



Making transport more accessible for disabled people

8 Design Opportunities
Easy-read key insights



Contents

1

Section 1. Introduction

Pages 4 - 5

2

Section 2. Why did we do this work?

Pages 6 - 8

3

Section 3. What did we do and how did we do it?

Pages 9 - 12

4

Section 4. What did we find out?

Design Opportunities 1 to 8

1. Bus stops: pages 16 - 22

2. Inside the bus: pages 23 - 29

3. Making 'live' travel information suitable for disabled travellers: pages 30 - 34

4. Train Stations: pages 35 - 42

5. Awareness of people's different travel needs: pages 43 - 49

6. Improving communication between disabled passengers and transport companies: pages 50 - 56

7. Improving assistance services: pages 57 - 63

8. Finding and sharing examples of good accessibility: pages 64 - 69

5

Section 5. What should happen next?

Pages 70 - 74

About this easy-read



Reading speed is different for everybody, but we think it will take about 15 to 20 minutes to read this report.



This report uses **blue words**.

When a word or phrase is difficult, we have written it in **blue writing** and explained it.

Introduction



We are the National Centre for Accessible Transport, called 'ncat' for short.



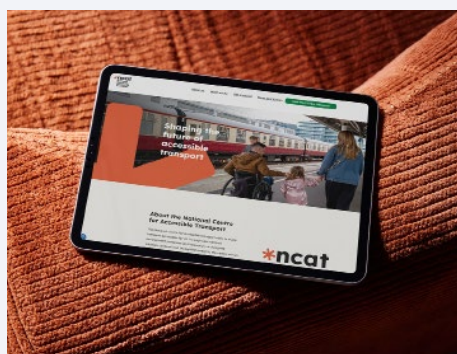
We work to make transport more accessible for disabled people.



Our report lists 8 areas where changes can be made to improve public transport for disabled people.



We started making disability and transport reports in 2023.



It is important to read these other reports as well. They are on our website:

www.ncat.uk



ncat encourages you to use the information in this report.

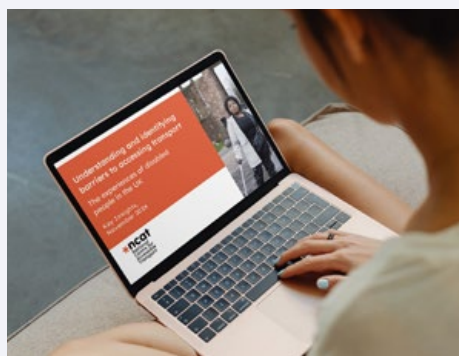
When you use information from this report, please say it is from:



'ncat (2025). Translating research into design opportunities

Available at www.ncat.uk

Why do we do this work?



One of ncat's reports is called:

'Understanding and identifying barriers to transport'.



That report says a lot about the difficulties disabled people face when using public transport.



What we need to do now, is work out how to remove, or reduce, these difficulties.



And the best way to do that, is to look at every part of how our transport system works...



...and **design** it better!



Design is when:

you plan how something should work before you make it!



We need a transport system which disabled people can use well.



So, we need to design it from their point of view!



We decided to write a report about how to do that.



How can we design public transport which works for disabled people?

What did we do and how did we do it?



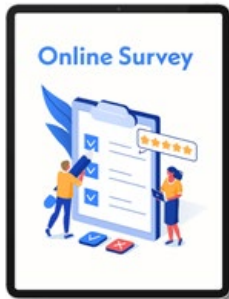
We only looked at when people use buses, trains and underground trains.



This is because that is when most difficulties happen.



First, we asked disabled people about the difficulties they face often when travelling.



To do this we did an online survey which 482 people replied to.



We asked people how easy or hard they found 5 parts of their journey.



These were:



at train or bus stations and stops



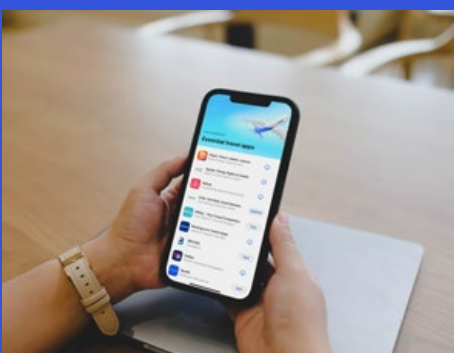
noisy, crowded or bright stations



seating on buses, trains and underground trains (like the London Underground)



**live information when travelling
(like station notice boards, screens
and audio announcements)**



planning and booking journeys.



We then spoke with 50 people.



These were in small groups, in online interviews and in-person interviews.



We made sure we had people with different experiences and different backgrounds.



From all the information we gathered, we made a list of 8 ways to design transport better.

We called these **design opportunities.**

What did we find out?



8

From our survey and from the people we talked to, we discovered 8 common parts of the journey where people face barriers.



There is a **design opportunity** to make disabled peoples' journeys better in each of these 8 situations.



1

Bus stops



2 Inside the bus



3 Making 'live' travel information suitable for disabled travellers



4 Train stations



5 Awareness of people's different travel needs



6

Improving communication between disabled passengers and transport companies



7

Improving assistance services



8

Finding and sharing examples of good accessibility

Bus stops





1. Bus stops: What are the barriers?



Bus stops are really important part of public transport.



But, many bus stops are not accessible to disabled passengers. Many bus stops don't have dropped kerbs and it sometimes is not clear where you get on.



This opportunity focuses on practical improvements that could be made to bus stops.

This would help them to be more accessible and comfortable for disabled passengers.

Bus stops: How things could be made better



How might we design bus stops that are accessible to everyone?



Physical access and safety



What if bus stops were easy and safe for everyone to navigate to and use?



Boarding a bus



What if every bus arrived at the bus stop in the same way?

This would make it safe and stress free.



Finding your way



What if passengers always knew where to wait, board, even when it is crowded or unfamiliar?



Travel information



What if travel information at every stop was usable by everyone, whether you read it, hear it, or touch it?



Knowing which bus is yours



What if it was always obvious which bus was coming, even for those who can't see it well or hear it coming?

"Now approaching, the X78 to Ponteland"



Hailing a bus



For some people, hailing a bus is difficult.



What if stopping a bus did not take any effort, or was not needed at all?



Waiting for and boarding a bus



What if the space at the stop made it easier for everyone to wait comfortably?



Bus stops in towns, cities and the countryside



What if every bus stop could be accessible, no matter if it was in a busy city or quiet country road?

Inside the bus



*ncat



2. Inside the bus: **What are the barriers?**



The inside of buses often look very similar.



They are not always accessible to people with different access needs.



Sometimes, passengers with wheelchairs or walking sticks don't have much space to move around.



Most buses try and squeeze as many seats in as possible. This is unfair to people who need the space to move around.



This opportunity focuses on changes to the inside of buses that improve access and comfort for disabled passengers.



Inside the bus: How things could be made better



How might we design the inside of buses to meet everyone's needs?



Flexible seating and space



What if the space inside the bus could change to suit different people's needs?



Finding and reaching a seat safely



What if passengers could easily find and reach a seat that is right for them?



What if this was easy to do, even when people have limited vision or mobility?



Priority seats



Priority seating helps people travel safely and with dignity, even for needs you can't always see.



What if all passengers understood who priority seating is for?



Priority seating and wheelchair spaces



What if disabled passengers knew before they got on the bus whether the space they needed would be free?



Help finding and reaching a seat



What if passengers were supported to get to the right seat safely?

This could be digital help or in-person support.



Specialist bus services



What if some buses were designed to prioritise disabled passengers, particularly during peak times?

Making 'live' travel information suitable for disabled travellers

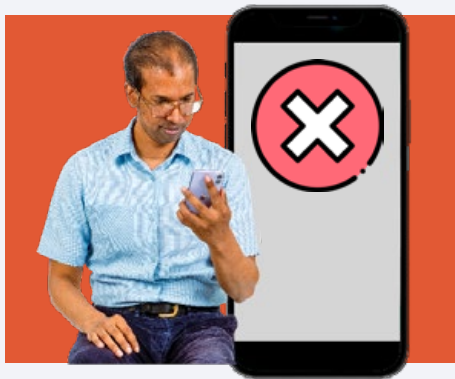


3. Making 'live' travel information suitable for disabled travellers

What are the barriers?



Access to live and accurate travel information is really important for disabled passengers.



But, for many disabled passengers things in place at the moment are unclear, or inaccessible.



This opportunity focuses on improving the accessibility of live travel information.

Making 'live' travel information suitable for disabled travellers: **How things could be made better**



Accessible information points



What if every station, stop, or vehicle had an inclusive access point for information and support?



Audio travel for passengers with vision loss



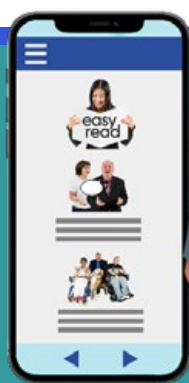
What if people with visual impairments always had access to clear travel updates, exactly when they need them?



Accessible live information screens



What if departure boards were designed from the start with accessibility in mind?



Personalised travel information



What if each passenger could access only the travel information they needed, in the format they need?



Knowing what's ahead



What if passengers knew in advance what to expect? This would not just be about delays, but also things like crowding and step-free access.



People could then plan or adjust their journey when they need to.

Train Stations





4. Train stations: What are the barriers?



It is difficult to get around stations, especially at peak times and when there are travel problems.



This is due to:



signs in the wrong place



stations being busy with lots of people, bright lighting, too much noise and too much going on



assistance from staff for people who can't see well is unreliable.



This opportunity focuses on improving the accessibility of train stations



Train stations: How things could be made better



Navigation that works for everyone



What if passengers could find their way through a station, no matter of their impairment, or mobility?



What if passengers could find their way easily, even when they are travelling somewhere new?



Service information



What if passengers always knew what facilities were available and if they are working before and on their journey?



Accessible tickets and barrier access



What if showing your ticket or going through a barrier didn't require free hands or complex actions?



Seating, waiting and rest areas



What if waiting areas were warm, quiet, and designed to meet the access needs of everyone?



Boarding a train



What if every passenger knew where to wait and board and could get there safely and easily?



Support for independence



What if arriving at or leaving a train felt easy, even without asking for help?



Assistance, staff and feedback



What if finding help points when needed was accessible, clearly signposted, and available in different formats?



Facilities that work for everyone



What if toilets, lifts and service desks were designed with different people's needs in mind from the start?



Changing from different modes of transport



What if changing between modes of transport, like train to bus, felt easy and supported?

Awareness of people's different travel needs



A man with white hair and glasses is looking at a train times poster. The poster is titled "Train Times" and shows a schedule for a train line. The background is a blue gradient.

5. Awareness of people's different travel needs What are the barriers?



Poor attitudes from non-disabled people and transport staff make it more difficult for disabled people to travel.



Some people then avoid travel, or avoid travelling on their own.



These poor attitudes knock disabled people's confidence and affect their mental health.



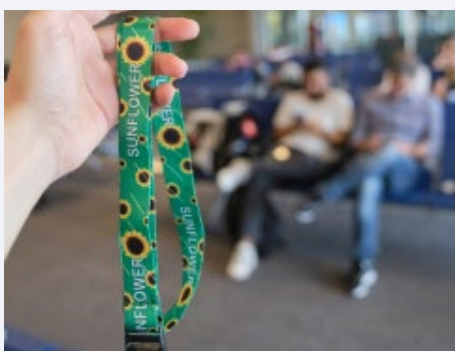
People said that always having to speak up for their travel needs is emotionally exhausting.



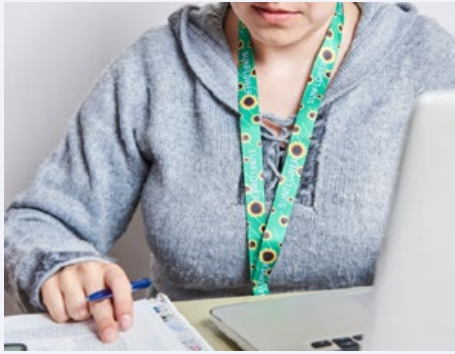
This is especially true when other people cannot see their disability.



People then get scared. Scared of not being believed, of getting drawn into arguments, of being looked down on.



The public do not understand enough about disabilities which they cannot see – they don't recognise reminders like the sunflower lanyard.



You can wear the sunflower lanyard round your neck to try and let people know that you have a hidden disability.



This opportunity focuses on the public's awareness of people's access needs on public transport.

Awareness of people's different travel needs: **How things could be made better**



Visibility of non-visible disabilities



What if people with non-visible disabilities didn't have to explain themselves to be believed or respected?



Priority spaces



What if priority seating and accessible areas were clearly understood and used with respect?



Inclusivity



What if buses, trains, and stations felt like shared spaces where support and patience was just normal?



Supporting campaigns



What if symbols like the hidden disabilities sunflower lanyard were recognised and supported by the public and staff?



People being understanding



What if people didn't have to keep asking to get the space or understanding they need?

Improving communication between disabled passengers and transport companies



A photograph of a person in a wheelchair boarding a blue train. The person is wearing a blue jacket and a backpack. The train is blue and white, and the background shows a city street.

6. Communication with transport companies: What are the barriers?



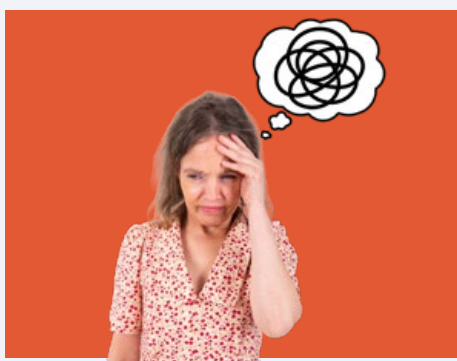
Transport companies are not clear about what help they should give.

This is confusing.



It leaves people anxious and disappointed.

They do not know what to do next when the help they expected does not arrive.



This is especially true when support from staff or services is unclear or does not happen as expected.



Bus drivers can be unhelpful with ramps. They do not wait for the person to sit down before moving away. They do not say when they are at your stop.



Disabled people need clear messages about the help they can expect.



This opportunity focuses on improving communication between disabled passengers and transport companies.

Communication with transport companies: **How things could be made better**



Understanding what help will be available



**What if disabled passengers always knew
upfront what support or access features
would be available on their journey?**



Accessible guidance



What if there was a simple way to understand your rights as a disabled passenger?



What if there was a simple way to find out what to do when things go wrong?



Updates about changes



What if disruptions were communicated clearly?



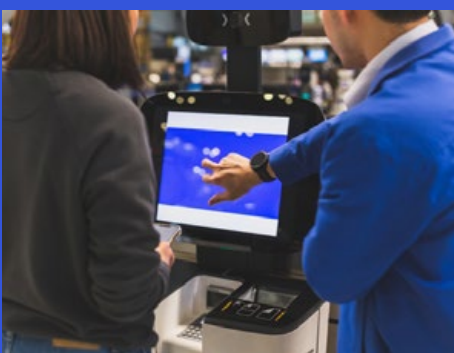
If updates are given in time, it can help disabled travellers to make changes to their journeys and plans.



Tracking booked support



What if you could check at any time that assistance or facilities are available and ready for you to use?



Fixing problems



What if good support helped build trust between disabled passengers and staff?



Bus drivers



What if disabled passengers knew exactly what kind of support they could expect from bus drivers? And it was the same each time?

Improving assistance services



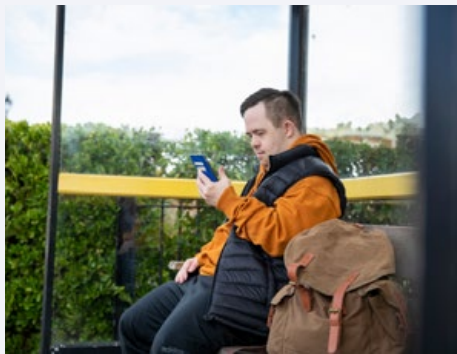


7. Improving assistance services: What are the barriers?

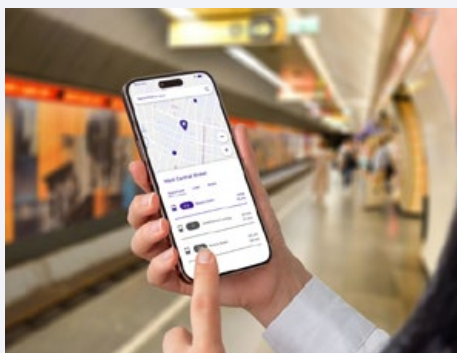


Assistance services are not good enough.

Companies are poor at doing anything when told things have gone wrong.



This is especially true at stations and at bus stops.



Disabled people want better technology, like journey planning apps and live updates.



The kinds of assistance available are different depending on what kind of transport you are using.



This opportunity focuses on improving travel assistance services across all modes of transport.

Improving assistance services: How things could be made better



Reliable support



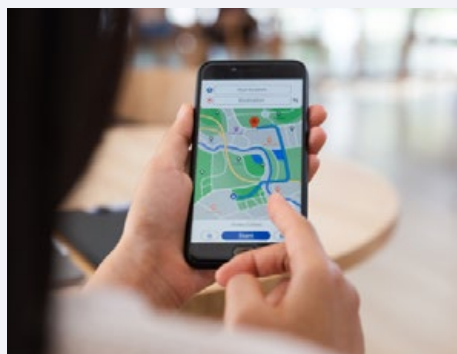
What if assistance was easy to ask for?



**What if it was reliable every time, across all
buses, the and trains?**



Technology for independent travel



What if assistance tools helped people to navigate independently?



This would mean less people waited for staff or working out how to use tricky systems.



Assistance that fits individual needs



What if assistance could be changed to meet individual needs instead of thinking one size fits all?



The same support across all modes of transport



What if assistance followed the whole journey, not just at one stop or on one company's service?



Feedback



What if disabled passengers could easily give feedback?



What if people knew it would lead to positive action or changes for the better?



Person-centred training



What if every staff member's assistance was confident and respectful?

Finding and sharing examples of good accessibility





8. Finding and sharing examples of good accessibility: What are the barriers?



Good practice is when things are done well.



The same transport company can have **good practice** in one place and bad practice in another.



Problems that happen across all transport for disabled people are:



**unreliable services, information,
and assistance**



**fear of arguments, judgment, or
uncertainty about what will or will not
happen when travelling.**



**This opportunity focuses on sharing
examples of inclusive transport design to
encourage improvements across the UK.**

Finding and sharing examples of good accessibility: **How things could be made better**



Best practice



**What if every great accessible design
could be shared with and inspire others?**



Make guidance easy to understand



What if design guidance came with examples, showing how things work in real places, not just diagrams?



Networks



What if transport companies had an easy way to find out about inclusive practices from across the UK, and build on them together?



What if guidance showed which features should be the same and which can change to meet local needs?



Work with disabled people



What if inclusive transport guidance was designed together with disabled people?

What should happen next?

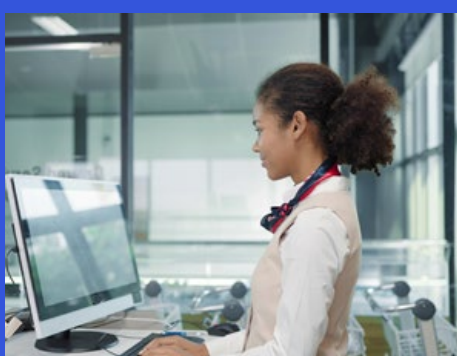


Everyone said that making transport work for disabled people means looking at their everyday experiences of travelling.



This means not just the layout of a station or a bus stop!

It also means understanding:



how transport staff can properly support disabled people



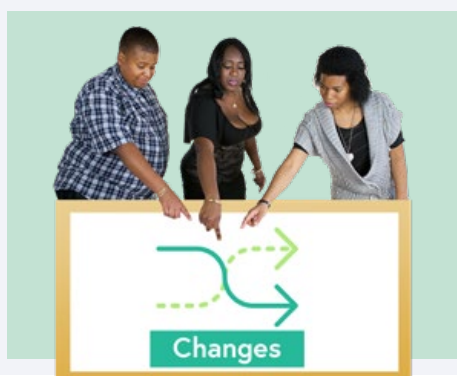
how to make sure the information about travel is given at the same time the disabled person is travelling.



Disabled people have to be included in deciding how to do this.



Including disabled people means finding out about their practical needs.



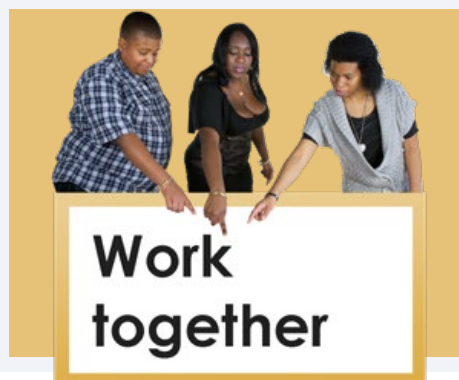
All 8 design opportunities show where changes can be made.



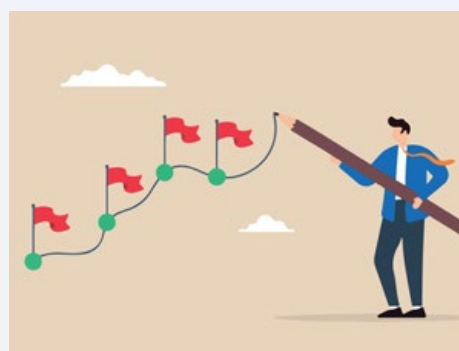
Some changes could happen soon.



Others will take more time and planning.



Transport companies, the Government and designers must work together to do this.



When you take the 8 design opportunities together, they show how the whole journey experience for disabled people needs fixing.



ncat now promises to:



keep finding out more about what still needs to be done to make transport accessible

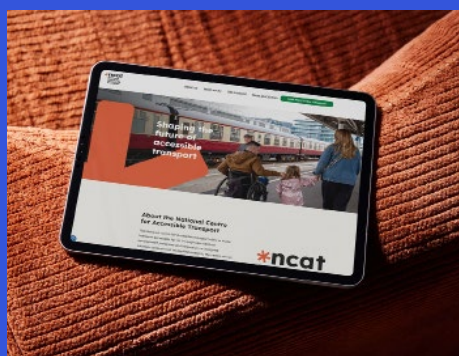


tell everyone who needs to know about these design opportunities



work with our partners and with disabled people to make these design opportunities actually happen.

For information about ncat



visit our website:

www.ncat.uk



send an email to this address:

info@ncat.uk



follow us on LinkedIn:

linkedin.com/company/ncat-uk

The information in this booklet was adapted from an original written by ncat.

This easy-read version has been created with the help of the people below who use easy-read materials themselves.



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