

Understanding and identifying barriers to accessing transport

The experiences of disabled
people in the UK

Key Insights,
November 2024



About ncat



The National Centre for Accessible Transport works to ensure that no disabled person faces challenges arising from poor access to transport by:

- Engaging with disabled people to better understand their experiences and co-design solutions
- Amplifying the voices of disabled people in all decision making
- Collaborating widely with all transport stakeholders
- Demonstrating good practice and impact to influence policy

ncat is delivered by a consortium of organisations that includes Coventry University, Policy Connect, The Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC), Designability, Connected Places Catapult, and WSP. It is funded for seven years from 2023 by the Motability Foundation.

For more information about ncat and its work please visit www.ncat.uk

To contact ncat, either about this report or any other query, please email info@ncat.uk



Why did we do this work?

Disabled people make 38% fewer journeys using transport than non-disabled people. This has not changed for over ten years¹.

This report is part of a series of research conducted by the National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) since its launch as an Evidence Centre in early 2023. Whilst this is a standalone report, we would recommend it is considered alongside other ncat research published from late 2024. As ncat progresses further, reports and insights will also be published on our website www.ncat.uk

1. The Transport Accessibility Gap Report, March 2022

2. Inclusion London

In 2023, the National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) was set up to help reduce this transport accessibility gap. ncat works with disabled people and people in the transport industry to understand how transport could be improved.

To ensure that ncat is led by the views of disabled people, a survey was developed. It aimed to find the barriers that disabled people face while travelling. We also invited some disabled people to complete travel diaries.

Access barriers (called 'barriers' in this report) are obstacles that prevent or make it difficult for disabled people to access services, information, or physical spaces. This was developed by disabled people in the [Social Model of Disability²](#). For example, wheelchair users experience barriers when travelling because of the lack of step-free train stations, not because they use a wheelchair or have a mobility impairment.

What did we do?

1,195 people completed a survey about their experiences of transport in the UK.

How did we design the research?

A group of nine disabled people, called Experts by Experience, helped to design and create the research.

We wanted to make sure that disabled people could access the survey easily. It was tested for accessibility and survey participants could respond online, by phone, or through a Video Relay Service for British Sign Language users.

Who responded to the research?

A total of 1,195 people completed the survey. They also provided 1,274 comments.

The survey included responses from disabled people living in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. It included responses from people who use all modes of transport, such as trains, cars, and boats.

14 disabled people participated in the travel diary study. Over two weeks, they completed 62 diary entries. They wrote about their normal day-to-day journey experiences and shared photos. We gathered stories from across the UK.

What do disabled people think about transport?

Disabled people face widespread barriers when they travel.

But this is not new. Disabled people have been sharing their experiences and campaigning for change for a long time. This research shows that the barriers that disabled people experience continue to create access inequality. This makes it hard or sometimes impossible for many people to use certain modes of transport.

Disabled people do not think transport is accessible. Most do not think this will change in the next 10 years.

- **Transport is not accessible in the UK.** Most disabled people said that transport is currently not accessible. The average accessibility score for all modes of transport was 4.4 out of 10³. Except for cars and wheelchair accessible vehicles, all modes of transport scored 5 or lower out of 10.
- **There is little optimism about future improvements.** Disabled people are not confident that accessibility will improve in the next 10 years. The average score for future improvements was only 3.4 out of 10⁴.

3. Participants rated accessibility on a scale where 0 is 'not at all accessible' and 10 is 'extremely accessible'

4. The rating was on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'not at all likely' and 10 is 'extremely likely'.

What do disabled people think about transport?

92% of disabled people face barrier(s) on at least one mode of transport.

Most disabled people experience barriers when travelling.

- **Cars and wheelchair accessible vehicles are the most used modes of transport.** Cars and wheelchair accessible vehicles were the most used mode of transport, followed by walking, wheeling, cycling or scootering.
- **Most disabled people surveyed have experienced barriers on at least one mode of transport.** 92% of respondents reported facing at least one barrier. Train users face the most barriers.



“You are excited to go and be like your friends but you keep hitting obstacles, and with each one it ruins your day and that smile goes away.”

Anonymous survey participant



What's the impact of inaccessible transport?

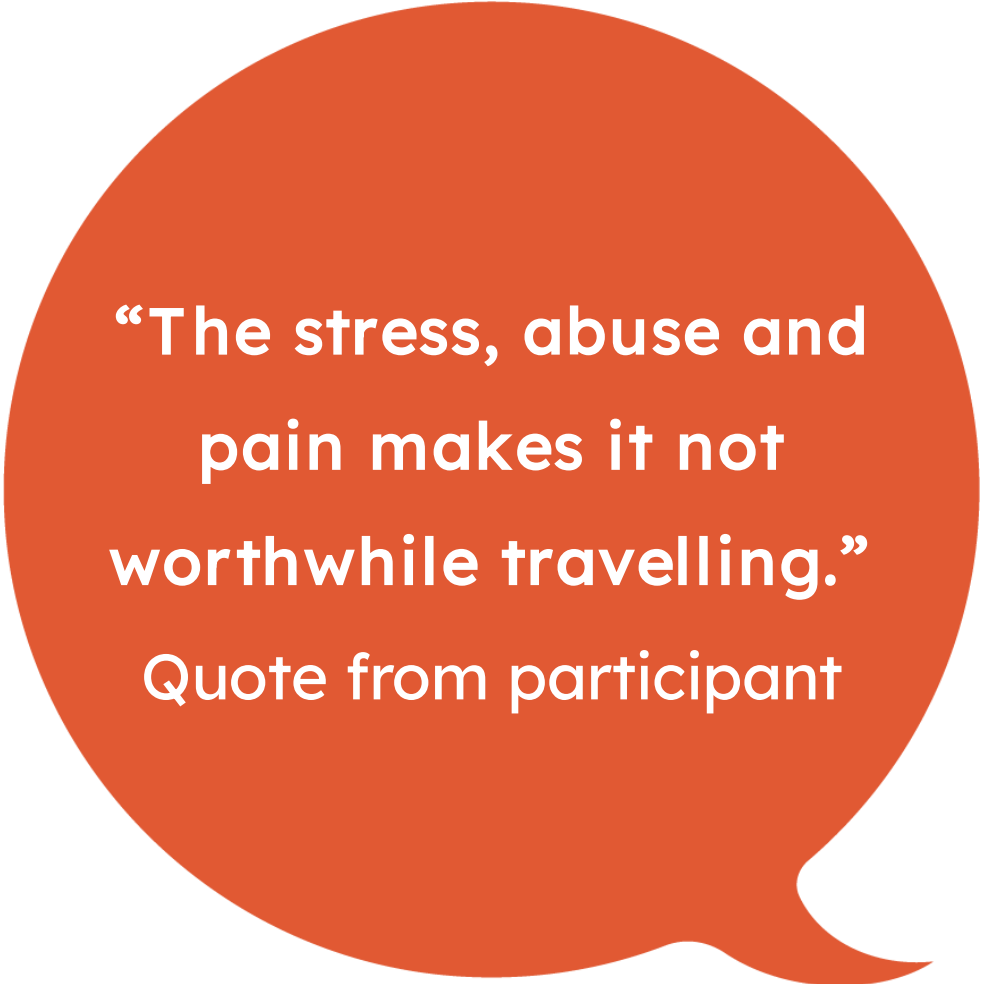
Transport barriers mean disabled people travel less and have worse wellbeing.

Inaccessible transport makes disabled people travel less, and it makes journeys take longer.

- **Transport barriers affect how often disabled people travel.** 79% of disabled people travel less often and 84% experience longer journey times due to transport barriers.

Inaccessible transport impacts the wellbeing of many disabled people.

- **Transport barriers impact people's wellbeing.** 77% of disabled people said that transport barriers have a negative effect on their physical or mental wellbeing. 75% said they make them feel stress when travelling.



“The stress, abuse and pain makes it not worthwhile travelling.”

Quote from participant

What transport barriers do disabled people face?

The issues with accessible transport are diverse and widespread. Disabled people face barriers like badly designed and cluttered streets, unreliable step-free access, and poor staff assistance.

Disabled people face many barriers when they travel.

The barriers that impact the highest proportion of disabled people are:

- **Pavement and curbs** are poorly designed.
- **Getting on and off a vehicle**, including step-free access is difficult, including gaps, ramps and lifts.
- **Things on the street get in the way**, such as advertising signs and parked cars.
- **Using staff assistance is an issue**, including people not being around to help
- **Step-free stations** are lacking or unreliable.

What transport barriers do disabled people face? (part 2)

Percentage of disabled people impacted by type of transport barrier, by mode of transport

Transport barrier	Mode of transport	Percentage of disabled people with this barrier (%)
Pavement and curbs	Walking, wheeling, cycling or scootering	65%
Step-free access on/off vehicle	Train	64%
Things on the street	Walking, wheeling, cycling or scootering	59%
Step-free access on/off vehicle	Underground train	58%
Entering a taxi	Taxi and PHV	56%
Using staff assistance	Airplane	53%
Step-free stations	Train	52%
Step-free stations	Train	52%
Using staff assistance	Train	50%
Step-free access on/off vehicle	Coach	48%

What transport barriers do disabled people face? (part 3)

Inaccessible streets and pavements are the biggest barriers in public spaces.

- **Things on the street create barriers for disabled people.** This includes things like cars, bins and advertising signage getting in the way. This is a barrier for 59% of people that walk, wheel, cycle or scoot.
- **Pavement and curbs are poorly designed.** 39% of respondents⁵ said that pavement and curbs are an issue. As a disabled person said, “Bad condition of pavements, lack of dropped kerbs, roadworks hampering access i.e. blocking dropped kerb.”

5. This question was asked to people who walk, wheel, cycle, or use buses, cars, community transport services, private hire vehicles, taxis and wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Personal stories: Travel diaries

Maggie is a woman in her seventies who went on a holiday in Wales with her family. She went to a village where paths and walkways were often narrow and uneven. She has mobility and dexterity impairments, and uses a mobility scooter while out.

When she told us about her journey, she said she “Took my mobility scooter around the village with my sister-in-law, her husband and my husband, to look around, as we were all on holiday, staying in a caravan and it is a very old scenic village.

My main problems were lack of pavements and/or lack of wide enough pavements and/or lack of dropped kerbs, or the dropped kerbs were too high which meant that for most of the time I had to drive my scooter on the road.

This was dangerous because of the cars, and made my sister anxious, but it did mean I could travel alongside my sister and talk to her. When able to get on the pavement I had to go in front of her as the pavements weren't wide enough, so we couldn't talk to each other.

The impact of this uneven and inaccessible streetscape was “Discomfort, danger and lack of control of my scooter.”

Maggie felt that this presented a risk to her and that there were improvements that could improve her journey. These included, “Better pavements, wider and with dropped kerbs that actually are dropped.

Alternatively, lanes in the road like cycle lanes, but for mobility scooters.”

“I have experienced ongoing problems with shopkeepers placing their signs on the footpath, just giving enough space for pram users and pedestrians just enough space to get past, but not enough for mobility scooter, and then stand laughing.”

Anonymous survey participant



What transport barriers do disabled people face? (part 4)

Vehicles and transport stations are not designed to meet the needs of disabled people.

- **Step-free access on and off a vehicle is lacking or unreliable.** This includes things like gaps on to vehicles, ramps and lifts. This is a barrier for 44% of respondents on vehicles⁷, and 43% of respondents at stations⁸.
- **Stations are entirely inaccessible for some people.** Many disabled people said that stations were inaccessible. One person said that they, “can’t enter [the] station at all.”
- **Toilets and changing places are unavailable or poor quality.** 33% of respondents⁹ said these are an issue at stations and transport stops.

7. This question was asked to users of boats, buses, coaches, community transport services, taxis or PHVs, trains, trams, and underground trains.

8. This question was asked to users of airplanes, boats, trains, trams, and underground trains. 9. This question was asked to users of boats, cars, trains, trams, and underground trains.

“Many of the ‘step free’ platforms still have huge gaps or a small step up to the trains which can cause a lot of anxiety and not all wheelchairs can manage.”

Anonymous survey participant



Personal stories: Travel diaries

Annabel is a woman who lives with a range of impairments, including a mobility impairment and chronic pain, which means she often can't stand for long periods. She told us about going to the train station.

She said, "I drove to the train station to pick up my brother... I arrived at the train station car park 10 minutes before his train arrived. I couldn't find the accessible parking because it was on the second floor rather than the ground floor which was unusual. When I eventually found them, all but one spot (the furthest away) was full. There were 6 cars with no blue badges displayed - I had to walk past them all to get to the station entrance..."

This misuse of the accessible parking bays meant that even before she had got into the station, Annabel had expended energy in overcoming a barrier created by the behaviour of others. She then went on to say, "When I finally got into the train station... there was nowhere to sit within the arrival hall (as in no seating provided at all), and the only seating was within the food area which was limited fixed benches facing away from the arrival gates. This meant I could sit down but not see people arriving to look out for my brother and he couldn't see me. I sat here for 15 mins then sat on the floor of the arrival hall as it got closer to his arrival time. This wasn't comfortable."

To improve her experience next time, she recommended that the station implements "Seating within arrivals, additional seating in general," and "parking attendants checking accessible spaces were not being abused."

What transport barriers do disabled people face?

Interactions with other people can make travelling difficult.

- **Staff assistance is unreliable.** This includes staff being unavailable, even if assistance is booked. 47% of respondents¹⁰ highlighted this issue. As one person said, “No staff means no help!”
- **Public and staff attitudes and behaviours can be negative.** This includes the way that staff and the public interact with and treat disabled people when travelling. This impacts 31% of respondents¹¹.

10. This question was asked to users of aeroplanes, trains, and underground trains.

11. This question was asked to users of all modes of transport.



**“Abuse from others, following,
stalking me, yelling at me,
shouting things like you’re not
really disabled.”**

Anonymous survey participant



What transport barriers do disabled people face? (part 5)

The design of vehicles and physical spaces makes it hard for disabled people to feel comfortable when travelling.

- Moving vehicles create problems for people on board, including things like lack of handrails or vehicles not stopping for long enough. 33% of respondents¹² said this was a barrier.
- Car journeys have specific challenges, including finding suitable parking spaces or parking bays with enough room. This impacts 32% of car and wheelchair accessible vehicle users. As one disabled person said, “Lack of disabled parking in town centres”.

12. This question was asked to people who use aeroplanes, boats, buses, coaches, trains, trams and underground trains.

“Walking to the toilet onboard when coach is moving is scary and dangerous; I’m so shaken by the movement on the road, I’m scared I’ll fall down.”

Anonymous survey participant



What conclusions did we come to?

Transport is not accessible for everybody. Transport access barriers prevent or make it difficult for disabled people to access services, information, and physical spaces.

A survey of over a thousand disabled people revealed that 92% have experienced a barrier on at least one mode of transport. Barriers exist on all modes of transport, and across the UK. 68% of disabled people surveyed have more than one access need and face multiple, compounding barriers as they travel.

The key barriers are badly designed and cluttered streets, unreliable step-free access, and poor staff assistance. Interventions should be targeted at these issues.

But this is not new. Disabled people have been sharing their experiences of transport and campaigning for change for a long time. There are many other sources of information available, and some recent ones are listed below.

- House of Commons (2022): [Access to transport for disabled people](#)
- Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (2022): [A new approach to travel, our streets and our places](#)
- Motability (2022): [The Transport Accessibility Gap](#)
- Transport for All (2023): [Are we there yet? Barriers to transport for disabled people in 2023](#)
- Transport for Wales (2024): [TfW Accessible Travel Policy Making Rail Accessible: Helping Older, and Disabled Passengers - Policy Document](#)
- Transport Scotland (2023): [Accessible Travel Framework: Evaluation Research Project Report](#)

What should happen next?

For change to happen, people working in the transport sector need to understand and care about accessible transport.

What will ncat do?

- **Provide grant funding** to improve streets, step-free access, and staff assistance.
- **Share the data** from this research to give people that work in the transport sector open information.
- **Track how things change** and update the survey, ideally annually.
- **Identify barriers preventing travel.** Conduct analysis of the barriers that prevent disabled people from travelling or using certain modes of transport.

- **Raise awareness about transport barriers** using the experiences shared in this report. Target communications at key people in the transport sector. This includes driving change with a Policy Commission in Parliament.

What can people working in the transport sector do?

- **Prioritise improving transport services and regulations.** The UK and devolved governments should implement practical changes, informed by the findings of this report.
- **Ensure disabled people are decision-makers.** Disabled people need to be decision-makers in the transport industry. Their experiences need to be listened to and acted on.

What should happen next? (part 2)

What can people conducting research do?

- **Actively include disabled people in research from the beginning.** Enable disabled people to lead research and create supportive environments in research organisations.
- **Make research tools accessible.** From online survey software to the tools used for data analysis, test the accessibility of products with disabled people.
- **Ensure fair and ethical research practices.** It is important to involve disabled people throughout research, but this must be done in an inclusive and accessible way and when disabled people support research activities, they should be appropriately compensated for their efforts.
- **Consider that disabled people often have multiple impairments and access needs.** Questionnaires regularly only allow for participants to select a single impairment category, or results are often aggregated. This leaves research with a potentially biased picture of needs and doesn't capture the reality of most disabled people's experiences.
- **Ensure research outputs are shared with decision makers and industry.** There is lots of fantastic research out there already that people who can make change don't know about. ncat can help share findings, so [contact ncat](#) - we can help.
- **Ensure research outputs are accessible to disabled people,** including Word, Easy Read and British Sign Language.

Key insights

This report just gives key insights.

The Full Report as well as Easy-Read and BSL version of the highlights are available at www.ncat.uk/what-we-do/projects

ncat encourage you to freely use the data available in this report for your research, analyses, and publications. When using this data, please reference it as follows to acknowledge ncat as the source:

‘ncat (2024). ‘Understanding and identifying barriers to accessing transport’

Available at www.ncat.uk