

Breaking down barriers

“Accessible transport ensures everyone has a full range of opportunities irrespective of their background and challenges, combating isolation and enhancing wellbeing.”

Gerard Butler, the newly appointed Chair of CILT UK's Accessibility and Inclusion Forum shares how transport can become a powerful enabler of wellbeing for all.

Transport and logistics play a crucial role in connecting communities and enhancing quality of life, yet accessibility barriers continue to prevent many from fully participating in society. As part of our wellbeing edition, we sat down with Geoff Butler FCILT, who recently took the helm as Chair of CILT (UK)'s Accessibility and Inclusion Forum. With his background in transport data and journey planning systems, Gerard brings valuable experience in improving how accessibility information is communicated. In this conversation, he discusses the vital link between accessible transport and community wellbeing, outlines his priorities for the Forum, and shares his vision for a more inclusive industry that serves everyone's needs.

What inspired you to take on the role of Chair for CILT UK's Accessibility and Inclusion Forum, and what personal experiences inform your approach to these issues in the transportation and logistics sector?

Transport has a unique opportunity to contribute to effective accessibility and inclusion in wider society, as a key instrument in social justice, and the CILT membership, regions and forums have a vital role in sharing and highlighting best practice. I have been involved in the Forum for several years under the inspired leadership of Peter Rayner and Ann Frye and believed it is crucial to continue the good work of the Forum over several years. I have a background in transport data and journey planning systems, and have overseen substantial improvements in how accessibility information is communicated.

How do you see the connection between accessibility in transport and overall wellbeing for communities?

A vital one. Accessibility in transport is not an end in itself but ensures that everyone has a full range of opportunities to them irrespective of their background and challenges, hence avoiding social exclusion. More fundamentally, access to vital health, education and training facilities is maintained and enhanced. In the broader sense of the community, new rail openings and improved bus services which reduce journey times, and are available to all, mean that work, education and leisure activities can be

accessed over a far wider area. Not only does unemployment reduce, but incoming visitors to newly-connected towns create more economic activity.

What are your top priorities in your first year as Chair of the Forum?

My priorities are to refresh our terms of reference, with the help of the committee, who have a vast array of lived and industry experience. This will look to underline more explicitly the role transport plays in wider society, particularly from the inclusion perspective. We have already begun to engage with the other forums and regions, promoting complementary events which will be of interest to our forum members. Progressing from this, we intend to arrange joint events with other forums, and represent CILT in providing responses to formal consultations from an accessibility and inclusion perspective.

What innovations or best practices in accessibility have you encountered that you believe could transform the industry?

I am particularly pleased to see the recent introduction of British Sign Language displays on key National Rail stations, and hope this can be applied over a far wider area, in the rail industry and beyond. The mandatory move towards next bus stop announcements have been essential to those with accessibility needs. I am involved in the evolution of the Department for Transport's NaPTAN national stop and station database to ensure better quality accessibility information is provided for bus stops in particular. This can provide a firm foundation for reliable real time stop information, delivering dramatic improvements in completing end to end journeys with confidence.

How can logistics and transport companies better engage with disabled users to understand their needs, rather than making assumptions about accessibility requirements?

It is vital to actively seek and engage feedback, ideally through establishing an Accessibility Forum such as ours to ensure that real first-hand insight is available. This should be used to inform effective training on accessibility and inclusion, not just for customer-facing staff, but across logistics

and transport organisations as a whole. Indeed, we are looking to arrange a joint event with the Institute's Freight and Logistics Policy Group to examine the impact of home deliveries on accessibility and well being for people with impairments.

Mental wellbeing is increasingly recognised as crucial alongside physical accessibility. How do you plan to address this dimension in your work with the Forum?

We believe that there needs to be a clear sense of what 'inclusion' represents in the purpose of our Forum. Hence, alongside our focus on accessibility initiatives, we would be looking to focus on aspects of transport poverty, and equally digital access, given the importance of being able to find out what services are available, and how any adjustments are communicated. We would look to focus on best practice initiatives within the industry's workforce but also within service delivery to customers.

How can transport and logistics professionals better understand the intersection between accessibility, inclusion, and wellbeing?

Take time to talk to people with unique lived experiences and insights, and think about how your area can improve in service delivery. If there is an opportunity for specific training, it is always a worthwhile experience, and take a broad view of the end to end journey, not purely the transport element of it. Always seek examples of best practice elsewhere to see whether these can be applied locally. As a Forum, we would look to showcase such initiatives.

Looking ahead five years, what changes would you like to see in the industry that would indicate real progress in both accessibility and wellbeing?

I would like to see continued advancements in stations and bus stops being made more accessible, as well as a corresponding improvement to information to enable users to make informed choices. However, greater promotion of integrated public transport options where new openings are not possible would unlock so many opportunities in work and leisure and combat isolation. The true social value of public transport investment must be continually emphasised. ❌



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