

**Muscular  
Dystrophy  
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change  
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volunteers

# TRAILBLAZERS

Part of the Young Campaigners' Network



## END OF THE LINE

### THE TRAILBLAZERS' TRANSPORT REPORT

Report 1 of the **Inclusion Now** series  
May 2009

**“So many times I’ve been denied access on public transport because of my condition. Most people find it is easy to get around and be independent but when you have a disability simple tasks like this can be extremely difficult.**

**Whether it’s buses, trains or tubes, there’s always some kind of problem. I know I’m not the only one who’s experienced this.”**

**Judith Merry, Buckinghamshire**

**This report has been researched, compiled and written by *Trailblazers* Ambassadors:**

**Judith Merry** – National Ambassador

**Laura Merry** – National Ambassador

**Craig Everest** – East of England

**Nick Wallis** – East Midlands

**Nicky Baker** – London

**James Lee** – London

**Sulaiman Khan** – London

**Matilda Ibini** – London

**Jennifer Gallacher** – North East

**David Gale** – North East

**Jessica Berry** – North West

**Colin Rabbich** – North West

**Stephen Liney** – South East

**Zoe Hallam** – South East

**Donna Cameron** – South West

**Helen Starbuck** – South West

**Jagdeep Kaur Sehmbi** – West Midlands

**Chris Willis** – Yorkshire and Humberside

**Rebecca Unsworth** – Yorkshire and Humberside

**Michaela Hollywood** – Northern Ireland

**Suzanne Glover** – Northern Ireland

**Richard McDermott** – Scotland

**Lauren West** – Wales

## INTRODUCTION

More than 100 young disabled campaigners from all over the UK have spent the past three months carrying out an undercover investigation into the state of our nation's public transport system: *End of the Line* reveals our results and findings.

Despite the Disability Discrimination Act of 2005 stating that transport service providers are obliged to make 'reasonable adjustments' if their services are not fully accessible to disabled people, our report shows that many young wheelchair users and people with mobility difficulties face serious challenges when accessing public transport compared to their non-disabled peers.

We are calling on the Government and local authorities, together with transport providers, to review their accessibility policies. Young disabled people want to be independent and transport should not stop us.

The evidence in this report comes from a wide range of primary quantitative and qualitative evidence gathering methods including over 190 mystery commuter surveys, station surveys, campaigners' blogs, focus groups and film reports. Secondary evidence in this report comes from various sources including the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, the Department for Transport and Transport for London.

## ABOUT TRAILBLAZERS

*Trailblazers* is a nationwide organisation of young disabled and non-disabled campaigners. We are part of the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign, the leading UK charity focusing on all muscle diseases. We aim to fight the social injustices experienced by young people living with muscle disease or a related condition and ensure they can gain access to the services they require.



Suzanne Glover at the *Trailblazers* launch at Westminster

Jagdeep Kaur Sehmbi at her local station in Birmingham





## KEY FINDINGS

- Wheelchair users have less choice when using public transport and as a result are forced to pay more than their non disabled peers – the majority of coaches are inaccessible so trains are the only option for longer journeys. A typical train journey from London to Manchester with a Disabled Adult's Railcard costs £35.65 while a typical coach journey would cost just £13.20.
- Young disabled passengers often feel like second class citizens on public transport through a combination of unreliable technology, poor disability awareness staff training and inaccessible stations.
- Young disabled passengers cannot always access the first bus, train or taxi that arrives at a station or stop.
- The Assisted Passenger Registration Service (24 hour advance booking) for trains restricts the spontaneity and independence of disabled passengers and fails to provide a reliable service that passengers have confidence in.
- The number of *Trailblazers* involved in the survey was significantly affected by their poor opinion of public transport and overall belief that transport is not up to scratch in the UK. Simply put, many Trailblazers could not take part.
- Non-wheelchair users with mobility difficulties also faced serious problems when attempting to use buses and trains. Bus drivers fail often to park next to the kerb meaning Trailblazers have a greater distance to climb into the bus. Drivers can pull away from stops too quickly before a passenger is seated and safe.

Equality and Human Rights Commission said:

**"The Equality and Human Rights Commission welcomes and applauds Trailblazers and the current campaign to promote access to public transport."**

Judith Merry at a bus stop in Oxford





## BUSES

The *Trailblazers* mystery commuter surveys on public transport uncovered a wide variation in the standard of services encountered by young disabled people using buses.

- In more than half of all journeys on buses we found some problem with the accessible facilities at the station or bus stop, on the bus or a poor service from members of staff.
- In one in three of the journeys made by *Trailblazers*, the survey respondent was unable to board the first relevant bus to arrive at their stop. This was a consequence of the access ramp being unavailable, the accessible space being unavailable or the driver failing to stop at a location which was accessible to the passenger.
- In one third of journeys undertaken by *Trailblazers* the respondents said that the driver was not helpful.

A *Trailblazers* public transport focus group identified the attitude and poor standard of disability awareness of some bus drivers as a significant deterrent to disabled passengers using public buses. The group concluded that although the majority of bus drivers do carefully consider disabled passengers' assistance needs there are too many drivers who require improved disability awareness training to ensure that all disabled passengers are treated fairly.

**"The negative attitude some drivers give off is upsetting. If I ask them kindly and politely for the height of the bus to be lowered it's as if I am asking for a complex task to be performed, when all they have to do is push a button."**

Matilda Ibini, London

### Common concerns included:

- drivers not parking close enough to kerbs for the ramps to work
- faulty ramps
- some routes continue to lack regular accessible buses
- drivers lacking sufficient training or inclination to use ramps
- pram users filling accessible spaces
- passengers feeling insecure or in danger of tipping over
- drivers giving insufficient time for passengers to sit down or secure their wheelchair
- the availability of only one accessible space for a wheelchair
- the Dial-a-Bus and Ring-and-Ride are often oversubscribed and restrictive

**"Wheelchair accessible buses do not run on every route everyday making the idea of hopping on a bus as a quick way of going on a journey unrealistic for a wheelchair user."**

Jennifer Gallacher, Middlesbrough



### Action needed:

With 9.8 million disabled people in the UK and an ageing population we are calling on the Government, local authorities and public transport providers to:

- conduct a major review of accessibility on buses and coaches across the UK
- ensure that accessibility on buses and coaches are at the heart of public transport planning not merely a concept that to pay lip service to
- ensure that seat belts are fitted in wheelchair spaces to guarantee security of wheelchair users
- ensure that buses on all routes are accessible
- set up a system where when a ramp is not working on a bus and a disabled passenger wants to use it the driver informs a central depot who arrange for an accessible taxi to be provided for the passenger. We believe this would encourage bus service providers to guarantee their buses are always accessible.

*"I once decided to go to our local mall and on the way there my sister told the driver where we wanted to stop. However on the way we decided to get off one stop earlier. When my sister told this to the bus driver he made a huge fuss and was really rude. Although buses are somewhat good accessibly, the journeys often cause me so much stress and are always quite a traumatic experience."*

Sulaiman Khan, London

*"My local transport service is really good. On the train they always have the ramp ready and at busy times move people out of the way for me so I can get on. On the bus they stop at a footpath so that the ramp is not too steep, and get out and guide my chair down."*

Suzanne Glover, Northern Ireland

*"Recently I had an awful experience using the red buses, where within one day alone I think I faced all the possible problems you can when trying to catch the bus. On two of the four occasions the bus drivers did not wait for me to get on board! Then a bus driver positioned his bus in the middle of the road, (not near the curb where he is required to park) so there was no way as a wheelchair user I would have been able to step onto the road and board, without risking my safety. Then two of the buses ramps were not even working and we had waited for that bus in the freezing cold for almost 2 hours, so to be treated like that just infuriated us all."*

Maliha Aziz, London



James Lee carrying out surveys on London buses

## TRAINS

The *Trailblazers* mystery commuter surveys on trains highlighted a number of concerns regarding disabled passengers accessing the rail network.

In 50% of journeys the surveyor reported some form of disappointment with the disabled facilities at the station, on the train or a poor service from members of staff.

As a result of few long distance coach/bus companies currently providing wheelchair access, young disabled people who want to travel around the UK often have no other option but to use a train service when travelling long distances.

Despite this the mystery commuters surveys show that on 25% of surveyed journeys the passenger was unable to board the first train that they wanted to. This was put down to a number of reasons which included:

- having to wait for staff availability
- the staff could not be contacted at the destination station
- there was only one member of staff and they were too busy to help
- there was no disabled seating or space available

**"It's all well and good to hunt down the man with the ramp while on the platform, but once you're on the train what goes on at the arriving end platform is completely out of your hands - bad communication or forgetful staff result in you not getting off the train! I feel that these experiences make you feel a huge lack in confidence with this service."**

Colin Rabbich, Morecambe

**"A couple of times there has been no one with the ramp to help me off the train at my destination platform, even though I had informed them at the other station and been assured that someone would have the ramps ready."**

Jagdeep Kaur Sehmbi, Birmingham

A *Trailblazers* public transport focus group identified the poor reliability of the 24 hours advance notice Assisted Passenger Reservation Service. This creates a lack of confidence in the service for disabled passengers.

The group believes that a new system for accessible train travel should be implemented, as the requirement to book assistance 24 hours in advance removes an individual's freedom to travel independently and spontaneously. The group could understand that an unmanned station may require 24 hours' notice but could not see why if notice of a wheelchair user travelling on a particular train was given at the journey's origin, a member of staff could not meet them at a manned mainline destination.

The group also noted that the shortage of lifts between platforms made travelling around railway stations particularly difficult and protracted.

Jessica Berry at Macclesfield station





**"I had to pay for my PA to travel too so even with my Disabled Person's Railcard it meant I ended up paying more than a non-disabled person."**

Nicky Baker, Harrow

### **Common concerns include:**

- having to rely on other people to negotiate the train system means the independence of young disabled passengers is compromised
- passengers being left on trains when arriving at destinations due to poor communication and planning between stations
- a lack of lifts from one platform to another makes travelling around stations hard work and sometimes leaves passengers feeling like second-class citizens
- not all conductors know how to give the discount for disabled passengers which means paying the full price
- non-wheelchair users who have mobility difficulties feel humiliated when being questioned as to why they use a Disabled Person's Railcard
- the 24 hour advance booking service means if you're disabled you are not able to travel at short notice
- the steps on to trains are often too high creating problems for non-wheelchair users with mobility difficulties

### **Action needed:**

We are calling on the Government, local authorities and public transport providers to:

- include a button in carriage doorways that can be pressed by a passenger to inform the driver that there is a wheelchair user waiting for assistance
- ensure that, until such time when all trains can be boarded and disembarked independently, the Assisted Passenger Reservation Service is improved to guarantee that all disabled passengers receive a universally high standard of service
- ensure that trains and stations are more accessible for disabled passengers. If electric ramps can work for buses why not trains?
- improve staff training on use of ramps
- to improve facilities for disabled passengers on trains, for example building in low level tables in wheelchair-designated spaces, as is already the case with some rail service providers

**"It's really just a case of equality of service. Why should any disabled person have to wait around for assistance or have to ring 24 hours in advance to use a station?"**

Stephen Liney, Aylesbury

**"Some stations are great, particularly the smaller ones, but some never hurry themselves to come and get you off the train despite having booked the travel assistance at least 24 hours before. It's so scary being left on a train with no way of getting off."**

Jessica Berry, Macclesfield

## TAXIS

The Trailblazer' mystery commuter surveys on taxis highlighted a number of concerns.

Two thirds of *Trailblazers* completing a surveyed journey said that they were disappointed in some way with service provided or the cost incurred.

Two out of five of survey respondents felt that they paid more to use a wheelchair accessible taxi than a non-wheelchair user would.

As a result of the strain of using the bus and rail networks many disabled people feel as if they have to use taxis if they are going to be able to travel around their town or city. However, the Disability Living Allowance mobility component does not reflect the vast cost differential between personalised individual public transport, like taxis, and mass public transport such as buses or trains. Other concerns included some drivers showing rudeness and a lack of patience and understanding of the value a wheelchair user places on their powered wheelchair.

There were examples of *Trailblazers* who had been forced into vehicles when there was not enough space, causing damage to the passenger's chair.

**"Taxis are prohibitively expensive, even with a Taxi discount card. I once had to pay £65 to go into central London, because I can't use the tube or trust the buses, which made even the driver cringe. The average person pays about £5 to go into central London from where I live."**

Sulaiman Khan, London

In some cases wheelchairs had not been properly secured before departure and drivers failed to take into consideration the passenger when driving over speed bumps or braking sharply.

A *Trailblazers'* public transport focus group identified the need for better disability awareness training for some taxi drivers, although the group acknowledged that taxis as a rule provided the best and most reliable service for many disabled people. The group also reported that taxis are expensive, yet essential when other modes of transport remain inaccessible or provide too many inconveniences.

**"I specifically asked one particular company for a TX1 car, which is a bigger taxi. I checked if I needed to book in advance to go home. They said no, but failed to tell me that their taxi service does not collect from Roehampton area where I had been dropped off – it took one hour to order an accessible taxi which was really irritating."**

Judith Merry, Buckinghamshire

### Common concerns include:

- drivers not stopping at a place the passenger could access the vehicle
- drivers not stopping to pick up wheelchair users
- drivers not knowing how to use a ramp
- a shortage of wheelchair accessible taxis
- drivers failing to secure wheelchairs before driving away
- ramps often being too steep and narrow
- cost issues – taxis are significantly more expensive than other modes of public transport yet many disabled people feel they have no other choice

### Action needed:

We are calling on the Government, local authorities and taxi and mini cab providers to ensure that:

- ramps in taxis are extendable and wider so all wheelchair users can use them safely
- taxi subsidy cards are available for disabled passengers with a discount that reflects the dependence many disabled people have on them
- more wheelchair accessible taxi services are available
- taxi drivers are given better disability awareness training

*"I feel taxis are the best form of transport, but I don't use them due to often being let down, and the hassle some drivers present. I didn't mind when I was younger to roll around in the back of a van, but now it's far too tiring!"*

Colin Rabbich, Morecambe

*"I have a regular driver who will arrange for someone else to come for me if he is busy and he always tries to accommodate my bookings if I give him short notice. I couldn't have a good social life without the taxi service I use."*

Jennifer Gallacher, Middlesbrough

Jennifer Gallacher using a wheelchair accessible taxi in Middlesbrough





## THE LONDON UNDERGROUND

London's underground network is one of the city's most popular and swiftest modes of transport. However we had a very low number of tube journeys surveyed as part of the *Trailblazers* study due to the vast majority of the underground network being inaccessible. Even if a Trailblazer was able to board a tube at one station that was accessible there was a high likelihood that they would not be able to exit from their station of choice due to the high number of inaccessible stations.

Fifty-seven stations are, according to Transport for London, accessible to most customers, including wheelchair users. But with a total of 260 stations on the underground and Docklands Light Railway network only 22% of stations are accessible to all wheelchair users, and of these only 1.5% (or four) of accessible stations are in Zone 1 (central London).

We do however commend Transport for London for producing detailed accessible maps.

*"Travelling with my sister (who is also a wheelchair user) is impossible in London as there is only ever one wheelchair space available on a bus. Therefore journeys take much longer than they do for non-disabled siblings or friends."*

Laura Merry, Roehampton

*"A typical journey from my home near Aylesbury to the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign offices in central London takes me around four and a half hours and that's on a good day. It would take a non-disabled person two hours."*

Judith Merry, Buckinghamshire



### Action needed:

We are calling on the Government, the London Assembly and Transport for London to:

- increase the number of fully accessible London Underground stations
- ensure all new London Underground trains are accessible for wheelchair users and people with mobility difficulties
- put accessibility at the heart of all future planning for trains, stations and platforms on the London Underground network

## PLANES

As of 2007 airlines and holiday companies are no longer able to refuse to fly people because they are disabled. However *Trailblazers* continue to show concern at the way airlines treat essential equipment, like powered wheelchairs, on flights.

*Trailblazers* believe one solution is for airlines to allocate specific places on planes where seats can be removed and wheelchairs can be clamped into place – this will provide greater comfort for many wheelchair users and ensure their chair is not at risk of damage. At the current time most wheelchair users have to transfer into a manual wheelchair provided by the airline.

Many disabled passengers are charged by airlines for excess baggage for medical and/or disability supplies/equipment. Some airlines also charge people who need extra oxygen when they fly to transport the canisters and many will not allow passengers to bring their own supplies on board. This equates to a tax on breathing.

**"My biggest worry has always been to do with whether airlines can ensure my wheelchair is kept safe. Who wants to turn up at their destination with a broken wheelchair? I'm sure that would ruin the trip for everyone!"**

Colin Rabbich, Morecambe

**"Why should using a wheelchair be prohibitive to using a plane? If you need special seating arrangements I don't see why this should have to cost more. I have a friend who had to book a first class bed instead of travelling in economy because of the pain he experiences when sitting upright for prolonged periods of time. I feel airlines should be obliged to provide necessary adaptations at no extra cost to the disabled passenger."**

James Lee, London

**"A bill for £150 or so seems exorbitant for what amounts to basically transporting a single cylinder there and back. Disabled people have to constantly fight for things I feel should be made available to us when we need it."**

Helen Starbuck, Plymouth

**"When I went abroad with one particular airline, they dropped my wheelchair off the baggage belt that puts luggage into the plane. During the flight they were very nice to me and all (even letting me meet the pilot), but once we got to our destination they handed me my wheelchair, which was practically in total bits. I was in tears because it was only a six-month-old wheelchair that took me ages to get from the council. What made it worse is they never apologised or paid for it either, and after the shock that wheelchair never worked right! Other airlines however have provided excellent pre-flight planning for disabled passengers and do everything they can to guarantee a good experience."**

Sulaiman Khan, London

### Action needed:

We are calling on Government, airlines and airports to:

- consult disabled passengers about how to improve airport and inflight facilities
- learn from best practice employed by service providers such as Virgin Airways
- put the needs of disabled passengers at the heart of short and long term service planning

## SUMMARY

There has undoubtedly been a vast improvement in accessible public transport since the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), part of which stated that transport service providers are obliged to make 'reasonable adjustments' if their services are not fully accessible to disabled people, came into law in 2005.

However, the evidence presented in *End of the Line* shows that, despite the DDA many disabled people still struggle to use public transport as a consequence of the service being either unsafe, unreliable or too expensive.

The Muscular Dystrophy Campaign *Trailblazers* are calling on the Government and local authorities, together with transport providers, to review and update their policies on public transport. We want them to ensure that public transport is fully inclusive in its planning and enables and empowers young disabled people, rather than excluding and isolating them as often unfortunately continues to be the case.



**"We want...to ensure that public transport is fully inclusive in its planning and enables and empowers young disabled people, rather than excluding and isolating them."**

Judith Merry, Trailblazers National Ambassador



## USEFUL LINKS

### **Cabinet Office**

**[www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk)**

Features the contact details of ministers relevant to your campaign.

### **Department for Transport**

**[www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk)**

The Government department responsible for public transport.

### **Passenger Focus**

**[www.passengerfocus.org.uk](http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk)**

An independent national rail consumer watchdog.

### **Transport for London**

**[www.tfl.gov.uk/](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/)**

The website for London's transport network

### **Direct Enquiries**

**[www.directenquiries.com](http://www.directenquiries.com)**

Provides nationwide resources for disabled people

### **DirectGov**

**[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)**

Provides information on Government services and those responsible for them

### **Find your MP**

**[www.findyourmp.parliament.uk/commons](http://www.findyourmp.parliament.uk/commons)**

Self explanatory!

### **Find your Assembly Member**

**[www.assemblywales.org/memhome/member-search.htm](http://www.assemblywales.org/memhome/member-search.htm)**

If you live in Wales, search here.

### **Find your MSP**

**[www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/membersPages/MSPAddressPostcodeFinder.htm](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/membersPages/MSPAddressPostcodeFinder.htm)**

If you live in Scotland search here

### **Find your MLA**

**[www.niassembly.gov.uk/members/constmap\\_res.htm](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/members/constmap_res.htm)**

If you live in Northern Ireland search here

### **The Equalities and Human Rights Commission**

**[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)**

The home of campaigning for equality in the UK and Northern Ireland.

**This report has been researched, compiled  
and written by *Trailblazers* Ambassadors**

Muscular Dystrophy Campaign  
61 Southwark Street  
London SE1 0HL

020 7803 4807  
[trailblazers@muscular-dystrophy.org](mailto:trailblazers@muscular-dystrophy.org)  
[www.muscular-dystrophy.org/trailblazers](http://www.muscular-dystrophy.org/trailblazers)

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