

#MakeTransportAccessible - creating the perfect world for blind and partially sighted people

"It is so important to make transport accessible for our blind and partially sighted community as we are heavily reliant on public transport for our daily life, and to access social and work opportunities. Making transport accessible enables us to be more confident, safe, active and independent."

Sight Loss Council volunteer member, Vidya Nathan

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1. Executive summary

This report highlights a number of issues recurring across the bus network, which include;

- Highly inaccessible bus stops, both in terms of design and a lack of real-time information, with nearly 30% of people reporting the accessibility of the bus stops they used as poor or very poor.
- Passengers are still relying on flagging down buses which, when combined with the lack of accessible timetables and irregular services, can lead to missed journeys; nearly 20% of our Mystery Shopper respondents reported it was ‘not easy at all’ for them to catch the right bus.
- BPS passengers are still suffering a ‘bus route lottery’ of mixed driver standards.
- The number of audio-visual announcements on buses remains low, with nearly 60% of our mystery shoppers reported no audio-visual announcements on their bus service.

This report highlights a number of issues recurring across the rail network, which include;

- Unmanned stations present BPS passengers with a significant additional accessibility issue; 100% of respondents who used a station without a staffed ticket office reported an issue with their journey as a result.
- Railway station design is largely inaccessible, with poor signage and frequent changes making this significantly worse, with nearly a third of our Mystery Shopper respondents reported they found the station difficult to navigate.
- Overcrowding on trains themselves causes significant accessibility issues, including blocking of access to amenities for passengers and preventing or delaying staff providing assistance.
- A large number of BPS passengers are either unable to access Passenger Assist, or unaware it exists, with 30% not using the service because it wasn't available or because they didn't know it existed.

2. The report

This is a report from Thomas Pocklington Trust, which analyses qualitative and quantitative responses from face-to-face and online surveys, combined with open-source government data, to identify the key priorities and themes that emerged.

This report utilises the results from Thomas Pocklington Trust's 2023 Mystery Shopper initiative, which saw BPS passengers examine a range of issues across multiple transport providers. The mystery shopping research was led by Sight Loss Councils. These are regional groups led by blind and partially sighted members and funded by Thomas

Pocklington Trust. Together, they work with organisations to ensure what they do is accessible and inclusive.

This report also includes feedback from [VI Lives](#). Produced jointly by Guide Dogs, RNIB and Thomas Pocklington Trust, the VI Lives research study provides insights into the experiences of people living with a vision impairment. It is based on hundreds of conversations with people who live with a vision impairment and provides one of the richest and most in-depth pictures yet of the varied experiences and challenges that affect their day-to-day lives.

This report also includes data from the Department for Transport, namely the [2021 National Travel Survey](#) (NTS). This is the latest in a series of household surveys of personal travel by residents of England travelling within Great Britain, from data collected via interviews and a seven-day travel diary.

It also contains data collected during [Listening Month 2022](#), a major engagement project by Thomas Pocklington Trust and Sight Loss Councils to understand blind and partially sighted people's experiences through a national online survey, dozens of local and national engagement events and other formal and informal channels.

The report highlights the key issues faced by blind and partially sighted people accessing the rail and bus network across England. The report aims to promote understanding and encourage change to create a more accessible and equal world for blind and partially sighted people.

3. Our work

Activity is happening at both local and national levels, with Sight Loss Councils engaging with transport providers, managers and elected representatives to highlight local issues and drive grassroots change.

TPT has supported this work with a programme of public affairs engagement at the national level, influencing change at the very highest levels of government. This is alongside a growing programme of corporate engagement that seeks to embed change within transport providers across the nation.

This work is further amplified by a communications programme that effectively increases awareness of and engagement with the issues BPS passengers face.

4. Why transport

For people with sight loss public transport is vital social infrastructure, providing access to work and education opportunities, key services, community life, leisure and recreation.

The ability of BPS people to fulfil their needs and aspirations is therefore linked to their ability to travel and access transport resources independently and safely. As Steve, an SLC volunteer told us; “Transport is a lifeline for me as I have been blind from birth. It needs to be reliable and accessible.”

When asked ‘what matters most to blind and partially sighted people’, 65% of respondents to our Listening Month project selected accessibility

and availability of public transport. It was raised as a prominent issue in every region and was also the highest scoring option for those selecting the issue that is most important for addressing their own personal needs. Transport has, therefore, been selected as our national priority project for 2023/24, with a particular focus on buses and trains.

These are the two dominant forms of public transport in the UK. People with a mobility disability are more reliant on local buses than those without but are largely precluded from certain transport modes as a result of their disability. For example, the average person with a mobility disability use surface rail a staggering 85% less. Without the ability to drive, an accessible bus and network is essential for both local and national travel.

5. Barriers to entry

Blind and partially sighted people rely on a range of transport solutions to get around independently. These include public transport such as buses, trains, trams and light rail services, as well as private transport such as taxis and private hire vehicles (PHV). All public transport providers have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make their services accessible.

Despite this – and blind and partially sighted people’s reliance on their services – a lack of accessibility significantly hampers the ability and confidence of blind and partially sighted people to use these services. [Some 20%](#) of blind and partially sighted people report issues relating to travel, transport and mobility, and BPS people [regularly report](#) a significant feeling of loss or lack of independence.

As outlined in the VI Lives report, a quarter of blind and partially sighted people feel that they are not getting out as much as they would like – this increases to over a third when we look at those with a moderate or severe V I and to 43% for those aged over 75. A full third reported they were unable to use public transport as much as they would like.

6. Entrenching inequality

The prominence of transport as a reported issue amongst blind and partially sighted across multiple reports is a recognition of the deleterious impact a lack of accessible transport has on other aspects of blind and partially sighted people's lives. The inequalities in access to transport contribute to poverty and economic deprivation, inequalities in health and wellbeing, and social isolation.

As the VI Lives report highlights, only 54% of blind and partially sighted people of working age are in employment. As the report states, 'specific barriers to seeking work often include practical limitations like proximity and transport.' Accessible transport also has impacts on social isolation; over a third of the BPS people spoken to say they can't take part in social activities as much as they would like. A further 11% say they can't take part at all.

The isolation exacerbated by a lack of accessible transport leads to a BPS population that is dangerously secluded from their fellow citizens and wider society. It is likely a result of their low participations levels in social circles, communities and workplaces that, as VI Lives reports, 'public understanding around the breadth of sight conditions, including 'V I' and differing levels of adaptation, is very poor.' When surveyed, 46%

of BPS people agreed that the general public is often prejudiced against people with VI, whilst close to 40% have experienced discrimination.

7. Limiting opportunity

The Government's National Travel Survey gives an insight into the very real limitations people with a disability face when travelling.

Adults who report that their disability or illness affects them a lot in their ability to carry out day-to-day tasks reported lower trip rates (on average, 452 per person in 2021) than those affected less, and those with no disability or illness lasting more than 12 months. The greatest difference amongst average trip purposes between participants with a mobility difficulty and without a mobility difficulty were for the purposes of commuting.

The problems of accessibility – combined with the limiting effects of pre-existing mobility issues that may preclude transport such as walking or cycling – means that the average person with a mobility issue makes less than 60% of the journeys people without do and covers just 44% of the distance.

This is a clear indication that a lack of accessible transport not only limits the ability of BPS people to access their immediate community, but their ability to access wider society too.

8. Bus stops

Issues begin at the bus stops and stations which BPS passengers find highly inaccessible, both in terms of design and real-time information;

nearly 30% of people reported the accessibility of the bus stops they used as poor or very poor.

Bus stops rely heavily on physical timetables, which are often vandalised, missing or printing in inaccessible fonts. In fact, not a single transport user reported accessing timetable information in a physical format, instead relying on memory, app or operator websites. Yet our Mystery Shopping data showed these apps are often inaccessible or provide inaccurate information.

Meanwhile at smaller stops, the lack of shelter can make it difficult for BPS passengers to locate the stop, and poor wayfinding signage at larger stations means BPS passengers often struggle to locate their bus ahead of departure.

As one Mystery Shopper told us, there was simply 'too big a distance between the real time information display and the actual stop.' A full third of Mystery Shoppers reported they found the accessibility of the bus stop on their journey 'poor', reflecting the accessibility improvements that are essential to open up bus journeys.

The lack of accessible information makes it difficult for BPS passengers to navigate the bus network and acts as a barrier to new trips; a staggering 94% of our Mystery Shopper respondents reported that they used their bus journey for familiar journeys. In addition, without accessible real-time information, BPS passengers are still relying on flagging down buses which, relying on sight, can lead to missed journeys. Nearly 20% of our Mystery Shopper respondents reported it was 'not easy at all' for them to catch the right bus.

9. On the Buses

Accessibility issues did not end there, however. Nearly 60% of our mystery shoppers reported no audio-visual announcements on their bus service – despite the government confirming this year that the Accessible Information Regulations, which will mandate audio-visual announcements, will be brought forward. As a result, 35% of our Mystery Shopper respondents said they only felt ‘somewhat’ safe on their bus journey.

In addition, our Mystery Shoppers showed the ‘bus route lottery’ of varying levels of awareness and understanding of the needs of BPS passengers amongst drivers. Over 20% reported they thought the level of support offered by the driver was either poor or very poor; one respondent reported their driver had simply ‘no knowledge of how to help’, and a high number of respondents also reported that their driver pulled off before they had the chance to sit down. However, over a quarter of respondents rated their driver’s support as ‘good’, which highlights the inconsistency BPS passengers face.

10. Train stations

Our Mystery Shopper data revealed a range of accessibility issues which, again, begin at the station. Railway station design is largely inaccessible, with poor signage and frequent changes making this significantly worse. 32% of our Mystery Shopper respondents reported they found the station difficult to navigate, with reasons ranging from a lack of tactile navigation to confusing layouts.

Unmanned stations are a particular issue, not only in terms of accessibility but safety too. This is despite technological solutions being at hand; a full 69% of respondents would have found an audio guide for the station layout useful, particularly for locating platforms, which users found were laid out illogically or hidden from BPS passengers.

Over 90% of Mystery Shopper respondents reported that the station they used had a staffed ticket office. For one respondent, the lack of a staffed ticket office 'made me feel very stressed'. For another, it meant 'I wasn't able to buy a ticket and had to wait for a member of the public to help me use the ticket machine. We missed the first train because of this.' All respondents who used a station without a staffed ticket office reported an issue with their journey as a result.

Passenger Assist is intended to overcome some of these issues by providing support to those passengers who need it; yet of those Mystery Shoppers who did not use Passenger Assist, nearly 30% did not do so because it wasn't available or because they didn't know it existed. This left BPS passengers who needed the help that Passenger Assist is supposed to provide to navigate the rail network alone.

11. In the carriages

In general, accessibility of rolling stock is high, with the majority of Mystery Shoppers reporting they found accessibility of the layout of the train 'OK.' This data is distorted, however, by the high number of Mystery Shoppers who did not respond to this section as they did not leave their seat during their journey.

However, overcrowding causes significant accessibility issues, including blocking of access to amenities for passengers and preventing or delaying staff providing assistance. As a result, nearly half the respondents in our Mystery Shopper data did not encounter any on board staff at all during their journey.

As with buses, the cumulative effects of these accessibility issues act as a barrier to new journeys; 88% of our Mystery Shopper respondents reported that they only used the train for familiar journeys.

12. Effects of an inaccessible network

The effects of a lack of accessible transport on the health, wealth and happiness of BPS people is clear from the disparate usage figures between those with a mobility disability and those without.

People with a mobility disability make 1/5 of the trips related to education that people without a mobility disability do, commute 80% less and make 1/3 less of the trips related to entertainment. In fact, people with a mobility disability make less trips and travel less distance for every reason bar personal business.

The failure to deliver accessible transport is a major road block to blind and partially sighted people participating in society as equals, preventing access to economic opportunities, education, support networks, friends, family and wider society.

Transport must form a fundamental building block of any project or body of work that aims to deliver a more inclusive society. Building accessibility into public spaces or private industry must begin with the

idea that blind and partially sighted people aren't prevented from visiting those spaces in the first instance by an inability to travel to them.

13. What next?

Thomas Pocklington Trust and Sight Loss Councils will be using this report as the evidential basis of a campaign for change amongst transport stakeholders.

Sight Loss Councils and the Public Affairs and Campaigns Team at Thomas Pocklington Trust will continue to work together to focus on the priority concerns identified by blind and partially sighted people and report back on progress made.

14. About Thomas Pocklington Trust

Thomas Pocklington Trust is a national charity dedicated to enabling and empowering blind and partially sighted people of all ages to live the life they want to lead.

We are committed to increasing awareness and understanding of their needs and aspirations, to working with partners and to developing and implementing services which meet these needs to increase independence and improve lives.

Web: www.pocklington-trust.org.uk

Facebook: [@thomaspocklingtontrust](https://www.facebook.com/thomaspocklingtontrust)

Twitter: [@TPTgeneral](https://twitter.com/TPTgeneral)

LinkedIn: [@pocklington-trust](https://www.linkedin.com/company/pocklington-trust)

<https://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/VI-Lives-Report-Sep-22.pdf>

Accessibility

If you need this report in an alternative format (eg large print), email communications.team@pocklington-trust.org.uk

Publication date: November 2023