

PRECIS:

Accessible and Inclusive Rail Travel for Disabled People





Introduction

The House of Commons Research Briefing on Access to Rail Travel for Disabled People (July 2022) highlights the legislative framework governing accessibility, ongoing challenges, and the improvements needed to create a fully accessible rail network. This precis, written in January 2025 by Octavius Infrastructure, extrapolates the key points of the research to address future Access for All (AfA) projects and sector challenges.

Key Legislation & Regulations

EQUALITY ACT 2010

Part 12 and Schedule 20: Provide legal rights for disabled passengers using trains, taxis, buses, and coaches.

Part 3: Requires service providers to make reasonable adjustments to avoid discrimination and ensure accessibility in the provision of goods, services, & facilities.

RETAINED EU LAW

Establishes EU-wide standards for rail accessibility and passenger rights, retained in UK law to maintain high accessibility standards.

ACCESSIBLE DESIGN AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The Joint Code of Practice from the UK and Scottish Governments sets design standards for station infrastructure, including car parks, ticket offices, and platforms. Adherence is mandatory whenever infrastructure is installed, renewed, or replaced as part of licensing conditions.

ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL POLICY

All station and train operators are required by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to publish and follow an Accessible Travel Policy. This policy outlines procedures and services for assisting disabled passengers.

TRAIN ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

Operators of mainline trains, light rail, and trams were required to meet accessibility standards by 1 January 2020, though some dispensations allowed delays. While most trains are now compliant, full compliance across all rail vehicles remains an ongoing challenge.

Ongoing Policy Issues

ACCESSIBILITY GAPS

Despite robust legislation, many railway stations lack essential accessibility features such as step-free access, lifts, and ramps. The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) stresses the need for substantial investment to close these gaps.

AWARENESS AND UTILISATION

Many disabled passengers are unaware of the assistance available to them, such as the Passenger Assist service, which impacts their ability to fully utilise rail services.

INCLUSIVE TRANSPORT STRATEGY (ITS) AND NATIONAL DISABILITY STRATEGY (NDS)

Inclusive Transport Strategy (2018): Sets targets to improve access across all transport modes, supported by annual progress updates and metrics assessing progress.

National Disability Strategy (2021): Includes actions like rail station accessibility audits and improved audible and visual announcements. However, legal challenges have paused the implementation of some policies.

Future Improvements and Challenges

FUNDING AND INVESTMENT

Programs like the Access for All initiative provide crucial funding for station upgrades, but progress is slow, and increased investment is needed to meet accessibility goals.

AWARENESS AND TRAINING

Raising awareness among disabled passengers about available services is essential. In addition, comprehensive disability awareness training for rail staff can significantly improve passenger experiences.

COMPLIANCE AND MONITORING

The DPTAC advises the Department for Transport (DfT) on accessibility standards and highlights the need for ongoing monitoring to ensure compliance and identify areas for improvement.





| Ensuring Compliance with Accessibility Standards

JOINT CODE OF PRACTICE FOR ACCESSIBLE DESIGN

Sets mandatory standards for station infrastructure, ensuring accessibility in car parks, platforms, and other areas.

LICENSING REQUIREMENTS

Operators must adhere to Accessible Travel Policies as a condition of their licence, detailing how they assist disabled passengers.

FUNDING FOR IMPROVEMENTS

The Access for All programme remains the primary source of funding for accessibility upgrades, focusing on step-free and level access solutions.

PASSENGER ASSIST SERVICE

Passenger Assist, a legal requirement under ORR's Accessible Travel Policies, helps disabled passengers navigate stations and board trains. While satisfaction with the service is high, many passengers remain unaware of its availability.

While significant legislative and regulatory frameworks are in place to ensure access to rail travel for disabled people, there are still large gaps in infrastructure, awareness, and service utilisation that need to be addressed to achieve full accessibility. Ongoing strategies like the Inclusive Transport Strategy (ITS) and National Disability Strategy (NDS) aim to bridge these gaps, but their implementation faces challenges and requires sustained investment and commitment. Compliance with accessibility standards is ensured through regulatory requirements, licensing conditions, funding programmes such as Access for All, and ongoing monitoring by bodies like the DPTAC. Addressing these challenges holistically will ensure that all passengers can benefit from inclusive rail travel.



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