



# **Joined up policies, joined up journeys:**

## **Roadmapping accessible transport in the UK and devolved nations**

Highlights Report, July 2025

This report is part of a series of research conducted by the National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) since its launch as an Evidence Centre in early 2023. Whilst this is a standalone report, we would recommend it is considered alongside other ncat research published from late 2024. As ncat progresses further, reports and insights will also be published on our website [www.ncat.uk](http://www.ncat.uk)

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# 1 Why did we do this work?

Disabled people make 38% fewer journeys than non-disabled people, a trend that has persisted for over a decade.<sup>1</sup> Research by the National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) shows that 92% of disabled people face barriers when using at least one mode of transport.<sup>2</sup> The UK transport system is failing disabled people.<sup>3</sup> Outside England, most of UK transport policymaking is devolved to regional administrations. The characteristics of the different transport systems and the policy and regulatory processes that shape them differ between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Therefore, while producing a UK-wide

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<sup>1</sup> [Motability, The Transport Accessibility Report, 2022](#)

<sup>2</sup> [ncat, Understanding and identifying barriers to accessing transport, 2024](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Transport Scotland, Disability and Transport, 2021 & The Transport Accessibility Statistics; The Transport Accessibility Statistics, Northern Ireland, Are we there yet? Barriers to transport for disabled people in 2023; Are we there yet? Barriers to transport for disabled people in 2023](#)

overview of the key challenges and opportunities for change, this inquiry addresses each nation separately. The inquiry explores how disabled people's transport experiences and insights can feed into policymaking at the highest level of government.

## **2 What did we do, how did we do it, and who did we work with?**

Our research had three main components: a scoping stage, policy roundtables, and a call for evidence.

### **Scoping stage**

In the scoping component, we reviewed recent UK-wide research, policy, and legislation on transport accessibility. We engaged with Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs), advisory panels, and transport professionals to guide this inquiry's focus.

### **Call for evidence**

- Design
  - Designed by Policy Connect, with input from The Research Institute for Disabled Consumers.
  - Nine open-ended questions on co-production, cross-government coordination, and underexplored issues within policymaking.
  - For every question, respondents could give a written response in a text box. The survey also allowed respondents to submit photographs, videos, audio files, and documents.
  - Respondents could give evidence for each nation separately, and the UK as a whole.

- Assessed and pre-tested for accessibility.
- Dissemination
  - People could respond to the call either via an online survey or by phone. A Video Relay Service was also offered.
  - It was open to anyone who had an interest in transport accessibility. People could respond as individual or on behalf of an organisation.
  - The call for evidence was shared through ncat's Community of Accessible Transport Panel, Policy Connect's connections, and LinkedIn.
- Respondents
  - 953 people responded to the call.
  - 346 respondents did not respond to any of the research questions.
  - 607 respondents responded to at least one of the research questions.
    - 578 respondents identified as disabled (n= 547) or having some sort of conditions/disability/impairment (n= 31).

**Table 1: Frequency of respondents for each nation**

<b>Nation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
England	464
Scotland	56
Wales	42
Northern Ireland	7
UK-wide	57

- Analysis
  - The answers to research questions were grouped by nation (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, UK-wide).
  - We identified common topics and noted nation-specific problems and solutions.

## **Policy roundtables**

The policy roundtables were a series of five evidence sessions chaired by Parliamentarians on the Accessible Transport Policy Commission. These roundtables brought together 78 disabled people, disabled people's organisations, transport professionals and policymakers. The roundtables addressed key policy challenges in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Another roundtable focused on UK transport regulatory bodies.

- Preparation
  - To help participants prepare, Policy Connect held video calls with panellists to brief them in the lead up to the roundtables.
  - Ahead of the sessions, participants were sent briefings that outlined relevant recent research, key legislation, and government policies and programmes.
- During
  - The first half hour of the two-hour sessions involved presentations from two to three organisations. The rest of the session was an open discussion among the attendees.
- After
  - Each of the sessions was recorded and transcribed.
  - Five to six key topics were identified and paired with quotes from participants.

- Findings were circulated among those who registered for the session.

**Table 2: Summary of the policy roundtables: number of attendees, chair, presenters**

<b>Policy roundtable</b>	<b>Chair</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Panellists</b>	<b>Number of attendees</b>
Wales	Baroness Grey-Thompson	17 September 2024	Disability Rights Taskforce Working Group on Travel, Gig Buddies Cymru and Transport for Wales	8
England	Lord Shinkwin	19 September 2024	Transport for All, Bus Users UK and Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation (CIHT)	25
Scotland	Richard Baker MP	14 November 2024	Royal National Institute of Blind People Scotland and Lothian Buses	17
Northern Ireland	Sorcha Eastwood MP	21 November 2024	The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC), Disability Action Northern Ireland and Consumer Council	9
UK-wide Regulation	Baroness Brinton	26 November 2024	Office for Road and Rail, Civil Aviation Authority and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency	19

### **3 What did we find?**

#### **Finding 1: The UK lacks coherent inclusive transport strategies and coordination across nations**

Transport accessibility across the UK is shaped by fragmented governance, outdated frameworks, and inconsistent policy delivery. Each nation has a different legal, regulatory, and policy landscape, which has led to disparities in access and entitlements. The absence of up-to-date legal frameworks and cross-government coordination has created a “postcode lottery” for disabled people. Between nations, this can look like concessionary travel schemes different in their eligibility criteria and discount amount. Within nations, underfunding and a lack of coordination disproportionately impact disabled people in rural areas, and those from marginalised and lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

*“Transport isn't just transport, it's the economy, employment, planning, housing, health, the arts and culture - it's the thread through all” (A disabled respondent)*

#### **Finding 2: Seamless door-to-door journeys are hindered by a lack of integration between different transport modes and services**

Disabled people often rely on multiple transport modes, but poor integration between them creates major obstacles. Inaccessible journey information, poor street infrastructure, and uncoordinated transport schedules can disrupt transitions between journeys. Challenges intensify

for those who cannot easily arrange alternatives, such as deaf passengers needing taxis during cancellations, or those in rural areas.

*“Policies fail to ensure seamless accessibility across the entire journey, including from home to the station and back again. So, a more holistic approach, like integrating local transport services like buses, taxis, and cycling schemes should be included in accessibility plans.”* (Lucy Vallis, CEO of Possability People)

### **Finding 3: Accessible transport standards are fragmented and limited**

Accessibility standards are inconsistent across transport sectors. While rail and aviation have clearer guidelines and monitoring, sectors like buses and street infrastructure lack enforceable standards. A lack of standards contributes to inconsistent services, which places the burden on disabled passengers to navigate different systems with limited clarity or support. Without standards, costly retrofitting becomes necessary.

*“There needs to be a minimised set of standards for accessible transport and needs to ensure that no matter where you travel to throughout the UK all transport routes and means of transport are accessible.”*

(Deborah Preston, Access Advisor at the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority)

### **Finding 4: The lack of coproduction in decision making processes often leads to accessibility being treated as an afterthought**

Disabled people are frequently excluded from decision-making processes that shape transport policy and infrastructure. Local and



national access groups vary in power and permanence, creating inconsistency. Many disabled people report being consulted after decisions are made, and for years without seeing any change. Without formal structures, funding, and accountability, disabled people's input is undervalued, and their expertise underutilised.

*"We keep talking about 'nothing about us without us' but everything seems to happen without us half the time, and we only find out afterwards. We need to have a statutory right to information at the early stage rather than a consultation once they have made up their mind about what it is they want to do and are just ticking the box"* (Claire Walters, Bus Users UK)

## **Finding 5: Transport regulators don't have enough powers, capacity and visibility to fulfil their responsibilities around accessibility**

Transport regulation is fragmented and varies in its effectiveness. Some regulators (like the Office for Road and Rail) can fine providers, but others (like the Civil Aviation Authority) rely on public pressure. The public perception of regulators is often negative, with many seeing them as ineffective or complicit in inaccessible practices. Many regulators lack engagement with disabled people, and capacity. In Northern Ireland, disabled people have fewer legal protections due to outdated legislation.

*"Regulators need to work more closely with those affected. It should be a requirement that providers hold access panels and request feedback from various groups, and that this evidence is shared with the regulatory bodies themselves."* (Matt Harrison, Thomas Pocklington Trust)

## 4 What conclusions did we come to?

This report identifies key areas that require structural changes to improve transport accessibility policy and regulation across the UK. Substantial reform is needed across the UK to ensure transport systems are equitable, consistent, and inclusive by design.

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*Strategy, funding, standards, enforcement, coproduction, coordination, integration are all crucial elements of accessible transport. Without one, the others cannot achieve transport accessibility.*

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Transport accessibility must become consistent across nations and modes, allowing disabled people to make seamless door-to-door journeys. This can be best achieved through a standardisation of transport accessibility practices and integration of transport. Standards of transport accessibility must be effectively regulated. Crucially, every stage of transport policy making, planning, delivery and evaluation must be coproduced with disabled people. Structural change must be supported by cultural change by shifting policy makers' view of disabled people as a “burden” and by recognising disabled people as a key part of society.

## 5 What should happen next?

In this section, based on our conclusions, we have made recommendations for departments that oversee transport across the UK. Recognising transport as a largely devolved area, we have set out separate recommendations for each of the four nations. Our recommendations are formed by a five-year roadmap of strategic and legislative reform and evaluation that centres coproduction.

### **England: Department for Transport (DfT)**

#### **Year 1: Strategy, Foundations, and Co-production**

- The forthcoming Integrated National Transport Strategy should announce a plan to develop an accessible transport framework, to be delivered as part of the Strategy. The framework should be:
  - Coproduced with Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) and Disabled People's Organisations representing a variety of disability groups through the advisory committee.
  - Informed by the findings of the Transport Select Committee's Access Denied report and ncat's Accessible Transport Policy Commission.
- Form a Ministerial Taskforce across departments (health, housing, employment) to deliver the strategy in England.
- Commission a review of accessible transport standards on design and service.
  - Identify where existing standards need to be updated, and where new standards need to be created.
  - The review should develop a list of 5-10 high-priority standards to be produced within the next 5 years.

- Work with the local government sector to develop a local accessible transport charter, that commits local authorities to:<sup>4</sup>
  - Appointing a disabled people's champion to key transport public decision-making bodies.
  - Establishing an advisory accessibility panel, chaired by a councillor, and composed of disabled people and DPOs to advise local authorities and transport operators.
  - Embedding technical and service standards produced by the proposed Accessible Transport Standards Commission.

### **Years 2-3: Reform, Standards, and Delivery**

- Set up an Accessible Transport Standards Commission to update and create standards in the priority areas identified by the review in the first year by 2030.
  - Invite devolved nations to participate in the Commission.
  - Develop a practice of ongoing review of accessible transport standards.<sup>5</sup>
- Establish a UK-wide Disability Transport Taskforce.

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<sup>4</sup> As set out in ncat's [Accessible Transport Charter](#).

<sup>5</sup> The Commission could be a collaboration between the government/DfT and the British Standards Institute and ncat. This combination of organisations would give the Commission the expertise and profile needed to make sure that the transport sector adopts the standards. ncat would provide an evidence base and access to the lived experiences and insights of disabled people through its Community of Accessible Transport research panel and Expert Advisory Group of Disabled People's Organisations and disability charities. As the National Standards Body, the British Standards Institute produces authoritative guidance for the transport sector. The Department for Transport is best placed to work with policymakers and industry to ensure the standards are adopted. The Commission should adopt a similar approach to [DSIT's new Regulatory Innovation Office](#), which aims to "reduce the burden of red tape on innovation and help kickstart economic growth," building a more inclusive and better-integrated transport system. The Commission's service model would also build on examples of international good practice, such as the [US Access Board](#) ("...an independent federal agency that advances accessibility through leadership in accessible design and the development of accessibility guidelines and standards").

- As an official-level subgroup of the Council of Nations and Regions.
- The taskforce would aim for consistency between each nation's accessible transport frameworks, and create an opportunity for best practice sharing.
- Its governance should be set out in a published terms of reference, with transparent reporting via annual updates and shared meeting summaries.
- Propose and consult the reform of the Equality Act 2010 to strengthen regulation.<sup>6</sup> In particular:
  - Improve its transport provisions, including developing a clearer definition of reasonable adjustments, extending coverage to maritime, and exploring the inclusion of aviation.
  - This process should be co-produced with DPTAC, DPOs, and the Accessible Transport Policy Commission.
- Improve regulatory practices.
  - Require regulatory bodies to publish plain-language annual reviews of their accessibility enforcement activity, and maintain a publicly available register of these documents.
  - Pilot financial penalty frameworks for non-compliance.<sup>7</sup>
    - Resources collected by fines should be reinvested into accessibility improvements.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Accessibility regulations in transport are inconsistent, outdated, and weakly enforced, with many transport providers treating accessibility as optional rather than a legal requirement. Without strong laws and consistent regulation, other accessibility reforms will lack enforcement power.

<sup>7</sup> The ORR currently holds such powers in Great Britain. Regulatory bodies such as the CAA currently rely on reputational powers which are not enough. In other countries such as Australia, the equivalent aviation authorities have financial powers.

<sup>8</sup> As previously recommended by ncat's [Working Together for Accessible Transport report](#)

## **Years 4-5: Transparency and Evaluation**

- Conduct an England-specific review of the impact of the accessibility design and training standards.
  - This review should contribute to UK-wide learning while addressing region-specific challenges.
  - Gather devolved nations' reviews within the Accessible Transport Standards Commission.
- Publish an annual accessibility enforcement and compliance summary, in plain language.
  - Share findings with DPTAC, and the UK-wide Disability Transport Taskforce.

## **Wales: Welsh Government**

### **Year 1: Strategy and Co-production**

- Establish a National Accessibility Advisory Panel to advise Ministers.
  - This should be a formal, cross-modal, and cross-government structure with long-term funding and links to local panels.
  - Build on the work of the existing panels that are limited in their scope.
  - Membership should include representatives from existing panels and other DPOs that represent a variety of disability groups.
- Integrate Disability Rights Taskforce Working Group for Travel's recommendations and the Accessible Transport Plan into Llwybr Newydd.
  - Secure dedicated funding for the Disability Rights Taskforce Working Group on Travel and Transport for Wales' Access

and Inclusion Panel to ensure contribution and monitoring of the Plan.

- Develop and deliver the strategy with the proposed National Accessibility Advisory Board.

### **Year 2-3: Standards**

- Join the proposed UK-wide Accessible Transport Standards Commission (see our roadmap for England, years 2-3).
  - Co-develop standards while ensuring Wales-specific concerns are addressed.
- Contribute to the UK-wide Disability Transport Taskforce to ensure strategic alignment (see our roadmap for England, years 2-3).
- Establish local access panels, working with local authorities and corporate joint committees in Wales.
  - Each local authority (or region) should have an access panel, chaired by a councillor, involving disabled people and DPOs.
  - Formalise their role in regional transport planning and link their work with the national strategy, and the Disabled People's Access and Inclusion Panel.
  - Provide stable funding and capacity building.
  - Propose to local authorities or regions to appoint a disabled people's champion to key transport public decision-making bodies.

### **Year 4-5: Evaluation and Enforcement**

- Conduct a Wales-specific review of the impact of the accessibility design and training standards.
  - This review should contribute to UK-wide learning while addressing region-specific challenges.

- Mandate accessibility and disability awareness training for all public-facing transport staff and managers within TfW.
  - Monitor uptake and quality annually with the Access and Inclusion Panel.
- Publish an annual accessibility enforcement and compliance summary, in plain language.
  - Share findings with the Disability Transport Taskforce (see our roadmap for England, years 2-3), and UK-wide dashboards and standards reviews.

## **Scotland: Transport Scotland**

### **Year 1: Coordination and Co-production**

- Begin co-production of the successor Accessible Travel Framework for post-2026 that is in line with the National Transport Strategy 2.
  - Build on the 2024-2026 Delivery Plan's seven workstreams.<sup>9</sup>
  - Lead engagement through Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS), Disability Equality Scotland, local access panels, and disability specific DPOs such as RNIB Scotland, and Down Syndrome Scotland.
  - Prioritise areas such as evaluation frameworks, clear enforcement steps, data, and training.
  - Prepare for accessible transport standards setting.
- Establish cross-departmental taskforce to deliver the framework as a part of the National Transport Strategy 2.

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<sup>9</sup> In the final stage, there was a commitment to improving passenger experience, journey information, street accessibility, parking, data and evaluation of accessible transport, and transport to health and social care.



- Include transport, health, housing, education, and digital infrastructure.
- Strengthen the Access Panel Network through a coordination fund.
  - Expand Disability Equality Scotland's support with secure, dedicated funding.
  - Prioritise capacity-building in rural and island areas.

### **Year 2-3: Standards and Coordination**

- Join the proposed UK-wide Accessible Transport Standards Commission (see our roadmap for England, years 2-3).
  - Co-develop standards while ensuring Scotland-specific concerns are addressed.
  - Propose the uptake of the concessionary schemes in Scotland across the UK.
- Contribute to the UK-wide Disability Transport Taskforce to ensure strategic alignment (see our roadmap for England, years 2-3).
- Mandate accessibility and disability awareness training for all public-facing transport staff and managers within Transport Scotland.
  - Monitor uptake and quality annually with MACS, and Access Panel Network.

### **Year 4-5: Evaluation and Enforcement**

- Conduct a Scotland-specific review of the impact of the accessibility design and training standards.
  - This review should contribute to UK-wide learning while addressing region-specific challenges.
- Publish an annual accessibility enforcement and compliance summary, in plain language.

- Share findings with the Disability Transport Taskforce (see our roadmap for England, years 2-3), and UK-wide dashboards and standards reviews.

## **Northern Ireland: Department for Infrastructure (DfI)**

### **Year 1: Strategy and Co-production**

- Publish an inclusive transport strategy for Northern Ireland.
  - Coproduce the strategy with The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC), ensuring their partnership is respected and long-term in the development and evaluation of the strategy.
  - Invite other DPOs, representing a variety of disability groups, to contribute directly via structured input processes.
  - Ensure the prioritisation of equitable access to transport, rural inclusion, and taxi reform.
  - Review the availability and quality of transport accessibility standards in Northern Ireland.
- Set up more community accessibility panels at the district council level, linked to rural partnerships.
  - These panels should be funded by DfI and operate independently to assess local access needs.
  - Each panel should be chaired by a councillor.
  - Each panel should make recommendations to the Department and Translink.
- Establish a cross-departmental Ministerial Taskforce on Accessible Transport (DfI-led, with representation from health, education, and communities).

## **Years 2-3: Reform, Standards, and Delivery**

- Propose to reform the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).
  - The Department for Communities would lead this work.
  - Introduce protection from indirect discrimination.
  - Define 'reasonable adjustments' in the context of transport services.
  - Put anticipatory duties on public bodies in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty in Great Britain.
- Contribute to the UK-wide Disability Transport Taskforce to ensure strategic alignment (see our roadmap for England, years 2-3).
- Accept DfT's invitation to the Accessible Transport Standards Commission with IMTAC's input (see our roadmap for England, years 2-3).
  - Directly issue standards through public service obligations and contracts.
- Mandate accessibility and disability awareness training for all public-facing transport staff and managers within DfI.
  - Monitor uptake and quality annually with IMTAC.

## **Years 4-5: Enforcement and Evaluation**

- Conduct a Northern Ireland-specific review of the impact of the accessibility design and training standards.
  - This review should contribute to UK-wide learning while addressing region-specific challenges.
- Publish an annual accessibility enforcement and compliance summary, in plain language.
  - IMTAC should be involved in shaping the reporting framework and reviewing findings.

- Share findings with the Disability Transport Taskforce (see our roadmap for England, years 2-3), and UK-wide dashboards and standards reviews.

## **6 How will ncat use these findings to achieve change for disabled people's transport?**

As a UK-wide centre, ncat will work for disabled people across the UK to have equitable access to transport, regardless of geography or their background.

To inform the actions outlined in the roadmaps, particularly for the UK Government, the Accessible Transport Policy Commission will continue to bring together key stakeholders.

To inform devolved governments in delivering the roadmaps, ncat will continue to connect with Disabled People's Organisations, advisory boards, transport and regulatory bodies, and departments overseeing transport across the UK.

This report further highlighted the importance of centring disabled people in decision-making processes that impact them, legislation and regulation to protect disabled people's rights, and training to effectively implement policy changes. In its next phase, ncat will be conducting applied research to develop coproduction and training frameworks, and improving complaints processes.

## 7 About ncat

The National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) works as an Evidence Centre developing high quality evidence, best practice, and innovative solutions to inform future disability and transport strategy, policy, and practice 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 seven years from 2023 by the Motability Foundation.

For more information about ncat and its work please visit [www.ncat.uk](http://www.ncat.uk)

To contact ncat, either about this report or any other query, please email [info@ncat.uk](mailto:info@ncat.uk)

## 8 References

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