

promoting quality public transport.....

Transport Committee
 House of Commons
 London SW1A 0AA

20th March 2023

Dear Committee Members,

Accessible Transport : Legal Obligations

1. TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We are pleased to give our views to this inquiry

How effective is the current legislation aimed at ensuring accessible transport for all?

2. We are not fully up to date with current legislation but clearly there is a long way to go to ensure accessible transport for all.

How can existing legislation be better enforced to make accessible transport a reality?

3. We leave others to give more detail. Clearly funding is an issue including the need for visible trained staff on the ground to assist passengers with access needs and indeed all passengers especially when transport services are disrupted in a planned or emergency situation.

Are operators and local licensing authorities fulfilling their legal obligations to disabled travellers and travellers with other accessibility needs? If not, why not?

4. There are a lot of inadequacies here. A significant proportion of bus stops have not been updated to make them accessible, making it difficult or impossible for people with mobility issues to travel by bus. For example, no raised kerbs at bus stops to enable wheelchair users to board and alight; although it must be stressed that many bus stops outside towns and cities do not even have hard standing for intending passengers to wait on.

5. It is especially disappointing that some Local Authorities are failing to ensure that new developments e.g. new housing, are not being made to provide new and accessible bus stops as part of their development.

6. Bus companies need to be more proactive in not only encouraging “lost” passengers but in attracting new ones. Accurate real time information at bus stops and next stop information on buses would help prospective passengers’ confidence in using buses. Clearer information about point to point fares would also help.

7. Deaf/blind people are reliant on drivers telling them when they are approaching their destination. This does not always happen. There should be audio announcements at least by drivers and, ideally, visual displays of upcoming stops. These steps would benefit all passengers. However such luxuries are notable by their absence in the North West. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in Greater London.

How well do complaints and compensation processes work when things go wrong?

8. We have no statistical evidence. Procedures on rail are probably more transparent than on bus. With regard to the latter there should be more information about complaints procedures and appeal options at passenger contact points including on bus.

Are there specific transport modes or kinds of journeys where compliance with legal obligations is especially patchy? Are there differences according to where in the country you are travelling? What difficulties does this cause for travellers with access needs?

9. There are examples of many stations on the rail network where passengers have to travel to a station beyond their destination to either leave or to cross the line by legal means and take a train back to their original destination so that they can satisfactorily exit. This is because many stations do not have level access to all platforms and the universal provision of this is slow in coming about. A visible programme of improvements should be on the agenda.

10. Rural areas are particularly problematical for accessibility issues for bus services. Many bus stops have little information at bus stops and there is a notable lack of real time information displays. There is a requisite for bus stop information to be clearly available to the visually impaired and at head height. Buses should have large route numbers/destinations which are easier to read.

How effective are the relevant regulators at enforcing accessibility in transport? These include the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Office of Rail and Road, Local Licensing Authorities [and the Civil Aviation Authority].

11. We do not have enough evidence to be able to comment on this.

Do current legal obligations or guidance need to be strengthened?

12. See our response to the first question.

What best practices should transport operators be following to improve their performance on access and inclusion for users?

13. I think we have covered some of this in previous answers. Proper training and conduct of staff is crucial. For example deaf/blind people are reliant on bus drivers telling them when they are approaching their destination and we have had reports of this not always happening.

How effective is the government's Inclusive Transport Strategy, and how well does it influence decision making across transport policy?

14. Looking at experience in many public transport scenarios, the fairest answer is to say not very effective.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

JohnAMoorhouse

John Moorhouse
Company Secretary