

## ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION FORUM

### Joined-up journeys

**I**ntegration has long been a buzzword amongst transport operators and planners, but what does this really mean for older and disabled passengers for whom any journey is only as accessible as its least accessible part? From bus stops to airports, interchange between modes of transport (or indeed making any kind of travel connection) can be stressful and daunting for all of us. For travellers with additional access needs, this is often made more difficult because of poor planning and connectivity.

This year's Access and Inclusion Seminar will explore the difficulties faced by disabled and older people and will look at practical solutions that may help achieve joined-up journeys. It will be held on 10th April in Birmingham and will bring together transport operators, infrastructure designers and other professionals with transport-users with a range of access needs. The aim is to illustrate some of the most common obstacles to accessibility and to demonstrate how serious the issue of poor connectivity can be for older and disabled travellers. We shall be looking at ways in which we can resolve or mitigate these issues – or preferably anticipate and prevent them from happening.

Over the past few decades, the UK's transport industry has invested a great deal in improving accessibility for all travellers. We now have buses, trains and coaches with wheelchair spaces, ramps and lifts, as well as priority seating, audio-visual information and hi-vis handrails. There are wheelchair-accessible taxis, minibuses and private cars, blue-badge parking bays and accessible drop-off points. We have railway stations and other major transport interchanges with accessible toilets, induction loops and low-level counters. Transport sector staff have been trained to recognise and work with passengers who have additional needs (whether due to physical, sensory or cognitive impairments or mental health conditions) and we have a plethora of technology and apps to help us plan our journeys. Why, then, do so many disabled travellers and would-be travellers still find themselves unable to get around easily?

Of course, many of the access improvements listed above are far from fully implemented and operational, but there are various other factors preventing us from utilising the full potential of our transport infrastructure, not least how the



Pedestrian waiting at a crossing with no corresponding dropped kerb on the opposite side of the road

individual elements of that infrastructure connect with one another. Every journey that we make, irrespective of its distance, involves taking a complex chain of decisions and actions to get from A to B, from planning to arrival. This is equally true whether travelling on foot, or by private or public transport – or a combination of any or all of these.

What happens if even one part of that chain is inaccessible, or if the interface between travel modes renders those modes inaccessible, thereby breaking the chain? Consider sheltered housing built on a street with no dropped kerbs or crossings; the bus stop where the bus ramp cannot be safely deployed; the missing section of footpath; the otherwise accessible railway station with no step-free connection to its own car park or to the surrounding streets; the inconsistency of parking provision; airports and ferry terminals where assistance is available at check-in but not at boarding and vice versa.

Interchanges are only truly accessible if they have accessible connections to other forms of transport, pedestrian routes, parking, pick-up and drop-off points. Wayfinding, legibility and usability of large and small interchanges are critical for all passengers but are often inconsistent. Sometimes it is the unintended consequences of day-to-day operating practices which cause problems.

We transport professionals genuinely want to facilitate seamless intermodal

travel and better integration for all travellers. Designers and operators are already working hard to improve accessibility within the boundaries of their own remit, but is anybody taking a step back and looking holistically at how it all works together, particularly in terms of accessibility? If there are issues that impede accessibility for users, how do we resolve them?

It will not be easy. Our transport industry encompasses a wide range of sectors, each with its own regulatory and funding constraints that are shaped by matters as diverse as built infrastructure, planning policy, staffing and security. Critically, we need to understand why these problems are occurring. Planning and good practice in areas as diverse as timetabling, signage, ticketing, physical infrastructure and co-operation between providers will all play a vital part in making journeys achievable for all.

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Bus being boarded at Cowes ferry terminal