Policy paper - https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/railways-bill/railways-bill-accessibility

Railways Bill factsheet: accessibility

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Accessibility is one of the government's top priorities for the railway and will be a central focus for Great British Rail (GBR). This means a relentless focus on high performance and service standards for all passengers, including those with accessibility needs.

We recognise that our railways are not meeting the accessibility needs of our customers and stakeholders. Too often, we have fallen short – especially for our most vulnerable passengers. Existing practices and standards are not delivering the outcomes people rely on, with assistance services frequently proving unreliable, potentially excluding people from travelling by train. This is our opportunity to change that. That is why the Railways Bill includes legal requirements to ensure that the interests of passengers, including those with accessibility needs, will be at the heart of decision-making on the railways.

What are you doing to improve accessibility now?

Although we expect the bill and GBR to fundamentally reform and improve the passenger experience, we are not waiting for GBR to start making things better. The accessibility roadmap published alongside the response to the Railways Bill consultation, sets out a series of accessibility improvements and projects being delivered ahead of the establishment of GBR.

Our roadmap to an accessible railway

The roadmap is based around 7 priority themes, with several measurable actions that will create a more inclusive and accessible rail network and deliver improvements to the day-to-day travelling experience for disabled people and others who need assistance. The actions are diverse, including improvements such as how we deliver Passenger Assist, widening eligibility for the Disabled Persons Railcard (DPRC), rolling out welcome points in stations, and improving disability and inclusion training to bring consistency across rail operators. The 7 priority themes are:

- improving the accessibility of our stations and trains
- improving the reliability of key accessibility assets (such as lifts and toilets)
- improving the consistency and reliability of Passenger Assist (The service where passengers can request assistance for their journey)
- improving customer information

- improving the awareness of available concessions and improving the accessibility of retail channels such as websites and apps
- improving the monitoring of disabled people's travel experience and how the industry is being held to account
- enacting cultural change in the rail industry ensuring accessibility is prioritised

The roadmap demonstrates how we are making meaningful improvements and delivering more accessible journeys in the near term. The accessibility roadmap covers England, Scotland and Wales.

What does the Railways Bill do?

In parallel with the accessibility roadmap, we have also brought forward the Railways Bill. The Bill reforms the railway sector to place GBR in charge of the infrastructure (for example, tracks and stations) and many of the trains and train services, as well as selling tickets for its services through its own retailer. It is therefore vital that the bill ensures that GBR must consider accessibility as a core priority when it is taking decisions which affect the railway. The legal requirements placed on GBR through the Railways Bill are listed below.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

The PSED is a statutory duty on listed public authorities and bodies carrying out public functions. It ensures that those organisations consider how their functions (including their policies, programmes and services) will affect people with different protected characteristics. The Railways Bill confirms that the PSED will apply to GBR when it exercises its functions, including when it operates passenger train services and manages the railway network infrastructure in Great Britain. This is a change from what happens now, because currently franchised train operating companies (such as CrossCountry and Avanti) are not subject to the PSED. This means that the PSED will play a much more substantial role in the government's reformed rail sector than it does today.

Duty to promote passenger interests and accessibility

The general duty to promote the interests of all passengers, including those with disabilities, will apply to GBR, the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), the Transport Secretary and devolved ministers when they exercise their relevant statutory functions related to the railways and railway services (which means when they carry out any railway activities or take any decisions regarding the railway). This duty is fundamental to the government's vision of putting all passengers back at the heart of the railway: it should be impossible for anyone to take decisions on infrastructure, stations, trains, train services or the timetable without considering the impact on the

passenger experience, including specifically those with accessibility needs for whom the experience of rail travel needs to significantly improve.

The passenger watchdog

The establishment of the new passenger watchdog strengthens the focus on passenger experience and accessibility. It will have a specific statutory role to have regard to the interests and needs of disabled passengers and will use its research and investigation powers to monitor how services are delivered to disabled passengers and to understand their experience of the network. The watchdog will then engage with GBR and other operators to share best practice and advocate for improvements. The watchdog's role of setting minimum standards can also be used to good effect in this area, as it can set minimum standards regarding accessible travel policies and the use of Passenger Assist. It can also make interventions where operators are falling short of these standards. For more information, see the dedicated passenger watchdog factsheet published alongside this one. The watchdog's role will not replace Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committees advisory function to the Secretary of State, which will continue to exist and provide valuable advice to the department.

Stakeholder engagement

The government has also committed to include a specific requirement within GBR's licence for GBR to engage with stakeholders, including accessibility stakeholders. We expect to consult on a draft version of the licence following the introduction of the Railways Bill, and for it to be finalised once the legislation has received Royal Assent.

Ticket retailing

As announced in January 2025, GBR will retail online, bringing together individual train operators' ticket websites. The resulting high-quality app and website will meet accessible design standards.

Statutory powers

The Railways Bill will grant the Transport Secretary new statutory powers to issue guidance and legally binding directions to GBR, including on matters related to accessibility. Directions and guidance will be used proportionately and with justification, and only where other levers prove insufficient or are not appropriate. The Transport Secretary will be required to publish any issued directions or guidance, as well as any subsequent amendments or revocations.

Combined, these measures will ensure that accessibility will be central to shaping how the railways are planned and run and will support the sector in delivering the government's objective of creating a railway that is truly accessible for all.