# **Accessible Transport Policy Commission**

The Future of Coproduction and Service User Engagement in the Transport Sector

Outcomes Briefing

November 2023

## Overview

On Wednesday 8th November 2023, Marion Fellows MP chaired the Accessible Transport Policy Commission's Autumn Roundtable on the future of coproduction and service user engagement in the transport sector. Coproduction is one of the National Centre for Accessible Transport's (ncat) approach to shaping the future of travel, and emerged as a prominent theme of discussion at the Commission's launch in September.

This briefing captures the main findings from the discussion. The paper will be shared with policy makers and industry stakeholders. The findings will also be used to inform the future work of the Commission and ncat.

## Key Findings

### True coproduction requires transport organisations to involve disabled people in decision making at all levels

**“Having the leaders of the business hearing directly from disabled customers, I think, really makes a big difference.” – Brandon Peat, Accessibility and Inclusion Manager, Avanti West Coast**

* Brighton and Hove Buses and Metrobus have a three-tier approach to making services accessible:
	+ Tier One: All senior managers undertake the same training as frontline staff. This helps them understand the importance of accessibility and makes them more likely to commit resources appropriately.
	+ Tier Two: Appoint a dedicated accessibility and inclusion manager. Where this is not possible, this responsibility should be assigned to a senior staff member.
	+ Tier Three: Work with disabled people and representative organisations to understand their experiences of services and act on their insights to make improvements.
* Avanti West Coast's accessibility panel was set up to advise on key projects across the company such as train refurbishments, reviews of staff disability awareness training and the company's social media strategy. The panel proved valuable during the Covid-19 pandemic when plans changed day by day.
* Like Brighton and Hove Buses, Avanti West Coast has directly involved senior staff in coproduction practices. The company's partnerships and strategy director has regularly chaired the panel, lending authority to accessibility initiatives and helping to feed the panel's advice into decision making processes at the top of the organisation.

### Effective communication is essential to successful coproduction

**“The inconsistency of transport providers is quite significant.” – Stephen Brookes MBE, Bus and Rail Disability Policy Adviser, Disability Rights UK**

* Transport organisations must be prepared not only to listen to disabled customers but proactively encourage people to share their insights with them.
* Communication is also vital to providing a good service to disabled people. The roundtable discussed how people's needs often vary depending on their impairment and the role technology can play in both removing barriers and imposing new ones, depending on personal and situational factors.
* For example, relying on a single method of communication, such as a smart phone app to inform passengers of changes to services or an audio system to inform people of an emergency, can exclude people who do not have a smart phone or are deaf and hearing impaired.
* Transport operators also need to communicate more effectively among themselves. The lack of consistency in the way different companies engage with disabled consumers can undermine the quality of services. This is particularly true in times of disruption or when passengers are required to interact with different providers over the course of a single journey.
* More effort must be made to improve coordination between transport services – both within and across transport modes such as trains, buses and taxis – to support door-to-door journeys.

### Like many other industries, the transport sector often fails to understand the commercial benefits of inclusive practices

**The accessible pound is everybody, because everyone will have a short-term, if not a longer-term accessibility requirement.” – Victoria Garcia MBE, Accessibility and Communities Manager, Brighton and Hove Buses and Metrobus**

* Coproduction is highlighted as good practice in many transport sector guidance documents but can easily be ignored if organisations aren't inclined to follow it.
* The legal requirements for organisations to comply with good practice are also difficult to enforce – for example, the Equality Act places the burden on individuals to take organisations to court and prove that they have experienced discrimination.
* The business case for making transport services accessible needs to be communicated more effectively to companies – particularly senior management.
* False assumptions that only a small minority of customers have an impairment, or travel with someone who does, can lead transport companies to view accessibility solely through a corporate social responsibility lens rather than as a commercial necessity.
* Several roundtable attendees noted that presenting basic information to executive boards such as the value of the £274 billion Purple Pound and the fact that around one-fifth of the population has an impairment can have a significant impact on decision making.
* However, some attendees suggested facts and figures about disability alone may not capture the true benefits of inclusive design for disabled and non-disabled people alike.

### Transport organisations should create multiple channels of coproduction and ensure that their interactions with disabled people are meaningful and respectful of participants' time and expertise

**“I find it so upsetting actually that we are expecting people who are specialists to give up their time for free.” – Professor Matthew Campbell-Hill, Chair of Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, Department for Transport**

* Genuine coproduction needs to start early on in projects and the process should be designed thoughtfully. It's often easier for people to contribute to a project when they are presented with a tangible set of proposals.
* Effective relationships between the organisation and disabled people can be vital for securing timely and productive interactions. Coproduction panels are one way of fostering relationships – but transport services should also think about wider engagement with individual customers and groups. For example, Avanti West Coast has established a Facebook group to connect with customers online.
* Organisations must respect and renumerate disabled people's time and expertise as they would anyone else. Too often, they expect disabled people to volunteer their knowledge, experience and skills for tasks that professional consultants would be paid to do in other contexts.