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ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSION FORUM

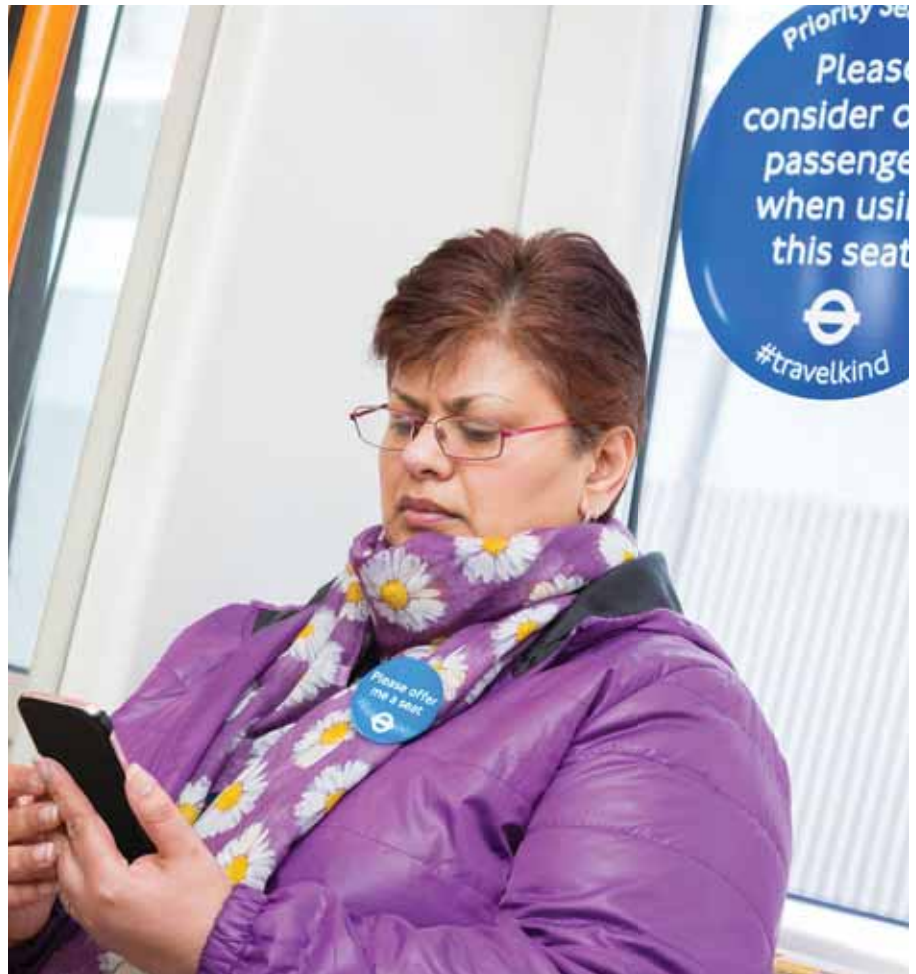
Mental health and travel

A quarter of all adults in England have been diagnosed with at least one mental illness, according to the NHS Digital Health Survey for England 2014, and many more have experienced mental illness without being diagnosed. The Centre for Transport Studies at University College London has carried out an online survey of people with mental health conditions in order to establish the difficulties they face when travelling and to identify ways in which these can be overcome.

Over a third of respondents frequently cannot leave home because of their mental illness, and nearly all of them experience this occasionally. Day-to-day fluctuations in their health mean that over half of them cannot buy advanced train tickets, so they miss out on some of the cheapest fares. The mode of travel that the largest number cannot use is London Underground and similar systems, often because of fears about being stuck in a tunnel. About half of them cannot use buses or trains. Nearly as many cannot drive a car, but for some respondents it is the only way that they can travel, because they feel a need to be in control of their journey.

The main causes of anxiety are the attitudes and behaviour of other people, particularly when trains and buses are overcrowded. Very few of the respondents possessed travel assistance cards, concessionary bus passes, 'Please offer me a seat' badges, Disabled Person's Railcards or Blue Badges for car parking or have received travel training; many of them say that these initiatives would encourage them to travel more if they received them.

The report contains a number of recommendations. Some of these focus on being able to obtain help when travelling. Interactions with transport staff should be improved by ensuring that all passenger-facing staff receive training about how to talk to people with mental health conditions. Some of the respondents were prevented from using taxis because they found the need to chat to the driver stressful. This could be overcome by the



introduction of a small card that could be shown to the driver asking him or her not to talk unnecessarily, and drivers being trained to respect the request. Many of the respondents needed to know that when travelling by train or bus they could be confident of finding a seat in a quiet place that they could escape from easily, if necessary. This would be quite difficult, particularly in the peak, but would be helped by employers ensuring that meetings are not held at the beginning and end of the working day, providing more quiet coaches on trains and enforcing them effectively, and involving people with mental health conditions in the design of the interior layout of buses and trains.

Initiatives such as the 'Please offer me a seat' badges aim to encourage people with mental illnesses to travel

It is hoped that this report will stimulate debate and that the recommendations will form the basis of policy and action. By doing so, not only will a significant proportion of the population find it easier to travel, but also everyone will benefit from more pleasant and comfortable journeys.

The report is available: www.ucl.ac.uk/civil-environmental-geomatic-engineering/mental-health-and-travel-report

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