# Weekly Poll Accessible Travel Framework Four Part Series: Communication with transport providers in Scotland

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## Introduction

The Accessible Travel Framework four part series on communication with transport providers in Scotland was conducted between October and November 2022 via Disability Equality Scotland’s weekly members poll.

These questions were asked as part of a body of research and evaluation work that Disability Equality Scotland is working on in partnership with Transport Scotland, we are undertaking this to monitor the progress that has been made on the goals of the Accessible Travel Framework.

The Accessible Travel Framework is a ten year plan published in 2016 in collaboration between the Scottish Government, the transport community and disabled people through their organizations. More information can be found here: [Accessible Travel Framework - Accessible Travel Hub](https://accessibletravel.scot/accessible-travel/)

The responses from this Weekly Poll Transport Series will go on to inform the work being done to evaluate the progress of the framework and will also form the foundation for a series of recommendations, actions, and priorities to be taken forward in order to complete the goals of the framework and ensure safe and accessible travel for all.

The aim of this research is:

* To understand what has been done to work towards the priorities of the Accessible Travel Framework to date.
* To hear directly from disabled people who use transportation services and gain their insight as to what changes have been implemented, and how this has impacted their experience.
* To use this information to inform recommendations for new priorities for the Accessible Travel Framework based on the current needs and priorities of those using transport services in Scotland.

**The four parts included:**

**Part 1:** Access to Travel Information from Transport Providers

**Part 2:** Communicating feedback, suggestions and complaints to transport providers in Scotland

**Part 3**: Opportunities for Co-production & Consultation with transport providers in Scotland

**Part 4:** Inclusive forms of communication used by transport providers in Scotland.

Through the analysis process two strands of information were collected; one focusing on the issues and experiences of disabled people using transport services and focusing on how these align or connect with the prioritized work packages of the Accessible Travel Framework. And the second strand which focuses on identified priority areas and suggestions found in the poll responses.

Key areas which reoccur throughout the dataset;

* Importance of facilitating improvements which support independent access to information and independent travel and instil confidence in disabled people to travel and utilize all available modes of transport and travel support options.
* Value and importance of integrating information, across different organizations, transport providers, but also integrating information into to the locality of a particular community and/or area.
* Importance of clarity and consistency of information across all transport organizations. And the importance of incentivizing and supporting the updating of information, ensuring accuracy, and more active resolutions to minor issues and improvements which have been raised by disabled people traveling on a particular service.

These are priorities that have been raised throughout the responses to this four part series.

One of the main aims of gathering this poll data was to gain a richer understanding of disabled peoples experiences of accessing information and to gauge what are some of the key areas of this information that can be improved upon. As highlighted through the on-going research and evaluation work into the Accessible Travel Framework being undertaken by Disability Equality Scotland and Transport Scotland, channels of communication is a vital component of the Accessible Travel Framework in a variety of capacities such as;

* Supporting communication through the creation and accessing of information alongside facilitating feedback and consultation
* Supporting conversations and collaboration between different transport companies,
* Access to and experiences of effective and positive communication with transport providers

The research shows that lines of communication and access to information are intrinsically linked to all six areas outlined in the original 2016 framework.

The six areas are;

* Area 1: Developing principles and charters for travel accessibility across modes
* Area 2: Developing national guidance and good practice for accessible travel issues
* Area 3: Improving availability of accessible information to plan and make journeys
* Area 4: Enabling staff to support disabled people through awareness and training
* Area 5: Co-production of transport policy and practices
* Area 6: Sharing experiences, feedback, knowledge and learning

Whilst communication is a vital component for all these areas, the focus of this poll series’ questions centred around Area 3, Area 5, and Area 6.

# Summary of Part 1: Access to Travel Information from Transport Providers

This week the focus of our questions was on finding out more about members experiences accessing information directly from transport providers such as; ScotRail First Bus, etc.

We wanted to gather views on and experiences of accessing travel information from transport providers, this may be through contacting them directly via phone, accessing their website or app, or going into an office or station for in person advice and information.

**Question 1**

Do you feel well informed and aware of travel information and travel options provided by transport services in Scotland?

* Yes 12% (19 respondents)
* No 88% (136 respondents)

**Question 2**

How informed do you feel about the potential changes made to your travel plans? (E.g. announcements, updates/changes to timetables, cancelations, diversions etc.)

* Very informed 1% (1 respondent)
* Quite informed 5% (10 respondents)
* Not very informed 19% (29 respondents)
* Not at all informed 72% (112 respondents)
* Don’t know 3% (4 respondents)

**Question 3**

What is your preferred way of accessing travel information from a transport provider? And why?

## Written communication

Many respondents noted their preference was for written communication due to issues with audible announcements. Some issues were raised around reliance on audio updates and announcements during a journey if there are changes or disruption to services. In turn, this can make journey planning and wayfinding particularly inaccessible to people with hearing loss, or additional auditory or sensory issues.

“I need Written communications. Audible announcements in travel stations or on a train or bus are hard or impossible to discern. They can be uncomfortably loud and not clear enough.

It is stressful on a journey when there is disruption or delay and you don’t know why. I have been left at a train station when I didn’t realise a bus alternative was outside waiting to take all passengers - I hadn’t been able to hear the audible announcement well enough and staff didn’t think to check on passengers and make sure they were aware.”

## Online access via website

Many respondents stated that their preference was for online access to information through individual transport provider websites.

Some respondents noted that whilst accessing information online was their preference it was often difficult or ineffective for those with sight impairments specifically those using screen readers, and that this should be taken into consideration when formatting and writing transport provider websites so that they meet [web accessibility standards](https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/).

Desktop access to information is preferred by many respondents. With further options and supports for phone access to websites/apps and live text services to support those with additional access needs.

However additional information options must also be prioritized and offered in a wide variety of inclusive formats to ensure that those unable to access online information can still receive up to date transport information for journey planning.

Some respondents stated that they found reading transport provider websites and timetables difficult due to the format and visual stress. And often used social media for updates and for clarifying potential issues.

“On their website with their travel ahead option. I find reading timetables really difficult due to dyslexia and visual stress. I now check Twitter regularly too since our buses are cancelled”

## Printed timetables

Some respondents noted that they needed printed timetables to receive up to date and accurate information. Respondents also mentioned that on many services updated printed timetables have not been provided since before the pandemic and this is impacting passengers’ abilities to utilize transport systems and maintain an awareness of updated routes.

Many respondents also noted that digitally displayed timetables at bus stops/ train stations would also be of benefit.

Many respondents noted that there has been a severe decline in the consistency of transportation and the accuracy of both online and printed timetables due a series of external factors including the Covid-19 pandemic and the energy crisis which detrimentally effected public transport.

It was noted that these inconsistencies have had an impact on multi-modal journeys which require the passenger to make time sensitive changes to different lines, different modes, or travel between stations, either by walking, wheeling, or by car. Leaving passengers with a lack of confidence and additional stress when trying to complete journeys which rely on multi-modal components. Respondents note that finding ways of supporting and incentivizing integration and interconnectivity between modes should be a high priority moving forwards.

“When there is a change or disruption to one leg of the journey nobody helps when this impacts on your onward plans by other busses or connecting to the train. You are left in limbo and it’s very stressful for disabled people who don’t have the same options and choices as non disabled people.”

## Live customer support

Some respondents also suggested a live text or chat function via phone or website that could be of huge benefit to those who need live updates on delays or changes to journey who experience hearing loss or may prefer written forms of communication.

Noting that this would be helpful in their journey planning experience, as they would be able to ask specific questions in relation to their particular access requirements and planned routes. Noting that it was particularly important that customer support staff had in-depth knowledge of access requirements and options at their particular station and in the locality, ensuring that they would be able to tailor information to particular passenger’s access and mobility queries and requirements.

## By telephone

Many respondents commented that their preference was for accessing information via phone, as they do not have the option of accessing transport providers websites and apps and are reliant on the phone for access accurate and up-to-date information.

## Information desk

Some respondents noted that they preferred to access information via information desks located at stations. However, some comments noted that these desks are not always open or unmanned for portions of the week.

“At bus stations it is easier if I can talk to someone though many help desks are becoming unmanned.”

## Apps

Respondents stated that they used apps and websites but that the quantity of different websites and Apps was confusing and difficult to navigate. Commenting that there are;

“Too many disparate forms of information different websites and apps”

Many respondents indicate that they struggled to switch between websites and apps and found discrepancies between information across different platforms. Respondents noted that it would improve their ability to journey plan effectively if there was some way of bringing information from all different transport providers into one website or App, allowing for cross referencing. Respondents also expressed a need for more specific tailored information across Apps and websites which provide area and station specific information, alongside information as it relates to specific access and mobility needs.

A much lower quantity of respondents use word of mouth from members of the community, local news, and social media platforms to gather information.

However a few noted that they used Google for navigating routes and journeys, for gaining further information about particular areas and planning step free and clear pathway routes. With only a few respondents commenting that they often felt they needed to rely on local knowledge and word of mouth to get access to accurate/updated information.

“Where bus timetables are updated at bus stops this is useful but doesn’t always happen when service schedules change. Normally someone passing will say the bus no longer comes and that is the first I know of it and the websites don’t give accurate information. I can’t use journey planning apps as I am a wheelchair user and they don’t give enough information. I have also tried using the Thistle Assistance Card but it’s not that good. The drivers think it’s a payment card and just say it’s not valid on their services.”

# Comments

## Inaccessible timetables and transport information

Many respondents commented that formats of the timetable were difficult to access and read. Some respondents had issues with utilizing different methods of accessing transport information, with some respondents trying to use supports such as screen readers which is difficult to use effectively on many transport provider websites.

“I'm blind and use a screen reader to access online information including travel information. Traveline Scotland site isn't accessible at all, and the First Glasgow bus timetables on their website are only published in PDF which doesn't work well with the screen reader and they only list information for some of the stops along the route.

I use thetrainline.com for train times as this is accessible whereas the Scotrail journey check isn't very accessible for screen readers”

Many respondents commented on the need for cross modal connection planning and commented on the value of an App/website/service which could support and inform this need.

“Most bus stop timetables are out of date as is information on websites. Apps can have better information but don’t have enough information to plan your journey if you have mobility issues (on distance and gradient between stops) and on cross modal connections.”

A few respondents also stated that having printed and accessible timetables is a necessity for them to plan journeys, and that there is still a number of people who cannot use or do not have access to social media, a smart phone, regular Wi-Fi access, and therefore physical timetables and consistent and accurate schedules for transport is crucial to many people being able to effectively use public transport services.

“I'm in my 50s, fortunately I can fumble about on social media etc, to obtain travel information. Unfortunately, some older people can’t, and others who have medical conditions can't use the internet either.”

## Accessibility issues with Scotrail app & Difficulty using the Thistle assistance card

Respondents noted further issues accessing up to date information via apps such as ScotRail app, Traveline, etc.

Further issues were also raised with the recognition of and experience using the Thistle Assistance card. With passengers noting that many drivers do not recognize the card.

## Bus sensors

Some respondents commented on their worries about accessing various mobility supports on buses and one made the suggestion of additional tracking and sensors to see how busy, or whether a wheelchair space is available on a particular bus.

“Would it be so hard to put sensors or a system in place to allow you to know if the 1 wheelchair space is free? I often can’t get on the bus because the 1 space is taken or a buggy is in it. I then have to use the car and use the car often to ensure reliability as buses are not reliable.”

## Independent and autonomous travel

Many respondents highlighted the importance of independent travel and the vital importance of services and supports which provide information and access which enables disabled people to travel independently.

“Wheelchair accessibility, as always, whether in Scottish planning or transport, seems to be forgotten. There is hardly one accessible rail station without planning to ask for assistance. As an independent human my desire is independent travel, not Independence.”

Some respondents noted the importance of:

 “Incentivizing public transport supports as a way of prompting and supporting sustainable changes”

Highlighting the importance of integration between sustainable transport policy and access and equality policy and initiatives as they relate to travel/transport, and finding was of facilitating opportunities to work together.

## Lack of confidence

Afew respondents commented that due to unreliability and previous issues they felt inclined to use personal modes of transport as they do not feel confident using public transport, as many have had difficult experiences with delays, lack of accessible information, etc. These difficulties have left them feeling less confident in using these services regularly or for important journeys, and on some occasions respondents chose to use private transport or their own personal modes of transport instead.

A few respondents also noted that they felt a lack of confidence in the actions of the Accessible Travel Framework being followed through on, and Some respondents noted that they felt unaware of the work being done in relation to the Framework’s work packages. Stating that they would like to know more about and see more measurable and impactful changes as the framework develops and moves forward.

## Conclusion

88% of respondents stated that they did not feel as informed as they could be about travel and transport in Scotland. With a 72% stating that they did not feel up to date and aware of potential changes to services, delays, etc.

The comments and responses show that many disabled people using transport services in Scotland feel that there is still crucial work to be done to ensure that the goals outlined in the Accessible Travel Framework are met and that disabled people have effective services to support individuals making successful door to door journeys utilizing a wide variety of transport modes.

Comments also show that further work needs to be done to communicate the changes and development surrounding the implementation of the Accessible Travel Framework work packages and outcomes to date.

Many respondents noted the issues with accessing information via printed timetables, information desks, and other live forms of communication options, but equally expressed a preference for accessing information online via transport provider websites predominately. Through the comments we can see a preference for written communication, and for live chat options where staff can responsively tailor information to the individual queries and requirements of the customer.

Many of the comments showed that respondents are experiencing issues accessing accurate information, it shows that due to this respondents are feeling less confident in their ability to travel independently.

We can see that many of the key themes coming out of respondent’s comments are around anxiety and confusion generated from information not being updated quickly enough, and the respondents feel the potential need to utilize private forms of transport to ensure a successful journey on some occasions.

Many comments highlighted that being able to travel without help is vital, and passengers value independent travel as a high priority alongside clarity of information.

Respondents feel that transport providers are not adapting and being responsive to the changing needs and the necessity of daily updates to service information.

Through these responses we can see some key values and priorities coming through such as;

* Patience and clarity from staff in both the delivery of information and accessible and inclusive communication formats which are frequently updated.
* Ensuring all passengers are aware of changes and updates to services. Live and updated information is vitally important to an individual’s ability to plan a journey and having this will instill a confidence in the information and services provided which will improve the success and experience of planning and making journeys in Scotland.

# Summary of Part 2: Communicating feedback, suggestions and complaints to transport providers in Scotland

This week our questions focused on how members found the process of communicating feedback or lodging complaints with transport providers in Scotland.

We wanted to hear about members experiences with submitting comments, feedback, and suggestions, and if members had experiences filing a complaint about an issue they may have encountered. We wanted to gather members thoughts on how accessible they’ve found these methods of communicating experiences and feedback to different transport providers across Scotland.

**Question 1**

How accessible have you found the experience of providing feedback and/or submitting a suggestion, comment, or complaint to a transport provider?

* Very accessible 12% (4 respondents)
* Quite accessible 24% ( 8 respondents)
* Not very accessible 43% (14 respondents)
* Not at all accessible 15% ( 5 respondents)
* Don’t know 6% (2 respondents)

**Question 2**

Have you received a response to any feedback/complaints/suggestions you may have lodged with a transport service provider?

* Yes 48% (16 respondents)
* No 48% ( 16 respondents)
* Don’t know 4% ( 1 respondents)

**Question 3**

Do you feel that your comments/feedback on transport services are being listened to and/or acted upon?

* Yes 28% (9 respondents)
* No 63% ( 20 respondents)
* Don’t know 9% ( 3 respondents)

**Question 4**

What is your preferred method of communicating feedback, suggestions, complaints, to a transport provider? And why?

## Preference for email/written feedback

Written feedback via email came back as the preferred method of communicating feedback. As it is free to use, there is a record of the communication, and it can be directed to a specific person within an organization.

“Email to a specific person because I feel that would be more likely to be read and acted upon.”

“I personally like to email the company as I am too nervous doing it in person or on the phone and my anxiety doesn’t help it, so doing so by email I am able to put across my point of complaint and the issue.”

Respondents found that email allowed for control over how they communicated and instilled more confidence in what they are trying to convey. It also allowed for the individual to take time consider and articulate their concern or suggestion.

However additional supports, inclusive communication and access requirements need to be taken into consideration and provided when providing written options, in order to support those who may not be able to use written forms of communication or may require additional supports to do so.

## Constructive improvements rather than complaints

Some respondents commented that the complaint systems for transport providers were potentially not the most constructive way to communicate a suggestion and that there was a need for change/improvements to services, they suggested that instead there could be a way of speaking with a feedback customer support department or staff member.

“email. I am affected by deafness and phone is a barrier. I'm not confident in my English and do not like formal letters etc. Also, I'm seeking improvements rather than "complaining" and don't like negative complaints system. Prefer customer service approach”

## Seeing results/impacts of feedback

Some respondents commented that they felt that no matter which mode was used to communicate their feedback they still weren’t seeing active change and improvement and that they found this discouraged further interaction and comments with transport providers.

This needs to be mitigated so that those submitting feedback, firstly receive a response to their comment, and secondly that this feedback is processed correctly, and that changes are implemented to ensure that the transport services are responsive to customer feedback and the needs of disabled people traveling in Scotland.

“Email or letter still provides the same answer. When i lodged a complaint with X regarding a seating issue they did not seem that bothered and again when I complained about seating on another route, they were very clear to point out that the service would not be changing so there was nothing they could do.”

## Lack of clarity on how to submit feedback

Some respondents commented that it was difficult to know how to submit feedback, and that they were unaware of how to do this or the different options that were available.
Others noted that they didn’t want to submit feedback or lodge complaints as it was unpleasant to have to relive and recount previous negatives experiences with travel. It is paramount that we have open and easy forms of communicating, that allow disabled people to share experiences in a safe and supportive environment. Open passenger engagement and feedback is a vital way to ensure that priorities and goals are shared between transport providers, policymakers and disabled people using transport services in Scotland.

Some respondents noted that feedback/complaint submission options and surrounding policy documents are not often widely available in a series of inclusive formats, or in some cases unknown whether available in a range of formats. Standard inclusive format options for feedback and complaint submissions are paramount to ensuring that transport providers offer responsive services which cater to a variety of access needs. This extends to surveys and further feedback collection opportunities.

“Unfortunately even if a complaints/feedback policy exists, it is rare that accessible formats are made available which often prevents the raising of complaints.”

## Instant online response

Some respondents suggested a chat function, or an online response system would be more effective.

“Tend to send emails. But a visible link with instant response online would be better.”

**Question 5**

Do you feel you have been made aware of all relevant lines of communication available to customers for feedback/suggestions and complaints?

* Yes 21% (7 respondents)
* No 64% ( 21 respondents)
* Don’t know 15% ( 5 respondents)

## Comments

## Inconsistencies across different transport modes and providers

Some respondents noted that there are discrepancies and inconsistences across different transport modes which lead to confusion and inconsistencies in experiences of communicating across different transport providers.

“some providers are better than others with the rail industry there is a wall of silence and no replies. Local bus operator does listen although when they ask the drivers for feedback on an issue the communication breaks down. The ferries are bit hit or miss.”

## Feedback and complaint protocols not widely known

Some respondents voiced concerns that they were not aware of the appropriate procedure for filing complaints/concerns/feedback.

“I'm not aware that I've been made aware of the 'correct' procedure for making a formal complaint about, or, against a transport provider.”

## Difficult to find relevant contact details for specific complaints/feedback departments

Many respondents stated it was difficult to find appropriate contact details, email or postal addresses for specific complaint and feedback departments.

“When I made my complaint, I had to look at various sources to find where to complain to. There often isn’t clear wording or it is in what is known as small print, and it’s hard to find. If I can’t email, I usually then write to them which has its own difficulty as in trying to get it posted.”

Many respondents expressed that it was difficult to navigate websites to access online submissions for feedback/complaints.

## Standardized / automated responses

Some respondents noted that they receive automated responses, which were not relevant to their original comment.

“The transport provider I contacted send me a standard response which bore no relationship to my complaint.”

## Suggestions/recommendations

Respondent recommended running a series of questions gathering compliments and complaints for each mode of transport in order to have a clearer picture of the strengths and weakness across all different transport modes

Respondent suggested developing transport experience survey in collaboration with disabled people, and to potentially extend this work either through workshops or focus groups.

Other respondents suggested filing feedback and suggestions through a central service who could advocate for the individual.

“I think instead of having to deal with individuals etc it would be helpful to register points at a central service that could advocate for change. Some front line workers are excellent.”

**Conclusion**

The majority of respondents found that it was quite accessible or not very accessible to submit comments and complaints. With a split responses of 48% between those stating that they have submitted comments and those that haven’t. With 64% of respondents stating that they do not feel aware of communication options with transport providers for feedback and complaints.

From the emerging themes in respondents comments we can see that open lines of communication, and the facilitation of feedback and comments from the perspective of passengers are crucial to upholding the key priorities of the Accessible Travel Framework specifically pertaining to goals surrounding consultation and coproduction, alongside facilitating collaborative communication with disabled people travelling in Scotland.

From the comments we can see that respondents are not always receiving feedback and responses to their submitted complaints. And crucially that the respondents are not experiencing an improvement or a responsive change to the service they have complained or submitted constructive feedback about. Which leads to a lack of confidence to submit further feedback or communicate with the transport provider about an urgent issue if they feel as if action is not being taken.

It is recommended that transport providers are encouraged and facilitated to provide clear information about feedback submission and specific feedback department contact details.

Furthermore it is vital that submitted feedback receives a prompt response, and that feedback which states an urgent issue with a travel/transport service and experience is raised with the relevant team and that changes are implemented where possible.

This is an important component of the Accessible Travel Frameworks work packages surrounding coproduction and collaboration which needs be encouraged and supported moving forward with its development.

These responses show that whilst respondents feel they can communicate with relevant transport providers when needed, and have gotten responses, a majority have not seen or do not feel that action is being taken based on their submitted feedback/issues raised.

Respondents have provided important comments and suggestions for further improvement in relation to submitting feedback and complaints to transport providers such as; developing a specific transport experience feedback survey across different modes of transport in collaborations/partnership with disabled people, live online response system for urgent issues/feedback, clear contact pages which detail addresses for customer support, provide a range of different inclusive communication formats for feedback surveys and feedback submission options and provide instructional guides on how to submit comments, complaints and feedback and to prioritize sharing and promoting information on how to submit feedback/comments for each provider.

# Summary of Part 3: Opportunities for Co-production & Consultation with transport providers in Scotland

This week our questions focused on experiences with co-production and collaboration between transport services and disabled people and organisations that work with and advocate for disabled people.

We were interested in how members have found experiences of consultation and co-production with transport providers or transport organisations in Scotland. This includes opportunities for individuals and community groups to influence transport policy development and to provide feedback on changes to transport services.

We also wanted to hear members thoughts on how they would like to see co-production and collaboration facilitated going forward. Specifically what forms of communication they would find helpful to facilitate consultations. E.g. whether they prefer in-person or online meetings for consultations, or whether they would prefer surveys in a range of different audio and visual formats where they can provide feedback in their own time, etc.

**Question 1**

Do you feel there are opportunities for disabled people and organisations that work with and advocate for disabled people to participate in transport policy development and to provide feedback on changes to transport services?

* Yes 17% (6 respondents)
* No 49% (17 respondents)
* Don’t know 34% (12 respondents)

**Question 2:**

Have you ever been involved in a consultation process relating to travel and transport issues in Scotland?

* Yes 33% (12 respondents)
* No 64% (23 respondents)
* Don’t know 3% ( 1 respondent)

**Question 3:**

If yes, do you have any feedback on that process?

## Positive experiences of consultation

Some respondents shared positive experiences they had attending discussions with transport providers/officials where they felt the discussion was open and the individuals were facilitated to share their perspectives which opened up a productive and reflective conversation.

“I attended an online discussion with transport officials where the ability to share personal experiences was afforded. Not only did I feel that the delegates were listened to, I felt that there was more information and help out there than I/we realised. This is something I hope can continue so that we can provide continuous feedback.”

Some respondents noted that they had been involved with multiple bus and train consultation groups and discussions, but stated they felt a need for similar discussions to be undertaking in relation to underground and taxis as well.

## Negative experiences of consultation

Some respondents shared negative experiences where they felt they had to advocate for themselves and push for consultation meeting opportunities.

“Our Panel had to force the issue of consultation in the first place, under the Public Sector Disability Equality Duty. By the time the first meeting took place, the plan had been decided, including an EqIA which didn't stand-up to scrutiny.

 Overall, it was a disappointing experience and just proves how large public organizations can still get away with suiting themselves.”

Some respondents noted that whilst they did take part in productive consultation exercises and discussions there was very little follow up and updates afterwards, and participants are not aware of the changes and work done afterwards to take on board consultation comments suggestions and discussions.

“Difficult to see change and positive implementation of suggestions”

## Lack of inclusive formats and access supports for consultation meetings

Many respondents commented that they found a lack of inclusive formats and supports to facilitate their access needs in order to attend consultation meetings. With no BSL interpreter and captioners provided to enable individuals to attend online consultations.

“Due to living in a rural area no buses can run without a subsidy. Consultations are only by "virtual" meetings, but I cannot participate in "virtual" meetings due to being deaf. I can attend face-to-face meetings but my local council refuses to hold any face-to-face consultations about bus subsidies.”

These comments highlight the need to ensure that all online and face-to-face consultation meetings are fully accessible in order to ensure participants with many different experiences and access needs have an opportunity to engage in the discussion process.

## Diversity in representation at consultations

Respondents feel that consultation groups don’t hear from or accommodate a wide enough variety of participants, and that this will have a negative impact on the diversity of experience/perspective in these group consultation scenarios.

Respondents shared experiences of being involved in different forms of fact finding, and community group discussion and consultation work in both rural and urban communities, stating that this was of benefit however there is an identified need for further promotion, advertisement, and active encouragement to facilitate people to join these groups and discussions. Pointing out that being part of an access panel or other kind of community group helped them find out information about these consultation groups and that unless someone is already part of community groups it is difficult for individuals to find information and invites to participation in these discussions.

“I found the process very interesting and I enjoyed being involved with the process. However I think that there are people who are not aware of the opportunities to get involved this can often be due to them not being involved with other local groups. Being part of a local disability group has given me the opportunity to get involved in a number of different things.”

Question 4

What methods of consultation would you find most accessible and useful? For example; an invitation to online consultation group meeting, in person consultation group meeting, invitation to participate in a focus group, a survey in a range of different audio and visual formats, etc.

## Easy read formats

Many respondents commented that Easy Read formats for surveys and other written forms of consultations should be supplied to ensure that the consultation forms are accessible to a wider group of individuals.

This should extend to other forms of inclusive communication as well, to ensure that a variety of access needs are provided and consultations are accessible to all.

## Surveys

Surveys were a popular option with many respondents saying that they liked being able to consider their answers and take time to reflect on the questions.

“An online survey that I can complete in my own time”

“I found it better to get involved online such as email or Survey such as the forms you send out from DES. However I think that there needs to be a Range of different ways. This should include information being available in Easy Read”

## Focus group

Some respondents stated that focus groups may be more impactful and may facilitate more open and productive feedback and communication.

“Surveys are fine for me but I think focus groups can have more impact”

## Hybrid

Hybrid consultations were favoured by many respondents, online consultations afford opportunities for a wide range of individuals to attend and participate, but that it is vital to the success of these events that a range of inclusive communication formats are provided for all written communication, and BSL captioners and interpreters are present at all consultation events to ensure it meets access requirements.

“Hybrid consultation that is supported by good communication networks.”

## Face to face meetings/conversations

Some respondents noted that they need in person consultations and meetings as most online consultation do not provide appropriate supports for those with additional access requirements. An alternative to this would be to provide BSL interpreters and captioners for online consultation meetings,

## Options for individual feedback or consultations

Some respondents noted that it would be of benefit to have the option of one-to-one consultations as well as survey options, as another way to facilitate individuals who may want to share insights and feedback that they may not wish to/feel comfortable sharing in a group context.

“I would prefer a one to one discussion. When it is a group you never get the chance to mention all the issues you wanted to! Another option would be filling in a questionnaire like this one which would enable a consultant to pick out the issues relevant to them and then ask about them at a group meeting.”

## Timing of consultations

Some respondents commented on the timing of the consultations, at what times are they held and what stages of the project is of huge importance and can affect how a consultation impacts the project, and how feedback and insights are carried forward as key recommendations for a project moving forward.

Many respondents expressed the urgent need and meaningful benefit for consultation and advisory group work, stating that they would like to see more co-production and discussion with transport providers before the implementation of changes to ensure disabled people and accessibility and mobility needs are considered from the outset of transport changes.

## Suggestions

Respondent suggestions focus on the importance of specific online or face to face consultation meetings, which have clearly delineated and monitored project timescales, and key follow-up actions which are updated and report back on to all those who participated in consultation group. Respondents suggested walk throughs/wheel throughs with policymakers and transport providers so they can understand the potential barriers and issues to travel.

“Online focus groups or 1-to-1 interviews / meetings; surveys; a walk-a-bout / wheel-a-bout with policy-makers so they can see the barriers in practice and the experiences of disabled and Deaf people navigating transport.”

**Question 5**

Are there any systems or supports that could be put in place to support and facilitate a process of consultation and feedback between disabled people and transport providers or those working to affect change on transport and travel in Scotland?

## Feedback and monitoring access standards

Respondents suggested that there should be feedback systems put in place to monitor access standards across different transport modes.

“Perhaps a feedback system to monitor how disability standards are met across the various transport groups, including an evaluation periodically to nip any issues in the bud.”

## Shared consultations

Some respondents suggested sharing consultations across providers and facilitating a more centralized approach. Allowing opportunities for transport modes to problem solve collectively, to communicate and share issues, potentially leading to more multi-modal integration.

“Sharing consultation across providers in a more "centralised" way would save everyone reinventing the wheel.”

## Transparency and promotion of consultations

Respondents noted that it was crucial to advertise consultation opportunities widely, in public spaces, community groups, etc. Ensuring that different members of community are aware of opportunities and feel confident and able to participate in a range of consultations.

“Consultation events should be advertised at stations, in libraries and through services such as Carers Groups. Accessible venues are a must.”

“Trying different ways of reaching individuals with disabilities. Perhaps you already do but there are possibly lots of people like myself who are not aware of ways to connect with others who have similar issues.”

Some respondents expressed concerns in relation to inclusion of disabled people with a range of different experiences, access and mobility needs. Respondents noted that on many occasions they are not aware of consultation groups and discussion opportunities.

## Conclusion

While just under half of the respondents feel that are not enough opportunities, 17% said that there were, with 34% stating they did not know. 33% said that they had been involved in consultation discussions, and many respondents who had participated in a variety of discussion group/focus group and consultation events stated that they had positive and productive experiences.

With many respondents suggesting further forms of engagement, coproduction and consultation methods that should be put in place.

The respondents comments and feedback suggest that these consultation practices are vital to the successful implementation of meaningful and impactful change which meets the needs and priorities of disabled people traveling in Scotland. Respondents noted that further measures need to be put in place to achieve the Accessible Travel Frameworks goal of supporting and ensuring a coproduction model of engagement.

Respondents suggested that these measure should include; accessible forms of hybrid consultation employing a series of inclusive communication formats to facilitate engagement, further promotion of consultation opportunities in the community, consultations and group discussions which involve transport providers from multiple modes, walk throughs and wheel throughs of transport stations and journeys for policy makers, surveys which are easily accessible and provider in a wide variety of inclusive communication forms, such as Easy Read, Braille, etc.

# Part 4: Inclusive forms of communication used by transport providers in Scotland.

This week our questions focused on the inclusive forms of communication that are on offer from different transport providers in Scotland.
We wanted to hear about members experiences utilizing different forms of inclusive communication options to access transport information, to book tickets, to plan their journeys, etc.

We were interested in their experiences using various available formats of audio and visual description, easy read format options, British Sign Language options, braille options, etc.

**Question 1**

When accessing transport information, how satisfied are you with the range of inclusive communication formats offered by transport providers in Scotland?

* Very satisfied 4% (2 respondents)
* Satisfied 22% (11 respondents)
* Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 35% (18 respondents)
* Dissatisfied 22% (11 respondents)
* Very dissatisfied 17% (9 respondents)

**Question 2**

When planning a journey, what services/tools do you use?

* Telephone 26% (13 respondents)
* Information desk 30% (15 respondents)
* Printed Timetable/leaflets at stations/stops 42.00% ( 21 respondents)
* Transport provider website 64% (32 respondents)
* Transport provider social media channels (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)

22.00% (11 respondents)

* Mobile App (e.g., Google maps, Traveline, Thistle Assistance App, etc) 50% (25 respondents)
* Other 18% (9 respondents)

**Question 3**

Are there any inclusive communication formats that you would find helpful that are not widely offered by transport providers in Scotland?

* Yes 33% (17 respondents)
* No 18% (9 respondents)
* Don’t know 49% (25 respondents)

**Question 4:**

If yes, what formats would you find helpful that are currently not widely offered?

## Live text/instant online responses

Many respondents stated that live texts, or responsive chat services would be of great benefit to them. This connected to the need for tailored and personalized local knowledge responses to travel and transport accessibility issues/needs which many people have. Respondents felt that being able to have a quick and effective conversation with a trained member of the customer service team who would be able to provide live and update information on the customers journey would enable the individual to have more confidence travelling.

## Issues with automated chats and phone calls

Some respondents raised issues with the accuracy, format, and effectiveness of accessing travel information from automated systems. Stating that they need information which can be clearly explained, and many instances personalized for their access requirements and particular queries.

Many respondents raised issues with hearing in large public spaces which lead to misunderstanding and lack of awareness of crucial changes to travel.

## Issues arising during the journey

Some respondents commented that many forms of supports have been put in place providing accurate and update information to support journey planning, but that many issues with travel are during the individual passenger journey. Issues with obtaining up to date information in relation to delays and cancellations, platform change announcements, and this has a detrimental impact on the success of the journey, and the ease and confidence with which disabled people should be travelling throughout Scotland. Most issues are acknowledged by respondents to be at the point of starting the journey and moving through different phases of the journey, specifically issues with the live journey changes or updates rather than issues accessing information at the planning stage.

“It isn't the planning that is a problem, it is the actual travel - and in particular, the changes that are introduced before or during the journal. As someone with hearing loss, it remains incredibly difficult in many instances to understand what is going on. Instructions are often only given over tanoy, either in the travel station, on the platform or on the train/bus. It is difficult or impossible to hear and understand what is being said. I have missed connections because announcements about platform changes haven't been conveyed in a written form. I have been left on train platforms unaware that a bus has been arranged to take passengers because the train has been cancelled. It is good to see more info appearing on screens, but it is not where it needs to be yet. Or there needs to be a way to receive notifications direct to your phone.”

## Timetables

Many respondents commented that printed or digital displayed timetables would be of great benefit to their journey planning experience, as some respondents do not have continuous access to Wi-Fi or a computer or smartphone through which to access the online timetables. Many respondents noted that timetables have not been replaced, update, or provided since before the Covid 19 pandemic beginning in 2020.

## Information desks

Some respondents noted that many additional accessible options including Easy Read formatted information and timetables are kept in information desk but that due the restrictions of the Covid 19 pandemic some of these information desks were shut and have yet to be reopened.

“Often easy read formats are available from the information desk or ticket kiosk . However, these are often unmanned, meaning that the planning has to be done beforehand and then hopefully everything goes to plan. That said, often things don’t go to plan and there are no humans around to help people with disabilities.”

## Clear language

Some respondents noted that transport providers need to consider the adult literacy age of their transport information publicly available. Respondents commented that most transport information provided is available at a literacy level which includes many people with different needs, and that the accessibility of both formatting and content needs to be considered when publishing this information. The potential of information provided at a lower adult literacy level so that information can be accessed across different reading levels.

## Suggestions

Many respondents provided recommendations of formats and practices that would be of huge benefit to their travel experiences and their ability to plan journeys, and confidently travel via public transport such as bus and rail and providing information about vehicles provided and their access features and options online. Suggested formats include: Plain English Easy Read Large print Accessible film clips with BSL, subtitles and voiceovers, clear subtitles on film clips, and chat facility to communicate.

**Question 5**

Do feel that changes should be made to improve the accessibility of online transport information and travel planning resources? In relation to different inclusive format options and assistance provided, etc.

* Yes 80% (40 respondents)
* No 6% ( 3 respondents)
* Don’t know 14% (7 respondents)

**Question 6**

Do you feel that changes should be made to improve the accessibility of in-person and over the phone access to transport information?

* Yes 71% (36 respondents)
* No 6% ( 3 respondents)
* Don’t know 23% (12 respondents)

Question 7

If yes: what improvements could be made?

## Local / personalized access information

Many respondents commented that customer service staff working for transport providers need to have local knowledge of the area, and this should be prioritized in their training. Commenting that front facing customer service staff should have knowledge of geography and of the transport services intersection with other modes of transport alongside knowledge of access and mobility requirement options at various local stations.

Respondents commented on the need for a member of staff to be present and responsive, and that tailored advice to a particular need or a locality was paramount to the success of the journey. Some respondents shared negative experiences interacting with customer support staff, being told that trains or buses cannot be held a few additional minutes and experiencing lack of supports for boarding transport.

## Clear information

Respondents noted the importance for customer support staff to speak clearly, slowly, and to not obstruct their face so that those hard of hearing may be able to lip read where possible. Respondents also noted the importance of providing hearing loops and additional supports for those with hearing loss etc.

Respondents noted that customer support staff in some instances need further disability and awareness training specifically for hidden/invisible disabilities.

Some respondents also noted discrepancies between information displayed in station, on website, and on across apps.

“Huge gap between the services and information online and what is provided at the transport offices/stations/bus stops”

“Online route planning needs to be much clearer, without the many different links, booking systems, pricing minefields and whether you can get assistance or not. It's not always conducive if you can only get assistance in parts of the travel. There may be the availability of a ramp, AND staff to put it in place so you could get on or off the train at the specific point in time you need it.”

## Information hub

Many respondents commented that they felt it would be of huge benefit to have information from transport providers collected all in one place, unifying information from many different available sources, all information collated in one place, especially time sensitive update information such as delays, route changes, cancellations. More information on what vehicles have additional access and mobility supports, what meetings and websites have BSL and text-typing options. This information is currently collected and displayed via the Accessible Travel Hub, and so a key recommendation would be to incentivize further engagement with the Accessible Travel Hub from all transport providers to ensure more and up to date and relevant information is collated and displayed there.

This would also support and facilitate cross model journeys and integration of transport services to support one another, ensuring that disabled people who need to use multiple modes of transport to reach their destination.

## Face to face and telephone customer support

Some respondents stated the importance of face-to-face customer support in stations and offices.

“A lot of the information that was previously routinely available in-person and over the phone is now not as easily available. You tend to be expected to obtain the information on-line and there are not as many people available to give you the information via older routine methods. Sometimes there are no staff available at the information desk.”

## Online instant responses

Many respondents acknowledged the need for a chat feature, video link, and live customer support live chat, live text.

## Comments

Some respondents shared issues surrounding accessing train services and platforms on time and expressed issues with train services not assisting or being responsive to access and mobility needs when it comes to passengers’ abilities to access trains on time. A respondent suggested trying to find a way of financially supporting/subsidising open tickets for disabled people travelling by rail to relieve the stress of missing transport and having to repurchase tickets or purchase open tickets.

Many respondents made suggestions on methods of improving access to travel information, such as;

 “larger font for information leaflets and Braille. Maybe an electronic board with voice activation for sight deprived people. This could be standardised across transport hubs so that disabled people would become confident in finding and using them.”

Respondents noted issues of cancelations and delays due to lack of bus drivers, and specifically noted issues with communicating these change to the schedule in accessible formats. Stating that travel information was not update at bus stops, or via travel apps, and passenger had to rely on social media and website which did not have suitable accessible provisions.

Many respondents commented on the need for BSL, Easy Read, Braille and other forms of inclusive communication formatting to be a top priority and for transport providers to consider translating all their travel information into these key accessible formats.

"translation" once finished, into BSL, easy-read, braille etc. and this should be released at the same time. The current approach means that even if accessible information is produced it is often hidden behind websites that are not accessible to people with cognitive difficulties, having the ability to change the size of the font is one thing but it doesn't help if you don't understand the information. - build it in from the start point of providing a service.”

Some respondents highlighted the importance of patience and listening skills which are vital for customer support roles.

“During In person and online assistance, patience, understanding and listening skills are a must for all people. Giving people time to respond, and understand questions/suggestions.”

Many respondents highlighted that website accessibility is crucial for disabled people to access key resources and alternative formats which transport providers offer online.

“The current approach means that even if accessible information is produced it is often hidden behind websites that are not accessible to people with cognitive difficulties, having the ability to change the size of the font is one thing but it doesn't help if you don't understand the information.”

Some respondents commented on the potential gaps between communication and delivery of some transport services.

With a few respondents commenting that they feel there are inconsistencies across platforms, that there are gaps and potential discrepancies between what is being communicated and what is potentially on offer with regards to a particular transport service.

Many respondents commented on the improvements in the rail services, especially in relation to booking passenger assistance.

“Rail services generally offer good information and it is easy to book Assistance on rail journeys.”

## Conclusion

From these responses and comments we can see a lack of clarity to the experience of communicating with transport providers and accessing crucial information for journey planning, with only 22% satisfied with the range of inclusive communication formats provided.

This feedback shows that respondents are not confident in their awareness of all services on offer and feel that there are more supports and options required to ensure equal access to transport information for all those travelling in Scotland.

A value of nuanced and personally tailored information which empowers the individual to make their journey confidently is clearly highlighted by the respondent’s feedback.

The feedback shows that whilst respondents find it difficult to navigate transport provider’s websites that they are also one of the most popular formats and so further work to improve access usability is urgently needed.

Many respondents noted that they feel changes and improvements in accessible communication options need to be implemented. Giving clear indications of the forms of barriers that are in place for disabled people in Scotland and recommendations of forms of inclusive communication changes that should be prioritized.

Many of the respondents comments demonstrate a lack of confidence in their ability to access accurate and up-to-date information, effecting their ability to make successful journeys independently, and this highlights the need to prioritize implementing more responsive and accurate accessible and inclusive forms of communication transport and travel information in Scotland.

# Accessible Travel Framework Four Part Series conclusion

Through the responses to these poll questions, we can see that disabled people travelling in Scotland are still experiencing issues surrounding access to consistent and clear information. Their confidence has been impacted by these inconsistencies and by a wide variety of external factors, such as disruptions to services due to the Covid-19 pandemic, front facing staff strikes across bus and rail companies, and various other larger environmental factors such as the cost of living crisis, the climate crisis and relatedly the energy crisis. These wider crisis have had an effect on transport organizations abilities to work towards some of the key areas of accessible travel such as efficiency and consistency of communication with customers and the implementation of changes and supports in relation to identified issues and requirements.

Through these poll responses we can see some key values and priorities coming through such as; patience and clarity from staff in the delivery of information and the accessible and inclusive communication formats which are frequently updated, ensuring all passengers are aware of changes and updates to services. Live and updated information is vitally important to an individual’s ability to plan a journey, and having this will instill a confidence in the information and services provided which will support disabled people wishing to travel to feel confident and independent in their journey.

From these responses we can see some key things that respondents value highly in their travel experience such as;

* Trust in their transport providers and their services
* Clarity of information
* Confidence in the success of their journey and the quality of their experience
* Ease of travel
* Independent travel
* Consistency of information

These are all crucial components that need to be equally prioritized and provided when offering inclusive access to communication channels, travel information, and transport services.

Alongside gathering important perspectives on travel issues and priorities, we also collected many crucial recommendations and suggestions for ways to improve services provided, support changes in services, and work towards resolving critical issues acknowledged and gaps in service and knowledge still present in transport services across all modes of transport throughout Scotland.

The responses show that there are still gaps in communication channels which need to be resolved pertaining to facilitating feedback consultation and ensuring inclusive communication formats and options of travel information. Through the feedback of the members of Disability Equality Scotland we can see that these communication issues impact confidence in transport providers and show a lack of confidence in planning and successfully completing journeys,

Alongside issues with access to accurate and updated transport information and consolidating information from various sources to plan specific multi-modal journey routes. These are some of the crucial priorities to be worked towards and upheld in all aspects of this work moving forward with the Accessible Travel Frameworks work packages from 2023 and beyond.

Key priorities as they pertain to Area 3, Area 5 and Area 6 of the Accessible Travel Framework:

Area 3

* Prioritize increasing the consistency, accuracy and availability of written information, printed timetables etc in a wide variety of inclusive formats.
* Incentivize and support a wider range of inclusive formats for information predominately via transport provider websites and apps.

Area 5

* Ensure that consultation opportunities provide a range of access requirements, and that information about opportunities of consultations are shared and prominently widely in a wide range of inclusive formats.

Area 6

* Facilitate and support open communication through creating more accessible channels for feedback and consultation. Incentivizing responsive action, specifically supporting transport providers to receptively implement changes and respond to suggestions and issues raised by disabled people using transport in Scotland.

The Accessible Travel Framework needs to reprioritize and focus on impactful change that enables independent travel ensuring that disabled people traveling in Scotland feel confident to undertake journeys on their own without undue stress or issue, and this feedback needs to be further reflected upon as part of the Accessible Travel Framework evaluation research project in the coming months.