

Accessible Transport Policy Commission

The Role of Local Government in Shaping

Accessible Transport

Outcomes Briefing

April 2024

Overview

On Tuesday 5th March 2024, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson DBE DL chaired a meeting of the Accessible Transport Policy Commission on the role of local government in shaping accessible transport. This meeting brought together local government leaders, disabled people and transport professionals to examine the important role that local and regional policymakers have in making transport systems more accessible. In addition, the meeting launched the [Closing the Transport Accessibility Gap Charter](#).

This briefing captures the main findings from the discussion. The paper will be shared with policy makers and industry stakeholders. The findings will also be used to inform the future work of the Commission and the National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat).

Key Findings

The Charter will drive local government leaders around the UK to take more rapid and systematic action to eliminate barriers to independent transport for disabled people

“This charter is extremely helpful if not essential, for ensuring that public bodies like TfL get it right in future”
– Seb Dance, Deputy Mayor for Transport at the Greater London Authority and Deputy Chair of Transport for London.

- Speakers highlighted a number of practices that their authorities use to make transport more accessible across their networks.
- They engage with stakeholders through a variety of different forums:
 - Greater Manchester Combined Authority has a disability reference group to advise on the accessibility issues on the transport network. For example, the group informed the design of new buses and a new payment and ticketing system.
 - West Yorkshire Combined Authority operates several access groups and design reference groups to make sure its transport plan meets the needs of people across the region.

- West Midlands Combined Authority plans to put the disability accessibility champions promoted in the Charter on its transport scrutiny committee. This would ensure they can shape policy at both the local authority and regional level.
- Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Combined Authority has established an equality forum to make sure accessibility is considered from the start of key projects.
- Some authorities are including accessibility within wider transport and urban management plans to ensure that new infrastructure is accessible from day one. This inclusive design approach benefits disabled people and reduces pressure on limited budgets for inclusive travel. Examples include:
 - West Yorkshire Combined Authority is tapping into Access for All, funding from its City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement and other capital investment programmes to help finance accessibility improvements.
 - Greater Manchester Combined Authority has included accessibility in its strategies for improving the city's streets and air quality.
 - Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Combined Authority has launched a £5 million investment programme in electric vehicle infrastructure which will include ensuring that charging points are accessible for disabled people.
- Siloed funding streams and decision-making structures can undermine good practice. For example, investments in new more accessible rail stock may not be matched by upgrades to station infrastructure, reducing the impact of the former.
 - The Mayor of Greater Manchester Combined Authority has taken control of the bus network, enabling all motor transport services and infrastructure to be integrated.
- Rural transport has a significantly greater number of challenges, such as fewer alternatives to private vehicles, longer distances and higher costs. This puts disabled people at greater risk of social and economic exclusion.
- Transport East is developing a [Rural Mobility Centre of Excellence](#). The key features will be: community transport; long-term funding certainty; the development of a social value tool kit for business cases; and workforce training.

The social model of disability should be at the centre of the transport sector's efforts to understand and remove barriers for disabled people

“We’re not the problem, here. If we use the social model, we can design out the barriers that disable us on the transport system... And it helps us think about access barriers beyond just infrastructure as well.” – Caroline Strickland, CEO of Transport for All

- Adopting the social model of disability is crucial for addressing systemic barriers in transportation and beyond. It reminds us that the whole of society is inaccessible – challenges disabled people experience on the transport system are interconnected with

barriers in other areas of society, from education and workplace to social relationships and the problems with the benefits system.

- Transport professionals too often overlook accessibility considerations because they don't feel informed and confident about this aspect of transport design and so leave this task to someone else – even when they are at least in part responsible for accessibility.
- Good practice-sharing and consistent standards are needed to make sure every authority knows what it needs to do to make local services accessible, and that disabled people have the same experience whatever part of the country they are in. This might include:
 - Design guides and standards for how to design accessible vehicles and infrastructure – for example, the [National Bus Strategy \(2024\)](#) could have gone further by setting out how buses and bus stops should be designed.
 - Working across different agencies – local authorities might be required to coordinate with bodies such as National Highways or the Department for Transport.
- However, the UK also needs legislation to mandate design standards to make sure that they are implemented in practice.

As well as addressing the needs of people with visible disabilities, the transport system must be accessible for people hidden disabilities and learning disabilities

“What is starting to come out more, is the hidden disabilities. Somebody with arthritis who gets on the bus who is bounce them all over the place, is not having a good day.” – Nigel Hinch, Director of ABILITY Community Transport and Councillor at West Northamptonshire Council

- The transport sector needs to ensure that people with lived experience of disability contribute to discussions and decisions. In addition to appointing disabled champions to key committees, local authorities should:
 - Elevate more disabled people to corporate governance structures such as those that oversee management, human resources and finance.
 - Pay disabled advisers the same as other paid consultants and advisers.
 - Diversify the transport profession so we have more disabled transport professionals providing design advice.
 - Embed accessibility into engineer training.
- Simple technological solutions can make a big difference to disabled people's journeys, such as an application that provides comprehensive answers to journey planning questions – similar to how [City Mapper](#) operates.

Transport providers must be allowed to share in the social and economic benefits of making transport accessible

“What we have found was it is a mine field in terms of the solutions around some of this. Some of it is around funding, there is never enough funding, but, I think, what would help is that long-term funding.” – Kamal Pancha, Senior Adviser at the Local Government Association.

- Policy makers and transport planners need to think broadly about how accessible transportation can enhance opportunities for disabled people. This means setting objectives that relate to key outcomes for disabled people such as improving disabled people's enrolment in education, rates of employment and their ability to get to the shops.
- The benefits of accessible and inclusive transport systems to other public services and the wider economy more generally need to be reflected in service contracts so that operators can share in the gains associated with improving disabled people's lives.
- Greater funding certainty for transport authorities over five or more years would help decision makers to make the case within their organisations for investment in accessible services and infrastructure.
- In Wales the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) helps make transport authorities and operators prioritise accessibility by placing a legal duty on public bodies to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of the country.

Additional Links

- [The Accessible Transport Charter](#)
- Explanations of the social model of disability from [Disability Rights UK](#) and [Inclusion London](#)
- [Equity in Transport: A Path to Inclusive and Sustainable Transport Network For All - Acting Assistant Director for Transport at Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority](#)
[Tim Bellamy's blog about our meeting.](#)

About the Accessible Transport Policy Commission

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

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

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

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

- Barry Sheerman, MP for Huddersfield (Labour and Co-operative Party)

- Lord Shinkwin (Conservative Party)
- Marion Fellows, MP for Motherwell and Wishaw (Scottish National Party)
- Paul Maynard, MP for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Conservative Party)
- Zarah Sultana, MP for Coventry South (Labour Party)

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

About the National Centre for Accessible Transport

The National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) works to ensure that no disabled person faces challenges arising from poor access to transport. ncat aims to deliver on this mission by:

- Engaging with disabled people to better understand their experiences and co-design solutions
- Amplifying the voices of disabled people in all decision making
- Collaborating widely with all transport stakeholders
- Demonstrating good practice and impact to influence policy

ncat is delivered by a consortium of organisations that includes Coventry University, Policy Connect, The Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC), Designability, Connected Places Catapult, and WSP. It is funded for the period 2023-2030 by the Motability Foundation.