Accessible Information Regulations Briefing Note

Public Service Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023

Summary

Around 14 million people in Great Britain are disabled, and on average they rely on using local bus and coach services more than most to make the journeys many take for granted. For some, a lack of on-board travel information can be a major barrier to traveling confidently and independently. More broadly, on-board information has the potential to improve the journey experience for all passengers. Many transport operators and authorities have taken steps to provide this information, but over half of vehicles remain unequipped to provide it. This is why the government has introduced the Accessible Information Regulations. These new rules will make the provision of audible and visible information a requirement on board local services across Great Britain, which will help everyone to travel with confidence.

Background

For some passengers, most notably those who are visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, people with cognitive or learning impairments, and some autistic people, a lack of information about a vehicle's location and direction of travel can make travelling by bus or coach an anxiety inducing experience. In their 2014 "Destination Unknown" survey, the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association found that 70% of visually impaired respondents had missed their stop because the driver forgot to tell them when to get off, and 68% would use buses more frequently if audio-visual announcements were provided on board. We know however, that accessible onboard information benefits a range of people, not just those who are disabled, making services simple to use for regular passengers and first timers alike.

Providing audible and visible information on board transport services is not a new concept. The provision of announcements and visual displays has been a requirement for new railway rolling stock since 1998, and since the early 2000s several operators and authorities have begun providing it on buses. For over fifteen years, most bus services in London have incorporated audible and visible information on the route and upcoming stops.

As of 2022/23, 49% of vehicles operating local services in England have the necessary equipment installed. This figure drops to 29% for England outside London, 37% in Wales, and 35% in Scotland. There remain many areas where disabled passengers cannot board a bus with confidence that onboard information will enable them to alight in the right place. Mandating its provision is therefore about consistency of experience, ensuring that wherever disabled people and other passengers travel in Great Britain they can be sure of accessing the information they need.

Figure 1 LED single line next stop display on a Brighton And Hove vehicle.

What is accessible information?

"Accessible Information" is information provided about a local bus or coach service to passengers travelling on board it, provided in both audible and visible formats.
This requires information to be presented on display screen(s) so that the majority of seated passengers have an unobstructed view of the screen.

Audible information needs to be high enough above background level to be understood for the majority of seated passengers.

Figure 2 T Loop sign

For double deck vehicles the requirements apply to both decks of the vehicle.

The Regulations make provision for people who rely on hearing aids to access audible information. Audible information must be available to somebody using a hearing aid in conjunction with an Audio Frequency Induction Loop (T- Switch on a hearing aid) when they are seated in a priority seat or wheelchair space.

The Regulations are technology independent:
- an LED display would be acceptable as would a TFT.
- operators are free to choose how audible information is generated, including whether announcements are pre-recorded, whether text-to-speech software is used to generate them automatically, or whether the driver will announce them manually.

What information is required to be provided?

Route Information
This is required to be provided at each stopping place (not if vehicle drives past a stop).
- Name / number of service
- Final stopping point or direction of travel (i.e. clockwise)

Passengers must be notified at the end of route.

Stopping Place
This is required to be provided for each potential stopping place even if the vehicle drives past the stop without stopping.
- Name of next scheduled stopping place

This has to be provided once the vehicle has left or passed the previous stopping place. It shall be long enough before the scheduled stopping place to allow a passenger to get off – i.e. so time to process the name and the bell to be pushed in time to safely stop. The timing of announcement could depend on distance between stops.

Where a hail and ride section is used passengers shall be alerted at the stopping place preceding its start, and before the scheduled stopping place following its end.

Diversion Information
Where diverted or will be diverted it is required that passengers are alerted that the vehicle is not able to stop at scheduled stopping places.

Figure 3 TFT next stop display on a Metrobus vehicle in Crawley

On what services must information be provided?

Information must be provided on board buses and coaches operating local services in England, Scotland and Wales, except where exempted.
Exemptions are:
- There is no requirement for any service operated under a Section 19 permit or any service using a vehicle first used before 1 October 2023 and operated under a Section 22 permit to comply.
- Long distance services – but where the majority of a service is "local" (two stops within 15 miles) in nature the Regulations apply.
- Excursions and Tours.
- Demand responsive transport.
- Closed door home-to-school transport.
- Minibuses - vehicles designed to carry sixteen or fewer passengers.
- Heritage services - services using vehicles first used before 1 January 1973 are not required to comply.

Passenger Needs

Operators are encouraged to think not only of the steps they must take to comply with the legal obligations, but also how they can use accessible information to enhance the experience of all passengers. In doing so, it is recommended that they should engage with organisations representing passengers, and particularly disabled passengers, to ensure that their solution is fit for purpose.

When must Information be provided?

The requirement to comply with the Regulations is based upon the age of the vehicle:
* Vehicles first used on or after 1 October 2024 from first use.
* Vehicles first used on or after 1 October 2019 must comply from 1 October 2024.
* Vehicles first used between 1 October 2014 and 30 September 2019 must comply
* from 1 October 2025.
* Vehicles first used between 1 January 1973 and 30 September 2014 must comply
* from 1 October 2026.

For new vehicles after 1 October 2024 the vehicles must provide uninterrupted line of sight between at least one display at each wheelchair space on the vehicle.
Where a vehicle has audio visual equipment installed before 1 October 2023 then the equipment does not need to meet the full requirements of the Regulations until 1 October 2031

Grant Opportunity for Small Operators

The government has allocated £4.65m to support smaller operators to comply with the Regulations, RTIG have been asked to manage the grant on behalf of the Department for Transport.
In the coming weeks RTIG will be launching a grant scheme to support the cost of fitting vehicles with audio visual equipment. This will be targeted at the smallest operators.
Once further information on the grant, the timings and process will be available at
https://rtig.org.uk/aig

Applicability of this advice note

This note is intended to provide and introduction to the regulations and their requirements. For complete information on the requirements and what is required for compliance the regulations themselves must be used.

About RTIG

RTIG is a community group which seeks to establish, support and share good practice in the use of information and communications technology in public transport.
With members from public authorities, transport operators, consultancies and the systems industry, we have an impartial perspective and support the common good. We have an excellent relationship with national Government and work closely with other community groups.