



On Track for Inclusive Train Travel

Plain English summary



Funded by



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About this report

The On Track for Inclusive Train Travel project was split into four phases: Discovery, Define, Develop and Deliver. This report explains what we learned during the Discovery phase of the project.

The project looks at how disabled people experience train travel, especially when they need help from staff. It explores how rail staff training, systems, working practices and organisational decisions affect what happens on real journeys

We brought together evidence from:

- desk-based research
- policy and guidance documents
- surveys
- interviews
- focus groups with disabled people

Overview

Disabled people still face many problems when travelling by train. This is happening even though:

- there are policies and rules
- most rail staff receive disability awareness and inclusion training

The Discovery phase showed that training on its own does not make journeys more reliable or inclusive for disabled people.

What matters more in day-to-day travel is:

- whether there are enough staff on duty
- whether those staff have time to help how information is passed between staff and stations
- whether information systems work properly
- how stations and trains are designed

- how organisations support staff and hold people accountable

Because of these issues, disabled passengers often experience:

- booked assistance not turning up or being poor quality
- long waits or being unable to find staff
- anxiety and loss of confidence
- several problems during a single journey

Because of this, some disabled people choose not to travel by train at all.

When disabled people are involved in training and service design, the results are much better. However, this involvement is uneven and often limited.

Most Train Operating Companies (TOCs) measure disability awareness by:

- how many people complete the training
- whether it meets legal requirements

They pay much less attention to:

- how staff behave in real situations
- whether passengers feel safe, confident and supported
- whether journeys are predictable and reliable

To improve disabled people's experiences, the rail industry needs to change systems, organisational culture and ways of working., not just training.

Background

Disabled people regularly face barriers when travelling by rail.

Research shows that help from staff is one of the most important factors in whether a journey is accessible and inclusive.

When staff support works well, it can:

- increase confidence

- support independent travel
- reduce anxiety
- make complex journeys possible

When it does not work well, it can:

- create stress and uncertainty
- leave people without the support they need
- lead to people avoiding rail travel entirely

These problems are particularly severe in the rail sector where journeys often include multiple stations, lots of different staff teams and tight time pressures.

The On Track for Inclusive Train Travel project

This is a project funded by the Motability Foundation.

It is delivered by:

- RNIB
- Community Rail Network

Working with:

- Community Rail Lancashire
- Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership

The project aims to improve how rail staff support disabled people and helps to create real, lasting change across the rail workforce.

The project starts from a simple idea that training only works if the systems around staff help them to use it.

Purpose of the Discovery phase

The Discovery phase aimed to understand:

- what shapes disabled people’s experiences when they need staff support
- how training operates in real, everyday conditions
- how systems and culture affect staff behaviour

We used:

- desk-based research
- surveys
- interviews
- focus groups

We also used international research to understand how similar issues occur elsewhere.

The findings do not represent everyone’s experience and are not meant to provide all the answers. They are meant to highlight patterns, identify problems worth focusing on and inform testing and improvement.

What we found

Disability awareness training is delivered across the rail sector.

However, its impact is shaped far more by how the railway operates than by what the training says.

Reliable assistance depends on:

- having enough staff available
- good handover between staff and locations
- accessible and reliable technology
- clear and usable information
- stations and trains that are easy to navigate

Involving disabled people improves training and services, but this varies across TOCs.

Evaluation of training focuses mainly on whether it was completed and whether it meets legal requirements. Few TOCs focus on whether staff can apply the training under pressure, passengers feels supported and journeys actually work from start to finish.

Working with disabled people

There is strong evidence that involving disabled people improves:

- the quality of training
- service design
- credibility and trust

Many train operators involve disabled people through:

- accessibility panels
- consultations
- working with charities
- gathering lived-experience stories

However, this involvement is often:

- one-off
- limited to training development and delivery
- not built into decision-making

Community rail partnerships often show better ways of involving disabled people in a better way. But learning from this does not always lead to wider organisational change.

What needs to be in place for things to work better

There is no single solution that works everywhere and will fix everything.

Instead, better experiences happen when several conditions work together.

Training needs to be:

- Grounded in the social model of disability
- Co-designed with disabled people
- Interactive and practical
- Focused on communication and judgement

Day-to day operations need:

- Enough staff
- Clear handovers
- Flexibility when things go wrong
- Clear authority so staff can act during disruption

Stations and environments need:

- Clear signage
- Good lighting
- Clean, calm spaces
- Predictable information that is easy to understand

Without these conditions, even well-trained staff may not be able to support passengers effectively.

Opportunities for improvement

The Discovery phase identified opportunities to:

- Focus on passenger outcomes and experience, not just legal compliance
- help staff to apply training in real conditions
- improve coordination across whole journeys
- involve disabled people on an ongoing basis
- strengthen feedback and learning loops
- create consistent training for all roles

These are areas to explore and test, not ready-made solutions.

Conclusion

Disability awareness training is widespread across the rail industry, but disabled passengers still face avoidable barriers.

These barriers come from:

- how the railway is run
- organisational culture
- design of stations, trains and systems
- as well as training

Addressing these together offers the best chance of delivering reliable, dignified and inclusive rail travel.

Any future work will need to:

- focus on what matters most
- work closely with partners
- fit with wider rail reform and the move to Great British Railways

Testing small changes in real conditions will help to identify where improvements are possible within real-world limits.

For more information, you can read the full [Discovery Report](#).

Appendix A: Disability Equality Training in the UK Rail Sector

Rail operators are required by law to provide disability equality training. This requirement comes from the Equality Act 2010 and Accessible Travel Policy guidance.

Training must:

- involve disabled people
- be updated regularly
- help staff build real skills, not just general awareness

Most operators now meet the legal requirement. However,, consistency and impact vary across the sector.

Appendix B: Cross-sector evidence

Research from transport, healthcare and public services shows that:

- training usually improves awareness and confidence
- training on its own rarely changes behaviour in the long-term

Training works best when it is:

- co-designed with disabled people
- supported by organisational systems and processes
- supported by leadership
- the organisations culture supports and encourages inclusive behaviour

Appendix C: UK-wide operational barriers

Whether assistance works reliably is affected by:

- not having enough staff
- staff being under time pressure
- procedures that are not flexible
- coordination failures between teams
- inaccessible complaints processes

These barriers are systemic and predictable. They are not isolated incidents.

Appendix D: RNIB Rail Accessibility Analysis

Disabled passengers reported:

- low confidence about travelling by train
- difficulty planning journeys
- problems using ticket machines
- information that is confusing or unclear
- difficulty finding staff when they need help

Passengers said journeys were much better when:

- staff behaved positively
- information was clear
- support was reliable and predictable

Negative experiences often had long-lasting effect, making people less willing to travel.