, water fountains, etc)	37%
Crowds	34%
Personal security (hate crime, lack of street lighting, speed and volume of traffic)	28%
My surroundings are too hilly/steep for me to walk or wheel	22%
I cannot walk or wheel	20%
Air pollution	16%
Lack of tactile paving	13%
I experience sensory overload on walking/wheeling routes	12%
I cannot walk far and I do not have access to a mobility aid I can use	12%
I cannot walk far and I do not want to use a mobility aid	8%
Fear of losing benefits	8%
The signage on my walking route is confusing	6%
Other	1%
No barriers – this mode is accessible to me	4%

Only 4% of respondents reported experiencing no barriers. Given that every journey begins and ends with walking and wheeling, this suggests that 96% of disabled people face barriers to travel each time they leave the house.

## Pavements

Issues with pavements are by far the most frequently experienced barriers to walking and wheeling, with poorly maintained surfaces, street clutter, and pavement parking being the top three most common respectively.

77% of respondents experienced poor surfaces, including bumps, potholes, tree roots, broken tiles, and narrow width, making it the most frequently cited barrier of any mode of transport. Poor pavements can render whole routes inaccessible and even dangerous. For wheelchair users, irregular surfaces can be painful or impossible to go over and can cause damage to the chair. Bad pavements also posed a serious trip hazard, particularly for blind and visually impaired people, and those with impaired balance.

57% of respondents experienced pavement parking, while 65% experienced street clutter including litter, bollards, A-boards, outdoor dining, parked cycles, and e-scooters. When the route is obstructed, disabled people were left with little option but to either go into the road, putting us at further risk from traffic, or turn back to find another route, making journeys even longer.

The biggest barrier I face as a blind guide dog handler is street clutter. Even the most familiar route can become impossible due to pavement parking, dumped rubbish, e-scooters or roadworks. It's really exhausting to manage and often means replanning routes which take longer and feel more stressful and unsafe.

The road to my nearest bus stop is in awful repair. I have damaged my wheelchair and nearly fallen out of it due to bad paving. I have to go

on an alternative route which takes twice as long to get me to the bus stop. And my chair is now damaged.

Pavements can be really hazardous. I have had a number of falls due to poor surfaces and have scars and broken teeth as a result.

## Crossings

50% of respondents experienced missing dropped kerbs, making it the fourth most common barrier. Where dropped kerbs do exist, people told us these were frequently broken, too steep to manage, or obstructed, again forcing people to turn back and find the next nearest place to cross, or go into the road alongside traffic.

44% have contended with inadequate or hazardous pedestrian crossings. As well as there being too few controlled crossings, people also said that many lacked the audio-visual cues needed to make them accessible, and left insufficient time to cross. A lack of tactile paving, which is vital for indicating where safe crossings are, was also experienced by 13% of respondents.

I was on my way to a bus stop, following directions on google maps. I got to the end of the pavement and there was no dropped kerb. I had to turn around and go back the way I had come, but it was ages before I found a dropped kerb. I then had to come back again but this time wheeling along the road, while dodging cars. The annoying detour I had to take made me miss my bus.

## Public and surroundings

50% of respondents were affected by people cycling or scooting on pavements. Deaf and visually impaired people wrote about the number of collisions and near misses they had faced, with assistance dogs being spooked by vehicles speeding around them.

I also encounter barriers with people cycling or using e-scooters on the pavement. I so frequently have them come past me very suddenly and I have no awareness of them behind me. I don't walk in

a very straight line because of my balance issues and I'm so worried I'll walk into someone's path, injuring me, them and my assistance dog.

## **Environmental**

39% of respondents cited environmental barriers such as the weather, slippery surfaces, and ungritted paths as a barrier to walking/wheeling. Whilst weather patterns cannot be controlled, the impact of a lack of adequate shelter or timely gritting is likely to be high for disabled people.

Another environmental barrier is air pollution, which was experienced by 16% of respondents. Though it is particularly harmful for those with respiratory conditions, air pollution can have detrimental effects on every organ in the body at every stage of life.<sup>xviii</sup> Disabled people with pre-existing conditions are generally at higher risk of these health complications.<sup>xix</sup>

## **Provision of amenities and signage**

37% of respondents said that a lack of public facilities, such as accessible toilets, water fountains, and seating, was a barrier to walking and wheeling. Not only are facilities often unavailable or inaccessible, they can also be difficult to locate. People told us about not being able to find out the information they need, such as whether toilets are locked with a radar key, or where they can sit down along a route.

## **Mobility aids**

Many disabled people require a mobility aid to make walking and wheeling journeys. However, there are a host of barriers to getting a mobility aid that works for you.

12% of respondents said they cannot walk far unaided yet are unable to access a suitable mobility aid. People told us that the mobility aid they would prefer is too expensive, and not available through the NHS.

Others said the infrastructure and logistics surrounding them (storage space at home or work, poor pavement surfaces, a lack of public charging points for electric wheelchairs/mobility scooters) meant they cannot use what would otherwise be an ideal option.

# Cycling

Much as is the case for non-disabled people, cycling has the smallest mode-share for disabled people. According to the National Travel Survey, an average disabled person makes just 2 journeys per year by cycling, compared with 17 for a non-disabled person (over eight times as many!)<sup>xx</sup>. This average figure somewhat masks the diversity in experience. Many disabled people are avid cyclists, some finding cycling more accessible and easier than walking and wheeling<sup>xxi</sup>. However, the majority (as many as 84% according to data from 2017) of disabled people never cycle.<sup>xxii</sup>

As is the case for walking and wheeling, while the Local Transport Note LTN 1/20 provides some good guidance to local authorities on delivering accessible cycle infrastructure, it is just guidance – local authorities are not legally required to comply, and are not always provided with the investment and resources to do so.

Access to suitable cycles is another key issue – these are not available from NHS wheelchair services, and not available on the Motability Scheme.

## Barriers to cycling

**Figure 7: Which of the following barriers have you experienced to cycling in the past 12 months? (Tick all that apply)**

Barrier	Respondents
I cannot cycle due to my impairment or health condition	58%
Lack of road safety/ danger of collision	35%
Too few cycle lanes	27%
Fear of cycle theft	22%
Cycling lanes are poorly maintained	22%
Lack of storage/parking space	22%
I lack the skills/confidence to cycle	21%
Cycling infrastructure is not suitable for adapted cycles	20%
There is a perception that disabled people don't/can't cycle	18%
Cycle routes are poorly signposted	16%
Too expensive (cost of cycle, storage, adaptations etc)	13%
I fear or have experienced antisocial behaviour or hate crime while cycling	12%
I am sometimes denied access to public transport when I take my cycle	11%
Not enough opportunity to hire cycles	8%
I feel like cycling 'isn't for people like me'	8%
I fear that I will lose or have lost my benefits because I cycle	3%
None – this mode is accessible to me	3%

### Impairment

58% of respondents said they could not cycle due to their impairment, making it the most common barrier. While this framing contrasts with our own use of the Social Model (that we are disabled by barriers rather

than our impairment) we chose to include this option in the survey due to strong feedback from workshop participants.

## Safety and confidence

The second most common barrier was dangerous roads and the risk of collision (35% of respondents). Some said that they were made to feel unsafe by poor driver behaviour and a lack of segregated cycling routes. Others also said their impairment put them at higher risk (e.g., being easily thrown off balance or unable to hear traffic approaching from behind).

21% said that they didn't have the skills or confidence to be able to cycle safely, and added that there were no adult classes available to help them improve. For some the safety risk came from other people, with 12% saying they were afraid of or had experienced antisocial behaviour or hate crime while cycling.

I cannot cycle confidently and there are no adult classes in my area. A lack of accessible cycle parking. A lack of bike lanes mean I must cycle on busy main roads which is impossible. I am tired and sweaty when I get to my location and there's nowhere to store locks or helmets.

## Poor cycling infrastructure

Poor cycling infrastructure was among one of the most common barriers. 27% said that there were too few cycle lanes, and 22% said that the ones available to them were often poorly maintained or obstructed.

20% also said that existing infrastructure was not suitable for adapted cycles, such as routes being too narrow. This is particularly concerning, given that 32% of those surveyed exclusively use a non-standard cycle.

## Access to cycles and storage

Financial barriers prevented 13% of respondents from accessing a suitable cycle or storage space. Adapted cycles in particular can be prohibitively expensive, especially given the much higher living costs disabled people face<sup>xxiii</sup>.

8% also said that there were not enough opportunities to hire cycles, especially ones with adaptations, or tandem cycles with a pilot. This also deprived people of the opportunity to try an adapted cycle before committing to an expensive purchase.

For 22%, storing the cycle was a major barrier to cycling. A lack of parking spaces, especially for larger adapted cycles, meant that people had nowhere safe to store it. This then increased the risk of cycle theft, which was a barrier for a further 22%.

I could use a specially adapted hand-cycle bike if such things were readily available & affordable. I feel sad, discriminated against, forgotten and unimportant in society.

## Cycling as a mobility aid

Of those respondents who do cycle, 24% use their cycle as a mobility aid. A further 26% would like to use their cycle as a mobility aid, but face barriers to doing so. We asked those who didn't currently use their cycle as a mobility aid, but would like to, what barriers they faced that prevented them from doing so.

Cost was the most common barrier, with 25% saying the cycle they would need is too expensive. Some said they would like to use their cycle as a mobility aid but lack the confidence to do so. A significant reason for this was the fear of traffic collisions, with 22% saying they felt too unsafe to travel on roads, while others said that they lacked the skills needed to use a cycle as a mobility aid, and that there were not enough classes or opportunities to try one out.

19% also said that there was insufficient cycling infrastructure for cycles to be a viable mobility aid, with an additional 14% saying they would have nowhere to park or store it at home. Integrating cycling with other forms of transport was also an issue for some; 6% said that although they could cycle on the streets, they could not take their cycle on buses or trains as they could with other mobility aids, which prevented them from making journeys further afield.

## Perceptions

18% of respondents said that they were impacted by a pervasive belief that disabled people don't or can't cycle. If held by decision makers, these attitudes can reinforce the physical barriers we face. If disabled people are believed to be inherently unable to cycle, accessible cycles and infrastructure don't get funded. This then prevents us from being able to cycle, and the pattern continues.<sup>xxiv</sup>

# Public transport

## Bus

Government statistics show that disabled people make a greater proportion of our trips by bus than non-disabled people (5% compared with 3%)<sup>xxv</sup>, demonstrating the crucial role the bus plays as the often only accessible form of public transport available.

In the past few decades, progress has been made with regards to the accessibility of vehicles. Of the 31,000-strong bus fleet in England<sup>xxvi</sup>:

- 28% have free WiFi.
- 46% provide audio visual information.
- 99% have been issued with an accessibility certificate, meaning that they comply with the standards as set out in the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2000 (PSVAR). All bus vehicles were meant to comply by 2017, and all coach vehicles by 2020<sup>xxvii</sup>.

Since 2008, (some) disabled and older people have been eligible for free off-peak bus travel under the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme<sup>xxviii</sup>. In 2022, journeys made with a concessionary pass (older person's or disabled) made up 20% of all bus passenger journeys in England<sup>xxix</sup>.

The Department for Transport published Bus Back Better in 2021; the National Bus Strategy for England. It requires transport authorities and bus operators to produce a Bus Service Improvement Plan detailing the changes they will make.

Additionally, within the strategy the Government made a commitment to:

- Ensure that Government-funded buses deliver greater accessibility (for example, space for a second wheelchair, hearing loops and audio-visual information).
- Review the eligibility criteria for concessionary schemes.<sup>xxx</sup>

Despite progress, the percentage of bus complaints that relate to accessibility increased between 2016/17 and 2021/2022<sup>xxxi</sup>, and barriers remain. For example, PSVAR regulations only apply to buses which can carry 22 or more passengers. Additionally, they rely on a 'standard' size wheelchair to determine the design of bus interiors which has not increased to reflect modern mobility aid sizes.

The 2017 Bus Services Act allows Government to require local operators to provide key information to disabled passengers in accessible formats<sup>xxxii</sup>. In 2023 those powers were used to introduce rules requiring local bus and coach services to provide audio-visual information on the route and direction, upcoming stops, and details of diversions<sup>xxxiii</sup>. However, services have until October 2026 before they must do this.

Legislation requiring drivers to be trained in disability awareness came was introduced in March 2018<sup>xxxiv</sup>. Department for Transport data shows 99% of bus operators required drivers to take this training<sup>xxxv</sup>, yet an audit from Bus Users UK found only 89% of drivers reported having been trained<sup>xxxvi</sup>. There is no data on the quality or effectiveness of said training.

Something that has been an enduring issue for disabled people using buses is conflicts around the priority space, for example, what a driver should do if a wheelchair user wishes to board but the space is occupied by a buggy. In 2017 Doug Paulley took his case on this issue against the bus operator FirstGroup to the Supreme Court, citing the Equality Act (2010)'s principle that service providers must make "reasonable adjustments" for disabled service users. The Supreme Court ruled that FirstGroup had failed to make sufficient adjustments for the needs of

disabled passengers, and set a legal precedent requiring operator's to adopt a policy of wheelchair users taking priority in the space. In practice this should look like drivers asking the passenger in the space to move, and if they don't, to ask them again more insistently.<sup>xxxvii</sup>



# Barriers to using the bus

**Figure 8: Which barriers, if any, have you experienced to using the bus in the past 12 months (tick all that apply)**

Barrier	Respondents
Issues with priority space/seating (not enough, already in use, not clearly defined, etc)	51%
Overcrowding	49%
Infrequent or unreliable service	48%
It takes too long compared to other modes	43%
Driver attitudes and behaviour	41%
Inadequate bus stops/ shelters	40%
Risk of catching COVID	37%
Lack of accurate real-time information on bus times	37%
Negative attitudes/ antisocial behaviour/ hate crime from other passengers	35%
Bus stop is too far away/ not close enough to my home/ not close to destination	34%
Issues with ramp (broken/ too steep, deployed incorrectly, no ramp)	28%
Too many interchanges/ I have to change buses	27%
Personal security/ I don't feel safe	22%
Audio/visual information: announcements are not communicated to me in a way I can access	21%
Sensory environment (lighting, brightness, noise levels, smells)	21%
I cannot take my mobility aid or medical equipment with me	11%
Expensive	11%
Other	3%
None – this mode is accessible to me	4%

## Seating and spaces

51% of respondents experienced issues with priority seating and spaces such as seats being occupied or not clearly defined, or there being too few. In these instances, disabled people reported being left waiting until a vehicle with a free priority seat/space arrived, adding to journey time and uncertainty. Having to ask for a seat or space to be vacated can lead to conflict with other passengers, creating even more stress.

Despite wheelchair users having legal priority over buggies, disabled people tell us that drivers often do not let them on when there is a buggy on board, and that many parents do not stow the buggy when asked. This demonstrates that existing case law<sup>xxxviii</sup> around priority seating is not widely understood or enforced, despite visible signage.

49% of respondents said that overcrowding had affected them on recent journeys, making it the second most common barrier to buses. Crowding can also mean that there is less priority seating available, and less space for those using mobility aids to manoeuvre safely.

11% of disabled people reported being unable to take their mobility aid with them on the bus, either due to services not accommodating them or because of the stress involved.

40% of respondents experienced inadequate bus stops last year. Examples included a lack of seating, lack of shelter leaving people exposed to the rain and cold, inaccessible surrounding street space (such as cycle lanes cutting through ‘floating’ bus stops) and street clutter.

Sometimes I don't have a mobility aid with me and don't look disabled as it's a hidden disability and I look young. When seats are taken, I don't have confidence to ask to sit down, so I risk standing for the journey and being in more pain

The first 3 buses that arrived all had buggies on them, they all refused to move for me. None of the drivers were willing to intervene. A journey that should have been 20 minutes ended up taking 3 hours.

## Convenience

48% of respondents reported infrequent and unreliable services as a barrier to using the bus. Infrequent services disproportionately impact disabled people: we're more likely to be prevented from boarding the first bus that arrives (due to barriers e.g., priority space being taken) so a longer wait between buses impacts us more.

43% of respondents felt that the bus takes too long compared to other modes. 34% of respondents also report having no bus stop near to their home or destination. This not only increases the time and energy disabled people expend getting to the stop, but also increases exposure to barriers along the pavement that could further disrupt the journey. Similar problems are presented by interchanges, which 27% of participants reported as a barrier; every interchange is another opportunity for a driver to turn you away, for there to be no priority seating, for the bus to be overcrowded, or for the service to be delayed.

The biggest barrier to the buses locally is the lack of them. They've just announced they're cutting the last reliable route. The buses that do exist are infrequent and unreliable. It's the impact on my mental health rather than the bus being inaccessible that is the issue.

In my area the local buses that take me to my GP and shops run once an hour, but they never follow the timetable and can turn up 40 minutes late, there's no seat at the bus stop and I can't stand for that long. Recently the council stopped the bus service all together for a few weeks and I had to make a formal complaint to the council. On other occasions the bus has been too full for me to board and be able to sit down and I can't travel safely standing and holding the poles.

## Interactions

41% of respondents experienced negative attitudes and behaviour from bus drivers. People told us about times when the bus driver failed to abide by existing codes of practice, suggesting that while there are accessibility regulations and driver training in place, these are inadequate, forgotten or ignored.

35% of respondents experienced discriminatory behaviour from other passengers, ranging from laughing, tutting, and rude remarks, all the way to harassment and hate crime.

Both these elements may contribute to 22% of respondents having fears around their personal security while using the bus.

37% of respondents reported the risk of catching Covid-19 from other passengers as a barrier to travelling by bus. This is said to be exacerbated by overcrowding, with some people telling us they use the bus much less frequently since the mask mandate has been lifted.

My worse experience recently was when a bus pulled up with a buggy already on board. I went to the front of the bus to speak to the driver and to calmly remind him that wheelchairs have priority and to ask him to ask the person with the buggy to move. The driver became extremely angry and aggressive, and got out of his booth and stood up to yell down at me. He shouted in my face that I don't have any right, and that 'we are all equal' so I don't take priority. He then sped off. It was very frightening and made me cry, and damaged my confidence.

## Information

37% of respondents experienced a lack of real-time information while using buses last year, meaning live updates such as delays, cancellations, diversions, and vehicle faults (e.g., broken ramps) are not being clearly communicated. 21% of respondents said the information that was provided was not available in both audio and visual formats.

The driver had shouted out if anyone needed the next stop, which as I am profoundly Deaf, I didn't hear and as a result was not until a few stops later where I had no idea where I was that I realised something must have happened. The driver started shouting at me for not saying anything and left me at a bus stop where I had no idea how to get home. It made me feel angry, scared and excluded.

## Ramps

Despite almost all buses being certified as compliant with accessibility regulations<sup>xxxix</sup>, the fact that 28% of respondents experienced issues with ramps shows these certifications are insufficient. Participants reported issues including mechanical faults such as ramps getting jammed, and drivers deploying ramps incorrectly (for example, not ‘kneeling’ the bus).

My local bus route has one leaf ramps and is just about manageable in my electric chair which has anti tips, even then I get stuck because the ramp steepness forces my rear wheels (the drive wheels) off the ground, and there is no way I could use my manual chair as I would not be able to get up that steepness. As a result instead of a 25 min journey to my destination I have to take 50 mins going via two other bus routes with different style ramps to get to the same destination.

## Train

Several measures are in place to try and address barriers to rail travel in England. For example, the Government's Inclusive Transport Strategy (2018) contained a number of pledges, including to review the eligibility criteria for the Disabled Persons Railcard, and to work with the Rail Delivery Group to create an app for passengers to book assistance<sup>xl</sup>. The Access for All programme funds accessibility upgrades for stations, the allocation of which is decided through competitive bids. Accessibility of rail vehicles is mandated by legislation which sets out standards for features including door-widths, information displays, priority spaces and toilets – and all vehicles were meant to be compliant by January 2020.

As a condition of their operating licence, all licensed train and station operators are required to write and follow an Accessible Travel Policy (ATP). These policies must document how operators will provide an equitable service to disabled passengers across a range of areas including assistance, ticketing and staff availability. The ATP must detail how the operator will provide the two types of assistance:

1. pre-booked passenger assistance (arranged by the passenger up to 2 hours in advance) must always be provided “at any station during the hours that trains are scheduled to serve that station”;
2. Turn Up and Go (un-booked) must be provided “where reasonably practicable”.<sup>xli</sup>

The regulator, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), must approve the policies before they grant licences, and is also responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance.

Rail has dominated the transport policy landscape in recent years. The 2021 Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail set out the Government’s plans to create a new body, Great British Railways, to manage rail, with a statutory duty to improve accessibility. It also included plans to develop

and implement a national rail accessibility strategy, and carry out accessibility audits of all train stations<sup>xlii</sup>.

Despite these plans and pledges, the physical infrastructure of England's railways is wrought with barriers:

- Only 1 in 4 mainline train stations have step-free access (from street to platform only)<sup>xliii</sup>.
- Just 2% have level boarding (train floors level with platform)<sup>xliiv</sup>. There is no National standardised height for train platforms meaning rolling stock continues to be purchased with different floor heights.
- At 67% of stations, the platform(s) are too narrow for wheelchairs to turn<sup>xlv</sup>.
- Around 40% of rail stations have no tactile paving, a vital safety feature for blind and visually impaired people<sup>xlvi</sup>.
- Dozens of dispensations have been awarded to companies to allow trains to continue running despite not being compliant with accessibility regulations.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Due to the inaccessibility of rail infrastructure, many disabled people rely upon staff assistance to travel by train. Only 11% of stations are staffed at all times<sup>xlviii</sup>, with a further 45% staffed only part-time<sup>xlix</sup>. Operators can decide how to deploy staff, with few regulatory conditions.

The Rail Delivery Group collects data on the number and success rate of pre-booked Passenger Assistance requests. In the year ending March '23, just 81% of Passenger Assistance requests resulted in all assistance being received<sup>l</sup>. This means almost 1 in 5 assistance requests were unsuccessful. This figure also only applies to pre-booked assistance (which must be booked a minimum of 2 hours in advance of travel), and not 'Turn Up and Go', where passengers can request assistance immediately upon arriving at a station, on which there is very little data.

All of this amounts to a difficult experience using rail for many disabled people, and it's no wonder we make far fewer journeys by this mode than non-disabled people. The National Travel Survey 2021 found that people with a 'mobility difficulty' made on average 2 trips per year, as opposed to 14 trips per year completed for the average person with 'no mobility difficulty'<sup>li</sup>.

# Barriers to using rail

**Figure 9: Which of these barriers, if any, have you experienced to using trains in the past 12 months (tick all that apply)**

Barrier	Respondents
Expensive	65%
Overcrowding of trains and stations	49%
Issues with lifts: not working, too small, too few	44%
Lack of step-free access or level boarding	43%
Cannot easily get to and from stations (lack of accessible parking, expensive taxis, surrounding streetspace is inaccessible, etc.)	41%
Not enough priority seating, or conflicts as to who has priority	40%
Poor information about accessibility of stations	38%
Staffing levels: not enough staff available or no staff	38%
Rail replacement services (poorly signposted, stressful, etc.)	37%
Issues with booking or receiving assistance (Passenger Assist, Turn Up and Go)	37%
Lack of accessible facilities on board and in stations (toilets, rest stops, changing spaces etc.)	35%
Risk of catching COVID	31%
Infrequent or unreliable service	27%
Poor signage, signposting and wayfinding in stations	27%
Negative attitudes, antisocial behaviour, or hate crime from other passengers	25%
Staff attitudes or behaviour	25%
Sensory environment (lighting, brightness, noise levels, smells)	23%
Issues with booking or paying for tickets	22%
Lack of accurate real-time information on train times	18%

Audio/visual information: announcements are not communicated to me in a way I can access	17%
Personal security / I do not feel safe	17%
Lack of tactile paving on platforms	9%
Other	3%
None – this mode is accessible to me	3%

## Fares and ticketing

65% of respondents reported that they could not afford to use trains as and when they needed to, suggesting train travel is prohibitively expensive. This makes cost the most common barrier to train travel.

Infrastructure barriers can also drive up the price: people told us how their nearest station was inaccessible to them, requiring them to pay for a longer journey to get to a station that they can board from.

Station not being accessible, so having to travel to a different station and the additional cost of this.

22% of respondents said they face additional barriers when booking or paying for tickets. A lack of staff assistance was a key factor in this, with several respondents saying that they could not travel at all when the ticket office was closed. This could be because navigating which ticket to buy was too complex, or because alternative options such as ticket vending machines (TVMs) were inaccessible.

When it comes to purchasing tickets, 33% of respondents told us they use ticket offices, compared to 18% who told us they use TVMs. 14% respondents use cash to pay for tickets. Therefore, proposals to close ticket offices would likely entrench these barriers even further.

## Insufficient space

The second most reported issue was overcrowding of trains and stations, which affected 49% of respondents. Disabled people reported overcrowding prevents them from safely moving through the train or accessing toilets, inducing sensory overload and panic attacks, and putting mobility aids and assistance dogs at risk of harm. It can also increase the chance of contracting Covid-19, which was a barrier for 31% of respondents.

Crucially, overcrowding can limit the number of available seats. 40% of respondents said that a lack of priority seating, or conflicts as to who has priority, had been a barrier to using the train. People reported feeling forced into uncomfortable situations, either having to stand in pain for prolonged periods of time, or request that someone give up their seat, which is sometimes met with great hostility.

Respondents also wrote about problems with the wheelchair priority space; not only could there be too few on some services, but the available spaces could be too small for those with a larger chair or scooter, or cluttered with luggage.

When trains are crowded, and seating is unavailable I do not have the confidence to explain to those in priority seating that I have disabilities that are not obvious to others.

There was no disability seating on a train I took recently. Also no free seats in general, I had to stand by the doors for 40 minutes with my mobility aid. I was incredibly stressed and embarrassed. Resulted in me having so much pain in my body that I'm still flaring from now.

## Step-free access

Issues with step free access on the rail network were extremely common, with 43% of respondents saying this had been a barrier for them.

At the limited number of stations that do have step-free access, lifts can frequently be taken out of service at short notice. 44% of respondents experienced issues with lifts on recent journeys, including outages, lifts being too small for larger wheelchairs or mobility scooters, and too few lifts to meet demand.

While a quarter of stations are step-free from street to platform, only 2% of stations have level boarding<sup>lii</sup>. Wheelchair and mobility scooter users reported being prevented from travelling spontaneously as a result, and only travelling from stations that have staff to deploy a manual boarding ramp within staffed hours.

To use the train, I have to travel past my station by a number of stops, to a station with a lift, cross the platform & come back to avoid stairs at my home station. This can extend any journey time by over an hour. The journey from my nearest town would be 12 minutes without this diversion. If I need to return late, the time I can leave is reduced to accommodate the extra time. Additionally, the lifts are not always working, & this can be hard to find out in advance.

## Getting to and from the station

For many disabled people, the barriers to train travel begin long before boarding, with 41% of respondents saying they cannot easily get to and from the station at either end of the journey. This can be because the station is too far away, or because there is poor connectivity with other modes.

Physical infrastructure around the station can exacerbate these barriers. People reported that a lack of accessible parking prevented them from driving to the station, or meant they had to walk a significant distance from the car, leading to pain and fatigue. Sometimes this meant respondents had little choice but to hire a taxi to get to the station instead, adding to the already prohibitive cost of train travel.

If the streetspace surrounding a station is inaccessible, such as the nearest dropped kerb being obstructed, respondents said this could prevent them from travelling at all.

The closest train station is a long way away and I haven't been able to get to it. I have not been able to make journeys because of that, and I have not been able to visit my family or friends. It feels very sad not to have seen my family in a long time.

## Information

38% of respondents said that poor information about the accessibility of stations had been a barrier to train travel. People reported having to abandon trips halfway through after running into unexpected access barriers, or being reluctant to use the rail at all without the information they need.

Even when information was available in advance, 27% of people said that poor signage within stations prevented them from finding the correct platforms, lifts, and facilities. Often, this was made worse by a lack of visible staff to ask for directions.

Respondents also faced barriers to accessing live information, with 18% saying there was a lack of accurate, real-time updates, and 17% saying that updates were not communicated in accessible formats. This resulted in people missing stops, and being unaware of platform changes, delays, and other vital updates.

Only 37% of respondents felt well informed during a journey (for example in relation to announcements about delays, personal security, and next stops), and a significant 10% said they didn't feel informed at all.

My partner and I both got on a train. We both use mobility aids and both hard of hearing. The train was evacuated but we did not hear the announcement. Nobody came with a ramp to get us off. So we were

stuck on the train, with everyone else getting off. We didn't know why they were.

## Staffing and assistance

38% of respondents said that low staffing levels and issues with booking and receiving assistance had been a recent barrier to train travel.

People told us that their prebooked assistance had been late, delivered incorrectly, or had not shown up at all. These were rarely one-off instances; in fact, regular assistance failures are part and parcel of disabled people's experiences travelling by rail<sup>iiii</sup>.

11% of respondents told us they usually plan their journeys because assistance must be arranged in advance, due to the inadequacies of Turn Up And Go. However, issues with assistance occurred even when booked in advance.

If I'm travelling by train, then I need to book assistance. I'm able to rely on Turn Up And Go on the local train services, but I don't trust passenger assistance at King's Cross to cope – it's pretty hit and miss even with a booking.

Many reported not being able to find station staff to obtain assistance, regardless of whether they had booked in advance or not. We were told about situations where participants were forced to expend time and energy searching around the station, or shouting for help.

My medical condition means I need to use toilets often, so I have to plan my route as the accessible toilets at my local stations are always locked and I have problems finding staff to open them.

This is not only extremely disruptive, causing undue stress and making people miss their trains, but can also be dangerous. Participants wrote about getting stranded on the train or the platform for long periods of time with no assistance, and without access to toilets or medications. In

these situations, some people had to resort to asking members of the public for help, or even tweeting at train companies.

In addition to issues with the assistance itself, assistance services are poorly promoted. 51% of respondents had never heard of the Passenger Assistance mobile app (launched in 2021). 24% respondents had not heard of the Passenger Assistance service in general, and 61% had not heard of Turn Up And Go.

While participants often spoke highly of the staff they interacted with, generally finding them helpful and friendly, the negative attitudes and behaviour of some staff created barriers for 25% of respondents. This ranged from being “treated like a nuisance and a burden” for requiring assistance, to staff using demeaning or offensive language towards them.

The staff forgot I needed assistance and was left on the platform for about an hour after my train departure time. I had to call passenger assist for them to ring the station. Staff then booked me a taxi, another hour. But said I should have come to the reception (I'm blind they left me on the platform). Then said it was ok though because now I can complain and I'll get a full refund and the taxi will take me to the house so I don't have to walk from the station. (This was during a change). I tried to complain but couldn't, as the process was so inaccessible. I got home 3 hours after when I should have. I no longer do journeys that have changes, so I only travel direct and pay family petrol money to pick me up. They usually have to drive a 2 hour or 3 hour round trip. And I know I am lucky that I have family that will do this.

## Unreliability

Though everyone is affected by disruptions, these have a more pronounced impact on disabled people. 37% of respondents said that rail replacement services had affected their ability to travel by train, and could be stressful, poorly signposted, too far away, and lacking step-free access.

Infrequent or unreliable services affected a further 27% of respondents. When rail services change last minute, disabled people can be hit with a whole new set of access barriers, with no time or information on how to navigate them.

Because disabled people have significantly fewer transport options to fall back on in the event of a disruption, respondents reported being either stranded or forced to book expensive taxis to complete their journey.

On return journey (at unmanned station with no step-free access to other platform, including toilet and sheltered area) there were issues on the line that lead to multiple trains being cancelled and endlessly delayed. After being on the platform for 2 hours I tried to use the help point and get a taxi arranged - I needed desperately to empty my catheter bag but had no access to a toilet - and it seemed that the trains weren't going to restart any time soon. [...] Abled passengers were getting trains in the other direction to a larger station that had trains and then getting a direct train past me. I did not have this option and staff didn't seem to understand this. This wasn't helped by the trains not being cancelled until they had had an ever-extending delay of an hour - so help point were like "there's a train in 20 minutes" when that train was being constantly delayed further.

## Facilities and environment

35% of respondents reported a lack of accessible facilities, both in the station and on the train. This includes toilets, rest spaces, and changing facilities. Several people also said that even when there were accessible facilities on board, they could be out of order or in inaccessible locations.

As well as the physical accessibility of facilities, the sensory environment can also create barriers. Harsh lighting, strong smells, and noise levels can all contribute to discomfort and sensory overload, with 23% of respondents saying these environmental factors had affected



them on recent journeys. Dim lighting can also be problematic for people with visual impairments, who often require higher contrast to navigate the station.

A further barrier for blind and visually impaired people is the lack of tactile paving on platform edges. 26% of respondents had encountered platforms with either partial or no tactile paving, with each of these encounters posing the risk of serious injury or death. Tactile paving is missing from roughly 40% of stations<sup>liv</sup>, meaning that visually impaired people are routinely forced to use dangerous infrastructure, or are prevented from travelling by rail at all.

Often the disabled toilets are not working on trains, this makes using the train impossible

Trains are by far the worst mode of transport for food smells and bright lighting, particularly as I use them for longer journeys.

## Safety and security

Personal security was also an issue for disabled people travelling by rail, with 17% reporting concerns for their safety as a barrier. Some safety issues emerged from inaccessible infrastructure, such as having mobility aids caught in the gap between the train and the platform, being injured in crowds, or tipping backwards on steep boarding ramps.

Safety concerns also arose from interactions with staff and other passengers, ranging from rudeness and prejudice towards disabled people, all the way to hate crime. 25% of respondents had encountered negative attitudes and behaviour from other passengers.

They even attempt to use incorrect ramps that are not safely attached to the train, and try to bully me into using them [...] I am concerned at what could have happened to me if I didn't resist some of the attempts to make me use unsafe equipment. I feel that I always have to look out for my own safety when travelling by train, because I can't assume I will be kept safe.

I have had to get off a train a stop early because a man was being creepy. It was late at night, there were no staff in the train and the stop I planned to get off at was unmanned at that time, as well as poorly lit. This meant I had a long walk in the dark (3 miles) to get home, as I had to get off a stop early to avoid being alone with him.

# Light rail

Light rail and trams differ from “heavy” or mainline rail in that they have slightly different regulatory and safety requirements, are generally administered at a local level instead of nationally, and typically utilise light-weight vehicles and tracks. In England, the following systems are considered to fall into this category:

- London Underground
- Docklands Light Railway
- London Trams
- Nottingham Express Transit
- West Midlands Metro
- Sheffield Supertram
- Tyne and Wear Metro
- Manchester Metrolink
- Blackpool Tramway

Throughout this section we’ll refer to all of these as ‘light rail’.

Accessibility requirements for light rail vehicles are covered by the The Rail Vehicle Accessibility (Non-Interoperable Rail System) Regulations 2010<sup>lv</sup> which mandates the specifications of features such as boarding devices, handrails, toilets, wheelchair spaces, and doorways. As is the case for heavy rail, the Department for Transport can grant exemption orders to light rail operators authorising the use of vehicles on a network even if they do not comply with the regulations. Many such exemptions are in place, covering light rail systems including Docklands Light Railway, Blackpool Tramway and London Underground, for specifications such as dimensions of priority space, provision of boarding devices, and audio/visual announcements<sup>lvi</sup>.

Light rail is fast, high-frequency and high-capacity, and often considered the vital arteries of an urban area. However, in some cities many disabled people are locked out of benefitting from these features,

due to barriers such as overcrowding and lack of step-free access. For example:

- Only 92 out of 272 London Underground stations have step-free access<sup>lvii</sup>, although at around half of these there is no level boarding and so a manual boarding ramp is required.
- The Docklands Light Railway uses driverless trains and stations are generally unstaffed, meaning those requiring assistance (such as sight-guiding for visually impaired people) may not be able to use it.
- According to information available on their websites, all stations and vehicles on Nottingham Express Transit, Tyne and Wear Metro, West Midlands Metro, Sheffield Supertram, Manchester Metrolink, and Blackpool Tramway are wheelchair accessible. However, our research has found that disabled people do not consider or experience all stations to be accessible.

According to Government statistics, during 2012 to 2019, disabled people took about half as many journeys by light rail than non-disabled people (5 journeys per year vs 11.4 journeys per year)<sup>lviii</sup>. This differs little between London and systems across the rest of England.

# Barriers to light rail

**Figure 10: Which of these barriers, if any, have you experienced to using light rail in the past 12 months (tick all that apply)**

Barrier	Respondents
Overcrowded trains/stations/platforms	59%
Lack of step-free access and level boarding	51%
Issues with lifts (not working, too small, too few)	47%
Lack of staff assistance / issues with arranging or receiving assistance	37%
Poor information about accessibility of stations/stops	36%
Lack of toilets	35%
Walking distances within stations	34%
Risk of catching COVID	31%
Lack of rest places (benches, alcoves)	28%
Negative attitudes, antisocial behaviour, or hate crime from other passengers	28%
Personal security / I do not feel safe	27%
Poor signage, signposting and wayfinding	26%
Sensory environment (lighting, brightness, noise levels, smells)	23%
Lack of escalators	22%
Staff attitudes and behaviour	19%
Audio/visual information: announcements are not communicated to me in a way I can access	16%
Expensive	14%
Issues with purchasing tickets	14%
I cannot take my mobility aid or medical equipment with me	12%
Infrequent or unreliable service	11%
Lack of tactile paving	5%
Other	2%
None – this mode is accessible to me	7%

## Overcrowding

Overcrowding was the most frequently reported barrier for disabled people travelling by light rail and was experienced by 59% of respondents. This is a slightly higher percentage than those who reported overcrowding on trains (50% of respondents).

Crowding can make it either unsafe or impossible for disabled people to board a service, meaning that respondents had to spend more time waiting on the platform, or abandon their journey. People told us that they only travel off peak, or simply avoid light rail for fear of getting caught in a crush.

Others reported contending with injury, sensory overload, or panic attacks due to overcrowding. An increased risk of Covid-19 in crowds was reported as a barrier to using light rail for 31% of respondents. Crowded services also mean fewer available seats, putting disabled people in positions of conflict with other passengers.

The Manchester Metrolink’s platform and staircase are often overcrowded. One time, the staircase was overcrowded and I could not hold a handrail going down the stairs (something I always do). I fell badly and fell down quite a few stairs. I was not majorly injured, other than scratches and bruises. However, this could have been avoided if there were fewer people.

I now feel almost unable to use the Victoria line. It is so overwhelming, so hot, so busy, inundated with a constant flood of people even every 2 minutes another train but still rammed, but they are making it busier and busier all the time. I can't bear it. It is fast and convenient but it is so intense and distressing I almost can't do it anymore. It was not so busy off-peak 10 years ago.

## Step free access

51% said that a lack of step-free access and level boarding had been a barrier to travel. This had led people to take longer and more convoluted

routes, making journeys more time-consuming, stressful, and expensive. A lack of level boarding also required people to rely on manual boarding ramps provided by staff, putting further limitations on independent travel.

Where level boarding is available, respondents reported crucial design flaws, such as confusing signposting, and a remaining gap between the train and the platform that makes it inaccessible for some.

47% reported problems with lifts, including them being frequently out of service, too small, poorly signposted, or long distances apart. Sudden suspensions in lift services put disabled people at serious risk of being stranded in stations, especially on underground metros with no phone signal or Wi-Fi.

The walking distances within stations was also a barrier for 34% of respondents. The London Underground came up frequently in these answers, with the extended walking times causing pain and fatigue, especially for those with mobility or energy limiting impairments.

This can be exacerbated by a lack of escalators: stairs are not just a barrier for wheelchair and mobility scooter users, and while some disabled people may be able to manage a few steps, a whole flight might be prohibitive. Escalators are therefore a crucial accessibility feature for metro services, but one that 22% of respondents found to be lacking.

I was getting the Tube to a work meeting. Despite (as I always do) checking TfL Go app before I set off to confirm the lifts were all working along my route, when I arrived at Green Park station the lift was out of service. I was trapped, underground, with no way to exit the station, and - as I was travelling alone - no way of finding help. Obviously underground my phone didn't have signal so I couldn't call or message anyone. I was frantically wheeling up and down the platforms trying to find a member of staff, but there was no one around and I couldn't find a help point. Finally I managed to find someone. They called someone else to try and fix the lift. It became

apparent that the lift could not be fixed for a while, so I had to get back on the Tube to the nearest step-free station which was all the way in Earl's Court. It was a nightmare and I was 2 hours late for my meeting, and exhausted.

Also, a lot of tram stations in Manchester - particularly on the Bury line - do not have adequate step-free access and no level crossings, forcing people who need step free access to travel well out of their way - sometimes on unsafe routes, either because gangs hang out in these spaces or they're obscured from public view - to get to the station.

## Assistance and staff

37% of respondents said that they have experienced problems with assistance.

Frequently, respondents said they were unable to find station staff to ask for assistance, and even when staff were available and visible, the assistance could be poorly coordinated or inappropriate. Combined with other barriers, searching for and waiting for assistance made light rail journeys excessively time consuming.

Respondents also wrote that staff could sometimes be unaware of how to provide the right assistance or use alternative forms of communication, leaving disabled passengers having to advocate for themselves or defer to other passengers for support. 19% said that they encountered negative attitudes and behaviour from staff, sometimes being rude and dismissive, or making them feel like a nuisance for requesting assistance.

Trying to use the Bakerloo line at Paddington - I didn't know who to contact and where they were when I wanted assistance. The gate line staff were Elizabeth line staff - they rang the right team up for me but it took about 30 minutes for assistance to be coordinated. One of the members of staff didn't know that the station was accessible via ramp.

## Information

36% of respondents said it is difficult to find accurate and relevant information about the accessibility of stops or stations (including escalators, rest-stops, level boarding points). Lift outages were often recorded incorrectly, leaving respondents stranded mid-journey. This is compounded by a lack of information on alternative routes when there are sudden changes to the timetable, or the accessibility of a given station/stop.

A lack of audio-visual announcements was a barrier for 16% of respondents, causing them to miss crucial live updates. Unexpected changes to the service were particularly problematic for Deaf and hard of hearing passengers, as these tend to be relayed exclusively over audio announcement.

26% also said that the wayfinding within stations was either confusing or inaccessible. When there are no visible staff to ask for help, and where there are long distances between platforms, disabled people reported having to trek around the station searching for where they need to go.

I've recently begun travelling on the Tube with my assistance dog who cannot go on escalators. This has made it significantly more difficult to travel on the Tube. Signage is often poor and I've spent long times going in circles trying to find stairs or lifts. At some stations there are stairs part of the way up, with the rest escalators and multiple lifts and navigating platforms to get to other lifts is really problematic. It's also really difficult to find accurate information about whether stations are escalator free. I've often not been able to find staff on the underground to help me find where to go. It has decreased my confidence when travelling by tube and made it significantly more stressful. I have to allow a lot more time when travelling and it has made me late for work events in the past despite allowing extra travel time.

## Accessible facilities and environment

35% of disabled people said that a lack of accessible toilets on board and in stations was a barrier for them.

28% also reported insufficient seating and rest spaces, and a further 23% said that features of the sensory environment such as lighting, noise levels, and smells created barriers. Sensory overload was a common experience, and a lack of quiet respite areas was more likely to

impact those who are neurodivergent or who have mental health conditions.

Very noisy very stressful when you depend on your hearing only  
Some stairs are not marked on the steps with yellow paint.

## Personal safety

Concerns around safety and personal security presented barriers for 27% of respondents. Some wrote about the ways inaccessible infrastructure put them in danger (e.g., getting injured in crowds, being stranded when step-free access was suspended), while some were made to feel unsafe by other passengers.

28% of respondents experienced negative attitudes and behaviour from other passengers. This ranged from being rude or mocking, all the way through to assault and hate crime. A few people also said they were not confident anything would be done if they reported it, or said they have reported an incident and seen little result. A lack of visible staff increased these concerns around safety for some respondents.

On Manchester trams some passengers can be very rude - recently, I was going to take a seat when a young man rushed into it while tripping over my cane, then spent the whole journey talking with his friends about me and the general consensus among them was 'she's blind anyway, it doesn't matter'. Travelling alone, I don't know how to react and do worry about my safety in these situations, and when it is crowded.

I almost never use the metro link. I find other passengers can be intimidating, as I am neurodivergent; especially if they are being anti-social. It is very common for people to smoke weed on the metrolink, which smells horrible and makes me anxious and nauseous.

## Ticketing

14% of disabled people faced financial barriers to travelling by light rail. As well as the fare itself, disabled people reported additional costs

created by other access barriers on the network, such as taking the bus to a staffed station instead of the one closest, taking a taxi when step-free access is suspended, or paying for a PA's ticket as well as your own.

An additional 14% faced other barriers to purchasing tickets. People told us that in the absence of staff or ticket offices, they were forced to use TVMs, which were often inaccessible. Others said that the fare system was too confusing, and often found themselves unsure of which ticket they needed or how to go about purchasing it.

If I can't get a ticket or have one already then unless there are staff around to help, which often there is not, I find it difficult to get a ticket/top up oyster etc

I had hoped to just jump on the metro at Birmingham New Street. The tram was stationary so didn't know which way it was going to head towards. I had no clue how to purchase a ticket and didn't want to get on without a ticket.

## Other barriers

12% of respondents said that not being able to take their mobility aid or medical equipment with them was a barrier, particularly an issue for those who use mobility scooters which are permitted on some but not all light rail systems. For some, the limited step-free access available on light rail services (particularly in London) forced them to leave their mobility aid at home in order to make their journey, often to the detriment of their health and comfort. For those who use their mobility aid full time, this puts whole swathes of the metro out of bounds.

11% said that infrequent or unreliable services was a barrier, and 5% experienced a lack of tactile paving.

# Private transport

## Cars and vans

Car travel is a lifeline for many disabled people. Government statistics show that, like non-disabled people, disabled adults made almost two-thirds of all trips by car in 2021<sup>lx</sup>. However, disabled adults make a higher proportion of journeys as car passengers than non-disabled adults (19% compared with 12%), and we make slightly fewer trips as drivers (42% compared with 48%).

However, 28% of disabled adults live in households which don't have access to a car, compared with 15% of non-disabled adults<sup>lx</sup>. Additionally, in 2021 only 61% of disabled adults had a full driving license, compared with 80% of non-disabled adults<sup>lxi</sup>.

Several concessionary schemes exist to mitigate the financial impact of using a car. For example, drivers who receive some disability related benefits can claim road tax exemption.<sup>lxii</sup> The Blue Badge scheme, administered by local authorities, issues cards to disabled people allowing us to park closer near to shops and services. In August 2019, Blue Badge eligibility criteria widened to include more people with non-visible impairments. In 2019/20, 2.15 million people were automatically eligible for a blue badge, yet only 46% of those people held a badge<sup>lxiii</sup>.

Provision of designated accessible parking spaces varies across the country. Manual for Streets recommends that 5% of parking spaces in residential areas be allocated for blue badge holders<sup>lxiv</sup>. Local Authorities can create either statutory spaces, the use of which can be enforced, or advisory spaces which cannot. The former are used sparingly due to costs of enforcement<sup>lxv</sup>.

## Barriers

Figure 11: Which of these barriers, if any, have you experienced to using the car or van in the past 12 months (tick all that apply)

Barrier	Respondents
Lack of driver (I don't/can't drive and it is difficult to find a driver)	43%
Cost	40%
Number of car parking spaces for disabled people	38%
Traffic	36%
Distance between car parking and where you need to go	32%
State of roads (potholes etc)	27%
Traffic reduction measures (i.e congestion zones, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, one-way systems, bus priority)	23%
Vehicle design – I can't find a vehicle that suits my needs OR I have difficulty getting into and out of the vehicle easily/independently	17%
Lack of facilities at motorway services (i.e accessible toilets)	11%
Fuel refilling stations/ EV charging points are inaccessible to me / I can't use them	8%
Access to driving lessons and assessments for adaptive vehicles	7%
Difficulty navigating and reading signs	7%
Other	2%
None – this mode is accessible to me	11%

### Access to a driver and vehicle

Difficulty finding a driver was the most common barrier, with 43% of people saying they could not or did not drive, and were often unable to find someone who could. Around half of respondents said that they exclusively or primarily used the car as a passenger, with only 36%

saying they mainly drove themselves. These findings suggest that, despite relying on the car due to access barriers on public transport, many disabled people are regularly left without the necessary support to use it.

As well as finding a driver, many disabled people face barriers to finding a suitable vehicle. 17% of respondents said that they could not access a vehicle that met their needs, or that they struggled to get in and out of their car independently. For some participants, the cost of an appropriate or adapted vehicle was too high, or there didn't seem to be a suitable design at all. An additional 7% reported a lack of instructors and assessments for those using adapted vehicles.

As I'm unlikely to be eligible for a Motability vehicle, I would have to fund an adapted car myself, and that's currently not affordable for me. This means I continue to be reliant on other people to give me lifts, or expensive taxis.

## Financial barriers

40% of respondents faced financial barriers to car travel, encompassing both our higher living costs and the costs of a vehicle, tax, and fuel. The vehicle adaptations used by 37% of those surveyed can add thousands to the already mounting costs.

There is a tax exemption in place for vehicles used by disabled people to help mitigate these barriers. However, 12% were unaware of whether they had a disabled tax class vehicle or not, suggesting that there is either not enough awareness of this exemption, or that there are other barriers to accessing it.

The Motability Scheme also seeks to mitigate financial barriers to driving by allowing disabled people who receive the higher mobility component of PIP or DLA to lease a suitable vehicle using this allowance. However, there are significant barriers to accessing the Motability scheme and the benefits required to qualify for it<sup>lxvi</sup>. This once

again leaves many disabled people to pay out of pocket for vital (and expensive) adaptations.

## Parking

A lack of spaces for disabled people to park is a significant barrier to driving and was the third most frequently reported issue for this mode (38%).

In the absence of an accessible space, disabled people reported having to park a long way from our destinations, increasing journey time and walking distance. This distance was a barrier for 32% of respondents. This is a particularly concerning issue given how many participants use the car precisely because it allows us to make door-to-door journeys and reduces the walking distance.

People with larger, adapted vehicles such as wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs), also told us about issues with finding a space big enough, especially in the absence of enough Blue Badge parking bays.

## Traffic

For disabled people, traffic and the policies around it can be extremely divisive issues. While 36% said that traffic is a barrier for them, traffic reduction measures like Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods, road user charging policies such as congestion zones, and one-way systems were also barriers for 23% of respondents.

This suggests that while measures must be taken to reduce traffic, that these measures must also account for the access needs of disabled people, or they can end up replicating the very problems they seek to address, as well as creating new ones.

This reflects findings from our previous research into Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, which demonstrated the divided opinion and diversity of experience among disabled people around car reduction measures<sup>lxvii</sup>.



Respondents reported a range of examples of how traffic impacted them, including that extended time sitting down can cause pain, inflammation, and exhaustion, while increasing exposure to air pollution for both those inside and outside of the vehicle. It can also prevent people from attending to other vital needs, including going to the toilet and taking medication.

People also told us about examples of traffic reduction initiatives that have had a negative impact, saying that the need to navigate around Low Traffic Neighbourhoods has increased their journey times, caused them to sit in traffic for longer, and forced them to make unexpected diversions. Participants also reported that measures like speed bumps can cause serious pain, especially for those with spinal injuries.

When driving a normal journey or long journey, when I arrive at traffic on the motorway, I have no way of knowing about traffic in advance as its broadcasted in emergency news wave on the radio & the fact I can't hear it & don't know how to access it, I get bit stressful when not knowing what's going on, so I accept it when I'm stuck in traffic but it is a nuisance if I end up needing the toilet & the traffic is not moving.

As I have spinal issues, traffic calming measures such as sleeping policemen and rumble-strips are at best uncomfortable, at worst acutely painful. This is often worse in car parks due to measures which would not be acceptable on the road. I hit one yesterday which literally took my breath away, the rise and fall was so sharp.

## Other infrastructure barriers

27% of respondents said that potholes, road works, and badly maintained surfaces made traveling by car inaccessible. As well as forcing people to take unexpected diversions and increasing journey time, irregular surfaces can cause serious pain for some.

Many essential facilities also exclude disabled people, with 11% saying that service stations lacked accessible facilities such as toilets, and 12% of disabled drivers saying that fuelling and EV charging points were inaccessible to them.

# Taxis and PHVs

Given the extensive barriers to public transport and active travel, as well as the large proportion of disabled people who cannot drive or have no household access to a vehicle, Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (PHVs) fill a vital gap in disabled people's mobility options. This is reflected in Government statistics: disabled people with "mobility difficulties" make more than double the number of trips per year than non-disabled people<sup>lxviii</sup>. Despite the essential role taxis play, access barriers remain.

Requirements on licensing authorities for taxis are limited to requiring them to maintain lists of which vehicles are wheelchair accessible. There is no requirement at a national for a percentage of a fleet to be accessible.

As of July 2023 13% of all licensed vehicles across England were wheelchair accessible, consisting of 55% of taxis and just 2% of PHVs<sup>lxix</sup>. The percentage of wheelchair accessible taxis nationally has fallen to 55% from 58% in 2016-17<sup>lxx</sup>. While all taxis in London are wheelchair accessible, in the rest of England outside of London this falls to 39%.

In summer 2022 the 'Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles (Disabled Persons)' Act was passed. This closed a loophole and expanded certain provisions in the Equality Act to apply to all disabled people where previously they only applied to those with particular impairments or in specific circumstances. Now, non-exempt drivers must accept the carriage of any disabled person who could reasonably travel in their vehicle, provide reasonable mobility assistance to enable a passenger to get into and out of the vehicle with their mobility aids, and not make or propose additional charges for doing so.

# Barriers

**Figure 12: Which of these barriers, if any, have you experienced to using taxis/PHVs in the past 12 months (tick all that apply)**

Barrier	Respondents
Expensive	64%
Not enough Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs) available	34%
Negative attitudes/behaviour from driver	29%
The driver provides unsatisfactory assistance	27%
I have experienced access refusals	26%
When booking, the operator does not listen/understand my access request	26%
Lack of available/accessible kerbside pickup	24%
I get charged extra for being disabled or having a mobility aid	15%
The booking system is not accessible to me	15%
Other	6%
Issues with the design of the vehicle	3%
None – this mode is accessible to me	7%

## Cost

Cost was the most common barrier to using taxis and PHVs by some margin, with 64% of respondents saying they could not afford to use taxis as much as they want or need. While taxis are often one of the most physically accessible modes for many disabled people, this suggests they are one of the least financially accessible. Our research shows disabled people are being forced to rely on a mode of travel that we cannot afford to use.

I tend to resort to taxis when unable to walk but when no buses are available, although this is an expensive option. Sometimes if a taxi is my only transport option, I simply won't go because I can't afford it.

## Lack of suitable vehicles

The second most common barrier to taxis was the limited availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs), which affected 34% of respondents. People told us this created a constant sense of anxiety and uncertainty when making taxi journeys; people couldn't be sure how long the wait would be until a WAV became available, or whether there would be any availability at all.

In some cases this has led to people being forced to use non-WAVs to make a journey to the detriment of their health, while others had to abandon their journey.

We have only one taxi company in Norwich that has wheelchair accessible vehicles. These are used for school run and day centre contracts so actually booking one is almost impossible because they only have 2 wavs. The vehicles are not available at times I need them often don't work beyond 5pm and don't want to work at weekends.

## Problems with drivers

Negative experiences with driver behaviour were very common and were reported by 29% of respondents. This ranged from unsolicited remarks and uncomfortable questions to outright hostility, including throwing or breaking mobility aids.

Despite it being illegal, 26% of respondents had experienced an access refusal (where drivers either refuse to pick up a disabled person, or drive off upon seeing them).

Even when drivers did agree to carry some respondents, they could give inadequate or sometimes dangerous assistance. This includes not safely deploying a ramp, failing to fix a wheelchair user in place properly, or demanding a guide dog be stowed in the boot.

15% reported that they have been charged extra for being disabled. Some told of drivers who added on a fee or left the meter running for

the time it takes to load a mobility aid, or for the additional time a disabled passenger needed to get into the vehicle. Both of which are illegal.

I tried to get into a pre-booked taxi with my guide dog but the driver refused to carry her. He was rude and argumentative and it left me feeling shaken and stranded a long way from other modes of transport.

## Booking

As well as barriers during the journey, disabled people frequently face barriers to booking a taxi in the first place. 26% of respondents said that their access requests have been misunderstood or ignored by call handlers when trying to book a taxi. People told us that this meant they either couldn't get a taxi at all, or that an inaccessible vehicle showed up. A further 15% said that the booking systems themselves are often inaccessible. When there are limited operating companies in a given area, it is even more important that they provide a range of booking formats. We also found that out of all the modes of transport covered in this survey, participants rated taxis as being the most difficult mode to find information on, with 19% of our respondents saying this was extremely difficult.

Taxi turned up with broken ramp despite the booking having been specifically for a wheelchair user. I was unable to get to my appointment on time and I had to re-book. This meant that I waited an extra 5 months for urgent medical treatment. It made me feel angry and upset.

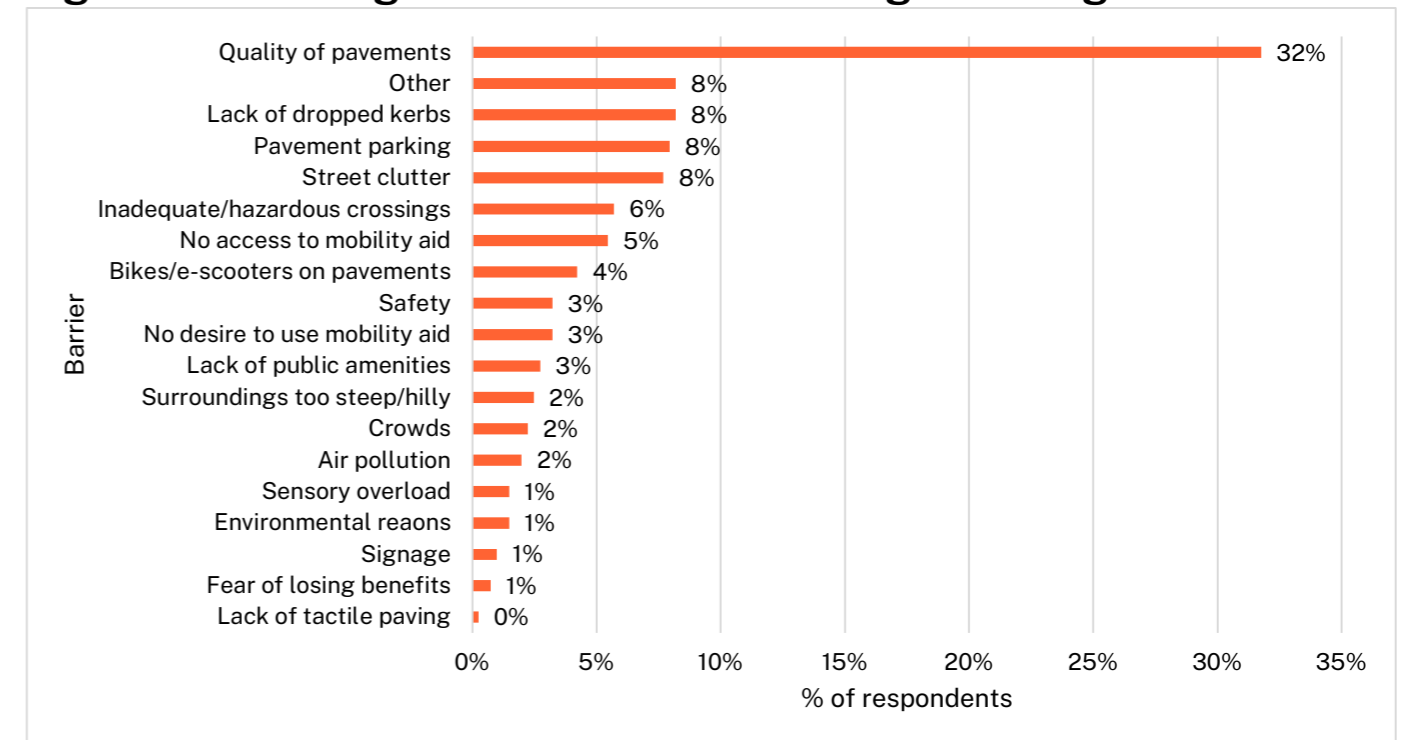
## Pick-up/drop-off points

24% of respondents said that a lack of a suitable kerbside pickup or drop off location was a barrier to taxi travel. This could be because of litter or other obstructions on the kerb, or because there are cycle lanes along the wayside that make crossing to the vehicle unsafe.

# Most significant barriers

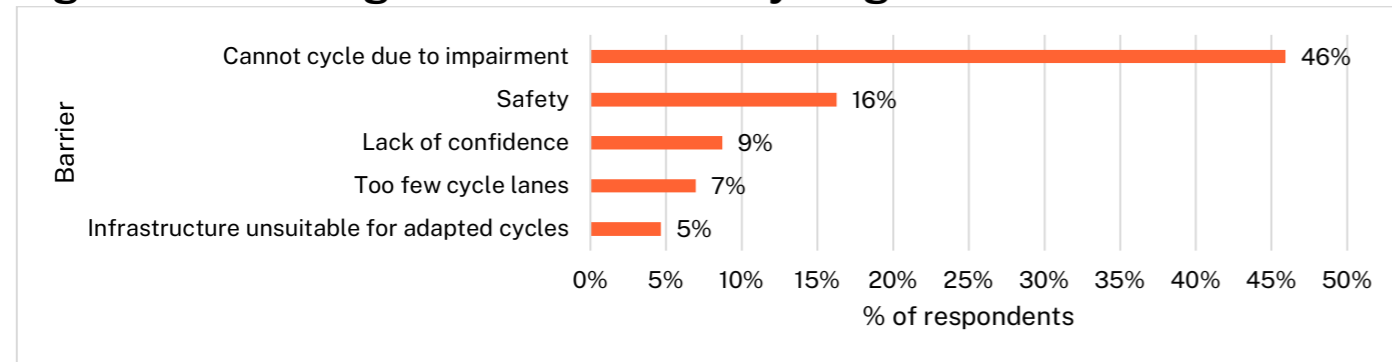
We asked respondents to consider which of the barriers they had faced on recent journeys was the most significant impediment to each mode, and to choose the one which they felt was the most disabling.

**Figure 13: Most significant barrier to walking/wheeling**



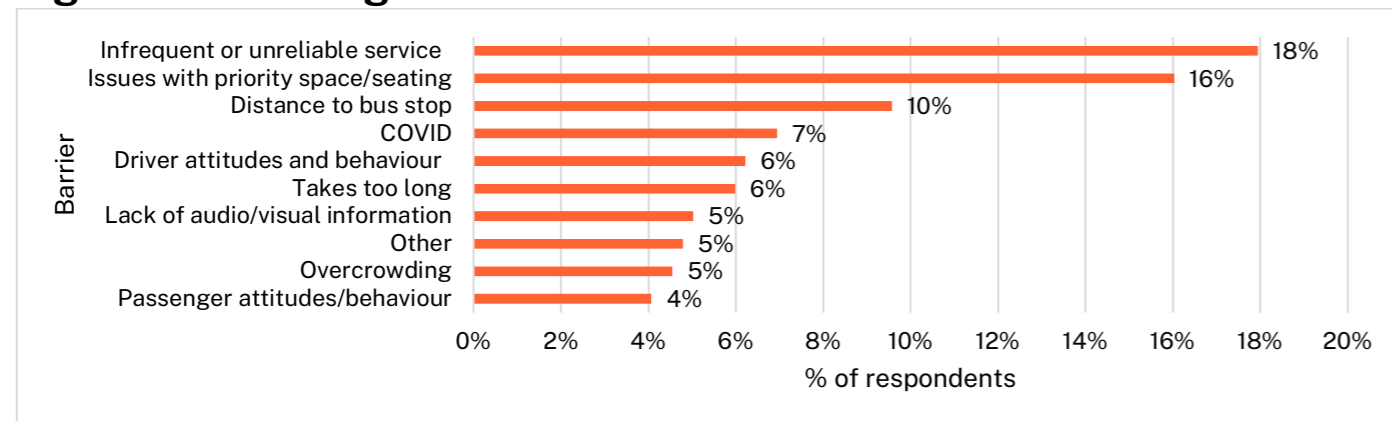
For walking and wheeling, the most common answer by far was poor pavement surfaces, with 32% selecting this as the most significant barrier. There was little variation across impairment groups.

**Figure 14: Most significant barrier to cycling**



Respondents overwhelmingly reported their impairment or health condition as the single most significant barrier to cycling, with 46% of respondents saying this was most impactful. This was far higher than the second highest option (lack of road safety/danger of collisions) which was selected by 16%.

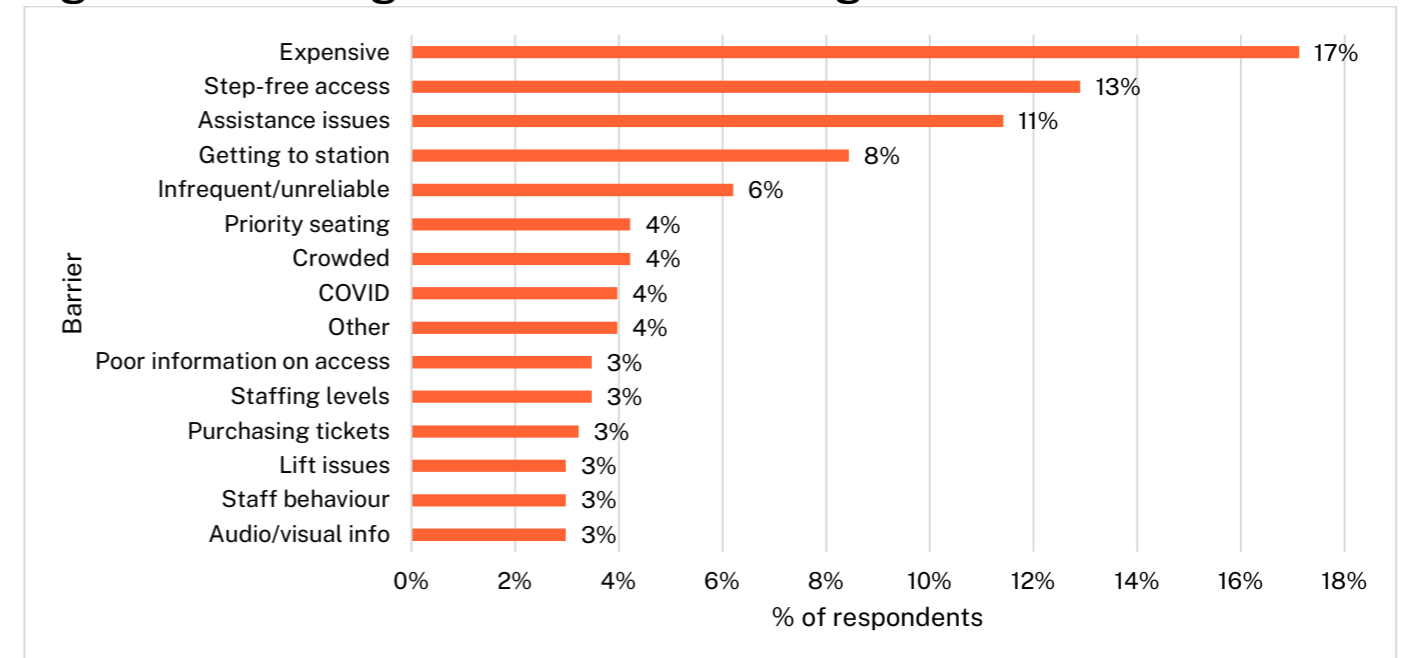
**Figure 15: Most significant barrier to buses**



Participants cited infrequent or unreliable service as being the most significant barrier to bus travel (18%), which was closely followed by issues with priority space (16%).

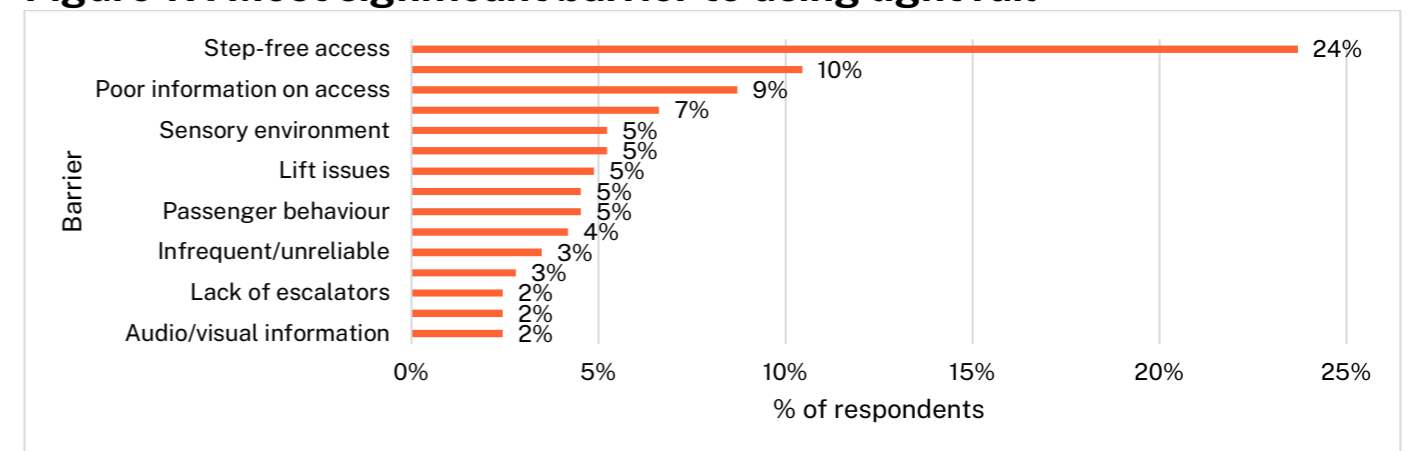
However, this did vary significantly between impairment types, more so than for other modes. For example, 22% of participants with chronic illness chose conflicts around the priority space as the most significant barrier they experience. Participants with learning disability were more likely to choose crowdedness (15%) and antisocial behaviour (10%), while blind and visually impaired people were far more likely to consider lack of audio information as the most significant barrier (20%, compared with 2% for those without visual impairment).

**Figure 16: Most significant barrier to using trains**



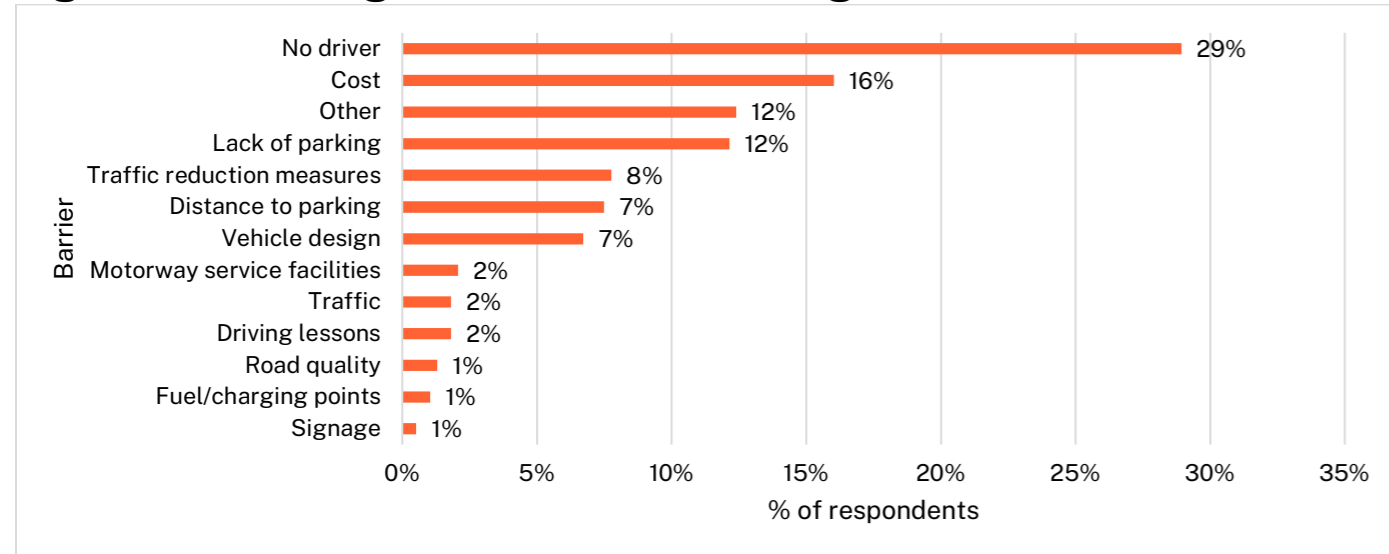
Respondents rated the cost of train travel as being the most significant barrier. This was selected by 17% of respondents, and was closely followed by a lack of step-free access and level boarding (13%), then issues with booking and receiving assistance (11%).

**Figure 17: Most significant barrier to using light rail**



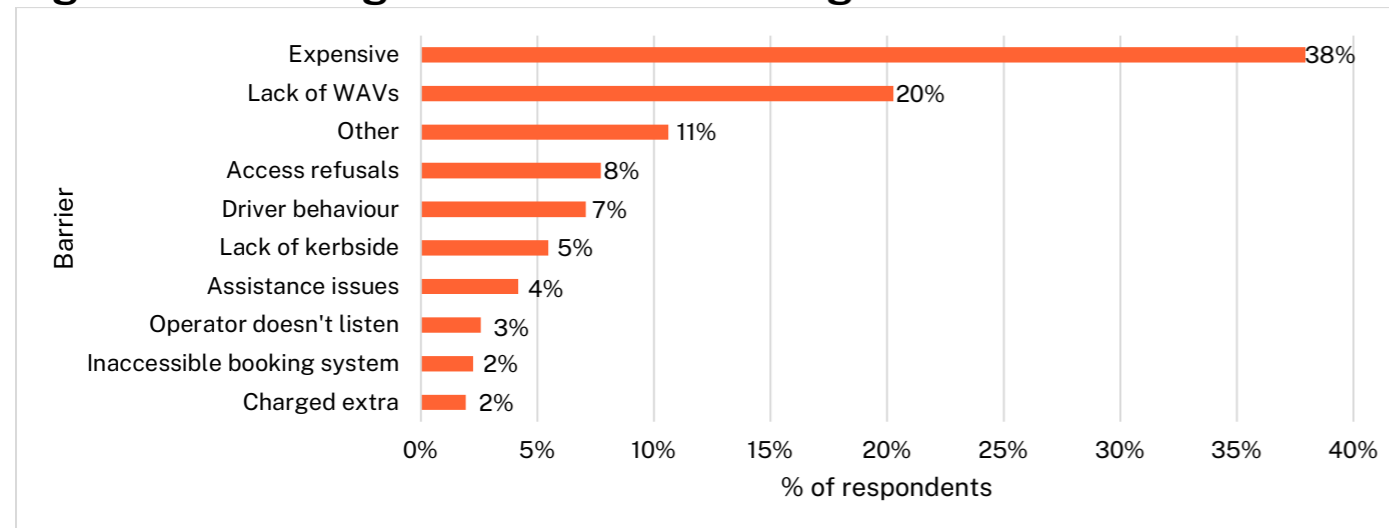
Respondents rated a lack of step-free access as the most significant barrier to using light rail. This was the case for 24% of respondents, and was significantly higher than the second most significant barrier (crowding, 10%). It is interesting to note that though a lack of step-free access was not the most commonly experienced barrier, it was by far the most disabling for those who did experience it.

**Figure 18: Most significant barrier to using car**



Out of all the barriers to using the car, participants said that difficulty finding a driver had the most impact. 29% ranked this as the most significant barrier, almost double the proportion of the next most significant which was cost (16%). This makes difficulty finding a driver both the most commonly experienced and the most disabling barrier to disabled people using the car.

**Figure 19: Most significant barrier to using Taxis/PHVs**



38% of respondents said that the most significant barrier to taxis was the cost, making it both the most frequently experienced and most disabling barrier. This was followed by a lack of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) which was ranked second (20%).

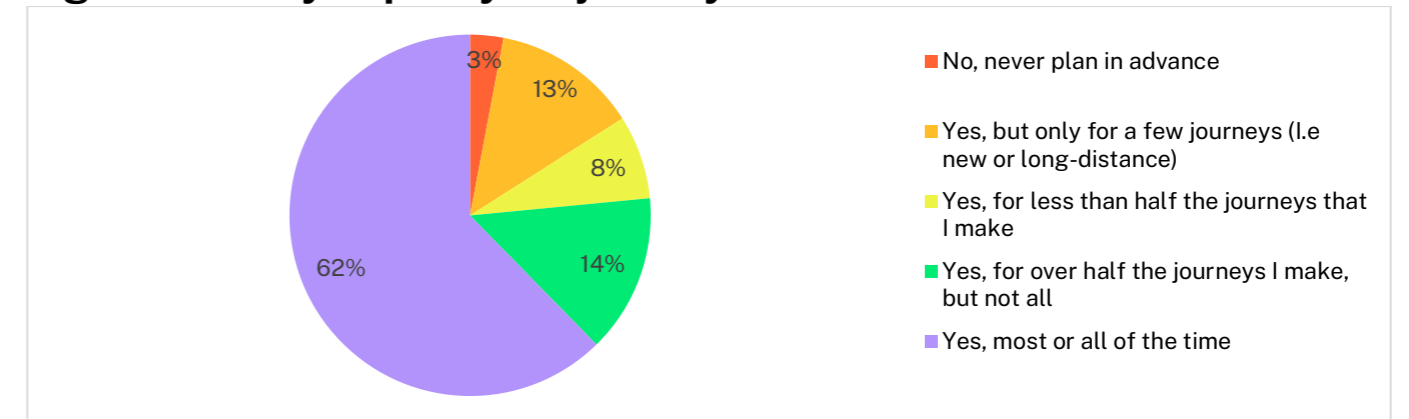
# Cross cutting themes

## Journey planning

*“Travel needs to be planned like a military campaign.”*

Access barriers start having an impact on disabled people before we’re even past the front door. 62% of respondents reported planning journeys in advance “most or all of the time”, while only 3% never plan. Advanced planning is clearly an essential part of many disabled people’s transport arrangements: disabled people explained how barriers are so pervasive that extensive research must be done, and meticulous arrangements made before setting out, just to ensure the journey will be accessible.

**Figure 20: Do you plan your journeys in advance?**



The consequences of an unplanned journey can be significant: respondents reported getting stranded, leading to trauma and anxiety (and in the worst instances, putting people off travelling altogether).

I once didn't plan and I ended up stuck on a tube station platform as the only exit was up 40 steps.

# Journey planning can feel mandatory

In a free-text box where we asked participants to explain why they do or do not plan journeys in advance, 26% of respondents told us they \*have\* to plan out of necessity, using language such as “forced” and “it’s essential”. A much smaller proportion of respondents told us they like to plan in advance as a matter of personal preference (8%).

What you quickly learn as a powerchair user is that spontaneity does not work.

11% of respondents to this question told us about the need to arrange assistance in advance. Many wrote that they felt they must book Passenger Assistance for their mainline rail journeys in advance of travel, either because they had been told to do so, or because negative past experiences had left them unable to trust the Turn Up And Go service:

I don’t trust that I can just ‘turn up and go’. I have been told by the local train station that I have to book ahead of my journey as otherwise there will be no staff to get me on or off the train.”

## Barriers to journey planning

Given how essential advance planning is for many disabled people, it is frustrating that the process of planning itself is so fraught with barriers. This research shows that journey planning is hindered by two main barriers:

### 1. Missing information

Transport operators often don’t make vital information readily available. Information that respondents said they required, but often couldn’t find, included:

- Walking distances within stations
- Availability and working status of lifts and escalators
- Staffing levels
- Crowding levels
- Availability/location of toilets, accessible toilets, Changing Places, rest stops, relief areas for Guide Dogs, and other facilities
- Whether priority space/seat(s) are occupied

Being blind I need to plan safest places to cross roads, easiest places to catch buses, but it is hard to find this information.

Walking is difficult due to my lung capacity. I struggle with long walks inside stations (e.g Kings Cross tube to mainline). TfL equate disability with wheelchairs and give you the ‘step free’ route, but this often requires even more walking. Many people can manage a few stairs but can’t walk far, and this info is not available anywhere on TfL.

Sometimes the information provided can be inaccurate, making it hard for disabled people to trust our journeys will go as planned.

Some stations are advertised as step free from platform to train, but then the train comes and there is a step and my wheel will get stuck.

Finding this information then becomes another step in the already time-consuming planning process, creating further barriers to travel.

I have to plan in quite some depth. If using public transport, it can take up to 2 weeks to plan a trip.

## 2. Inaccessible information

Transport operators often fail to provide information to disabled passengers in the formats we need. If travel details are only available on a website, this could exclude the 23% of disabled adults who have no access to the internet (compared with 6% of nondisabled adults)<sup>lxxi</sup>. Conversely, if information only exists as posters, signs, departure boards, or tannoy announcements, this excludes those with sensory impairments.

I can't read bus stop timetables or rail station departure boards. I need to know what help to ask for e.g., where is the bus stop for a particular bus number.

Yet this report shows that even when journeys are planned in advance, they can still go wrong, adding to the overall anxiety associated with travelling for many disabled people. The uncertainty around whether the information we have been given about our journey is accurate, or whether our best laid plans will still be dashed by barriers, can shatter our confidence completely.

I plan all journeys no matter how short like going to the shop because I have had problems with works on the pavement. However, even with my best efforts to plan and make arrangements I have been stuck on trains when the booked assistance didn't bring a ramp for me to get off, or a lift is broken, or a "step free" station isn't actually step free...

## How disabled people plan our journeys

**Figure 22: Which tools do you use to plan journeys (tick all that you have used in the past 12 months)**

%	Method
84%	Online: official website (e.g., National Rail Enquiries)
65%	Mobile app platforms (Citymapper, Google Maps, etc)
49%	Help from a friend or family member
45%	Online: other website (e.g., blog posts)
42%	Face-to-face at the information desk/office
36%	Printed timetable/map/information leaflet at a station or stop
34%	Social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc)
28%	Telephone Enquiry
23%	Information and advice from a charity or non-profit organisation

A significant number of disabled people do not have access to the internet, or face barriers to using it<sup>lxxii</sup>. Therefore, non-digital means of planning journeys (visiting staff at a ticket office or information desk, checking printed timetables/maps/information leaflets at stations or stops, and using the telephone), are of huge importance to ensuring digitally excluded disabled people continue to have access to the information we need.

A resounding 42% of respondents said they plan their journeys face-to-face with staff at ticket offices, and over a third (36%) of respondents used printed timetables. This is particularly notable given the fact the majority of respondents to our survey took part online and therefore have internet access.

# Financial barriers

“It's affecting my ability to work and earn enough money to live.”

Financial barriers to transport are some of the most significant and pervasive barriers reported in this research. When asked the main reason for not making as many journeys as they would like, 10% of respondents said the cost of travel, and this was the single most disabling barrier for 2 out of the 7 modes assessed (Train and Taxi/PHV).

Scope estimates that households with at least one disabled adult or child face an extra £975 in living costs per month<sup>lxxiii</sup>. We are also twice as likely to be unemployed<sup>lxxiv</sup>, and twelve percentage points more likely to live in poverty than non-disabled people<sup>lxxv</sup>. This means that, as well as incurring higher transport costs, disabled people have significantly less income to pay for it, making financial barriers even more prohibitive for our community.

## Transport is significantly more expensive for disabled people

On top of the costs everyone faces (tickets, buying or renting a vehicle), disabled people often contend with the additional expense of mobility aids, vehicle adaptations, tickets for PAs or carers, among other things – adding thousands of pounds per year to the cost of travel.

I need to travel with someone with me and this means I have to pay more, even with a disabled persons railcard, it is more expensive than for a non-disabled person.

As well as these *direct* financial barriers, disabled people also face *indirect* financial barriers. These are the ways in which non-monetary access barriers can drive up the cost of the journey even further. For

example, a lack of step-free access at someone's local train station may force them to drive to a station further afield, incurring the additional cost of fuel and parking.

I can't live a normal life unless I pay for taxis to take me everywhere. When I do try and use public transport I find that the buses don't run on time or I can't use them because there are no seats available, and trying to use the tube or overground is a nightmare because supposedly accessible stations often have lifts that are out of order and there's no information, so you turn up and find out you can't travel, or the incompetent staff tell you the lifts are working when they are not.

These indirect financial barriers can be as pervasive as the direct costs themselves. For example, while 11% of respondents cited cost as a barrier to bus travel, 11% also said that, because of access barriers while using buses, their journeys were more expensive. Those who experienced barriers such as a lack of audio-visual information, overcrowding, and negative driver attitudes and behaviour (to name but a few), were all statistically more likely to report increased cost as an impact than those who did not experience these barriers. This could be down to having to take a more expensive mode (such as taxis) to avoid these barriers, choosing a different route which may be longer and more costly, or requiring assistance or aids that must be paid for out of pocket.

## The cycle of transport poverty

These barriers can lock disabled people in a vicious cycle of financial hardship.

When asked about the impact that inaccessible transport has on their lives, 18% of respondents wrote about the detrimental impact it had on their work. People described missing events and opportunities for career progression, not being able to do particular types of work that require or



benefit from attendance on-site, or their ability to work at all being “severely curtailed”.

For most of 2021, I worked from home for a company based in Sheffield. When we had to return to the office, I was entirely reliant upon my parents driving me to and from work due to a lack of reliable and accessible transport. This became unmanageable and was a significant factor in me leaving my job at the end of the year. [...] I have missed out on so many opportunities through poor access to public transport.

## Benefits and concessions

There are some benefits and concessions available for disabled people which seek to mitigate these financial barriers, including:

- Personal Independence Payments (PIP)
- Disabled Person’s Railcard
- English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (for buses, and some other local transport)
- The Motability Scheme
- Access to Work

However, our research suggests there are significant barriers to obtaining them, and they do not go far enough to adequately meet the extra costs we face.

Issues reported by participants include time restrictions on when some concessionary passes can be used, and difficulty applying their discount when purchasing a ticket. For those travelling with a PA, the discount on their ticket was rendered virtually redundant, as they still had to pay the costs of their essential companion.

In some areas, such as Greater Manchester, local concession passes allow disabled people to travel for free on local buses, trams and trains (with some time restrictions depending on the pass held), but do not

include the cost of a carer’s ticket. The MerseyRail pass for disabled people provides free travel on local buses, trams, trains and ferries, with no time restrictions. Elsewhere, East Sussex provide a carer pass for some companions of disabled people, but their local pass is for buses only and to travel at off-peak times.

The eligibility criteria for these schemes can also be extremely narrow, meaning that thousands of disabled people do not have access to the concessions and equipment we need. For example, while 19% of respondents said they use the Motability Scheme, 27% said they wanted to use it but could not as they are not eligible or they experience barriers to applying.

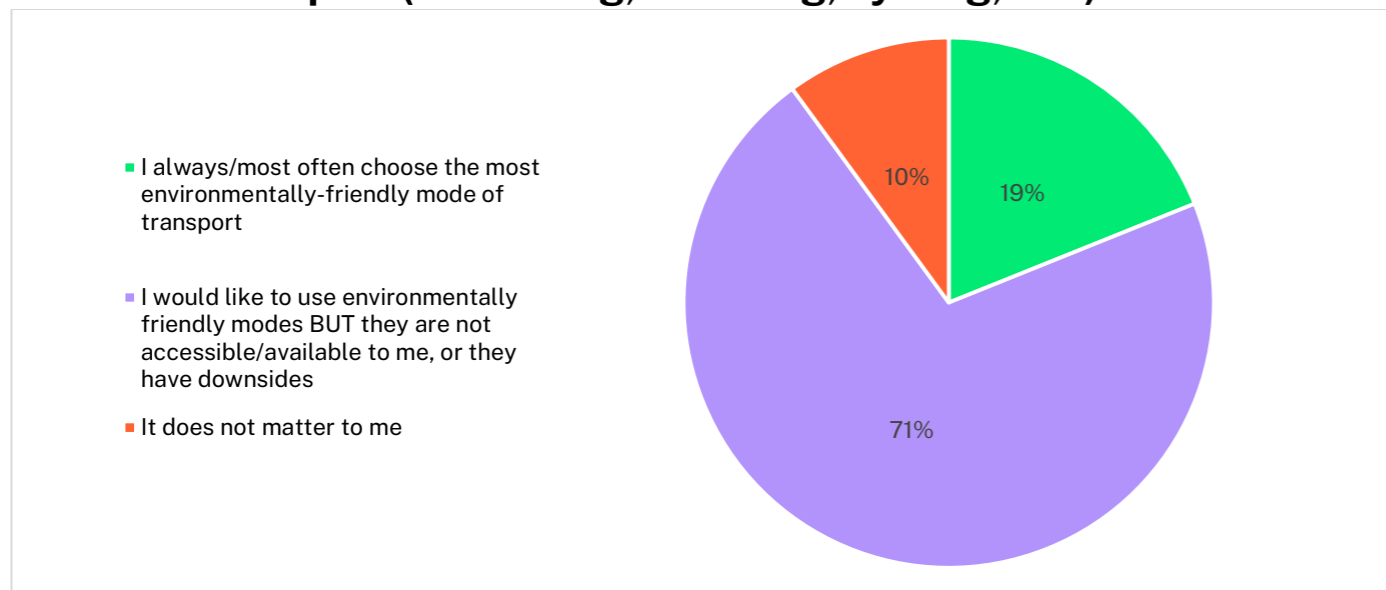
I don't think that I caught a train since early 2020 until very recently after receiving my Disabled Persons Railcard (like Travelcard for buses, I only became eligible for the Railcard recently after receiving PIP for the first time - a process which took over a year and ended with a tribunal hearing). Before that, I hadn't caught a train in ages as fares are prohibitively expensive.

I then applied for higher rate PIP on the basis that I could barely move / function. I was denied this and, as a result, could not access Motability which would have paid for the very expensive high-tech adaptations that I need to drive.

# Green transport

*“I am in favour of things being environmentally friendly, but right now any mode of wheelchair accessible transport would be welcome, even if it were coal or steam driven.”*

**Figure 23: How do you feel about green/environmentally friendly modes of transport (i.e walking, wheeling, cycling, bus)?**



**19% of respondents said they always or most often chose the most environmentally friendly mode of transport.** For those that did use green transport, the most common reason was because it was the most readily available, convenient, or accessible for a given journey. Interestingly, this was a more important factor in determining whether disabled people used public transport than environmental concerns alone.

**This is because many disabled people felt they did not have the luxury of choice when it came to using sustainable modes.** Travelling while disabled is already fraught with so many barriers, that many of us have to prioritise getting from A to B by whatever limited means necessary. Respondents wrote about feeling “forced” to use certain modes (green or not), and emphasized that they do not have as many options as non-

disabled people. This meant that many could not use sustainable modes, even when they wanted to.

I deeply care about climate justice and desperately want to use greener and more sustainable modes of transport, but these are often inaccessible to me. I can't cycle, pavements are atrocious which makes wheeling difficult, the Tube is mostly out of bounds, and buses take forever. It means I am sometimes forced to take taxis.

## Barriers to sustainable travel

Importantly, the majority (71%) of disabled people said they would like to use environmentally friendly modes of transport more, but that they were prevented from doing so by a lack of accessibility and availability. As well as the mode specific barriers detailed in this report, respondents identified some cross-cutting barriers to sustainable travel options. These include:

### Irregular and unreliable public transport options

Local bus services are almost impossible for me. There are no buses after 6pm and none on Sunday so wherever I go it is a minimum of a 3 mile walk both to and from a bus stop or ask family or friends to drive me

### Poorly joined up routes

There are no tram stations within a sensible distance of my home, and I would need three or four busses to get to a lot of the places I visit.

## **Risks to safety and wellbeing (e.g. pain, fatigue, risk of catching Covid-19)**

Driving is generally the best option for me, it provides door to door transport, safety and comfort. Safety is so important, since I have been disabled I feel more vulnerable travelling alone, having a safe space, car, helps to mitigate anxiety

## **Low staffing or lack of PA/carer**

I cannot find my way from one mode of transport to another without help ie. change platforms at a railway station I don't know

## **Financial barriers to mobility aids, adapted cycles, and public transport fares.**

[...] bus stops/train stations too far for me as I can only walk very limited distances. I really need a motorised wheelchair but can't afford one as well as leasing a car so that limits how far I can get anywhere once parked.

While respondents predominantly cited external barriers, 31% said that their impairment prevented them from using particular modes. It is important to acknowledge that many disabled people will continue to require private transport, even if access to public transport and active travel improve.

But for a significant portion of our community, making more sustainable journeys is a real possibility if barriers are removed, and one the majority of us want to see realised. It is also clear that robust, structural change is required to remove barriers and make sustainable transport more available, accessible, and convenient for all.

# **RECOMMENDATIONS**

# Where next?

This report demonstrates in stark detail that the current state of accessible transport in England is unjust, and unacceptable. Its findings speak volumes: our community wants to make more journeys, to have more choices of how to travel, and to have the resources and mobility aids we need to be able to make our journeys.

The 2018 Inclusive Transport Strategy (ITS) included a series of actions that sought to equalise transport access for disabled people by 2030. Yet with only seven years to go, many of the government's own metrics show that the strategy has stalled<sup>lxvii</sup>. It's imperative that the Department for Transport investigates the reasons for this and takes action to address areas that the Strategy did not encompass – such as Active Travel.

In closing, we return to the question that we've been asked so many times before: where is the data? We ask the same of all those who have the power to improve transport access. Be transparent and publish your analysis on why the duties, guidance, and pledges that exist have not yet succeeded. Accessible transport is not a point of competitive advantage: it should be for all, and progress towards it, evaluations of current interventions, and plans for the future should be published for all to benefit.

We want to work constructively with all those responsible for policy and practice across the transport sector to ensure disabled people's experiences are truly influencing decisions from the boardroom to the front line. Now it's time for the industry and wider system to act. Here are some places it might want to begin.

## Engagement barriers

This report demonstrates a lack of progress on inclusive engagement despite ongoing evidence of urgent need. For example, almost three years on from our *Pave The Way* report into Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, this issue continues to divide local communities. Local Authorities still have some way to go to implement inclusive engagement, mitigation of negative impacts, and ensuring walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure upgrades are accessible to disabled people.

Unless industry challenges the assumptions it holds about disabled people's transport preferences, barriers across all modes risk being here to stay. Better engagement across the sector holds the key.

## Recommendation 1

1. National Government, Local Government, regional transport authorities and industry must:
  - Meaningfully engage and co-design with the disabled community and Disabled People's Organisations to:
    - review, revise and reinforce policy and guidelines, and when designing, delivering, and evaluating vehicles, schemes, and systems.
    - ensure that consultation processes are well-documented, inclusive, and responsive to the needs and concerns of the disabled community, taking a pan-impairment perspective
    - deliver against all recommendations outlined in this report
  - Where consultation and engagement are outsourced to third parties, this approach must be mandated and enforced through contracts.

## **This must lead to:**

- All transport designs, guidance and legislation being co designed with disabled people.
- Legislation, guidance, and policy that is fit for purpose, takes a pan-impairment approach, and prioritises barrier removal.
- Accessible consultation and engagement becoming the default approach, rather than ‘best practice’ to be aspired to
- Disabled people and Disabled People’s Organisations working as equal partners within Governments and industry, with fair remuneration, to inform design and policy decisions.
- Disabled people being truly involved at the heart of decisions, avoiding consulting or engaging being a ‘tick box’ exercise.

## **Enforcement barriers**

Barriers stemming from a lack of accountability and enforcement were raised across many areas of the survey. For example, the Public Sector Equality Duty tells public bodies, and private companies who deliver a public service, that they must “take steps” to “consider” how any action will impact protected characteristic groups. This report provides evidence that these directives do not go far enough to ensure that disabled people are protected from decisions that will impact our ability to travel or access public transport services.

The means of enforcement can be a barrier in itself. For example, requiring individual disabled people to make claims under the Equality Act means a claim must be made every time a person is discriminated against, even if it is by the same body: placing a repeated burden of enforcing the law on the disabled person being discriminated against.

Inadequate enforcement means that barriers are not recorded or removed. Instead, disabled people and our organisations are often left to highlight barriers and drive change, despite the transport industry having both the power and opportunity to make improvements. Lastly, the current situation is not future proof. Whether the future of transport is autonomous vehicles, Demand Responsible Transport, or even hoverboards, the sector’s approach to enforcement and regulation leave us concerned that a two tier transport system will be embedded even further.

## Recommendation 2

### 2. National Government must:

- Introduce a single regulator with a remit for accessibility encompassing all transport modes and streetspace, and provide sufficient investment and resourcing to ensure a consistent approach to enforcement across the sector.
- This regulator should:
  - Gather data on compliance with legislation, guidance and standards using transparent methods and act on the results promptly.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing legislation and policies in prohibiting discrimination and access refusals, and take action to address gaps.
- Establish accessible and streamlined complaints processes with swift response times, prompt resolution and impact on future practice.

### This must lead to:

- Barriers caused by or occurring during interchanges being identified and removed by operators.
- More consistent experiences for disabled people on multi-modal journeys.
- More cross-industry working, with disabled passenger's experiences impacting on improvements across all modes.
- Simplified and accessible ways to make a complaint or report non-compliance.
- Increased transparency of when operators or industry bodies are not complying with accessibility legislation, and the penalties received.
- Increased satisfaction of disabled people with complaints processes and experiences of using a regulator.

## Infrastructure barriers

Greater transparency is needed on how infrastructure investment is prioritised, for what regions and on which modes, and the methods used must reflect the reality of travel for disabled people. For example, the Government's Levelling Up Fund prioritisation method appears to use the average journey times across an area as a metric for prioritisation, without assessing journey times for step-free or other more accessible routes<sup>lxxvii</sup>.

Elsewhere, good practice on transport infrastructure is limited to pledges, guidance, or voluntary standards, such as the recent Publicly Available Specification (PAS) for Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure (PAS 1889). Without mandating this good practice, results can't be guaranteed.

Lastly, indecision at a national level, despite asking for and receiving evidence – such as continued inaction on pavement parking in England – has meant infrastructure barriers which should have been removed continue to persist.

Action is needed across all elements of infrastructure, and it must be taken by a wide range of groups. For example, in national and Local Governments infrastructure spans across transport, housing, planning and other departments. Without a joined-up approach to improving infrastructure across England, barriers will remain.

## Recommendation 3

3. National Government, Local Government, regional transport authorities and industry must:

- Work in collaboration with one another, and Disabled People's Organisations, to develop and implement transparent prioritisation methods that reflect the reality of current inaccessible transport.
- Provide ring-fenced investment in accessible and reliable public transport options, making them a feasible choice for disabled people.
- Proactively audit and address obstacles regularly, and enforce regulations and penalties where obstacles remain.
- Enhance the accessibility and usability of infrastructure at all parts of a journey, for example invest in ticket vending machines (TVMs) to increase accessibility, level-boarding across the rail and light rail networks, and increase the availability of secure accessible adapted cycle storage.

### This must lead to:

- Increased numbers of rail and light rail stations with step-free access and level boarding.
- Increased availability of the full range of infrastructure and facilities required for disabled people to make journeys, from seating, to toilets, to parking spaces.
- Greater confidence among disabled people that we won't encounter infrastructure barriers on our journeys.

## Financial barriers

Evidence of the extra costs faced by disabled people, both direct and indirect, is not new. Yet action has been slow and fragmented. There must be a significant and swift change to the approach to concessions for travel for disabled people, overhauling the eligibility criteria, and standardising concessions across modes to ensure equity and fairness. Furthermore, financial barriers to travel should be addressed alongside a holistic approach to the range of resources we need to make journeys: from access to mobility aids, to access to adapted vehicles and cycles.

## Recommendation 4

4.

a. All concessionary scheme administrators and providers (including Local Government, regional transport authorities, operators, and industry bodies) must:

- Overhaul the criteria used to assess eligibility for concessions, taking a social model approach
- Work with disabled people to co-produce solutions to ensure accessibility and simplicity of the application process for the scheme.

b. Local Government and combined authorities must:

- Urgently implement the full range of enhancements to the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme in their area of jurisdiction, to include free travel:
  - at all times (i.e before 9.30am and after 11pm)
  - for any person travelling as the companion to a disabled person.
  - on other modes of transport within the region, including light rail, trams, and trains.

- c. Sub National Transport Authorities must:
- Work together to explore joining up the operation of the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme, to enable card holders to travel between regions.

## Recommendation 5

5. Government, including the Department for Transport, Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health and Social Care must:
- Review and streamline financial assistance for the direct and indirect costs of travel beyond fares, including:
    - Accessible vehicle and cycles purchase, adaptation and storage.
    - Costs of accessible driving lessons and cycle training
    - Costs of appropriate mobility aids.
    - Extra costs when journeys go wrong.

### This must lead to:

- No disabled people being excluded by the flawed link between concessions and inappropriate criteria such as Personal Independence Payment entitlement.
- A consistent approach across to concessionary transport across England.
- Simplified and accessible ways to make an application, with previously excluded disabled people taking up the schemes.
- A reduction in regional disparities in access and criteria for mobility aid provision.
- Increased number of disabled people eligible for vital and wide-ranging financial assistance.
- Disabled people no longer being financially disadvantaged by the direct and indirect costs of travel.

## Attitudinal barriers

Encounters with staff and the general public were highlighted as significant barriers to travel. Industry can take steps to remove attitudinal barriers by investing in safe staffing levels, and providing good quality Disability Equality Training designed and delivered by disabled people. Where training currently exists it has limitations: for example, the Office of Rail and Road only requires train companies to provide refresher disability training to frontline staff<sup>lxxviii</sup>, which does not address company culture at all levels.

## Recommendation 5

6. Regulators, national Government, Local Government, regional transport authorities and industry must:
- Interrogate the causes of negative interactions between staff and disabled people, including the effectiveness of current staff training programmes, putting in place actions to address these.
  - Through co-produced research, establish what is required in terms of staff numbers, skills and training across transport services to enable staff to meet the wide range of passenger needs – from booking, to accessing facilities, to passenger assistance including Turn Up and Go, and ensure this requirement is met.
  - These actions could come under the responsibility of the aforementioned single transport accessibility regulator once established, but should not wait until then.



## **This must lead to:**

- Regular high-quality training for all frontline and back-office transport staff which follows the Social Model of Disability, and is developed and delivered by disabled people.
- Enough staff being in place across transport networks at all times so that disabled people can access frontline transport staff's support with ticket purchasing, wayfinding, and assistance whenever it is required and without needing to arrange this in advance.

# **Information and communication barriers**

Across all modes, respondents to the survey highlighted the importance of accurate, reliable and accessible information being available to all disabled people both to plan a journey and while on the move. While progress is being made, for example the introduction of BSL announcements at some rail stations, and the recent mandating of audio visual announcements on new buses, gaps remain: local bus services in rural areas were particularly highlighted by survey respondents as information deserts.

Additionally, while digital booking options and means of accessing information are used by many disabled people, this research highlights the importance of non-digital methods. These methods must be retained, supported, and invested in.

## **Recommendation 7**

7. National Government, Local Government, regional transport authorities and industry must:
  - Evaluate and quickly address the provision of accessible information on vehicles, streets and on stations, including:
    - The accessibility of signage and wayfinding information, including temporary disruptions due to streetworks or other obstructions
    - Gaps in the provision of accessible information on board vehicles and at stations and stops

- Commit to retaining and improving multiple accessible formats and contact channels for both information and payment.
- Ensure these are accessible to unbanked and digitally excluded people, both before and during a journey.

## Recommendation 8

8. Transport operators and transport technology companies (also known as Mobility as a Service (MaaS) platforms) must:
- Work with disabled people to co-produce solutions to guarantee the accessibility of their websites, booking platforms and apps.
  - Provide information that disabled people rely upon: ranging from real-time information on station accessibility features, to whether a wheelchair space on a bus is occupied, to alternative routes for planned and unplanned disruptions.
  - Go significantly further than the Government’s MaaS code of practice which ‘recommends’ accessibility, and instead design accessible platforms taking a co-production approach.

### This must lead to:

- Disabled people easily having the information and options required to make the journeys we need and want to make, using the mode and route of our choice.
- Increased availability of the information and tools required to plan, make, and adjust journeys, in a range of accessible formats.
- Disabled people and Disabled People’s Organisations working as equal partners in the design and development of technology platforms.
- A pan-impairment approach being taken to accessibility, data requirements, user testing, and setting measures of success.

# Change is possible

The evidence from our community is clear. 40 years on from the founding of Transport for All, and almost 30 years on from the Disability Discrimination Act, disabled people still experience inequality and discrimination. This can’t go on.

In response, we have a bold five-year plan to achieve our vision of transport justice for disabled people.

If you’d like to be a part of the journey, sign up as a member and join our movement of disabled people fighting for a better future.

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