

# Transport Committee

## Oral evidence: [Accessible transport: legal obligations](#), HC 580

Wednesday 14 June 2023

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Members present: Iain Stewart (Chair); Mike Amesbury; Mr Ben Bradshaw; Jack Brereton; Ruth Cadbury, Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith.

Questions 1–73

### Witnesses

**I:** Christiane Link, journalist, campaigner and consultant for transport accessibility; Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson DBE, Cross-Bench Peer, transport accessibility campaigner; Stephen Anderson, transport accessibility campaigner; and Alan Benson MBE, transport accessibility campaigner.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Christiane Link](#)



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Christiane Link, Baroness Grey-Thompson, Stephen Anderson and Alan Benson MBE.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to today's session of the Transport Select Committee. My name is Iain Stewart. I am the Chair of the Committee. To start with some housekeeping points, it is rather warm today so if colleagues or witnesses wish to take off jackets, loosen ties, feel free to do so. Could I remind colleagues to introduce themselves by name when asking a question? Could each of our witnesses please introduce themselves with their name and position? Perhaps I could start with Mr Anderson.

**Stephen Anderson:** Thank you, Convenor. My name is Stephen Anderson. I am registered as blind. I also have Asperger's syndrome. My guide dog Barney is at my feet at the moment. I would class myself as an accessibility campaigner.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you. Welcome, and welcome too, Barney, to our proceedings. Baroness Grey-Thompson.

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** Thank you. I am Tanni Grey-Thompson. I am a Cross-Bench Peer and a wheelchair user, and I have been campaigning for 30 years for better, accessible transport. I do not mean to start off by being flippant; however, we are nowhere near the miserable experience of commuting that a non-disabled person has.

Q3 **Chair:** Thank you. Ms Link.

**Christiane Link:** My name is Christiane Link. I am a consultant and I have advised the aviation and transport industry for over 20 years regarding accessibility and how to improve their customer experience for disabled customers. I am a wheelchair user. I consider myself a member of the disability community.

**Chair:** Thank you. Mr Benson.

**Alan Benson:** Good morning. I am Alan Benson. I am an activist and campaigner. I am chair of Transport for All, the disabled rights transport charity. I am deputy chair of TravelWatch. I am a founder member of the Campaign for Level Boarding. I am on the South Western Railway accessibility panel, and have a number of other hats. Today, I am appearing in my own right in a personal capacity.

Q4 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Welcome, all. Our purpose in this inquiry, and this is the first of the oral evidence sessions, is to consider whether the existing legislation and regulations covering access to transport are sufficient or whether there are gaps, and where there is lack of enforcement of regulations that are already there. In this session, my colleagues and I will want to explore in detail some of the specific issues.

Could I start by inviting you to make a very general observation? In 2018, the Government stated that they wanted everyone to "travel



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easily, confidently and without extra cost." From your perspective, what is the reality today? How comprehensive is that transport statement from your experience? Mr Anderson, could I ask you to start, please?

**Stephen Anderson:** It is a very binary thing. In my experience, there is no such thing as an okay trip. It either goes very, very well or goes very, very wrong. I have had experiences where—if I take the example of private hire vehicles—I have now had 43 separate refusals when a driver has failed or refused to take me because of the presence of Barney. That does not necessarily set you up very well for a good morning of work, or if you are going out wanting to enjoy yourself. I have also been denied access to a cruise liner. Even though I had submitted all my paperwork beforehand, when I turned up I was advised that the equality legislation, because it was a cruise, does not cover that, despite it being the case in the United States and in other places.

I have found that abuse from members of the public is quite common. If I take Baker Street station alone, I have had abuse hurled at me in the last 12 months three separate times; all of which has contained the line—I apologise for the language—"You're not fucking blind." The police have done the square root of nothing about those things. I have some ideas on that, to tighten that up, as well as access refusals for private hire vehicles and, indeed, cruise liners.

Q5 **Chair:** Thank you. It is appalling that you have received that abuse. I would like to pick on some of those points in a moment. Baroness Grey-Thompson, I have had a note from our sound engineer. If you could move your laptop slightly away from the microphone, that would help. Thank you.

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** Thank you very much. The simple answer to the question is no; public transport routinely fails disabled people. I was asked recently by a train operating company to give an example of an amazing experience. I am afraid I have slightly slipped into being able to get on and off a train. I get very excited about being able to get on and off in a timely manner. That is not an amazing experience.

When you take in the extra time it takes to plan to travel, with mainline train stations now expecting a wheelchair user to be there more than 30 minutes before the train, we have such a different experience. This is partly a failure of legislation. I sit on the National Disability Council, which oversaw the implementation of the DDA. We were promised, 1 January 2020, that everything would be fine. Scope's latest figures are that it will be 2070 before there is step-free access to the platform, not even the train. The Government's own statistics talk about 100 years. In my lifetime, I will not be able to get on a train without the permission or support of a non-disabled person.

There is complete failure to enforce. We are constantly told, "It will never happen again," "It's just you," or "We're really sorry," and we are expected to go away. I live in north-east England and use trains a lot—



maybe 150 train journeys a year. One of the most offensive things I experience is turning up and being asked, "Did you book?" It is a constant negation of the fact that we have lives, we have work, we have families. We are constantly treated differently. If anyone follows me on social media, I tweet a lot about my train journeys in particular because they are what I take most, but I am treated incredibly differently from the vast majority of disabled people I know, either because I used to be an athlete or because I sit in the House of Lords. I was at a mainline train station recently where they reluctantly put me on a train because, I was told, "You're the person who tweets." Yes I am. We have to recognise that there are a lot of disabled people who do not have the time and energy to be able to complain every single time, because our complaints are generally batted away.

Q6 **Chair:** Thank you. Christiane.

**Christiane Link:** One of the biggest barriers to travel by train is the lack of reliability of the service. Every passenger has so-called failed assists. That means you board a train and no one is there at the other end. You might get over-carried and you have to find some kind of solution, go on the floor or drag your wheelchair out of a huge gap. It is a health and safety issue as well, so you will be extremely anxious the next time travelling.

When I joined the railway industry, my biggest surprise was how bad the situation really is. I always considered myself a bit unlucky: "Maybe that's just me. I've had some bad trips." Then I saw from inside how bad the situation is. This is a problem because the industry is used to these failed assists. They get used to it. There is no awareness any more that this is not okay because it virtually happens—not virtually—it happens every single day; staff members are used to it.

We are not talking just about changing a system; we also have to change the culture in the industry from the top down. That means the DFT must give a clear message that this is not acceptable any more and that there will be severe issues if it does not stop. Secondly, there is a responsibility with the managing directors, for everyone who has a "C" in their title in train operating companies, to say, "We go for accessibility. I don't accept failed assists any more. This culture is not acceptable any more. We really want to serve disabled people well because it is their right to travel."

You can see it in the language. The industry talks about people with access needs. I do not have an access need. Everyone has an access need. You don't want to sit on the platform; you want to travel on the train. I have a right to travel. The information is not filtering through to the transport industry that disabled people have a right to travel, and they did even before 1995, before the DDA was there. It is extremely important that we get the culture changed, and that can only be driven from the top. It will not work if you wait for an accessibility manager at a



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train operating company to change the culture of a huge organisation of 10,000 people.

Q7 **Chair:** Thank you. Mr Benson.

**Alan Benson:** Where to start? In front of me. The four of us, we know each other. We know each other because we share a common experience; we share techniques to overcome the barriers that we face on a daily basis. We are four, representing a network of hundreds, if not thousands, of people who share the same experience.

In the last three months, I have had to pull the passenger alarm three times on three separate trains. That is not unusual. The train is cancelled or the train assistance does not turn up to get me off, so the only way I can escape is to pull that horn. I have been stuck on a bus for two hours because the ramp failed. Journeys for me are journeys that will go wrong. I expect something to go wrong. It is just how badly it goes wrong. Does it mean I am delayed 10 minutes? Does it mean I am delayed three hours?

I will give you some idea of the scale of the impact. Transport for All has its offices in Brixton. When the lift was out at Brixton for six months for refurbishment, I calculated the extra travelling time it takes to use the bus. This is the kind of thing. A quarter of stations have lift access, so if I am using the bus instead of the station this is the kind of impact. In six months, I spent three extra weeks travelling on a bus, 20 minutes extra a journey. That is the kind of impact that we expect as disabled travellers.

The short answer to the inquiry question is no, the legislation is not effective. The question we have to ask is: what do we have to do to make it effective?

**Chair:** Thank you very much. As I said at the outset, the objective of this inquiry is to look at both the effectiveness of existing legislation and regulations and where there might be gaps that need filling. I turn now to my colleagues to follow up some of the points you have made.

Q8 **Gavin Newlands:** Thank you very much, Chair. My name is Gavin Newlands. I am the MP for Paisley and Renfrewshire North, and SNP transport spokesperson. Good morning to you all.

The written evidence received for this inquiry details clear failures across all transport modes, from taxis to planes, trains and so on. Anybody who follows Tanni on trains cannot help but notice the lived experience. As you said, if you are getting that experience, it can only be worse for everyone else. Does the failure across all transport modes affect your experience? I assume the answer is probably yes. If you disagree with that statement, please say so now before I move on. So, failures across all transport modes, everyone would agree with.

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** Yes.



**Q9** **Gavin Newlands:** Starting with you, Mr Benson, what mode of transport is probably the worst? In answering that, could you perhaps tell us what mode of transport has improved its accessibility or is improving its accessibility quicker than other modes?

**Alan Benson:** Can I start by confirming what a mode of transport is?

**Gavin Newlands:** Sure.

**Alan Benson:** A lot of the evidence that has been submitted talks about trains or taxis; some vehicle is involved. It is also important to consider, particularly as climate change and active travel become important, that modes of transport include walking and cycling, so we are talking about the streetscape as well. It is not just, as Tanni said, failure to be assisted on and off trains; roadworks make streetscapes inaccessible. The legislation is not just the Equality Act; it covers the whole plethora in a journey from door to door.

Which is worse? That is a really hard question to answer. One of the big issues is that we do not know the scale of the problem. The data is not captured. I picked up in the evidence that was submitted that South Eastern said they only had 300 and something incidents a year. That is rubbish. I was one of those incidents. I was an incident on South Eastern when I was over-carried but I did not report it. I do not have that statistic because the complaint procedure is useless. If every journey I take has one or more failures, I am not going to complain about every journey; it is just too tiring. I do not have enough personal resource to pursue those complaints, so those are not measured.

Personal experience is that the biggest failures happen to me on the railway because that is one of the biggest barriers, but the most frequent failures happen on the bus. So often, it is either failure of the ramp or the conflict with buggies, but I don't register them so I'm afraid I cannot answer your question. There is no worst.

Has it got better? In the 10 years I have been doing this, it has gone up and down. It has got better in some companies. It got a bit better before Covid. Since Covid, it has got worse again.

**Q10** **Gavin Newlands:** You are absolutely right about the streetscape environment and the big move towards active travel at the moment. Also there are e-scooters and e-bikes. In terms of access to buses and access to streets, we have seen some complaints about active travel schemes that become an issue for people who are accessing a bus or even just trying to walk the streets, with the clutter from e-bikes and so on. Do you want to comment on your experience of that?

**Alan Benson:** I am sure Stephen has a lot to say about this. E-bikes, particularly, for me are litter. They are absolutely everywhere. I carry or I have on the back of me a fluorescent rucksack. There are a number of reasons for that, which I may go into later. One of them is so that when I



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do detours into the road, which I have to do very frequently, I am visible to traffic. It is a conscious decision for my own safety.

Something worth saying about the whole transport landscape is that whereas you, as a passenger, are likely to get on a train or embark on a journey thinking about your destination, I am thinking about what I can do to make that journey safe and successful.

**Q11** **Gavin Newlands:** Thank you. Mr Anderson, there is a wider question with regard to different modes of transport and a specific issue with regard to active travel schemes, the design thereof and street clutter.

**Stephen Anderson:** E-scooters and the like are not e-scooters to me; they are e-fly tipping. When I navigate with Barney, he will just stop, which is what he is trained to do and he does very well with it. We end up with a problem when he stops and I have to go, "Right, now I've got to go into the road." This is when we get to a point where my head starts going that I want everybody to be green. I want everybody to act in an environmentally friendly way but this cannot continue. Equally, if I raise a concern about it, am I going to be shamed, particularly on social media, for daring to suggest we should do something that might discourage people from using e-scooters in a minuscule way? There is a juggling act that, mentally, as a disabled person, I have to take into account. I feel comfortable saying that here.

We need some form of enforced docking, like with the Boris bikes in central London, assuming they are all docked. I remember when I was at school—St Vincent's School, a special school for sensory impairment and other needs—I was told that as you grow up your independence is going to be compromised and your incidents of discrimination are going to go up. I thought at the time that my mobility teacher was talking absolute nonsense. Unfortunately, she was absolutely right.

If I talk about what modes of transport have got better, the answer is approximately zero. In terms of what is getting worse, the number of refusals I have had from taxi and private hire vehicles has doubled since the end of the last lockdown. Guide Dogs said that the number of refusals has gone up from 75% to 81% of people who have been refused access in the last year. Some 61% of visually impaired people feel lonely. These are all things that we have to take into account. Even the idea that when I was kicked off Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines—I waited six years to say that publicly. It is the whole thing of having to think seven steps ahead. "Is my journey going to be less bad than it was last time?" When it goes well, it goes very well but that is extremely rare. Going extremely well means it went okay.

Even today, my journey went without fault but then I got to the doors of Portcullis House and a member of security grabbed me violently. I am sorry to bring that up to the Committee, but I was not very impressed. The security guard shouted at me for about 90 seconds total. I stood up for myself and stood my ground, but that is an example of the kind of





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attitude that we deal with a lot of the time. I thought I would just put that on the record.

**Chair:** Before we go back to Mr Newlands, thank you for raising that with us. I apologise on behalf of Parliament that you had that experience. We will be taking it up with the security people here to make sure that it does not happen again. I apologise again on Parliament's behalf for the experience you had; it is not acceptable.

Q12 **Gavin Newlands:** Thank you very much, Chair. Tanni, your experience of trains has already been touched on thus far. Do you have experience of other modes of transport? Have you seen any improvements? Bus regulations are finally in place, which has taken far too long. That is one instance. Are there other examples for you, good or bad?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** The reality is that it is so variable so much of the time.

Q13 **Gavin Newlands:** Inconsistent.

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** Yes. We are reliant on people rather than policies, procedures and infrastructure. One of my frustrations is that the 2012 Paralympics were incredible, the best moment of my entire life, but there is some real tick-box compliance, and because we had the games I am constantly told they changed the world for disabled people. We might now have ramps on taxis in London, but it is reliant on the taxi driver. I had an amazing experience last week when a taxi driver stepped in and helped me in a situation, but I have had so many transport failures.

Rather than reiterating what has been said, because I support both comments already, the impact since covid has been a real challenge. During covid, the wheelchair space did not count as a seat, so a number of times I got refused, even though I had booked the wheelchair space. Train companies would not let me buy the ticket because it was not a seat. I will write to the Committee with more detail about that. That shows complete lack of priority. Wheelchair spaces on buses and trains are quite often filled with luggage; it is down to the individual to remove them. On airlines, I have had to fill in a form—a couple of years ago, admittedly—that said would my impairment likely cause offence to other passengers. No.

Q14 **Gavin Newlands:** Which airline was that?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** I will write to the Committee about that. It is not just one airline. Some of that has got worse. Routinely now, disabled people are told they are not allowed to fly on their own because of health and safety. Anyone who looks at Sophie Morgan's Twitter feed will see that her wheelchair has been damaged yet again. The biggest challenge, when you get on a flight, is whether your chair will even arrive or arrive in one piece.





We need to look at cars and blue badge parking. York has recently gone through a kerfuffle about removing blue badge parking. The abuse of that is something we need to look at. I tried to change my car to an electric car last year. I could not do it because of the complete inaccessibility of any electric charging points anywhere near where I live; up steps, too far away. Again, disabled people are going to be battered over the head; we are asking the country to move to electric-charging vehicles and disabled people cannot do that. Try to get an electric wheelchair-accessible vehicle. In the United States, they cost at least \$30,000 more. It has not moved on.

A company like ScotRail bans scooter users because one time somebody did something with a scooter, and every scooter user is now banned. I am in discussion with ScotRail about changing that policy.

Q15 **Ruth Cadbury:** Do you mean mobility scooters?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** Mobility scooters, yes. My solution, which I came in on this morning, is that I have a battery pack extension to my wheelchair; it is very expensive, at least £5,000. But I have that so that I do not have to use public transport because it is so unreliable that you cannot base your life on trying to use it. Given the hours we work here, getting home late at night or early in the morning, I am in a fortunate position to do that.

There is no legislation that covers them. We need to be looking at that. If we pass any legislation that inadvertently bans them, beyond my personal use of them, we will have a massive detrimental effect on thousands of disabled people who will find it even harder to get around than they currently do.

Q16 **Gavin Newlands:** Christiane, do you have anything to add?

**Christiane Link:** Yes. Since covid, society is not used to disabled people and you can see that on every form of transport. The standards are so low at the moment. Check-in staff do not know how to book in the battery from a device. I have the same device as Tanni. It is a standard lithium battery. I put it in my handbag and it is not dangerous. It took me 90 minutes last week to check in that battery. Basically, nobody knew who to call, whatever. Then they asked me the weight of the battery. Five hundred grams? I don't know. There are no standards any more. That was not the case before covid. There were routines; people were used to seeing wheelchair users, other disabled people, cane users, guide dogs and so on. That has totally dropped and it has a massive impact on disabled people at the moment.

That is why we need a massively proactive approach by the regulators. If the regulators do not stop that now, we will go further downhill in the next couple of years because the standards and the processes are not there. I know a lot of organisations had to train their staff quite quickly after covid. Passenger numbers were going up more quickly than



expected. That is good news and I understand what the challenges are, but we need proactive regulators for aviation and for rail transport and so on. It cannot be that we, as disabled passengers, are now playing the role of ORR inspectors, saying, "Hello, there's another non-compliant ramp which should already have been replaced before covid." That is not our role and it is not acceptable in any other area of life. You cannot do your MOT yourself. You have to go to someone. Why do I have to regulate the services I use and have to go to the regulator and say, "Hello, can you please do something about it?" We need a more proactive approach by the regulators. They need more resources and they need enforcement powers. It will not go on without that. Even so, I fully understand that the ATP is a good framework for the ORR. It is far better than what we had before. The same is true for the 1107/2006.

In aviation, we have come a long way. I fully understand that. But now is the time, because of the downhill standards in services, that someone has to stop this direction because it already has a massive effect on disabled people. It will have an impact on their health. Travelling means health. Travelling means access to employment, access to quality of life. Transport has a purpose. People want to go on holidays. They want to enjoy their life. I go on business trips all the time. That is how I earn my money. Why should I stop that? But I need the support of the regulators and the people in charge to make sure that the standard is acceptable. Otherwise, it becomes unbearable.

**Gavin Newlands:** Thank you.

Q17 **Grahame Morris:** My name is Grahame Morris and I am the Labour Member of Parliament for Easington in the north-east of England, the same region as Tanni. I would like to follow up some of the answers you have just given. First, can I ask if any members of the panel are members of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee? No.

I was reading a piece in *Disability News*. There was a lot of criticism of the regulators. It is interesting that points have been made that it should be down to policy, driven by policy and adopted as policy, and not down to the good will of individuals, either an individual driver or a person on a train to improve the situation.

What is your view of the role of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Group? The criticism I read is that they were not being transparent. When there was criticism of Ministers and policy, they were not forthcoming with freedom of information requests. Is that a fair criticism? Tanni, are you aware of this?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** For disclosure, I know the new Chair of DPTAC.

It is one of those things. I am not aware of all the detail behind it. I have read the news bulletins. Most disabled people probably do not know DPTAC exists or what it is meant to do. If you try to explain something like the rail or public transport industry to anybody, 47 pieces of paper



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later, you might have an answer. What I have read about the priority in DPTAC does not seem to have had any priority in DFT. Over the years, I do not know how many Ministers I have spoken to—different people—to try to raise it up the priority list and it does not get there. Sorry, I cannot specifically answer that question. I have never really had much to do with DPTAC.

**Q18 Grahame Morris:** To reinforce the point you made earlier, and that your colleague Christiane made, about whether improving accessibility for disabled people is a priority for the Department and for Ministers, what is your opinion of that?

**Christiane Link:** If that is the case, the message is not landing where people make decisions in the organisations. We need a strong voice. The Transport Secretary, the railway Minister and the aviation Minister have to bang the drum constantly and say, "Accessibility is important. I expect that for my Department, from the train operators, from the airports," and so on. I do not hear that loud enough. Sometimes there are statements on awareness days or whatever, and that is a bit of window dressing, if I may say so. We need actions, and that means a loud voice and then checking whether they are delivered. Is Network Rail really delivering at their station when it comes to accessibility, when it comes to delivering their footbridges? Why are they building inaccessible footbridges in 2023 that have to be fixed in 20 years' time? That is something where I wish that politicians, people in charge, the Department, directors at the Department would say, "Stop," at an early point and say, "That is not okay."

DPTAC is important. All advisory groups of disabled people are important, if they get listened to. Whether that is the case, I do not know; I don't have insight. I chair the advisory group of East Midlands Airport and I can say that the airport is listening. The airport is rated very good by the CAA. It is winning prizes now for its customer experience concept for disabled people. That shows it is possible to achieve something when we listen to disabled people, when it is a professional relationship. We still need what I said at the beginning. It is the top-down approach that this is important, that disabled people cannot do the work on their own as well. There is no point having an advisory group if nothing is actioned. I do not know if that is the case with DPTAC but it is important.

**Q19 Grahame Morris:** Is part of the problem the number of regulators involved? I do not know if there is a magic bullet, but in the work of this Committee, in making recommendations to Government, do we need a tsar? Do we need somebody with overarching responsibilities given some particular powers by Ministers in order to implement policy so that we can see the evidence of improvement?

I do not want to hog this session, but I wonder if I might ask Stephen this. In relation to the experiences that you shared with the Committee earlier about Brixton station when the lift was out of operation, in another inquiry we have pushed Ministers and train operating companies more



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generally over the issue of ticket office closures. Part of their justification has been, "We'll have more staff available on the platform to help passengers with disabilities to get on and off trains and give advice." Is that your experience?

**Stephen Anderson:** No. Very simply, it is a cover for having less staff. I have actually found that, if I need assistance, I need a point where I can go, rather than running round all the platforms going, "Hello, are there any staff there?" I do not want to play a game of cat and mouse while going to work or going on a trip.

On the point about regulators, I have often found that in the response I get to complaints I make about disability discrimination, they are not taken as seriously as they should be. It should be considered appalling and outrageous. If we use the scooter example with ScotRail, lots of people have complained to ScotRail and not a lot has happened yet; whereas when something happens the other way, bang, it happens. That is very telling.

To go on from that, when I have had abuse at Baker Street station, I have raised the issues and said, "What can we do? Can we try to fix something?" I had a response from TfL the other day saying, "We're going to do absolutely nothing about what's happened to you." I spoke to a couple of friends about this privately. A number of friends came back to me and said, "That's disgraceful," and all the rest of it. One friend put it very succinctly. I was not going to share this but I will share it with you. We can speak candidly. I said, "I don't understand why TfL aren't listening to me." She came back to me and just said, "You're disabled. You know you don't matter to them. You don't matter at all." The problem is that she was absolutely right.

The problem is that the regulators have no teeth; there are absolutely no teeth. When we have had people who have had taxi refusals, nothing has happened. Prosecutions have not occurred. Licences have not been revoked. That should be automatic. Somebody should be saying, "Excuse me, what's going on?" I do not feel there is enough of a regulator to bang the door down. Enough of this awareness stuff. We actually need something to happen and for it to be made loud and clear from the highest echelons of Government that this is totally unacceptable and we are not going to stand for it. The sooner we can get to that position, the better. Here endeth the lesson.

Q20 **Grahame Morris:** That's really helpful. Alan, is there anything you can add? Your colleagues have been quite eloquent and forceful.

**Alan Benson:** I agree with everything they have said. I have not met anybody who goes to work without the intention of trying to do a good service, whether that is Ministers, bosses or managers; it does not matter. They all go to work with the intention of delivering a good service. It is how that is implemented. I note from the evidence that has been submitted that almost everybody wants stricter enforcement and



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more regulation, and that includes the operators that are subject to the rules and regulations—for instance, consistency and knowing what they need to do.

The health and safety legislation that was implemented in 1973 dramatically changed accidents and injuries across society. But our approach to disability legislation is derogations. We will avoid making coaches accessible for 20 years. We will avoid updating stations or trains. It is all about, “It’s too expensive to do it now. We’ll do it next time.” Until we treat accessibility like we treat health and safety, it is not going to change.

**Grahame Morris:** Thanks, Alan. That is useful.

Q21 **Jack Brereton:** Thank you all for the hugely varied examples you have given in terms both of the physical barriers and where processes are not being followed effectively. Christiane, why are we in this situation and why has it become so bad with some of these barriers?

**Christiane Link:** The most important point is that the priorities are not right at the moment. We fell a bit behind, or it was not the priority. As Tanni said before, 2012 was the best time of my life as well because we got it right. Everyone was well-trained, the processes were clear and disabled people were welcome in society. That has totally changed since covid. There is a different feeling.

Another problem is that, because standards have fallen after covid and because society is as it is at the moment, at the same time there was nothing to strengthen the regulators in the past 10 years. You have a good system. We do not need a tsar. You need to strengthen the systems we already have in place; they need more staff, they need more money and they need more power. I think that is relatively easy to fix. We do not let other industries treat customers in the way they treat disabled customers. It is also a matter of fairness. In the CAA ratings of airports where airports are rated “Very good”, it is not difficult to find out why that is the case. They invest in their disabled customers. They build new accessible toilets and lifts. Others get “Poor” or “Room for improvement”—I cannot remember what the ratings are called—“Needs improvement”. They do not invest and nothing happens, so it is also a matter of fairness. Okay, airports get a “Good” or “Very good” rating. And the others? What is happening with them? Is it okay that they do not invest? That is not fair.

We need a regulator to get economic fairness into the system because, if nothing happens, what is the problem? Maybe a customer will complain, but, again, it is very difficult to complain in aviation; 1107 is applicable but that is not a law where you can go to the court easily and say, “Hello, I got discriminated against. Please give me compensation.” The Equality Act is not applicable as soon as you step on to a plane. That is wrong. I cannot get compensation. I cannot sue the airport for treating me badly.



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It is quite difficult. It is a regulator-based system but the regulator is not strong enough in the UK.

I just won a case in Switzerland, funnily enough, against a Portuguese airline that denied me boarding. From London, I went to Geneva and got denied boarding. In Switzerland, not even a European Union country, based on European Union law it went to court. I had no idea how I would achieve that. The same happened to me in the UK. It is a bit absurd. Switzerland is enforcing the European Union law better than any other EU member state, and the UK, which was in the European Union, and has a strong regulator. Something is somehow out of track.

Q22 **Jack Brereton:** Tanni, you mentioned the huge number of stations across the network that are still not DDA compliant. I heard you talk about the challenges you have had with things like lifts not working and so forth. How frequently are these issues happening?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** The latest statistics I have seen are that any 1.2% of Network Rail lifts are not working. If you look at the tube, recently I was trying to get to London Bridge, the lift was out and there were no announcements on the platform. Legally, TfL lost a court case, where they were meant to put out signs at gate lines. That was not done. It was not done last week either when I was travelling on the tube.

We need to be more creative. Quite often, lifts are seen as the answer instead of thinking more creatively. As Christiane was saying, how can Network Rail build a footbridge that has steps in this day and age? How did it get through? What we are seeing as well is, "Oh, now we have an app to book assistance, so it's better than it used to be." Tony Jennings, who I know has given evidence to the Committee, said that an app cannot deploy a ramp. We have been told life is better for us, but we are not necessarily seeing that in reality. Unless we bring in a process of buying low-floor trains, starting to do something now, we are never going to get to the point of doing it. Again, something Tony submitted was that the overspend on the Elizabeth line at Bond Street is more than the Government are spending on their Access for All budget in total. That cannot be allowed to keep happening.

As Alan said, it is because it is really hard to complain. It is not reported, so it does not come up the system. Every time, we are told that it is just one person, "It's just you," "It's just unfortunate." As much as I really dislike asking a non-disabled person to sit in a wheelchair, because it doesn't give you any example of lived reality, I would ask any of the Committee to come and travel somewhere with me, or any of us, and see what our lived reality is like because we cannot just run to a train station and get on.

I realise that I have been really grumpy about some of this. There are very good examples that have happened. My local train company is pretty good and there are lots of good examples. The reality is that getting on and off a train or on and off a bus or in and out of a taxi





without mishap is just what people expect all the time. The reality is that, if you are non-disabled, you just do not see that because it is not in your frame of reference; it never is.

**Q23 Jack Brereton:** We have seen quite a lot of disruption on the rail network with industrial action recently. Has that impacted on some of the assistance that is provided to people with a disability?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** If my life is not disrupted any more than a non-disabled person's life is disrupted I am okay with it, whether there are leaves on the line or something like that, because we are being treated the same.

Apologies that I keep bringing it back to trains, but at so many mainline train stations, the assistance desk is not open for the first train in the morning. At King's Cross, when I want to catch the 6 o'clock in the morning train north, the assistance desk does not open until gone seven. It is things like that. It is exactly the same with the ticket office, trying to find a member of staff. If a train is cancelled, which happened to me on Sunday, you are running around Doncaster train station trying to find somebody to get you on. Then my assistance was cancelled halfway down. No one met me at King's Cross. Somebody on the train obviously follows me on Twitter because I had five members of staff who got me off the train, which never happens.

The normal disruption is the normal disruption, but with the rest of it, I probably spend a couple of hours a week longer than a non-disabled person planning. That is the extra time every single week that I spend just trying to get around the UK.

**Q24 Jack Brereton:** Stephen, you mentioned some of the barriers that partially sighted people in particular face on pavements, with obstructions and issues like that. What are the barriers people face on pavements? This Committee has talked a lot in the past about things like pavement parking and those sorts of issues. Are there continued concerns about some of the barriers that blind and partially sighted people are facing in what is meant to be the safe space of pavements?

**Stephen Anderson:** Yes. E-scooters. Absolutely right. When I go to where I am Director of Music, St Thomas' Church, Kensal Green, on a Sunday, on the road there I regularly have to navigate e-scooters. There is nothing I can do. I sulk, go into the road and come back in.

In terms of vehicles, as a public servant, I have learned the processes. I am able very quickly to get the council on the phone and say, "Excuse me. We've got a car here. Get it moved, come on." But a lot of disabled people are not in a position—sorry, speaking for blind and partially sighted people specifically—for whatever reason to do that. It should not be me going down a road, getting my phone out like I am some kind of enforcement officer all the time. I would love the salary to go with it. It really makes life quite miserable.





If I may tap back into something that was said earlier. It was absolutely right about the Civil Aviation Authority and the Swiss case. I had the same problem with Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines in that the Equality Act and the equality legislation does not cover them at all. I had to settle out of court because there was absolutely no way I could do anything about the way I had been treated and the way I had been discriminated against. There were no teeth. Again, it comes back to this; we need a way, like many non-disabled people would consider as a given, to have a single-button process to trigger action and not have to follow it up with hundreds of hours of emails, and hundreds of pounds-worth of litigation stuff going on. Just make it happen; it is that simple. Some stats from Scope the other week said that disabled people have costs of about £1,000 a month in addition to their other expenses. We do not have the finances, let alone the mental wherewithal, to follow up every single incident. If we did, there would be no time to sleep; it is as simple as that.

**Q25 Jack Brereton:** Thank you. Alan, we have heard a lot about some of the challenges and barriers that people are facing. To what extent does that then become too much of a barrier and people with a disability avoid travelling altogether and stay at home?

**Alan Benson:** One of the dilemmas I have about being here today is that I want to paint for the Committee a realistic picture of the things that we face that we have overcome, but I am really conscious that this inquiry has attracted a lot of attention in the disability community. There are a number of people listening this morning and I do not want to put them off travelling. There are already enough disincentives that put people off.

**Jack Brereton:** Exactly.

**Alan Benson:** I spend a significant amount of my time online, sharing my tips and my knowledge to try to get other disabled people travelling. Something that has been touched on, and I want to be explicit in this, is that all of the responsibility for chasing up failures lands with the disabled person who is subject to the failures, whether that is complaining through the complaints processes, using the ombudsman or actually resorting to legislation.

Stephen and Christiane talked about taking legal action. There are, I think, three solicitors in this country who will take action for you. There are a handful of barristers who will take it to the High Court. It comes down all the time to me, as an individual, having to be my own solicitor and go through legal processes that are, quite frankly, scary and risky, because there is significant financial risk. I believe the transport operators consider the fines and the penalties a cost of doing business. It is easier to pay compensation and get us to go away than to fix the issues.

**Q26 Jack Brereton:** Does that have a direct impact on some people being able to travel at all?



**Alan Benson:** Absolutely. Absolutely. The thing that is not put across this morning is that in front of you today you have Stephen with Barney and three wheelchair users, so our impairments are quite well understood. People know what assistance we need, what a good environment looks like. The majority of disabled people, an increasing number coming out of covid, have energy impairments and invisible impairments. They find it a much harder environment because they are faced with lack of belief; they are faced with personal animosity in some cases. As bad as our experience is, I believe there are people who have it a lot worse than I do.

Q27 **Jack Brereton:** Do our other witnesses have any comments on the real impacts people are facing because of these barriers, particularly the mental health impacts, and the consequences that people face by being cooped up in their houses?

**Christiane Link:** The complexity of the system alone is a problem. I get so many requests by friends, friends of friends and friends of friends' friends, asking me to plan their journey. It is not just that they do not know how to do it but they are so anxious that they want to check with someone whether they have got the system right. The system is so complex because it is inaccessible.

What you need is a rolling stock strategy. We are still buying trains that do not fit into the tracks; massive step, massive gap. That does not only affect wheelchair users. My grandma stopped travelling when she was 70 because she could not lift her leg any more. That is end of. It prevents people from travelling because they know the system is complex; it is not made for them. A big step and a big gap is not the ideal solution for someone who is older and might have arthritis in their knees. It is that simple. That prevents people from travelling.

You need a rolling stock strategy. You need to say to the rolling stock companies, "From 2025, we will not buy a single train from you that doesn't meet the UK platform height standard." That is half the problem solved when it comes to access to trains and assistance. It affects so many disabled people. Blind people are falling into the gaps. It is a health and safety issue. I do not even understand how an industry that has praised itself for health and safety standards for so long has accepted for so long that it has those gaps and those steps and that there are incidents. There are constantly incidents. It is an open secret on the railway that accidents are happening and people are injuring themselves.

Complexity is a problem. Health and safety is a problem. It prevents people from travelling. If anything goes wrong, even if they did all the right things to plan and to book—the burden is with the customer in the first place, by the way—where do we have that? There is no other system where you put the burden of fixing the system on the customer. I am not using the booking app. I deleted it last year because I make as many trips as I can without booking, to make a point. You do not book before you travel. I do not want to book before I travel. I have a business to



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run. I do not know how long a meeting takes at an airport, so how should I book that? Tanni is in the same position.

You say you want more disabled people in employment. Well, it has an impact on my employment if I have to book a train or not. You need a rolling stock strategy. Set a date: by 2025, not a single train is bought in this country, procured by DfT, that has no level access.

**Stephen Anderson:** If I may, could I give an example of a country I visited where I thought the provision, certainly for blind and partially sighted people, was exemplary? When I was in Japan, I was on the Tokyo metro. The tactile paving going into the station took me from the pavement. It was not just at the platform edge, not just, "This will stop you falling on the platform, hopefully" kind of thing—that is how we have to think—it took me from the pavement outside. The tactile paving took me into the station, it took me to the ticket office, it took me on to the platform, and then there was level boarding on to the train.

This is an example of how bad assistance can be. I count how long it takes for someone to arrive. Average in the UK is about 10 minutes late. In Japan, the lady was six seconds behind the train arriving and she apologised for being late. I made some comment to her along the lines of, "Goodness me, if you are sorry for six seconds late, you should come to the UK. You'll get on to the honours list in no time because that's fantastic." Even on the Bullet trains, assistance was great, level boarding was great.

We were leaving Hiroshima one time. I went up to them and said, "I'm really sorry, do you mind if we go two hours earlier?" In the UK, there would be a, "Well, you should have booked this. Shame on you" sort of attitude. Whereas in Japan, it was, "Yep, not a problem." I asked, "Why is it not a problem?" The very simple response was, "Because we are here to serve you." That response says it all. It should be about service not getting stuck behind red tape. It should not be about how it looks from one side. It should be about serving disabled people. I commend Japan not just generally, but specifically, on disability. The attitude and the infrastructure was set up to be nothing short of exemplary.

Q28 **Jack Brereton:** Tanni, is there anything you want to add?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** Yes, thank you. One train company several years ago sent my picture to quite a significant number of staff and said, "If you see this woman on a platform, do whatever you can just to get rid of her," which is quite interesting. Christiane is right. You have to be an expert in the system and you have to be an expert in every single mode. You also have to be an expert in which train stations or bus stops are accessible because a lot of the information held is wrong. A little while ago, I was able to book assistance for a train station that was completely inaccessible. The whole information system needs looking at. We have not covered bus stops that cross cycle paths. There are some just over Westminster Bridge that have an impact on disabled people.



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Bringing it back to the app, we were promised with the app that we would be able to buy tickets and have functionality. A lot of the train companies do not even use the app; they are developing their own. You have to try to book a cheap ticket and then try to book assistance and hope you can get it. The impact it is having is absolutely on people's mental health and wellbeing. I am the same as Alan and others; we want people to travel but they have to know a little bit about the reality.

The Government strategy of getting more disabled people into work is brilliant; I massively support it, but unless we look at that in the whole round of how disabled people are able to get to work, it is almost impossible to do. I sat on the board of TfL many years ago. The policy in place at the time was that it was only if a disabled person had to spend more than 40 minutes extra travelling that it counted as an inconvenience. Maybe it should be five minutes. We are constantly dumbing down all the expectations of disabled people.

Picking up what Christiane said, level boarding is a must. Merseyrail is a closed loop network, so they have been able to do it. It is fantastic and we should be rolling it out. The purple pound, the amount of money disabled people have to spend, is significant. If you cannot get where you want to go, we are losing so many opportunities. The impact on disabled people of inaccessible transport is not being measured because, again, it does not have priority. It is, "What, you want a job, you want to work?" The number of times I have been to a train station and they have said, "Oh, are you going for a day out?" No. Leaving here, I have been criticised for missing my booked assistance. I'm really sorry but I can't dictate what time the Chamber finishes. That is a constant for disabled people. There is no expectation of our lives.

**Jack Brereton:** Thank you.

**Chair:** For the record, on the point you made about us experiencing journeys, we are endeavouring to do that. I and a number of my colleagues have made journeys with people with different disabilities, so that we can educate ourselves on the real challenges that you face.

Q29 **Ruth Cadbury:** I am Ruth Cadbury, a Labour MP in west London. I had the honour to travel around central London recently with Alan and a colleague with a non-visible impairment, which opened up a further series of questions and insights.

The transport authorities and transport companies all have equality, diversity and inclusion policies and procedures. HS2, which is a construction company, took its EDI from HR and put it in health and safety, so EDI is a core part of their health and safety policies and procedures. Would that make a difference?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** Maybe.

**Stephen Anderson:** The challenge is that the proof will be in the pudding. In theory, it sounds fantastic but it depends on what that policy



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says. That is the other challenge. Yes, the direct answer to the question is that it depends.

**Christiane Link:** Accessibility is definitely a health and safety issue, I agree with that. When I was head of accessibility at GTR, one of the first things I wanted was to have a deep overview of where the failed assists were coming from, where they were happening and, especially, why. We used health and safety tools to achieve that. I see the link, but just to put a policy in another department is not delivering anything. The question is: what is the delivery, what are the processes, and is the board of HS2 on board? What is with the directors, the CEO and so forth? That is far more important than where the policy is.

Q30 **Ruth Cadbury:** True. Thank you. Alan.

**Alan Benson:** I want to think for a second. I have worked with HS2 a little bit and I am convinced that they want to deliver an accessible railway. I think that is the message. Certainly from my personal messages all of the senior managers I have met across any transport mode or company, and there are quite a few, want to deliver a good service. It is often about the conflicts they get with other bits of their business, whether conflicts with health and safety, which is the claim with mobility scooters, or whether it is conflicts with finance or engineering. It always seems to be that accessibility loses the arguments. Until it wins those arguments—as I said earlier, like health and safety does—we are not going to deliver a properly accessible transport network.

The other thing is that we are dealing with networks that are 100 or more years old. We are dealing with deeply embedded barriers, but our solutions are looking at three and five-year timescales. Our investment is on three and five years and gets cut the minute there are budget squeezes. We need to start setting an aspiration and sticking to it. The 2013 aspiration for an equal transport system—a great aspiration—has not been backed by investment or actions.

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** There are lots of promises about the list of lines that will be step free. I do not count “Step free to platform” as step free. We need to find another way of describing it. It does not allow independent travel because you are reliant on a ramp. That is really disappointing. Alan is completely right. You are trying to overlay new engineering on an old network. I will believe HS2 is accessible when I see it, because there will be compromises. There always are. Step free and level boarding is the one that gets cut every time.

**Stephen Anderson:** Perhaps in those circumstances the term can be changed to “Incomplete step-free access” so that it is clear that it is not total. That is what came to mind straightaway.

**Chair:** We still have a good number of questions to get through. Forgive me, I am going to move on.



- Q31 **Greg Smith:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning. I am Greg Smith, the MP for Buckingham. Can I return to the issue of streetscape and the barriers that come? Many of you have already spoken eloquently and powerfully about the impact of pavement parking, cars on kerbs and e-scooters. I quite liked the term “e-fly tipping” that was used earlier. Apart from the very practical examples where technological innovation has brought new challenges, what are your views on how planners, local authorities, town councils, district councils or unitary councils see or understand the streetscape as an issue to be considered in transport planning?

Perhaps to give some flavour to that question, I could give the example of a walk I did with the Guide Dogs charity in Princes Risborough earlier this year. There is a raised platform across the road between two pavements which is the same material as the pavement. That, in many ways, for someone in a wheelchair is rather convenient; you do not have to drop down the kerb and you can get straight across from one pavement to another, but for someone blind or partially sighted there is no distinction between the pavement and that which has moving traffic on it, and people walk straight out into the road. How can we get local authorities, planning authorities and smaller authorities like town councils properly to understand and consider, when they are putting in well-intentioned streetscape changes, the needs of people with varying disabilities?

**Christiane Link:** There are standards for that already, but you are absolutely right; the standards are not always followed. We have exactly the installation you just described in our street. My partner is blind. I shot out of the house when I saw what they were doing and I talked to the builders myself. I said, “Hello, there are a lot of blind people in this area. You know this needs tactile paving. We can’t just have that flat, and I’m a wheelchair user.”

There are standards. The UK is quite good when it comes to tactiles on the roads and at kerbs. The local authorities have to follow the standards. Anything else and again it becomes a health and safety issue. If a blind person does not know whether he or she is on the pavement or on the road, it is the responsibility of the local authority to deliver accessibility and that is a good example.

- Q32 **Greg Smith:** Do local authorities actually see streetscape as a transport issue or do they predominantly see it as a beauty issue or a convenience issue? What is your experience around the country, bearing in mind that there are a lot of different local authorities and planning authorities?

**Christiane Link:** Totally different. In London, going from one borough to another, in Soho the world is totally different from Greenwich. I don’t think there is a yes or no answer, that it is this way or that way. It is a bit of a postcode lottery; you are totally right. The postcode changes on virtually every single street. Again, enforcement standardisation is the issue.





Q33 **Greg Smith:** Thank you. Tanni.

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** In Soho, I have to push on the road because there are few dropped kerbs. I can jump a four-inch kerb in my chair but a lot of them are too big. No, I do not think it is considered a transport issue. There has been a big impact with covid legislation or post-covid legislation opening up streets and pavement cafés. Certainly, as we were coming out of lockdown, that was a massive issue for disabled people and visually impaired people.

You can look at things like dropped kerbs and tactile paving. I will send the Committee a photo of some tactile paving that has recently been put in close to London Bridge that leads a visually impaired person into a wall. I am not sure what is happening when somebody is laying that and they don't think, "Hang on a minute, shall I just check that I'm meant to be guiding a visually impaired person into a wall?" There are things like cobbles. When there are roadworks, some of the temporary ramps are quite dangerous. Some of the tarmac temporary ramps that are put down are even worse. You end up just accepting it. If I do not have the energy to complain about missed assist, I do not have the energy necessarily to complain about that, although I try to because it is going to impact lots of other people. I do not think that is considered by most places around the country. It is not deliberate; they are not trying to make our lives more difficult. It is just that there is no consideration; it is never on anyone's priority list to think, "Hang on a minute. How can I make this better?"

Q34 **Greg Smith:** Thank you. Stephen.

**Stephen Anderson:** I now know to avoid London Bridge on my way home. Thank you for that. I should say, to register an interest, that I work for a local authority.

When it comes to this sort of thing, if a disability related question comes up, it is often, "Yes, thank you for that. We'll take it into account." Then you read the final report six months later and think, "You really didn't take that into account at all, did you?" Ideally, and I know this probably is not going to happen, what I would love as a veto is to be able to say, "You have to consult a disabled person and disabled people have to be happy enough with it." I appreciate that it cannot always be a utopia, but to be able to say, "Yes, blind and partially sighted people don't think this is dangerous. Wheelchair users don't think this is going to cause an insurmountable obstacle," something along those lines, would be very beneficial. No, I do not think that streetscape is considered as something where disabled people's needs should properly be considered.

Q35 **Greg Smith:** Thank you. Alan.

**Alan Benson:** It depends on where you are. Certainly, Transport for All has done some work with some local authorities that consider it a key part of that decision-making process. It is something we have already touched on in other modes. There are rules, regulations and specifications that exist, but they are either not understood or why they





are there is not understood. People design tactile paving so that it meets the standards, but they have not understood why it is there, so it comes up in the wrong form.

There is also the issue that different impairments have different and sometimes conflicting requirements. For Stephen, tactile paving is essential. For me, tactile paving is incredibly uncomfortable. Those are not easy questions to answer, so it is easier for the decision-makers not to make decisions. There are some very good examples of good practice. The City of London has produced a streetscape tool where you can analyse the impact of different streetscape features and how that affects different impairments, producing a score. There are processes being developed to measure success. Part of the issue is that we cannot measure what good looks like in so many situations. There is a possible opportunity for improving accessibility through measuring good.

**Greg Smith:** Thank you very much.

Q36 **Mr Bradshaw:** The picture you all paint is of transport operators routinely breaking the law with impunity. How do they get away with it? Why isn't anyone prosecuting them? What are the regulators doing?

**Alan Benson:** It is enforcement.

**Christiane Link:** That is a good question to ask the regulator.

Q37 **Mr Bradshaw:** Which regulators, in particular, should we have our eyes on?

**Christiane Link:** The CAA.

Q38 **Mr Bradshaw:** Does the Equality and Human Rights Commission have a role in this? Could they? Surely, a disability comes under that. They did a very good inquiry into antisemitism in my party, sorted it out and said we had broken the law. Why can't they do something on disability and transport?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** I would like it if DFT took a bit more responsibility. Personally I am not sure that it should be down to the EHRC to stand up for rights of disabled people. Companies get away with it because they know they can. The offer you usually get is, "Have a couple of free tickets." "We promise it will never happen again." They do not have to prove that they have learned anything. Because of lack of numbers of complaints, they can paint the picture as not a big issue. Then a couple of disabled people who take cases and fight them publicly through the court system are often berated and lampooned, and treated pretty poorly, which sometimes puts other disabled people off taking legal cases. I have seen how disabled people who take legal action are treated.

Things like ATPs are not enforced. Whether or not it is ORR, we could probably have a whole debate on the RDG and what their role is. Great



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British Railways and its accessibility panel has to have some teeth. The environment accessibility panel of Network Rail is quite variable on how seriously it is taken. It needs to happen at the highest level. I think DFT should step up.

**Q39 Mr Bradshaw:** You have all described in different ways the inadequacy of the complaints system and complaints handling. Are there any examples of good practice that we could look at and encourage the spread of?

**Christiane Link:** What is needed for railways is an automatic system, a proper automatic system. First, you need to establish a system whereby failed assists are recorded. That is not the case at the moment, at least not with every train operator. There is not even data transparency on how often disabled people have to face failed assists and do not get the assistance they have booked or that they have requested. If you have that, if the data is there, why don't you compensate the passengers automatically, because you know when it happened and to whom? That is what is needed. To rely on disabled people, especially people with learning difficulties, to fill in a form and say, "Hello, I got discriminated," or, "The assistance didn't work," and describe in length what actually happened, is not realistic. It is also the reason why there is a lack of data.

Again, the burden is with the disabled passenger. If we do not complain, it is not logged anyway. Even if we do, the last over-carry I had was not even recorded in any railway system. I asked my colleagues, "Can you please look in the log files at what they have recorded for this incident?" There was an over-carry at Southeastern. I went to Kent; that is not where I wanted to go but that is where I ended up. I asked a colleague to look into the system. They had not even recorded it. Where should the data come from? I have to complain, otherwise it is not noticed. Then there is still no guarantee that the regulator is aware of it.

In aviation, by the way, it is better. If you miss your flight or your connection because assistance did not show up, the airport has the legal obligation to inform the regulator. We need the same on the railway.

**Q40 Mr Bradshaw:** Are there any institutional initiatives that other countries have? Do you know if there is an individual disability rights commissioner with statutory powers to enforce the law and take up cases which would provide a good model for the UK?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** I was at a meeting recently where we were talking about the railway having a booking system where you could drop from 48 hours to 24 hours. I had an example recently when I was at the Gare du Nord. I was on a train to Schiphol. Eventually, at Gard du Nord, they enabled me to get on the train. At Schiphol, they refused to get me off because I had not booked. That was even worse. I basically said, "Look, I am just going to go to Amsterdam Central and come back in 20



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minutes. You either get me off now or you get me off later." My experience in other countries, in rail travel, is not great.

In airline travel, I have rarely had a problem flying around the USA and Canada, but they have a different attitude towards disability. You are not treated as an oddity because you want to get on a plane. That is better.

**Christiane Link:** In general, Austria has a very good system when it comes to discrimination. It is not a court, but you negotiate with the discriminator; in this case it is a federal department. They get an official letter and get asked to come in. Then you negotiate and explain your case and so on. That is something that I would highly recommend to the UK. I took action in Austria myself; I am not even Austrian, but it was so easy and well organised. It was impressive and it has an impact. If a company had to come to a department and explain to a civil servant what they had done, that would have an impact.

Q41 **Mr Bradshaw:** Was it a commissioner in the transport department who had that power?

**Christiane Link:** It is not just for transport. It is for any discrimination you have in Austria. It is based at the equivalent of the UK Department for Work and Pensions. There is a system and there are very low barriers to do that. Even for me, as a foreigner, I was able to do that and I had a case against transport providers in Austria. In fact, I had several cases in Austria. You do not "win" the case officially. It is a negotiation, but as a disabled person I went out of the room and had the feeling that I had won. I got compensation and acknowledgment and they agreed to changes. I did not have to go through the court system.

Q42 **Mr Bradshaw:** It was low cost for you.

**Christiane Link:** No cost whatsoever, and the Government even pay the travel costs to get there. Cost is always a problem for disabled people. I must say that it has really changed the country. It makes a huge difference.

There is still discrimination, unreliability and so on, but in general the system they have introduced in Austria is really good. The Germans are looking into that as well. It is a very low barrier, but it changes things. Do you think that the managing director of a train operating company would be amused to have to go to the Department for Transport, for example, in a meeting to explain why they had 30 failed assists? That makes an impact.

Q43 **Mr Bradshaw:** Stephen.

**Stephen Anderson:** For me, the biggest challenge beyond the regulator side of it is the general approach. I think transport companies know this. When they see it as a customer service issue rather than a discrimination issue, it causes all sorts of problems. When I had somebody hurl abuse at me on a train a couple of weeks ago, and I reported it and said, "I want



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you to do something," a couple of people went down and just told him to settle down. This was after he had said to me, "You're not fucking blind." Transport for London just said, "Oh, we've just asked him to settle down." I said, "Have you called the police? This is a hate issue," and they said, "No." It should be automatic; if there is an incident of hate, it should be taken out of my hands and the police called immediately.

The other problem was that there were no help points. I could not call anybody. There should be good tactile paving to get me to a help point, where I can request help immediately. Then in turn, if that does not occur, I should have a way of following it up properly. At the moment, I just have a voicemail on my phone saying, "We're going to do nothing. Sorry about that. Goodbye." It was the same a few years ago when a member of assistance staff made the comment, "Why are you travelling on your own? If you can't travel on your own, you shouldn't be out in public." I had no way of following that up. I had no way of saying, "That is outrageous, and I am not going to stand for it."

A couple of weeks ago the police said to me, "Well, if you get another incident, can you follow the person and then we'll track them down?" I'm not following someone who has assaulted me. There is no follow-up; there are no teeth; there is no backbone; there is no substance. I think I have said everything I am going to say on that.

**Q44 Mr Bradshaw:** Stephen, I apologise; I did not introduce myself. I am Ben Bradshaw, the MP for Exeter. Alan, is there anything you want to add about regulation or good models of regulatory and complaint systems?

**Alan Benson:** There is something that I would like to highlight. Again, we have touched on this a bit. It is down to the individual knowing what their rights are, knowing what they are entitled to and knowing what they can expect. So many disabled people put up with appalling service because they do not know that they are entitled to more, and they do not know where to go to complain. For example, if you go to the rail ombudsman, they are not interested in accessibility issues. They are not about solving the problem. Most disabled people do not want money. We do not want compensation. We want things to get fixed, but actually we are paid off.

**Q45 Mr Bradshaw:** Thank you. Finally, a number of you said that the situation has got much worse since covid because you think there are new staff who have not been trained properly, but there seems to be a much more fundamental problem since covid. What is the explanation for that? Have the companies taken their eye off the ball? Is it a financial issue, Alan?

**Alan Benson:** I think a lot of it is to do with training and exposure. Because disabled people have not been out, and the train operators have not been able to do equality training, people have forgotten how to behave. That has resulted in things getting worse.



What covid has shown us, and the benefit for me from covid, is that so often, when we ask for something, we are told, "We can't do it; it costs too much; it is against the laws and regulations." Covid taught us that where there's a will, there's a way, not only to change but to change really quickly. It can be done. It is just lack of impetus.

**Mr Bradshaw:** Thank you.

Q46 **Greg Smith:** This is Greg Smith, again. You have all painted a really grim picture of the way you are all treated, and the way complaints are dealt with and received, that is clearly unacceptable and something has to change.

In written evidence that, as a Committee, we have received, it suggests that on top of the appalling scenarios you have all described to us this morning, people with less visible disabilities, such as neurodivergence, are taken even less seriously when it comes to complaints. In your experience, do you all have that same view? Do you think that there are certain other avenues beyond those which we have already discussed this morning that transport operators, local authorities, public services and private services alike need to consider when it comes to hidden disabilities?

**Christiane Link:** I think if the culture of an organisation is all right, is customer-centric and customer-focused, it does not even matter if the impairment is visible or not. It is a very artificial way to look at disability. It is, in fact, how non-disabled people see us. Obviously, for non-disabled people, it seems to be important whether the disability is visible or not. For us, at least for me, it is not important. I have non-visible impairments on top of my spinal cord injury. Most other disabled people have. We hardly have just one impairment, and that's it, especially with age. We are ageing as well. It is not just because we are disabled; we are getting age affected. That is not how the world works.

It comes down to the culture of the organisation. If someone asks me, "What is the number of this bus?" and the bus driver responds, "Can't you see that?" "No, I can't. I'm short-sighted." If you have a customer-focused approach and culture, and that is filtered through to the frontline, it does not even matter because he will answer the question in a friendly way, whether the impairment is visible or not. It is if the culture in the organisation is all right, and the recruitment is correct and the cousin does not get hired because another cousin already works in the same organisation. It is a cultural issue first and foremost. In service and customer-focused organisations, it should not matter whether the impairment is visible or not.

Q47 **Greg Smith:** Tanni.

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** Yes. What she said. This may be controversial, but I am not a fan of the sunflower lanyards because that is about labelling people in different ways. For me, it has to be about treating everybody with a little bit more respect, whether it is an older



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person travelling, who may need a bit of help with a suitcase or something like that. It is the culture that needs to be looked at and assessed.

Don't get me wrong. When I sat on the board of Transport for London, Peter Hendy, now Lord Hendy, used to make every board member do frontline gate duty. Doing six hours at London Bridge station is really eye-opening about how members of staff are treated, but that does not mean that disabled people or people with invisible impairments should not have the same right to travel as everyone else.

**Stephen Anderson:** In addition to my visual impairment I have Asperger's syndrome which, for those who do not know, is a form of autism. In particular, I find people grabbing me very distressing, so what happened this morning outside was particularly distressing. I find that people do not listen to me when I ask them to let go. I have got to the point where I have to threaten to hit them to be in with a chance. I have had to do that multiple times. I don't like threatening to hit people. I really don't want to do it, but we have got to the point where we have to stand up for ourselves in a really forceful way. I find that particularly distressing.

It comes back to the whole thing about customer service-led and client-led, not getting stuck behind red tape or policy. If I say not to touch me, it is a basic issue of respect: "Don't touch me." It is that simple, but people just seem to think, with disability and passenger assistance in particular, "Oh, we've written a nice policy and done the training, marvellous," as opposed to, "How can I help you?" That is a really big thing and should be embedded into not just policies but the psyche.

Q48 **Greg Smith:** That is very helpful, thank you. Alan.

**Alan Benson:** Disabled people can be a target. The risk of being attacked or assaulted is almost always there. Certainly, I have had people try to move me out of the wheelchair space on a train by physically lifting me up and moving me because they want to be there. They have failed. I am heavier than they thought I was.

I cannot hide that I am a disabled person. I am very obvious, but a lot of people do not want to wear the sunflower lanyards. A lot of solutions for the issues that we face are increasingly technology-based. A lot of disabled people do not want to stand in a public space with their mobile phone trying to access assistance or tickets because they feel vulnerable. It comes down to what Christiane said. It is down to customer service. Don't separate disability as a special treatment. Treating everybody with the best customer service will solve so many of the issues that we face.

**Greg Smith:** Thank you very much.

Q49 **Mike Amesbury:** I am Mike Amesbury. I am the Labour Member of Parliament for Weaver Vale in the north-west. I am going to focus on legislation. First, is the legislation covering access to transport





comprehensive enough?

**Alan Benson:** I have a knowledge of the bits of the legislation that I have come up against. I think that is something that a lot of disabled people find. They get to know, in quite a lot of detail, the bits they have had to fight because you have to know it to be able to argue it. I know a lot about a little, so my feeling is that, no, it is not comprehensive enough. My feeling is that it is not detailed enough.

For example, in the 2017 case, *Paulley v. FirstGroup*, which I know the Committee is aware of, one of the comments in the judgment was that legislation should be enacted to prioritise the wheelchair space on the bus. We are now six or seven years later and that has not changed. That is still a fight that we are all having every day. I do not believe that any legislation is comprehensive, but even the legislation that we have is not good enough and is not being properly enforced.

Q50 **Mike Amesbury:** Thank you. Stephen.

**Stephen Anderson:** The short answer is no. The legislation does not cover everything that it should and the stuff that is there is very hard to enforce. Even when it is enforced, it does not really have the kick that I feel it needs. For example, with private hire vehicles, sections 169 and 170 of the Equality Act are examples of the laws we have to know. It is a level 3 fine, which equates to about £1,000. There is no automatic revocation of the licence, and you have to do all the legwork. Having an automatic revocation, and ideally a level 4 fine or possibly level 5, would be much more suitable, in my humble opinion.

There is also the fact that cruise liners are not covered by equality legislation on transport. That really disturbs me. I think that needs to be tightened up. Indeed, the Americans with Disabilities Act, which we talked about before, covers cruise liners that dock in the United States.

Having mandatory help points that are manned somewhere not at a call centre the other end of the country which will be picked up in five minutes would be helpful. It is not just when there are assistance fails—I understand that they may go wrong from time to time—but when there are instances of abuse that need to be dealt with immediately. I think those three things would help me, as a disabled person, provided they are enforced properly, to feel much more confident and get rid of what Gavin Neate has referred to as arrival anxiety.

Q51 **Mike Amesbury:** Thank you. Baroness Grey-Thomson.

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** No, the inclusive transport strategy is regrettably just another strategy, and disabled people are slightly bored by strategies. They seem to keep being done to us all the time and not much actually happens. For me, the Government need to take equal access seriously. We need action and investment.





To stick with the railways, in delivering an inclusive system, it has to be fit for purpose for future generations. What we currently have does not cover that. We have to stop allowing derogations. The current legislation is not effective. If we look at rolling stock derogations, the Class 158s have a narrow entrance vestibule that prevents mobility scooters from accessing them. It is not just ScotRail that bans mobility scooters. It is Northern Trains as well. There needs to be a step-by-step plan to take action, not just to keep kicking it into the long grass. The short answer is no. Even if what we have was used properly, it would not be enough. Ultimately, it is not enough.

Q52 **Mike Amesbury:** Thank you. Christiane.

**Christiane Link:** I agree. It is no. The ATP guidance in the ORR is a good example of how it can be done. The direction is already there, but it has to be enforced and it has to get a bit stricter and stronger. I think we have to move away from the idea that disabled people have to take action to enforce the law. That is the task of the Government and no one else. I am not the regulator. The regulator for railways is the ORR and for aviation it is the CAA. They have to be able to do that.

I have one good point about derogations. They also happen when it comes to building stations and transport infrastructure. I did not even know the term before I joined the railway, and was gobsmacked to hear that we have a brilliant standard. The DFT has set a brilliant accessibility standard that then gets watered down in the project meetings, and at the very bottom we go for derogation. I did not even know what that was.

It was beyond my imagination that we have rules. They are good. The standard is quite good, but then Network Rail can go for derogation and everyone in the room agrees to that. That was exactly the culture we had before. We cannot just water it down and think that accessibility is a gold-plated something that is optional. Stop the derogations in the building area as well, not just in the rolling stock. You will build substandard stations otherwise.

Q53 **Mike Amesbury:** Lack of enforcement and no teeth is a common theme. Earlier on, one of our Committee members referred to the Equality and Human Rights Commission. What is your understanding of what their role should be and how effectively they are delivering it?

**Christiane Link:** To be honest, I do not really have an answer. I do not perceive them as a strong tool to enforce accessibility at the moment. I do not see that they are doing that yet and that it has an impact. They are hardly discussed in the industry; not in aviation and not in the railway. If I do not mention them in meetings, it never comes up.

The cases that the commission had in transport—correct me if I am wrong; I am not an expert in the Equality and Human Rights Commission—are a couple of years old minimum. From my perspective, I do not think they play a huge role at the moment. Whether they should, I



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do not know. I still think that accessibility is a health and safety and rights issue that should be enforced like any other aviation and railway regulation. That is the role of the regulator and the DFT.

The DFT is also the buyer and the money giver, so to say. They should have an interest in getting the best value for money for the taxpayer. That is also a topic. I am not sure that it has much to do with the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Money talks here as well. Why are we building substandard stations?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** I do not think I have ever heard the EHRC used as much around transport as I have today, so it is really interesting. It is not an option I have ever thought about, and I work in this space. To me, it is just a different form of derogation if we kick it to the EHRC to take cases. It stops the DFT stepping up to what I see as their responsibility. My strong preference is that DFT steps up and actually does what it should be doing.

I was one of the people who argued in the early 1990s that we needed an equality Act and that disability and discrimination legislation in the DDA was not the best way to go forward because we would always be in a game of top trumps. The reality of what we have seen with equality legislation is that disabilities are a forgotten part of that and get a much lower profile. Sadly, there is a game of top trumps with protected characteristics. Disability affects 20% of the population, but it does not get talked about in education or in transport. It just gets forgotten. I do not think, personally, that the EHRC is the right option. The DFT needs to be the body that oversees this.

Q54 **Mike Amesbury:** Stephen.

**Stephen Anderson:** A few years ago I put out a tweet saying, "I have had a discriminatory incident. I'm struggling to get anywhere. Does anybody have any contacts in the Equality and Human Rights Commission that they could recommend?" One person came back and said, "Don't bother. They've got absolutely no teeth. They won't listen to you. They're a complete waste of time." I think that tells you everything you need to know.

Q55 **Mike Amesbury:** Thank you. Finally, Alan.

**Alan Benson:** I read the EHRC submission to the Committee with interest. I am aware that their remit covers transport. I don't know anybody who has had a positive engagement with them on it. I note from their submission that they had a bigger project over a couple of years. I might be wrong in this, but I think it raised 30 or 35 cases. Stephen, remind us of how many legal cases you have personally taken.

**Stephen Anderson:** I have successfully prosecuted 20 private hire drivers. There are currently 23 waiting to be heard. I have settled with five or six other people in the transport sector.



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**Alan Benson:** Arguably, Stephen's impact is greater than the EHRC.

**Stephen Anderson:** Thank you; I'll take that.

**Alan Benson:** You're welcome.

Q56 **Mike Amesbury:** On your fundamental right as a person and as a customer to go from A to B to access transport, the Human Rights Commission is not the barometer.

**Alan Benson:** It is not a route that I would pursue.

**Mike Amesbury:** Thank you very much, everybody.

Q57 **Grahame Morris:** I am Grahame Morris from Easington. You have covered some of the ground in the question I was going to ask, but I want to explore it a little more. Tanni, you were quite damning in your assessment of the inclusive transport strategy. I do not know if it is a case of paralysis by analysis. We have so many policies and strategies. I think my colleagues were trying to be helpful when referencing other levers that might be applied to the Department for Transport. On the issue of equality impact assessments—you said you thought it was an equality issue—Stephen said something interesting earlier. He thought it was a discrimination issue. Often these matters are dealt with as a customer services issue. Could that be part of the solution?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** By the time some of these policies and procedures filter down into reality and day-by-day lived experience, they get watered down so much. Over the years I have seen some great strategies, but do they change my day-to-day experience of travelling? Not really.

Q58 **Grahame Morris:** That is the yardstick, isn't it? That is the evidence. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Are the policies and the enforcement working in a way that makes a difference to disabled people's everyday lived experience? I was just thinking about my journey down to London. I had a terrible time on the Northern Rail service. There were only two carriages. It was bad enough for me. I could stand, even with my bad leg, but anybody who had greater degrees of disability and mobility issues could not get on the train. I think their choices are informed by that experience, so they do not try. They use some alternative method of travel.

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** We were talking about the extra cost of being disabled. I live in the north-east of England and I work in London. I moved house to be closer to an accessible—at the moment—train station at Eaglescliffe. That is my title, so people know where I live. There is currently a ramp. There are discussions about whether that ramp is going to be removed and a lift put in, which is interesting. The extra cost of doing that and the extra cost of living near an accessible tube station in London can be £150,000 more than a non-disabled person. There are all those things.



I use Grand Central a lot. They are really good, but that is because there are six trains a day and I know every single member of staff. That is not what it should be based on. It is because they know me. Most of my good experiences are because people know me. The reality is that I don't think it filters down far enough. People are not trying to be malicious, but it is just—

Q59 **Grahame Morris:** Is it ignorance or a lack of understanding?

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** Yes. People are busy. They are trying to do different things, and they are stressed in their daily life. We are not on people's horizon in what we are trying to do. At worst, we are not seen as an integral part of society. If we take it back to covid at its worst, the fact that "Do not attempt resuscitation" orders were put on tens of thousands of disabled people without their knowledge or discussion shows what society thinks of disabled people. I am sorry. That was quite a global statement, but then we go, "2012 was lovely." Until it becomes a high enough priority, sadly things are not going to change. What we need is a Secretary of State who is disabled.

Q60 **Grahame Morris:** We might be able to arrange that for you.

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** We need someone who knows and has that kind of awareness. That is when we will see a real difference. There are lots of committees and bodies that are advisory but they just get ignored without disabled people being around the table. That is why today is so important. Without listening to the voices of disabled people, things will not change.

**Grahame Morris:** That is the whole purpose of the Committee inviting you. Your voices are very important and valued. Thank you very much.

**Chair:** For our final set of questions, over to Ruth Cadbury.

Q61 **Ruth Cadbury:** We briefly touched on the Vienna example and the national legal culture that has led to improvements on services in Austria. Are there any other examples of good practice, from the UK or elsewhere, where things are significantly better than the generality and experiences that you have described today? What made the difference in those cases?

**Christiane Link:** I can tell you about Vienna again. It is just a coincidence, but the city of Vienna has only accessible tube stations. That was not the case 30 years ago. They started a huge programme to make every single tube station accessible. I think that is needed for London, as well as for the UK nationwide.

Q62 **Ruth Cadbury:** Is that integrated across the whole transport network, including pedestrian areas?

**Christiane Link:** It is the tube in Vienna. I love this example so much because very often, in London, you hear, "Yeah, but we have the oldest tube in the world, and it's so difficult." Vienna is only 20 years younger,



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so that cannot be the argument. It is a matter of the political will they have shown. Italy has a similar system for the whole country. To be fair, I don't know where that is now, but they have a road map and I think that is the right approach. New York has just announced their road map to make the metro fully accessible by 2050. Disabled people applauded that.

We know how difficult it is. We know it needs time, but it needs a road map. If you do not have a plan, you will never end up anywhere. We do not even have a plan at the moment. If you do not have a plan for how to make this country's railway stations accessible, you will never achieve that. You need a ring-fenced budget and a cross-party commitment for the next 30 years that no one touches, or they know that, if they touch it, the society-wide outcry will be so bad that they do not touch it. That is what is needed. You need a plan. A strategy is never enough.

**Q63 Ruth Cadbury:** Thank you. Are there any other examples of where it works well and good practice?

**Stephen Anderson:** I come back to what I said earlier about Japan, in particular Tokyo. There is step-free access at every station on the metro. There is tactile paving from pavement to platform, including offshoots to the ticket office. There is the attitude of the staff as well. When I had the thing about, "Can I go on a train a bit earlier?" it was not a problem. I asked them, "Why is that not a problem, because in the UK I would probably get shouted at for that?" She just went, "We are here to serve." I think that sums it up.

It is not just the point about New York and having an infrastructure plan set for 2050, which would be very useful. Incidentally, when I went to a public consultation for my local station, Harrow-on-the-Hill, when they were doing step-free access and I talked about making the whole network accessible, one of the people from TfL said to me, "It's never going to be fully accessible and you need to get over it." Those were his exact words.

It is not just the infrastructure. It is the attitude. It is the approach and valuing disabled people and not just seeing them as some sort of commodity that has to be, as has been referred to before, paid off, told to shut up or just told that you are going to be unequal and to go back in your little cubby hole. We are not going anywhere. Let's make that clear.

**Q64 Ruth Cadbury:** Except you want to go everywhere.

**Stephen Anderson:** Indeed.

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** I have had some really good experiences in the USA. I have had some great experiences flying and on trains in Spain. We need to look at the Netherlands because they have bold plans to ensure that the entire railway network—410 stations—is going to be fully independently accessible to everyone by 2030. That is a really important place to look.



**Grahame Morris:** It is political will. You can do anything you want if the political will is there.

Q65 **Ruth Cadbury:** Do you have anything to add, Alan?

**Alan Benson:** I think the argument is not just about big-ticket items. It is not just about lifts and station refurbishments. There are all sorts of good examples of little initiatives.

Q66 **Ruth Cadbury:** Like?

**Alan Benson:** For example, from memory I think TransPennine have just released a video tour of a number of their stations so that people who are nervous can, through the VR system, look around a station and know where all the facilities are. People are not good at sharing those ideas and they are not good at critically analysing their own efforts. Somebody in a bus company said to me that accessibility should not be an issue of competitive advantage. We know that the solutions are out there. They should be shared. Motability has just set up and funded a centre for investigating evidence-gathering. We know the evidence. We know the solutions. We just need them implemented.

Q67 **Ruth Cadbury:** Finally, preferably in a sentence, what one thing would make the biggest difference to the ability of people with access needs to travel when and where they want or need to? I will start with Alan.

**Alan Benson:** I was hoping you would leave me to last.

Q68 **Ruth Cadbury:** That's fine. I will go to Christiane and come back this way.

**Christiane Link:** Accountability and responsibility by people in charge at a very high level will make a huge difference. As long as everyone is responsible, no one is responsible.

Q69 **Ruth Cadbury:** Tanni.

**Baroness Grey-Thompson:** Level boarding.

Q70 **Ruth Cadbury:** Stephen.

**Stephen Anderson:** Change the law. Change the approach. Change the standards and respect that I know my needs better than anybody else on the planet.

Q71 **Ruth Cadbury:** Good point. Alan.

**Alan Benson:** Train everybody, not just the frontline staff. Train the directors, the managers, the project managers and the accountants. Everybody needs accessibility at the heart of their job, just like health and safety.

Q72 **Ruth Cadbury:** That is a point we covered when we met before, including the designers, the architects, the interior decs people and the equipment designers.





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**Alan Benson:** And that training needs to be led by disabled people.

**Ruth Cadbury:** Thank you very much.

Q73 **Chair:** That brings us to the end of this session. I thank all four of you most sincerely for your time this morning and for sharing your own experiences and suggestions. They have been incredibly helpful to this inquiry and will give us a number of areas that we want to pursue with other witnesses in future sessions. I know that a number of you have sent in written evidence already. If there is anything you would like to follow up, please feel free to do so.

Finally, Stephen, I again repeat the apology for the experience you had coming into Parliament this morning. That was not acceptable, and I can assure you that we will be following it up.

**Stephen Anderson:** May I say one thing to end on a happy note? What I am going to say at first is not happy, but it will turn into happy. As some of you may know, Barney is retiring in the next couple of weeks, so his career as a guide dog will be finished. Barney and I have come and sat in the public gallery on many occasions and heard many of you talking. Barney has been asleep for much of that. I hope that doesn't offend any of you.

I want to place on record generally, today being an exception, how accessible Parliament has been to me and to Barney. I want to place on record my thanks to the parliamentary staff for all that they did to make my experience in Parliament, particularly visiting the House of Commons, an accessible one. I thank Barney for seven and a half years of wonderful partnership.

**Chair:** Thank you. Barney has behaved impeccably throughout. I have been keeping my eye on him during the proceedings. His ears are pricking up. We wish him a long and happy retirement. Once again, thank you all for your time and evidence this morning.