Equipping Councils for Change:

Building local government capacity to deliver accessible transport with disabled people

Highlights Report, January 2025

ncat
National Centre for Accessible Transport

Introduction

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). 'Equipping Councils for Change; Building local government capacity to deliver accessible transport with disabled people'. Available at www.ncat.uk

1   Why did we do this work?

This research explored the roles and responsibilities of accessible transport staff in local government (henceforth 'accessible transport staff'). These are staff whose jobs have a specific focus on accessibility or who are in positions with a wider remit that include accessibility as a key responsibility.

Our aim was to make recommendations on how accessible transport staff can be better supported to make transport accessible for disabled people.

We looked at how disability and accessibility featured in the personal backgrounds, education, training and day to day practices of accessible transport staff.

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

Our research had five elements. We conducted:

- A rapid evidence review of existing studies about local government accessible transport staff and other jobs (such as special educational needs teachers, employment support staff) that involve working with disabled people.

- A survey of 422 disabled people to learn what types of local support and services disabled people find most useful in using the local transport network.

- A survey of 42 accessible transport staff regarding the nature of their jobs, educational backgrounds and experiences of disability and accessibility.

- A focus group and a series of interviews with nine accessible transport staff to explore in detail their roles, responsibilities and experiences of working towards a more accessible transport system.

- A policy roundtable with local and regional authority leaders and disabled people, disabled people's organisations and other stakeholders to discuss the findings and recommendations from the research. The roundtable was hosted in Parliament by the Accessible Transport Policy Commission and chaired by Richard Baker MP.

3   What did we find? And what conclusions did we come to?

Conclusion 1: Disabled people and accessible transport staff agree that making local streets accessible should be the top priority in efforts to make sure transport is accessible for all.

Supporting findings:

- Three-quarters of disabled people (78%) and transport staff (75%) who took part in our surveys said that they would advise local policy makers to focus on making streets more accessible.
- Improving the accessibility of local transport services and connectivity between different modes of transport were also among the top three priorities for both groups.

Conclusion 2: Transport staff feel that collaborating with stakeholders – including disabled people – is a vital part of their roles but do not have enough time to do this effectively.

Supporting findings:

- Over three-quarters (76%) of accessible transport staff who took part in our survey reported that they often collaborated with stakeholders in the course of their work.
- Our interviews indicated that staff frequently lacked the time and funding to run effective coproduction exercises due to heavy workloads.
- Fifty-eight percent (58%) of survey respondents also rated a lack of staff time and expertise as 8 or above out of 10, indicating that this was a significant barrier to making transport accessible.

Conclusion 3: Local governments often fail to meet their legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 because they do not allocate enough funding to compliance efforts.

Supporting findings:

- Respondents to our survey of accessible transport staff said limited funds were the biggest barrier to making services accessible, with two-thirds giving this issue a rating of at least 8 out of 10.
- Policy roundtable attendees said that funding constraints in local government over the past decade had led to accessibility specialists across the country being made redundant, leading to a loss of expertise
- Staff who took part our in interviews and focus groups said budgetary constraints could mean either that transport services and infrastructure are built to only meet the minimum legal standards and lead to accessibility features being delayed.

Conclusion 4: Most staff have some training on accessibility, but the quality of such training varies widely.

Supporting findings:

- Thirty-two percent (32%) of accessible transport staff gave a rating of 8 or above out of 10 to the statement suggesting they lack adequate training and awareness of the challenges faced by disabled people on transport.
- Participants in our focus groups and interviews said that training courses often felt tokenistic and were not effective in helping them to do their jobs.

- Just under half of respondents to our staff survey (46%) favoured our suggestion that ncat should help to set up a Community of Practice for local government staff around accessible transport.

Conclusion 5: Involving disabled people in decision making is vital to improving outcomes for disabled people.

Supporting findings:

- Staff highlighted examples of the advantages of having disabled people directly involved in transport services and decision making. These included a visually impaired councillor who took on a leading role in transport policy making at his authority and disabled staff who had shaped decisions.
- Our review of existing studies shows the importance of formalising coproduction in organisational structures: this is only way to ensure that the practice of coproduction can survive changes in staff personnel.
- The literature also indicates the critical role that leaders play in creating a culture that encourages staff to advocate for better policy, services and outcomes for disabled people.

4   What should happen next?

National government

Recommendation 1

a) The UK and devolved governments should develop and maintain a national website where disabled people and transport

professionals can find and understand regulations, guidance, case law and other resources relevant to making transport accessible.[1]

b) The UK's Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, the Northern Irish Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee and the Welsh government's Disability Taskforce should form a joint working group to oversee this project and invite key industry bodies to observe and promote the project to local government and wider transport sector stakeholders.

Recommendation 2

c) The UK and devolved governments should reinstate the Access to Elected Office Fund that supports disabled people to run for election – including to become councillors and mayors.

d) The UK and devolved governments should promote the relaunched scheme with a public awareness campaign designed to highlight the impact disabled office holders can make on public policy and the importance of making sure disabled people are represented at the highest levels of decision making.

Local government

Recommendation 3

The Local Government Association (England, Wales, Northern Ireland) and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities should work with Disabled People's Organisations to develop guidance on how local governments can coproduce with disabled people.

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[1] See the Care Quality Commission website's "Regulations for service providers and managers" page for an example of a similar resource.

Recommendation 4

a) Local and regional authorities' transport teams should conduct comprehensive capability and capacity assessments[2] in relation to accessibility and disability inclusion to identify current strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

b) The assessments should include a consideration of whether the authority's team includes officers with a dedicated accessibility role, and whether they have sufficient seniority and support from leadership (see Recommendation 4b), as well as appropriate training (see Recommendation 5) and peer support (see Recommendation 7).

c) Capability and capacity assessments should be coproduced with local disabled people and Disabled People's Organisations.

Recommendation 4

The Local Government Association in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities should work with Disabled People's Organisations to develop guidance on how local government should coproduce with disabled people.

Recommendation 5

a) Local and regional authorities should codify coproduction with disabled people in their formal decision-making structures and processes.

b) Every authority should name one elected official and one administrative leader as responsible for making sure disabled people are genuinely involved in decision making at every level of their organisation.

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[2] See the Local Government Association's "Capability and capacity reviews". See also recent reviews of local government capability and capacity with respect to other areas, such as data science.

Recommendation 6

Local and regional authorities should make sure that every member of staff receives high quality disability and inclusion training. This should include training specific to their roles and responsibilities within the authority (see Recommendation 8).

The National Centre for Accessible Transport

Recommendation 7

a) ncat should look at what's needed to commission a pilot of an accessible transport community of practice (CoP) for local government.

b) The pilot CoP should be geographically limited (for example, to Scotland, or the English Midlands) and, if successful, should be expanded to cover the whole of the UK. The CoP will help professionals share knowledge and best practices, provide mutual support, and build accessible transport as a specialism within the local government sector.[3]

c) The initiative should have the social model of disability and coproduction embedded in its governance, with disabled transport professionals directly involved in shaping the community's priorities and taking part in its activities.

Recommendation 8

ncat should review the current training landscape in accessible transport and look at what's needed to develop a framework for education, training, accreditation, and professional development in this area.

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[3] See for example The Advanced & Predictive Analytics Network in Local Government (APAN) run by the Local Government Association.

Recommendation 9

ncat should commission a pilot of the accessibility capability and capacity assessment at a local and a regional authority (see Recommendation 3).

5   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

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