



Economic Benefits of Accessible Transport

Highlights Report, November 2025

1 Why did we do this work?

Disabled people in the UK continue to face significant barriers to accessible transport, resulting in fewer journeys, longer travel times, and increased stress. One of the issues faced by accessibility related schemes in transport is the lack of investment. Indeed, the previous ncat research *Working together for accessible transport* published in November 2024 found that accessibility improvements are seen to be too expensive, and it can be difficult to justify the investment. This project set out to identify the barriers to funding accessibility improvements and to provide recommendations for strengthening the economic case for accessible transport.

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

To ensure a robust and evidence-based understanding of the economic benefits of accessible transport, the project adopted a two-stage research approach:

Stage 1: Discovery Phase

This phase combined desk-based research with direct stakeholder engagement to identify barriers and opportunities in appraising accessibility improvements.

- Comprehensive review of guidance: We analysed key documents such as HM Treasury's Green Book, the Department for Transport's Transport Analysis Guidance, and related policy papers to assess how current funding and appraisal processes address accessibility.

- Stakeholder engagement: We conducted interviews and a workshop with public sector transport organisations, national government agencies, transport bodies, and a disabled people's charity to gather practical insights and experiences.

Findings from both streams were combined to highlight the main challenges in developing strong business cases for accessibility-related schemes and to capture examples of solutions currently being applied.

Stage 2: Recommendation Phase

Building on the discovery findings, this phase focused on developing actionable recommendations.

- Draft recommendations: We created recommendations grouped by theme and ownership based on identified barriers and stakeholder input.
- Validation workshop: We presented draft recommendations to stakeholders for feedback and refinement.
- Final reporting: We incorporated feedback to finalise recommendations and produce the report.

3 What did we find?

To understand the barriers and opportunities for improving accessible transport, we combined a review of key government guidance with direct input from those working in and affected by the transport sector.

The main findings from the desktop review are summarised below:

- There aren't any current dedicated funds for accessibility-related improvements, resulting in conflicting priorities between transport schemes and objectives.

- Elements of the Treasury's Five Case Model create challenges for accessibility schemes seeking funding.
- Getting public sector funding for the implementation of a new scheme is a long, slow, and structured process.
- The lack of data collected on accessibility challenges is undermining the understanding of inaccessibility impacts and associated decision-making processes.
- Existing appraisal methods typically undervalue accessibility benefits.
- Accessibility schemes score poorly in terms of value for money.
- It is hard to learn from previous business cases due to lack of transparency.
- Forthcoming Green Book updates could support accessibility schemes if followed through.

The main findings from the stakeholder engagement are summarised below:

- There isn't enough expertise and dedicated resource in organisations to develop accessibility-related business cases.
- Lack of leadership commitment and dedicated policies often holds back the prioritisation of accessibility-related schemes.
- Limited and outdated evidence and data on the economic and social benefits of accessibility-related improvements make it difficult to justify investment.

- There is an overemphasis on the importance of the benefit-cost ratio and value for money in funding decisions, with under-reliance on wider social value.
- The funding process for accessibility schemes is slow, uncertain, and expensive, discouraging organisations from starting business case development.
- Inconsistency in the timing and depth of engagement with disabled people leads to variability in how lived experience is incorporated into business case.

4 What conclusions did we come to?

Conclusions on key barriers that public sector organisations face when creating business cases for investment in accessibility related schemes:

- **Conclusion 1:** The lack of dedicated policies and funding pots makes it harder to invest in accessibility related improvements. Having to compete with other priorities for the same funding, means more effort and lower possibility of success.
- **Conclusion 2:** Getting public sector funding is a long, structured and complex process, that requires specialist skills. Many authorities don't have enough expertise and dedicated resources to carry out accessibility related business cases.
- **Conclusion 3:** The Government's guidance documents and tools are not fit for purpose to support authorities in creating successful accessibility related business cases. This means staff rely on specialist know-how or their own custom tools to get around this challenge.
- **Conclusion 4:** The overemphasis on the economic case is a key barrier to creating successful business cases for accessibility

related schemes. Poor value for money scores and limited ways to incorporate social benefits are among the biggest challenges.

- **Conclusion 5:** There are gaps in evidence and data on the economic and social benefits of accessibility related improvements. This is heightened by lack of transparency and knowledge sharing within and among authorities of data and best practices.

5 What should happen next?

Five recommendations were developed to address the main challenges identified in the research. These were then reviewed and refined in a follow-up workshop with stakeholders. The recommendations below specify whether they are intended for public sector transport organisations or for the Department for Transport (DfT) and wider government.

Recommendation 1: Embed accessibility in organisational culture through leadership, team diversity, general disability awareness training, and targeted business case development training

Public sector transport organisations to:

- Consider wider training and upskilling on accessibility and inclusion to the whole organisation staff including leaders.
- Provide targeted training to upskill staff in integrating accessibility into business cases - specifically focusing on how to appraise accessibility impacts and effectively incorporate the lived experiences of disabled people into the development process.

Adopt a 'lead by example' approach where leaders consider inclusivity a core priority and are active in listening, understanding and tackling accessibility barriers.

- Ensure that the number of professionals with accessibility expertise and responsibilities and their remits are appropriate for the size of the organisation.
- Employ professionals with lived experience to embed inclusivity and diversity at the core of the organisation.
- Ensure teams working on business cases have the necessary understanding of accessibility and vice versa.
- Ensure knowledge-sharing across all teams working on accessibility related schemes and business cases.

DfT/Government to:

- Develop dedicated training on:
 - appraising accessibility in business cases
 - the best approach to engage and include disabled people's lived experiences into business cases,
 - on the updated Green Book.
- Update training materials, once insights are gathered from adopting the following recommendations.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen policies, strategies, action plans and create funding mechanisms that prioritise transport accessibility.

Public sector transport organisations to:

- Create stronger policies, strategies and action plans that include a clear focus on improving transport accessibility.
- Ensure Local Transport Plans contain a dedicated accessibility section that sets out the authority's funding priorities and commitments to making transport more inclusive for disabled people.

DfT/Government to:

- Establish a binding programme with enforceable mechanisms to compel authorities and operators to invest in accessibility in transport within the upcoming INTS. Such mechanisms could for example be built into local government transport funding settlements, e.g. Local Transport Grants, City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements, or Transport for City Regions funding.
- Secure funding for accessibility by adopting one of the following approaches:
 - Ringfencing funding for accessibility-related projects to minimise competition with other priorities, **or**
 - Prioritising accessibility-related schemes for funding, **or**
 - Set conditions that ensure funding is given only to schemes that demonstrate accessibility improvements or inclusivity.
- If ringfencing or prioritisation cannot be achieved due to the Government's commitment to consolidating funding pots, accessibility should still be explicitly considered within the consolidated pot.

Recommendation 3: Increase collection and sharing of data regarding accessible transport

Public sector transport organisations to:

- Openly share evidence and data (in line with data protection regulations) that will support the understanding of the economic and social benefits of accessibility related schemes.
- Openly share successful and unsuccessful business cases (including the engagement undertaken and methods adopted to assess quantitative and qualitative benefits) within organisation and beyond.
- Systematically conduct monitoring and evaluation of accessibility related improvements to increase the availability of data and understanding of the impacts of such improvements.

The Local Government Association or an industry body should consider taking the lead to develop and manage a central resource to facilitate sharing of such information.

DfT/Government to:

- Collect and share more national data through the Office for National Statistics about disabled people and their characteristics and needs, their employment, economic potential and their suppressed demand for transport; specifically, update the purple pound based on a government-led research study. Evaluate and share the socio-economic impacts of accessible transport, splitting according to different modal, infrastructure, service or digital improvements.

- Provide a tailored monitoring and evaluation framework for accessibility improvements to encourage systematic monitoring and evaluation activities, including of the socio-economic impacts.
- Set up mechanisms to monitor accessible transport barriers (physical, digital, emotional or contextual) and improvements over time for accountability and continuous progress including customer feedback. Aim to link reduction in barriers with increase in improvements.
- Consider developing more accessible transport related scorecards ensuring the customer experience, the physical infrastructure, the transport services and vehicles, the digital environment and the holistic door-to-door journeys are assessed for their accessibility and inclusivity.
- Set up an open access repository for business cases and approaches to develop them (including the engagement undertaken and methods adopted to assess quantitative and qualitative benefits). Encourage (or enforce) sharing of these.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen appraisal of accessibility in business cases through consideration of lived experiences and better assessment of accessibility benefits

All to:

- Use the new data collected and shared as per **Recommendation 3** to explicitly link accessibility improvements to wider social and economic outcomes.

Public sector transport organisations to:

- Set up engagement practices with disabled people which are systematic, consistent, start early in the business case process and are based on co-production standards and takes into consideration the variety of accessibility needs. Engagement methods and intensity should be suitable to the scope of the project to avoid fatigue from stakeholders (for instance, deciding between access panel or engagement with a range of disabled people organisations).

DfT/Government to:

- Introduce structured methods to capture benefits to quality of life as a result of accessibility improvements.
- Expand appraisal methods to better capture accessibility benefits, considering the entire travel ecosystem including improvements to infrastructure (wayfinding, seating, shelter, and step-free access), services (induction loops in vehicles, travel assistance) and to the digital experience (accessible apps).
- Improve the assessment methodology of the monetised benefits of accessibility based on new data available as per

Recommendation 3.

Recommendation 5: Ensure updated Green Book and other guidance documents support authorities and transport organisations develop strong accessibility related business cases and facilitate their access to funding

DfT/Government to:

- Integrate the methods mentioned in **Recommendation 4** as standard practice into the TAG.
- Strengthen the importance of the strategic narrative and qualitative assessment within the business case.
- Enhance each of the Treasury's Five Cases to ensure specificities of accessibility are catered for.
- Clarify how accessibility outcomes should be weighted alongside other investment objectives and provide guidance on avoiding double counting, recognising that impacts for disabled people are already partially captured in existing appraisal components (e.g., user benefits) and any new technique must include adjustments to prevent overlap.
- Recognise accessibility benefits as material and not merely 'additional' or 'nice to have'.
- Ensure the proportionality approach of the Green Book and TAG is applied by decision-makers and consider simplifying the process leading to funding award for smaller projects.

6 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.

ncat is funded by the Motability Foundation, with the aim of providing the evidence base to make transport more accessible.

For more information about ncat and its work please visit www.ncat.uk

To contact ncat, either about this report or any other query, please email info@ncat.uk

7 References

Please note, this reference list reflects the full set of materials used to inform the research, extending beyond the documents cited within this highlights report.

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9 Terms used in this report

Appraisal – A systematic process used to assess the economic viability, feasibility and impacts of a project.

Appraisal Summary Table (AST) – A table that shows the impacts of a project, including social, environmental, and economic effects, typically appended to the business case.

Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) – A metric that compares expected benefits of a project to its total costs. A higher number means better value.

Business Case – A document that explains why a project should be funded. It explains the need for the investment, benefits, costs and how the project will be delivered.

Distributional Impact – How the effects of a project are spread across different groups of people, like disabled or low-income users.

HM Treasury – The UK Government department responsible for managing public money and setting rules for how it should be spent.

Indicative BCR – A newer way to include benefits that are hard to measure in monetary terms.

Inclusive Transport Strategy (ITS) – A government plan to make transport more accessible for disabled people by 2030.

Place-based Business Case – A business case that focuses on the needs and benefits for a specific local area or community.

Purple Pound – The spending power of disabled people and their households in the UK, estimated at £274 billion per year.

Scorecard - A tool used to measure and track performance across different areas.

The Five Case Model - The UK Government's method for checking if a project is a good use of public money. It looks at five dimensions: strategic, economic, financial, commercial, and management.

The Green Book – HM Treasury guidance on how to plan and assess public spending.

The Green Book Review - A 2025 review of the UK Government's official guidance for public spending decisions.

Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG) – UK Government guidance and best practice on how to assess transport projects.

Value for Money (VfM) – A way to check if the benefits of a project are worth the cost.