# **Accessible Transport Policy Commission**

Integrated National Transport Strategy Roundtable

Outcomes Briefing

July 2025

## Overview

On Wednesday 18th June 2025, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson chaired a meeting of the Accessible Transport Policy Commission on government's forthcoming Integrated National Transport Strategy. The roundtable convened Department for Transport officials with representatives from disabled people's organisations, local transport authorities, transport operators and companies to discuss opportunities for the strategy to help make the transport system more accessible and inclusive for disabled people.

In addition to the roundtable, the meeting featured a presentation by Eilis Garvey from WSP on the National Centre for Accessible Transport's [*Understanding and Identifying Barriers to Transport*](https://www.ncat.uk/projects/understanding-and-identifying-barriers-to-transport/) research project and the accompanying [Transport Barriers Database](https://www.ncat.uk/what-we-do/transport-barriers-database/) – an interactive online dashboard for transport decision-makers and researchers.

This briefing will be shared with government Ministers and officials, as well as Parliamentarians, to inform the development and delivery of the strategy.

## Key Findings

### The National Integrated Transport Strategy will make access and inclusion a priority, seeking to address accessibility challenges in several areas

It's absolutely right that [accessibility] should be a golden thread that goes throughout everything that you do, equally, we felt it was important to dedicate some particular space to talk about the challenges and opportunities, and the particular things that we want to achieve [through the strategy]” – Holly Greig, Department for Transport

* The Department for Transport's Integrated National Transport Strategy aims to fulfil the government's manifesto commitments to publish a long-term plan for the transport system, and to address fragmentation and other causes of inefficiencies in transport. It is due to be published by the end of the year.
* Last November the then Secretary of State for Transport Louise Haigh set out [the political vision for the strategy](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-11-28/hcws266) which emphasised the importance of making the transport system fit for purpose for everyone in society including disabled people. The current Secretary of State Heidi Alexander has said she also wants the strategy to address the door-to-door experience of people making journeys.
* The Department has consulted on the development of the strategy through a call for ideas – which has received over 6,000 responses – a regional roadshow of 11 sessions speaking with transport stakeholders, and a series of focus groups and panels with specific groups of people whose particular experiences may not have been captured through the other consultation exercises.
* Accessibility and inclusion is one of the priority areas that the government has identified for the strategy. This has several strands:
  + Physical accessibility – including making sure that people can access streets and pavements where they live and work.
  + Making journey information and ticketing processes more accessible.
  + Personal safety – making sure people can travel safely and securely.
  + Making sure accessibility is built into transport decision-making at every stage.
* The Department is also working to make sure the strategy supports the government's broader commitments on housebuilding, railway reform and in its recent infrastructure strategy as well as the cross-government missions programme, particularly those around health and access to opportunity.

### Roundtable urged the government to set some clear targets for the strategy around accessibility, along with robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, to make sure the strategy's ambitions and achieved

“First and foremost, we need a proper roadmap. Unfortunately, I fear, a transport strategy alone will not be enough. We need more than strategy papers and warm words. Everyone in the country should know when their local station will be fully accessible, even if it's in 30 years' time” – Christiane Link, Ortegalink Ltd

* Roundtable participants said that for the strategy to be effective, it would need to include specific metrics or deadlines, such as a roadmap to support the delivery of accessibility improvements. Without these, there is a risk that the strategy's ambitions around accessibility may be undermined by other priorities.
* Making infrastructure improvements to railways is especially challenging in rural areas, which are often low on the list of priorities for investment from central government. However, the [Rural Mobility Centre of Excellence's](https://www.transporteast.gov.uk/rural-transport/rural-mobility-centre-of-excellence/) research shows that countryside rail stations are highly valued by local people.
* They pointed to successes in the Netherlands – which has almost achieved a target set a decade ago to have step-free access from streets to trains by 2030 – and Spain's 2007 law requiring newly procured trains to provide level boarding.
* The fragmented nature of the transport system is one of the key systemic causes of inaccessible transport. A unified system of accountability that shows who is responsible for making different parts of the transport system accessible would help stop common failures from being continually repeated without resolution.
* There should also be accessibility standards with some form of monitoring for compliance and enforcement. Varying practices among operators make it hard to plan journeys and create uncertainty for disabled passengers.
* Particular priority should be given to staffing, making sure that personnel have suitable skills and are well-trained to support disabled passengers.

### The strategy provides a number of opportunities to produce significant improvements in accessibility by encouraging more joined-up decision-making

“It's how do we support local authorities to become more emboldened in taking these decisions and pushing back at some of the decision-making scheme appraisal and the way that transport appraisal is undertaken does not necessarily come out best when you actually provide a scheme that helps to move people…” – Sharon Payne, Transport East

* The roundtable heard how a more integrated transport system could help transport decision makers make better choices around accessibility.
* For example, the Liverpool City Region's project to improve the accessibility of the railway systems has been made possible by the collaboration between Mersey Rail, the train manufacturer Stadler and the Combined Authority to upgrade both the stations and rolling stock. The creation of Great British Railways is an opportunity to replicate similar ways of working across the country.
* Better coordination and standardisation between local authorities could lead to more person-centred transport by ensuring that regulations and guidance around important features like the use of tactile paving are interpreted consistently. This would give disabled people greater confidence and choice in making journeys.
* There are existing standards – such as BS8300, on accessibility in the built environment – that could be incorporated into the strategy.
* Better engagement between local transport authorities and different parts of their communities, including disabled people, could help transport planners push for bolder schemes than current appraisal methods often encourage.
* Putting strong social values criteria in procurement contracts is another way commissioners can incentivise transport operators and manufacturers to ensure that their infrastructure and services are accessible and inclusive.

### Commitments in the strategy around more accessible journeys planning information should focus on making transport more convenient and spontaneous for disabled people, particularly by making it easier for passengers to arrange assistance

I've come across situations of stations that are listed as being accessible because, yes, you can get a wheelchair on and off both platforms, you can't over the footbridge” – Ben Foley, Wheels for Wellbeing

* The discussion reflected on the importance of accessible, timely and accurate journey information. The government is exploring how to better provide real-time information, and the role that open access data and improved information sharing between public and private sector organisations can play in a more integrated transport system.
* The meeting heard about the wide range of practical challenges that disabled people experience when trying to find out whether transport services will meet their accessible needs in advance of a journey. This ranges from operator websites that generally provide reliable information to journey planners that may offer misleading information, sending people on a route that is inappropriate for their access requirements.
* The lack of information is a particular problem in rural areas. Many authorities no longer print timetables in order to reduce costs.
* Different operators also have different rules around how much notice they require from disabled passengers to book assistance. These rules are not always easily available to the public.

### Disabled people continue to face widespread barriers across all modes of transport, with little hope that things will improve

“92% of people we asked experienced at least one barrier when using transport – and, generally, people were not optimistic that that was going to change in the next ten years.” – Eilis Garvey, WSP

* Eilis Garvey presented findings from a national survey of 1,192 disabled people. The survey, available online, by phone, and in BSL via video relay, asked respondents about the barriers they faced at each stage of their journey across different transport modes.
* Trains were reported as the most challenging, with 91% of users encountering a barrier. Buses were close behind at 90%, followed by both aeroplanes and the London Underground at 86%.
* The survey covered every stage of the journey – from booking and planning, to travelling to the station, boarding, being onboard, and receiving assistance.
* Across the board, respondents expressed deep frustration and a lack of confidence that the transport system would become more inclusive in the next decade.

### Barriers begin on the street and extend through every stage of the journey – often made worse by poor communication and a lack of staff understanding

“Even if you get from A to B, if it doesn’t go well, it kind of affects your whole mood, your whole day, your whole enjoyment of the trip.” – Eilis Garvey, WSP

* The most commonly reported barrier was navigating street obstacles – including outdoor seating, bins, pavement parking, and dockless bikes or scooters. These issues affected 59% of respondents and were especially problematic in London and for wheelchair users and assistance dog users.
* Pavement and kerb conditions were also a significant concern, reported by 39% of respondents.
* Getting on and off vehicles was the second most common barrier, affecting 44% of respondents. This included missing step-free access at boarding points, large gaps between trains and platforms, and inaccessible taxis. Getting in and out of taxis or private vehicles was a barrier for 56%, particularly for wheelchair users.
* Interactions with staff and other passengers came up as the third most significant barrier. 24% of people experienced difficulties booking assistance, while 47% reported issues using it.
* These interactions were especially problematic for people with invisible disabilities, learning disabilities or communication impairments, who often encountered a lack of understanding and inflexible attitudes.

### Behind every statistic is a person just trying to get somewhere – and being let down by the system

“Jess is deaf, and while waiting for the tube during a disruption, there were no visual announcements, no staff available, and when she finally found someone, he spoke with a mic covering his mouth and didn’t check if she understood.” – Eilis Garvey, WSP

* Eilis shared travel diaries that highlighted how everyday journeys can be filled with unnecessary stress. Jess’s regular commute in London – taking two tubes and a bus – was disrupted by poor communication and a lack of visual information.
* Staff assistance, where available, was often delivered in ways that ignored the needs of disabled passengers. In Jess’s case, even after identifying herself as deaf and asking for help, staff did not communicate in a way she could understand.
* These examples show how even relatively minor disruptions or oversights can make a journey exhausting or demoralising.
* The broader message was clear: transport is not just about getting from A to B. It’s about access to work, education, relationships, and joy. When transport systems fail to meet disabled people’s needs, the impact is felt far beyond the journey itself.

## About the Accessible Transport Policy Commission

The Accessible Transport Policy Commission is part of the [National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat)](https://www.ncat.uk/) 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:

* Lord Shinkwin (Conservative Party)
* Baroness Brinton (Liberal Democrat Party)
* Zarah Sultana, MP for Coventry South (Independent)
* Sorcha Eastwood, MP for Lagan Valley (Alliance Party)
* Richard Baker, MP for Glenrothes and Mid Fife (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 remove barriers through the development and dissemination of inclusive and robust evidence.

Our evidence will inform policy and strategy, and inﬂuence investment decisions by government, transport operators, and providers of mobility services.

Our work is fully rooted in the realities of the lived experiences of disabled people and stakeholders who inform and help prioritise our work.

ncat considers the transport system as a whole, to create an evidence base that inspires others to develop solutions for accessible travel that works for everyone.

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