

## Bus Users Accessibility Audit 2023

Operators have once again been sharing the work they are doing to improve access to bus and coach services. This year's Accessibility Audit has captured innovation and developments in good practice from operators representing over 40 regions across Great Britain.

It is clear from the results that many operators are acting on the recommendations made in last year's report and are increasingly working with passengers, charities and local communities to improve inclusion and access to transport. There is still work to be done but it is in everyone's interests, including the bus and coach industry itself, to make their services accessible to everyone.

### Summary

With the recent news that on-board audio-visual announcements are to become mandatory on buses it was unsurprising that this topped the list of features introduced to improve access. While apps and websites also ranked high, non-tech improvements such as additional wheelchair space, room to manoeuvre and leg room were also popular developments, with 62% of responders reporting that 50% of more of their fleet had these features, almost double that of last year.

For the first year we asked operators what proportion of their fleet are PSVAR compliant with 100% reporting 50% or over, and 81% of these putting it at 100%. The number of drivers required to pull into every stop regardless of whether a waiting passenger signals was actually down this year from 65% to 52%, while the number required to deploy the ramp whenever asked remained firm at 100%. Another first this year was asking whether drivers wait for passengers to be seated before pulling away with 78% saying yes, whenever possible.

Technology still represents the most popular method of communicating with disabled passengers which is effective only for those people with digital access. On the rise, however, was printed materials and meetings, both virtual and face-to-face. When it comes to actively involving passengers in the design and delivery of services, while social media was top of the list, operators are also working with local groups, running events and consultations, and engaging passengers through BSIPs.

More operators are now training staff to recognise and respond to a customer in distress, particularly customer service staff, and more staff are receiving disability awareness/assistance training, with a few operators including it as a standard part of induction/training. Far more staff are also Dementia Friends and 93% of responding operators have provided mental health first aid training for their staff.

On-board training for Guide Dog puppies was another first for the survey with 58% of operators actively involved, and there was an increase in the range of card and lanyard assistance schemes available to passengers. When asked what else they were currently doing or planning to do to improve accessibility, operators responded with a host of initiatives including improved vehicle design, closer collaboration with community groups and charities, and a number of projects to allow groups and individuals to familiarise themselves with buses in order to improve travel confidence.

### 1. Features and technology introduced to improve the journey for disabled people

- On-board audio-visual announcements 78%
- New app or website 52%
- More space to manoeuvre wheelchairs 48%
- Additional wheelchair space 44%
- Extra leg room 33%
- Companion passes 33%
- At stop audio-visual announcements 19%
- Communication aids 19%
- Space checker/booking facility 11%

Other features mentioned:

- Taxi guarantee
- Rear facing next stop announcement screens
- English and Welsh announcements
- BSL on some airport services
- Safeguarding policy and group
- Dementia-friendly flooring

### 2. Proportion of fleet with these features

- Up to 25% 23%
- 25% to 50% 15%
- Over 50% 46%
- 100% 16%

### 3. Proportion of fleet that is PSVAR compliant

- Over 50% 19% of responders
- 100% 81% of responders

### 4. Drivers required to pull into every stop regardless of whether a waiting passenger signals

- Yes 52%
- No 48%

### 5. Drivers required to deploy the ramp when asked

- Yes 100%

### 6. Drivers required to wait for passengers to be seated before pulling away

- Yes where possible 78%
- Not at present 22%

### 7. Method of communicating with disabled passengers

- Website 93%
- Social media 89%
- Apps 82%
- Printed materials 85%
- Meetings in person and virtual 82%
- Phone service 70%
- Text 15%
- Working with other organisations 12%
- Accessibility & inclusion channel 4%

## **8. Method of involving passengers in the design and delivery of services**

- Social media 70%
- Engaging with community groups 60%
- Face-to-face events 56%
- BSIPs 41%
- Consultation 33%
- Passenger panels 26%
- Online events 30%

Other methods mentioned:

- Customer feedback and complaints
- Local authorities and emails

## **9. Members of staff trained to recognise and respond to a customer in distress**

- Senior managers 70%
- Customer service staff 85%
- Depot staff 26%
- Drivers 90%
- None at present 7%

Other staff mentioned:

- All staff receive training
- Outside support team

## **10. Members of staff receiving disability awareness/assistance training**

- Senior managers 74%
- Customer service staff 74%
- Depot staff 33%
- Drivers 89%
- None at present 4%

Other staff mentioned:

- Standard induction course for all staff
- Driver training team
- Accessibility and Inclusion Officer
- Retail colleagues

## **11. Members of staff receiving Mental Health First Aid training**

- Senior managers 48%
- Customer service staff 33%
- Depot staff 22%
- Drivers 30%
- None at present 7%

Other staff mentioned:

- Internal cross departmental team
- Health and wellbeing champion
- Wellbeing volunteers

## **12. On-Board training for Guide Dog puppies**

- Yes – 58%
- Not at present – 42%

### **13. Members of staff that are Dementia Friends**

- Senior managers 33%
- Customer service staff 48%
- Depot staff 7%
- Drivers 37%
- None at present 30%

Other staff mentioned:

- HR
- Driver training team
- Accessibility and Inclusion Officer
- Retail colleagues
- Dementia Friends Accredited

### **14. Passenger card and lanyard schemes for additional support**

- Helping Hands
- Journey Assistance Cards
- Thistle Assistance Card/App
- Keep Safe Card/App
- Orange Wallet
- Sunflower scheme
- Safer travel cards
- NCT's own Journey Assistance Cards
- Boarding assistance cards
- CPT scheme
- Colleagues trained to recognise all assistance cards
- Motorised wheelchair risk assessment and passes issued
- Disability Access Card for parents or guardians travelling with specialised wheelchair buggies
- Additional needs indicated on booking

### **15. Other initiatives to improve accessibility**

- 'Chatty Bus' events
- Dedicated accessibility department ensuring time to listen, learn and bring forward ways to improve accessibility
- Bus familiarisation schemes with local communities, groups, schools and SED departments
- 'Swap with me' events via RNIB
- Ongoing link with sight impairment groups
- Sponsorship of Guide Dogs
- Supporting guide dogs and other disability groups with bus familiarisation
- Independent Travel Training regardless of age/ability
- 'Supported Journeys' for customers who are learning how to travel independently
- Work with local schools to build travel confidence in younger customers
- Extensive work with local groups to promote accessible travel
- Working closely with MIND to encourage awareness of driving staff to recognise mental health distress
- Working with agencies looking at the safety of female passengers
- Drivers and customers 'here to help' displays and customer care training
- Extra Help to Travel Cards
- Posts on staff app to remind staff of accessibility issues

- Recognising when staff go above and beyond the minimum standard, to encourage and reward great customer service
- Raising the profile of importance of accessibility
- Extra fold out arms by the doors to improve access
- Improved and clearer LED destination blinds
- Rear accessible lifts on vehicles to enable people to board safely and easily
- Large print timetables and bus stop posters
- Keep Safe Places
- Participant in the Hate Crime Charter
- Partnerships with charities and organisations for driver training opportunities
- Improving digital accessibility across websites and apps
- Working with local authority partners
- New London TfL spec DD

## **16. Future plans**

- Next stop passenger information
- Training colleagues on mental health and disability awareness plus ongoing refresher training
- Additional wheelchair bay in all new electric fleet from October 2023
- Hearing loops and next-stop announcements as standard
- App in development to audit all bus stops - providing information and choice for passengers
- Ongoing work to improve accessibility especially through technology
- Introduce further new London TfL spec DDs

## **Conclusions**

Operators are getting the message that improving accessibility can only be done by working in partnership with the people and groups most affected. Digital exclusion is also increasingly being recognised as a barrier to access and inclusion.

To counteract this, a growing number of operators are offering audio-visual announcements, printed materials and face-to-face meetings as a way to engage and communicate. Staff training and awareness programmes are also on the increase, as are the range of schemes to improve travel confidence and safety when travelling. This precisely reflects the recommendations made in our first survey and is particularly welcome where it goes above and beyond the basic legal requirements.

However, some operators are still failing to meet their legal duties to passengers and while the number is falling, just 89% of responders in this year's survey train their drivers in disability awareness/assistance training. This number should be 100%.

It was also disappointing to see a fall in the number of buses required to pull into every stop regardless of whether a waiting passenger signals. Although this can add time to a journey it is also a simple, low-cost and effective way to improve access and ensure no passenger is left behind.

The number of people in the UK who are older or have a disability, illness or mental health issue will continue to grow. Anything done to improve their journey will not only benefit current bus users, it will encourage even more of us onto these vital, sustainable services.

### **About Bus Users**

Bus Users UK is a charity that campaigns for inclusive, accessible transport. We are the only approved Alternative Dispute Resolution Body for the bus and coach industry and the designated body for handling complaints under the Passenger Rights in Bus and Coach Legislation. We are also part of the Sustainable Transport Alliance, a group working to promote the benefits of public, shared and active travel.

Alongside our complaints work we investigate and monitor services and work with operators and transport providers to improve services for everyone. We run events, carry out research, respond to consultations, speak at government select committees and take part in industry events to make sure the voice of the passenger is heard.

Bus Users UK Charitable Trust Ltd is a registered charity (1178677 and SC049144) and a Company Limited by Guarantee (04635458).

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