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- Photos
- About us
- Our services
- News
 - Newsletter
- Blog
- Useful links and contacts
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News

Fresh calls for 'turn-up-and-go' assistance from train operators

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"Disabled people do not wish for special treatment – just the ability to get from A to B with dignity and respect"

(Respondent from the Papworth Trust survey)

Fresh calls for more train operators to implement 'turn-up-and-go' assistance for disabled passengers have been made by the [Papworth Trust](#) in their [Improving Rail Travel](#) report published this month.

The report will increase the pressure on rail companies to allow disabled customers to travel with the same spontaneity enjoyed by non-disabled people. Last year, Transport for All [wrote to the Association of Train Operating Companies \(ATOC\)](#) urging them to end the discriminatory practice of requesting that disabled people plan journeys 24hours ahead.

The report, based on in-depth research and a survey of 800 disabled people and their rail travel experiences, confirms what the majority of disabled passengers already know, that inadequately trained staff, inaccessible stations and booking confusions are preventing disabled people from using trains.

Half of those surveyed said they avoided train travel all together, whilst two thirds said they would use trains more if a turn-up-and-go' service was implemented.

Turn-up-and-go assistance is available at all London Underground stations, and was successfully introduced at all London Overground stations last year. ATOC have confirmed that they will be [introducing turn-up-and-go assistance at 34 London stations](#), albeit on a trial basis. Papworth Trust say that 'turn up and go', which would enable disabled people to travel spontaneously without having to book in advance, should be available at all accessible rail stations.

However, Transport for All believes that the service should be available at every UK station, rather than just accessible ones. Even when a station is inaccessible to some disabled people (e.g. because of stairs), others, for example visually impaired people or those with a learning disability, may be able to access the station and will benefit from assistance.

Freedom of movement

The currently-available Passenger Assist books and organises assistance including providing ramps from platform to train, meeting and guiding visually impaired passengers and providing alternative transport such as a taxi where a station is inaccessible. However, the 24-hour advance booking policy puts disabled people at a huge disadvantage.

As such, Papworth Trust's report demonstrates that implementing a national 'turn-up and-go' service should be an absolute priority for UK train operators. As it stands, advance booking arrangements effectively block freedom of movement by preventing spontaneous travel, therefore denying disabled people the independence that non-disabled people enjoy.

Transport For All member Ravi Mehta said: *"At the moment, just going to a friend's house, I have to spend ages just in the planning – I just know not to do anything spontaneously. Sometimes it's just too much hassle".* He continued: *"Other people just say, 'Oh, I want to go to Romford.' We have to plan in advance – it's not equal rights."*

Ravi has also encountered problems with unreliable staff assistance. *"The staff will say they've called ahead, and when you get there, no-one's there. If I was travelling by myself I'd be stuck. I went from London to Southampton to see a friend, and when the train arrived at Waterloo there was no-one there. My carer ran to find the nearest person to get a ramp. Luckily it was the last stop, otherwise we'd have been in trouble."*

"Turn-up and go assistance would mean so much stress would be taken off my shoulders – a little bit more of a normal life. It's ridiculous you have to give a whole day just to get a ramp out'.

Improving accessibility

Whilst the report also outlines several improvements which have taken place since 2002 when the Office of Rail Regulation outlined a set of criteria to assess accessibility, significant issues around accessible rail travel still exist, particularly around communication, staff training and attitudes.

In 2002, just 154 out of the UK's 1,967 rail stations met the Office of Rail Regulation's accessibility criteria of step-free access, audio announcements, visual display boards and station staffing. By 2014, an additional 250 stations had met the criteria. However, there are now 3% fewer stations which have available staff: a major issue if disabled people are to receive adequate help and assistance when travelling by train. Respondents to the Papworth Trust's survey cited lack of help from staff as the second most common reason for avoiding train travel, after the difficulty of getting on or off trains.

The Papworth Trust's eight recommendations

...for the government

1. Include accessibility improvement targets in franchise agreements
2. Include key performance indicators for train companies around accessibility in franchise agreements
3. Require monitoring data on journeys involving disabled people to be collected and published
4. Require train companies to open up their data on stations, trains and staffing levels used on the 'Stations Made Easy' website.

...for train operators

1. Improve consistency in the levels of service offered to disabled passengers
2. Focus efforts on increasing accessibility on the busiest stations to maximise impact
3. Introduce a 'turn up and go' service at accessible stations
4. Improve staff training.

A continuing problem

Transport for All believe it is scandalous that disabled people are continuing to experience challenges and difficulties in rail travel in 2015 and join with the Papworth Trust in calling for improvements.

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