

Transport Committee

**Access denied: rights
versus reality in disabled
people's access to transport:
Government Response**

**First Special Report of Session 2024–25
HC 931**

Transport Committee

The Transport Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Transport and its associated public bodies.

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Publication

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First Special Report

The Transport Committee published its First Report of Session 2024–25, [Access denied: rights versus reality in disabled people’s access to transport](#) (HC 770), on 20 March 2025. The Government response was received on 19 May 2025 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

Introduction

1. The Department is grateful for the Transport Select Committee’s report, *Access Denied*, which lands at a pivotal time: a moment when the Government is focused on securing Britain’s future, reforming public services, and putting the needs of working people—including disabled people—at the heart of the transport system.

2. Disabled people continue to face unacceptable barriers across the transport network. When operators fail to meet their accessibility duties, whether through missed passenger assists, carriage refusals or staff not knowing their responsibilities, it has a real impact on disabled people's lives. These barriers represent a failure to meet the needs of all customers, particularly disabled passengers. The Department agrees that standards need to improve and that all parties have a role to play in that, especially at the front line of service delivery. Too often, even when infrastructure is in place or legal requirements are met, services still fall short in practice.
3. These failures limit disabled people's access to work, education, healthcare, and recreation. This exclusion affects not just individuals but the nation as a whole—hampering growth, productivity, and social participation. Research shows that improved accessibility can boost tax revenues by supporting disabled people into employment, increase fare income for operators, and expand the reach of key economic sectors like tourism.¹

1 Department for Work & Pensions, Improving Lives, 2017. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a74af20e5274a529406956a/improving-lives-the-future-of-work-health-and-disability.PDF>
Scope, 2023. <https://business.scope.org.uk/disabled-customers-purple-pound/>
Visit England, 2024. <https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/make-your-business-accessible-and-inclusive/discover-value-purple-pound>

4. Addressing accessibility failings is central to the Government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity and unlock growth. We are grateful to the Committee for producing this timely report, building on work from the previous Parliament, and welcome the focus it brings to the lived experience of disabled passengers and the practical actions required from across the transport sector—not just in infrastructure, but in how operators and staff deliver services every day.
5. Since this Government came to power, we have been clear that the travelling public should be at the heart of the transport system, with government, regulators and operators focused on meeting the needs of all people using the system. Some of the longstanding and complex issues identified in the report may take time to resolve - as the report clearly brings out; fixing the problems identified will require changing attitudes and organisational culture, and not just the removal of physical barriers.
6. Nevertheless, the changes needed have been clearly set out through the testament of the many disabled people who contributed evidence to the inquiry. The Department will act on the issues raised and be clear that operators and regulators should also treat accessibility as a fundamental expectation that should be prioritised and not considered an optional service.
7. Work already begun includes the development of an Integrated National Transport Strategy which will bring together actors at the national, regional and local level to provide a unified passenger

focused experience that delivers seamless and accessible journeys for all. Transport is more than just infrastructure. It is about people and the journeys they make. It will take time, but this Government's aim is to change transport to make it user-focused, safe, inclusive and reliable, helping make everyday life easier for everyone, including disabled people. This strategy will be underpinned by tangible actions that match the ambitions set forth, and the Department has already started delivering on these.

8. On rail, the Department is committed to making travel more inclusive and will publish a rail accessibility roadmap later this year setting out measures and initiatives that will be, and are being, undertaken in advance of the creation of Great British Railways (GBR). As part of our rail reforms, a new passenger watchdog will be established alongside GBR to strengthen the voice of passengers and ensure operators are accountable for delivering excellent passenger services across the rail network. As outlined in the recent consultation on the forthcoming railways bill, there is potential to expand the scope and functions of the new watchdog to other transport modes in the future via further legislation.
9. Local services make a fundamental impact on the daily lives of disabled people, and local transport providers' role in making sure services are accessible and inclusive is of fundamental importance to removing accessibility barriers. In December 2024, the Bus Services (No 2) Bill was introduced to Parliament. The Bill includes a comprehensive

package of measures to improve local bus network accessibility and safety infrastructure and addresses the important concerns raised by parliamentarians about floating bus stops. In further support of making local bus services more accessible, the timeline for grant payments to small bus and coach operators was extended so they can comply with accessible information requirements; nearly £4m in grants have been awarded or are completing final due diligence checks.

10. The Department has also partnered with Innovate UK to run an innovation competition to develop transferrable Audio-Visual (AV) equipment for coaches and buses. This aims to support rail-replacement operators to comply with the Public Service Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023 (AIR). The competition has selected four projects to take forward, with each project awarded up to £170,000. Supporting multiple projects will incentivise competitive solutions, allowing operators to exercise choice while still delivering a consistent service for passengers. Projects should collaborate with disability stakeholders and coach operators in developing solutions, and work towards delivering a market-ready solution by March 2026.
11. This year, the Department has overseen the completion of the Changing Places Toilets Programme. The programme provided £2.5m in funding to install Changing Places Toilets across the transport network, including 54 facilities at Motorway Service Areas and six rail stations. A quarter of a million people cannot

use standard accessible toilets and need access to Changing Places facilities, which have more space and equipment. The rollout of these facilities makes a real difference to the lives of disabled people and their families, meaning they can travel more independently and confidently. This, in turn, can help boost local areas and their economies by encouraging more disabled people and their families to visit and spend money in local businesses that are easily accessible.

12. On aviation, one of the first steps this Government undertook upon taking office was to establish the Aviation Accessibility Task and Finish Group, chaired by Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson. The Group brings together industry and consumer representatives to tackle barriers faced by disabled and less mobile air passengers, with the aim of developing practical and achievable measures to improve accessibility. It is expected to publish its recommendations this summer.
13. The Secretary of State's focus on people and places is reflected in the portfolio of all the Department's ministers, with Minister for Local Transport, Simon Lightwood, appointed as the Department's accessibility lead. In this role he will work in close partnership with his ministerial colleagues to make sure accessibility is embedded within all minister's portfolios and throughout the Department's work. Our ministers are also making sure that transport accessibility is high on the agenda of the cross-government disability roundtables hosted by the Cabinet Office and chaired by the Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP (Minister for Social Security and Disability).

- 14.** This is only part of the Department's drive to improve standards for all passengers, including disabled people, based upon an accountable, efficient and inclusive transport system. These actions align to the wider Government strategy to reform public services, raise productivity, and deliver better outcomes from every pound we spend. Accessibility must be part of that drive for a smarter, inclusive, people-focused transport system.

Recommendations and Departmental Response

- 15.** In its report, Access Denied, the Committee framed its recommendations against overarching themes covering policy aspirations to implementation, the legislative framework, regulation and enforcement, and the burden placed on individuals to achieve redress. The Committee also laid out several rail specific recommendations. In setting out our departmental response, we have sought to follow this thematic structure grouping recommendations and responses together accordingly.
- 16.** As the Committee will appreciate, the Government is addressing significant economic and fiscal challenges, which will inevitably constrain the depth and pace of the work it can take forward, and we currently await the outcome of the Spending Review process. Solutions will also need to be considered against the Government's need to make sure that regulatory oversight is efficient, supports growth and

is proportionate in making sure operators understand and act upon their accessibility duties. Within that environment the Department will seek to take the steps it can to support an inclusive and accessible transport network.

Policy Aspiration to Implementation – the Government’s Strategy and Approach to Delivering a Barrier Free and Integrated Accessible Transport System.

Recommendations from the Transport Committee

“...The Government should publish within 12 months a new Inclusive Transport Strategy. This strategy must have a stretching ambition, but one underpinned by metrics, actions, costings and milestones which clearly map out a practical pathway to deliver on that ambition. It must be cross-modal and closely linked to the Government’s promised Integrated Transport Strategy, but a specific focus on accessibility is needed...”

“...The Government’s new strategy for inclusive transport should set out what practical measures it will take to embed the principle that every instance of not meeting accessibility obligations constitutes a serious failure for which operators and service providers will be held accountable. This must include measures to collect comprehensive data on such failures...”

The Department’s Response

- 17.** The Department accepts that our strategic approach to consideration of accessibility can be improved. Accessibility must be a golden thread that runs through the design, implementation and operation of our transport system – this stands true for local and national planning, as well as urban and rural settings, and public and private sector transport operators. The Department agrees that for this to be true, ambition must be matched with practical and clearly mapped actions, milestones and accountability measures at all levels – these are the basic tenets of all good infrastructure and delivery programmes. As the Committee’s inquiry concluded, the absence of these overarching structures was one reason why the previous Government’s 2018 Inclusive Transport Strategy (ITS) – despite many interventions being delivered - has not achieved a step change in the perceived experience of disabled people. Delivering this change to address accessibility barriers, will require action and ownership from all relevant parties,

and as the inquiry heard from witnesses ownership needs to be across all organisational levels – from frontline staff to senior executives.

18. That is why, as the Department brings forward the Integrated National Transport Strategy (INTS), it is our intention that accessibility should be incorporated as a key area of focus within our overall approach to creating a transport network that is designed and built in a way that provides for seamless, joined up journeys that are coordinated to meet the needs of people and enable prosperous communities, and promote growth.
19. The Committee has recommended a second standalone ITS, however, on balance, the Department concludes that the best way to ensure that accessibility is embedded as a golden thread at the heart of both our work and that of those delivering transport services and infrastructure is to incorporate it within our forthcoming INTS. An important consideration in coming to this conclusion has been that too often accessibility can be sidelined or approached as an add-on in transport planning, incorporation within the INTS will avoid this.
20. The strategy will have a clear focus on people in line with the Government's mission of breaking down barriers, promoting social mobility and addressing inequality. Work focused on the delivery of accessibility outcomes will be based upon a clear action plan and milestones and informed by both the

findings of this inquiry and independent evaluation of the 2018 ITS conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen).

21. The development of this new strategy has already been informed by the advice of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), with further planned engagement through the summer. The Department intends to keep the Transport Select Committee informed on the progress of this work throughout its lifecycle.

Recommendations from the Transport Committee

“...The Department must set out in response to this report how it will change its processes in order to build accessibility into decision-making processes both internally and at agencies overseen by the Department, and how it will ensure that internal checks and balances for accessibility are effective. Relying on consultations to highlight problems after policies and interventions have already been designed is not acceptable...”

“...The Department should share with this Committee a work plan mapping out DPTAC’s involvement in upcoming policy decisions and publish quarterly reports detailing the impact that DPTAC has had on the Department’s decision-making...”

The Department's Response

- 22.** The Department agrees that effective governance and transparency are fundamental aspects of accountable government, and that consultation and engagement is meaningful. The Department's objective is to put people and communities at the heart of everything we do, and we have already taken practical steps to drive internal culture change and increase the focus on accessibility in project and proposal development.
- 23.** To make sure that happens when key decisions are made within and beyond the Department, we will also review our business case guidance and associated processes at key decision points to identify what more can be done to reflect impacts on people, including in terms of accessibility.
- 24.** The Department takes its responsibilities under the Public Sector Equalities Duty (PSED) extremely seriously, as evidenced by the fact it has expanded its dedicated team, the People and Equalities Centre of Excellence (PECoE), bringing pre-existing equalities, 'people-centred thinking', and policy expertise together with a strong analytical base. The PECoE champions people and equalities and provides advice, guidance and training to Departmental officials, as well as working across the Department to promote and embed people-centred thinking into our work.
- 25.** This includes promoting awareness across the Department of the Social Model of Disability, which is the perspective that people are disabled by the barriers that exist in the world, rather than

their individual bodies or minds. People living with impairment or illness are not inherently ‘disabled’ – this is something that is created in addition through exclusion. In a truly accessible world where all barriers are removed, people would still experience the effects of their impairments (such as fatigue, muscle weakness, or blindness) – but living with these would not result in their exclusion from society, as society would be built to enable everyone to live full, vibrant, meaningful, autonomous lives.

26. Since its creation under the Transport Act 1985 the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) has been a constant presence providing impartial expert advice to the Department on the passenger needs of disabled people. DPTAC plays a key role in advising the Department across all aspects of policy development and implementation, and in the last year has seen its membership refreshed and expanded with a new cohort of disability experts joining the Committee. Under the Transport Act 1985, so far as reasonably practicable, at least 50 per cent of DPTAC’s membership should be made up of people who identify as disabled making sure that lived experience, as well as professional or academic expertise, informs advice to the Department.
27. DPTAC operates in an open and transparent manner, providing annual reports on its work to Parliament and publishes details of its membership and work on its dedicated website.² How DPTAC publishes and

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disabled-persons-transport-advisory-committee>

disseminates the outputs of its work is ultimately a decision for that Committee. DPTAC provides advice on matters subject to policy development and the standard considerations in terms of handling officially sensitive information are applied by the Committee in line with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Information Commissioner's Office guidelines. In the course of its interactions with DPTAC, the Department follows the recommendations of the Cabinet Office Functional Review of Bodies Providing Expert Advice to Government³ for expert committee's including the provision of feedback to the Committee on how its advice has informed policy decisions. In support of the Select Committee's desire to make sure that DPTAC's advice is considered in an open and transparent manner, the Committee has agreed to further enhance its public reporting by publishing regular updates to its work programme alongside its main committee meeting minutes, with these meetings taking place no fewer than four times per year.

3 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82208340f0b62305b92a07/Functional_Review_of_Bodies_Providing_Expert_Advice_to_the_Government-Report__1_.PDF

The Legislative Framework

Recommendations from the Transport Committee

“...The Department for Transport should lead a review of transport accessibility legislation in collaboration with the Office for Equality and Opportunity, and with meaningful involvement and leadership by disabled people, to assess how it could be streamlined, clarified and updated, and whether it should be underpinned by greater specification of the standards providers must work to. Specification of standards should include matters currently subject only to the Public Sector Equality Duty or the duty to make reasonable adjustments. The review should be completed within 12 months of the publication of this report...”

The Department’s Response

- 28.** The Department accepts the need to look again at the legislative framework for accessibility in transport. The inquiry has highlighted the complex nature of the legislative framework that has grown over the years and how this may lead to uncertainty or obfuscation in securing the rights of disabled people across our transport network. The Department agrees that there is value in further work being undertaken to review transport accessibility legislation. The objective of

this should be to provide the universal and clear specification of the standards that must be worked to across transport modes and services.

- 29.** As the findings of the inquiry outlines, the complexity of the current legislative framework means that undertaking this work will need careful consideration and planning. The Department believes that the Law Commission is best placed to undertake this work. As such, the Department has approached the Law Commission to assess their capacity to undertake this work. Subject to agreement with the Commission, the Department envisages this work being undertaken on a phased basis with clear milestones, for example including a consultation stage, and progress review points that will provide assurance that the review is progressing in a timely manner. The exact timeline and duration of this review will need to be confirmed with the Law Commission, but it is the Department's intention that this will not affect progress on our existing planned legislative priorities. The Law Commission has advised the Department that it is experienced in conducting work in parallel to legislation being brought forth.
- 30.** Transport focused work previously undertaken by the Law Commission includes the completion of a far-reaching review on behalf of the Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles (CCAV) to enable the safe and responsible introduction of automated vehicles on British roads and public places. This work informed the development of legislation leading to the Automated Vehicles Act 2024. The Commission

is currently undertaking a review of the law around highly automated and autonomous flight on behalf of the Civil Aviation Authority and the Department for Transport. Disability focused work undertaken by the Commission includes the ongoing review of disabled children's social care law, and the review of adult social care law which informed the development of the Care Act 2014.

Regulation and Enforcement

Recommendations from the Transport Committee

“...The Secretary of State should immediately give regulators an explicit mandate, backed by the necessary resources, to be far more proactive within the scope of their current powers in identifying and enforcing against breaches of accessibility law and regulations by operators. The Department should set annual reporting requirements for regulators to publish updates on the number of breaches of accessibility laws, regulations and guidance that they have a) identified, b) addressed through informal action and c) taken formal enforcement action against. This transparency would enable the public to gauge the success of a new stance of proactive enforcement...”

“...The Department should within 12 months review the roles of enforcement bodies with responsibilities for transport accessibility and prepare to legislate where necessary:

- to ensure that all have consistent and sufficient powers at their disposal, and have both the powers and resources needed to intervene formally at lower thresholds than is currently the case;*
- to assess whether such bodies should be given the power and resources to act on breaches of the Equality Act general duties and the Public Sector Equality Duty in matters within their remit, in order to facilitate swifter resolution of breaches and take some of the burden of legal action away from individuals;*
- to ensure that no transport mode, including the street environment, is left uncovered by an effective enforcement regime; and*
- to assess whether a single body with responsibility for enforcement across transport modes would be more effective at asserting the rights of disabled travellers and bringing about systemic change...”*

The Department’s Response

- 31.** The Department agrees that there should be no ambiguity about the importance of all relevant parties fulfilling their duties on accessibility. The Department

sets the policy framework for transport accessibility, which regulators enforce. As the inquiry identified, the effectiveness of regulators in fulfilling their responsibilities is central to breaking down barriers and upholding disabled people's rights. As a first step to making sure that this is the case, the Department will reiterate the importance and necessity of prioritising accessibility and equalities duties in the annual leadership directive letters issued by Ministers to the senior leadership of our departmental Arms-length Bodies (ALBs) and agencies. It is important that as regulators set forth their priorities and business plans, that accessibility is properly considered alongside their wider regulatory objectives.

- 32.** It is right to highlight that regulators and agencies should be resourced and set-up in a manner that maximises their efficiency and effectiveness in fulfilling their remit, with clear reporting mechanisms in place on how they undertake and enforce their duties and responsibilities – and that these bodies are ultimately held accountable by Ministers for their performance. The recently announced Cabinet Office review of ALB's commissioned by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, to improve performance, maximise efficiency and provide clear Ministerial oversight will be an important consideration in this regard. The Department for Transport will be engaged in this review, and the performance of ALB's with relevant accessibility related responsibilities, will be an important consideration in this process. As part of this

work, the Government will consider what legislation may be required so that the review outcomes can be implemented and delivered upon.

- 33.** As this wider review is undertaken the Department intends to work further with representative bodies of disabled people, regulators and operators by convening these stakeholders together to determine how collective action can be taken to:
- a.** Identify and commit to practical steps to improve accountability for accessibility failures.
 - b.** Strengthen enforcement mechanisms and regulatory alignment.
 - c.** Elevate the voices of disabled people in shaping enforcement strategies.
 - d.** Showcase and scale up exemplary practices in training, monitoring, and redress.
- 34.** The Department envisages that these outputs can be supported by the co-production of an accessibility charter that brings together in one place the guiding principles that underpin the rights and responsibilities of disabled passengers, regulators and enforcement bodies, and operators. The Department is aware that the National Centre for Accessible Transport has worked with the Accessible Transport Policy Commission to create an Accessible Transport Charter for local and regional political leaders,⁴ and it is the

4 <https://www.ncat.uk/2024/03/05/ncat-launches-accessible-transport-charter-at-second-accessible-transport-policy-commission/>

Department's intention to work collaboratively to build upon this pioneering piece and amplify it to the national level.

- 35.** Local leaders and government have an important role to play in improving accessibility outcomes, whether in terms of locally franchised or licensed services or the built environment. The day-to-day management of local roads is a local authority function to which the Public Sector Equality Duty applies. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring they manage their streets in a way that allows them to comply with the Duty. The Department's role is to provide the legislative framework, policy and good practice advice. The key piece of design guidance, the Manual for Streets, is clear that in managing streets, local authorities should follow the hierarchy of road users, which puts consideration of the needs of people walking, including people using mobility aids, first. Inclusive Mobility: A Guide to Best Practice on access to pedestrian and transport infrastructure, clearly sets out how to design accessible public realm.
- 36.** The Department is also considering the outcome of a consultation on a range of measures to tackle the problem of pavement parking. This includes the views of many local authorities with overall responsibility for enforcing parking contraventions. We are committed to publishing a formal response to the consultation and announcing next steps as soon as possible.
- 37.** Industry standards may also provide an opportunity to improve uniformed accessibility standards where there is a market need. For example, the PAS (Publicly

Available Standard) 1899, published by the British Standards Institution (BSI), lays out best practice on designing and installing accessible public Electric Vehicle charge points. As part of our work to assess how clear and uniformed standards can be applied to improve accessibility, the Department intends to look at how the creation and adoption of these standards may also be supported to further improve transport accessibility.

Micromobility Regulation

Recommendations from the Transport Committee

“...The case of e-scooters demonstrates the importance of ensuring that enforcement is not an afterthought when new elements are introduced into transport networks. Should the Government eventually seek to legislate for permanent e-scooter rental schemes or use of privately owned e-scooters on public roads, it must not rely on saying that it is up to local authorities or police forces to use their powers to manage detrimental impacts on disabled people without proving that this can be effective. It must present evidence from the extensive rental trial schemes demonstrating that it is possible for operators and local authorities to manage such schemes in a way which does not further impair disabled people’s safe and confident access

to the street environment. This may require the Government to make additional resources available for enforcement...”

The Department’s Response

38. The Department notes the Committee’s advice about the importance of supporting evidence underpinning the application of future policy and regulation to achieve the best outcomes in disabled people being able to access our streets with confidence and in safety. This will be an important consideration in the development of policy decisions on micromobility or e-scooter regulation and it is the Department’s intention to consult on any new proposed regulations before they come into force.
39. The Department is undertaking trials of rental e-scooters to assess their benefits and wider impacts, to inform options for future regulations. The trials are due to run until 31 May 2026 and are currently live in 18 areas. A second national evaluation of the e-scooter trials began in April 2025 and is due to run until May 2026. The results will be published in due course after it has concluded. This will build on learning from the first evaluation, exploring what journeys e-scooters are replacing; how they integrate with public transport; their safety for users and for others; and the accessibility impacts of e-scooters. They will also explore changing travel patterns since the coronavirus pandemic, when the trials were initially set up, and as e-scooters have become more embedded in public life.

40. Safety for all road users and pedestrians will always be a top priority, until changes are made, private e-scooters remain illegal to use on public roads, cycle lanes and pavements, and rental e-scooters can only be used as part of the Government's rental e-scooter trials, with the police responsible for enforcement.
41. The Department also recognises the issues of poorly parked rental e-scooters and e-cycles, particularly for those with mobility or visual impairments. That is why the Government has announced it will give local leaders the powers to regulate on-street micromobility schemes, so local areas can shape these schemes around their needs, connect people to public transport and tackle the scourge of badly parked cycles and e-cycles. All local authorities with rental e-scooters in our e-scooter trials are required to have a parking plan that ensures they do not become obstructive.

The Burden Placed on Individuals

Recommendations from the Transport Committee

“...We recommend that the Department for Transport work with disabled people's organisations to design a unified service to receive and triage accessibility complaints or reports of failures, ensure that they reach the relevant operator, authority or regulator, and follow them up if not resolved. Such a service

would require an investment in knowledgeable and resourceful staff and in effective and accessible advertising. This should be in place within 12 months. Data about reported problems gathered through this platform should be made available to operators, regulators, campaigners, parliamentarians and the general public...”

“...Users of such a service must receive assurance that information about complaints and failures is being aggregated and used proactively to improve systems and services, not just to effect redress to the individual. In order to achieve this, the Department should:

- *analyse information gathered through this mechanism both to hold operators to account for resolving specific problems promptly, and to enable systemic issues and trends to be identified and addressed; and*
- *report quarterly on what issues have been resolved and services improved as a result...”*

The Department's Response

- 42.** The inquiry highlighted the complexity of complaints processes across transport modes and operators, and the Department has already been working with disabled people's representative groups to improve the information available to people about their rights and where to seek redress. The Department partnered with the charity Scope to support their production of

Right to Ride⁵ a one-stop transport rights guide that covers all land based public transport that operates in Great Britain including train, bus, coach, taxi and private hire vehicles. The guide is not intended to solve the many challenges that disabled people face when using the public transport system, but it can help people understand their rights and the standards that the law says disabled people should expect when using public transport and how to complain when these rights are not upheld. The guide includes information on accessibility and how to request help.

- 43.** The Department is clear that transport operators should be doing their utmost to respond to and address complaints and issues in the first instance. This is not only a matter of good customer service – it is also key to meeting legal obligations, maintaining public trust, and improving service quality. Disabled passengers deserve a timely, informed, and respectful response when things go wrong. Transport operators are uniquely placed to provide this and should take the lead in putting things right.
- 44.** The Department will undertake further work to explore how complaints processes and escalation routes could be simplified through internal review and collaboration with relevant bodies. It is intended that this work will focus on how it may be possible to improve signposting people to the right channels and reduce the burden on individuals in having to navigate complex systems. This work presents an opportunity to consider how improved complaints systems

may also benefit operators through more efficient processes and complaints handling, supporting a virtuous circle of transparency, efficiency, and accountability. This work will compliment and feed into workstreams to consider opportunities to improve the consumer landscape across transport modes and the development of the INTS. The Department has begun work to assess the efficacy of current bus complaints pathways, and it is our intention to engage Transport Focus and other relevant complaints and dispute resolution bodies to map complaints processes and identify potential areas to achieve better efficiencies, including how data use and transparency can be captured, collated and published to promote accountability. This work will look to build on existing good practice such as the work of the Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) consumer panel work programme and Consumer Strategy.⁶

Recommendations from the Transport Committee

“...As one way of reducing the need for complaints in the first place, we recommend that all licensed transport providers be required to appoint an accessible transport champion with the specific responsibility for navigating journeys on a regular basis to assess conditions against a checklist, as a lean and rapid way of assessing the passenger experience. Champions should

have an understanding of accessibility needs on a pan-disability basis, and personal experience of navigating transport as a disabled person or carer...”

“...It is not sufficient for training to be delivered on disability awareness, accessibility and preventing discrimination: the training must be of a guaranteed minimum standard and proven to be effective in improving outcomes. The Department for Transport should, with the active participation of disabled people, establish an expert unit to review within 12 months the training packages currently available across modes to identify, benchmark and standardise best practice, and conduct ongoing quality assurance...”

The Department's Response

- 45.** The Department will undertake further work to assess how best to address the issues raised. As previously stated, the Department sets the policy framework for transport accessibility, which regulators enforce, but as this inquiry has rightly highlighted, meaningful progress hinges on everyone, especially operators, not just following the rules in a tick-box manner but addressing cultural and human factors within their organisations. A clear message came through the testimony of witnesses giving evidence during the inquiry - everyone must play their part in breaking down barriers including non-disabled passengers.

- 46.** It is not the remit of the Department to impose specific personnel roles on individual operators, but initiatives such as transport champions or mystery shoppers may be beneficial in some licensed provider and operator settings, for example, a franchised operator, while possibly not being practical where the provider is a sole operator such as a taxi driver. Nevertheless, as evidenced by the operators who attained Inclusive Transport Leader Scheme (ITLS) accreditation and the work of the Accessible Transport Policy Commission, there is appetite among operators to learn and adopt best practice in promoting accessibility awareness and understanding amongst their staff and making sure this is applied in day-to-day practices, including learning on the effectiveness of existing mystery shopper type-practices by passenger watchdogs and regulators.
- 47.** As noted above, the Accessible Transport Policy Commission and the National Centre for Accessible Transport have worked with local government leaders to create an accessibility charter. The Department intends to undertake further work to assess how clear and straightforward standards that a charter can help provide could support consistent, high-quality training.
- 48.** To understand what works best and is most likely to impart a lasting awareness and understanding of accessibility amongst operator management and staff, the Department agrees that there is merit in reviewing the training packages and practices currently available across modes, such as the

Department's REAL Disability Equality Training Programme,⁷ to identify, benchmark and standardise best practice. The Department will work with DPTAC to assess how this work could be undertaken in a timely manner with the active participation of disabled persons organisations and input from operators and industry bodies such as the Bus Centre of Excellence, the Rail Delivery Group, and Confederation of Passenger Transport. The output of this work will support the legislative and statutory measures the Department is taking to improve operator and staff awareness, including new statutory training requirements being introduced by the Bus Services Bill.

Rail Specific Recommendations

Recommendation from the Transport Committee (new inclusive transport strategy – rail – independent accessibility)

“As part of a new Inclusive Transport Strategy, the Government must set out concrete timescales for achieving independent accessibility across the rail network and commit to setting out within 12 months a road map for how to meet those timescales. This road map must inform the rolling stock, station

and network enhancements strategies of the Department and, when it is operational, Great British Railways”

The Department’s Response

49. The Department recognises the importance of enabling disabled passengers to travel independently and with confidence. The current infrastructure that supports our railways presents a unique set of challenges when it comes to achieving accessibility, many of the stations on the network date back to Victorian times and were built and designed when we had far less understanding of different disabilities and how to create accessibility for all.
50. During the passage of the *Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act 2024*, Rail Minister Lord Hendy announced the creation of an Accessibility Roadmap, which the Department intends to publish later this year. Whilst this Roadmap will not provide an immediate solution to these longstanding challenges, it will outline measures and initiatives to be undertaken ahead of the establishment of Great British Railways (GBR).
51. GBR will have a customer-focused culture, taking responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the railway, with a strong emphasis on passenger support and assistance. Over the next 12–18 months, focused work will continue on the design of GBR, including on how accessibility will be approached.

Recommendation from the Transport Committee (Rail – commissioning approach)

“Progress in implementing agreed accessibility upgrades at stations has been too halting, and delivery too slow and costly. The Department for Transport and its agencies and partners should consider adopting a different commissioning approach based on a rolling programme of rapid interventions, as opposed to individual station projects commissioned separately. By creating certainty and consistency for contractors, this should speed up delivery and lower costs.”

The Department’s Response

- 52.** The Access for All (AfA) programme delivers step free routes at selected stations. Selections are made through a national industry-led nomination process with Department for Transport and Network Rail evaluation to ensure that the funding budget is allocated fairly.
- 53.** The Department is exploring adapting AfA to a longer-term, rolling programme to improve efficiency and delivery, while continuing to fund accessibility through existing station upgrade processes as the industry must comply with current accessibility standards whenever they install, replace or renew station infrastructure.

- 54.** Accessibility improvements can be made whenever the industry installs, replaces or renews infrastructure work at stations as this must meet current accessibility standards. The Department will consider how regulators could be empowered to be more proactive in enforcing accessible design standards to make sure that they are applied consistently in practice.

Recommendation from the Transport Committee (Rail – station accessibility audit & open data)

“Station accessibility audit information must be published in full within two months of this report to permit independent scrutiny of progress, the resources required and any decisions made to rule out works at particular locations. In its Inclusive Transport Strategy, the Department should commit to compiling and publishing in open data format a register of key accessibility assets on the rail and bus network which can be drawn upon by journey planning tools”

The Department’s Response

- 55.** The Department agrees that there is significant merit in making data available to help improve accessibility and journey planning. The Department undertook a comprehensive accessibility audit of rail station facilities between April 2021 to April 2023. The data is currently available on the Rail Data Marketplace and

is being maintained by the rail industry. The data has also been used to update the National Rail Enquiries website with a more substantial redesign of the website's station information pages underway [and due to be delivered by this summer].

56. The Department is undertaking discovery work to capture bus and rail accessibility assets within the National Public Transport Access Nodes (NaPTAN) which is a national dataset of all public transport 'stops' in England, Scotland and Wales. This discovery work is the starting point for accessibility journey planning. Rail accessibility assets are being prioritised in terms of rail replacement stops to align with the expiration of coach operator exemptions from the Accessible Information Regulations which will expire on the 31 July 2026. The project is also piloting a new methodology for collating data on bus stop accessibility across the country drawing on AI technology.

Recommendation from the Transport Committee (Rail – staffing levels)

“The presence of staff is often a crucial determinant of the ability of disabled people to travel. Ahead of the establishment of Great British Railways and nationalisation of operating companies, the Department must be prepared to intervene where necessary to ensure that changes to staffing levels on the rail network do not have the effect of reducing access and inclusion. When legislating for the creation of Great British

Railways, it must take steps to ensure that that body gives accessibility appropriate weight in future decision-making about the number, roles and location of staff.”

The Department's Response

57. The Department understands the important role that staff play in providing face-to-face services on the railways, especially to those who may need more support. Looking forward we want to see staff roles evolve, where appropriate, to meet changing passenger needs and behaviour. Enabling staff to be more agile will enhance customer support and better provide passengers with reassurance.
58. Train and station operators are already required by their operating licences to establish and comply with an Accessible Travel Policy (ATP), which must set out how they will assist disabled people. The ATP, and any subsequent changes, must be approved by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR).
59. Ahead of the creation of GBR, the Accessibility Roadmap will outline measures and initiatives that will contribute to our overarching aim of independent access for all passengers. The forthcoming Railways Bill will also create a new passenger watchdog. In the public consultation we proposed it would have an explicit duty on accessibility by monitoring how services are delivered to disabled passengers and advocating improvements where issues arise. The Government's response to the consultation will be

published later this year. There will also be focused work on the design of GBR over the next 12–18 months which will establish its priorities for accessibility.