

# Accessible travel policy

Valid from April 2025



WE'RE WITH YOU

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# A. Commitments to providing assistance

Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) is the parent company for the following train companies. It runs the largest rail network in the country, operating services across the south-east of England under the following brands:

## **Southern**

Extensive network from London to stations across Sussex and Surrey, the south coast and suburban 'metro' services across south London and to Milton Keynes via Watford Junction.

## **Gatwick Express**

Direct services between London Victoria and Gatwick Airport (and some services towards Brighton).

## **Thameslink**

Network of services linking many stations north of London such as Bedford, Cambridge, Peterborough, St Albans with destinations south of the River Thames via St Pancras International such as London Bridge, East Croydon, Sutton, Gatwick Airport, Brighton, Horsham, Sevenoaks and Rainham (Kent).

## **Great Northern**

Services from London King's Cross to Peterborough, King's Lynn via Cambridge and suburban services from Moorgate towards Hertford North, Welwyn Garden City and Stevenage.

GTR is fully committed to creating a more accessible and inclusive railway. We want all our customers to have the confidence to travel on our network no matter their access need, or the level of support they require.

We operate one of the busiest and most complex networks in the country and understand that we need to provide a robust system of support for all our customers.

To achieve these aims, we are:

- Ensuring the processes we have in place lead to a high level of assistance at all stages of the journey
- Treating all our customers as individuals and providing them with the assistance that meets their specific needs
- Making our trains, our stations (those stations managed by us) and facilities as accessible as possible
- Providing the training our people (those employed by us) need to be able to provide excellent customer service and assistance to disabled customers
- Working with industry partners to maximise opportunities to improve accessibility on our network, which includes working with Network Rail on the accessibility support at their managed stations and on the provision of lifts across stations which serve our customers
- Exploring innovative solutions to enhance how we provide assistance to our customers

This document forms our Accessible Travel Policy and describes how we will work towards achieving these commitments. It also explains the processes we have in place, sources of accessibility information and our approach to making accessibility improvements on our network.

Our Accessible Travel Policy document is accompanied by our customer leaflet, 'Making Rail Accessible'. This leaflet describes what customers can expect from us throughout their journey, including if things do not go as planned. Customers can obtain a copy on our websites. It is also available at all staffed stations where our train services call.

Alternative format versions of our Accessible Travel Policy and Making Rail Accessible are readily available to download from our websites.

We are committed to maximising the availability of the 'Making Rail Accessible' leaflet at public places and will work in partnership with our stakeholders to make it available at places like council offices, libraries, community centres and schools.

Copies of our Accessible Travel Policy can be found at:

**[www.southernrailway.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/accessible-travel-policy](http://www.southernrailway.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/accessible-travel-policy)**

**[www.thameslinkrailway.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/accessible-travel-policy](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/accessible-travel-policy)**

**[www.greatnorthernrail.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/accessible-travel-policy](http://www.greatnorthernrail.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/accessible-travel-policy)**

**[www.gatwickexpress.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/accessible-travel-policy](http://www.gatwickexpress.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/accessible-travel-policy)**

Information on the accessibility of our stations can be found at:

**[www.southernrailway.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information](http://www.southernrailway.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information)**

**[www.thameslinkrailway.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information)**

**[www.greatnorthernrail.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information](http://www.greatnorthernrail.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information)**

**[www.gatwickexpress.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information](http://www.gatwickexpress.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information)**

## **A1. Booking and providing assistance**

Booking assistance before travel is entirely optional.

For booked assistance, we participate in a national booking system called Passenger Assist, which provides several methods to book assistance before the journey, such as:

- Telephone
- Web form
- Passenger Assistance by Transreport app

Our Assisted Travel Team can arrange booked assistance. They can also give travel advice (e.g. timetable information, station staffing details) for travel on our services (Southern, Thameslink, Great Northern and Gatwick Express) as well as any other train operator's services during the time those services operate. Details of these times are included on the individual station pages of the National Rail Enquiries website, **[nationalrail.co.uk](http://nationalrail.co.uk)**

Through Passenger Assist, we will coordinate arrangements with other train operators – for example, if the journey involves changing onto a service operated by another operator, we can book assistance for the whole journey.

When booking assistance, our trained team of advisors will look at individual customer needs and will plan journeys by checking specific details, including station accessibility information and staff availability via the National Rail Enquiries website. They will ensure that appropriate assistance is in place at each stage of the journey. We will send customers confirmation of the arrangements – normally by email (information can be provided by post or alternative format such as large print by request).

We commit to staff our Assisted Travel team in a way that we will answer calls as quickly as possible; we aim to answer calls within 60 seconds with most of them answered within five minutes. We aim to respond to online booking requests within two hours.

For every booking confirmation, we provide a link to a short survey within the booking confirmation to facilitate feedback regarding the booking and journey experience to help us to monitor and continuously improve our performance.

Our dedicated assistance team are 24 hours a day, except on Christmas day.

### **Southern/Gatwick Express**

Telephone: **0800 138 1016**

NGT Text: **0800 138 1018**

### **Thameslink/Great Northern**

Telephone: **0800 058 2844**

NGT Text: **0800 138 1018**

### **Recommended notice period for booking assistance**

We recommend that assistance is booked two hours before travel in order for us to make appropriate arrangements. However, we fully understand that booking is a choice, and many people choose to travel spontaneously. Many of our stations and trains have staff available to offer both unbooked and booked assistance.

If your journey involves another train company, we may need to confirm part of your journey with them. This might depend on their contact centre opening hours. If this is the case, we will discuss options with you.

## Assistance at our stations

We manage c240 stations. These vary widely with regards to physical facilities (e.g. stations with steps, lifts, level boarding humps) and staffing levels (ranging from unstaffed, staffed for part of the day through to fully staffed at all times that trains operate). We apply the ORR's categories for station accessibility. Further details regarding station accessibility are available on our Station Information summary on our web sites or from Assisted Travel.

Whether customers pre-book assistance or prefer more flexibility, we recommend arriving 20 minutes prior to the train's scheduled departure time. The reason for this is to make sure arrangements are in place at the destination (or interchange) station such as the availability of staff and lifts. If there is insufficient time to check these arrangements, we may assist the customer onto the next available train.

At our stations, any of our staff can provide assistance. At many stations, customers can contact them at our ticket gates or the ticket office (notably at smaller stations) or via help points.

All our stations also have a designated meeting point where passengers who have booked assistance can meet with or contact our staff. Assisted Travel will advise of the location of meeting points when we confirm booked arrangements.

When booking assistance, our Assisted Travel team will establish each customer's specific requirement and identify the most appropriate option to enable them to make their journey. In the case of unstaffed stations, they will look at various options, including deploying staff from another station or if necessary, arranging alternative transport.

For unbooked assistance at our staffed stations, customers can ask a member of our station team, who will discuss their needs and make arrangements to ensure they reach their destination.

Similarly, when travelling from any of our unstaffed stations, customers can contact our off-site Control support team via the Help Point ('emergency and assisted travel button') or via freephone telephone number **0808 168 1238** (or text **07970 511077**).

The support team will ensure that customers can reach their destination, whether by train or if necessary, by providing alternative transport.

Many of our Southern trains also have either a Conductor or On-Board Supervisor (OBS), who are required to step onto the platform when the train arrives at the station, to identify any passengers requiring boarding assistance and to provide this assistance. On trains where on-board staff are present, they will provide alighting and boarding assistance at any unstaffed stations that we call at (including stations managed by other train operators).

Our station staff will provide assistance to board a train service and will advise any on-board staff of any customers with assistance needs, including any assistance needed at the destination.

Our station staff follow a handover procedure to ensure that colleagues at the destination (or interchange) station with designated responsibility for providing assistance are contacted by telephone via a dedicated telephone number and are aware of specific assistance required at the destination. This protocol is followed for all journeys, whether booked or not. In cases where a destination station is unstaffed, staff will make contact with a nearby station. They will identify whether a team member is available to go to the unstaffed station or to arrange an alternative journey plan to enable our customer to reach their destination.

When the train arrives at a GTR operated station, our staff will ensure that help leaving the train is available - we will do all we can to ensure that assistance is provided within five minutes of the train's arrival at its terminus station, where reasonably practicable. GTR does not manage all stations that serve our passengers and commit to working closely with those that manage these stations to deliver the same.

Our station and on-board staff will provide manual boarding ramps for customers who require assistance boarding/leaving trains whether travelling booked or unbooked.

At stations within our Thameslink Core (London St Pancras through to London Bridge), the accessible carriages stopping point will align with raised level boarding areas (or 'humps'). Staff are on hand at the level boarding areas, at all times that trains call to notify the destination station of any passenger requiring assistance and also to provide any assistance for passengers leaving the train.

On occasions when services are disrupted (or on occasions when a train's platform number is altered at short notice), we will provide information about changes via both audible (e.g. manual and automated announcements) and visual (display screens) at our stations. Our staff will always work with the customer to identify the best option to enable customers to reach their destination.

Our staff are all trained to proactively look out for any disabled passengers and to tailor any support as necessary.

## **Mobile Assistance Team**

We have completed our progressive roll out of this service across our network. Whilst some of the staff will be based at these stations, in most cases they will travel to them from a local 'hub' station.

We ask unbooked passengers who require boarding assistance to contact our Control support team 20 minutes before their train is due to depart. You can contact the team either via the Help Point ('emergency and assisted travel button') or via a freephone number (**0808 168 1238** or text **07970 511077**).



Information is provided at each of these stations to raise awareness of these arrangements. The team will then arrange appropriate assistance (usually sending mobile staff who are based a short distance from these stations).

For the latest information regarding the Mobile Assistance Teams trial and the stations which they cover, please visit:

**[www.southernrailway.com/mobileassistanceteam](http://www.southernrailway.com/mobileassistanceteam)**

**[www.thameslinkrailway.com/mobileassistanceteam](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/mobileassistanceteam)**

**[www.greatnorthernrail.com/mobileassistanceteam](http://www.greatnorthernrail.com/mobileassistanceteam)**

### **Assistance with onward travel**

Our staff will, where practicable, assist with any relevant onward travel, such as to the taxi rank, bus or tram stop and airport assistance point (within a station boundary). Information regarding onward travel is also available at our stations, on posters, from our staff and via display screens.

Our Assisted Travel team can also provide travel advice ahead of a journey, including information regarding local taxi companies. We will do all we reasonably and practicably can to ensure those taxi operators who provide taxis at our stations include the provision of accessible taxis and a reasonable number of drivers trained in disability awareness. We will build this into relevant contract negotiations going forward.

### **Station facilities and services**

We commit to ensuring that our station accessibility information is up to date on the National Rail Enquiries website, including details on step-free access, Assisted Travel, and staff help available including staffing times and meeting points for assistance.

We will ensure that information on the National Rail Enquiries and our own websites reflects any limitations or temporary changes to station lifts. In these circumstances, we will work with customers to find an appropriate solution. We ensure that our Assisted Travel team are briefed on any short-term limitations that may impact an accessible journey such as lift availability, temporary works at a station or engineering works.

### **Assistance with luggage**

We will do all practicable to provide assistance with luggage for disabled customers (and others who need this assistance) within our staffed stations and when boarding and alighting trains. This service is free of charge.

As a guide, where assistance is provided, it can only be provided with up to two items of luggage which should not exceed 30 x 70 x 90cm in size and a single item of hand luggage that must be capable of being held in the customer's lap. It is recommended to have pull-along cases and follow airline recommendations of not exceeding 23kg per bag.

Where luggage assistance has not been booked in advance, we will do our best to assist, but this may be limited by the availability of staff at short notice.

We don't offer seat reservations on any of our services, and our Assisted Travel team will make this clear at the booking stage. However, where a journey involves another operator's service that has reservable seats, our Assisted Travel team can make reservations for this part of the journey upon request.

### **Wheelchair spaces**

All our trains have wheelchair spaces within the standard class seating area only, which are marked on the outside of the carriage. We do not have wheelchair spaces within first-class areas. Wheelchair spaces aren't reservable, although our staff will do all they can to enforce wheelchair users' priority of wheelchair spaces. If all wheelchair spaces are occupied, they will work with the customer to identify the best option to enable them to reach their destination.

Our staff are briefed to make sure customers are not offered a ticket they cannot make use of (for example, due to no wheelchair spaces in first class).

### **Priority seating**

We also provide Priority Seating areas on all our trains for disabled, pregnant and older customers, and those carrying infants. We also acknowledge that customers may have a temporary need for a priority seat, for example, during medical treatment. Priority seats are clearly labelled on our trains and in many cases are designated with contrasting seat fabric. They are usually located close to exit doors, so they are more accessible to customers who need them.

To make it easier for customers who may need a seat, we have a Priority Seat card scheme to support requesting a Priority Seat from other customers.

Our staff will assist customers to a seat on the train if required and take all reasonable steps to ensure these areas are available to those who need them.

### **Assistance dogs**

Assistance dogs are welcome on all our services. We can also provide drinking water for assistance dogs at staffed stations.

We support the National Rail 'Assistance dog under seat' card which can be obtained free of charge from **National Rail Enquiries - Travel**.

## **A.2 Information Provision**

### **A.2.1 Accessible Travel Policy documentation including alternative formats**

We provide a customer guide that summarises this Accessible travel Policy, titled 'Making Rail Accessible'. This guide outlines practical information to enable disabled people to travel with confidence across our network.

Copies will be available from all our staffed stations, stations our trains call at managed by other operators, or from our Assisted Travel team and website (in PDF format). Easy read and audio versions of our ATP Policy and Making Rail Accessible can also be downloaded from our websites.

Copies are also provided to local stakeholder partners, including mobility forums and user groups. Guidance is also provided to these groups on how people can request further copies if required. We are committed to extending the availability of copies to further locations where public services (e.g. health care) are provided across our network.

This policy document, our 'Making Rail Accessible' leaflet and station and train accessibility information are all available in alternative formats online and on request via our Assisted Travel team, including audio and large print versions. We aim to provide alternative format documents within seven working days of a request. If this is not possible, we will advise within seven working days of the delivery timescale.

At each of our stations, we also provide signage at heights accessible to wheelchair users and visually impaired customers outlining how to obtain our 'Making Rail Accessible' leaflet and policy document.

### **A.2.2 Station and train accessibility information**

We will ensure station and train accessibility information is kept up to date and readily available to our customers. We make sure it is accessible using screen readers and other software with accessibility features, such as Adobe Reader. This information is also available in alternative formats on request within seven working days via our Assisted Travel team. If this is not possible, we will advise within seven working days of the delivery timescale.

Station information is also available via the National Rail Enquiries website, and we are working with industry partners to improve this information, including more detailed station classifications.

Information on the accessibility of our stations can be found within the Station information pages on our websites at:

**[www.southernrailway.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information](http://www.southernrailway.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information)**

**[www.thameslinkrailway.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information)**

**[www.greatnorthernrail.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information](http://www.greatnorthernrail.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information)**

**[www.gatwickexpress.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information](http://www.gatwickexpress.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/station-information)**

Information on the accessibility of our trains can be found at:

**[www.southernrailway.com/fleetaccessibility](http://www.southernrailway.com/fleetaccessibility)**

**[www.thameslinkrailway.com/fleetaccessibility](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/fleetaccessibility)**

**[www.greatnorthernrail.com/fleetaccessibility](http://www.greatnorthernrail.com/fleetaccessibility)**

**[www.gatwickexpress.com/fleetaccessibility](http://www.gatwickexpress.com/fleetaccessibility)**

To make it easy for all customers to plan their journeys, we have produced a map showing the level of step-free access for all stations on our network. We regularly review and update this to ensure it is as accurate as possible to help customers understand which journeys are more accessible. This will not include any temporary changes to step-free access, e.g. out of order lifts, which are provided on the National Rail Enquiries website. This map is available in a downloadable PDF format on our website.

We provide up to date accessibility information to our station staff to ensure they can provide the best possible assistance to our disabled customers and help them complete their journey. All our customer facing staff have access to live information to enable them to deliver assistance. All on-board and many station-based staff have mobile devices to provide access to train running information and live bulletins provided by our control centre. Our teams have access to a variety of key 'live' accessibility information. Examples include:

- Lift status email reports
- Live train toilet service status app
- Phone directory app to enable quick contact with staff able to provide assistance at stations
- An online 'Accessibility library' providing access to the latest briefing materials

Our Assisted Travel team are also able to provide customers with detailed information regarding station and train accessibility.

Throughout our franchise, we have made a significant investment in our fleet through both the introduction of new trains and refurbishing our existing fleet to ensure our trains are accessible for all customers. As a result of this investment, accessible features on our trains include:

- Priority seating on all trains
- Accessible spaces with low-level passenger alarms
- Audible and visual information systems
- Boarding ramps
- Accessible toilets (most of our trains)

For train accessibility information please see:

**[www.southernrailway.com/fleetaccessibility](http://www.southernrailway.com/fleetaccessibility)**

**[www.thameslinkrailway.com/fleetaccessibility](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/fleetaccessibility)**

**[www.greatnorthernrail.com/fleetaccessibility](http://www.greatnorthernrail.com/fleetaccessibility)**

**[www.gatwickexpress.com/fleetaccessibility](http://www.gatwickexpress.com/fleetaccessibility)**

We continuously work towards improving accessibility at our stations and with others who manage stations which serve our customers, including through our annual accessibility fund, we commit to improving things such as:

- Accessible toilets
- Accessible seating
- Signage and wayfinding
- Visible and audible customer information
- Induction loops
- Help points

We also work in partnership with Network Rail and the Department for Transport (DfT) to deliver large scale accessibility improvements such lift schemes through the Access for All fund.

### **A.2.3 Passenger journey information**

We want to make sure it is easy for all our customers to find important information, especially for those who are not frequent rail users. At all times, we will try to provide clear and accurate information to our customers, especially during times of disruption. We will take into account that customers have a wide range of impairments at every stage of the journey - whether at home, online, on the move - at the station or on the train, to ensure everybody has access to this information.

When we provide rail replacement buses or coaches for planned disruption, we use accessible vehicles. In circumstances when this is not possible, our Assisted Travel and customer facing teams will always identify an alternative journey plan to enable disabled customers to complete their journey.

We have processes in place to ensure that information is available to customers, our staff and other rail operators when there are any changes to accessible facilities at stations. We provide regular updates for customers on any temporary changes to accessible facilities at our stations on our website, which provides the same information available on the National Rail Enquiries website. Where a station facility is unavailable, we will work with our customers to find a suitable alternative.

On-board facilities are essential to ensuring all customers have a comfortable journey. We have robust processes in place to monitor and maintain the accessible facilities on our trains. However, despite this, sometimes an accessible facility may not be available, such as an accessible toilet. Our station staff will check whether an accessible toilet is available before providing boarding assistance to any customer who might need it. Where an accessible toilet is not available, our staff will inform the customer and discuss with them if they still wish to travel on that train or agree on a suitable alternative, such as travelling on a different service. Our staff are not able to assist customers using the toilet.

During the journey, disabled passengers can obtain live information on services including during times of disruption via a number of sources – our Control support team via help points ('emergency and assisted travel button') or via a freephone number (**0808 168 1238** or text **07970 511077**), or by contacting our social media team via X, formerly known as Twitter (24-hour coverage).

We also have a dedicated assisted travel section on each of our branded websites outlining contact details for assisted travel. We provide useful information such as our Wheelchair & Scooter policy and travel support resources, including Priority Seat Card, Travel Support Card and our Easy Travel Guide.

**[www.southernrailway.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/support-whilst-travelling](http://www.southernrailway.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/support-whilst-travelling)**

**[www.thameslinkrailway.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/support-whilst-travelling](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/support-whilst-travelling)**

**[www.greatnorthernrail.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/support-whilst-travelling](http://www.greatnorthernrail.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/support-whilst-travelling)**

**[www.gatwickexpress.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/support-whilst-travelling](http://www.gatwickexpress.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/support-whilst-travelling)**

## **Train departures and arrivals information**

At most of our stations, customer information is provided through customer information screens at various locations around the station and audio announcements. This ensures clear and consistent audio and visual information is provided on the platforms and other areas of the station.

Most of our stations also have help points for customers to contact a member of staff for assistance or information.

We are committed to providing clear visual and audio information to customers whilst they are onboard our trains. We understand how important it is for accurate on-board information to be provided. All of our trains have public address systems that can be used for automated and manual announcements including 'next stop' announcements. Services on parts of our Southern network also have Conductors and On-board Supervisors.

We are committed to ensuring drivers and other on-board staff are given the training they need to make clear and informative announcements. Our on-board staff all have access to real-time journey information.

We understand how important it is to provide customers with the information they need during disruption and on some of our trains we are also able to provide customers with up-to-date information directly through our information screens and automated announcements.

On all our services, calling pattern information will be provided to ensure customers have enough time to prepare to disembark when they reach their destination.

## **Connections and wayfinding**

We have clear signage in place to ensure disabled customers can navigate easily and confidently around our stations. We regularly monitor how effective this signage is and look at ways to improve this both in our stations and with our industry partners at Network Rail managed stations where our services call.

We understand how important it is to work closely with local authorities across our network. Our Stakeholder Managers have regular discussions with local authorities, MPs, Rail User Groups etc. to ensure signage is clear and up to date with further input from our Access Advisory Panel to ensure signage remains accurate. For example, accessible entrances, onward travel options, step-free routes, publicising any temporary changes in the local vicinity or to station accessibility. We ensure that signage is available at our stations to help passengers locate the 'Town Centre' and provide 'Local Information Posters' and 'Onward Travel Posters' for nearby bus stops etc. At some larger stations, live local bus information screens are also provided.

We also work in partnership with the airport operators on our network (Gatwick and Luton) to make sure that customers receive seamless assistance between the railway (train) and airport (plane). For example, we work in partnership with the airports to provide clear wayfinding between the station and airport, and to make sure it is easy for customers to locate rail and airport assistance staff. For example, at Gatwick Airport station, we changed our branded signage to reflect the airport signage for consistency throughout the airport.

Our Assisted Travel team are trained to check accessibility information when making customer bookings through Passenger Assist. They are also regularly briefed about any changes to station accessibility or connections with other services. This ensures that where a customer books a journey that involves travel with more than one operator, our Assisted Travel team can provide accessibility information for their whole journey.



## Delays and disruption

There are times when our services may be disrupted. In addition to the provision of audible and visual information in our stations and on our trains, during these times our Assisted Travel team will try to proactively contact customers who have booked assistance through all reasonable means and using contact details provided.

Our mobile app and websites also show live train running information. Customers requiring assistance can also contact our off-site dedicated Control support team based at our control centre either via the Help Point ('emergency and assisted travel button') or via freephone telephone number **0808 168 1238** (or text **07970 511077**).

## Planned disruption - engineering works

We communicate planned engineering work in advance via audible and visual information across communication channels.

Our Assisted Travel team will also proactively contact anyone who has booked assistance with us through Passenger Assist to review any booked journeys affected by unplanned engineering works. They will work with customers to review alternative journey options and agree on a suitable alternative journey plan.

For customers who have provided a contact telephone number either our Assisted Travel team, station staff or our off-site team based at our Rail Operations Control centre will make reasonable efforts to inform them in advance and make alternative arrangements. If it is not possible to contact a customer who has booked through Passenger Assist in advance, our station staff (and on-board staff, where available) will have mobile phones. They will actively assist those customers who arrive at the station with making arrangements for a suitable alternative.

We will also use our website, X (formerly known as Twitter), and other communication methods to support and proactively provide information to customers during unplanned and planned disruption.

During unplanned disruption our stations and on-board teams are trained to proactively provide audible and visual information regarding for example delays, disruption or alternative transport.

We regularly check availability of facilities that support accessible travel such as station and on-board toilets, induction loops and audible/visual information systems. Customers are able to report any defects via our staff, and all customer relations channels including Twitter.

## **A.2.4 Information points, help points and contact centres**

We recognise the importance of providing our customers with clear, accurate and up to date information.

### **Information Points**

At our staffed stations, service information is available in person at ticket offices during advertised staffing hours, which are clearly signed within the station and from other station staff.

We will ensure that easily accessible information is available at all our stations.

At our larger stations, we provide clearly signed information points that are designed with ease of use by disabled passengers in mind, providing information such as timetables and how to obtain our 'Making Rail Accessible' leaflet. Whether the information point is staffed or unstaffed, we will ensure information is easy to locate (normally located on the station concourse) and as a minimum available whenever the ticket office is open. In all cases, we will ensure that information is available at a suitable height to enable all customers to access it.

### **Help Points**

At our unstaffed stations and many of our staffed stations, help points are in place to enable customers to speak directly with off-site teams, including National Rail Enquiries for train running information and our dedicated Assisted Travel support team, if required.

These are normally located at the station entrance or on the platform, primarily at unstaffed/partially staffed stations.

Typically they consist of a white circular wall mounted unit with two buttons and a speaker (fitted with an induction loop).

- The blue button (information) is for general enquiries such as train running information
- The green button (emergency) is for emergencies and immediate assisted travel support

Our station Help Points are tested by staff at regular intervals. Faults are triaged and raised with the relevant contractor with a seven day Service Level Agreement in place for response and resolution. Spare parts are held to expedite resolution and our contractor's performance is monitored and reviewed at periodic contract meetings.

## **Journey assistance from our Control support team**

In addition to contacting our off-site Control support team through our help points, customers are also able to speak to them via freephone **0808 168 1238** (or text **07970 511077**).

Our Control support Team can organise boarding assistance or other support during the journey as required. As with our station staff, they will undertake to understand the customer's specific requirements and based on the circumstances they will identify the most appropriate journey plan. This may involve redeploying staff from another station, dispatching mobile or on-board staff or arranging for alternative accessible transport.

We are committed to ensuring our staff, whether based in our station or in our Control centre, have up-to-date information available to them on:

- The facilities, services and accessibility of all the stations at which our trains call. For consistency, this will be through access to National Rail Enquiries station pages
- Timetables information
- Toilet status on our trains
- Information on fares and ticketing
- Information relating to connections with other operators' train services
- Information regarding the accessibility of other forms of onward transport
- Delays, disruption, diversions and emergencies which affect the advertised timetable

### **A.2.5 Websites**

We want as many people as possible to be able to use our websites. We are committed to working towards achieving the industry recognised Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which define how to make web pages and content more accessible for people with disabilities.

We also provide a link on our websites to access the 'Making Rail Accessible' leaflet and details of how to obtain it in accessible formats. We also offer guidance on how customers can provide feedback or make a complaint, and we include information on the availability of redress in the event something has gone wrong for an assistance booking.

If customers need assistance on our website content in a different format such as accessible PDF or large print, this can be requested via our Assisted Travel team.

## **A.3 Ticketing and fares**

We offer a range of options for purchasing tickets to suit all customer needs and preferences. Customers can buy tickets online, at ticket offices, from Ticket Machines and from on-board staff (where available).

If disabled customers are unable to purchase a ticket at a station before they travel due to our facilities being unavailable, they can buy a ticket without penalty at their destination or from on-board staff (where available). We will also ensure that any reduction they are entitled to is applied, such as the applicable discount for Disabled Persons Railcard holders.

Ticket machines are available at all our stations. These are low level for the convenience of wheelchair users and other disabled customers. They are enabled to issue tickets at the reduced rate for holders of a Disabled Persons Railcard and the holder's companion.

Many of our stations have automatic ticket gates, and where these are in place, there will always be at least one wide gate that is designed for disabled passengers. When a station with automatic gates is unstaffed or staff are not in attendance at the gates, we will leave these gates locked open.

### **Purchasing tickets in advance of the journey**

We will provide information to customers to advise them of any restrictions on our services that may mean they cannot make use of any tickets purchased in advance (such as accessibility of rolling stock or due to no wheelchair spaces in first class).

Further information or help on purchasing tickets can be found on our websites, or by speaking to a member of station or on-board staff.

We support the industry-wide schemes for our customers as follows:

## Disabled Persons Railcard

Customers who have a Disabled Persons Railcard are entitled to 1/3 off rail travel for them and a companion whenever they travel.

Further details on the Disabled Persons Railcard, including eligibility criteria and how to apply and other discounts, can be found at:

Website: **Disabled Persons Railcard | Official Retailer | National Rail**  
([disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk](https://disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk))  
Email: **[railcardhelp@nationalrail.co.uk](mailto:railcardhelp@nationalrail.co.uk)**  
Telephone: **\*0345 605 0525**  
Minicom/  
Textphone: **0345 601 0132**

\*Calls cost no more than calls to geographic numbers (01 or 02) and may be recorded for training and monitoring purposes.

**There are alternative discounts available for those with some disabilities, who do not have a Disabled Persons Railcard.**

### For those who are blind or visually impaired

If you are blind or visually impaired, you and one adult companion travelling with you are eligible for the following discounts:

<b>Ticket Type</b>	<b>Discount on adult fare</b>
First Class/Standard Anytime Singles or Returns	34% off
First Class/Standard Anytime Day Single	34% off
First Class/Standard Anytime Day Return	50% off

### Season tickets for blind or visually impaired customers

You can also buy one adult Season ticket that enables a companion to travel with you on National Rail services only, at no extra cost (so two people travel for the price of one). It doesn't have to be the same person travelling with you on every journey.

### To be eligible

Please take evidence of your visual impairment with you to prove your eligibility. It must be either a CVI/BP1/BD8 certificate or documentation from a recognised institution, for example, Social Services, your Local Authority or Blind Veterans UK. Tickets can be purchased from staffed National Rail station ticket offices.

## For those who are staying in their own wheelchair

If you are staying in your own wheelchair during a journey, you can get the following discounts below. Discounts are available on adult and child fares.

If you have a companion travelling with you, they are also eligible for the same discounts. Tickets can be purchased from staffed National Rail station ticket offices.

<b>Ticket Type</b>	<b>Discount on adult fare</b>
First Class/Standard Anytime Singles or Returns	34% off
First Class/Standard Anytime Day Single	34% off
First Class/Standard Anytime Day Return	50% off

## Senior Railcard

Customers who are 60 or over can buy a Senior Railcard. This gives a discount of up to 1/3 off most rail fares in the UK. Some restrictions apply in Southern England in the morning peak period, including on our services so please check before travelling.

Further details on this concessionary scheme can be found at:

Website: **Senior Railcard | Official Retailer | National Rail**  
([senior-railcard.co.uk](http://senior-railcard.co.uk))

Email: **[railcardhelp@nationalrail.co.uk](mailto:railcardhelp@nationalrail.co.uk)**

Telephone: **0345 3000 250**

## **A.4 Alternative accessible transport**

Please refer to the station accessibility information section for more details on the physical features and facilities at our stations, including step-free access.

For customers wishing to travel from or to one of our stations which is not accessible due to it being unstaffed at the time of the journey, or due to a physical feature (such as steps to platforms), we will identify the most appropriate journey option based on the customer's specific circumstances.

Wherever possible, we aim to ensure that customers can travel by train for as much of the journey as practicable. At unstaffed stations, we will consider whether staff can be deployed to provide assistance. In some cases (such as a disabled customer with reduced mobility being unable to travel due to the station, train or alternative transport being inaccessible) we may provide a free taxi (accessible, if required) between the inaccessible station and the nearest or most convenient accessible station. There is no additional cost for this service above the cost of the rail ticket.

For booked travel, our Assisted Travel team will consider every customer's specific requirements in advance of travel to organise a suitable journey plan. Similarly, for unbooked travel, the staff at our stations, on our trains and off-site will follow the same principle to enable customers to complete their journey.

### **Rail replacement buses**

Our bus supplier complies with relevant regulations including PSVAR subject to any official derogations. This contract is reviewed on an annual basis to consider any changes to increase the availability of accessible vehicles.

At least 12 weeks before all major engineering works, we take steps to assess our requirement for accessible vehicles to maximise their availability. Our approach is to ensure that the experience of disabled people when buses are provided closely resembles that of non-disabled people during all planned engineering works.

If we provide a taxi due to non-availability of a suitable (accessible) vehicle, we will do all we can to ensure the alternative transport waiting time is similar to the passengers' who can use a non-accessible bus/coach. Our staff are briefed ahead of any planned disruption to support disabled people. For example, they will consider suitable (sheltered) waiting facilities and access to toilets. If any delay is known for alternative transport and that it will be greater than 30 minutes beyond the original expected times, they will inform the customer immediately and maintain regular contact as required.

Not all local authorities have mandatory disability equality training in place when they issue taxi or minicab licences. Therefore, we can't guarantee that all drivers we use received such training.

## **A.5 Scooters and mobility aids**

### **Wheelchairs**

All our trains and boarding ramps are designed to safely accommodate wheelchairs (including powerchairs) within the designated spaces on board provided they are no greater than the following dimensions:

Width: 700mm

Length: 1,200mm

Weight: 300kg (including the user)

### **Mobility Scooters**

We recognise the importance of scooters as a mobility aid for many customers, especially as our station facilities vary widely, with the majority having a gap between the platform and train. Our policy is designed to enable scooter users to travel safely. We are always happy to assist customers to board and alight from our trains using manual boarding ramps (and level boarding at Thameslink stations between London St Pancras and London Bridge).

For safety reasons we can only accept scooters on our services that meet the following requirements:

Width: 700mm

Length: 1,200mm

Weight: 300kg (including the user)

Have a turning radius of no more than 1,500mm

Where the above dimensions are exceeded, we are also unable to provide journey support via an alternative vehicle.

We ask customers to always listen to the advice given by our staff and consider whether they are comfortable to steer it up a short steep ramp over the gap between the platform and train. Our staff will be unable to take the controls for the customer.

For customer safety, we ask that scooters are not driven above 3 miles per hour whilst at any station. Customers can place their scooter in the accessible space and should not block the area around the doors. When parked on board a train, scooters should be locked to prevent it rolling. We ask that scooter users transfer from their mobility scooter to the seating provided where possible.

Many rail replacement buses are unable to accept mobility scooters. If possible, our station teams may be able to store a mobility scooter, for collection later.



Scooter policies do vary between train operators. Some may not allow customers to take their scooter on board. If travelling with another operator, customers can check their scooter policy at **[nationalrail.co.uk](https://www.nationalrail.co.uk)** or by calling **08457 484950** or contact our Assisted Travel team.

Please see our Wheelchairs and Mobility scooters guide at:

**[www.southernrailway.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/mobility-scooters-and-wheelchairs](https://www.southernrailway.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/mobility-scooters-and-wheelchairs)**

**[www.thameslinkrailway.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/mobility-scooters-and-wheelchairs](https://www.thameslinkrailway.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/mobility-scooters-and-wheelchairs)**

**[www.greatnorthernrail.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/mobility-scooters-and-wheelchairs](https://www.greatnorthernrail.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/mobility-scooters-and-wheelchairs)**

**[www.gatwickexpress.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/mobility-scooters-and-wheelchairs](https://www.gatwickexpress.com/travel-information/travel-help/assisted-travel/mobility-scooters-and-wheelchairs)**

## **A.6 Delays, disruption and emergencies**

We understand the impact that disruption to our services can have on all passengers and in particular those who are disabled. Our staff will always work with passengers on an individual basis, if necessary, to ensure they are supported and able to complete their journey - whether on an alternative train service or via a suitable (accessible if required) replacement vehicle.

We will assist customers in making connections including when the platform is changed at short notice. During periods of significant disruption, we will, where possible and if necessary, deploy additional staff from head office roles to support our rostered station teams.

We will also make all reasonable efforts to provide replacement facilities that are accessible, for example during building works to a station.

As stated in section A.4 above, we source rail replacement buses via a supplier which complies with relevant regulations subject to any official derogations.

If an inaccessible bus is provided for unplanned disruption, we will ensure that a suitable alternative taxi is arranged. Our staff (whether on-site or via our help points) will identify and organise suitable alternative transport based on the circumstances, arranging an accessible taxi if required.

For passengers who have booked assistance through Passenger Assist, whose journey has been disrupted, we will do all we reasonably can to make contact using telephone details provided when the booking was made. Our Assisted Travel team will check alternative journey options, and with input from the customer will identify the most appropriate alternative journey plan - considering alternative rail services, rail replacement buses or taxi transfers. This information will be provided both aurally and/or by email according to the passenger's preferences.

## **Emergency situations**

We carry out emergency planning exercises, which include due consideration of the needs of disabled people.

There are information posters on our trains outlining what to do in an emergency. In most cases, it is safest to remain on the train and wait for instructions.

Our Assisted Travel team can explain the emergency information that is displayed on our trains to our customers upon request.

Passenger alarms are fitted to all of our trains and can be used for contacting the driver during emergency situations or circumstances such as:

- If the ramp isn't deployed at the destination station
- Disruption resulting in the train not stopping at the destination station.

On some trains, additional low-level alarms are located close to wheelchair spaces, and our staff will ensure these are made available to customers when providing boarding assistance.

In an emergency such as evacuating a station or train, our staff are trained to work with the emergency services to assist disabled people. In such situations, disabled customers should follow their instructions, and they will make all necessary arrangements to facilitate safe assistance.

Each of our stations has its own detailed station emergency plan which takes into account the needs of disabled passengers. In case of emergency, trained staff, with the assistance of the emergency services where applicable, will assist passengers to a safe place.

## A.7 Station facilities

### Left luggage

Although we don't operate any left luggage facilities, they are available at Gatwick Airport, London Victoria, London St Pancras International and King's Cross stations, all with step-free access. These facilities are provided by the Excess Baggage Company who charge for this service. The Excess Baggage staff will take the luggage from customers at their reception following security checks and will lock it away securely until the customer returns to collect it. More details on this service can be found online at **[excess-baggage.com](https://www.excess-baggage.com)** or by calling **0800 524 4822**.

### Third-party provided facilities

We will do all reasonably practicable to ensure that any services and facilities provided by a third party are as accessible as possible such as not locating facilities that would create an obstruction. We will build this into relevant contract negotiations going forward.

### Disabled (Blue Badge) parking

We have car parks at most of our stations, and the majority of our station car parks have one or more marked bays for Blue Badge parking and are covered by CCTV. These are generally the space(s) closest to the station entrance in the car park. Parking is free for Blue Badge holders. Parking with a Blue Badge is only permitted in Blue Badge bays. However, if all Blue Badge bays are occupied, Blue Badge holders may still park free of charge in a standard bay.

Some of our car parks have automatic number plate recognition in place. At these car parks, Blue Badge holders will need to register either online or by telephone. Registration can either be carried out annually (through our online car parking portal) or on a daily basis by telephone. Please note that the registration is only for that specific vehicle/number plate.

We make regular checks to prevent misuse of the spaces. We have introduced 'Space Thief' signage to enable easy reporting of any abuse of Blue Badge bays to our car park operator to prevent misuse.

Parking on yellow or red lines, reserved bays or outside of designated bays is likely to result in a penalty notice.

We will ensure our bays are compliant with the DfT Accessible Stations Code of Practice or will seek a derogation from the DfT where applicable.

## **Replacement facilities**

Where accessible facilities are less than that normally provided (and anticipated to be unavailable for a significant amount of time), we will review the situation and where possible will provide replacement facilities. We will always put the necessary arrangements in place to ensure our disabled customers are supported at every stage of their journey.

## **Station entrances**

We commit to not permanently close any entrances or gates at our stations if this will result in a reduction in accessibility to any platform or facility without consultation with appropriate stakeholders such as the DfT, Transport Focus, London TravelWatch, our Access Advisory Panel or local access groups. We will always consider the needs of our disabled customers' needs when restricting or temporarily closing access points at our stations.

## **A.8 Redress**

Delivering a railway that enables all passengers to travel with confidence is important to us. Customers who have not received the level of assistance they would reasonably expect after they've made a booking can contact us via our customer relations team. If a booked assistance fails then customers are asked to contact us as soon as possible, and to include the ticket or proof of purchase and an overview of what went wrong, and we will take appropriate action including arranging to refund the ticket cost.

If a journey involves multiple train or station operators, we will liaise with them during our investigation to provide a clear response. If the substantive part of an assistance failure is the responsibility of another train operating company (i.e. in cases where the failure took place when travelling with another operator), we will transfer the complaint to them on and tell the customer we have done so.

Whether the assistance was booked or not, we investigate any complaints, take appropriate action, and provide the customer with redress if appropriate.

Our complaint handling procedure sets out further details around what customers can expect from us in the event of things going wrong.

Customers also have the right to contact the Rail Ombudsman ([railombudsman.org](https://railombudsman.org)) to seek further redress if they are not satisfied with our response. Our complaint handling procedure sets out more detail on what customers can expect from us and can be found on our websites, including within our passenger charter.

# **B. Strategy and management**

## **B.1 Strategy**

Our Operational Excellence Director has accountability for accessibility at GTR. This section outlines our strategy to deliver an accessible railway by working constructively with disabled passengers, training and empowering our staff and measuring the success of our Accessible Travel Policy to encourage more disabled people, across the range of disabilities to travel on our services.

## **B.2 Management arrangements**

The provision of support for all our disabled customers has always been an integral part of how we plan and deliver our rail services.

Our whole management and executive team champion accessibility and are supporting the needs of disabled people. The accessibility team is part of the Customer Experience team, led by the Head of Customer Experience. The Accessibility Lead manages our Accessibility team which consists of our Accessibility Engagement Manager and Accessibility Improvement Manager. As part of the Customer Experience team, they ensure all areas of the business are aware of their responsibilities to disabled people.

The Accessibility Lead is responsible for ensuring that relevant commitments within our franchise to accessible travel are delivered:

- Our Access Advisory Panel - A critical passenger group, representing disabled passengers (See section B3 for details)
- Our Accessibility mystery shopping programme - deploy mystery shoppers representing a range of impairments across our network, typically 30 journeys per quarter (see section B for details)
- Minor Works fund - accessibility fund of up to c£700k per annum to deliver enhancements at stations (see section B4 for details)
- Our Try a Train programme - programme of events to enable groups of disabled people and others who wish to increase their confidence to travel with a journey and event (see section B5 for details)

We have also established an Accessible Travel Programme Steering Group which has representatives from departments across GTR. This group reports into the GTR Customer Experience Group, which is chaired by our Chief Operating Officer.

We also ensure an ongoing focus on delivering accessible services through our growing network of Access Ambassadors - managers and customer facing staff from across GTR who are passionate about accessibility and take ownership for ensuring excellent, accessible services are implemented within their specific areas.

Our Accessible Travel Policy imports requirements into our operating licence, which is issued by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR). Our Accessibility team have developed a series of systems to monitor compliance across our network and attend regular customer-focussed meetings to provide reports.

## **B.3 Monitoring and evaluation**

We monitor our service to disabled passengers in several ways and use their feedback to improve the services we provide.

Our Accessibility Team uses the methods detailed below to monitor our services and facilities to ensure that they comply with our policy commitments, as a minimum.

We track all complaints and praise made via Customer Relations or social media and provide periodic reports delivering insight from our passengers across our business.

Any failure to provide assistance is investigated and recorded on our safety system, with any findings or recommendations actioned. This includes addressing issues which may arise where staff have not acted in accordance with their requirements and training.

Our GTR Customer Experience Group considers passenger feedback on many matters and develops plans to improve our services and facilities. Each plan is overseen by an executive member who is responsible for its execution and ensuring individual managers and staff are aware of their areas of accountability. In the case of accessibility improvements, this is the Operational Excellence Director.

We monitor and evaluate performance through many methods:

**Access Advisory Panel** - The Access Advisory Panel comprises of a voluntary group of disabled passengers with a wide spectrum of impairments to support and challenge us in delivering accessible services. The AAP are our critical source of insight in many respects. We meet with our AAP bi-monthly, with frequent interaction and discussion between meetings. They have direct input into our project planning processes, offer best practice and are consulted on all aspects of delivering accessible services to shape the delivery of those services. As regular passengers on our network, they also provide ongoing journey reports to assist with improvement work. Our AAP also engage with our staff to encourage excellent performance both during their journeys, at panel meetings and station visits. Further details at:

**[www.southernrailway.com/accesspanel](http://www.southernrailway.com/accesspanel)**

**[www.thameslinkrailway.com/accesspanel](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/accesspanel)**

**[www.greatnorthernrail.com/accesspanel](http://www.greatnorthernrail.com/accesspanel)**

**[www.gatwickexpress.com/accesspanel](http://www.gatwickexpress.com/accesspanel)**

**Assisted Travel surveys** - For every booking confirmation, we provide a link to a short survey within the booking confirmation to facilitate feedback regarding the booking and journey experience to help us monitor and continuously improve our performance. These surveys are anonymous and used as a measure of our customer satisfaction so will not generate a response following submission.

**Customer complaints** - Every complaint is recorded and passed to the relevant manager for investigation to ensure root cause issues are resolved and necessary action taken. All comments and complaints that we receive are categorised so that we can evaluate our performance against each type of complaint.

**Regular meetings with industry partners** - Key aspects of delivering accessible services such as lift availability are reviewed regularly by our executive team in partnership with Network Rail. These sessions focus on reviewing critical trend information to ensure any existing and emerging risks are visible and timely action is taken. This approach supports joint actions to be identified and taken forward across facilities (e.g. lift provision at all stations serving our customers) and assistance delivery (notably at those Network Rail managed stations which serve our customers).

**Industry data** - We use qualitative and quantitative data compiled from industry sources, including the Office of Road and Rail and Passenger Assist to monitor our service.

**Service quality regime on stations and trains** – We usually have a team of service quality auditors who carry out regular audits of customer facilities and service on stations and trains. These cover the availability of equipment and facilities, staff levels, cleanliness, upkeep and repair. We normally audit a minimum of 156 stations and 388 trains each month.

As part of the service quality regime we have mystery shoppers travelling on our network performing assessments at our stations and on our trains. The shoppers assess the availability, helpfulness and friendliness of our customer facing colleagues. The mystery shopping regime requires 25% of our assessments each month to be performed by shoppers who have additional needs. These can range from passengers with restricted mobility, impaired vision or passengers travelling with a pushchair.

Our results are shared with the DfT every month and they are published on our website.

**External rail industry surveys** – We also use data from external rail industry bodies to evaluate our performance on accessibility issues. Our main source is the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS), which measures customer satisfaction and takes place every six months and the Wavelength study. We also run a monthly customer satisfaction survey (CSS) which mirrors the NRPS.

The NRPS and CSS results cover the wider passenger experience and also are broken down by:

- Whether respondents are disabled
- Whether they have booked assistance
- Whether this assistance was delivered to their satisfaction
- Whether the facilities at the station met their needs as a disabled person



## B.4 Access improvements

We are committed to ensuring compliance with PRM-TSI and National Technical Specification Notices (NTSNs) and the DfT Accessible Railway Stations design standards when installing or refurbishing our trains or facilities at our stations. Where compliance is not achievable after every effort possible has been made, we commit to applying for derogations against NTSN/PRM-TSI and/or the DfT Accessible Railway Stations design standards.

We commit to spending up to £700k per annum through our Accessibility Minor Works fund on a range of projects to enhance accessibility at stations across our route including:

- Installation of accessible toilets
- Improving drop off areas
- New customer information and public address systems
- Improved information desks
- Signage enhancements
- Automated doors for waiting lounges and booking halls

Some examples of Minor Works improvements currently being delivered include:

- Streatham Common - widened entrance doors
- East Croydon and Chichester signage improvements
- Enhanced customer information screen and public address at various stations
- Additional 'Wide Aisle Ticket Gates' at Tooting to support the Access for All lift scheme.

We review our Accessible Travel Policy on an annual basis, taking customer feedback into account to make continuous improvements.

We continue to work with Network Rail, DfT, TfL and local Stakeholders to campaign for significant investment to provide step-free facilities at our stations. The main source of funding is through the Access for All Programme (AfA), although GTR engages with other stakeholders to find match contributions to support the cost of scheme design and delivery. GTR has championed additional investment for lifts as a key enabler for accessible travel, for example at both Royston and Harlington stations.

The following GTR managed stations have recently seen AfA lift schemes completed: East Grinstead, Crowborough, Catford, Streatham, Finsbury Park and Tooting.

Further schemes that are currently awarded funding (by DfT) to receive step-free access solutions include:

Alexandra Palace, Battersea Park, Biggleswade, Cricklewood, Flitwick, Hertford North, Leatherhead, Luton, Mill Hill Broadway, Palmers Green, Peckham Rye, South Croydon, Wivelsfield and Legrave.

We continue to support the AfA programme. We are working with local authorities on developing feasibility studies/designs for locations like Elephant and Castle and Loughborough Junction.

In addition to ongoing infrastructure enhancements, GTR have progressively introduced a range of resources to support accessible travel. Recent improvements include:

- **Aira App** - Launched in partnership with Thomas Pocklington Trust, provides navigational guidance for blind and visually impaired customers and is now available at all of our managed stations
- **Easy Guides** (also available in Easy Read format) - Aimed primarily at providing people with learning disabilities with increased confidence to travel
- **Sign Live** - Connects users with trained interpreters who provide British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation via a smartphone when interacting with our station and contact centre colleagues
- **Sanitary bins** - Provided in all of our male toilet cubicles, in partnership with Prostate Cancer UK
- **Fleet Audio Guide** - Aimed at blind and visually impaired customers describing our Class 700 Thameslink trains. Further guides are planned for 2025

Further details at:

**[www.southernrailway.com/accessiblity/support-whilst-travelling](http://www.southernrailway.com/accessiblity/support-whilst-travelling)**

**[www.thameslinkrailway.com/accessibility/support-whilst-travelling](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/accessibility/support-whilst-travelling)**

**[www.greatnorthernrail.com/accessibility/support-whilst-travelling](http://www.greatnorthernrail.com/accessibility/support-whilst-travelling)**

**[www.gatwickexpress.com/accessibility/support-whilst-travelling](http://www.gatwickexpress.com/accessibility/support-whilst-travelling)**

We have also introduced a series of videos (which include captions and BSL) to highlight how we make rail accessible at all stages of the journey - 'Planning your journey', 'What's available at the station', 'Getting on board' and 'Arriving at your destination' - available on our Assisted Travel pages as follows:

**[www.southernrailway.com/accessibility/assisted-travel](http://www.southernrailway.com/accessibility/assisted-travel)**

**[www.thameslinkrailway.com/accessibility/assisted-travel](http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/accessibility/assisted-travel)**

**[www.greatnorthernrail.com/accessibility/assisted-travel](http://www.greatnorthernrail.com/accessibility/assisted-travel)**

**[www.gatwickexpress.com/accessibility/assisted-travel](http://www.gatwickexpress.com/accessibility/assisted-travel)**

## **B.5 Working with disabled customers, local communities and local authorities**

Our Access Advisory Panel provide critical insight on all aspects of providing accessible services, as outlined in Sec B3 (Monitoring and evaluation).

Projects that the panel has helped to drive have included the development of industry-leading support resources such as our Communication Guide and Travel Support Card. They also helped us with station developments, including our annual minor works fund, staff training packages, scooter and wheelchair guide and preparation of this Assisted Travel Policy.

We also consult with the following organisations and include their ideas where possible:

- Transport Focus
- Local authorities including access groups
- Thomas Pocklington Trust
- Self-advocacy groups
- Rail User Groups
- Charities
- Schools and Colleges
- Community Rail Partnerships
- Luton Airport Authority
- Gatwick Airport Limited

We actively seek passenger feedback through monthly Meet the Manager sessions, and our senior managers frequently meet with disabled passengers to gain insight into our ongoing focus on accessible travel.

We also have an ongoing programme of 'Try a Train Events'. These provide an ideal opportunity for those who lack confidence travelling by train to visit our stations and to experience a train journey. The events are aimed at those who have any form of disability or access needs who wish to build their confidence when travelling. The trips are also available to those who may encounter other barriers to travelling, e.g. senior citizens, non-English speakers. During the event, we will tailor the agenda to the group's specific needs and area of interest.

A typical 'Try a Train' consists of:

- Introduction to the station layout including car parking, onward travel and various station facilities
- Overview of ticketing options information available including ticket office, ticket machines and smart cards
- Meet the local station manager and station teams
- A chance to sample a train to a relevant destination of interest

By the end of the trip, our aim is for participants to feel that they have experienced a complete journey that will encourage further travel with confidence, with any anxieties or concerns fully addressed. We have carried out more than 50 events since the programme commenced in April 2016.

There are several key industry partners that we work with to improve the accessibility of our services. Key organisations that represent the interests of customers with disabilities - including the Office for Rail and Road, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, the DfT, Transport Focus and London TravelWatch.

We will actively promote the availability of assisted travel, with a particular focus on the customer leaflet, 'Making Rail Accessible'. As well as ensuring this leaflet is available at staffed stations our trains call at, we will via our stakeholder network do all we can to make it available at prominent locations where public services are provided. We will also advertise the leaflet on station posters, and via social media.

## B.6 Staff training

We know that staff training is of critical importance in removing barriers to access. Therefore, we have made disability equality training mandatory for all new members of staff who join the company. We also train our existing customer facing staff on how to assist disabled passengers. Key parts of the training are delivered by disabled facilitators whenever possible.

The current training is composed of several modules to provide our staff with the skills to meet the needs of customers and to be able to provide excellent service for disabled customers. This training is delivered in accordance with both legislation and our focus on enabling everyone to access our network with confidence.

The training covers legislation such as the Equality Act 2010, as well as practical exercises on how to assist and communicate with passengers from across the spectrum of disabilities. It is designed to deliver the nine training outcomes outlined by the ORR within their ATP Policy guidance:

- 1. Understanding disabled people and their everyday challenges:** challenging misconceptions and understanding barriers to access and inclusion.
- 2. Equality legislation:** exploring and understanding the Equality Act 2010.
- 3. Defining disability:** an introduction to the various definitions of disability and the appropriate terminology.
- 4. Recognising passengers who need assistance:** exploring physical and non-physical impairments to enable staff to assess individual needs and provide appropriate assistance.
- 5. Railway regulatory framework:** understanding regulations and policies that are relevant within the railway industry.
- 6. Passenger assist:** how it works for disabled passengers and the role of railway staff in delivering the service.
- 7. Communication:** finding a way to communicate with disabled people with patience, respect and dignity.
- 8. Accessibility in stations:** the identification of accessible features at the stations where staff work as well as at the key destination stations on our network.
- 9. Providing safe assistance:** Staff aware of their duty to ensure staff and passengers remain safe at all times.

Our Access Advisory Panel also participate in and have a crucial role in reviewing and updating our training materials on an ongoing basis. We use films highlighting the customer voice to demonstrate what disabled customers expect when travelling with us.

## **Role-specific training**

Customer facing staff also receive job-specific training on a local basis, including local procedures and facilities relevant to assisting passengers such as using station wheelchairs, lift facilities, induction loops and practical training such as deploying manual boarding ramps. We track the training records continuously.

We produce a series of staff briefings that contain set procedures and advice on how to help passengers who need assistance. These are available to customer facing teams via an online library to ensure that they always have access to up-to-date content.

During 2024 we have progressively introduced 'In Person' accessibility training for staff who interact with customers. This training, delivered by disabled trainers to small groups explores in detail various scenarios that our staff need to competently handle when providing assistance, and provides practical guidance including appropriate language and terminology.

We are looking to extend this training to other teams such as those who provide remote assistance from our Control support team during Spring 2025.

For many roles at the stations, we use additional staff employed by agencies. The agencies are provided with the same training material as our own staff and keep a record of training delivery.

## **Assisted Travel Team**

Our Assisted Travel team are also extensively briefed on accessibility awareness and receive appropriate refresher training. They are closely supported by our accessibility managers who regularly update them on any relevant information that may impact on accessible services such as any changes to our timetable or service alterations.

## **Future plans**

All new staff at all levels of the company, including senior managers, receive disability equality training that delivers the mandatory training outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 (as described above).

We will continue to ensure that all customer facing staff who interact directly with passengers at any time as part of their duties will receive accessibility training that delivers the mandatory outcomes 1-9.

We will also ensure that all staff will receive refresher training within two years of receipt of accessibility awareness training, and as a minimum of 2 years after that to ensure the mandatory training outcomes described above are maintained. We will use the various measures outlined in Section B2 (such as mystery shopping) to make sure that the required outcomes are being consistently delivered.

We recognise the importance of ensuring that any agency or contract staff providing services to passengers are able to support disabled passengers. Where reasonably practicable, we will ensure that any agency or contract staff employed on a temporary basis who provide services to passengers receive an appropriate level of accessibility awareness training which as a minimum delivers areas 6, 7 and 9 in the ORR mandatory training outcomes.

Any staff employed at a contact centre who provides information or advice directly to customers, whether directly employed or not, will receive appropriate accessibility awareness training that delivers outcomes 6 and 7 in the ORR training guidance.

Similarly, wherever reasonably practicable, we will include the requirement for drivers of rail replacement taxis and buses to receive appropriate accessibility awareness training within contractual discussions.

We will continue to develop training materials with input from disabled people through our extensive network of groups who provide insight and share experiences, including our Access Advisory Panel. We will also continue to monitor the experiences of disabled passengers through these groups as well as through our mystery shopping programme and other methods outlined in section B3 (Monitoring & Evaluation).

We provide ORR with an annual overview of our relevant staff training, including the training schedule and numbers of staff who have received it. At the time of submitting our Accessible Travel Policy, we will ensure that all statistics, legislation and language used in training are up to date. We regularly report to the ORR setting out progress against delivery of these staff training commitments.



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