



No stopping us now

Towards accessible bus stops for all

October 2026

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Front cover image by Peter Kindersley via Centre for Ageing Better.

Executive summary

Bus stops are the gateway to bus travel, yet many disabled passengers experience significant barriers achieving independent mobility.

An estimated 16.8 million people in the UK (around a quarter of the population) have some form of disability, and disabled people make a third as many journeys per week as the national average. Previous research shows that 40% of disabled bus users have experienced inadequate bus stops and 37% find the lack of real-time information a barrier. This report examines barriers to accessing bus services and sets out practical recommendations.

Structural barriers

Progress is constrained by several structural barriers:

- Current lack of robust, statutory guidance on bus stop accessibility
- Constrained capital and revenue funding
- Fragmented responsibilities between different tiers of local government and operators
- Competing demands for limited pavement and road space
- The need for coordination between utility providers, highway authorities and operators
- Complex and regulatory processes and limited enforcement capacity
- Inconsistent data and asset tracking across the bus stop network.

A whole-journey approach

This report is about the accessibility of the bus stop itself and the access to the bus stop. Whether a bus stop and the bus journey it enables are accessible depends on a much broader set of factors affecting the overall journey. This report therefore adopts a 'whole-

journey' approach, considering accessibility across four stages: pre-trip planning, travel to and from the stop, waiting and boarding, and bus travel and alighting. Barriers exist at every stage, from inaccessible journey-planning websites and poorly maintained pavements, to inadequate kerb heights, absent real-time information and gaps in driver training.

A categorisation framework for investment

Recognising that no single design fits every location, the report sets out a four-category framework for prioritising investment, while ensuring every stop meets a baseline of accessibility: a marked presence, legible information, a safe boarding kerb and step-free access.

Co-design and human interactions

Interactions with bus drivers and the public play an important role in shaping bus user experiences. Infrastructure improvements must be matched by genuine co-design with disabled people and by improved driver training and passenger awareness.

Delivering accessible bus stops at scale will require a whole-system response: joined-up investment in physical infrastructure and information provision, removal of structural and regulatory barriers, and meaningful engagement with disabled people throughout design and delivery.



around
one quarter
of the UK population
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Introduction

Bus stops are an important link between passengers and bus services. They are the start and end of every journey, and often shape whether a journey feels accessible, reliable, and comfortable.

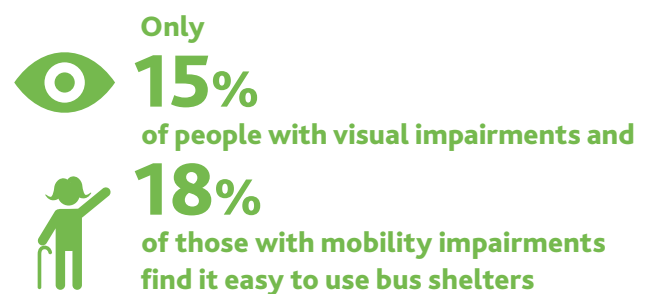
For disabled passengers, including those with physical, sensory and non-visible impairments and neurodivergence, a poorly designed bus stop environment can make bus travel entirely unviable. Features such as kerb height, shelter design, lighting, and information provision directly affect whether passengers can plan journeys, feel safe while waiting, and board independently.

An estimated 16.8 million people in the UK (25% of the population) have some form of disability.¹ Disabled people make an average of just 5.84 journeys per week, a third of the national average.² Many depend on buses, making more trips by bus than non-disabled people, yet inaccessible bus stops are a primary barrier to independent travel. Previous research revealed:

- 40% of disabled bus users have experienced inadequate bus stops, including lack of seating, lack of shelter, and inaccessible street space
- 37% report a lack of real-time information at stops, including on delays, cancellations, and vehicle faults
- 50% of disabled people report difficulty navigating routes due to a lack of dropped kerbs
- 41% have experienced problems with driver attitudes and behaviours³
- Only 15% of people with visual impairments and 18% of those with mobility impairments find it easy to use bus shelters.⁴

This report sets out the accessibility challenges faced by disabled people across the entire bus journey and provides practical recommendations for decision makers. It builds on Campaign for Better Transport's 2024 paper, *Better Bus Stops: Creating a national bus stop standard*, and on existing best practice guidance. The Equality Act (2010) requires public transport operators and highway authorities to provide reasonable adjustments so that disabled passengers

are not disadvantaged. There also is a national best practice guidance document on inclusive mobility, which outlines accessibility features and specifications that need to be considered for bus stops, including siting, shelters and information provision.⁵



Based on insights from a broad range of organisations representing disabled people and passengers with additional accessibility needs, the report adopts a whole-journey approach, examining accessibility across different stages: pre-trip planning, travel to and from the bus stop, waiting, boarding and alighting the bus, and onboard travel. Barriers exist at every stage, from inaccessible journey-planning websites and poorly maintained pavements, to inadequate kerb heights, absent real-time information, and insufficient driver training. The report also recognises that no one size fits all by setting out accessibility features for different categories of bus stops based on their level of use and service provision.

Delivering accessible bus stops at scale requires overcoming significant structural barriers: insufficient and short-term capital funding, fragmented responsibilities between local authorities and operators, and inconsistent data.

However, by understanding lived experiences of disabled bus passengers and developing targeted improvements to infrastructure and information provision, there is a clear potential for creating bus stops which serve all users.

What is a bus stop?

A bus stop is where a passenger boards and alights a bus. It is a critical transition point where the passenger journey moves from the street environment onto public transport. Bus stop locations on the highway are recorded in the central Department for Transport (DfT) National Public Transport Access Nodes (NaPTAN) database, alongside other public transport access points.

There are four types of bus stop recorded in NaPTAN:

- 1 Marked** – A physically marked stop with a bus stop pole/flag or shelter. These are used for scheduled services, for passenger onboarding and alighting and are the most recognisable format. This type is the most accessible type.
- 2 Custom/Unmarked** – A location point with no physical marker, or only marked on road, but where scheduled services stop for onboarding and alighting. This type is more common in rural areas but creates greater challenges for visibility, predictability and accessibility.
- 3 Hail and Ride** – An unmarked road section where buses stop on request, if safe to do so. Low awareness of these sections creates barriers for both passenger and drivers, but they play an important role, particularly in rural areas where provision of bus stops is less frequent.
- 4 Flexible Zones** – Typically a demand-responsive transport (DRT) arrangement where passengers book journeys within a defined zone, but stops as such have no fixed location. While offering flexibility, this type assumes access to online services and presents accessibility challenges.

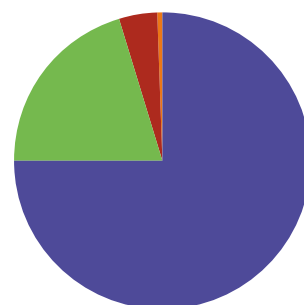
The majority of bus stop are marked. This may be through the presence of one or more identifying

features, including road markings, a flag on a pole and a shelter. Yet nearly one in four bus stops are Unmarked or Hail and Ride. More common in rural areas, they enable passengers to hail a bus in areas where authorities are unable to install a flag. However, they create challenges for visibility, predictability and accessibility leading to missed services. There may be situations where marking unmarked bus stops may be impractical, such as places with very infrequent, irregular or special provision services. However, where possible, Unmarked bus stops should be identified by local authorities and operators and marked – to increase accessibility for passengers. In addition, Hail and Ride sections should have designated and safe roadside boarding zones identified locally. Passengers cannot be expected to wait on uneven grass verges or unlit carriageway edges, which inherently exclude wheelchair users and those with mobility or sensory impairments.

We believe every bus stop should be as accessible to all users as possible. However, different types of stopping places and locations present different technical and operational constraints. The bus stop categorisation developed in *Better Bus Stops* therefore provides a framework for identifying appropriate accessibility features for different types of bus stops. These are described later in this report.

As of September 2026, there are **417,034** bus stops in Great Britain.

 Marked	313,436 (75.2%)
 Custom/Unmarked	84,238 (20.2%)
 Hail and Ride	17,960 (4.3%)
 Flexible Zones ⁶	1,400 (0.3%)



What is accessibility?

Accessibility encompasses the design, testing and delivery of products and services to be usable by everyone, including people with different impairments, ensuring equitable access and independence.

This report uses the social model of disability, which recognises that people are disabled by societal barriers, not by their impairment or condition. In this case, poor or absent bus stop infrastructure and information disables individuals, suppressing bus travel.

Accessibility removes environmental, attitudinal and informational barriers creating equality (independence, choice, and inclusion) allowing for similar, effective, and independent experiences for people with permanent, temporary, or situational limitations.

Accessible bus travel requires ensuring that through information provision and physical infrastructure, the whole bus journey is made possible and practical.

“ We are disabled by barriers that exist in the world, rather than our individual bodies or minds. Those of us living with impairments or illness are not inherently ‘disabled’ – this is something that is created through exclusion. ”

Transport for All, Mission Statement

   **almost
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Types of accessibility

Accessibility in the context of this document refers to a diverse range of access needs and challenges faced by bus users, which can affect their ability to access, interpret and utilise infrastructure and information at and around the bus stop.

To help identify the infrastructure and information provision needed, this document examines the following types of access needs:

Physical accessibility: Supports people with physical impairments, including mobility scooter and wheelchair users, those using other mobility aids (including crutches, walking canes and frames), and people with hidden impairments, such as chronic pain, fatigue or severe breathing issues. These conditions affect people’s capacity to reach and wait at the bus stop, as well as board and alight the bus. Requirements include kerbs, shelters, step-free access.

Sensory accessibility: Supports people with visual and hearing impairments. These affect people’s capacity to locate and access the bus stop, and be

made aware of timetabling, approaching vehicles and change in schedules. Requirements include information in audio and visual formats and tactile cues.

Cognitive accessibility: Supports people with neurodivergence or neurological conditions that affect memory, reasoning, communication and learning, such as dementia, Parkinson’s disease, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia and dyscalculia. These conditions affect people’s ability to process information and can trigger sensory overwhelm from sound, lighting, crowdedness or temperature. Requirements include clear, predictable layouts and minimisation of sensory overload, such as excessive noise or visual clutter.

Understanding this broad spectrum of impairments, and the ways these intersect, is important, as some people might have multiple conditions and complex needs.

“ *The inconsistencies in current designs at a local level and nationally mean that most disabled people are not currently having their access needs met in existing bus stop design. However, groups who feel particularly overlooked are those with hidden impairments, such as those who are neurodivergent, mental health, chronic illnesses or broader cognitive impairments.* ”

Transport for All, Mission Statement

Why accessible bus stops matter

Well-designed and maintained bus stops are fundamental to ensuring bus services are accessible, not only for those with disabilities, but also older, younger and less mobile users.

As mentioned, a quarter of the UK population have some form of disability. Meanwhile, people aged 65 and over make up 19% of England's population, and this figure is predicted to increase to 26% over the next 40 years.⁷ We must design our infrastructure fit for the future, today.

Making transport more accessible is critical for enabling access to educational, employment and social opportunities. Yet disabled people's travel options are more limited, which means they make an average of just 5.84 journeys per week - a third of the national average.⁸ Many rely on private cars, both as a driver and a passenger, but 29% of disabled adults live in households without access to a car, compared with 16% of non-disabled adults.⁹ Buses, alongside other accessible transport options like community transport, are therefore essential for increasing independent mobility.

Inaccessible bus stops play a major role in restricting access to bus services and inhibiting transport independence for disabled people.¹⁰ Transport for All's 2023 report into the accessibility challenges experienced by disabled people revealed:



21%

found the information provided was not available in both audio and visual format



40%

have experienced inadequate bus stops, with lack of seating, lack of shelter leaving people exposed to the rain and cold, inaccessible surrounding street space and street clutter



37%

experienced a lack of real-time information while using buses, with live updates such as delays, cancellations, diversions, and vehicle faults (e.g. broken ramps) not clearly communicated.¹¹

Despite some progress in these areas, a substantial gap in transport experience between disabled and nondisabled passengers remains. Disabled passengers consistently report lower satisfaction, particularly with boarding, bus stop conditions and value for money.¹² Support for disabled passengers' needs is necessary across the whole journey experience. Addressing inadequacies in the physical infrastructure, information provision and human experience in and around bus stops will be fundamental to address gaps which persist for disabled people.

Structural barriers to improving bus stop accessibility

There is a growing awareness of accessibility needs and available national guidance on inclusive mobility. However, delivering fully inclusive bus stop infrastructure remains challenging for many local authorities because of organisational, and resource-driven barriers.

1. Lack of robust, statutory guidance

There are different examples of good practice for bus stop infrastructure and national regulations for accessible information provision on board buses. However, there is currently no single, consistent and comprehensive source of national guidance that establishes clear expectations for bus stops' infrastructure and information provision.¹³ This leads to inconsistencies for passengers.



2. Insufficient funding and resources

Bus stop infrastructure and information accessibility improvements can be expensive, and local transport authorities have limited capital funding dedicated to buses. Revenue funding constraints also make it difficult to undertake ongoing cleaning and maintenance, such as printed timetable revisions and replacing damaged or outdated equipment.¹⁴ The shift towards longer-term, needs-based Local Authority Bus Grant allocations could ease these pressures.

3. Fragmentation of responsibilities

In some regions, responsibilities are split between governance levels. In two-tier areas, it is the upper-tier county councils (as the local transport authorities) that are responsible for bus stop investment plans and procurement, while lower-tier district councils (as the highways authorities) manage road and pavement layout changes, highways and footway maintenance, parking and traffic management. The latter also tend to manage maintenance and upkeep of bus stops. The local transport authorities are responsible for coordinating and reporting service and timetable changes, while the highways authorities may be the ones to physically change the information at bus stops, or this may be delegated to operators. All this requires very close collaboration and good working relationships between different local authority teams and bus operators.

4. Competing demands for limited space

Roads, pavements and wider bus stop environments must balance the needs of different users: bus passengers, pedestrians, cyclists, parked vehicles, street furniture, and utilities, often within constrained spaces. Department for Transport guidance stipulates that two metres must be left on the pavement for pedestrians to pass by a shelter.¹⁵ Introducing raised kerbs, hard standing, shelters, and real time passenger information (RTPI) units in already cluttered environments can require significant redesign, negotiation, and compromise.

5. Coordination with utilities and stakeholders

Installing or upgrading bus stops often requires collaboration with multiple partners, including utility providers, highways authorities, and transport operators. Utility works frequently delay upgrades, and resurfacing or kerb alignment projects may be undone by later maintenance, leading to rework and inefficiency. A lack of standardisation between councils, operators, and third-party contractors can create inconsistencies in accessibility features.

6. Regulatory and enforcement limitations

Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) are often required when making any changes to the surrounding road, pavement or kerb when upgrading bus stops, or managing parking restrictions near stops. These processes are slow, bureaucratic, and resource intensive for councils, and require extensive consultation with

various stakeholders. Delays in TRO approvals can stall entire accessibility programmes, particularly in urban areas with competing demands for road and footway space. Obstruction around bus stops can also reduce accessibility. Councils can designate bus stop clearways or introduce parking restrictions to address this. However, enforcement powers, or local authority capacity to action enforcement, are often limited.

7. Lack of consistent data and asset tracking

Many local authorities struggle to maintain up-to-date, centralised data on bus stop conditions and accessibility attributes. Without accurate asset tracking, it is difficult to prioritise upgrades or identify stops where accessibility interventions would have the greatest impact. The DfT central NaPTAN database does not yet include consistent accessibility metadata, limiting integrated planning.

Accessible bus stops and information across the whole journey experience

When considering how to align bus stop provision with passenger needs, it is useful to segment bus travel into stages. This enables viewing the bus stop in relation to the entire passenger journey, and the role it plays facilitating this.



1. **Pre-trip planning:** everything a user does before leaving for the journey. It includes deciding whether to travel, when to travel, and which service(s) to use.



2. **Travel to and from the bus stops:** covers the user's walk, wheel or other forms of travel from their starting point to the boarding stop and any onward and return journey.



3. **Waiting for the bus and boarding:** Begins when the user arrives at the stop and continues until safely on the bus.



4. **Bus travel and alighting at stop:** Covers the period after boarding until the user alights at the correct stop.

In addition to physically accessible infrastructure at and around the bus stops, accessible information is paramount for passengers across the whole journey, from planning, arriving at the bus stop, waiting for the bus and ultimately boarding the right bus and departing at the right stop.

This approach reflects evidence from recent research by the National Centre for Accessible Transport, which highlights that barriers experienced by disabled people extend beyond individual transport services and infrastructure assets, encompassing journey planning, access to stops, information provision, interactions with staff and other passengers, and onward travel.¹⁶

Accessibility should be considered across the full range of information presented:

- Bus service timetable, maps and real-time information
- Bus stop features
- Bus vehicle features
- Ticketing, payment and concessionary pass periods
- Online journey planning tools, such as Google Maps, Traveline, and others
- Offline journey planning tools, such as service booklets, maps and timetables
- Navigation, road crossings and wayfinding options and tools
- Connecting bus services and other transport modes, such as tram or train, available.

Accessible communication is an umbrella term to describe the communication of information that is clear, direct, easy to understand and that has been made available in multiple accessible formats so that all have equal access.

The three formats for accessible bus stop information are generally considered to be:



Visual



Audio



Tactile

None of these are mutually exclusive. People have various information access and communication requirements, and it is important to provide accessible approaches.

Ensuring digital information platforms are accessible is crucial for disabled people. Under the Equality Act, transport providers and authorities are service providers and have a duty to make reasonable adjustments so disabled people are not put at a substantial disadvantage. This explicitly covers information provision, including websites and online passenger information. The Act does not define technical standards, but inaccessible websites could constitute unlawful discrimination.

Web based platforms should be designed in accord with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and be tested with disabled users to ensure actual usability. WCAG is a set of technical standards that, when followed, improve the accessibility of web content, websites, and web applications for people with a wide range of impairments. In the United Kingdom, use of WCAG 2.2 Level AA is required for public sector organisations under the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018.

1. Pre-trip planning



This is everything a user does before leaving for the journey. It includes deciding whether to travel, when to travel, and which service(s) to use.

Disabled people disproportionately spend more time planning travel compared with non-disabled people.¹⁷ Typical activities include checking timetables, live departure information, disruption alerts, prior information on accessibility (step-free access, buggy/wheelchair space), purchasing tickets, and confirming the correct stop/location.

Key passenger questions may include:

What is the best route and when should I leave?

How much will it cost and how do I pay?

Is the journey accessible for my needs?

Is my service running normally?

Journey planning

Accessibility challenge

More than three in five (62%) disabled people plan journeys in advance most or all of the time (only 3% never plan, while the remainder plan some journeys), to ensure the chosen mode of transport is accessible for them and to arrange assistance, if necessary.¹⁸ However, information about accessibility features at stops, routes to bus stops, diversion routes and toilet provision is frequently not readily available. As a result, many users need to seek information on social media sites (such as Facebook forums) to locate necessary information.

In addition, online information and journey planning, real-time passenger information (RTPI) and ticketing may not be fully accessible. This can include poor screen reader compatibility, lack of keyboard navigation or labelling for assistive technologies, no support for voice commands; thus complicating or inhibiting navigation for people with limited dexterity.

Methods for improvement

Information and journey planning platforms should provide a full suite of accessibility features. This includes clear and straightforward interfaces, multiple formats (digital, audio, and large print), real-time data on accessibility features (step-free access, lift availability, accessible toilet locations, bus stop features), and allowing users to customise routes based on specific needs. Platforms should avoid excessive use of captchas, time-limited sessions, and multi-step payment processes as these can be difficult for users with cognitive or motor impairments, as well as for neurodivergent individuals who may experience heightened anxiety when travelling.

RTPI provision is essential both for journey planning and to provide certainty at the bus stop. Operators should provide helplines for assistance from accessible travel teams. Digital solutions must enhance, not replace, clear, up-to-date printed timetables at the stop and human-led support helplines.

2. Travelling to and from the bus stop



These stages cover the user's walk, wheel or other forms of travel to the bus and onwards travel. It includes wayfinding to the stop and navigating the immediate streetscape.

Key passenger questions may include:

*Am I heading
in the right
direction?*

*Is this the correct
bus stop for my
journey?*

*Is the route
safe and
accessible?*

*Has anything
changed since I
planned my journey?*

Location of bus stops

Accessibility challenge

Long walking distances and steep inclines present difficulties for people with reduced stamina, walking difficulties, or reliance on mobility aids to access services.

Methods for improvement

In urban areas, the vast majority of households should have access to a bus stop within 400m walking distance. In dense city and town centres and areas with high concentrations of older residents, a shorter distance of 200m will be appropriate. Between 200-400m is also the standard spacing between stops on a route.¹⁹ Stop spacing should also account for gradients; a suggested standard is to reduce the maximum distance by ten metres for every one metre of rise or fall.²⁰

Wayfinding and navigation posts or totems should be provided directing passengers to the bus stop, particularly for larger stops, multi-bay stations and interchanges. Graphics should be standardised to ensure legibility, with Transport for London providing a useful guide into clear and coherent graphics for bus stop signage.²¹ DfT guidance suggests that incorporating a capital letter "B" on a bus stop flag (1m from the ground) will help vision impaired people.²²

Pavements

Accessibility challenge

Three quarters (75%) of disabled people identify the poor quality of pavements as a significant issue.²³ Uneven and poorly maintained pavements, potholes, drainage, and temporary obstructions such as roadworks, pavement parking, shared e-mobility vehicles (scooters, bikes), autonomous delivery robots, bins, advertising boards, or overhanging vegetation create trip hazards and can make wheeling or walking difficult.²⁴ Technical assessments of footway quality identify a deterioration in footway quality over time.²⁵ Poorly maintained and badly lit streets and overgrown vegetation can also make the journey to and from a bus stop feel unsafe, particularly for women and girls, older people and people with disabilities.

Over 43% of disabled people report pavement obstructions, such as bins, poles, advertising boards, and poorly placed street furniture, to be a major barrier to access, frequently forcing them onto the road.²⁶ Narrow pavements and clutter significantly restrict space for wheelchair users, mobility scooter users, parents with pushchairs, and people walking side by side with carers.

Methods for improvement

Local authorities should regularly survey pavement quality and implement a structured programme of pavement resurfacing.

Living Streets advises local transport authorities and their partners to conduct a walkability audit with residents to test how accessible a journey to a bus stop is. It enables authorities to identify challenges such as pavement unevenness, broken lighting or litter. Living Streets' guide to walkability audits provides information on how to contact relevant stakeholders, how to promote the audit and how to record results, with useful case studies.²⁷

Pavement parking

Accessibility challenge

The Highway Code specifies that pavements are primarily for pedestrians, wheelchair and mobility scooter users, while cyclists must not ride on the pavement and vehicles must not park partially or wholly on the pavement unless signs explicitly permit it. However, 65% of drivers admit to parking on the pavement, leading to 52% of pedestrians with visual impairments changing their route.²⁸ Parking regulations for shared micromobility (bikes and e-scooters) and their enforcement have also created challenges for disabled individuals.²⁹

Methods for improvement

Local authorities can issue a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to prevent pavement parking; however, many have found the process cumbersome and costly.³⁰ In January 2026, the Government announced plans to allow councils in England to tackle pavement parking by enforcing against "unnecessary obstruction", with new legislation and guidance expected later in 2026.³¹ While this approach falls short of the consistency a national ban would have enabled, local transport authorities should make use of these new powers when introduced.

Improved regulation of micromobility parking is also important, and the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act sets out a new regulatory framework for on-street micromobility, enabling greater local control of how shared, smaller vehicles are deployed and used. Local authorities should consider the impact on disabled pedestrians when determining what micromobility parking model to implement (docked, geofenced, freefloating).

Crossings and kerbs

Accessibility challenge

Lack of dropped kerbs and tactile paving make it harder for people with reduced mobility or sensory impairments to reach bus stops safely. Half (50%) of disabled people report struggling to navigate with lack of dropped kerbs.³⁰ Issues with crossings, including lack of zebra crossings or traffic lights, complex multi-stage crossings, poorly timed traffic signals or crossing detectors which do not reliably identify slower-moving or inconsistently-moving people, also act as barriers.

Gradients of pathways and the entrance to a bus stop also affect wheelchair users.

Methods for improvement

Consistency across networks is vital. A level entry via dropped kerbs and tactile paving should be provided at all pedestrian crossing points leading to bus stops to enable access for wheelchair users and visually impaired people.

Dropped kerbs should be flush with the carriageway, with a maximum 6mm tolerance.³³ DfT guidance suggests that gradients should not be steeper than one in 20, with level sections at regular intervals.³⁴

Ruils Independent Living (a charity supporting disabled people to live independently) advocates for the default installation of zebra crossings on side roads in high footfall and town centre areas.

Roadworks and alternative routes

Accessibility challenge

During roadworks or temporary diversions, replacement paths and temporary bus stops are often unsuitable for wheelchair users and visually impaired passengers, leaving some with no viable route to the bus stop.

Methods for improvement

Bus stops should be clearly signposted indicating diversions, alternative routes or temporary bus stops.

Local authorities should inform passengers ahead of any planned maintenance, disruption and temporary relocation of bus stops, and coordinate where necessary with local organisations supporting disabled individuals. Operators can inform passengers via RTPI and journey planning apps.

Floating bus stops

Accessibility challenge

Interaction between pedestrians and cyclists at bus stop bypasses (also known as floating bus stops) can be a barrier for disabled passengers, particularly those with visual impairments.

Methods for improvement

Floating bus stops should be avoided, if possible, particularly in areas where bus passenger and pedestrian volumes are high. Where this is not possible, authorities should follow the new DfT statutory guidance document, which makes recommendations for safe and accessible design of floating bus stops.³⁵ Further work to supplement the guidance is ongoing.

Appropriate signage, highway markings and tactile paving to alert and slow cycle traffic are paramount. It is critical to engage, and gain input from, accessibility user groups from the outset of the design process for such intersections and shared pedestrian and cycle space.

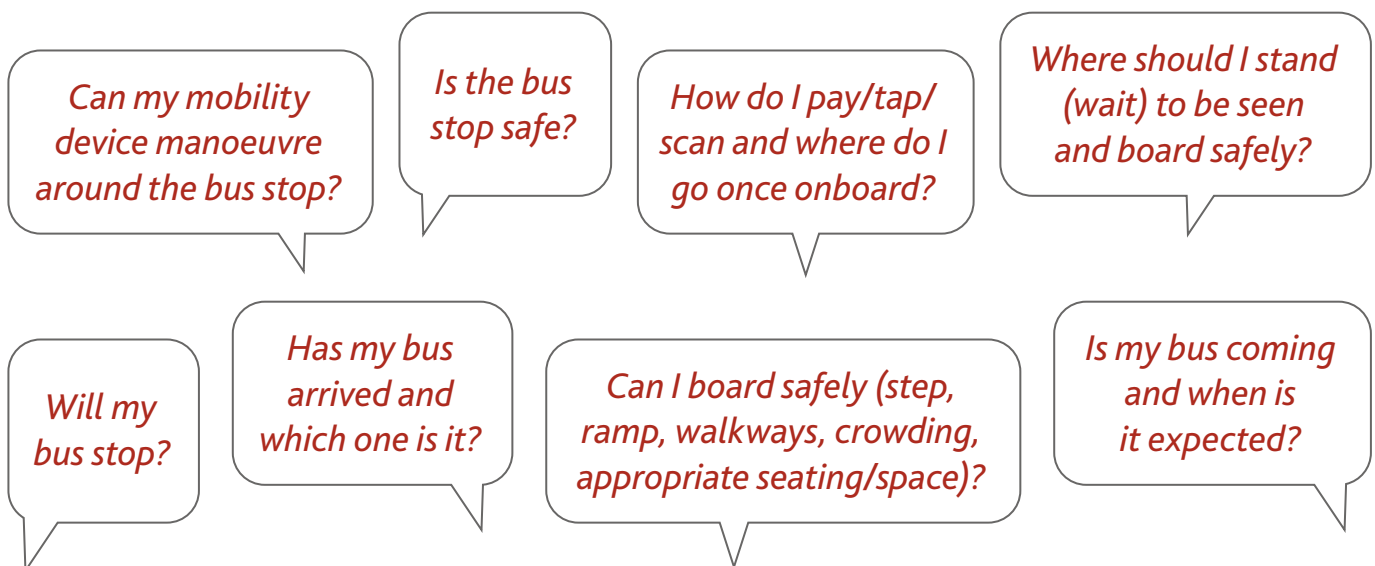
3. Waiting for the bus and boarding



These stages cover when the user has arrived at the correct stop and continues until they have boarded the correct bus and are ready to travel.

Passengers need reassurance that they are in the right place and that the service is coming, as well as clarity on what to do if it is not (cancelled, diverted, or delayed). For users unfamiliar with the bus network, this is often the most anxiety-inducing stage. With 20% of non-frequent buses running behind schedule,³⁶ comfortable waiting conditions and real-time information are important. The infrastructure and information features at the bus stop can help disabled passengers feel safe and reassured, making the driver aware that they are waiting, as well as ensuring they board safely.

Key passenger questions may include:



Shelters

Accessibility challenge

Many stops lack shelters, exposing passengers to the weather elements and missing vital features. However, even when installed, shelters may lack seating and the positioning of shelters may mean there is insufficient space for wheelchair and mobility scooter users to manoeuvre. Just 15% of those with visual impairments and 18% of those with mobility impairments think it is easy to use bus shelters.³⁷

Methods for improvement

While it may not be feasible for all bus stops to include shelters (see categorisation section below), shelters are a practical way of integrating seating and information displays as well as protecting passengers from the weather. There should be space within and around the shelter for full manoeuvrability of a wheelchair and for the deployment of a ramp.³⁸

Shelters should be positioned facing the road, so that they do not impede the view of approaching buses, and ensure drivers can clearly view waiting passengers.

Seating

Accessibility challenge

The London Travel Survey shows that almost a quarter of respondents with impairments could only stand for between 1 to 5 minutes.³⁹ Therefore, lack of designated disabled seating has a significant impact on their capacity to use a bus stop. People with mobility impairments or fatigue conditions, as well as older adults may require benches with backrests and armrests, which are not provided as standard.

Methods for improvement

Seating should be available at all sheltered bus stops, and space for a wheelchair. Perch-style seating (common in many shelters across England and Wales) is compliant with DfT Inclusive Mobility Guidelines; nonetheless, preference should be given to flat bench style seating with back and arm rests.

Areas for wheelchairs should be provided adjacent to seating, at the far bus stop end to ensure visibility for the driver. Existing space allocated for wheelchair users must also be updated to accommodate the size of new mobility devices.

Lighting and safety

Accessibility challenge

Safety can be a particular concern for disabled individuals. For example, Transport Focus' survey found that 21% of those with learning or comprehension difficulties (three times higher than non-disabled respondents) saw other passengers' behaviour as a concern at the bus stop.⁴⁰

Poorly lit stops can augment a sense of insecurity, deter early morning and evening travel, and reduce usability particularly in rural areas.

Poor lighting is a particular barrier for women and girls travelling alone, reducing their feeling of safety and security on public transport.⁴¹ Research has repeatedly shown that, for many, it is a primary deterrent against travelling by bus or using certain bus stops.⁴²

Methods for improvement

A well-lit environment during hours of darkness will enhance visibility and provide a sense of safety for passengers waiting at bus stops.⁴³

Lighting should be non-glare and designed to avoid creating dark shadows, which can cause feelings of insecurity.

Cost-effective and durable solutions include LED lighting and solar-powered lights that are automatically or manually triggered.

CCTV can help deter and track incidents, and therefore should be considered at high demand or vulnerable locations. This is especially necessary at interchanges and stops used frequently after dark (such as stops in industrial or commercial districts, or those outside hospitals which may be used by those on irregular shift patterns).

Creating an effective, integrated approach requires coordination between multiple stakeholders, including local authorities and law enforcement.

Kerbs and bus alignment

Accessibility challenge

Where the bus bay is of insufficient size, drivers may be unable to pull in close enough for disabled passengers to board easily. Bus boarding areas do not always provide easy access to the vehicle. Where kerbs are inconsistent or too low, wheelchair users and passengers with limited mobility often require driver assistance or cannot board independently.

Methods for improvement

A raised kerb of an appropriate height, depending on the bus stop boarding location and the vehicles used, should be provided for step-free boarding onto buses. A floor drop functionality and ramps on buses facilitate this.

The use of gullies in boarding and alighting zones should be avoided to prevent trip hazards or trapping wheelchairs.

Clear colour contrasts at kerb edges and shelters can support both visually impaired and neurodivergent passengers. Consistency in colour and design reduces confusion.

A bus stop clearway – a yellow line denoting where the bus should stop next to the bus stop – can be constructed to ensure buses are able to stop adjacent to the kerb to enable ease of boarding. This requires signage and enforcement to ensure other private vehicles do not park in the clearway.

“ Buses are supposed to stop when they see a guide dog or blind person with a white cane. As we cannot flag them down... buses drive past without stopping and I miss my bus.

(Transport for All, *Are we there yet?* 2023)

”

Boarding area

Accessibility challenge

The location of bus stops on the roadside and composition of the bus stop area and facilities, relative to other highway and street infrastructure, can affect passenger access, and the bus driver's capacity to enable a passenger to board safely.

Obstructions such as bollards, bins, and signposts adjacent to boarding points make manoeuvring more difficult, especially for wheelchair users and parents with prams.

Road bends, hills, gates, street furniture and vegetation can affect the line of sight between the passenger and driver, obscuring the view of an oncoming bus, preventing the timely 'request to stop' from a waiting passenger, and obstruct the driver's view of passengers waiting at the stop. This will inhibit the driver's ability to align with the kerb correctly, or cause the bus to miss the stop altogether. This can leave vulnerable passengers stranded, which erodes passenger trust, creates acute safety risks and frequently results in abandoned journeys.

Methods for improvement

Boarding areas should be free of clutter and obstructions. Tactile paving provides vital orientation cues for blind and visually impaired passengers, indicating safe waiting areas and boarding points.

Gradients must also be considered. The boarding/disembarking area should be flat to ensure that wheelchair users and those with visual impairments can safely move between the stop and the bus.

The bus driver requires a clear line of sight to bring the vehicle into alignment at the bus stop safely and have the capacity to deploy ramps as appropriate. The layout and design of the bus stops should ensure good sight lines from all directions with minimum blind spots, so that passengers feel safe.

At-stop information provision

Accessibility challenge

A lack of, incomplete, out of date or inaccessible information and communication at the bus stop creates uncertainty for passengers: 37% of disabled people report the absence of real-time updates as a barrier, and 21% found that information was not communicated in an accessible format.⁴⁴

Even when information is provided in a range of media (printed displays and online) it can be illegible:

- **Visual information** – Can use small text, inconsistent layout or placed at wrong/inconsistent heights meaning they may not work with assistive technologies such as Optical Character Recognition (OCR)
- **Audio output from digital displays** – The activation of audio can be inaccessible, the announcement can be too quiet, muffled, or not adaptive to background noise⁴⁵
- **Digital information and online** – Accessibility varies widely across council and operator websites. Some contain clutter such as adverts or complex e-ticketing systems
- **QR codes** – Often inaccessible, requiring precise line-of-sight scanning, and rely on the availability of sufficient phone signal or data. The over usage of QR codes can impede ability to access information quickly.

Methods for improvement

All stops should include clear, accurate and coherent information which includes the stop name, route numbers and destinations, timetables, as well as where additional information and assistance can be sourced – via a phone number and/or web address.

If space permits, there should also be maps of routes and interchanges between routes and other modes. The format of this information should be standardised to ensure predictability and certainty.

Both printed timetables and arrival information boards should be displayed at a height which is legible for a wheelchair user.

Digital RTPI displays should be audio-visual, with both manual and automatic options for audio activation. This includes via a passenger's phone or personal key fob and via a high colour contrast communal pushbutton placed in a consistent and physically accessible position. Audio volume should be automatically adjusted based upon ambient noise levels and be synchronised with visual outputs, providing clear and consistent information (stop name, route numbers and destinations, expected arrival times and disruption information).

Updates should include information on diversions and cancellations, as well as crowding levels where possible.

Information provided in digital formats should be in line with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

At-stop information provision should be complemented and enhanced with online information. This can be accessed by scanning QR codes, and/or signposted by proximity technology. The online content should allow for user personalisation and support the native accessibility feature of the user's device (usually a mobile phone) such as light/dark mode, text adjustment, contrast and screen readers.

Toilet facilities

Accessibility challenge

Toilets are usually present at major bus stations only. However, ease of access to such facilities is critical for many disabled and older bus users as well as those with young children. Accessible toilets may not fully provide for everyone's access needed. Over three quarters (78%) of disabled people are not confident about visiting new places, and 73% have come across an accessible toilet that they have been unable to use.⁴⁶

Methods for improvement

All major bus stations and interchanges should include standard and disabled access toilets, with specifications following national guidance. This includes ensuring toilets, sinks and handles are placed at an accessible height, including adequate space for manoeuvring a wheelchair (or other mobility device). Changing Places toilets could also be provided at major termini.

Where possible, other bus stops with high usage should be located near to public toilets and include information on where to find the nearest public toilet.

4. Bus travel and alighting at a stop



These stages cover the period after boarding until the user prepares to get off the bus. The user's information needs shift to orientation, reassurance, and progress tracking, understanding diversions, and receiving safety and disruption information.

The physical infrastructure present should enable users with a variety of access requirements to move between the stop and the bus and provide a comfortable and safe journey. The relevant staff should be trained to provide support, such as deploying ramps and ensuring a disabled passenger has access to the appropriate seat or space on the bus.

Key passenger questions may include:

Can I get off safely?

Will the bus stop?

When is my stop coming?

Is there a disruption, diversion, or delay affecting me?

Audio-visual information on board the bus

Accessibility challenge

The absence of audio-visual information on board the bus can make it harder for passengers to know they are on the correct bus, going in the right direction and when they need to get off. This can lead to missed stops and longer journeys.

Methods for improvement

The Public Service Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023 require local buses to provide audio and visual next-stop, route, and destination information within the vehicle. Most services must comply by October 2026, with full, nationwide compliance required by 2031. Clear information regarding service disruption and diversions should also be provided.

Ticketing

Accessibility challenge

Complex pricing and ticket structures, non-standard concessionary pass rules, card readers that are out of order, or the absence of an option to buy a ticket from the driver can create difficulties for disabled passengers when boarding.

Methods for improvement

Payment systems should be straightforward and possible methods of payment indicated clearly in the waiting area. Any online ticket should be clearly readable and easy to locate on a mobile device to avoid confusion or stress. Payment through an online app should not be the only option, and there should also be an ability to purchase a ticket from the driver.

Adequate space and seating

Accessibility challenge

Many buses only have one wheelchair space, which restricts access and creates anxiety for wheelchair users, if this space is taken. This can deter wheelchair users from travelling altogether.

Where the wheelchair or priority seating space is occupied by a non-disabled user, pushchairs or luggage, this can create friction between passengers.

The bus pulling away before disabled passengers have reached a seat can present a physical hazard of falls and injury.

Methods for improvement

Many companies are implementing clearer signage and information for all passengers on priority seating and wheelchair spaces. If the wheelchair space is occupied by non-wheelchair users or their belongings, drivers must take active, reasonable steps to persuade passengers to vacate the space, in line with established legal precedent, rather than treating the matter as a passive negotiation. Navigating this process, and communicating clearly with passengers, must be a core part of driver training. Driver training must also reinforce the basic operating standard of allowing passengers sufficient time to be safely seated before moving off from the stop.



Photos by National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat), Ernst-Günther Krause (NID) on Unsplash.

Bus stop categorisation

Space, resource and funding constraints mean that not all bus stops can be upgraded to feature the full spectrum of accessibility features discussed in the sections above.

Categorising bus stops on the basis of their location, use and passenger characteristics allows for a more targeted approach to infrastructure provision. It provides a useful framework for local authorities to assess what improvements are needed and to prioritise phased investment in partnership with local accessibility advocacy representatives.

We suggest four categories of bus stops below, and respective outcomes, but local authorities can select different categories depending on their requirements and urban or rural setting. Authorities and providers should involve and consult with local accessibility and user groups before embarking on large-scale infrastructure improvement programmes to ensure local passenger requirements and preferences are catered for.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Category
1 | Major termini and bus stations
☒ Gold-standard, supports widest user range |
| Category
2 | Local interchanges
☒ Improves independence, reduces travel stress |
| Category
3 | Intermediate stops
☒ Provides predictability for residents and older adults |
| Category
4 | Alighting only stops
☒ Provides a safe drop-off space |

The matrix below provides an indication of what features should be present at each category of stop and their accessibility. These should be treated as a baseline, rather than a ceiling. Where physical constraints prevent certain features from being implemented, councils and operators should explore practical and proportionate adjustments that preserve access to the bus network wherever possible..

Item of infrastructure	Category 1 Major termini and bus stations	Category 2 Local interchanges	Category 3 Intermediate stops	Category 4 Alighting only stops
Step free access to the bus stop, with dropped kerbs and tactile paving	✓	✓	✓	✓
Flag with bus stop signage	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wide enough space to maneuver a wheelchair	✓	✓	✓	✓
Marked boarding point	✓	✓		
Raised kerbs for boarding	✓	✓	✓	
Shelter (with open or transparent sides)	✓	✓		
Seating of an appropriate design and size	✓	✓		
Flat surfaced resting places for wheelchair	✓	✓	✓	
Printed timetable and route information (including 'effective from' date)	✓	✓	✓	
Audio-Visual RTPI digital display screens	✓	✓		
Online information accessed via QR codes and/or proximity technology	✓	✓	✓	
Web address for online information and contact number for support	✓	✓	✓	
Low-glare lighting	✓	✓		
Toilets	✓			

Human interactions

Interactions with bus drivers and the public play an important role in shaping bus user experiences. Three in five (59%) disabled people report experiencing negative attitudes or behaviours when travelling.⁴⁷

Regulation on the rights of bus and coach passengers requires drivers and other operator staff to complete disability awareness training. There are many examples of good-quality training materials developed for bus and coach drivers, including:

- The Department for Transport's REAL disability equality training programme⁴⁸
- The Welcome Aboard! Disability Awareness, Diversity and Customer Service Training developed by Disability Together and accredited by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency⁴⁹
- Training materials on how best to support blind or partially sighted passengers developed by the Thomas Pocklington Trust and its network of volunteer-led UK Sight Loss Councils⁵⁰
- A national training programme designed to help tackle violence against women and girls led by the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT).⁵¹

How other passengers behave can also shape a disabled individual's journey, positively and negatively. Passengers may not be aware of how, or when, to respond to disabled individuals' needs in and around bus stops. Bus stops are effective spaces to deploy outreach and communication campaigns which spread awareness about disabled passengers' experiences and encourage other passengers to support when appropriate. Enhancing cooperation between law enforcement and transport authorities can improve disabled people's confidence while travelling. An example of this approach is the Safer Travel Partnership between Transport for West Midlands, West Midlands Police and British Transport Police working to prevent and respond to anti-social behaviour as well as to provide advice for bus users.⁵²

 **three in five**
disabled people report
experiencing negative attitudes
or behaviours when travelling

The imperative of co-design and passenger feedback

Designing accessible bus infrastructure, services and the wider travelling environment requires systematic engagement with disabled users themselves, to ensure their experiences are fully understood and that their needs are reflected and represented in planning, design and delivery.

Co-design is an approach to service design where the people who will use a service, particularly disabled people and others with accessibility needs, are involved as active collaborators in identifying the problems and shaping the solutions being developed, rather than being consulted after designs, budgets or processes are already substantially fixed.

Methods for co-design include:

- Workshops with mock-ups, models, or physical prototypes (e.g. mock bus shelters, sample kerb heights, tactile surface samples people can test on-site)
- Accessibility audits led jointly by disabled people and technical staff

- Advisory panels of disabled users involved throughout a project, not just at consultation stage
- User journey mapping done together with people who have direct experience of the barriers being addressed.

Many bus operators and local authorities have their own bus user and disabled passenger panels, or they can engage with a range of representative organisations, including:

- The National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat) has its Community of Accessible Transport panel, bringing together disabled people and transport stakeholders to inform research, policy and innovation. This insight complements ncat's wider evidence base, research and resources, which support the transport sector to better understand accessibility barriers and opportunities for improvement. ncat is also currently working on a practical co-production toolkit for the transport sector⁵³
- The Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC) has a panel of over 4,000 disabled people across the UK which provides structured feedback to businesses and organisations⁵⁴

- Designability is a design and innovation organisation that can offer inclusive research, drawing on the experiences of disabled people, and support a collaborative and inclusive human-centred design process.⁵⁵

In addition to involving disabled people in improvement processes, passengers need to have a clear process to provide feedback. To ensure true accountability, information displays and waiting areas must clearly display how passengers can report faults and lodge service complaints. Bus stops and customer apps should provide simple, clear contact routes for passengers to report accessibility faults (such as broken tactile paving, blocked clearways, or non-functioning Audio-Visual displays) directly to the relevant local transport authority or operator, closing the accountability loop. Information should include direct customer service contact details for the operating company, as well as clear signposting to Bus Users UK as the recognised alternative dispute resolution body for passengers whose concerns are unresolved.

Best practice case studies

Driving accessible travel in Brighton and Hove

Brighton & Hove Buses and Metrobus are recognised as industry leaders for their approach to accessibility, moving beyond consultation to co-design accessible solutions shaped by the lived experience of disabled people.

Brighton & Hove Buses was the first bus operator to appoint a dedicated Accessibility and Communities Manager and establish an Accessibility and Safeguarding Team. The team is dedicated to listening to and learning from lived experience, working collaboratively with disabled people and representative organisations to co-design initiatives aimed at improving passenger journeys for all.

Through their Three-Tier Philosophy, accessibility is built into policy, design and training, with directors and senior managers completing the same courses as frontline colleagues. This approach has embedded a culture of accessibility throughout the whole business.

Examples of co-design in recent improvements include:

- The award-winning Helping Hand card, introduced in 2014, enabling passengers to communicate assistance requirements discreetly to the driver

- The Wheelchair Taxi Guarantee, providing a free accessible taxi when a wheelchair user is unable to board, enabling the passenger to continue their journey
- Newer buses co-designed with disabled people, featuring two wheelchair bays with visual screens facing the bays, additional pushchair space, dementia-friendly flooring and seating, and accessible onboard information
- Driver training, co-designed using passenger experiences to make journeys safer and more accessible. All drivers and frontline colleagues complete 'Accessible Travel for All' training, are Dementia Friends through Alzheimer's Society, and are trained as Level 1 My Sighted Guides in partnership with Guide Dogs.

Accessible bus shelters in London

Transport for London (TfL) is trialling new bus shelter designs at 27 locations across London to improve accessibility, safety and customer experience. The enhanced features include a dedicated wheelchair user waiting space, full bench style seating with priority seat designation, brighter lighting and CCTV cameras. TfL engaged with a range of campaign groups and charities representing disabled people in developing the new design features to ensure they meet the needs of all customers.⁵⁶

Super Bus Stops in Portsmouth

As part of its Bus Service Improvement Plan, Portsmouth City Council has delivered 29 advanced Super Stops, featuring ergonomically designed seating, smart lighting, printed and digital information for supporting wayfinding and live travel planning. Each location was assessed to ensure enhancements are tailored to local needs, site conditions, and passenger demand. The work is part of a comprehensive audit of bus stops across the city, which included targeted improvements to accessibility, safety, and visibility at bus stops.⁵⁷

Bus stop audit in Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire County Council has completed a full audit of all 4,000 bus stops across the county. It will help identify locations where provision falls below desired standards. The council has already worked up several areas for improvements at a cost of nearly £400,000. The next step is to make audit information available via interactive mapping to help inform passengers of what facilities are available, including any accessibility matters, at their chosen stop.

Innovation case studies

ncat's Scaling Innovation Programme, delivered in partnership with Connected Places Catapult, is a multi-million-pound programme connecting evidence, lived experience and industry partners to support the development, testing and scaling of accessible transport solutions.⁵⁸

The projects below have all been funded through the programme, ranging from accessible information and passenger confidence to transport planning and decision making. Together, they illustrate how evidence, lived experience and industry collaboration can accelerate the development and adoption of accessible transport solutions.

Measuring bus stop accessibility

Podaris is leading the development of EQuAL (Equity and Quality in Accessibility Levels), an open metric that better reflects disabled people's experiences of reaching and using public transport. The project is a partnership with the University of Liverpool, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and Translink, guided by an advisory group of disabled people's and passenger organisations. Existing measures such as PTAL (Public Transport Accessibility Level) focus mainly on walking distance to services and how often they run. EQuAL considers a much wider range of factors that affect whether a journey is accessible in practice, such as pavement quality, crossing points, tactile paving, bus stop infrastructure, vehicle accessibility and the wider street environment. It is available so that any transport authority can adopt it, supporting better-informed investment decisions and stronger business cases for accessibility improvements.⁵⁹ By prioritising bus stops with a high PTAL but low EQuAL score for improvements, local authorities can open up opportunity for disabled people to access high frequency services, providing a higher return on investment.

React Trigger System

React Accessibility is developing a passenger-to-driver communication feature for bus stops, enabling blind, partially sighted or other disabled passengers to automatically request their bus to stop, making boarding and onward travel easier.⁶⁰ It uses bus open data to match real-time vehicle allocation to a passenger's desired service and making a 'request to stop' to the bus driver via the vehicle's ticket machine.

Passengers can request both a boarding and alighting stop and optionally share an accessibility need with the bus driver. The initial passenger interface is through the React app. React beacons automatically activate the app and send audio-visual notifications when the passenger approaches the bus stop and when the bus arrives. Where supported, passengers can automatically or manually trigger public audio announcements from at-stop displays. React are currently conducting operational trials in a number of areas.

Modular retrofit bus stop accessibility kit

Mechara Technologies are developing a Predictable Stop Kit – a modular, low-cost retrofit system for public transport stops. The kit provides real-time travel information in multiple accessible formats: a high-contrast e-ink display, audio announcements (with ambient noise adjustment), an audio induction loop, Bluetooth to headphones and hearing aids, a braille stop code and a push button-enhancing information and communication options. It is co-designed with people with lived experience of disability and neurodiversity, including blind and partially sighted, d/Deaf and neurodiverse passengers, and works for everyone else too.⁶¹

Conclusion

Bus stops are the gateways to public transport. This report has examined the barriers disabled people face accessing bus stops and across the whole bus journey and the structural barriers to progress.

Addressing them requires a whole-systems approach to accessibility and targeted investment in physical infrastructure and information provision, delivered through genuine co-design with disabled people.

The Bus Services Act 2025 and the forthcoming statutory guidance on the safety and accessibility of bus stopping places offers a timely mechanism to promote a more consistent approach and deliver improvement across England. Due to practical and financial constraints, it would no doubt be challenging to ensure that all bus services and infrastructure are fully accessible to all. But with the right design and investment, more bus stops can become accessible over time and support passengers to travel independently.

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Report authors:

Isobel Duxfield, Silviya Barrett

Campaign for Better Transport 2026

Campaign for Better Transport, Unit 407,
164-180 Union Street, London SE1 0LH.

www.bettertransport.org.uk

info@bettertransport.org.uk

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