



Working together for accessible transport

Feedback from transport
professionals and stakeholders

Highlights Report, November 2024

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

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‘ncat (2024). ‘Working together for accessible transport’. Available at www.ncat.uk

1 Why did we do this work?

Research from the Motability Foundation has shown that disabled people take 38% fewer trips than non-disabled people. This has not improved for over a decade. More research is needed to understand why this has not improved.

The UK has a complex transport system. It has public and private organisations, and 1.5m employees.¹ This document uses feedback from transport professionals about ways to make transport more accessible.

We aimed to get feedback from transport professionals at all levels: local, regional and national, and with different levels of seniority. They are from the public, private and non-profit sectors.

¹ [Number of people employed in the transport and storage industry from 1st quarter 1997 to 3rd quarter 2024](#)

2 What did we do, how did we do it, and who did we work with?

This report looks at issues and barriers identified by those working in the transport sector. It examines their limits and opportunities to improve transport accessibility.

We held six feedback sessions with 173 transport sector representatives. They were selected from ncat's existing working relationships, transport representatives from the [Community of Accessible Transport \(CAT\) panel](#), and targeted outreach.

The feedback sessions included representatives from various groups. These groups were combined authorities, county councils, local councils, transport authorities, technology providers, consultants, and operators in rail, bus, aviation, and micromobility.

The feedback gathered was analysed using thematic analysis. We categorised the comments by theme and topic for this report, highlighting barriers and opportunities for change.

3 What did we find?

Transport sector workers provided 240 feedback comments about accessible transport. The main themes that were identified from this feedback were:

- Knowledge and understanding
- Financial
- Built environment
- Accountability and ownership

Table 1. Themes from comments by transport professionals, by number and proportion of responses.

Theme	Responses
Knowledge and understanding: Transport decisions and policies lack input from lived experiences.	42.9% of responses 103 comments
Financial: Accessibility improvements are seen to be too expensive, and it can be difficult to justify the investment.	22.5% of responses 54 comments
Built environment: Physical limits of buildings and existing infrastructure are seen as barriers to improving accessibility.	19.6% of responses 47 comments
Accountability and ownership: The transport sector lacks a joined-up approach to accessibility.	15.0% of responses 36 comments

Finding 1: Transport decisions and policies lack input from lived experiences

Knowledge and understanding barriers:

- **There isn't clear policy and design guidance about accessible transport for transport professionals:** A lack of laws and guidance was seen as a barrier to understanding by both public and private sector bodies. One respondent noted, "***Design standards sometimes contradict each other, and it can become more complex once contractors are involved in delivering projects.***"

- **There is a lack of understanding of lived experiences in the transport sector.** Respondents see engaging with disabled people as crucial to improving transport. One local authority respondent noted it is difficult “*finding local groups or specific users to engage (with)*”. Meanwhile, a micromobility operator commented that they have “*limited understanding of user needs*”.

Knowledge and understanding opportunities for improvement:

Transport sector employees identified ways that they could better understand accessible transport:

- **Work with disabled people and have more diverse decision-makers:** Many felt engaging with disabled people is key, and some commented on the need for more diversity in the workforce. There was also clear demand for better training about accessible transport. One public sector representative suggested to, “*learn more about it to understand (the) changes that we can make.*”
- **Set clear accessibility standards:** Respondents wanted better guidelines and policies for accessibility. This would support improvements and reduce inconsistency across the sector. One bus operator suggested the need for “*common standards for accessibility, so there is no need to have different bus specifications in different local authorities.*”

Finding 2: Accessibility improvements are seen to be too expensive, and it can be difficult to justify the investment

Financial barriers:

- **There is a lack of budget or long-term funding certainty in the transport sector.** Respondents cited budget limits and

competition for funding as obstacles to investing in accessible transport. One local authority representative stated that they have, ***“Scarce resources and competing funding needs”***.

- **The economic benefits of investing in transport accessibility or social value are not understood.** Many struggled to quantify the benefits of accessibility upgrades, making it hard to advocate for such investments. One remarked, ***“Every person is equal in a cost-benefit analysis. We don’t account for people that don’t have an alternative [means of transport].”***

Financial opportunities for improvement:

Transport professionals suggested actions to close the accessibility gap:

- **Highlight economic benefits:** Participants emphasised the need for evidence of the value of investments in accessibility. People wanted evidence that accessibility projects offer value, especially regarding trips and income. One noted, ***“We overlook the economic benefit of access.”***
- **Link funding to accessibility:** A suggestion was made to tie public sector funding to the accessibility of projects. One person stated, ***“Local authorities should withhold funding for schemes unless they demonstrate accessibility.”***

Finding 3: Physical limits of buildings and existing infrastructure are seen as barriers to improving accessibility

- **The built environment and existing infrastructure can create physical constraints to improving transport accessibility.** Some respondents cited space and historic constraints as barriers. Public sector representatives particularly noted this issue. For example, a combined authority representative mentioned difficulty

in widening cycle lanes for different mobility aids, while navigating market stalls and outdoor seating.

Built environment opportunities for improvement:

Despite the challenges, transport sector professionals see two key opportunities:

- **Better legislation and guidance:** Respondents believe improved laws and guidance are crucial. Low Traffic Neighbourhoods was referenced as a step in the right direction in terms of guidance on active travel standards. One respondent stated that they would value a similar publication that focused on accessibility.
- **More community engagement early into transport projects:** Some respondents stressed the need for better engagement during physical transport projects. One local authority representative said, "*More disabled people should be involved in design work.*"

Finding 4: The transport sector lacks a joined-up approach to accessibility

- **Transport sector decisions are driven by central policies:** Policies, and politics shape transport services. Public bodies said they must follow strategies and plans at all levels. This influences accessible transport. Respondents also noted that accessibility isn't prioritised like health and safety.
- **There are not clear accountabilities for accessible transport:** Some respondents said that decisions are beyond their control. A public authority cited the lack of national (governmental) coordination of accessibility as a major barrier.

- **There is not a collaborative or standard approach to accessibility across the transport sector:** Respondents noted the absence of a standard approach or direction as a barrier. Public authorities and non-profits called for better collaboration and consistency across the sector. This includes consistency across geographical boundaries and across different modes of transport. One suggested sharing best practices to improve accessible transport. A bus operator stated, “***Without having an approach that is joined up across county boundaries we won't have an accessible network.***”

Accountability and ownership opportunities for improvement:

Transport sector representatives proposed a key idea to improve accessibility.

- **Define roles, improve collaboration and share knowledge:** The need for a consistent approach to transport accessibility was suggested. One representative suggested a national policy group for accessible transport. The sharing of knowledge, evidence and data was also suggested.

4 What conclusions did we come to?

This document identifies obstacles to improved transport accessibility in the UK and proposes solutions, as suggested by transport professionals.

It draws on feedback from transport representatives to pinpoint four main issues that are seen to be hindering progress: **knowledge and understanding, financial, the built environment, and accountability and ownership.**

It summarises suggestions to overcome these issues. Ideas include increasing representation of disabled people in transport decision-making, making accessibility a priority in policies, showcasing the economic benefits of accessibility, and improving collaboration in the transport sector.

The report demonstrates that people working in the transport sector face obstacles and barriers that hinder improvements in transport accessibility. Those that participated in the research often had a desire to make transport access better but were hindered by factors such as knowledge and budgets. Recommendations have been made, which are summarised in the next section.

5 What should happen next?

Many people that participated in the research want to make transport more accessible. Their ideas were turned into recommendations. These aim to improve transport access for disabled people.

We have made recommendations for people in the transport and policy sector:

- **Get more disabled people into transport jobs and decision-making positions.** Review how your organisation recruits staff and speak to disabled people to understand how to make your organisation more inclusive.
- **Establish strong leadership for accessible transport.** Appoint a senior person in national governments as an accountable lead for accessible transport. This individual should be responsible for overseeing accessibility across all modes of transport and be responsible for holding transport organisations to account.
- **Align public funding with accessibility.** The government should ensure that transport projects receive public funding only if they prioritise accessibility. In the research, several people pointed out that accessibility is not viewed as essential as health and safety.
- **Create standard regulations and guidance about accessible transport.** Develop clear regulations and tools that people that work in the transport sector can use to embed accessibility in their work, whether that is a policy, or an operational service. These should be co-produced with disabled people and provide common standards that apply to all local authorities.

We have made recommendations for ncat and its future activities:

- **Conduct research into the economic benefits of accessible transport.** Provide evidence that transport professionals can use to secure funding for improvements.
- **Look at what's needed to train transport employees about how to meaningfully co-produce projects with disabled people.** Provide guidance and tools to help people in the transport sector co-produce projects with disabled people.
- **Create a forum and database for sharing knowledge across the transport sector.** Create ways for people to share knowledge and best practice across the transport sector and share national and international examples of things that work in different locations.

6 About ncat

The National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) works as an Evidence Centre developing high quality evidence, best practice, and innovative solutions to inform future disability and transport strategy, policy, and practice 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



7 References

- [Motability Foundation, The Transport Accessibility Gap The opportunity to improve the accessibility of transport for disabled people \(2022\)](#)