# **Accessible Transport Policy Commission**

Understanding the Roles and Responsibilities of Accessible Transport Staff in Local Government

Outcomes Briefing

November 2024

## Overview

On Wednesday 9th October, Richard Baker MP chaired a meeting of the Accessible Transport Policy Commission on the role and responsibilities of accessible transport staff working in local government. For the purposes of this project, the term accessible transport staff refers to both professionals who are specialists in accessibility and those who have a broader role that includes accessibility.

The roundtable was part of a yearlong research project undertaken by the National Centre for Accessible Transport to explore how local government staff involved in designing and managing transport can be better supported to embed accessibility into their work. It brought together disabled people's organisations, accessible transport staff, policymakers and researchers to discuss the project's draft findings and recommendations of the final report.

 The roundtable was used to refine the conclusions and recommendations of the draft report and will help to shape any papers produced for decision makers to assist with implementation of the recommendations. This briefing captures the main findings from the roundtable. A version of this paper will be included in the report as an appendix.

## Key Findings

### Participants said our recommendations would help make transport more accessible and equitable across the country

***“…The challenge we currently have, which you sum up in your report really well, is the variability across the country. And variability created by different levels of resource, different structures for governance, and different abilities and knowledge and capacity to deliver.”* Helen Ellerton, Head of Transport Policy, West Yorkshire Combined Authority**

* Attendees said that the report's recommendations would help local and regional authorities to understand and embed good practice around accessible transport into their policies and practice. This would help to raise standards and reduce variation across the country.
* The recommendations for local and regional authorities to conduct an assessment of their capacity and capabilities around accessible transport would be a first step towards making sure adequate funding and resources are dedicated to making sure disabled people can use their services and infrastructure.
* Authorities need to ringfence accessibility funding, so it is formally embedded into revenue and capital funding streams.
* Rural areas are often neglected in discussions about how to make the built environment more accessible.
* Making accessible standards and regulations easier to find, understand and use would encourage more innovation. For example, making standards about the design of bus stops and train stations more readily available would allow Google Maps and other journey planning tools to provide better guidance to disabled people.

### When implementing our recommendations around coproduction, local and regional authorities should make sure that disabled people are actively involved in decision making at the most senior levels of the organisation

***“…it's even more important that the recommendations around having people in positions of power,…and potentially have their own lived experience of having barriers to accessibility, is critically important to making sure we are making the right decisions.”* Keith McKain, National Bus Strategy Programme Manager, Surrey County Council**

* Attendees said that councillors and senior staff within authorities have an important role to play in making sure disabled people's needs and preferences are prioritised in the way policies are formed and services are delivered.
* Transport teams are ultimately accountable to their political and administrative leaders and have to respond to the objectives that leaders set.
* Having people with lived experience of disability in positions of power is vital to making sure that the right decisions are made. They can draw on a practical understanding of why accessibility and inclusion is important to the communities they serve.
* For example, the priorities at the top of an authority can decide whether transport projects are put through a rigorous equality impact assessment.

### Disabled People’s Organisations – both local and national – should be involved in both national and local decision-making structures to make the best use of their expertise and resources

***“Local Disability groups can only do what they can to support local implementation, helping with consultation, etc. but national standards are needed first. National organisation like mine…are here to help with the development of these national standards and the development of training standards etc. But there needs to be a move towards this at DfT level.”* Isabelle Clement, Director, Wheels for Wellbeing**

* Coproduction with local disabled people's organisations must encompass all aspects of policy, strategy, infrastructure design and construction and all stages of service delivery.
* The Disability Design Reference Group in Greater Manchester provides accessibility advice for transport projects across the region. The disabled people's organisation Breakthrough has been commissioned to run the group.
* Surrey County Council is working with the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People to coproduce training videos for the Bus Centre of Excellence covering accessibility needs for disabled people with different types of impairments.
* National and devolved governments must coproduce country-wide standards with national disabled people's organisations. This will provide a stronger foundation for coproduction locally.
* It may be helpful to create a disabled people's organisations directory for local government staff to consult.[[1]](#footnote-2)
* It is an important principle that disabled people must be paid for offering their insights as experts by experience, in the same way expert consultants receive remuneration in other industries.

### A new education and training framework should seek to rebuild local government expertise in accessible transport by taking a comprehensive approach that covers the wide range of professionals involved in shaping transport systems

***“The only course I could find was a postgraduate course, which I did, and went through. But on my course, I found out that accessibility, when it comes to architecture work or design work, is not one of the modules that they get taught. They only get taught it if they volunteer.”* Debbie Preston, Access Advisor, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority**

* A lack of established training opportunities on accessible transport means that authorities and individual staff must invest in their own training and qualifications in order to develop expertise in disability and accessibility.
* Surrey County Council have created training for managers and senior staff on reviewing accessibility assessments.
* The shortage of training courses has been made worse by local government funding constraints in the last decade which has resulted accessibility specialists being made redundant across the country. This expertise needs to be restored.
* Any new training standards or frameworks for local government must encompass the range of professions and roles that staff involved in designing and managing local transport systems hold.
* Training and qualifications in accessible transport must be coproduced with disabled people's organisations.

## About the Accessible Transport Policy Commission

The Accessible Transport Policy Commission is part of the [National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat)](https://www.ncat.uk/) and works to remove barriers to transport for disabled people across the UK.

The Commission holds meetings in Parliament to bring together Parliamentarians, disabled people, transport professionals and policymakers from the national, regional, local and devolved levels of government to improve public policies and everyday practices. It does this by applying evidence and insights from ncat and a wide range of other experts through roundtable discussions, research symposiums and cross-sector meetings.

The Commission is chaired by Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson DBE DL (Crossbench) and convened on a cross-party basis with Parliamentarians from both Houses.

Baroness Grey-Thompson is joined on the Commission by a number of vice-chairs:

* Lord Shinkwin (Conservative Party)
* Baroness Brinton (Liberal Democrat Party)
* Zarah Sultana, MP for Coventry South (Independent)
* Sorcha Eastwood, MP for Lagan Valley (Alliance Party)
* Richard Baker, MP for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (Labour Party)

The Commission’s secretariat is provided by the cross-party think tank Policy Connect.

## About the National Centre for Accessible Transport

The National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) works to ensure that no disabled person faces challenges arising from poor access to transport. ncat is an evidence centre that seeks to understand, document and analyse the transport landscape and identify opportunities for change. ncat aims to deliver on this mission 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 the period 2023-2030 by the Motability Foundation.

1. Inclusion London has created a [directory of Deaf and Disabled People’s Organisations](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/directory/listing/). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)