



Summary of the One Voice Disability Forum Transport Survey 2010

Over the last few months the One Voice Disability Forum has been carrying out some research to find out what the local transport situations is like for local disabled people. This was initiated as a result of a member having problems getting into town from Carnforth.

From the outset the aim of the work was not as a means of protest, but ways of helping local transport providers achieve the best results for their disabled passengers. We were also aware that rolling stock costs a lot of money and not everything can be achieved overnight. However 15 years after the first version of Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) was passed it seems reasonable to review the progress made so far.

65 people filled the One Voice survey, 38 of them were female and 27 male and below is a summary of the findings.

Experiences of Bus Travel:

Buses are used by 86% of disabled people, mainly 2-3 times a week. The majority of people found buses OK in terms of comfort (50%), ease of getting on and off (39.1%), finding a space (51.1%) and helpfulness of staff on the bus (52.1%).

The majority of people use the bus because it is affordable (60%) and convenient (60%). The buses are used to a large extent for shopping (58.5%) and social activities (71.7%) and to a lesser extent attending doctors' appointments. The possession of the NowCard contributes to making the bus a popular means of transport, however this concession has now been withdrawn on Dial a Bus.

The One Voice survey revealed some interesting access issues. 44 percent of people who use the bus require assistance when travelling. The accessibility of the bus and the competent way of putting down the ramp was indicated as one of the areas of concern for disabled people. The availability of the timetable in large print will benefit visually impaired people.

Other issues were related to bus driver's awareness such as a bus driver setting off before the disabled person had the chance to sit down. There were many wheelchair users who did not use buses; some of these reported that they felt that the drivers did not know how to use the ramp, others that drivers did not like getting out of the seat to lower the ramp, while others found that some drivers were not aware that the bus could be lowered to the kerb. The size of the steps emerged as a key issue. It is worth mentioning that a few users found the helpfulness of the drivers in Lancaster bad or very bad.

Some passengers with visual impairment find it difficult to make out names and numbers on the buses; some said the Carlisle bus was far more visible.

Some users found difficulty in accessing the toilets at the local bus station. Indeed, 42% seemed not to know about them, and from those who use them only 20 percent found them OK. Most of the users found the staff at Lancaster bus station helpful. However other stations, like Westgate, were felt to be lacking in staff.

Accessibility of Bus Timetables:

The survey revealed some interesting information about the ways that people find out about bus routes and times. Paper bus timetables are the most popular way of finding timetable information, and the next two most common answers were turn up and wait (42.9%) and at the bus stop (36.7%).

The internet was not used by many people (16.3%) to assist them with bus travel, and no one uses mobile phone text or text phone to find out information. 75% of respondents said that it would be helpful if the bus timetables showed times of accessible buses. This was most important to wheelchair users.

People with visual impairments manage to find the timetable information but people with fatigue/pain appear to have more problems getting such information. 75% of respondents felt the bus information was helpful.

Now Card:

82 percent of people had heard of the NowCard and 79 per cent of them owned one. Some people found staff at the bus station rude or not willing to give information on this.

Dial-A-Bus:

There is great awareness of the Dial-A-Bus service (81%). However, only 25% of these use it. The majority of people who use Dial-A-Bus have visual impairments and are over 75 years old. The ease of booking journeys was the main reason for using Dial-A-Bus. It seems that it is easy to use this service to go to Galloway's, but for other things such as college/doctor appointments it is more difficult. Interestingly, a user mentioned that they do not use Dial-A-Bus because the vehicles are inaccessible.

Experiences of Train Travel:

The train is used widely amongst disabled people in the Lancaster area. 67.7 percent of the people participated in the One Voice Survey use the train. A number of reasons were given for not travelling by train: some people did not need to; others found it involved too many access problems (e.g. travelling between bus stop and train station and/or between different platforms), while others found it too expensive. Most people used the train rarely/monthly. The main reason for using the train is that it is more comfortable for longer journeys. The train is mainly used to visit family and friends or attend hospital appointments out of the area. Fewer people use train for shopping compared to the bus.

Disabled Person's Railcard:

76.7 percent were aware of the Disabled Person's Railcard but only 42.4 percent had one. The majority of people did not get a railcard because they did not travel often enough to make it worth it. An interesting finding was, as a respondent with visual

impairment said: "(I have) not applied for (a Disabled Person's Railcard) as (I) cannot see well enough to fill in the forms." This might be an indication that there should be alternative ways to apply for the card e.g. telephone registration.

Accessibility of train routes and times:

No one uses the text phone service and only one person uses mobile phone text messages. The telephone (34.9%) and internet (46.5%) were the most common sources of timetable information, which may indicate that the train websites are more accessible than the one used by Stagecoach. People found it relatively easy to find information about train travel and found the information acceptable; a number of respondents said it was better than bus travel information.

Accessibility of trains:

Nearly 75 percent of respondents needed some form of assistance always/sometimes. Two of the main areas where people needed assistance were using the ramps and carrying luggage. A few people needed other kinds of help, such as being reminded when to get on and off. People with visual impairments had to rely on strangers to find on-route information and were generally not aware of the Journeycare service. There is a need to increase awareness amongst disabled people about this service.

A quarter of travellers did not know about the assistance available from the train companies and arranged assistance for themselves. Most respondents found the staff at the station generally helpful, and they seem to be improving over time. There is a case for reviewing the needs of deaf people as staff don't seem to be as aware of their disability so there might be room for improvement through training.

Accessibility of local stations:

The majority of travellers find the accessibility of the local train stations sufficient. However there are areas that need to be brought to the attention of the railway stations/companies. In particular, some people with visual impairments find the signs and the TV displays hard to read. In smaller stations like Silverdale or Wennington there is no information at all. People with hearing impairments cannot hear callers informing about changes or

delays. Also, knowing how to get the key for the disabled toilet is sometimes an issue. People do not seem content with the disabled facilities on the train, as 50 percent considered them bad or very bad or did not know about them. In general, however, respondents found that travelling by train was comfortable, that it was easy to get on and off and find a seat, and that staff on the train were helpful.

Experiences of Taxi Travel:

Taxis are a very popular means of transport with 72.3% of disabled people using them. 34.8 percent of them are wheelchair users, followed by people with some other mobility impairment. The cost of a taxi is the overriding reason for not using one. Fewer than 25% of people used a taxi more than once a week. 80% of people use a taxi because it is convenient. There was a fairly good spread of times when people used taxis, with mornings being most popular. Taxis are used widely for appointments at the doctor's and the hospital as well as for shopping and social activities.

Booking and Accessibility:

The taxi operators seem largely responsive to individual needs. There is evidence that users could not book a wheelchair accessible taxi in advance, as they were told that one could not be guaranteed. Some users work around these problems by being proactive: e.g. some mention in advance that they travel with a guide dog, while others stick with the same driver who knows their access needs. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of accessible taxis. The most difficult time to book one is in the morning, because this type of taxi (which can transport 7 children) is often used for school runs. It is also difficult to book a taxi in the evening. While half of the respondents could access any kind of vehicle, half had specific requirements. In particular, there appears to be a need for specific kind of vehicles, like saloons or larger vehicles. When people book a taxi it is important to specify what type of vehicle they need. Most respondents said that taxi drivers were generally responsive to their needs. However, a couple of issues raised were that some taxi drivers did not know how to use the ramps and some taxis do not have straps to secure a wheelchair.

Finally, many disabled people in the Lancaster area use their own transport to travel as it is cheaper and more convenient. Cycling

was also mentioned as a favourite means of transport, so it might be useful for local authorities to make cycling for disabled people more accessible.

We are very grateful to Donna Reeve who collated the data for us, and on the subject of gratitude I would like to thank everyone who bullied, cajoled and nagged people into filling in the questionnaire, and to offer a big thank-you to everyone who took part. The use and experiences of bus, train and taxi are based on answers given by disabled people in the Lancaster and Morecambe District.

If you would like to view the full report please contact our office or if you have any questions please email one-voice@btconnect.com