



Making transport more accessible for disabled people

8 areas for change



An easy-read summary

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Reading speed is different for everybody, but we think it will take about 12 minutes to read this report.



This report uses **blue words.**

When a word or phrase is difficult, we have written it in **blue writing and explained it.**

Introduction



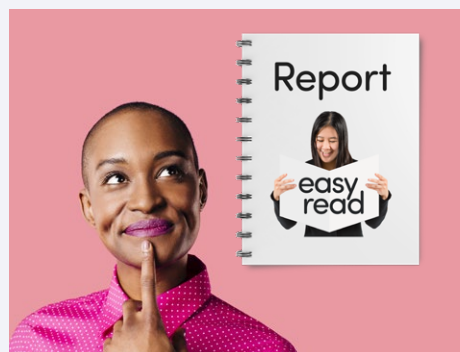
We are the National Centre for Accessible Transport, called 'ncat' for short.



We work to make transport more accessible for disabled people.



Our report is about 8 changes that can happen to make transport much easier for disabled people to use.



This is an easy-read version of the highlights report.

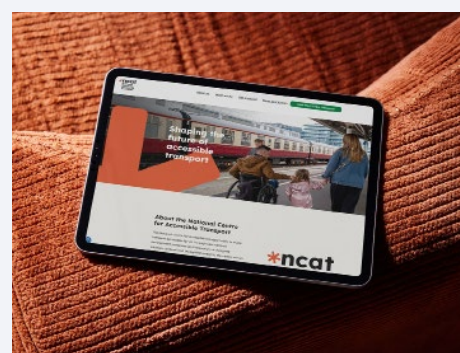


The report link is here:

Translating research into design opportunities



We started making disability and transport reports in 2023.



It is important to read these other reports as well. They are on our website:

www.ncat.uk



ncat encourages you to use the information in this report.



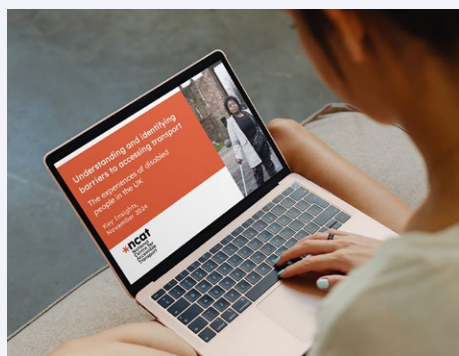
When you use information from this report, please say it is from:



'ncat (2025). Translating research into design opportunities

Available at www.ncat.uk

Why do we do this work?



One of ncat's reports is called:

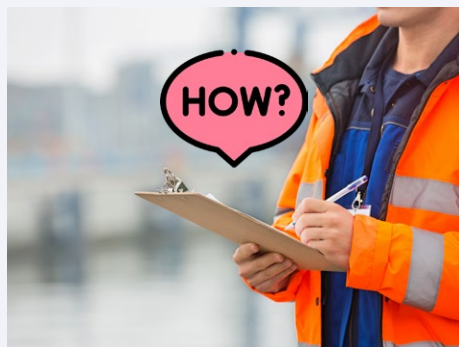
'Understanding and identifying barriers to transport'.



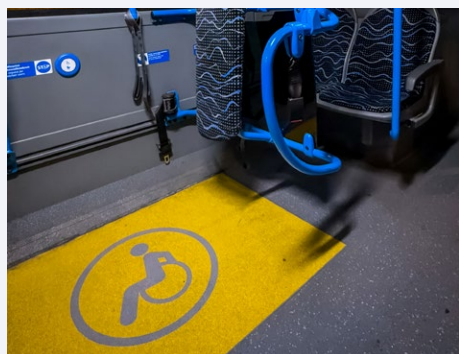
That report says a lot about the difficulties disabled people face when using public transport.



What we need to do now, is work out how to remove, or reduce, these difficulties.



And the best way to do that, is to look at every part of how our transport system works...



...and **design** it better!



Design is when:

you plan how something should work before you make it!



We need a transport system which disabled people can use well.



So, we need to design it from their point of view!



We decided to write a report about how to do that.

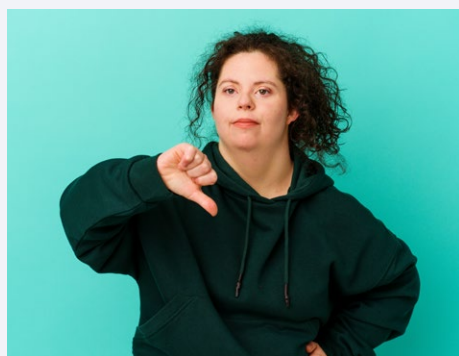


How can we design public transport which works for disabled people?

What did we do and how did we do it?



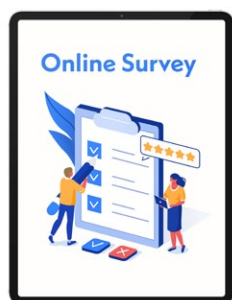
We only looked at when people use buses, trains and underground trains.



This is because that is when most difficulties happen.



Firstly, we asked disabled people about the travel difficulties they face most often.



To do this we did an online survey which 482 people replied to.



We asked people how easy or hard they found 5 parts of their journey.



These were:



at train or bus stations and stops



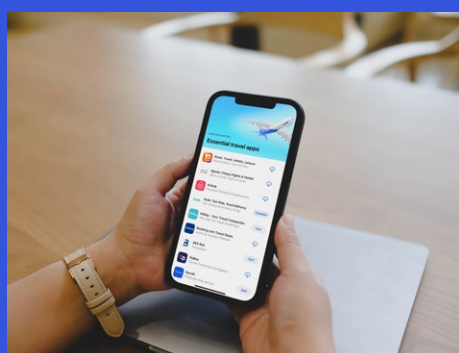
noisy, crowded or bright stations



seating on buses, trains and underground trains (like the London Underground)



**live information when travelling
(like station notice boards, screens
and audio announcements)**



planning and booking journeys.



We then spoke with 50 people.



These were in small groups, in online interviews and in-person interviews.



We made sure we had people with different experiences and different backgrounds.



From all the information we gathered, we made a list of 8 ways to design transport better.

We called these **design opportunities.**

What did we find out?



8

From our survey and from the people we talked to, we discovered 8 common situations.



There is a design opportunity to make disabled peoples' journeys better in each of these 8 situations.



1

Bus stops

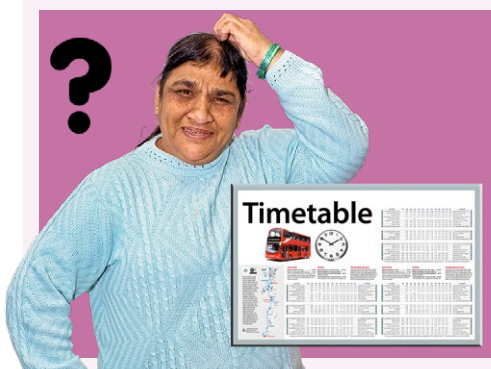


Difficulties experienced by disabled people when using bus stops are:



Physical barriers

For example, no step-free access or high kerbs.



travel information which is poor and difficult to find out about



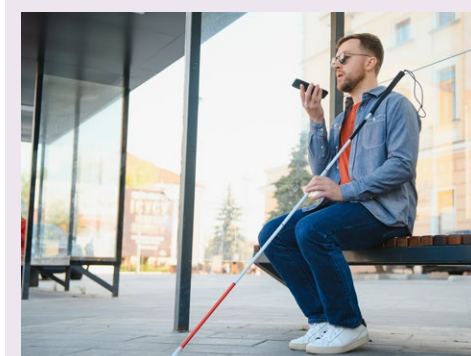
confusion and stress trying to find stops, knowing when the correct bus was coming, and trying to get on safely.



People using wheelchairs were made anxious when:



**it was not clear about where to get on,
and not having enough space at the stop
or to get on**



**people who were blind or partially sighted
often could not hear what was going on.**



A person with mobility impairment using a manual wheelchair said:

“When it's not a designated bus stop, and the driver just pulls up somewhere random, that's really hard. I never know where the door will open or if there's space to get on.”



2

Inside the bus



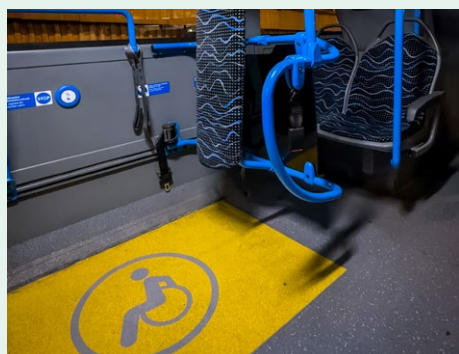
Staff and other passengers usually do not understand the right way to support disabled people to travel on a bus.



All too often disabled people are frustrated or become upset due to:



crowded spaces



not enough wheelchair areas



having to fight for space with prams and being forced to wait for the next bus - this is very upsetting



unclear which seats are priority seating



buses with different layouts and poor touch or sound clues - making it difficult for blind and partially sighted people to find a seat independently.



A person with mobility impairment using a manual wheelchair said:

"The amount of stress I get from getting on a bus and seeing a pram in the wheelchair space is awful. Then you have to have the conversation, and sometimes the drivers won't back you up."



3

Making 'live' travel information suitable for disabled travellers



Common problems which need better design are:



live announcements that are not clear



unclear or unreadable screens



not enough information about travel delays



information is not provided in all of the different formats needed. For example for people who can't see well or people who are sensitive to noise and crowds.



information is sometimes unreliable or is just wrong.



This makes people lose confidence in the information and to become anxious and avoid travelling.



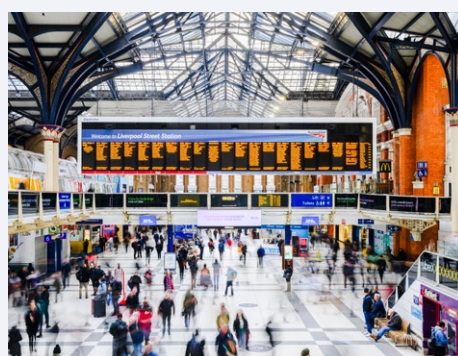
A blind person with a guide dog said:

"I need more than just a screen: I need it spoken, clear, and repeated. I can't keep up if it flashes past or disappears."



4

Train stations



It is difficult to get around stations, especially at peak times and when there are travel problems.



This is due to:



signs in the wrong place



stations busy with lots of people, bright lighting, too much noise and too much going on



assistance from staff for people who can't see well is unreliable.



People using wheelchairs are frustrated by physical barriers such as:



lifts and toilets in places which are hard to find, are not well signposted, are out of order or closed.



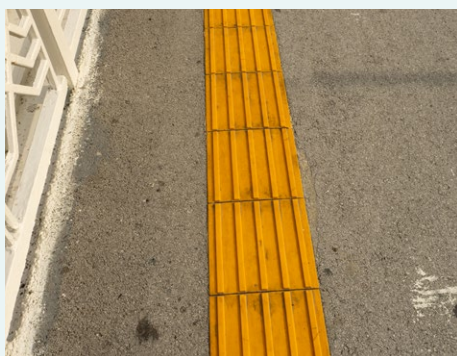
No matter their disability, people asked for:



ways of giving clear information on how to get through stations – especially for people who cannot hear or see well.



Helpful ways include:



tactile surfaces



signs which are made from colours with good contrast



sound beacons – these are warning devices that give off sound and visual alerts



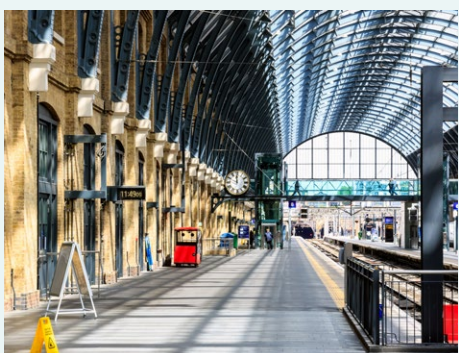
the right kind of lighting



information that is kept up to date and that people can use as they travel.



To reduce anxiety and to make it possible to travel independently, stations must offer disabled people:



calmer spaces



spaces where they know what to expect.



A person with low vision and who has difficulty working things out said:

"There are signs, but they're high up, small print, and not consistent. I end up walking in circles trying to find where I'm going."

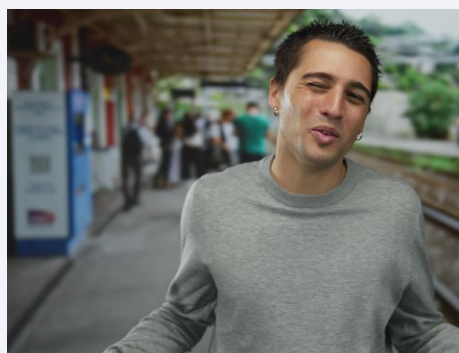
5

Awareness of people's different travel needs



We have already made a report about disabled people's different travel needs.

You can read this at [Invisible Barriers: How Public Attitudes Affect Inclusive Travel](#).



Poor attitudes from non-disabled people and transport staff make it more difficult for disabled people to travel.



Some people then just avoid travel, or avoid travelling on their own.



These poor attitudes knock disabled people's confidence and affect their mental health.



People said that always having to speak up for their travel needs is emotionally exhausting.



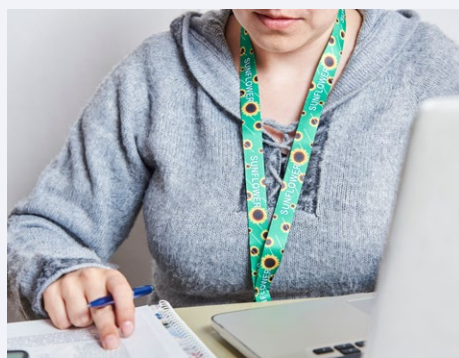
This is especially true when other people cannot see their disability.



Fear then sets in – fear of not being believed, of getting drawn into arguments, of being looked down on.



The public do not understand enough about disabilities which they cannot see – they don't recognise gentle reminders like the **sunflower lanyard**.



You can wear the **sunflower lanyard** round your neck to try and let people know that you have a hidden disability.



A person with autism and who is often in a lot of pain said:

"I wear a sunflower lanyard, but people either ignore it or don't know what it means. I still have to explain everything from scratch. People assume I'm faking it because they can't see my disability. It's exhausting always having to explain myself."



6

Transport companies



Transport companies are not clear about what help they should give.

This is confusing.



It leaves people anxious and disappointed.

They do not know what to do next when the help they expected does not arrive.



This is especially true when the promise of Passenger Assistance on trains does not happen.



Bus drivers can be unhelpful with ramps. They do not wait for the person to sit down before moving away. They do not say when they are at your stop.

CLEAR

MESSAGING

Disabled people need clear messages about the help they can expect.



A person with a neurological condition who uses a powered wheelchair said:

"I booked Passenger Assistance, but when I got there, no one knew. I never really know if I'll get the help I was promised. It's humiliating."



7 Improving assistance services

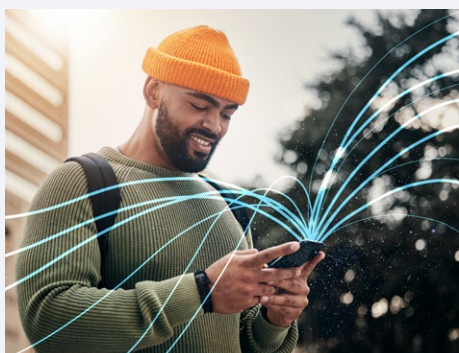


Assistance services are not good enough.

Companies are poor at doing anything when told things have gone wrong.



This is especially true at stations and at bus stops.



Disabled people want better technology, like journey planning apps and live updates.



The kinds of assistance available are different depending on what kind of transport you are using.



A person with limited upper limb mobility using powered wheelchair said:

“If the assistance could be tracked on your phone, like a taxi app, you’d at least know someone is coming. Right now it’s blind hope.”



A person with visual impairment and partial hearing loss said:

“In my town, the buses kneel automatically and say the number aloud. When I visited my sister’s, none of that happened. Why isn’t it the same everywhere?”

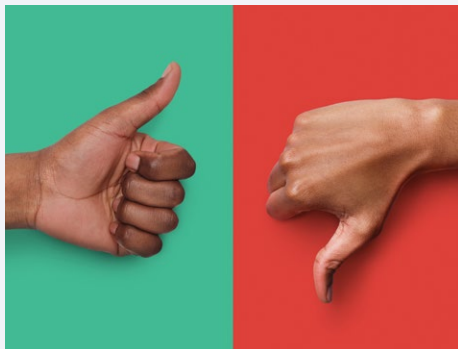


8

Finding and sharing examples of good accessibility



Good practice is when things are done well.



The same transport company can have **good practice** in one place and bad practice in another.



Problems that happen across all transport for disabled people are:



unreliable services, information, and assistance



fear of arguments, judgment, or uncertainty about what will or will not happen when travelling.

What should happen next?



Everyone said that making transport work for disabled people means looking at their everyday experiences of travelling.



This means not just the layout of a station or a bus stop!

It also means understanding:



how transport staff can properly support disabled people



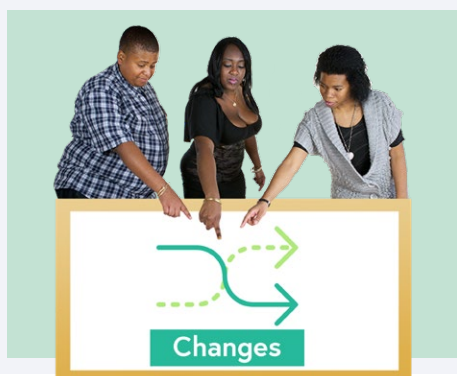
how to make sure the information about travel is given at the same time the disabled person is travelling.



Disabled people have to be included in deciding how to do this.



Including disabled people means finding out about their practical needs.



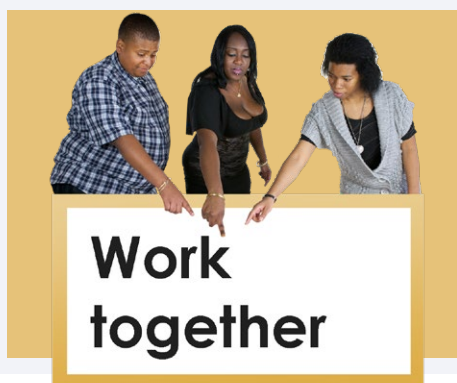
All 8 design opportunities show where changes can be made.



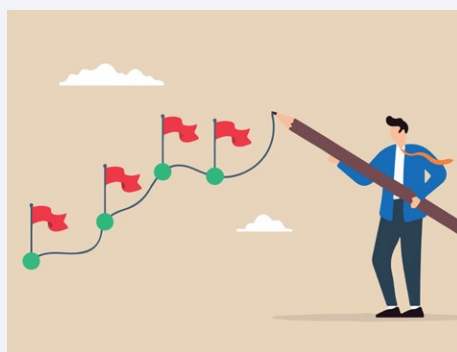
Some changes could happen soon.



Others will take more time and planning.



Transport companies, the Government and designers must work together to do this.



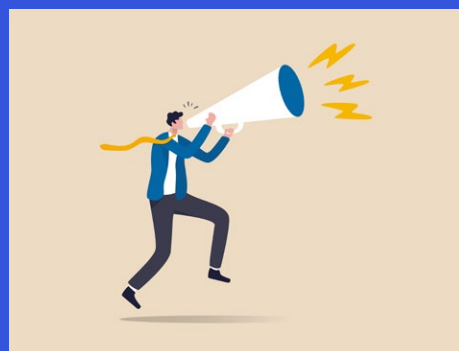
When you take the 8 design opportunities together, they show how the whole journey experience for disabled people needs fixing.



ncat now promises to:



keep finding out more about what still needs to be done to make transport accessible



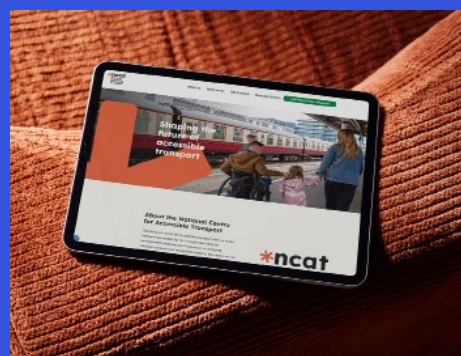
tell everyone who needs to know about these design opportunities



work with our partners and with disabled people to make these design opportunities actually happen.



For more information about ncat:



visit our website:

www.ncat.uk



send an email to this address:

info@ncat.uk



follow us on LinkedIn:

linkedin.com/company/ncat-uk

The information in this booklet was adapted from an original written by ncat.

This easy-read version has been created with the help of the people below who use easy-read materials themselves.



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