

Training for Transport Staff Webinar

Summary report



Introduction

Feedback has suggested that the success of a disabled person's journey can depend on the interactions they encounter with transport staff. The attitude and behaviour of transport staff can either encourage or hinder a disabled person's use of public transport. Much of this is influenced by the training transport staff receive on disability awareness and disability etiquette. This webinar was to explore the types of training that transport staff receive and how this translates to disabled peoples' experiences day-to-day.

Disability Equality Scotland worked in collaboration with Transport Scotland to present this discussion. The event took place digitally using the Zoom platform on 24 February 2022 in line with physical distancing guidelines for COVID-19.

There were 53 people in attendance. This report summarises the discussions at this event.

Background

Transport staffs' knowledge and awareness of disabled people's travel needs can make all the difference to a journey and can help disabled people to have confidence to travel.

During this interactive webinar, we were joined by representatives from leading public transport operators in Scotland to discuss how disabled people can be better supported on their journeys.

This paper summarises the discussions on the day.

Presenters:

Emma Scott, from Disability Equality Scotland set the context of the day and introduced the presenters:

- Claire Clark – Senior Executive Officer, Office of Road and Rail
- Billy Robb – Customer Services Director, NorthLink Ferries
- Cheryl Campbell – Airport Services Manager, Inverness airport (Highlands and Islands Airports)
- Robert Burns – Stakeholder Engagement Officer, FirstBus

Key points from presentations:

Office of Road and Rail

- Training ensures that rail operators understand disabled people and their everyday challenges travelling by rail. They include awareness of the Equality Act and the needs for reasonable adjustments and the definition of disability and the Social Model of Disability.
- Training recognises there are a range of disabilities that may require assistance and ensures rail staff understand what it means to communicate effectively with those passenger groups and introduce the policies and make sure that rail operators understand what booked and unbooked assistance is, how it works for disabled people and how rail staff play an important part delivering the service.
- Requirements are set on the importance of lived experience and expertise of a range of disabled people, that this is utilised in the development and delivery of training, that rail staff must hear from disabled people about their experience of rail travel and create a safe space to explore issues raised.
- Some examples of satisfactory delivery included delivery through MS Teams or Zoom in small groups with facilitators or disabled guest speakers; webinars with disabled panel members; some operators carried out individual visits to stations for the training in small teams. There were really good examples of operators utilising the existing network of disabled people through forums or engaging with disabled passengers to share experiences.
- Examples that were not satisfactory and the ORR queried, were e-learning packages, staff logging on and doing the training and then having a conversation with a manager. ORR made clear this doesn't satisfy requirements and the importance of engaging with disabled

people with lived experience.

- Over 30,000 members of rail staff who interact with passengers in the normal course of duties will have received refresher training and half the operators have developed new courses for staff induction and refresher training, at least 11 operators have extended training to cover all front-line staff.

NorthLink Ferries

- Training covers current legislation and safety procedures, including drills, how we manage emergency situations with the different types of passengers we carry.
- The course identifies customers with different needs and the impact of not providing accessible services, common disabilities, planning for action, the reframe of disability and the ageing population and how we manage that.
- Disability groups visit the shop and make journeys, reporting back on the facilities both afloat and ashore, groups of autistic people and visually impaired groups coming on board to test the facilities.
- NorthLink Ferries is also working with Disability Equality Scotland on training around disability awareness specific to disability hate crime for staff.

Highlands and Islands Airports

- Dedicated special assistance team can pre-book assistance.
- The dedicated team have a thorough training regime to go through, as they are helping people on and off the aircraft, but all staff have e-learning opportunities.
- The airports participate in the Sunflower Lanyard scheme, which allows someone to indicate that they need assistance during their journey and our staff can identify that they may need assistance.
- We have engaged with local Access Panels, the closest is in Nairn,

they have been a fountain of knowledge for us. Inverness Airport specifically takes on board advice and information from the Access Panel to improve training and share those messages.

- Travelling through an airport can be stressful for anyone and we want to eliminate that for passengers. To help, we ensure that all the information is clear. Therefore we focus the staff training on how best to communicate with disabled passengers, to identify what type of support is required and we listen to real life experience.
- Our special assistance team, if requested, can assist from the car-park, right through to the aircraft, through security as well, so they ensure that every aspect of the journey is explained and you are comfortable with that process.

FirstBus

- Training for drivers includes practical things like ramp deployment, as well as an understanding of the bus infrastructure and things like raised kerbs.
- Drivers also undertake 'Journey Maker' training, which involves an understanding of the support some disabled passengers might need to board or alight the bus, including how best to support disabled people.
- Classroom training introduces drivers to different types of disabilities, including sessions on hidden disabilities. Also during these sessions, drivers are given a brief introduction to BSL, including eight simple signs relevant on a journey, including 'hello', 'where are you going?' and 'can I see your pass?' Drivers are given the opportunity to continue with BSL training if they wish.
- Pre-covid, these sessions would have been supplemented with input from disabled people themselves, sharing their lived experience. It is hoped to re-establish this soon. FirstBus also works with other partners, for example Guide Dogs Scotland, who can give insight into the needs of blind passengers traveling with a guide dog.

Key discussion questions

Questions were put to the panellists, both in advance of the webinar and on the day. In addition, any unanswered questions were posed to the panel after the session, allowing them time to respond. Below is a summary of the questions covered.

Developing Training

Developing training with people with lived experience

Q: How do transport operators develop their accessibility training and seek input from those with lived experience?

A: Lothian Buses have created a really good network with local charities and organisations who support people with different accessibility needs and disabilities. They've been very helpful in offering information, guidance and training to the Lothian Buses Driver Training Team. We have also used communications such as our Hidden Disabilities Campaign as well as the Accessibility Manager engaging with support groups and day centres to learn from the lived experiences of our customers to identify what needs to be covered or re-visited within staff training.

Q: In what ways does your training cover the equal treatment of disabled people, that challenges stereotypes?

A: At ORR one of the training outcomes focuses on challenging misconceptions about disabled people and asks staff to consider their attitudinal barriers to access and inclusion. We don't prescribe how that is done, but the onus is on the rail operator to deliver those outcomes. For example, training, might involve showing a video in a class environment and you are asked to look at behaviour in different situations. Rail staff will feed back on their interpretation of the issue, and often it is the wrong issue they have identified. This highlights the behaviour bias and attitudes that people have to visible and invisible disabilities. So its a good way to get that message to rail staff.

Training for Senior Management Transport Staff

Q: Some of the more forward-thinking transport companies extend the training to management and Senior Management, so the whole organisation understands the importance of training. Has thought been given to extending who receives the training?

A: For us at Lothian Buses, absolutely, and it will continue to be explored with our People Management Team. Accessibility needs to be a fundamental factor in every transport company and for that reason, staff throughout the business must have a good understanding of disability awareness as well as equality and diversity. This is often accessible via E-learning modules that can be assigned to managers within a business, but can also be offered by the Accessibility lead, or external organisations.

Travel assistance cards

Q: How do operators deal with Travel Assistance cards, how are they kept up to date with different cards, such as Thistle Assistance, and what each card means, and how that translates into support for the passenger?

A: Lothian Buses show examples of the Thistle Assistance Card, Sunflower Lanyard and Guide Dog Trainer card as part of its 'Fundamental Training' for new drivers and also revisit this every few years in CPC training with driving colleagues. Lothian Buses use information directly from the creators of each awareness card to explain how they are intended to be used and recognised to ensure they are understood correctly. Hidden Disabilities are discussed as part of this conversation with colleagues and Lothian Buses have a Hidden Disabilities Campaign putting a spotlight on the challenges of using buses for some of our customers to further educate our colleagues and other customers.

Driver attitude and behaviour

Q: What kind of training are you providing that covers driver's attitude to disabled passengers?

A: With Lothian Buses, their training covers elements of conflict resolution, including how to de-escalate a situation and that customer care is the main priority. Lothian Buses also noted the importance of supporting their drivers, to make sure they are content in their roles, as this can also influence their interactions with customers.

A: At FirstBus, all the Journey Maker programmes put customer care at the

heart of the training, including a greeting when you board and a thank-you when you get off. FirstBus also share examples of good practice with their staff, sharing experiences to help others learn from others' experiences.

Passenger Assistance

Customer service on buses

Q: If someone requires using a ramp on a bus, is there ever a situation where the driver can refuse?

A: No, both Lothian and FirstBus colleagues confirmed that the ramp is available to anyone, regardless of disability if they need assistance with boarding or alighting. There is no precondition as to why the ramp should or should not be deployed. If you require a ramp, you can ask for it.

Q: What's the policy for staff who see someone on sticks struggling with bags trying to get on or off public transport?

A: Lothian Buses suggest this would be the case with our drivers, who are normally eager to help any customers who may be struggling. Some of our colleagues have hidden disabilities or care for family members who have been shielding during the pandemic, so not all have been able to continue helping customers in such a hands-on manner over the last couple of years. But we believe as anxiety around Covid eases, most of our colleagues will be able to return to being able to assist our customers when required.

Q: When the button has been pressed, does the driver have the responsibility to ensure that a disabled person is not in any difficulty?

A: Often buttons are pressed by customers in error, so as a driver approaches a stop, they will check to see who on the bus appears to be getting ready to alight. Lothian Buses would expect older and disabled customers to take more time to do this for their own safety, which is absolutely to be expected, but if the driver is unable to see anyone who appears to be getting ready or making their way towards the doors, they may think the button has been pushed in error. If a customer alerts the driver that they or another customer is preparing to get off but needs a little more time, Lothian Buses expect our drivers to understand and wait for the person to alight safely.

Impact of Covid-19 on passenger assistance

Q: What impact has COVID had on the delivery of passenger assistance – and what assurances can operators give that staff have been trained to carry out assistance in these circumstances?

A: Some transport staff have understandably been anxious about offering hands on assistance to customers during the pandemic, less so now. For this reason, Lothian Buses distributed useful information published by the RNIB and Guide Dogs about how to assist customer verbally rather than physically in a safe manner. Lothian Buses design our buses with accessibility in mind and train our drivers to lower the bus and deploy the ramp appropriately so that customers using wheelchairs can board and alight the bus independently without requiring hands on assistance in almost all cases.

A: Office of Rail and Road:

Throughout the pandemic, assistance on the railway has remained – In the very beginning some rail operators did state that booked assistance was advisable rather than ‘Turn up and Go’ to ensure the assistance would go ahead and to manage staff shortages - but the policy requirement for the provision of booked and un-booked assistance did not go away.

Our [latest passenger assist survey](#) which looks at booked assistance, actually showed a slight increase in relation to the overall satisfaction with passenger assistance however, owing to the restrictions, the sample size was lower than in previous years and the type of passenger who would have been travelling during this time may not be representative of the type of passenger who normally travels by rail.

In the early stages we saw how the rail industry needed to adapt to the delivery of assistance, for example having the correct protective gear and delivering the assistance safely. Although not an ORR accessibility requirement, we have seen examples of good practice shown by several operators who, on their websites and over the phone, describe the precautions being taken for assistance delivery to assure the passenger that assistance is still being delivered – and how it is being delivered safely. Operators are required to deliver staff training on disability and equality training every two years, although not a specific requirement, we would expect the delivery of safe assistance during the pandemic to form part of the ongoing training resource.

We are now two years into the pandemic, furthermore we would be extremely concerned if we learnt that the impact of this was being used to justify a failure in assistance. We expect operators to have adapted their procedures by now and be able to anticipate the needs of their passengers during these challenging times.

Bus Infrastructure and Accessibility

Mobility Scooters on buses

Q: It would be really helpful if we could have a scheme that allows mobility scooters on buses. The inability to use buses as a mobility scooter user is a barrier and many disabled people would be able to use bus and inter modal connect if they could travel end to end with their scooter.

A: At Lothian Buses we are currently unable to accept Mobility Scooters on our services unless they can be folded and stored as luggage. We do understand the importance of getting to a point that we can accept them as we know many people across the city rely on them for independence. However we have recently completed a review of our Conditions of Carriage and in doing so, trialled both a Boot Scoot and a Class 2 Mobility Scooter on each type of bus that we currently have within our fleet. Because it was not possible to safely board and alight using a Mobility Scooter on a couple of the older designs of buses in our fleet, we are required to continue with our rule until these layouts have been phased out of the fleet. We have a responsibility to get our customers safely to and from their destination and cannot put a customer in the position that they are unable to return home because we have had to use a different model of bus on a route that normally has a more spacious bus. We cannot put a timeline on when we will be able to accommodate unfolded scooters but are committed to considering how we use space in future bus design with accessibility for all of our customers in mind.

Q: Who has priority; wheelchairs or buggies?

A: By law, Wheelchair users have priority over the wheelchair accessible spaces on a bus. This means that if anyone other than a wheelchair user is occupying the accessible space and a wheelchair user wishes to board the bus, the driver must ask the customers in the space to vacate. They can offer to help them move seats or if this is not possible, offer them a ticket to

complete their journey on another bus. It must be noted, however, that some specialised buggies act in place of wheelchairs for some young disabled children. These have the same rights as any other customer using a wheelchair and do not need to move.

Specific questions for individual providers

Some of the questions were for specific providers to respond to. Below is a summary of these questions and answers.

Questions for Office of Rail and Road

Q: How does the ORR training package for rail correspond to the REAL training launched by the Department for Transport?

A: The ORR 9 training outcomes and the DfT REAL training package were developed and drafted entirely separate from one another.

ORRs 9 Training outcomes form part of rail companies' licence obligations under their Accessible Travel Policies and came before the DfT REAL package. The REAL package has been designed to be cross modal and focus on aspects of rail, however it doesn't go into the detail of the ORR 9 training outcomes, examples of such gaps include:

- Challenging misconceptions about disabled people and disability
- Explaining the relationship between disability and age
- Discussing attitudinal barriers to access and inclusion
- Delivering assistance safely
- Using appropriate language when describing disability and talking to disabled people
- Understanding the social model of disability and its implications for the provision of rail service

However, ORR signpost the REAL package when taking 'bespoke operators' through their Accessible Travel Policy approval. Bespoke operators are different from the mainline operators such as Scotrail because they don't run as much of a frequent service on the mainline network, for example heritage services. Due to their limited size and resource, we have advised them to consult the REAL training package to help them design their training on disability awareness for their staff.

Q: What role does the UK Rail Ambassador have in the training?

A: The Rail Ambassador was involved in the development and key stakeholder work in the lead up to the revised accessible guidance. The Ambassador also provides expert advice on key policy issues and the ORR's accessible travel policy.

Questions for NorthLink Ferries

Q: How do you ensure your equality impact assessments for policies and projects (including training methods and content) are meaningful, timely and involve people with protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010.

A: We recognise that accessibility is an issue for a wide range of disabled passengers and that a person has a disability under the Equality Act 2010. We will continue to operate beyond regulatory compliance wherever there are attainable benefits for customers with additional access needs, taking into account and adopting any final recommendations within the final post consultation Scottish Ferry Services Review.

Q: Is the website accessible for people with deafness and hearing loss, with subtitles and BSL (British Sign Language)?

A: The website is purely text and photo visual based and any Northlink media videos have an additional text run through.

Q: How will Northlink Ferries be able to make ferry journeys accessible as possible for people with disabilities?

A: We already provide a high level of accessibility, devised with the support and input of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) and Mobility and Access Committee Scotland (MACS). We will always listen to our customers for feedback and continue to work with all relevant groups. Onboard facilities include accessible cabins and a Changing Places toilet facility which we introduced in 2019 to all our vessels and all our public areas have wheelchair spaces available. We also have an ongoing training schedule for disability awareness for all our staff ashore and afloat.

Questions for Highlands and Islands Airports

Q: Is there an easy way to progress to boarding without inspection of the clinical/medical equipment you need in your carry on luggage? The questions and emptying of luggage to show equipment and prescriptions etc can be a bit embarrassing.

A: Everything has to be scanned, but the teams are trained and know what they are likely to see. We are more experienced with medical supplies, than possibly other airports, because a lot of our passengers are travelling for medical appointments. Staff are aware of the types of medical supplies they might come across, or something someone has on their person, that triggers the alarm or can't go through the scanner, so they know what is out there and how to handle it. The key part of their training is to handle the situation discreetly. There is an option to request a private search, if you want to have one, so that you don't have to be in the public view. We have a private search area.

Questions for FirstBus

Q:What do you think needs to improve bus journeys for people with disabilities such as Next Stop Announcements etc?

A: All First Bus drivers participate in intensive training from the moment they join the business. This includes recognising that when someone vacates the accessibility space, it makes an audible sound, making the driver aware that someone needs to leave the vehicle. However, development in technology allows First Bus to offer even more in terms of passenger information, so much so that installation of audio visual passenger information systems have been a standard feature of new vehicles purchased by First Bus since 2018 (in Glasgow initially). This function improves passenger information during the journey for those with hearing and visual impairments and will continue to feature in more new vehicles as they come into use.