

In the traveller's shoes

When I last wrote a piece for a *Focus* edition on Wellbeing (back in 2022) I noted that the experience of the Covid lockdowns had taught all of us how isolating and distressing it is to be stuck at home unable to travel, for whatever reason.



Roll forward to 2024 and most of us have regained the freedom to move about as we choose, and the boredom and frustration of lockdown is a distant memory.

But there are still many people for whom travel is unaffordable, unavailable, or unusable. The impact on their quality of life, not to mention access to healthcare, employment, and leisure, is enormous.

To take a few examples: Many older people are not tech savvy and do not have access to smartphones or laptops. Nor are they comfortable making financial transactions online even if they can. And yet we know that the best deals for train tickets are all online. While the reversal of the plan to close ticket offices is certainly helpful, many are open only for very restricted hours, so choices remain limited and often unaffordable.

For the large number of people with mobility, vision or hearing difficulties, access to and usability of public transport has certainly improved significantly in the

last twenty years or so. But the reality of everyday travel is still too often a source of huge anxiety. Bus ramps or station lifts out of action, assistance not available even when booked, a lack of information in a useable format whether that be audible, visual or just plain understandable! In short, spontaneous, trouble-free travel is still only a dream for many people.

I wrote in the March edition of *Focus* about issues of stress and sensory overload caused by poor design of transport infrastructure: Bright lights, reflective surfaces, noise. All these and more can trigger distress both mental and physical. And yet we know that with more sensitive design, most of these stress points can be removed.

While my primary focus is on issues of disability and ageing, I also want to highlight issues of personal safety and confidence. I know that there are places and times when I will not travel as a woman alone, but I am lucky to have a choice, many do not.

For all of us, a good or bad journey can affect wellbeing. While no-one can

guarantee that every journey will be seamless and trouble-free, there is much more that can be done to take the anxiety out of everyday travel for all of us. Greater awareness of access and safety needs and a combination of greater sensitivity in design and operation are all important. Stronger emphasis on recruiting staff with empathy and training them to recognise people's needs is also vital. We know that for many older people, for example, the presence of uniformed staff is the single biggest source of reassurance when they travel.

A week ago, I used the interactive information panel at a London station, complete with real time sign language, for advice on which bus I needed to take to my destination. The response was to tell me it was a 28-minute walk – no other options suggested. In other words, it's not all about technology. It is about communication and putting yourself as a transport provider or planner, in the traveller's shoes. ☹️

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Lynn has more than 15 years of experience in human resources leadership. Prior to joining XPO, she served in senior roles with Gist Limited for nearly a decade, with a focus on talent acquisition, development and retention. She holds a degree in business studies from Glasgow Caledonian University, as well as professional qualifications.