

Platform for Change:

Making rail journeys more accessible for people with sight loss



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1. Foreword

Hi, I'm Lucy Edwards. I'm a broadcaster, content creator, author and founder of my accessible beauty brand, etia. I lost my eyesight twelve years ago – but not my vision to make a change in this world.

I'm proud to say I'm blind, not broken. Like many other blind and partially sighted people, being able to travel independently is a huge part of my life. My guide dog, Miss Molly, and I make train journeys to London Euston and Kings Cross.

Our experiences as rail passengers are vital to our ability and willingness to get out and about: trains allow blind and partially sighted people to do everything from daily commutes to travelling across the country. Yet, as RNIB's new research in this report shows, people with sight loss face barriers almost every step of the journey: planning, buying and managing tickets, navigating in train stations, finding staff, getting on the train, finding a seat, and more. These barriers threaten our mental and physical health and, most of all, our ability to make the journeys we want and need to.

These challenges are a sign that the system isn't working for everyone – but it doesn't have to be this way. With the right support from national governments and train operators, we



David Reiss Photography

can implement the recommendations in this report and make our railway network safe, comfortable and accessible for blind and partially sighted people.

Because accessible trains aren't just better for us – they're better for everyone.

Lucy Edwards

Broadcaster, disability activist, and content creator

January 2026

2. Executive summary

For blind and partially sighted people, public transport is vital to getting around and leading an independent life. Driving a car or riding a bike is rarely, if ever, an option.

2025 marked 200 years of the railway in Britain, and yet, even after so much time, the British rail system regularly misses opportunities to meet the needs of blind and partially sighted passengers at each stage of the journey: from planning travel to buying tickets, navigating stations and trains, or interacting with staff for the assistance that is so often essential.

Change is needed to address the barriers in the current system, which is complicated and lacks clear accountability. The inconsistencies in passenger rail travel put many blind and partially sighted people at a significant disadvantage compared to sighted rail passengers. The result? People with sight loss are shut out from participating in society and the economy.

As we look to the establishment of Great British Railways (GBR) – the new publicly owned company that will look after both passenger services and railway infrastructure – RNIB has recommendations to take advantage of this singular opportunity to learn from current shortcomings and embed accessibility across all passenger rail services and infrastructure.

After first establishing the current state of rail travel for blind and partially sighted people, this report considers the seven priority areas for disabled people recently articulated by the Department for Transport in its roadmap to an accessible railway [1]:

- Improving the accessibility of stations and trains.
- Improving the reliability of key accessibility assets (such as lifts and toilets).
- Improving the consistency and reliability of Passenger Assist (the service where passengers can request assistance for their journey).
- Improving customer information.
- Improving the awareness of available concessions and improving the accessibility of retail channels such as websites and apps.
- Improving the monitoring of disabled people's travel experience and how the industry is being held to account.
- Enacting cultural change in the rail industry ensuring accessibility is prioritised.

3. Methodology

This report presents key findings from an online survey conducted by RNIB in February 2025, and insights from two focus groups with blind and partially sighted rail users held in October 2025. 1197 blind and partially sighted people responded to the survey, and the focus groups consisted of 12 participants over two sessions.

The survey explored participants' experiences of bus, train and pedestrian journeys; the focus groups were specific to trains. This report on rail travel is the final of three, each covering one of those transport modes.

54 per cent of survey respondents were registered severely sight impaired (blind), while 28 per cent were registered sight impaired (partially sighted), and 15 per cent have sight loss but aren't registered.

Of the 320,000 people in the UK with registered sight loss, half are registered blind and half are registered partially sighted.

The survey results were representative of UK nations:

- 9 per cent of survey respondents live in Scotland (which comprises 8 per cent of the UK population).
- 4 per cent of respondents live in Wales (which comprises 5 per cent of the UK population).
- 2 per cent of respondents live in Northern Ireland (which comprises 3 per cent of the UK population).

As this survey was self-selecting and advertised largely through email and social media, people with sight loss with lower rates of digital inclusion are unlikely to be represented in the findings of the survey.

4. Key findings

- 37 per cent of blind and partially sighted people say they aren't able to make all the journeys by train that they want or need to.
- 42 per cent of blind and partially sighted people prefer to buy their train tickets from a person at a ticket office – twice as popular as the next most preferred option: 21 per cent who use a smartphone app.
- Fewer than half (47 per cent) believe staff are adequately trained to help blind and partially sighted people.
- Only 44 per cent of blind and partially sighted people say they're reliably met by assistance staff at their destinations or connecting stations.
- 57 per cent of blind and partially sighted people say they face difficulties in using train toilets.

Blind and partially sighted people told us their top three barriers to rail travel:

1. Navigating within the station
2. Locating / identifying staff at the station
3. Tickets – buying them, then managing them (operating ticket barriers, presenting correct ticket when staff ask)

5. Recommendations

For Great British Railways and other ticket retailers

- Simplify fares so that passengers can more easily acquire the correct ticket for their journey and remove the confusion and chaos that can come with split tickets.
- All ticket concessions should be available via website, app and ticket vending machines.
- Staff should be trained to know about concessionary tickets available to blind and partially sighted people.
- A consistent, uniform website and app experience should be provided for journey planning, real-time information, ticket purchases and passenger assistance.
- Paper tickets should have tactile features, making them easier to identify and orient when being scanned at ticket gates.
- Information on train tickets needs to be presented in a clear font with good contrast and have tactile markings to ensure that the tickets are identifiable, legible and usable.

For station facility operators

- Use consistent, clear signage.
- Provide clear, consistent, timely audio announcements on trains and at train stations.
- Use bright lighting in stations.
- Install tactile wayfinding.

For rail staff

- Be aware of the needs of passengers with sight loss and be ready to offer assistance. When you locate and approach a passenger with sight loss, listen to what they say about the kind of assistance they require.
- Manage passenger numbers on crowded platforms.
- Guide passengers to their seat on the train, let them know about toilets / refreshments etc. and communicate with train staff about their presence.
- Onboard staff making stop announcements should include information for larger stations about expected arrival platform, side the doors will open on, and directions to onward journey links (bus, tube, taxi, etc.)

For rolling stock procurement

- Provide more charging points on trains.
- Make audio announcements specific to each carriage on the train.
- Install accessible seat numbers (large print, good contrast, braille).
- Provide tactile locks on toilets that indicate when vacant / occupied.
- When procuring new trains, prioritise consistent layout of fixtures such as toilets and priority seats.

6. The current state of rail travel

Blind and partially sighted people cited many problems with rail travel that affect all passengers: trains are unreliable, too slow, not frequent enough, too busy, not clean, and there are often insufficient train services or infrastructure near the living areas of people who rely on them. Most of all, rail travel was called too expensive, with one person highlighting:

“Ensuring that rail travel is accessible should mean that trains are not a luxury (as many people have to currently consider them) but are actually affordable.”

The UK rail network is currently a patchwork of accessibility, with sometimes drastic differences possible in a blind or partially sighted individual’s experience even within a single journey. One survey respondent pointed out the difficulty of answering RNIB’s questions about their experiences:

“All the answers differ for different stations and times of day. Some are good, some are bad.”

The inconsistency is comprehensive, affecting all parts of the journey. Another survey respondent said, “Train layout, stations, and staff availability make it all so hard to navigate.”

Blind and partially sighted people describe rail travel as too overwhelming: “plain difficult,

and I avoid it if possible,” and even “fraught with unseen danger.” Many blind and partially sighted rail passengers said rail travel is too complicated (especially with co-morbidities along with their sight loss, as one wheelchair user pointed out).

Even someone who said that their train journeys were largely successful concluded, “Frankly, I have given up travelling.” Another survey respondent said, “I used to travel a lot by train. Since my sight has started to fail, I have not travelled very much or on my own by train. It’s easier / safer not to go.”

However, the current state of rail travel isn’t always negative for blind and partially sighted people. Survey respondents also called rail travel “the most accessible and safest way to travel” and “one of the best ways of travelling.” One said they “find rail travel easier than bus travel as passenger assistance is available and there are consistent audio announcements.” But, consistent experiences of audio announcements aren’t shared by the majority of blind and partially sighted people in this research, as will be detailed in the section about audio information.

Not travelling alone

The complexity and inaccessibility of rail travel leads many blind and partially sighted people to report that they don’t travel alone, or that they don’t use trains because they would have to travel alone to do so. One respondent told us:

.....

“There is often a lack of guards on the train and if a stop is changed or you can’t hear the announcement, it is very easy to miss your stop. That is why having a companion on the train who can travel free would be vital to ensure the safety and comfort of persons like me. Especially when alighting at an unstaffed station.”

The presence of effective staff assistance can compensate for the inaccessibility of digital and physical infrastructure on the railway network. But staff not being universally available leads some blind and partially sighted people unable to travel without sighted assistance.

One person told us:

.....

“Independent rail travel would be far less stressful for me if station staff were more reliable and better trained to assist visually impaired passengers. In light of the countless negative experiences I have had, even if I book assistance in advance, I have now reached the point where travelling by train accompanied by family / friends is the only option to prevent unnecessary stress.”



7. Improving the accessibility of stations and trains

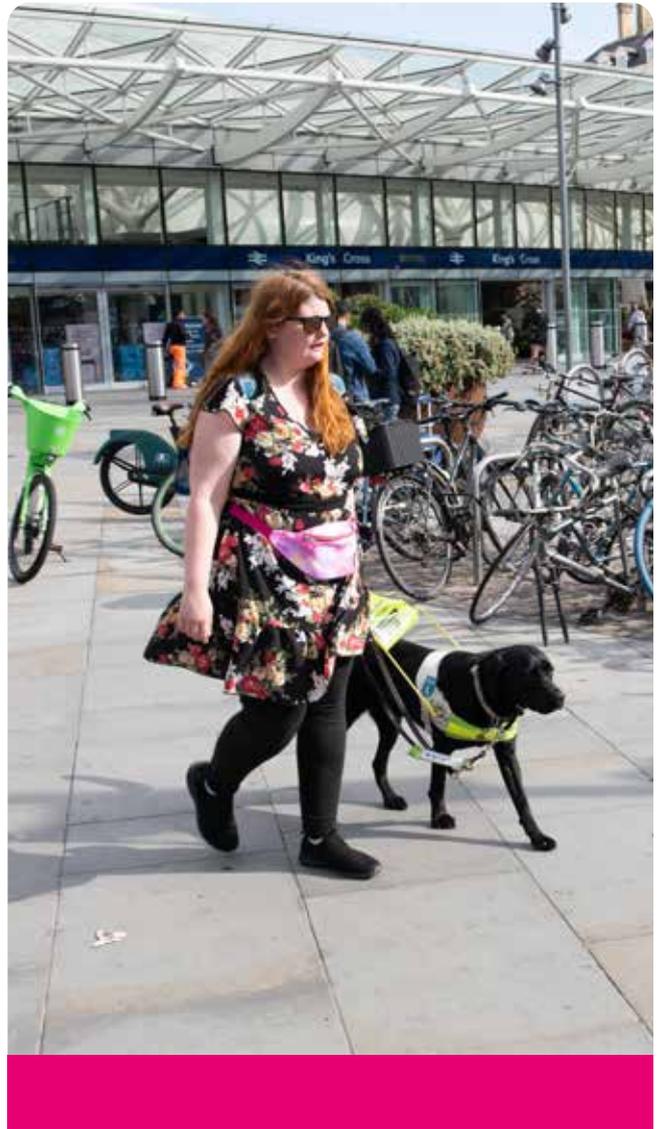
Getting to the train station

About a third of survey respondents (32 per cent) find it difficult to navigate to their local train station.

Some live quite a distance from the nearest train station, and public transport links may not exist. One person described the journey as difficult, "Sometimes two buses are needed." Another said, "My local train station is 10 miles away. There is no linking public transport."

Some described the challenges of making pedestrian journeys – highlighted in detail in our In My Way report (September 2025) – including pavement parking: "Illegally parked vehicles on way to station, obstructing blister paving and dropped kerb at crossroad junction."

The layout of areas outside train stations were also mentioned. Some recent design trends in cycle infrastructure and "shared use" areas with no physical delineation between pedestrians and cyclists aren't accessible or inclusive. This leads to blind and partially sighted people becoming unable to make journeys that they previously could undertake without sighted assistance.



"The changes made outside the train station in Leeds have turned the area into the Wild West as they have made a large public space with a two-way cycle lane. I cannot safely get there on my own any longer as people are riding all types of bikes, e-scooters and e-bikes over the place."

Wayfinding within train stations

Asked what would help them find their way in train stations, survey respondents said:

1. Clear signage
2. Good lighting
3. Good colour contrast
4. Tactile wayfinding

Clarity in signage, contrast and lighting are addressed in the section on visual information. A standardised design for GBR signage could bring welcome consistency and legibility to the current variety of signage driven by corporate branding rather than accessibility.

Lighting can be so bad that it encourages people with sight loss to only make train journeys in daylight hours, which becomes very restrictive in the winter months.

“When I travel by train, I try to get home while it is still daylight as of the stations I can use, one has a lot of steps, which I find challenging and can be rather creepy after dark, and the other local station is poorly lit.”

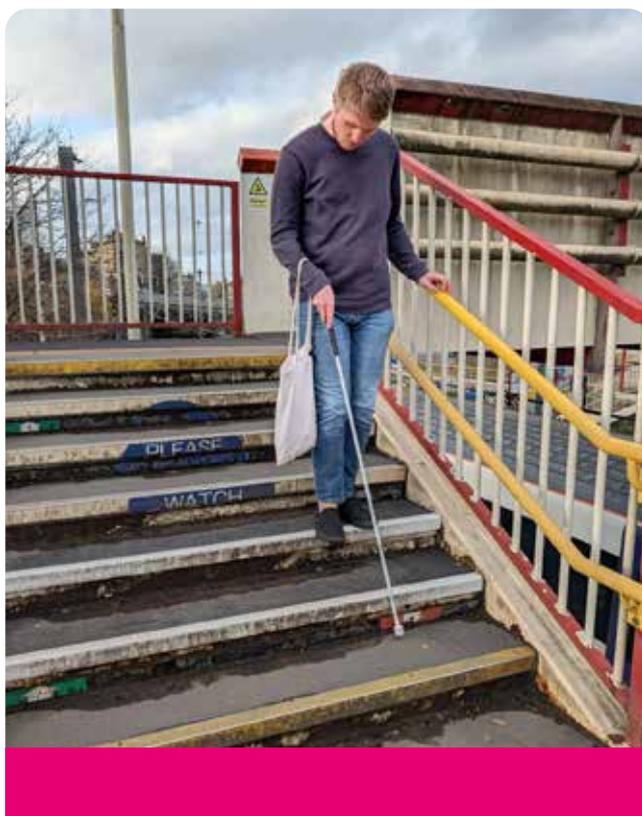
Tactile wayfinding is a tactile and colour-contrasted path on the floor that would direct a person to important station facilities: such as platforms, lifts or a point where they could meet staff.

Tactile wayfinding is less developed in British train stations than other navigation features, leaving blind

and partially sighted rail passengers without an accessibility feature that is well developed and widely deployed across Europe and in other parts of the world such as Japan.

In Great Britain, new train stations and significant refurbishments of existing stations are required to have tactile wayfinding, but no more detail is given, leading to inconsistent interpretations.

The provision of tactile wayfinding for other elements of a journey can become inconsistent when it reaches a train station. Cardiff provides a clear example of this inconsistency. The new Cardiff Bus Interchange has excellent tactile wayfinding installed, and this commitment has been extended through Central Square to create a continuous, accessible route linking the bus interchange and the adjacent train station. However,



Cardiff Central station itself currently has no tactile wayfinding at all. This gap undermines the benefits of the surrounding investment and illustrates how station-specific policies can prevent a truly joined-up approach to accessibility.

Since British train stations are very rarely newly built or refurbished to the extent that tactile wayfinding could be placed consistently throughout, omitting tactile wayfinding from all other projects leads to a situation where tactile wayfinding is never installed. This then means that even if blind and partially sighted people are consulted on plans they're likely to remain unfamiliar with tactile wayfinding and unable to advocate for it, yet our research suggests many people would welcome it.

To address the likelihood that blind and partially sighted people would not be familiar with tactile wayfinding in the UK, our survey described it simply, to avoid jargon, as a tactile and colour-contrasted path on the floor that would direct a person to important station facilities: such as platforms, lifts or a point where they could meet staff.

- Only 19 per cent have encountered tactile wayfinding within a train station. 68 per cent say they would benefit from tactile wayfinding, while several mentioned their support for tactile wayfinding:

“Colour coding walkways would benefit me.”

“Tactile paving, like so many advanced countries have. Unfortunately, not ours!”

“I would appreciate tactile routes to get to the assistance.”

“I’m impressed by the Japanese approach of braille seat numbers and tactile way finding.”

As GBR looks to update and bring greater consistency to stations they will manage, a unique opportunity exists to improve on the current situation. Consulting with blind and partially sighted rail passengers, and the Vision Rehabilitation Specialists who train them to navigate, is essential to determine how best to implement tactile wayfinding in stations across Great Britain.

Step-free access

Several blind and partially sighted rail travellers mentioned the difficulties that stations which require the use of stairs cause them, even to the extent of avoiding journeys that require changing trains because of the prospect of having to use stairs in the connecting station. Flights of stairs at unstaffed stations, with no possibility of assistance along the Victorian footbridges between platforms, are a particular concern.

Platform-train interface

The gap between the platform and a train carriage can be a significant source of fear. While the need for level access to and from the train is most associated with wheelchair users and other passengers with mobility impairments, 82 per cent of blind and partially sighted people said that the gap between a train and the platform causes them difficulty. One survey respondent explained the effect this has on them living near a small, unstaffed station:

"I am unable to board at my station unaccompanied as I need a ramp due to the gap between the train and the platform which has caused my guide dog to fall between the gap in the past."

Many people with sight loss struggle with depth perception, which means judging how far to step up or down can be very difficult if not impossible.

The platform-train interface (PTI) is how we measure and understand the gap between train and platform. PTI incidents include passengers:

- falling while getting on and off trains
- falling from the platform edge (whether a train is present or not)
- sometimes also then being struck by a train or coming into contact with the electric contact rail
- being trapped in train doors and dragged along as the train departs.

PTI incidents include falls from the platform edge onto the track when no train is present. 60 per cent of blind and partially sighted people reported difficulty with staying safely away from the edge of the platform.

A focus group participant and regular user of Thameslink services praised them for having disabled-specific coaches in the middle of the train, which have raised platforms aligned with where those coaches come to a stop so there is no gap at the platform-train interface; such infrastructure can be rolled out more consistently if it is found to be successful in increasing independent access to and from trains.

RNIB campaigned for the widescale increase in the installation of warning tactile paving at platform edges across Great Britain in recent years, but emphasises that this important work isn't finished until all platform edges have sufficient reliable warning tactile paving.

In early 2025, five years after the tragic death of Cleveland Gervais – a man with sight loss who fell from a train platform that lacked tactile paving to warn him of the platform edge – the Department for Transport confirmed that Network Rail had completed a programme of installing tactile paving on all platform edges at stations it's responsible for in Great Britain. Northern Ireland already had tactile paving on all of its platforms.

In areas including Wales, the absence of tactile paving at platform edges remains an accessibility concern. This issue isn't due to a lack of installation, but rather the failure of the adhesive used to secure the paving, which has resulted in sections becoming loose or detached. Remedial work is ongoing across the Wales and Borders network and requires coordinated action by both Transport for Wales and Network Rail.

The potential issues at the PTI are worsened by crowding. The social pressure, and sometimes physical pressure, to move quickly on or off the train adds stress and hazards for blind and partially sighted rail passengers. Better managing the behaviour of non-disabled passengers – perhaps with some combination of announcements at the station, physical infrastructure and marking off part of the platform as reserved for disabled people to reduce crowd buffeting – should be explored.

The regulatory body for the railway, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), says that PTI risk can be managed with platform infrastructure, staff responsibilities and train infrastructure.

RNIB concurs with the ORR recommendations that the platform should include visible and tactile warnings with clear demarcation of the platform edge, good platform surfaces, and appropriate lighting and signage. Mirrors on platforms can help the driver see the outside of the train. Platform edge doors and barriers

(which are aligned with the train doors and only open when a train is in the platform) can be appropriate at some stations.

Staff should control passenger numbers on the platform, pay close attention to train dispatch procedures, and maintain a presence on platforms to encourage sensible passenger behaviour.

Train infrastructure can include correct-side door enabling equipment (which controls the risk of doors being opened on the side not adjacent to a platform), door closure alarms on train doors, and train CCTV with in-cab driver monitors.

Boarding the train

Several aspects of boarding a train cause difficulty for blind and partially sighted passengers. Along with the platform-train interface, rail passengers with sight loss reported challenges:

- 67 per cent struggled opening the train doors.
- 77 per cent struggled finding the carriage they want.
- 79 per cent struggled finding an appropriate seat.

What is meant by the “appropriate seat” will depend on the person and situation – it could be reserved, a priority seat, a seat with some other feature such as one near the toilets or a plug socket, or just any seat that is free.

On the train

Once on the train, it can be impossible for a person with sight loss to be sure what carriage they're in. Currently, the indicators are predominantly or entirely visual. Adding an audio announcement to say which carriage passengers are entering would aid all passengers in orienting themselves. Coach-specific announcements of this kind would be particularly useful in combination with various features of the train – such as a café car or accessible toilet.

“It can be difficult to get off at local stations as the GWR train announces that only certain carriages are going to be used for departing the train. If you find yourself in the wrong carriage, it is a really stressful time trying to get to the correct carriage before the train leaves for another station. Instructions are not always clear when getting on board.”

The relevant carriage can be stated along with relative directions. For example: “The café is in coach C. This is coach F, C is two coaches behind,” or “This train is too long for the next platform so the doors in this carriage will not open. To alight here, move forward three carriages.”

An announcement at station stops to indicate which side of the train the doors will open, as happens on some London Underground lines, would aid accessibility for passengers with sight loss as it can be challenging to determine how best to prepare to alight from the train. This would

also help passengers with sight loss to navigate out of the way on stops where they aren't alighting, leaving space for departing passengers who may rush, shove, or be rude as they leave. “Doors will open on the left / right,” would help remove some of the pressure people feel to move quickly as they approach the platform-train interface, one of the more hazardous elements of a rail journey.

Other basic information offered as part of station stop announcements has the potential to assist in orienting blind and partially sighted rail passengers, as well as others unfamiliar with the destination. Onboard staff making station stop announcements should include information for larger stations about expected arrival platform, side the doors will open on, and directions to onward journey links to find any bus stops, taxi ranks, tube stations or tram stations.

More charging points on trains would provide greater accessibility for many blind and partially sighted people traveling by rail. Blind and partially sighted people with smartphones rely on them for accessibility features such as screen readers, which can quickly drain the battery. Many trains don't have sufficient or easily locatable charging sockets, causing anxiety for the passenger with sight loss with concerns their battery may die and they won't be able to display their ticket or railcard when necessary. Blind and partially sighted rail passengers

report having been told by specific station staff that if their phone battery is flat, they'd have to purchase another ticket, which compounds the other stresses of the train journey.

Accessible / Priority seating

Blind and partially sighted people often benefit significantly from having a seat on public transport. The benefits of this seating for blind and partially sighted people can be underappreciated by other passengers. A greater awareness of the benefits by others can make train journeys safer and more comfortable for everyone.

When passengers with sight loss are forced to stand on the train, they may inadvertently block other people that they can't see, which heightens the risk of conflict. This can make it more difficult for other passengers to move around the train or to board and depart safely. As a result, there is a higher chance of misunderstandings or negative interactions – especially when others don't realise the blind or partially sighted passenger has sight loss. These kinds of widely shared negative experiences can make many blind and partially sighted people less willing or able to travel by train if the times or routes are crowded.

Without visual cues, it's easier to lose balance or accidentally bump into people, their belongings or parts of the train like seats, grab rails and luggage racks. As one survey respondent explained:

"I often have to stand which I find very unsettling as I can lose my balance easily, and there are often bags etc in the aisle. I carry a symbol cane, but I would say somebody will offer me their seat less than 5 per cent of the time. I don't like to ask, as I don't want to draw attention to myself, but there have been occasions where I have asked for priority seating and been ignored (I think they think they are invisible)."

Luggage storage is important not just for those blind and partially sighted rail passengers who are travelling with luggage, but other passengers without luggage too. Several survey participants brought up the difficulties that arise when luggage overflows becomes an obstacle in the aisles or near priority seating. Luggage blocking the aisles makes it difficult or impossible to access the train manager if the blind or partially sighted passenger should need to do so.



Guide dog owners need a vacant seat next to them to allow sufficient room for the dog to lie under. But that means the seat can appear unoccupied and this can cause misunderstandings on busy, crowded trains. Guide dog users report particular difficulty with other passengers' lack of understanding of their need for priority seating.

Survey participants said:

.....
"I don't always see onboard staff, which causes me anxiety if there is an altercation. I don't always get enough space for myself and guide dog, especially when train is busy, and it is uncomfortable for us both."
.....

"I wouldn't get on a train myself as I'd not find my seat and because I need get a second seat for my dog. I would prefer staff helped me secure it as people can be rude."
.....

8. Improving the reliability of key accessibility features like toilets

Among the other accessibility considerations highlighted in this report, one subject is of particular importance to disabled people: without access to public toilets, there is no access to public life. Many people with sight loss told us about challenges in accessing the toilet on trains, to the point that some never attempt to do

so at all, and many limit their activity so that they aren't compelled to need the toilet on a train.

Specific challenges include locating toilets within the train, determining if they're accessible, identifying the status of the toilet – working or out of order, accessible or not, occupied or vacant – and orienting themselves within the toilet in safety and comfort.

38 per cent of blind and partially sighted people cannot locate accessible toilets on trains. The toilets themselves and signage directing to them are almost always entirely visual, so, without sighted assistance, a blind or partially sighted passenger might not even know which direction to go from their seat to reach the toilet.

56 per cent of blind and partially sighted people said there aren't enough accessible toilets onboard trains.

Not only do blind and partially sighted people benefit from accessible toilets, but many people with sight loss also use wheelchairs or have other co-morbidities that need to be taken into consideration. One passenger with sight loss reported that it's "almost impossible to change incontinence pads on trains," and another said, "No train has wheelchair accessible toilets."

While this isn't the case for the entire fleet of British trains, it highlights the potential that a rail passenger with sight loss would have no means of ascertaining which, if any, of the train toilets were wheelchair-accessible – and may not to risk finding out by

boarding a train that potentially lacks a toilet they can access.

57 per cent of blind and partially sighted people face difficulties in using onboard toilets. Many train toilet doors lack non-visual cues to indicate whether they're locked or unlocked. The top two improvements identified by survey respondents were an audio notification indicating if the door is locked / unlocked, and a tactile lock – not a button to press, but a latch or other mechanism that moves clearly between 'open' and 'locked' and can be understood by touch.

.....
"Braille in toilets, and consistent locking mechanisms in particular. Generally I avoid train toilets.

.....
"Never sure if toilet is occupied or vacant. I often try the door in error. It is embarrassing sometimes."

Improvements to better orient oneself once within the toilet should be prioritised. There was strong support for consistent layout of elements within the room – the toilet, sink, soap, bin, and so on, to limit any need for blind and partially sighted people to orient themselves by touch.

While this isn't possible to retrofit on the variety of trains already in service, GBR should prioritise consistency in the procurement of rolling stock. Some modern trains now have tactile diagrams just outside the door of the toilet, or on the inside of the door, indicating the location of all the fittings – a consistent location to find

this would be crucial to its success, limiting the need to feel around for it.

Finally, the importance of cleanliness in train toilets was widely understood to be an accessibility issue as well – because people with sight loss are at higher risk of being unable to detect the condition of the toilet until after they've come into contact with something unhygienic or unpleasant.

One person said, "Often train toilets are in a disgusting condition, blocked and overflowing. I would not necessarily be aware of this until it was too late and had walked in it. I would try to avoid using a toilet on a train at all costs."

.....
9. Improving the consistency and reliability of passenger assistance

According to the ORR, 14 per cent of the users of passenger assistance in 2024 / 25 have sight loss [2]. The overwhelming message from blind and partially sighted rail passengers who use passenger assistance is that while the service is very satisfactory when it functions properly, there are still crucial aspects that require attention.

Fewer than half of blind and partially sighted rail travellers (44 per cent) said that they're reliably met by staff at their destination or connecting station, with another 48 per cent saying they only "sometimes" are met by staff

when alighting from their train. The situation is even more challenging if the journey involves unstaffed stations, disruption, connections or multiple train operators. As one survey respondent explained:

.....
"I travel a lot by train as it's the main form of transport in my area. The main barrier to accessing train travel is the inconsistency of assistance. I've been put on the wrong train, left standing for ages at an unfamiliar station and nearly missed my train as a result. I've also had some fabulous assistance and met some wonderful people who were providing the assistance. So, it's not all bad, just inconsistent."

Reports of blind and partially sighted passengers being left on station platforms are common, as are instances of assistance staff putting blind or partially sighted passengers on the wrong trains. Other errors include a survey participant reporting that they were once given the incorrect luggage by assistance staff, leading to the loss of their laptop and other belongings.

.....
"Sadly, I used to travel regularly on the train but have had bad experiences with assistance. On one occasion there was no one there to put me on my connection – I pushed the wheelchair user, who was likewise let down, and she guided me!"

Blind and partially sighted people report needing to prepare for potential failure whenever seeking passenger assistance.

.....
"I don't think passenger assistance staff fully understand how you feel when you're on that train. You can have long train journeys worrying if somebody will be there to meet you at the other end. I feel needy, as though I'm pestering the staff, asking if support is arranged and in place. But nobody else on the train has to sit and worry whether they will be able to get where they're going or not."



Half (50 per cent) of blind and partially sighted rail passengers report that they have never attempted to book assistance ahead of time. Far more problems are reported with Turn Up And Go (un-booked) assistance than with booked assistance – starting at the point of requesting it. A survey participant pointed out that “turn up and go is a bit of a misnomer at an unmanned station.”

Regular rail travellers with sight loss end up with distinct impressions of which stations, train operating companies and station facility operators have better or worse passenger assistance based on their experiences. Some even plan their journeys around this, as one explained:

“You often have to think of a plan B when travelling to certain stations. I change at Wigan rather than Preston because there’s fewer platforms at Wigan, so I can manage easier if I don’t get my assistance there.”

Blind and partially sighted people expressed frustration at the inability to communicate with assistance staff in the event of a disruption, such as an incoming train being cancelled so they’ll miss a connection. RNIB welcomes the current phase of the Passenger Assist programme, as it has the potential to result in fewer “failed” assists by making it easier for blind and partially sighted rail passengers to connect with staff and communicate any needs or updates (such as delays or disruptions) that might affect

booked assistance. However, it’s vital that this functionality is accessible to blind and partially sighted rail passengers, and it should include an option for those who are digitally excluded.

Not all blind and partially sighted rail passengers have access to the internet, especially when out in public, so other methods of communication must always be available to connect digitally excluded passengers with staff who can assist them.

10. Improving customer information

Basic information about train times is currently inaccessible to many blind or partially sighted rail passengers:

- 34 per cent of blind and partially sighted people report that they ask for sighted assistance, from staff or a travel companion, to get the train time information they need.
- 24 per cent use an app or website on a smartphone.
- 20 per cent check the information they need on a computer at home before they leave for their journey.

Improvements in the availability and reliability of real-time information are urgently needed.

Audio announcements

Audio announcements on trains and at train stations provide dynamic timetable, departure and train stop

information, but they must be clear, timely, and consistently implemented.

Just under a quarter of survey respondents (24 per cent) said they always had audio announcements on the trains they travelled on. Even when they're in place, they're often not of sufficient quality and volume to be understood: 40 per cent of respondents said audio announcements were sometimes understandable and 14 per cent said they weren't understandable.

This inconsistency causes a lot of anxiety for blind and partially sighted rail passengers. When there are no audible announcements at all, blind and partially sighted passengers can become disoriented, leading to confusion, stress, and more reliance on sighted passengers or staff to assist them in determining if they're on the right train or alighting at the correct station. Sometimes the onboard announcement of the next stop doesn't give enough notice for blind or partially sighted passengers to react to the information. If a stop announcement only begins once the train doors have opened, passengers for that stop have very little time to react, collect any belongings and safely alight.

55 per cent say the audio announcements are sometimes or never of sufficient audio quality to be understood. This is a particular problem during disruptions to a journey, which will be addressed in a later section.

Visual information

Many blind and partially sighted rail passengers face barriers in accessing

visual real-time information on trains and at train stations. While some blind and partially sighted people are unable to access any kind of visual information, others can do so if appropriate accessibility features are in place.

All digital display information boards should display train information with a clear font, good contrast, correct screen placement and consistent ordering of information.

Currently, most train information is provided inaccessibly: blind and partially sighted rail passengers relying on visual information told us that display screens are often not big enough, and the colour schemes used to display information are not always legible. Digital screens provide an opportunity to improve the accessibility of this information when implemented correctly – for example, using a large, clear font that has sufficient contrast from its background.

For example, to display information in a station at a distance from passengers, text must be large and the colour contrast should be a minimum of 7:1. The text should be left-aligned with line spacing 1.5 times the size of the font.

"I would like information screens showing the stops to have better contrast. On West Midlands trains, it is orange text on a white background and this is done wholly because of their corporate colours without regard for those with a visual impairment."

The advent of GBR is a perfect opportunity to standardise signage and colour schemes to prioritise accessibility rather than corporate branding. GBR's use of Rail Alphabet 2, a variation on the 1965 Rail Alphabet designed for British Rail, is welcome as it's a Helvetica-like sans-serif font with various elements adapted to increase legibility to make it useful for signage, printed matter and online.

The location of digital display information boards within stations is also crucial. They must be placed away from bright or sunny areas to minimise glare on the screen, and they should also be positioned at an appropriate height to be read easily by people with sight loss.

Without clear information, blind and partially sighted passengers can become confused, go to the wrong platform, get the wrong train or be forced to rely on sighted assistance. One focus group respondent expressed shock that there are digital display boards on trains which provide real time information to other passengers:

.....
"I did not know that these digital display boards existed due to my sight loss. I had no idea that other passengers have easy access to all of this information that I have to struggle to find."

When arriving at a larger station to begin a train journey, passengers are often faced with complex and confusing options for information

and assistance. This inconsistency means passengers don't always get the support they need. In early 2025, the Rail Delivery Group trialled Welcome Points to address the difficulty of understanding and accessing train stations. These large digital screens are designed to be interacted with so are placed at a height where people can get close to them to make their information easier to read; they also feature tactile buttons. While not all features of Welcome Points would be accessible to all rail passengers with sight loss, they have the potential to address some of the barriers currently making it difficult or impossible for some blind and partially sighted people to make rail journeys.

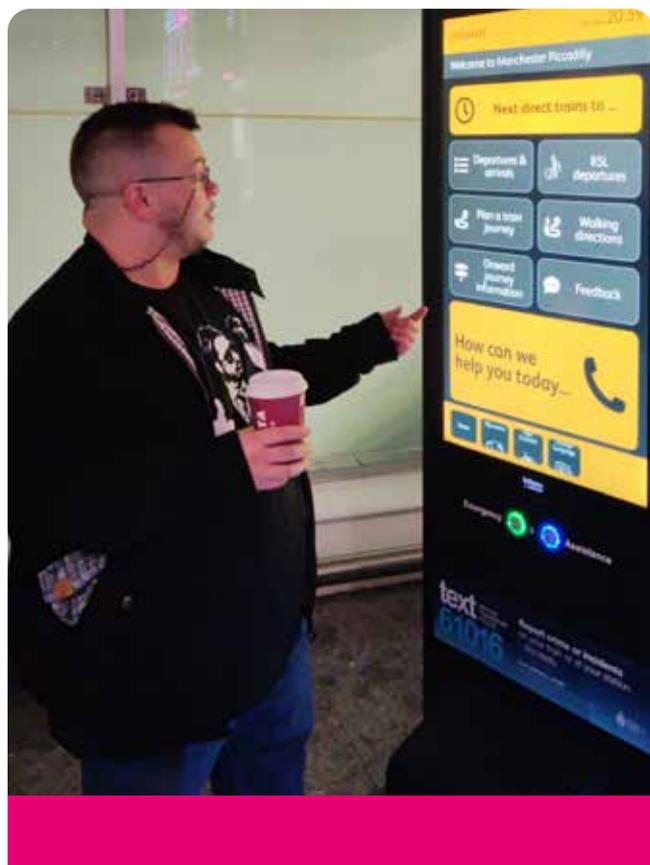
This lack of predictability in the placement of platform signage can affect the confidence of blind and partially sighted rail passengers in knowing whether they are in the correct location. Currently, many train operating companies are responsible for train stations, with Network Rail holding responsibility for some of the biggest and busiest stations. This is an opportunity for GBR, in consolidating all of those responsibilities, to adopt a consistent approach to the placement of platform signage in highly visible places. Where existing platform infrastructure precludes this standardised approach, a consultation should be started with the input of people with lived experience to find practical solutions.

Much information at stations, including information about tickets and planned engineering work, is

only available in standard-size print on leaflets and posters. A focus group member pointed out:

“I’ve never seen a leaflet available in large print. So, when they advertise changes to the pricing structure, the visually impaired community can often miss those advertisements.”

The establishment of GBR should include a commitment to make alternative format versions of important train and ticket information, such as large print leaflets and posters, consistently available, and to provide more consistent audio information at train stations. In addition, the existence of alternative format versions must be publicised by accessible means so that passengers with sight loss are able to take advantage of them.



11. Improving the awareness of available concessions and the accessibility of websites and apps

Purchasing tickets

There are a variety of methods to purchase train tickets, both non-digital and digital:

- 42 per cent of survey respondents reported that they prefer to buy their train tickets from a person at a ticket office. This is twice as popular as the next most preferred option.
- 21 per cent use a smartphone app.
- Only 2 per cent of respondents prefer to use a ticket vending machine.
- 71 per cent said that ticket vending machines were “difficult” or “impossible” to use.

These numbers are surprisingly stable over time: in 2017, when RNIB asked blind and partially sighted people whether they found it easy to use a ticket machine, only 3 per cent said it was easy. In 2025, 7 per cent said it was easy. Therefore, it’s unlikely that further exposure to the current design of ticket vending machines is going to result in further uptake among blind and partially sighted rail passengers.

The inaccessible and unintuitive interfaces of ticket vending machines are compounded by the complexity of journey and ticket fare information.

This can lead to users overpaying or buying the wrong tickets. The possibility of expensive mistakes and potentially being unable to travel adds to blind and partially sighted people's stress of attempting to use a ticket vending machine.

The inaccessibility of ticket machines presents a particular problem at unstaffed train stations, which can exclude blind and partially sighted passengers from travelling at all when their only method of purchasing tickets is through an inaccessible or unusable ticket vending machine.

Ticket vending machines can be made more accessible to blind and partially sighted travellers by having clear and consistent screen layouts with good contrast, and much more inclusive navigation with features like haptic responses from touchscreens, tactile buttons, and audio outputs. Ideally, ticket vending machines should mimic familiar screen reader technology like Apple's VoiceOver to reduce the cognitive demand of blind and partially sighted rail passengers learning an entirely new interface just for rail-ticket purchases.

The location of ticket vending machines within stations is also important. The machines should be placed away from direct sun, weather, or excessive noise to minimise the effects of glare, moisture, and other environmental factors that increase the difficulty of interacting with the machine. They should be placed in secure locations with privacy screens to ensure the least risk and greatest sense of safety for blind and

partially sighted people. These are passengers who cannot always judge the safety of their surroundings and as a result can be reluctant to use their bank cards or phone when in public, especially if their sight loss would be very obvious to strangers.

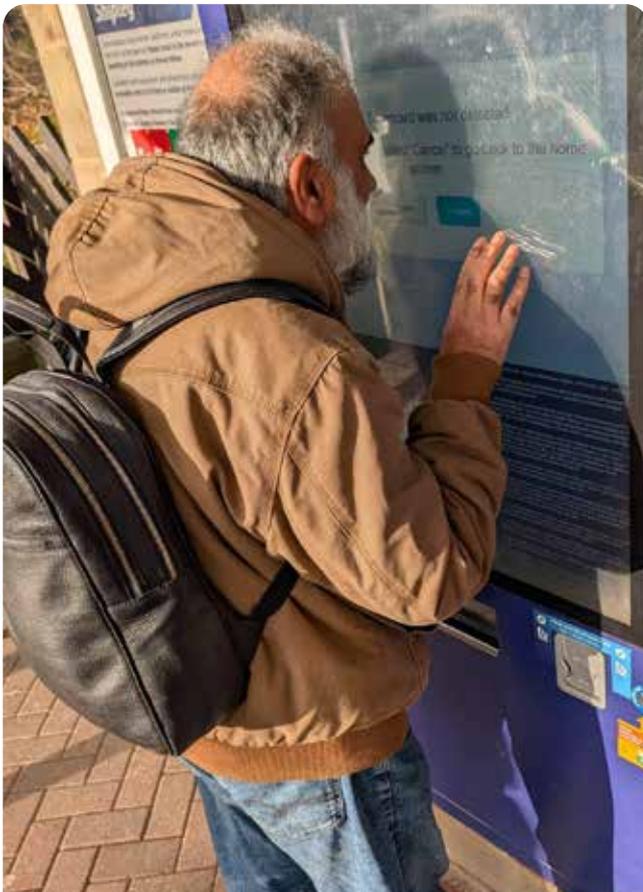
The significant preference for using non-digital over digital methods of purchasing tickets is in keeping with RNIB research from 2023, in which we found 28 per cent of blind and partially sighted people never used the internet or didn't have access to it (rising to 47 per cent of blind and partially sighted people aged 75 years and over), in comparison to 4 per cent of non-disabled people who are digitally excluded.

Importantly, some blind and partially sighted people use non-digital means of purchasing tickets – from a staff member at a ticket office – even if they're digitally included. There are many reasons why this may be the case, such as:

- Wishing to have trained, skilled assistance with the complex ticket types available to ensure the passenger has a suitable ticket for their journey.
- The preference for or potential greater accessibility of a paper ticket over an e-ticket.
- Digital methods like smartphone apps and ticket vending machines are unable to apply specific concession prices that currently can only be accessed through a ticket office.

Even for blind and partially sighted people who are digitally included, significant barriers to buying tickets online are present, due to the inaccessibility of train ticket apps and websites. In 2025, of the million websites checked for accessibility, 94.8 per cent of home pages had detected WCAG 2 (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) failures such as low contrast text and missing alternative text (image descriptions).

This means apps and websites are frequently difficult to navigate, unintuitive and malfunctioning for users of screen readers or magnification software. This can mean that blind and partially sighted people miss out on cheaper tickets, concessions and deals they are entitled to.



GBR has announced its plan to replace the current train company websites and apps with its own unified digital presence. In order to overcome the accessibility barriers that prevent blind and partially sighted people from buying and using tickets online, GBR needs to design and maintain a clear and consistent online platform (website and app) that adheres to the WCAG standard, which would make it compatible with assistive technologies used by blind and partially sighted users, among others.

RNIB welcomes a consistent, uniform website and app experience for journey planning, real-time information, ticket purchases, and passenger assistance. This user interface should include:

- Clear fonts (like Arial), with changeable font size – the websites and apps must be usable at high levels of magnification.
- Contrast always at least 7:1.
- Website colour adjustment options, to cater for the many different colours and combinations that will be most accessible to people with different kinds of sight loss.
- Consistent layout, so a website or app is predictable from one page to the next, to reduce the necessity to process a lot of new details at each stage of planning a journey or buying tickets.

Currently, digital purchase options don't take account of the nuanced choices that some blind and partially sighted people have to make about their journeys: the digital options will assume the "best" route from A to B (usually the fastest), which does not take into account whether a station, for example, is staffed, has step-free access or is the most familiar to the person with sight loss.

One survey participant said "I would like to be able to book online or by call. National Rail doesn't allow you to give NEC info so have to travel several miles to the train station to book." NEC is Scotland's National Entitlement Card, available to those registered blind or partially sighted, among others. Great British Railways' unified digital system for booking and accessing tickets for must be able to properly apply all cards or concessions that may be available to blind and partially sighted people in any part of Great Britain.

Using tickets

When train ticket information is inaccessible, blind and partially sighted passengers are at higher risk of mistakes, such as presenting the incorrect ticket to train staff on trains or at ticket barriers. This can cause stress, anxiety and fear in blind and partially sighted passengers that their behaviour is being perceived as suspicious or uncooperative.

This problem of quickly and correctly identifying tickets is compounded when passengers have split their journey with the purchase of

multiple tickets, a tactic which can, crucially, save money but leaves the passenger with more individual tickets to select between.

Paper tickets

Buying tickets non-digitally, from staff, results in physical paper and card tickets. RNIB has heard from blind and partially sighted rail passengers that they find it challenging to identify and distinguish them from each other – such as an outbound and return portion of a journey. In the case of paper roll tickets – which are not individual business-card size and on stiff paper, but instead a long strip of paper from a roll – the paper can be especially difficult to distinguish from other paper information, such as bus tickets or receipts.

The written information on physical tickets is often in very small fonts with insufficient contrast from its background, making the information inaccessible to many blind and partially sighted people. This makes it easy to miss out on critical information, such as any ticket terms of use. It also increases the risk that blind and partially sighted passengers might inadvertently discard or lose tickets, mistaking them for something else.

It can be difficult to orient tickets correctly at scanners to open ticket gates. This can be addressed by including a tactile feature on paper tickets indicating the part of the ticket that needs scanning. Blind and partially sighted people have had positive experiences of tactile markings on bank cards, such as notches cut out of

the side, raised dots, arrows or borders that indicate where a bar code is, or the direction that a card needs to be oriented to be scanned.

Tactile information helps with some train ticket activities such as identifying the train ticket, displaying, orientating and scanning the ticket. Tactile information cannot help with accessing the printed information, but following clear print guidelines would make this information most usable to the greatest number of people with sufficient useful vision.

GBR should ensure that physical tickets are designed in consultation with blind and partially sighted people, the third sector, and accessibility experts to make them accessible and usable to people with sight loss.

E-tickets

Many blind and partially sighted rail passengers who use digital tickets on their smartphone encounter problems when they need to display and use their train tickets.

Even blind and partially sighted people who have smartphones report often being very reluctant or entirely unwilling to get them out of their pocket or bag while out in public, due to concerns about theft, damage or loss of their device when they aren't able to risk-assess their surroundings. It's only possible for blind and partially sighted rail passengers to use digital tickets if they feel safe and confident using a smartphone openly during train journeys. In 2023, RNIB research found this not to be the

case. Two thirds (66 per cent) of blind and partially sighted people said they only "occasionally" or "never" used technology such as a smartphone to support them on public transport journeys. [5]

As with paper tickets, there are challenges for blind and partially sighted people to successfully align their device with the scanner to get through ticket gates, as this is a visual task that needs precision and depth perception.

Managing digital tickets can also be difficult. Screen reader users report extra stress when staff ask them to produce their ticket, as it can take longer to navigate a phone with a screen reader than sighted people are used to and it may be extra challenging to properly hear the relevant details of their ticket in a busy or noisy environment. Some report hostility from staff when they have selected the wrong ticket and their mistake is misinterpreted as an attempt to cover up the lack of a correct ticket.

People with sight loss have their phones set up to be accessible to their personal needs: features such as particular colour combinations or a particularly bright / dim screen can be challenging for the sighted train guard to read. As one person told RNIB:

.....
"If the conductor wants me to show my ticket, I can find this difficult and I have to remember to increase my screen brightness."

12. Improving the monitoring of disabled people's travel experience

Unstaffed stations

Many blind and partially sighted rail passengers cannot use unstaffed stations. One survey respondent called unstaffed stations "a nightmare."

Another said that the unsuitability of a small unstaffed station was such a severe consideration for them that it affected where they chose to live and buy a house:

"Some stations near me have no staff and that makes them almost impossible to use. Others are request stops and I would never use those. I was interested in buying a house close to a station once, but it turned out to be a request stop, had no staff and only had a level crossing, so I didn't move there."

Many blind and partially sighted people rely on staff assistance to make their journeys, and staff at ticket offices are the first point of contact. Some blind and partially sighted people need support with purchasing tickets, and some require staff to guide them through the station and safely onto the train. Staff at ticket offices often provide this support or arrange for others to do so.

Staff reduction risks leaving blind and partially sighted people stranded in stations, or feeling that train travel is no longer an option they can choose.

"It is essential that all stations are staffed because I cannot use an unstaffed station. Railway stations are extremely dangerous places and there is an urgent need for staff at each station. I would travel more by train if more had staff present."

Without staffed ticket offices, people must find a Help Point to request assistance, a task often not possible for blind and partially sighted people. The Help Point is not reliable even if it is found: an ORR report on disabled people's experiences requesting assistance at rail stations [6] said that just over half of the disabled auditors who were able to speak to a Help Point operator were able to board their train successfully. The report states:

"There was an element of good fortune in getting assistance from other sources to get on a train without an operational Help Point. This uncertainty and inconsistency could make planning journeys more difficult, and therefore, disabled passengers are less likely to make a rail journey from an unstaffed station."

Disruptions

Delays and cancellations have a disproportionate effect on passengers with sight loss.

The ORR's 2025 report on experiences of passenger assistance found that passengers who experienced planned and unplanned disruption had some of the lowest levels of satisfaction with the passenger assist service.[7] Blind and partially sighted people express intense concerns over what happens to booked passenger assistance if a portion of their journey involves a delayed or cancelled train. One explained:

"On a long journey back from Scotland my train was stopped at Newcastle and cancelled... Therefore, all that carefully booked travel assistance went out of the window. I suddenly was a blind person, alone in a station I did not know, lost in the system. I had to stand up and ask for sighted help from one of the many other people whose journeys had also suddenly stopped. One took me to a member of staff, who was massively busy dealing with the chaos. She was very kind and after a three-hour delay and moving onto two more trains we finally left Newcastle. In amongst all this, I needed to try to let Kings Cross know that I was coming and needed a sighted guide to get back to St Pancras."

Only 27 per cent of blind and partially sighted rail passengers said they can rely on train staff to alert them if their train was terminating early – stopping before reaching its planned destination.

"I am not aware of what would happen if there was an emergency on the train and we had to get off immediately. I'm not sure what me safely getting off that train would look like."

Passengers who've had assistance to get onto a train should be particularly sought out if problems develop on that train. This would mean greater safety and less anxiety for blind and partially sighted people when something happens on their train that they don't understand.

Communication of platform alterations is often not done with sufficient time to be accessible. People with sight loss may take longer to move between platforms or around a concourse to ensure safety and to allow for the greater cognitive load that navigation places on them. There is an expectation that everyone knows where the new platform is and can immediately get there, but people with sight loss often have no way of determining this.

Important safety considerations exist, especially where crowds and rushing will happen at the last minute. Blind and partially sighted people – particularly those who are rather younger or older, smaller, or with mobility impairments or other difficulties – report stress at the hazard of groups of people all moving very quickly to a new platform, in a direction the passenger with sight loss may not even know, and at a speed they may be less able to keep up with. A survey participant explained:

.....
"Train delays, re-routing of trains and cancellations can be problematic and I can become stressed if large numbers of people are on the platform and I'm not sure which train to board when re-routed, for example. I have to try to find the train guard or rely on kind general public to help me."

Passengers can face very long waits due to disruption, especially later at night – a time when a person might be tired from a long day, in the dark, anxious to get home, missing meals and eager to see family. Some people report feeling more vulnerable because of their sight loss: many have even less useful vision in the dark, they're concerned about the higher likelihood of anti-social behaviour or drunkenness on stations at night, and there are also fewer staff or fellow passengers around if the blind or partially sighted person tries to ask for help. Participants described being grabbed without warning or consent, feeling vulnerable after dark, facing night blindness, poor environments and anti-social behaviour.

Rail replacement services can bring further challenges as they tend not to be communicated accessibly, as a survey participant described:

.....
"I use an unstaffed station, if a replacement bus service is in operation, new times should be displayed on the website and the audio announcements in the station announcing that a bus has arrived. I missed two because there were no signs and no timetable."

.....
13. Enacting cultural change in the rail industry and ensuring accessibility is prioritised

Staff behaviour
.....

"Some are brilliant. Like Paddington. Really kind and helpful. Others, including my own local station, I don't bother asking. They actually recoil from my guide dog."

Blind and partially sighted people report intense inconsistency in the interactions they have with staff. Less than half (47 per cent) believe staff are adequately trained to help blind and partially sighted people.

One respondent said, "I feel I am lucky that the staff at my local station are always very helpful" – but helpful staff shouldn't be considered a matter of good luck. 47 per cent believe staff are adequately trained to help blind and partially sighted people. Negative staff interactions can have a severe impact on blind and partially sighted people's willingness and ability to travel.

While 70 per cent of blind and partially sighted people report that staff communicate effectively with them, greater awareness among rail staff of how to respectfully and usefully interact with passengers with sight loss is urgently needed.

Our research revealed that rail staff aren't yet providing consistent and appropriate sighted guiding which

involves a sighted person assisting someone to navigate safely by offering their arm, while describing surroundings and obstacles as they move together.. 36 per cent of blind and partially sighted people said that staff don't offer or provide appropriate guiding when assisting them. Staff training needs to cover sight loss awareness – co-produced and co-delivered by people with sight loss – and should be undertaken by senior management as well as frontline staff.

.....
"Staff are great. I occasionally don't get picked up. I generally find looking dangerous by the edge brings someone over."

.....
"It can be difficult to find staff on the platform. In the evenings it can feel unsafe on the platform because of lack of staff."

Blind and partially sighted rail passengers report negative feelings, "like I'm a burden," when requesting assistance.

.....
"Staff really need to know that disabled travellers have the right to turn up and go. On the rare occasions I have not been able to book ahead of time, they have made me feel really guilty about having to ask for assistance and being an inconvenience. I have every right to live spontaneously and planning is not always possible."

Blind and partially sighted people recommend that rail staff:

- Make the effort to locate and approach the passenger with sight loss.
- Introduce themselves.
- Offer assistance while avoiding a "one size fits all" approach – taking blind and partially sighted people's word for what kind of assistance they require, including none at all.
- Avoid dehumanising language about disabled people when speaking to other staff, such as "another one!" or "an assist."

On a positive note, various blind and partially sighted rail passengers reported an improvement in the last two years; one said across Scotland and another specified Greater Manchester.

Onboard train staff

Station staff providing platform assistance often understand their task as getting a person on a train, or, at most, to a seat. But this leaves blind and partially sighted people unaware of any staff on the train and often unable to orient themselves to find what they need, such as the location of toilets and or the availability of refreshments.

When new rolling stock is added, the staff using it should receive training on features like the location and operation of the toilets, where luggage can be stored, whether and where bins are located, and other things that will be obvious to sighted people but difficult or impossible for passengers with sight loss to

determine. One survey respondent expressed a wish that staff would “make sure your booked seat is available for you to use, tell those running the train you may need help during the trip, be sure you know about toilets and refreshments etc.”

“There has been a big increase in staff assistance at railways over the last two years, and their aid now makes the train section of a journey often the easiest part.”

“Lack of on train staff has reduced my confidence over time.”

“For me it is essential that train stations and trains are both staffed for my safety; I am worried that the staff I rely on will be taken away from the very places I need them to be to allow me to carry on travelling independently.”

Behaviour of others

Fellow passengers can be a lifeline or a challenge for blind and partially sighted people on rail journeys.

“Rail assistance is generally good, however I have been grabbed when getting off the train and this is unacceptable, both by public and assistance. I appreciate that people want to help but we really do need some kind of coordinated campaign telling people not to touch us without our consent. It’s a violation and also dangerous.”

People with some useful vision, who may decide to use a white cane in some situations but not in others, report having to decide whether it’s more useful to have the indicator of their sight loss to explain behaviour that might otherwise seem worrying or rude, or whether the cane makes them more vulnerable, often because of misconceptions on the part of other passengers.

“Sometimes, I feel carrying a symbol cane highlights me as a ‘target’ for bad behaviour, because people think I will take too long, so try to get ahead of me, and I believe people act more rudely because they think I can’t see them at all – like they are invisible so can behave how they want.”

Even more than on a bus, interactions with others on a train can put blind and partially sighted passengers at a higher risk of stress because they are much more likely to feel “stuck” on a train with the consequences of those interactions with other passengers – whether that be the embarrassment at bumping into someone, the verbal altercation that might arise from sitting in a seat that someone else believes is theirs, or the potentially serious effects of being near anti-social passengers if violence breaks out.

14. Summary

Our research has found that blind and partially sighted rail users face many challenges when using the current British rail system. While some journeys can go well, others are full of barriers. These inconsistencies reduce the confidence of people with sight loss to make the train journeys that they wish, and can put them at a significant disadvantage compared to sighted rail passengers.

The establishment of Great British Railways is a critical opportunity to embed accessibility in passenger services and infrastructure – an opportunity that must be seized. The rail network must be accessible by design, and accessible at every point in a person’s experience of planning, paying for and making their journey.

Only then can we ensure a railway system fit for the future, where accessibility is not an afterthought but central to every decision.

15. Recommendations

For GBR and other ticket retailers

- Simplify fares so that passengers can more easily acquire the correct ticket for their journey and remove the confusion and chaos that can come with split tickets.
- All ticket concessions should be available via website, app and ticket vending machines.

- Staff should be trained to know about concessionary tickets available to blind and partially sighted people.
- Provide a consistent, uniform website and app experience for journey planning, real-time information, ticket purchases and passenger assistance.
- Paper tickets should have tactile features to help identify and orient them properly to be scanned at ticket gates.

Information on train tickets needs to be presented in clear font with good contrast and have tactile markings to ensure that they are identifiable, legible and usable.

For station facility operators

- Use consistent, clear signage.
- Provide clear, timely audio announcements on trains and at train stations, consistently implemented.
- Ensure good lighting.
- Install tactile wayfinding.

For rail staff

- Be aware of the needs of passengers with sight loss and be ready to offer assistance. When you locate and approach a passenger with sight loss, listen to what they say about the kind of assistance they require.
- Manage passenger numbers on crowded platforms.
- Guide passengers to their seat on the train, let them know about toilets / refreshments, etc., and communicate with train staff about

their presence.

For rolling stock procurement

- Provide more charging points on trains.
- Make audio announcements specific to each carriage on the train.
- Install accessible seat numbers (large print, good contrast, braille).
- Provide tactile locks on toilets that indicate when vacant / occupied.
- When procuring new trains, prioritise consistent layout of fixtures such as toilets and priority seats.

16. What RNIB is doing

Key Principles of Inclusive Design

Standardisation is key to addressing many of the current barriers to inclusive train travel. Recognising this has led us to develop a growing suite of Key Principles of Inclusive Design, which distils the voices of blind and partially sighted people across the UK into a checklist for decision-makers, with short explanations of why each intervention matters.

RNIB works with decision-makers at every level – including the Department for Transport, GBR, Transport Scotland, Transport for Wales, Northern Ireland’s Department for Infrastructure, and regional train operating companies – advocating for everyone involved in commissioning and running rail services to take practical steps to dismantle the

barriers identified in this report, which affect the UK’s more than two million people living with sight loss.

We recognise the unique position we hold as the UK’s largest community of blind and partially sighted people. We’re committed to turning this insight into meaningful change and helping to remove the barriers that prevent rail travel from being truly inclusive.

17. Appendix: Passenger rail in the nations of the UK

Great British Railways (GBR) will replace Network Rail and coordinate train services and infrastructure across England and parts of Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland has its own infrastructure and rolling stock.

Scotland

In Scotland, most aspects of travel and transport are devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Transport Scotland is the Scottish Government’s department for transport and has oversight of many aspects of concessionary travel, including the Blind Persons’ Concessionary Travel Scheme which provides free rail travel for blind and partially sighted people anywhere in Scotland. A pilot is now in place to ensure that companions of Blind Persons’ Rail Card holders can also travel for free (until April 2026).

ScotRail Services is the main operator of trains and rail passenger services

in Scotland. In 2022, the Scottish Government stepped in to take control of ScotRail under operator of last resort powers, which allows a UK government to temporarily manage railway services when a private train operating company can no longer fulfil its obligations.

ScotRail and Network Rail in Scotland work closely together under an "Alliance Agreement" to ensure a safe and reliable service for passengers, as they are distinct organisations with separate roles. Network Rail manages the rail infrastructure in Scotland and two major railway stations, Glasgow Central and Edinburgh Waverley.

Under the name "Scotland's Railway," Network Rail oversees an industry-wide strategy for improving accessibility called "A Railway for Everyone". This is aimed at removing potential barriers for passengers' journeys, in terms of reaching the station, moving around the station, getting to the platform, boarding, and finding a space on the train.

It remains to be seen how the Railways Bill will impact on operations in Scotland. However, both the UK and Scottish governments have agreed in principle for GBR to enter arrangements with the Scottish Government to deliver infrastructure and passenger services functions. It is envisaged this will respect and protect existing devolved rail powers but also enhance them in areas where Scottish Ministers set strategy, specify and fund the railway.

Wales

In Wales, most rail services are already devolved. Transport for Wales (TfW), which is owned by the Welsh Government, runs the majority of passenger services within Wales, including the Wales and Borders network. The Core Valley Lines (CVL) – key routes around Cardiff – were transferred from Network Rail to Welsh Government ownership in 2020. This means Welsh Ministers now oversee both the infrastructure and services on those lines.

GBR will not take over the CVL or TfW's operations. These remain under Welsh Government control. GBR will still manage some cross-border infrastructure and services currently operated by companies like Great Western Railway (GWR) and Avanti, but day-to-day decisions about Welsh rail services will continue to be made in Wales.

There are plans for a GBR Cymru business unit, which will operate under a joint governance framework, with Welsh Ministers having a formal role in setting priorities and oversight through an agreement with UK Government. While the unit will help coordinate infrastructure and timetables for cross-border services, ultimate control over funding and strategic decisions will remain with the Secretary of State for Transport.

Travel for All is the Welsh Government's guiding framework for making transport across Wales more inclusive and accessible. Its aim is to put disabled people's rights

and lived experiences at the heart of transport planning, with a focus on removing barriers, improving safety, and ensuring everyone feels welcome when travelling. It aims to shape all future transport decisions, including rail reform, by requiring providers to design services and infrastructure in partnership with disabled people, and to meet new accessibility standards. At present, any changes to rail services in Wales – whether through Transport for Wales or in response to UK-wide legislation like GBR – will need to align with Travel for All’s five principles.

Northern Ireland

Translink is Northern Ireland’s main public transport provider, and includes the operation of coach, bus and train services (through NI Railways), including some cross border rail routes, incorporating the Belfast to Dublin train service in partnership with Irish Rail (Iarnród Éireann). The NI Transport Holding Company (NITHC) is a government owned body responsible for its subsidiary companies which trade jointly as Translink.

The Northern Ireland rail network has seen a significant reduction in coverage since the 1950s, with the network shrinking from 754 miles in 1920 to 207 miles today. The current network is not fully utilized for passenger services, and there are calls for improvements to enhance connectivity and accessibility across the region (as per the Consumer Council Report 2025).

People in the West of Northern Ireland are significantly disadvantaged, as train services are virtually non-existent, with most services based in the east, servicing Belfast and other hubs. This means that many people rely on buses, or other forms of transport, such as rural and community transport schemes, when there are gaps in the network and services.

18. References

5. Roadmap to an accessible railway (<https://bit.ly/4alUwuo>)
6. Experiences of Passenger Assist report 2024 to 2025 (<https://rnib.in/4jlYHsJ>)
7. WCAG 2.1 guideline 1.4.3 (<https://bit.ly/4qeeOdJ>)
8. WCAG 2.1 guideline 1.4.6 (<https://bit.ly/48ZN5qg>)
9. Inclusive Journeys – Improving the accessibility of public transport for people with sight loss (<https://bit.ly/3Y3MajE>)
10. Accessible Travel Policy Implementation – Review of un-booked assistance and Help Points – July 2022 (<https://bit.ly/49h2DXZ>)

Contact



helpline@rnib.org.uk



0303 123 9999



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