

# Accessibility Engagement Plan

July 2021



# Accessibility Engagement Plan

Customers' lived experiences are important to us at TransPennine Express (TPE).

With this in mind we are constantly exploring new ways of engaging with our older and disabled customers and the groups that represent them.

This Accessibility Engagement Plan sets out the ways in which we will communicate with our older and disabled customers to gather views, opinions, feedback and aspirations and use these to influence accessibility developments at TransPennine Express.

We want all of our older and disabled customers to feel confident when they travel with us.

If you have ideas of other ways we can reach out and hear from our customers then please do get in contact with us.

## Communicating with our customers

### What we do currently

In 2020 we created two dedicated panels comprised of people with a range of visible and non-visible disabilities and some of the groups that represent them. These panels focus on accessibility providing feedback on a range of initiatives to ensure that the needs of older and disabled customers are being thoroughly considered. The panels bring together a wide range of customers and stakeholders with varying knowledge and experience to ensure that we are considering all aspects of accessibility before proceeding with projects and alterations. These panels are vital sounding boards for TPE, and their opinions have a notable impact upon the work that we do.

### Customer panels

#### Accessibility Professionals Panel

Our Accessibility Professionals Panel is made up of both local and national organisations that represent disabled customers. Members include RNIB, RNID, Scope, Guide Dogs, Muscular Dystrophy UK and others. During the Covid-19 pandemic the group has met virtually over Teams once a quarter. Once social distancing restrictions ease the group will begin to meet face-to-face at locations across the network, giving members further opportunities to travel on our trains and explore more of our stations. Although the group formally convenes quarterly, individual members also collaborate with us on a one-to-one basis by providing guidance related to specific disabilities to support individual projects or teams.

A wide range of organisations were approached to initially establish the group, and additional members have become involved after supporting us with specific accessibility projects. We are keen to ensure that the group continues to represent a diverse range of accessibility requirements. We will create a range of targeted communications to reach out to local and national underrepresented organisations located across our networks to seek to expand the composition of the group.

#### Accessibility Customer Panel

Our Accessibility Customer Panel is made up of 12 individuals that are geographically dispersed across our network, with a wide range of accessibility requirements. Sensory, physical and cognitive impairments are all represented within the group to ensure that we are considering all accessibility needs in our work. It is important to ensure that we gather a wide range of varying opinions, and we continually seek to attract potential new members. The new engagement platforms launching this year will help us to grow the group.

Current members have joined as a result of previous engagement with older and disabled customers, alongside recommendations from the organisations that make up the Professionals Panel. We also approach customers who have made accessibility complaints or recommendations to join the group and help us to improve services. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic the group has met virtually every quarter, and this will continue until the group feel comfortable meeting in person.

## Group successes

Both Accessibility Panels have been pivotal in influencing developments at TPE. For example, through working collaboratively with RNID we have begun a feasibility study exploring the possibility of using speech to text technology to translate onboard announcements on our trains.

After each meeting, the group has the opportunity to report to the

TransPennine Express Board, an invaluable opportunity for members to shine a spotlight on key areas of interest and improvement to be considered at an executive level.

In response to the Eden Park tragedy the group chose to explore visual impairments with the Board. This presentation was an excellent way of highlighting the importance of tactile paving and other safety mitigations for blind and partially sighted people.

# Future plans

## Social media

It is important for us to hear from a diverse range of customers on accessibility and we are aware that joining panels isn't for everyone.

Therefore, we have committed to launch a dedicated accessibility Facebook group by the end of October 2021. We have chosen Facebook as this was recommended by the customer panel as a safe and secure platform for us to share information with customers.

This bespoke page will allow us to gather feedback from customers on a wide range of topics such as their experiences with booking passenger assistance to what colour schemes they find most accessible in our communications. This group will also be well positioned to host specific accessibility focused events with customers, live Q&A sessions with teams across the business and targeted support around individual disabilities.

With access to this wider pool of respondents we will be able to quickly spot trends and react to

feedback to ensure that the customer is at the heart of everything we do. The Facebook page will also provide an additional avenue for customers with accessibility requirements to get in contact with us and ask any questions they may have, whilst also providing us with a platform where we can quickly notify customers of accessibility related alterations that could impact their travel.

We will closely monitor engagement with this group to ensure that it continues to relate to disabled customers and will report upon its integration in future accessibility engagement plans.

We will be hosting 'Instagram Lives' and 'Tweet the Manager' sessions themed around accessibility to ensure that we are communicating with disabled customers on a range of Social Media platforms to gain maximum reach, giving customers the opportunity to hear about what we are doing and ask any questions they may have. We will also hold a Meet the Manager session where customers can dial in and ask any accessibility related questions directly to managers.

## Customer surveys

It is really important to us to understand customers' experiences using our Passenger Assistance service.

From October 2021 we will begin offering customers who have booked passenger assistance with us the opportunity to complete a dedicated post-trip survey, either digitally or over the phone depending on the customers' requirements.

This survey will ask tailored questions designed to provide us with qualitative and quantitative feedback that will help us spot trends and shape improvements at stations and on-board our services. Through gaining this specific feedback we will be able to utilise mass customer insight to support the progression of minor accessibility improvement projects. This feedback may also highlight areas where staff training could be enhanced.

# Acting on customer needs

## Disability and equality training

As of July 2021, all customer facing and management staff at TPE have been trained in Disability and Equality.

This training was developed in-house with support from national charities and local disabled customers.

To ensure this training remains relevant, staff are required to attend mandatory refresher training every two years.

The Office of Rail and Road provide TPE with a number of mandatory

## WhatsApp passenger assistance bookings

In early 2021 customers told us that it would be useful to have the ability to book passenger assistance over a live chat platform as this would fit seamlessly into everyday life.

In response to this feedback we will implement this functionality by March 2022, to coincide with the reduction in passenger assistance booking window from six hours to two hours before travel.

WhatsApp provides an additional avenue for customers to get in touch with us, and with advisers having access to passenger assistance bookings, this will vastly enhance the customer experience.

learning outcomes that must be covered within the refresher training area, and the content of these sessions will be designed with support from the accessibility panels.

TPE's Learning and Development Manager will host a series of sessions with both accessibility panels where the content of the training will be reviewed and developed by members.

The aim is to ensure that it contains up-to-date and relevant statistics and research around specific disabilities that are pertinent, alongside first-hand testimonials to bring the training to life.

# Minor works projects

TPE is committed to spending £100,000 a year on making minor alterations at stations to improve accessibility. Both accessibility panels recommend alterations that could be made at stations based upon lived experience or new and innovative technologies that they would like us to investigate. Other stakeholders can also propose projects for our consideration.

After thoroughly investigating and costing up these proposals we present them to our customer and professionals panels for sign-off. We are committed to ensuring that any alterations we make have maximum benefit for our older and disabled customers, therefore we will only progress with schemes that are endorsed by the accessibility panels.

# Recruitment

To support this Accessibility Engagement Strategy alongside the new Business Plan Commitments at TPE we are recruiting an Accessibility Coordinator to support the Accessibility and Integration Manager with projects across the business.

bookings and development of the bespoke Facebook page.

All newly recruited staff will attend Disability and Equality training and the social media advisers will also attend a newly developed suite of accessibility training especially designed to support the advisers with dealing with accessibility requests, covering the creation of accessible content and the use of inclusive language.

We have also committed to doubling the number of social media advisers. This growth will support the rollout of WhatsApp Passenger Assistance

# Conclusion

We recognise that people will choose to interact with us on different levels and using different platforms and are encouraged by the community requesting additional avenues for engagement. We will continue to monitor how effective each of these

engagement mechanisms are to ensure that we are constantly evolving to provide customers with the most efficient ways of hearing from us and we commit to thoroughly reviewing all avenues and responding in an agile manner.

if you have any feedback or ideas on how we could expand our communication channels to be even more inclusive for older and disabled customers, then please get in touch with our Accessibility and Integration Manager, Natasha Marsay [Natasha.marsay@tpexpress.co.uk](mailto:Natasha.marsay@tpexpress.co.uk)

# Contact Us

We value your feedback on this policy and our approach to meeting the needs of customers with disabilities.

You can share your thoughts by contacting our Assisted Travel Team.

**Call:**  
0800 107 2149

**Text Relay:**  
18001 0800 107 2149  
(for deaf or hard of hearing customers)

**Online:**  
Visit [www.tpexpress.co.uk/help](http://www.tpexpress.co.uk/help) and complete our easy to use webform to provide your feedback.

**By Post:**  
Customer Relations  
TransPennine Express,  
Freepost, ADMAIL 3878,  
Manchester M1 9YB

**Comments Form:**  
Fill in one of our FREEPOST customer comment forms available from any of our staffed stations.



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