

TRANSPORT COMMITTEE CALL FOR EVIDENCE: REFORMING PUBLIC TRANSPORT AFTER THE PANDEMIC

[Wheels for Wellbeing](#), a user-led advocacy charity for Disabled cyclists, sees reforms to public transport as an opportunity to improve Disabled people's access to the physical and mental health benefits of active travel.

Disabled people, including those with long-term health conditions, accounted for 59% of all deaths from Coronavirus between March and July. Rebuilding and improving physical health and wellbeing (in a demographic which, even before the COVID-19 crisis, was less likely to achieve the minimum recommended levels of weekly physical activity) is critical for Disabled populations in the UK in the context of the continuing pandemic. Accessible active travel and its integration with public transport will be not only life-enhancing but life-saving for millions.

Cycling is non-weight bearing and is therefore easier than walking. Many Disabled people can cycle even though they may not be able to walk or push their cycle comfortably or at all. For many Disabled people, their cycle (be it a bicycle, a trike, a handcycle...) is their mobility aid (where others use a wheelchair or a mobility scooter). However, this is not reflected in the definition of "[Invalid Carriages](#)". Our own [research](#) and research by [Sustrans](#) have demonstrated that the reasons Disabled people are less likely to use active travel modes result from a multitude of barriers to accessibility. 33% of Disabled people surveyed by Sustrans said they would cycle if they had the opportunity to do so. However, physical barriers in cycling infrastructure, the prohibitive cost of adaptive cycles, and/or lack of reliable access to public transport with their cycle resulted in them being unable to use cycling as a form of transport.

Removal infrastructure barriers

Uptake of active travel depends on it being accessible, safe, useable, and desirable for everyone, regardless of age, ability, and mobility needs. Accessible active infrastructure design requirements include (but are not limited to):

- Cycle lanes wide enough for non-standard cycles and cargo-cycles
- Smooth surfaces and minimal camber/cross fall, suited to different cycles and micro-mobility vehicles
- Cycle lanes separated from footways and protected from traffic wherever possible

- Secure and inclusive cycle-parking provision in city centres, residential areas, and public transport interchanges

We were delighted to see that most of our recommended improvements to cycling and walking infrastructure to encourage active travel by all (as summarised our own [Guide to Inclusive Cycling](#)) were reflected in the government's recent [Gear Change report](#) and new [Cycle Design guidelines](#).

We also are very supportive of the government's push for [emergency improvements to walking and cycling](#). However we call for Department for Transport to urgently produce a quick guide to delivering temporary changes to our streetscape **accessibly**, as local authorities are moving at pace and frequently delivering inaccessible walking and/or cycling temporary infrastructure. We recently wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport to [express our concerns](#) about this and make some very concrete suggestions.

Facilitating multi-modal journeys

Disabled people must be confident that they will be able to take their mobility aid – whether a wheelchair, mobility scooter, or cycle - on public transport throughout their journey.

Increasing the accessibility of public transport and multi-modal journeys will provide greater freedom to travel without reliance on private cars, particularly for long-distance journeys, and greatly support decarbonisation targets. It will open opportunities for Disabled people can take part in active tourism by accessing countryside destinations with their cycle, enabling them to discover natural environments/destinations and contribute to local economies.

We call for investment in:

- The re-design of future buses, coaches, trams, and train carriages to include space for cycles as mobility aids alongside current provision for wheelchairs (for buses and coaches this may be via provision of appropriate racks (front or back) and/or trunks)
- Step-free access from street to ticket offices and station platforms (including lifts which can take non-standard cycles)
- Step-free access from platform to carriage, either by transport doorways being flush with the platform or by the provision of ramps suitable for cycles and wheelchairs

Removing the Cost Barrier

Cycling, with e-assist if required, can replace private car or public transport use for all or part of a journey for Disabled people, reducing congestion and freeing up further capacity on public transport networks. However accessible infrastructure alone will not increase take-up of active travel if suitable cycles are not affordable to Disabled people (who are less likely to be in work than non-Disabled populations). Adaptive cycles are often prohibitively expensive, and rarely available for hire. Many non-standard cycle prices are more comparable to those of second hand cars or even some new cars, than to those of standard bicycles (for example, an e-assisted clip-on handcycle plus wheelchair combination will likely cost £8,000+). We call for:

- Financial subsidies for non-standard cycles (as are available via the [Energy Saving Trust in Scotland](#) and were made available to businesses to encourage the take up of [e-assisted cargo cycles in England](#))
- The inclusion of cycles in the [Motability](#) scheme
- An increase in accessible cycle hire opportunities, for example by local authorities being encouraged to tender public cycle hire schemes to companies providing non-standard in addition to standard cycles
- Availability of non-standard cycles through future GP ‘Cycling on Prescription’ schemes ([Department for Transport, Gear Change Report, 2020, p. 36](#))

Active travel and use of public transport start with using walking facilities:

To ensure that all Disabled cyclists can both start a journey and reach their final destination, cycles (when used as a mobility aid) need to be permitted on pavements, as wheelchairs and mobility scooters already are. We call on Department for Transport to report on its findings on this, as committed to in its [Accessible Transport Strategy](#).

Additional notes:

- 19% of the population are over 65 and 21% of UK adults are Disabled. The NHS advised 1.8 million people who are extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 infection (who have conditions including blood cancer, MS, or severe chest conditions) to practice ‘shielding’ and remain at home.
- Being isolated indoors for prolonged periods leads to a greatly increased risk of ill health, and greater care needs. The Chief Medical Officer recommends that every adult, including Disabled people, should aim for a minimum of 150 minutes per week

of moderate intensity exercise to improve their mental and physical health. Even before lockdown Disabled people were 50% less likely to achieve this. For all citizens, restrictions on the ability to exercise and on social interaction may cause or worsen key medical conditions, leading to an increase in the incidence of disability and higher economic costs.

- The [Office for National Statistics](#) reported that 75% of Disabled people were worried about the impact of COVID-19 on their life, compared to 66% of non-Disabled people. Disabled people were more likely to be concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their wellbeing, were less likely to leave their house to socialise, and were more likely to feel unsafe in public spaces.
- 65% of Disabled cyclists use their cycle as a mobility aid ([Wheels for Wellbeing, Experiences of Disabled cyclists report, 2019-20](#), p. 2).