

AAPConsultation@dft.gsi.gov.uk

please reply to allison.cosgrove@railfuturescotland.org.uk

Date 22 November 2017

Accessibility Action Plan Consultation

Railfuture is glad to have the opportunity to respond to this Consultation document. We have been contacted by several groups and individuals who have raised issues with us for inclusion in our response. As a rail organisation, our response is rail-focused, but some of our responses could relate to other forms of transport. We have also received specific comments on pavement access around stations.

We have used the paragraph headings given in the consultation document for ease of reference.

Paragraph 4 - Consistency in accessing transport services

We agree with the views expressed in 4.2 concerning the impact of disability, and are glad to see autism and mental health included as well as physical disabilities. At Action 4, we would like to see more work with dementia-friendly groups, as sufferers can see transport differently from more able users and these differences could be incorporated into planning of new stations and renovation of existing facilities, although we recognise that the Alzheimer's Society has been involved in this consultation.

We have been asked to include a requirement for visual stop displays on buses to be forward facing for a wheelchair user to see, as well as good quality audible announcements.

There appears to be no consistency around the issue of use of mobility scooters on trains, with Northern, Transpennine and Scotrail identified as TOCs which ban their use. One user has pointed out that if a scooter meets the same criteria for size and weight as an electric wheelchair, both vehicles should be allowed.

Paragraph 5 – Monitoring the Impact of Regulatory Compliance

Actions 9-16 are extremely laudable in terms of toilets access, alternative journey options, notification of incidents to passengers and availability of facilities. The use of text messaging could be explored to warn passengers, especially those with booked assistance, or any potential difficulties en route, but this option could be available for anyone booking a particular journey.

On the issue of text messaging, one user has pointed out that 03xx and 08xx numbers reject text messages from mobile phones, so they are useless for contacting service providers to book support or find out about accessibility. Given the wide use of mobile phones, this is surely something that could be addressed immediately.

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We would like to know more about the innovation competition: the entries, the costs of possible improvements and the selection criteria.

Likewise in Actions 17-19, we would like to know when this research will be published.

Future Policy Development

Question 5 – Passenger announcements are often inaudible in carriages because the equipment is faulty. This is particularly unhelpful when travelling in winter or at night.

Question 6 – As noted above, different TOCs apply different rules to the use of mobility scooters on trains. This is very unhelpful to travellers, especially those on holiday, who may be used to a local train service accepting their scooter, and then find this is not available when away from home.

Question 7 – The Government could and should continue to consult with groups representing disabled users to highlight issues, particularly in relation to “hidden” disabilities.

Spontaneous travel

We are aware that platform humps are seen by disabled users as extremely beneficial to being able to access platforms and trains, and we question why these are not more widely used.

At Action 28, on the publication of ORR research, we would like to see a timeframe on action from research publication, not just publication. Similarly the publication of research with Transport Focus should be followed by action to implement its findings, or there seems little point in carrying out the research.

Question 11 – TVM breakdowns are reported frequently, as well as difficulty with use because of sunlight and obstructions. This can cause worry especially when there is a connection to make but passengers are forced to wait in long queues to buy a ticket at the half way point where tickets are not sold on the train.

Building Confidence and Empowerment

Action 31 – We welcome this work with representative bodies, and would request that representatives of specific disabled groups also be included.

Final Comments

Ongoing work is appreciated by users, as noted in the following comments made to us:

“I have experience of London Airports and some in North America – believe me ours are brilliant with disabled people”

“The worst rail experience I had was with Swiss rail – steps with no rail etc”

“Platform humps for level access at some Thameslink stations is to be applauded”

“Our system isn’t perfect, but there’s a will to make it better. Keep it up”.

ALLISON COSGROVE
HEAD OF PASSENGER GROUP, RAILFUTURE
13 STORIES PARK, EAST LINTON EH40 3BN
allison.cosgrove@railfuturescotland.org.uk