

TRAILBLAZERS
**Muscular
Dystrophy UK**

Fighting muscle-wasting conditions



END OF THE LINE 2016

Improving access to public transport for young disabled people



ABOUT TRAILBLAZERS

Trailblazers is a group of disabled campaigners from across the UK who tackle the social issues affecting young disabled people, such as access to higher education, employment and social and leisure opportunities. We aim to fight these social injustices to ensure young disabled people can gain access to the services they require.

We are part of Muscular Dystrophy UK, the charity for individuals and families living with muscle-wasting conditions.

About Muscular Dystrophy UK

- ▶ We support research to drive the development of effective treatments and cures.
- ▶ We ensure access to specialist NHS care and support.
- ▶ We provide services and promote opportunities to enable individuals and families to live as independently as possible.

THANK YOU

Thank you to all the Trailblazers who filled in our surveys and shared their experiences with us. Special thanks go to Trailblazers Sulaiman Khan, James Lee, Ravi Mehta, Layla Harding and Vivek Gohil, and Peter Fletcher from Transport for London.

FOREWORD

by Sulaiman Khan, Trailblazers Regional Ambassador for London

As a friend recently said to me: Diversity is a given, but inclusion is a choice.

When it comes to public transport accessibility in the UK, this seems to be especially pertinent.

Following up from our *End of the line* 2009 report, things have improved significantly in terms of access to public transport for young people, particularly in London, who happen to be disabled. Though the system continues to be sporadic, there are still many issues that can be fixed to make public transport accessible to all. An example of some of these problems is on buses, where Trailblazers tell us they have been unable to get on a bus because the ramp was not working or because the driver refused to deploy the ramp.

Many of the issues raised in this report come down to the lack of funding and the negative attitudes of staff towards people with disabilities.

As someone who lives and works in London (and has a very active lifestyle), my experience of using public transport is reasonably good compared to others' across the country. However, there are still significant struggles I encounter, such as often being charged more for using a black cab or having to go the long way around on the London Underground because the majority of stations do not have disabled access. I still dream of the day when I will be able to get to Zone 1 on the tube!

That may change when Crossrail opens. For now, if I want to get into central London, I either have to spend an extortionate amount of money on a taxi or spend over two hours driving there in my personal vehicle, with nowhere to park.

This situation gets very frustrating for me, and I often have to leave much earlier to ensure I get to events, social activities, or meetings on time.



We, as young people who have disabilities, are just like our peers. We go to work. We go to school or university. We go out and socialise with our friends. We enjoy going to leisure facilities. If we can't participate in society just because we can't get somewhere, then everyone loses out.

According to the Business Disability Forum¹, there are approximately 10m disabled people in the UK, and we are 'a market you can't ignore – £212bn in the UK alone...' It makes good business sense to make public transport entirely accessible for all.

Now is the time to make this into tangible results. We are calling on the Government, transport operators and local authorities to collaborate with organisations like Trailblazers and other disability charities, so we can ensure everyone's needs are catered for and public transport is made fully accessible to the entire population. Young people with a disability are the future. What's the point if they can't even access public transport?

Here's to a brighter, more inclusive future.

Sulaiman Khan
(London Regional Ambassador)
Trailblazers, Muscular Dystrophy UK

¹ www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/customer-experience/the-evidence

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“My friend hailed down a taxi for us, and when he saw me he said, ‘Oh I can’t take wheelchairs, sorry,’ and drove off.”

Alexandra Haines, North West

What happened to Alexandra is unacceptable. It happens far too often to young disabled people, and this needs to change.

We launched our first investigation into public transport in 2009. This second, follow-up investigation has highlighted which aspects of public transport have become more accessible, which barriers still remain and what still needs to be improved.

As a network of young disabled people, we at Trailblazers know how important it is to our independence to be able to use public transport in the same way as our non-disabled peers. As with all young people, we need to get to school, college and university, to go to work and to socialise with our friends. Being unable to use public transport immediately denies us access to these opportunities.

As Trailblazers, we believe everyone should be able to access and use public transport safely, confidently and whenever they wish. However, as many young disabled people still experience difficulties when trying to use public transport, we find ourselves at a significant disadvantage over our non-disabled peers.

For many young disabled people, in comparison with the experience of our non-disabled peers, a journey using public transport is often:

- ▶ longer – having to take an accessible route or wait for assistance adds to journey time
- ▶ more expensive – having to pay for additional carers, taking taxis or purchasing accessible vehicles if local public transport is inaccessible, adds to the cost
- ▶ more stressful – these barriers add stress to any journey.

Methodology

Surveys and discussions

Over 100 Trailblazers filled out surveys on their experiences and opinions of public transport in their area, and nationally. Trailblazers also discussed concerns and highlighted good practice at events held across the country.

Mystery journeys

Trailblazers went undercover and rated their experiences on buses, trains and taxis over a period of six months. Young disabled people across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales faced a number of challenges along the way. Rating physical access, attitude and communications were some key aspects of the survey.

Longer journey times

We heard from young disabled people that journeys took far longer for them compared to their non-disabled friends, family and colleagues. So we thought we would put this to the test: Trailblazers compiled a snapshot of data from Transport for London’s online journey planner by comparing journeys with no access requirements with journeys requiring full level access. The findings were staggering.

On average, journeys requiring full access took 4.5 times longer than ‘ordinary’ journeys.

Read more on page 19.

Overall, our evidence shows that although there continues to be progress made, there is much further to go to make public transport fully accessible for disabled people across the UK.

Key findings:

- ▶ nearly two thirds of respondents have experienced problems getting on a bus owing to the attitude or behaviour of the driver or fellow passengers
- ▶ half of respondents have been unable to get on a bus because the ramp was not working
- ▶ more than half of respondents have been unable to travel on a bus because the wheelchair space was taken up by buggies
- ▶ over a quarter of respondents say they have been refused service by a taxi driver, purely because they are disabled
- ▶ over half of respondents have experienced difficulties in booking a wheelchair accessible taxi.

Action needed

We are calling on the Government, transport operators and local authorities:

- ▶ to put accessibility into the heart of any future infrastructure and vehicle design throughout the UK
- ▶ to ensure accessibility in transport works alongside those with buggies and luggage, so spontaneous travel is possible
- ▶ to improve communication about improvements and any short-term challenges or difficulties
- ▶ to increase the number of accessible taxis in the UK and ensure any app-based technology embraces accessibility in practice
- ▶ to work with groups such as Trailblazers to ensure all front-facing staff have adequate disability awareness training
- ▶ to improve accessibility of local transport infrastructure
- ▶ to bring into force section 165 of the Equality Act and implement the recommendations from the Law Commission's taxi consultation.



Photograph courtesy of Transport for London

BUSES

Trailblazers tell us that physical accessibility is one practical aspect of using public transport. However, attitudes, space on buses and the bus driver's awareness of the needs of disabled people can help or hinder access and affect confidence when attempting to use buses.

The UK Government opted out of a European regulation which made disability awareness training mandatory for bus drivers. Trailblazers see this as a missed opportunity to improve attitudes.

One hundred Trailblazers answered our survey asking for their general experience of using public transport over the past three years. The results show that there continues to be a wide variation in the standard of services experienced by young disabled people when using buses.

Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2000 (PSVAR)

In line with the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2000 (PSVAR), all full size single deck buses over 7.5 tonnes will be fully accessible from 1 January 2016, and all double deck buses from 1 January 2017. All coaches are to be accessible by 1 January 2020.

Wheelchairs v buggies on board – the debate continues

Our investigation highlights one of the major barriers to bus travel for young disabled people: being denied access to the wheelchair spaces because buggies were using them.

In 2013, disability rights campaigner, Doug Paulley (pictured below), took a bus company to court after he was denied access to a bus when a parent refused to remove their buggy. A judge ruled that the bus company's 'first-come first-served' policy was discriminatory under the Equality Act 2010. This decision was then overturned in 2014 by the Court of Appeal, who ruled that bus firms were not legally required to force parents with buggies to vacate the wheelchair priority space.

In July 2015, Paulley was granted permission to take the case to the Supreme Court.

Following the Court of Appeal's decision and the media interest in this case, Trailblazers have reported being told by bus drivers that they no longer had the right to the wheelchair space. Bus drivers claim they don't have to ask people to vacate the wheelchair space for them.

At the time of writing this report, the outcome of this case is not yet known. It could have major implications for disabled passengers.



Trailblazers say:

Wheelchair v buggies

"A bus driver told me I couldn't get on because a buggy was on board. I said wheelchairs had priority and he said, 'I don't think so...'"

Ravi Mehta, London

"A mother couldn't get on the bus because I was in the wheelchair space and she glared at us from outside the bus window. These bad journeys upset me and my family a great deal!"

Trailblazer, South East

"Bus companies should invest in creating more space for wheelchair users as well as prams. It need not be a wheelchair versus a pram, and pitting members of the public against each other. Foldable seating and more space is key."

Matilda Ibini, London

Confusion around scooters and wheelchairs

"The driver said, 'You cannot get on the bus with that', meaning my wheelchair. Then he said, 'Scooters are not allowed on'. He finally let me on, which made me late for a meeting."

Joe Kemp, Yorkshire and Humber

"I was refused entry on to a bus because my chair was powered. The driver also commented that my chair was 'too big' even though the bus was pretty empty."

Sophie Langan, Scotland

Poor physical access

"I ended up in A and E as there was a pole in the turning area on a smaller bus and my foot got twisted so badly that I thought it was broken. There isn't enough room for powerchairs to board and access disabled spaces. Many things seem to be measured in relation to manual chairs as they're more space-friendly. Also, bus drivers don't think about ventilators or other additional medical equipment that's needed."

Karis Williamson, Scotland

"For me I can never travel on buses alone because they feel incredibly unsafe. My electric wheelchair slides from side to side, banging me from the window to the pole. I don't feel able to travel independently on a bus."

Chloe Timms, South East

"Both my partner and I are wheelchair users and we are unable to use the buses together as there's only one wheelchair space. This is ridiculous because we like to go out together and would like to be able to travel on the same bus together."

Leon Donegan, London

Poor attitudes from drivers

"The driver pulled up to the stop, other people got on and when it would have been my turn to get on he said, 'Sorry, I've got two prams on, you'll have to wait for the next one.' I tried to point out that they should be making them fold up the prams. He closed the door and drove off."

Alexandra Haines, North West

"I've been unable to get off buses because drivers haven't put ramps down despite me pressing the button to say I need to get off."

Lucy Hale, North West

"I have been verbally abused by bus drivers and other passengers. One time a bus driver shouted to me, 'People like you shouldn't be allowed on the bus.'"

Clare Watson, London

"On one occasion I was boarding at Kings Lynn with my friend. I was waiting for the driver to open the ramp for me, only for him to shake his head and say, 'For [expletive] sake', slam his door and ask why my friend didn't do it. This was humiliating."

Robyn Rowland, East of England

Ramps breaking down

"Sometimes the ramp does not come out or gets stuck half-way, meaning I cannot get on. Then everyone else has to get off and someone has to come and fix it."

Clare Watson, London

"The hydraulic action that lowers the bus so the ramp can be used often does not work and I can't get on the bus. This seems to be more of a problem on the 'Yourbus' buses."
Charlotte Wood, East Midlands

Harassment by passengers

"My son has told me he's had a lot of people tutting and huffing as he took his time to get on the bus. My son only started using public transport last October with school as part of his travel training and he's very nervous of using the bus now."
A parent, South East

"There were two young women with a large pram and a small buggy, which they needed to move to allow me to get on the bus. They did this but were very angry and throughout the journey verbally attacked me saying I didn't have any rights to travel on the bus. It was actually quite scary as the abuse was aimed directly at me."
Trailblazer, London

People with less visible disabilities

"It is extremely hard to use public transport with an 'invisible' disability as people do not give up their seats for us. I suggest Transport for London introduces some sort of badge-wearing system like they have for pregnant women, so that passengers know to give up their seats for the 'invisibly' disabled."
Celestine Fraser, London

"The disabled seats used to have one window sign saying for disabled or pregnant. Now they have signs all over the seats, which is good for those who don't need those seats to realise. But when I, a 'healthy looking' young adult, sit there, I get looks of disgust. It's hard to know what's better."
Trailblazer, South West

Information

"The TfL journey planner has improved since the Olympics and it is easy to find information. However, outside London it is almost impossible to know whether a bus will be fully accessible."
Trailblazer, London



Trailblazer James Lee boarding a London bus.
Photograph courtesy of Transport for London.

Key findings:

- ▶ 67 percent of respondents have experienced problems getting on a bus, owing to the attitude or behaviour of the driver or fellow passengers
- ▶ 43 percent of respondents have been unable to get on a bus because the ramp was not working
- ▶ 31 percent of respondents have been unable to get on a bus because the driver refused to deploy the ramp
- ▶ more than half of respondents have been unable to travel on a bus because the wheelchair space was taken up by pushchairs
- ▶ over 20 percent of respondents have experienced harassment and verbal abuse on a bus during the past three years.

Common concerns include:

- ▶ bus drivers are confused about which types of wheelchairs and scooters are allowed on buses
- ▶ bus drivers don't ask parents to fold up their buggies, and parents refuse to vacate the wheelchair spaces
- ▶ narrow spaces on buses make it difficult for passengers in wheelchairs to get through
- ▶ uneven kerbs at bus stops make it difficult to rest ramps securely on the kerb
- ▶ people with less visible disabilities are told off for sitting in a priority seat
- ▶ negative attitudes from bus drivers and other passengers leave Trailblazers being harassed and feeling 'humiliated' and a 'nuisance'.

Action needed

We are calling on bus companies to:

- ▶ ensure all buses and bus routes are accessible to wheelchair users
- ▶ ensure, in future bus designs, that there is space for both a buggy and a wheelchair at the same time
- ▶ place the responsibility on bus drivers to use a PA system to request the wheelchair space to be vacated, so the responsibility is not on the disabled passenger to ask people to move
- ▶ set up a system so that when a ramp is not working on a bus, and a disabled passenger wants to board the bus, the driver informs a central depot to arrange an accessible taxi for the passenger
- ▶ make it mandatory for bus drivers to have disability awareness training
- ▶ ensure all buses have audio visual information on board.



CAMPAIGNING IN CUMBRIA

Trailblazer David Gale (pictured below right), was awarded Community Volunteer of the Year by Diverse Cumbria in 2016 for his campaign to improve access to public transport in Cumbria.

"Over the years, the main issue I have been trying to campaign about is access to public transport. It's what I wanted to look into since I first joined Trailblazers.

"Living in such a rural county as Cumbria, I always felt that access to transport was pretty poor for disabled people. Lots of bus services and railway services were inaccessible to the majority of people with mobility problems. So I thought if I could help in any way to change even the littlest thing, I would have done my job.

"The main issue for me here was the use of the railways as this has always been my main mode of transport and something I always enjoy. Travelling to big cities nearby, such as Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow, was never an issue. But if I wanted to visit many of the towns or villages in Cumbria, I would be aware of the possibility of facing a lot of difficulty.

"Even in my home city of Carlisle, there were problems at its mainline station, getting across to the other side. I complained, and Virgin Trains resolved the issue eventually by installing a lift.

"So I took it upon myself to visit many of the places and see how bad or good access to public transport was. I documented my findings in blogs I have posted on our website. The particular focus of mine was the Cumbrian Coast Line as there were numerous issues at many of its stations: getting on and off the trains, due to the huge steps off the trains, or even worse – huge gaps between the train and the platforms. Thankfully a lot of this has been improved, with humps being installed, making it a lot easier to get on and off the train.

"I visited the majority of rural stations on the famous Settle to Carlisle railway to give their rail users' group an idea of what improvements were needed to the stations on the route. They even gave me

a pass to do it at their expense. This was a great experience and gave me an insight into a whole load of different issues that can arise. Some of the stations were fine but the approach to the station would be inaccessible, while others couldn't be crossed without the use of a footbridge. I visited about nine stations in total and fed back my findings to the group and Northern Rail.

"Another common issue in my county is the poor information given about accessible buses on a number of routes. Together with my fellow Trailblazer, Carrie Ann Lightley, we approached our local council to see if they could at least improve the information given on timetables and their website. We managed to get the council to agree to this and the timetables were updated.

"Another thing I looked into was getting a new bus stop installed, because of poor access to a doctor's surgery. I met with the local council, police and the bus operator and they agreed to add this bus stop. It was put up early last year and has been used frequently.

"The bus companies have done a lot of the work for me with regard to their buses. The majority in Carlisle for example all are low-level buses, with plenty of room for wheelchair users and they are a lot easier to access. More buses in the county are to be replaced by 2018. I think gradually companies are getting the idea of what is needed to improve access on their services."



COACHES

It is interesting to note that none of our Trailblazers spoke to us about their experiences with coaches. This is possibly owing to the fact that coaches are not universally accessible, and some coach operators will not take certain types of wheelchair. There is also the issue of the lack of accessible toilets on board. Under the PSVAR 2000, coaches are not legally required to be wheelchair accessible until 2020. With so few Trailblazers ever having travelled by coach, it is evident that the accessibility of the coach network needs major improvement.

TRAINS

The UK's railway network is the oldest in the world; dating back to 1825. It is one of the most widely-used forms of public transport and since the privatisation of the network in 1994/5, rail passenger journeys have more than doubled.

In 2014 alone there were 1.65 billion journeys on the National Rail network. The railway system in the UK has been heavily invested in; the Department for Transport is spending £42.6 billion on the development of the high-speed rail network, HS2.

However, many disabled people still struggle to access the rail network owing to a combination of poor physical access and a lack of understanding about their needs.

The lack of accessible interconnecting public transport infrastructure compounds the problem, as people who are unable to use trains may also be denied access to other modes of public transport.

There have been some recent improvements with the Government's Access for All programme, which seeks to improve accessibility at some of the busiest stations. However, improving interconnecting infrastructure at smaller stations, and being able to access taxis and buses to get to these stations, are just as important, as people.

'I would love the spontaneity of being able to go somewhere with a friend at the drop of a hat.'

Letti Hellequin, Southampton

Information from train companies

"Booking-assisted travel is straightforward with Southeastern, but I feel unless you are well experienced with booking it, (and know how it all works), then it is complicated. Unless you know the stations and what the company provides (e.g. taxis instead of replacement bus service/taxi from an inaccessible station), they don't volunteer this information."

Chloe Timms, South East

Pre-booked assistance and 'turn up and go'

"I'm regularly refused the ramp for the train (Merseyrail) because I didn't book in advance. There is one member of staff who always reminds me that, 'People usually book in advance, you know?' I don't know who these 'people' are, but they're certainly none of my able-bodied friends."

Alexandra Haines, North West

"In Northern Ireland, you do not have to book assistance in advance. I feel I can trust Translink to meet my needs on every train journey. The conductors always phone ahead to my destination and inform them that I will require the ramp or assistance with the lift. I feel confident to travel alone, with friends or family, as I know conductors will provide me with assistance. All of the conductors are really friendly too!"

Suzanne Glover, Northern Ireland

"If only there was a 'call button' on trains because the amount of times I've booked assisted travel and still ended up with no ramp and no help (especially at Victoria Station) – well, it's too many times to count. It makes me anxious if I'm sitting on the train worrying that no-one is coming to help me get off, especially at the end of the line when I know the train will turn around and we'll travel back the way we came!"

Chloe Timms, South East

Harassment from other passengers

"I got on a train and a mother with a pram was in the wheelchair space. I asked if she could move. She started to, but also said she didn't have anywhere else to move to. I pointed out that it was a wheelchair space, and she started shouting at me.

"She said I had an attitude problem, she was going to move but needed to know where she would move to, that I had no right to speak to her like that, that she was

there first and where did I expect her to move to, there was no room. I said I didn't have an attitude problem. Then she started to talk over me, saying I shouldn't be speaking to her like that, who did I think I was, etc etc.

"In the end, the train attendant who had been at the side of the door from the second I got on the train, said it was fine. The mother could stay in the wheelchair space because her pram was too big to move anywhere else, and it would be no problem for me to sit in the doorway.

"She laughed it off saying, 'We won't let anyone fall on you!' I was still knocked into as people got on, and my back was to the door. I'm not just being pedantic over the wheelchair space; my safety was at risk. She could have folded the pram up, and everyone could have been safe. But no, I was stuck in the doorway and the loud shouting woman got her way. I'm always expected to be fine being stuck in the doorway."

**Alexandra Haines,
North West**

"My mum received physical and verbal harassment when she asked the staff why there wasn't a specific safe place to store my wheelchair in the carriage. Some men started sighing and talking about her and then one stood up, grabbed my wheelchair folded it up and shoved it to one side, saying, 'There – that wasn't too hard was it?' The situation escalated further, with another man grabbing my mum's arms and shoving her to one side."

Laura Bizzey, East of England

"I have had someone with a buggy shout through the carriage door: 'For [expletive] sake, there's a wheelchair in here!'"

Trailblazer, West Midlands

Inaccessible train stations

"The lifts in Twyford Station get switched off in the evenings when the station is unmanned, so I have to get off the train at a station further away from my home. If I call in advance, the rail company will provide a taxi for me. But taxis have not turned up. This has happened on more than one occasion."

Dean Yorke, South East

"My local train station is inaccessible. It means I have to travel to town, which is £20 in a taxi. Having an accessible train station close by would save me money."

Sophie Langan, Scotland

"There is no step-free station on the Central line from Ruislip until you get to Stratford. It has forced me to turn down jobs and generally made life more difficult than it should be."

Conrad Tokarczyk, London

More wheelchair spaces needed

"Because I can only sit at one part of the train, the wheelchair space has a lot of very drunk people around it and I have nowhere to move to. We need more flexible wheelchair spaces – not beside toilets."

Kiana Kalantar-Hormozi, Scotland

Booking tickets online

"You cannot book disabled tickets online, so I have to book a regular ticket and then ring the East Coast trainline and book the wheelchair space. Then my ticket I carry around doesn't even state my correct space. If disabled people could get a card alongside their Blue Badge, which has a code that you use online, that could enable you to book a disabled space online and avoid people abusing it."

Laura Richter, Yorkshire and Humber

"As much as I try to plan, more often than not, life throws a spanner in the works. I should have the same right to make a journey anywhere in London at the drop of a hat. It's a ramp, not rocket-science."

Matilda Ibini, London

Key findings:

- ▶ over half of respondents find information provided by the train company useful and easy to understand
- ▶ a quarter of respondents say their local train station is not accessible
- ▶ three quarters of respondents would prefer trains to have a 'turn up and go' service, rather than the requirement to book assistance 24 hours in advance
- ▶ nearly 15 percent of respondents have experienced harassment or verbal abuse on the train in the past three years.

Common concerns include:

- ▶ train companies do not supply clear and concise information about accessibility
- ▶ local, smaller train stations are not step-free, forcing disabled passengers to take buses or taxis to the nearest accessible station
- ▶ information is unclear on whether or not disabled people need to book train travel in advance
- ▶ pre-booked assistance restricts spontaneity in making travel decisions
- ▶ pre-booked assistance, when it arrives late or not at all, means disabled passengers miss their trains or are delayed getting off their train
- ▶ lifts are turned off in the evenings, making it a huge challenge for disabled people to get home at night.

Action needed

We are calling on train companies to:

- ▶ ensure more stations are made accessible for more users
- ▶ ensure train operators' information is up-to-date on whether passengers need to book or not
- ▶ ensure ticket offices are accessible to all users
- ▶ ensure help buttons are available in accessible locations on trains and platforms in case of an emergency
- ▶ ensure all front-facing staff receive disability awareness training
- ▶ ensure stations have clear signs that provide information on access and that they communicate any delays or problems visually and verbally to passengers
- ▶ ensure the wheelchair space is kept clear for wheelchair users on the train on all rail journeys
- ▶ communicate accessible services clearly.



TAXIS

Our survey highlighted three major concerns by Trailblazers. Firstly, that there are not enough wheelchair accessible taxis in regional areas, meaning many Trailblazers are often unable to use taxis when needed and sometimes never at all. Secondly, many Trailblazers, when trying to hail a taxi in the street, were ignored or told the ramp wasn't working. And thirdly, some Trailblazers reported being charged more, as a wheelchair user, for using a taxi. This is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010.

We are calling on the Government to bring Section 165 of the Equality Act 2010 into force, which would place legal duties on drivers of wheelchair-accessible taxis and PHVs to assist wheelchair users into their vehicles and not to make any additional charge for doing so.

The Law Commission published its findings and recommendations to Government in this area in May 2014. Recommendations addressed a number of these concerns. However, we are all still waiting for the official Government response to see if there are any plans to implement changes.

Poor attitudes from drivers

"Taxi drivers have refused me many times in London, or say they don't have the key for the ramps."

Trailblazer, West Midlands

"My friend hailed down a taxi for us, and when the driver saw me he said, 'Oh, I can't take wheelchairs, sorry,' and drove off. I've also had drivers at the front of a taxi rank drive past and go right to the back of the rank."

Alexandra Haines, North West

Being charged more

"Locally I'm charged £27 for a journey to the cinema, one way. The same journey costs my able-bodied siblings £9 both ways."

Trailblazer, Staffordshire

"A couple of taxis have tried to charge me extra (one, an extra £5) for putting ramps down, or simply having a wheelchair in their car."

Kieron Seaborne, Shropshire

"The price I pay for a taxi from a firm who have wheelchair-accessible taxis is more for a journey than it would cost someone who uses a car-type taxi."

Rebecca Unsworth, Yorkshire and Humber

Lack of accessible taxis

"Almost every time I try to book an accessible taxi I encounter problems. They often simply deny me service due to not having any available. I have also been left stranded in places for hours waiting for an accessible taxi to become available. It seriously limits me. I cannot rely on taxis as a reliable mode of transport."

Shauna Yabsley, Northern Ireland

"I do not know of one taxi in my area that is wheelchair-accessible. It makes it difficult if me and my partner, friend or family member would like to go out and they don't want to drive, as I feel like a burden."

Robyn Rowland, East of England

Design of taxis

"The ramps into a London cab are very steep and it is difficult to push any type of wheelchair in. They also have a very big lip, which makes it harder for the wheels to go over."

Velvet Bolingbroke, South West

"It would be good to have more taxis with facilities like long ramps and wheelchair clamps."

Charlotte Wood, East Midlands

Key findings:

- ▶ a quarter of respondents say they have experienced taxis failing to stop for them, despite their lights' being on and being hailed in the street
- ▶ nearly 30 percent of respondents say they have been refused service by a taxi driver, purely because they are disabled
- ▶ 35 percent of respondents feel taxis charge them more because they are wheelchair users
- ▶ nearly 60 percent of respondents have experienced difficulties in booking a wheelchair-accessible taxi
- ▶ nearly half of all respondents feel there is an inadequate number of wheelchair accessible taxis available.

Common concerns include:

- ▶ drivers who ignore wheelchair users and drive past them
- ▶ drivers who do not know how to use a ramp
- ▶ drivers who claim the ramp is broken
- ▶ a shortage of wheelchair accessible taxis
- ▶ drivers who fail to secure wheelchairs in place before driving away
- ▶ ramps that are often too steep and narrow
- ▶ drivers who charge disabled passengers more.

Action needed

We are calling on the Government, local authorities and taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) providers to ensure that:

- ▶ a number of accessible taxis are available at all times, in the same way non-accessible taxis are
- ▶ ramps in taxis are extendable and wider, so all wheelchair users can use them safely
- ▶ taxi subsidy cards are available for disabled passengers with a discount that reflects how dependent many disabled people are on them
- ▶ taxi drivers are given disability awareness training.



Trailblazer Lauren West boarding a London taxi.
Photograph courtesy of Transport for London.

LONDON UNDERGROUND AND OVERGROUND

London Underground carries around 1.3bn passengers every year and offers one of the fastest ways of getting around the capital. However, only 25 percent of the Underground network is accessible to wheelchair users and there are very few accessible stations in the heart of London.

By 2024, Transport for London aims to make 50 more stations on the Underground and Overground step-free, which would mean 56 percent of the network would have step-free access.

Since the 2012 London Olympics, we have seen improvements at some stations in terms of signage, physical accessibility and staff awareness. Portable ramps at platforms also make more stations accessible, which is a huge benefit to many passengers. However, this level of access and even signage is fragmented and disparate across the network.

London Overground seems to be leading the way when it comes to access issues. In addition to the greatly valued 'turn up and go' service provided on the network, Trailblazers praised the physical accessibility of the network and the information available about assistance with their journey.

Trailblazers would welcome any improvement to the physical infrastructure of the Underground and Overground, which is a lifeline for young disabled Londoners and visitors to the city. It is crucial that any station improvements put accessibility at the heart of planning.

"Step-free access is for all and is inclusive; it leaves no-one out."
Matilda Ibini, London

Trailblazers say:

Inaccessible stations

"Even in areas with level access, the gap between the train and platform has often been far too wide. My powerchair's front wheels are much bigger than a manual chair's castor wheels, and yet they have still fallen into the gaps, and I have been lucky that a friend was there to haul me out."

Letti Hellequin, South East

"Public transport by definition suggests that it is a service that should be accessible to everyone. Inaccessible Tube stations make it difficult for mobility impaired individuals to access the work, healthcare and education. If you cannot take the Tube, London's entire job market is out of bounds for you – this isn't fair in the 21st Century."

Conrad Tokarczyk, London

"I've often had to have staff call a station in advance for ramp assistance at an Underground station. The staff on many occasions seem confused about the procedure which I have often had to explain to them myself e.g. you need to come down with me to get the train number and give it to the station where I am getting off at. On occasions they have not passed on the information and I have had to block the doors from closing with my wheelchair and wait for staff to come and investigate why I won't let the doors close, so as to not end up at the last stop of the line (which would be the next accessible station). This is so unjust."

Trailblazer, London

Information

"If a lift is broken, there is no information given in advance. You can't get signal underground for Twitter updates, and it is difficult for me to access social media on the go, as I need to get carers to assist me."

Sulaiman Khan, London

Key findings:

- ▶ over 78 percent of respondents feel it is important for all London Underground stations to have step-free access
- ▶ nearly half of all respondents find it difficult to use the Underground because of its poor physical access
- ▶ half of respondents who use the Underground find the information on accessibility provided by Transport for London is not useful or easy to understand.

Common concerns include:

- ▶ a lack of step-free access and therefore longer journeys to destinations
- ▶ 'step-free' stations are not really step-free as there is still a gap or step to gain access to trains
- ▶ staff are not always visible when assistance is required
- ▶ help points are not always at an accessible level for wheelchair users, and are difficult to press
- ▶ lifts at stations are often out of order and this information is not communicated in good time
- ▶ it is important to have information in good time on whether stations are accessible to the platform, or to the train
- ▶ lack of clear signage to lifts and exits
- ▶ emergency help points on trains are inaccessible for many, because the covers are too heavy to lift, making communication with the driver impossible.

Action needed

We are calling on Transport for London to:

- ▶ ensure there are more step-free stations throughout London
- ▶ increase the use of innovative lift engineering, e.g. 'incline lift' as used at Greenford station
- ▶ ensure more portable platform ramps are available at stations while level access is completed
- ▶ all staff have disability awareness training
- ▶ ensure up-to-date access information is clearly disseminated
- ▶ improve signage to accessible routes throughout stations
- ▶ review emergency help points on trains and around stations with adequate consultation with groups like Trailblazers.



Trailblazer Vivek Gohil.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Lauren West (pictured below right) is a Campaigns Officer for Trailblazers and has spinal muscular atrophy

I am a typical 20-something who does the London commute. I love it because it really gives me a sense of normality.

But as a child, I was used to being chauffeured around in our family car because public transport was a complete no-go for me then, and we would drive from our home in Wales to London for my hospital check-ups.

One day after a hospital visit, we spotted an "accessible" London bus. I was super excited. My parents agreed we should take a ride to try it out. But it didn't happen. Drivers would tell me the ramp was broken, or there was no space. One driver saw me, and all the other people at the stop, and kept on driving, with people exclaiming in horror, 'That poor child only wants to ride the bus!'

I actually created quite a scene where fellow bus passengers refused to get on the bus until I was allowed on. In the end, we walked away. All the excitement of the opportunity to get on a bus had gone.

Fast forward fifteen years. Last year I took a trip to Greenwich from my new home in South London which involved three trains. I didn't book the ramp in advance because I don't like my life being dictated by red tape. It could well have backfired but it didn't. I made the journey by myself and in record time. That, in itself, shows how far public transport has come.

But I still really dislike that my ability to go where I want is heavily reliant on other people. With the UK public transport system, there is far too much room for human error. When I can't get a bus, it's usually because the driver has

parked incorrectly for the ramp to work. When I get stuck on a train, it's because the message hasn't been passed on that I'm waiting for assistance.

Technology has taken such huge strides that I think we should be looking at this to improve public transport. Let's be ambitious. Let's fight for trains that have built in ramps that we could activate ourselves. Why should other people hold the power of where and when we go?

I don't want to see just small changes. I want to see an infrastructure that removes the barriers disabled travellers face.



COMPARATIVE JOURNEYS

<i>FROM</i>	<i>TO</i>	<i>TIME TAKEN</i> – no access requirements	<i>TIME TAKEN</i> – full access requirements
Paddington	Oxford Circus	7 mins	30 mins
Euston	Camden Town	14 mins	22 mins
Liverpool Street	Bank	1 min	14 mins
Waterloo	Baker Street	8 mins	45 mins
Waterloo	Marylebone	12 mins	49 mins
Waterloo	Tottenham Court Road	22 mins	24 mins
Wimbledon	Waterloo	19 mins	27 mins
Paddington	Moorgate	24 mins	1 hr 1 mins
Oxford Street	Covent Garden	8 mins	22 mins
St Pauls	Holborn	3 mins	11 mins
Piccadilly	Covent Garden	2 mins	12 mins
Baker Street	Bond Street	2 mins	33 mins
Oxford Street	Notting Hill Gate	8 mins	27 mins
Baker Street	Shoreditch High Street	28 mins	56 mins
Camden Town	Kings Cross	4 mins	21 mins
Victoria	Kings Cross	9 mins	34 mins
Victoria	Willesden	23 mins	1 hr 14mins
Shepherd's Bush	Stratford	32 mins	1 hr 5 mins
Victoria	Bow Road	27 mins	1 hr 6 mins

An interview with Peter Fletcher from Transport for London

Trailblazers James Lee, Ravi Mehta, Layla Harding and Campaigns Officer Lauren West met with Peter Fletcher (pictured below right), Senior Communications Manager at Transport for London (TfL) to hear how TfL was supporting disabled passengers.

Ravi: Does TfL offer a travel mentoring scheme?

Peter: Yes. We set it up to help disabled Londoners plan journeys and learn how to get around our network. This could be from advice on the telephone to having up to five journeys with a travel mentor.

Ravi: What is the travel support card?

Peter: Disabled people can show this card to our staff to ask for assistance. It says on the front, 'Please can you help me' and has space inside to write your own information. It's there to give an additional level of support to disabled people who may have difficulty communicating or who aren't feeling confident.

Lauren: Do London Underground staff receive disability equality training?

Peter: Yes. With the ticket office closures and moving staff into gate lines and platforms, we've introduced five days of new training, with a day dedicated to Disability Equality. It's run by disabled people and there's a role-play situation using disabled actors to ask challenging questions of the staff. We have also produced a training video.

Lauren: Are all taxi drivers trained to use taxi ramps?

Peter: Taxi drivers can't be licensed until they prove they can use wheelchair ramps. So if they claim they don't know how to use them, report them to us.

Ravi: Trailblazers are often told, 'This is not my cab' or, 'The ramp is broken'. Are taxis inspected for ramps?

Peter: Every 12 months, a taxi has a 'conditions of fitness' test to make sure it meets all the requirements, one of which is

to have a working wheelchair ramp. A lot of taxi drivers share cabs, but they must know how to use the ramp.

Lauren: How can young disabled people make a complaint if they've been denied access to a bus?

Peter: If it's related to a buggy using the space and the bus driver has not asked the parent to move or share the space, then report it to our customer experience team on the phone or email, or via Twitter.

Layla: How can disabled customers find out if lifts aren't in operation?

Peter: Follow the @TfLAccess or any Tube line Twitter accounts. The information also goes on our website, or you can call our customer services team (0343 222 1234).

Layla: What support do you provide for disabled passengers when a lift breaks down?

Peter: If you're in the middle of a journey and it can't be completed because a lift has broken down, we offer a free taxi service to disabled people to complete their journey.

Ravi: What aspect of TfL's support with access for disabled passengers are you most proud of?

Peter: For me, it's this kind of thing – speaking to disabled people and getting them involved in our work. I think that's the best thing – and making more stations step free too!

www.tfl.gov.uk/transport-accessibility





Trailblazers James Lee, Lauren West and Ravi Mehta, using the London Underground

SUMMARY

In 2014, after calls from disability rights organisations including Trailblazers and Transport for All, Transport for London (TfL) announced a £75m fund to improve step-free access on the London Underground network. TfL also rolled out a 'turn up and go' service across the London Overground network, removing the much maligned requirement of having to book assistance 24 hours in advance.

Trailblazers had initially called for a 'turn up and go' service after the launch of our first *End of the Line* report in 2009 and are pleased that TfL listened to us. Now we are calling for a 'turn up and go' service to be rolled out across more of the UK's train network, so that disabled people will be able to make journeys with the same level of spontaneity as the rest of the public.

Since the launch of our first report in 2009, we have been working alongside transport groups to make sure accessibility is high up on their agenda. We have been working with the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC), the National Rail Accessibility Forum (NRAF), and the Department for Transport's own Inclusive Mobility Group to help set the agenda for future policies from Government and industry to support the mobility needs of disabled people. In addition, Tanvi Vyas,

Trailblazers Project Manager, sits on the Disabled Persons Travel Advisory Committee (DPTAC).

- ▶ we have been working closely with the government to make public transport more accessible.
- ▶ we know there are huge strides to be made in improving public transport. Since the launch of our original report into public transport, we have worked alongside transport groups to make sure accessibility is high up on their agenda. We have been working with the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC), the National Rail Accessibility Forum (NRAF), and the Department for Transport's own Inclusive Mobility Group to help set the agenda for future policies from Government and industry to support the mobility needs of disabled people. In addition, Trailblazers Project Manager Tanvi Vyas sits on the Disabled Persons Travel Advisory Committee (DPTAC).

Despite all the progress we have made, public transport still has a long way to go before it is truly compliant with the Equality Act 2010 and other disability discrimination legislation, which protects the rights of disabled people to access these public services like the rest of the population.



Trailblazer James Lee.
Photograph courtesy of Transport for London.

USEFUL LINKS

Department for Transport

www.dft.gov.uk

The Government department responsible for public transport

Transport Focus

www.transportfocus.org.uk

Campaigns on behalf of passengers and road users

Transport for London

www.tfl.gov.uk

The website for London's transport network

Gov.uk

www.gov.uk

Provides information on Government services and those responsible for them

Find your MP

www.theyworkforyou.com

Type in your postcode to find your local MP

Find your Assembly Member

www.assemblywales.org/memhome/membersearch.htm

If you live in Wales, search here

Find your MSP

www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/membersPages/MSPAddressPostcodeFinder.htm

If you live in Scotland, search here

Find your MLA

www.niassembly.gov.uk/members/constmap_res.htm

If you live in Northern Ireland, search here

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission

www.equalityhumanrights.com

The home of campaigning for equality in the UK and Northern Ireland

Stations Made Easy

www.nationalrail.co.uk/75001.aspx

An interactive tool on the National Rail Enquiries website

Transport for All

www.transportforall.org.uk

Campaigns for disabled transport users in London

Muscular Dystrophy UK

Fighting muscle-wasting conditions



Muscular Dystrophy UK is the charity bringing individuals, families and professionals together to beat muscle-wasting conditions. We're providing a range of services and opportunities to help people live as independently as possible.

We're here for you at the point of diagnosis and at every stage thereafter, and can:

- ▶ give you accurate and up-to-date information about your child's muscle-wasting condition, and let you know of progress in research
- ▶ give you tips and advice about day-to-day life, written by people who know exactly what it's like to live with a muscle-wasting condition
- ▶ put you in touch with other parents living with the same condition, who can tell you about their experiences
- ▶ tell you about the services, equipment and support you're entitled to.

0800 652 6352

info@muscular dystrophyuk.org

[@MDUK_News](#)

www.muscular dystrophyuk.org

Muscular Dystrophy UK, 61A Great Suffolk Street, London SE1 0BU

Registered Charity No. 205395 and Registered Scottish Charity No. SC039445

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www.muscular dystrophyuk.org/trailblazers