



On Track for Inclusive Train Travel - Scoping and Discovery Report

Report prepared by RNIB



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1. Executive Summary

Disabled people continue to experience significant and avoidable barriers when travelling by rail. Although disability awareness and inclusion training is now widespread and strengthened by regulatory requirements, the Discovery phase of the On Track for Inclusive Train Travel project found that current workforce training and development is not delivering consistently reliable or inclusive experiences for passengers.

Evidence gathered from desk research, rail industry representatives and disabled people shows that the impact of training is shaped far more by operational realities than by training content itself. Staffing pressures, inconsistent handover processes, inaccessible information systems, environmental design issues and fragmented accountability across railway companies all limit staff ability to apply inclusive practices in day-to-day contexts. As a result, disabled people continue to experience unpredictable assistance, difficulties locating staff, confidence barriers and challenges throughout their journeys, with some choosing not to travel at all.

Our Discovery work highlights that engagement with disabled people adds clear value to training and service design, but varies widely across organisations. Current evaluation approaches also focus heavily on compliance and completion metrics rather than behavioural change or outcomes that matter to passengers and potential users of rail.

Overall, the findings point to a need for sector-wide focus on operational, cultural and system-level enablers, not just training improvements, to strengthen reliability and inclusion. A number of opportunity areas have emerged that offer potential to strengthen the accessibility and inclusivity of the rail system. These include shifting from a compliance-based approach to one focused on performance and outcomes; improving the operational conditions that enable staff to act inclusively; enhancing coordination across operators, modes and journey elements; embedding co-design more consistently across programmes; and improving data, feedback and learning loops to support continuous improvement.

In addition, there is significant scope to develop and implement a more consistent, high-quality training and development offer for all roles across the rail workforce. Ensuring that every member of staff receives relevant disability awareness training - supported by appropriate management, leadership, and ongoing professional

development - will help embed inclusive practice more reliably and sustainably throughout the system.

These opportunity areas directly align with, and can be strengthened by, the growing body of work within community rail to engage disabled people and co-design improvements. Community rail partnerships increasingly provide a trusted local interface between the industry and disabled passengers, facilitating meaningful engagement, surfacing lived experience insights, and piloting inclusive practices at a community level. Their established role in convening local stakeholders and supporting co-production offers a valuable mechanism through which system-wide changes can be informed, tested and refined.

Leveraging community rail's expanding engagement and co-design capability will help ensure that these opportunities translate into practical, evidence-based improvements that enhance confidence, predictability, and overall accessibility for disabled passengers. By aligning system-level interventions with community-led insight and collaborative design, the rail industry will be better positioned to deliver reforms that are grounded in real experiences and responsive to diverse needs.

2. Background

Disabled people continue to face significant barriers when travelling by rail, with inconsistent or insufficient staff assistance repeatedly identified as a key obstacle to accessible and inclusive journeys (Alexiou, 2022). Research undertaken by the Motability Foundation (2023) as part of its innovation priorities review examined disabled people's experiences of using public transport and identified staff assistance as a critical enabler of accessible travel. The review found that many disabled people encounter difficulties when staff are unavailable, lack confidence in providing assistance, or are insufficiently trained to respond to diverse access needs, with such issues reported as particularly acute within the rail sector. These factors can contribute to reduced travel confidence, unmet accessibility needs, and ultimately the exclusion of disabled people from rail travel (RNIB, 2023).

In response to this, the On Track for Inclusive Train Travel project was established, funded by the Motability Foundation. The project was delivered jointly by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), in partnership with the Community Rail Network, working with two community rail partnerships: Community Rail Lancashire

and Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership. The project aimed to improve how rail staff serve and support disabled people, with the overarching goal of driving cultural and practical change within the rail workforce to make train travel more accessible and inclusive for all.

This project built on the community rail movement's strength in working closely with the rail industry to engage communities and advise on how the railway can respond to lived experience; and RNIB's expertise in coproducing solutions with disabled people to address barriers and systemic problems. It came at a critical moment, with opportunities emerging through the process of rail reform to help create a more accessible and inclusive railway.

A primary assumption underpinning the project was that achieving this goal will require more than simply introducing new or additional training. Disability awareness and inclusion training is already widely used across the rail industry, yet disabled people's experiences indicate that this training does not always translate into better communication, assistance or outcomes (Motability Foundation, 2023). A central focus of the On Track project was therefore to examine the role and effectiveness of existing disability awareness and inclusion training, and to understand how it operates within the wider context of everyday practice in train operating companies. This includes exploring how training is designed, delivered and experienced by staff. It also involves better understanding the organisational, cultural and system-level factors that can influence the extent to which learning is applied into practice.

This report draws together research findings focused on building a clearer understanding of the problem space before moving on to designing and piloting potential solutions.

The insights presented here are intended to inform subsequent co-design and testing activity, ensuring that any emerging solutions are grounded in evidence and insight rather than assumptions.

3. Purpose of the Discovery Phase

The purpose of the Discovery phase was to review, collect and assess evidence to better understand what influences disabled people's experiences of staff support when travelling by rail in the UK.

The Discovery combined desk-based analysis with quantitative and qualitative research to develop an indicative picture of current practices, lived experiences and barriers to effective disability assistance and inclusion within the UK rail sector. While the primary focus was UK-based and the findings are not intended to be statistically representative of all disabled rail users, international literature was also reviewed to help contextualise findings and identify best practice in disability awareness training.

3.1. Objectives

The Discovery process was guided by three key objectives:

1. To examine current approaches to disability assistance within the rail sector, including how disability awareness and inclusion training is designed, delivered, experienced and valued by staff, and how its impact is monitored.
2. To identify the organisational, cultural and system level factors that influence staff behaviour and shape how support is enacted in practice.
3. To better understand disabled people's experiences of rail travel, with a particular focus on interactions with staff and the factors that shape feelings of confidence, support and inclusion.

3.2. Key research questions

The research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What beliefs, practices and system-level constraints influence the perceived value and impact of disability awareness and inclusion training within the railway sector?
2. What limits train operating companies from fully realising the benefits of deeper engagement with disabled people and the organisations that represent them?
3. Under what conditions can deeper engagement deliver better outcomes for disabled passengers, support staff, and contribute to a more inclusive railway?

3.3. Summary of Discovery activities

Key activities contributing to Discovery included:

1. A review and synthesis of existing evidence, including:

- a review of disability awareness and inclusion training requirements, regulatory guidance and compliance within the UK rail sector (Appendix A)¹;

¹ Evidence review of UK rail training requirements and regulatory guidance undertaken by Mirriam Ricci.

- a cross-sector evidence review examining the effectiveness of disability awareness, equality and inclusion interventions, including international studies, with implications for training and practice in the UK-rail context (Appendix B)²; and
- an analysis of operational barriers and standard operating procedures, drawing on relevant operational and policy documentation, that may limit the delivery of effective disability assistance across the UK rail network (Appendix C)³.

2. Mixed methods research with representatives from train operating companies and other rail-sector organisations (Appendix D)⁴, including:

- a survey with 12 representatives; and,
- in-depth interviews with 12 organisational leads.

3. Mixed methods research with disabled people (Appendix D)⁵, including:

- a survey with 133 people with lived experience of rail travel; and,
- three focus groups, with participants recruited through an open advert inviting people with lived experience to take part in a forum discussing common barriers to public transport.
- Participants included disabled, Deaf and neurodivergent individuals living in the Gloucestershire area, as well as participants from Project SEARCH, a supported internship programme based at Lancashire County Council for young people aged 16-24 with learning disabilities and/or autism who have an Education, Health and Care plan. It also included participants from Community Rail Lancashire and Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership.

This report synthesises insights from across all of these activities to present a consolidated view of both the key issues and opportunities emerging from the Discovery phase.

² Cross-sector and international evidence review undertaken by Mirriam Ricci.

³ Operational and policy analysis undertaken by RNIB.

⁴ Survey and interviews with rail-sector representatives undertaken by Community Rail Lancashire and Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership; analysis undertaken by Yonder.

⁵ Survey with disabled people undertaken and analysed by Yonder; focus groups undertaken by Community Rail Lancashire and Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership and analysed by Yonder.

3.3.1. Limitations of the evidence

This Discovery phase was designed to provide an indicative, exploratory understanding of current practice, experiences and evidence, rather than statistically generalisable findings. Several limitations should therefore be noted.

The survey with disabled people (Appendix D) was conducted using Yonder's proprietary online panel. While the panel is actively recruited using equality, diversity and inclusion metrics and aligned with national population benchmarks, it is not fully representative of the wider population by definition. The target population for this study was adults who identify as disabled, and no quotas were set for gender, age or region. As a result, the achieved sample skews towards women and those aged 45-65 when compared with a nationally representative sample.

The focus groups were designed to generate rich qualitative insight into lived experience rather than to produce findings that are statistically representative. Participants were recruited through open adverts and partner organisations, meaning that those who took part were self-selecting and may have been more engaged with, or affected by, issues relating to public transport accessibility. In addition, the focus groups reflected the experiences of disabled, Deaf and neurodivergent people living in specific local contexts, and findings should therefore be understood as indicative of experiences in those areas rather than generalisable across all regions or population groups.

The cross-sector evidence review (Appendix B) also highlights wider limitations in the existing research base. Much of the available literature is based on small, non-representative samples, relies heavily on short-term or self-reported outcomes, and lacks longitudinal or behavioural measures of impact. There is also very limited rail-specific research evaluating disability awareness and inclusion training, meaning that findings drawn from other sectors require careful adaptation to the rail context.

Taken together, these limitations mean that the findings should be interpreted as directional rather than definitive, and as a basis for further testing, piloting and evaluation rather than as conclusive evidence of effectiveness.

4. Summary of Discovery Findings

The Discovery findings reveal a consistent pattern across evidence sources. Training is widespread and increasingly standardised, but its impact is shaped far more by the

systems, operational realities and organisational cultures in which staff work than by training content alone. Disabled passengers continue to face variable and often avoidable barriers, and assistance reliability depends on factors such as staffing coverage, handover processes, information design, and environmental accessibility. Engagement with disabled people is valued but uneven, and opportunities exist to strengthen evaluation, coordination and operational enablers across the sector.

The following sections outline these findings in more detail, structured around the core Discovery questions.

4.1. What beliefs, practices and system-level constraints influence the perceived value and impact of disability awareness and inclusion training within the railway sector?

4.1.1. Training is well established, but its value is primarily understood through regulatory compliance rather than passenger outcomes

Disability awareness and inclusion training is a legally mandated and regulator monitored component of UK rail operations, underpinned by statutory requirements and oversight from the Office of Rail and Road (ORR). The Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) Guidance establishes clear expectations regarding training content, refresher frequency (expected every two years for passenger facing roles) and staff competency, including a requirement that training content must be developed in consultation with disabled people (ORR, 2025a). It also sets out defined areas that training is expected to cover, including recognising visible and non-visible disabilities, inclusive communication, Passenger Assist processes (a booking system to provide tailored assistance), station accessibility, and the safe and reliable provision of assistance (for example, ramp use and guiding visually impaired passengers).

In addition to the existing regulatory framework, national initiatives such as the Department for Transport's REAL Disability Equality Training provide transport operators with thorough and flexible training modules to help them not only meet legal requirements but also go beyond basic standards. Developed in partnership with professionals from the transport sector and individuals with lived experience, this initiative is informed by the social model of disability and promotes person-centred principles such as Respect, Empathy, Ask and Listen (Department for Transport, 2020).

To date, progress against the ATP guidance has primarily been evidenced through delivery and coverage metrics. Early ORR reviews (2021) focused on providing initial regulatory assurance that operators were implementing the guidance. While these reviews identified early challenges in evidencing compliance, operators reported that nearly 30,000 frontline staff were expected to complete training by the end of 2021. These figures were presented as indicators of rollout activity, rather than as a benchmark against total workforce size or an assessment of whether coverage was sufficient.

Subsequent regulatory updates have focused less on confirming aggregate completion figures and more on how training is embedded and maintained, shifting regulatory attention from initial assurance towards the quality of refresher training plans. This includes reviewing evidence of consultation with disabled people as well as mechanisms in place to assure staff understanding and competence. A regulatory update in 2023 identified that most operators were demonstrating good practice in these areas (ORR, 2023). However, the update did not define this in detail or set out specific criteria against which good practice was assessed.

Despite these developments, evidence of training value within regulatory and organisational reporting is most commonly demonstrated through delivery metrics rather than outcomes in practice. Success is typically expressed in terms of coverage, completion and regulatory assurance, with far less emphasis on whether training leads to sustained changes in staff behaviour or improved outcomes for disabled passengers. Evidence from the UK-wide operational barriers analysis (see Appendix C) reinforces this distinction, indicating that while training under the ATP has strengthened, operational constraints and standard operating procedures frequently prevent trained staff from delivering reliable assistance. This creates a persistent gap between policy expectations and day-to-day practice.

In addition to these system-level constraints, a further challenge relates to a lack of consistency around how training is designed and delivered across the sector. Our survey and in-depth interviews with representatives from train operating companies (see Appendix D) revealed that most relied on in-house training material, with none using the Department for Transport's REAL training. The research did not establish whether this reflects limited adoption of REAL relative to initial expectations, or whether in-house training materials cover similar content.

While many operators reported adopting blended learning models and consulting disabled people in some capacity, provision was notably less consistent for non-frontline staff, with ongoing disability awareness or accessibility training often limited to passenger-facing roles. Training frequency also varied widely between organisations. Although most representatives felt that their current approach was effective and valued by staff, only one rated it as “very effective”. Such findings suggest that regulatory compliance does not necessarily translate into a consistent training experience for staff or alignment in capability across the sector.

The implications of these inconsistencies are clearly reflected in the day-to-day experiences of disabled passengers. Our passenger survey and focus groups (see Appendix D) revealed that accessibility challenges were widespread in the rail sector and closely linked to confidence and travel behaviour. Four in five respondents (82 per cent) reported difficulties when travelling by train, and nearly a third (32 per cent) reported choosing not to travel at all because they did not expect their accessibility needs to be met.

Overall, this evidence shows that while disability awareness and inclusive training is well established and increasingly standardised, its perceived value in the rail sector is largely shaped by compliance with regulatory expectations rather than by demonstrable impacts on everyday service delivery.

4.1.2. Training provides a foundation, but its impact is largely shaped by the systems around it

Cross-sector evidence (See Appendix B) shows that disability awareness, equality and inclusion interventions are commonly designed to improve staff empathy and communication, reflecting their importance for service quality and interactions with disabled passengers. The literature consistently associates such training with improvements in knowledge, confidence and understanding, particularly when it is grounded in the social model of disability and delivered through interactive or multi-method approaches (e.g., quizzes, videos, discussions and simulations). However, it also consistently suggests that training delivered as a standalone activity is unlikely to result in sustained behavioural change over time.

Evidence from across transport and other sectors (See Appendix B) demonstrates that training impact is contingent on how the learning is embedded and reinforced in practice. For example, a study in South Africa found that Disability Equality Training improved taxi drivers’ understanding of disability, but observable

behavioural change occurred only when this training was combined with practical support skills related to real-world assistance (Igei, 2020). More broadly, research suggests that multi-method approaches integrating discussion, practical application and structured learning are more effective than purely didactic or lecture-based formats, particularly where staff are supported to apply learning within operational contexts.

The UK-wide operational barriers analysis (See Appendix C) adds rail-specific detail on some of the contextual constraints that can prevent trained staff from applying learning to practice. It includes staffing and rostering constraints, tight dispatch windows and dwell-time pressures, rigid standard operating procedures that restrict discretion (including uncertainty during disruption), technology and data integration challenges, and communication and coordination problems across multi-operator journeys.

Findings from our passenger focus groups (See Appendix D) further illustrate how experiences of accessibility are shaped not only by staff knowledge or intent, but by the usability and predictability of the wider system. Participants described barriers during journey planning and ticketing, including unreliable or inaccessible ticket machines, low awareness of booking assistance and railcard discounts, and inconsistent access to clear and accessible travel information. Within stations and on trains, crowding, delays, confusing signage, poor lighting, and unsynchronised audio and visual announcements were repeatedly cited as sources of anxiety and reliance on others. Neurodivergent participants in particular described sensory overload in busy or noisy stations, leading some to avoid specific locations or travel at quieter times. These findings illustrate how environmental design and information systems can contribute to an inaccessible travel experience, regardless of the level of accessibility training staff may have received.

“Crewe stands out as a very challenging station with bewildering signage and few staff.” (Anonymous passenger)

The cross-sector evidence review (See Appendix B) also revealed significant limitations in how the impact of disability awareness training is generally assessed. Many evaluations typically rely on short-term, self-reported measures of confidence or knowledge immediately following training, with little longitudinal follow-up or direct observation of behaviour in practice. In the absence of reinforcement through inclusive organisational cultures, leadership commitment, operational alignment and

opportunities for reflection, any positive effects are less likely to be sustained or translated into consistent service improvements, particularly over the long term.

Survey and interview data from representatives (See Appendix D) reinforce this picture, showing that train operating companies primarily rely on passenger feedback and complaints data to measure progress on accessibility and inclusion. While these mechanisms provide a form of oversight, there is limited use of behavioural assessments or observational methods to evaluate how staff support is delivered in practice. This points towards an evaluation approach that is shaped largely by reactive performance management, rather than by measuring training outcomes against the aspects of support disabled passengers value most, such as communication quality, predictability and staff visibility.

Our findings also suggest that there may be significant differences in passenger experiences by type of disability, which current evaluations may be failing to capture. For example, our passenger survey (See Appendix D) revealed that although 92 per cent of those with hearing impairments (n=12) and 90 per cent of those with visual impairments (n=10) found rail staff to be helpful when assistance is needed, only 62 per cent of neurodivergent respondents (n=34) reflected the same view. This suggests that existing training may be enabling staff to meet the needs of some disabled passengers more effectively than others, contributing to potential discrepancies in the quality of support provided.

"Maybe [the staff] need more training, as not all disabilities are visible."
(Anonymous passenger)

"They must be open to the fact that not all disabilities and health conditions are obvious to see and can be hidden." (Anonymous passenger)

Taken together, these findings suggest that while training content is an important foundation, its translation to practice may be heavily influenced by the organisational and operational contexts in which it is delivered. Current approaches to monitoring and evaluation may lack the depth needed to capture these nuances.

4.1.3. Training alone cannot compensate for systematic reliability failures across staffing and handovers

The operational barriers analysis (See Appendix C) provides concrete examples of where and how assistance reliability breaks down in practice. One major risk area is

staffing coverage. According to the ORR's (2024) annual report on passenger satisfaction and the performance of Passenger Assist, passengers who believed that the station they boarded or alighted at was unstaffed reported higher rates of assistance failure. Specifically, 23 per cent of passengers who perceived their station to be unstaffed reported not receiving their booked assistance (Transport Focus, 2024). While based on passenger perceptions rather than objective staffing classifications, these findings remain important, as perceived staffing availability directly shapes expectations and travel confidence.

Our survey and focus groups with passengers (See Appendix D) reinforced these findings. Although 74 per cent of survey participants felt that rail staff were helpful when assistance was needed, many experienced difficulties around actually locating staff, particularly at smaller stations or during busy periods. Some reported avoiding seeking help altogether because staff appeared busy, while others noted that clear identifiers (such as distinctive uniforms or accessibility focused badges) would make it easier to approach staff with confidence. These accounts highlight that assistance reliability depends not only on staffing levels but also on staff visibility and approachability, suggesting that environmental and operational cues shape whether support can be accessed when it is needed.

"Maybe staff could wear badges that identify them as being disabled friendly to make them appear more approachable." (Anonymous passenger)

Another area where reliability issues frequently arise is in handovers and communication and coordination across complex journeys. The barriers analysis (See Appendix C) highlights that assistance failures are particularly acute across multi-operator journeys, where missed handovers and unclear responsibilities can undermine delivery. It notes that ORR has introduced standardised handover protocols through its "Improving assisted travel" programme specifically to address these challenges and strengthen coordination between stations and operators.

"I do cross-country [travel], but it can be difficult, and that worries me... It's the handover between the two different train operating companies - making sure that happens as per the way it should." (Anonymous passenger)

These examples reinforce that assistance reliability is not determined by training completion alone. It is highly sensitive to staffing presence, the quality of handover processes, and the inherent complexity of navigating multi-operator travel.

4.2. What limits train operating companies from fully realising the benefits of deeper engagement with disabled people and the organisations that represent them?

4.2.1. Engagement is important, but organisational and operational constraints currently limit its depth, consistency and impact

Within the UK rail sector, engagement with disabled people is formally embedded within training governance arrangements. ATP Guidance requires that disability awareness and inclusion training be developed in consultation with disabled people and informed by lived experience, positioning engagement as a regulatory expectation rather than an optional add-on. Cross-sector evidence (See Appendix B) strongly supports this approach, with broad consensus that involving disabled people improves the legitimacy, relevance and effectiveness of training, often captured in the principle of “nothing about us without us”. Our survey and in-depth interviews with representatives from train operating companies (See Appendix D) revealed clear instances where this had taken place:

“Our e-learning was co-designed with disabled people and reviewed by our Built Environment Accessibility Panel, which is made up of individuals with lived experience and specialist access consultants.” (TOC Representative)

“We have an accessibility panel that is made up of customers with lived experience of a range of disabilities as well as individuals who work for charities or organisations that support disabled people. When we create a new or refreshed training, we hold a meeting to discuss what they think are the most important areas to consider. Content is then created and a further session is held ... to create videos for the training to enhance the material, to show real lived experience of train travel.” (TOC Representative)

More broadly, the cross-sector evidence review (See Appendix B) provides clear illustrations of the additional value generated when engagement moves beyond consultation towards co-design or co-creation. For example, a study in Australia found that a bus driver training programme developed through an extended co-design process involving drivers and disability advocates produced training that reflected operational realities while authentically representing passenger needs, and was rated positively by both staff and disabled participants (Neves et al., 2025). Similarly, participatory design work at the Swiss Federal Railways showed that involving disabled users in the development of a mobile app improved usability for

visually impaired travellers while also fostering wider organisational learning and heightened staff awareness of accessibility issues beyond the immediate intervention (Vollenwyder et al., 2020).

However, the evidence review (See Appendix B) also cautions that when engagement is limited to discrete or one-off activities, its benefits may not be sustained. The operational barriers analysis (See Appendix C) also helps explain why some engagement benefits may be difficult to realise without wider system changes. It indicates that many experience-level failures across the UK rail sector are operationally produced, including issues relating to staffing coverage, rigid standard operating procedures, handover processes, health and safety constraints, and resourcing limitations. While these barriers are consistently evidenced at a sector level, further audit at individual train operating company level would be required to confirm how these constraints manifest locally.

This suggests that although engagement with disabled people is recognised, and often formally required, its value may be constrained when treated as episodic or training-specific involvement rather than embedded within continuous organisational learning, review and decision-making processes. Findings from our survey and interviews with representatives reinforce this interpretation. Several representatives noted that engagement facilitated through community rail—where disabled people often participate actively in co-designing local improvements—does not consistently feed into workforce development at an organisational or system level. As a result, valuable insights generated through community-led initiatives are not always translated into wider cultural or behavioural change within operators.

Some pointed out that staff engagement with disabled people was uneven across the workforce, with those in non-frontline roles often receiving little or no accessibility training. Approaches also varied widely between operators, with some offering comprehensive ongoing training and others restricting it to frontline roles. Some staff may also lack the time and flexibility to step away from their roles to participate in training. This variability limits the extent to which engagement can meaningfully influence organisation-wide practice and decision-making. Overall, these constraints reflect system-level restrictions rather than a lack of intent or commitment.

“The key constraint is release for training, therefore delivering anything that requires teams to leave their post for any period of time is very challenging, even when it is backed by compliance.” (TOC Representative)

"[I would like to see] more ability to release staff from their duties to undertake training." (TOC Representative)

Looking ahead, representatives viewed the upcoming transition to Great British Railways as an opportunity to establish a more coherent, sector-wide model of engagement that moves beyond one-off activities and supports more consistent organisational learning.

4.2.2. Inaccessible feedback and redress pathways may be restricting the sector's ability to learn from passengers' experiences

A further system constraint highlighted in the operational barriers analysis (See Appendix C) is the accessibility of complaints and redress routes, which can influence the extent to which organisations can learn from failure. ORR research cited in the report indicates that while 86 per cent of disabled passengers are aware of their right to complain following an unsatisfactory service, awareness of redress was lower at 71 per cent. Furthermore, among those who had raised a complaint, 46 per cent experienced barriers when engaging with the process, including 8 per cent who found the process to be inaccessible. Similar challenges were identified in relation to redress. These findings suggest that even where engagement is encouraged in principle, barriers within feedback and redress systems can reduce the sector's ability to capture learning, identify recurring pain points and drive improvements at scale.

Evidence from our passenger survey and focus groups (See Appendix D) reinforces this picture. Many participants reported low awareness of how to complain, or who to contact when things go wrong. Some described finding complaints processes difficult or inaccessible, while others reported choosing not to complain at all, instead relying on informal coping strategies or assistance from other passengers. Such factors may limit both the volume and representativeness of the passenger feedback available to operators, weakening organisational learning and reducing opportunities to identify and address systemic failures.

"I did say can you let the management know that all this has happened? But I never really felt you're taken seriously, having to live through that experience." (Anonymous passenger)

In addition to this, the barriers analysis (See Appendix C) highlights measurement gaps in areas such as Turn Up and Go, an assisted travel service that does not require pre-booking. While ORR has published data on request volumes, limitations

in data quality and reliability make it difficult for the sector to accurately track and understand unmet needs in this space.

4.3. Under what conditions can deeper engagement deliver better outcomes for disabled passengers, support staff, and contribute to a more inclusive railway?

4.3.1. Evidence points to enabling conditions rather than ready-made solutions

Rather than identifying a single transferable intervention model, the cross-sector evidence (See Appendix B) highlights a set of recurring conditions associated with more effective disability awareness and inclusion interventions. These include grounding training in the social model of disability, creating opportunities for direct contact with disabled people, elevating that contact into co-design or co-creation, and adopting multi-method learning approaches that build practical skills alongside awareness.

Examples across sectors illustrate how these conditions operate in practice. Co-designed training programmes are consistently found to be more relevant and credible because they reflect both lived experience and operational realities. Participatory approaches in transport settings have also been shown to support organisational learning that extends beyond the immediate focus of an intervention, influencing wider awareness of accessibility and inclusion.

The cross-sector evidence also highlights contested approaches, particularly in relation to disability simulations. While some studies suggest simulations can support specific technical learning outcomes when carefully framed and combined with debriefing and reflection grounded in the social model of disability, other research shows that simulations risk reinforcing stereotypes or eliciting pity rather than genuine empathy. The effectiveness of such approaches appears highly context-dependent and sensitive to theoretical framing.

The operational barriers analysis (See Appendix B) indicates that in rail, enabling conditions for real-world impact must also include operational enablers, particularly staffing coverage, reliable handover and coordination processes, flexibility in standard operating procedures, improved technology and data integration, and clarity of accountability across operators. Evidence from our passenger survey and focus groups (See Appendix D) further illustrates the importance of these enabling

conditions. Participants repeatedly emphasised that confidence to travel is shaped by predictability, clear and accessible information (e.g., legible signage, synchronised audio and visual announcements), and the visibility and approachability of staff. Cleanliness, particularly of toilets and seating areas, was also cited as contributing to comfort and willingness to travel longer distances. Where these conditions were absent, even well-intentioned staff support was experienced as inconsistent or difficult to access.

Overall, the evidence indicates that “what works” is not a single transferable training model but a combination of learning principles and enabling operational conditions that allow staff to apply training consistently in real-world rail contexts.

4.3.2. Evidence gaps reinforce the need for further exploration and testing in rail

A consistent finding across the cross-sector evidence review (See Appendix B) is the limited availability of rail-specific empirical research evaluating the effectiveness of disability awareness and inclusion training delivered by rail operators. Where rail-related evidence exists, it tends to focus on adjacent interventions, such as co-designed digital tools, rather than on evaluating training programmes themselves. Much of the available evidence is drawn from other transport modes and sectors, and the distinctive operational characteristics of rail have not been comprehensively examined in relation to training effectiveness.

The cross-sector review also identifies recurring methodological limitations, including small sample sizes, limited longitudinal follow-up and a reliance on self-reported outcomes rather than objective behavioural measures. These gaps constrain confidence in claims about sustained impact and reinforce the conclusion that assumptions about training effectiveness cannot be safely transferred into rail contexts without further exploration, testing and evaluation. The operational barriers analysis complements this by evidencing persistent gaps between policy and delivery, while explicitly distinguishing between issues supported by strong UK-wide evidence and those marked as “assumptions” that require further audit at a train operating company level. -wide evidence and those marked as “assumption

Survey and interview data from representatives (See Appendix D) also echoed this need for further investigation, as current approaches to evaluation do not track changes in staff behaviour, communication quality or passenger confidence, despite these being central determinants of disabled passengers’ travel behaviour. This

creates a significant evidence gap around how well current training models prepare staff for real-world delivery in rail settings. Such gaps highlight the need for more targeted pilots and stronger, rail-specific evaluation frameworks that link training inputs to observable behaviours and assistance reliability.

5. Opportunities and key considerations moving forward

This report highlights that the challenges shaping disabled people's experiences of rail travel are systemic, multi-layered and interdependent. As such, no single intervention or project can resolve these issues in isolation, and it would not be realistic or appropriate for this programme to attempt to address all identified issues simultaneously.

However, the evidence also points to a number of opportunities where further Discovery, testing and piloting could help address critical evidence gaps identified during this phase, and provide a stronger foundation for future policy, regulatory and delivery activity. These opportunities are not presented as ready-made solutions, but as promising areas for further exploration. They are intended to signal potential directions for future work, rather than a comprehensive or prescriptive programme of activity.

5.1. Moving from compliance to performance and outcomes

A consistent finding across Discovery is that disability awareness and inclusion training is well established within the rail sector and is largely framed, valued and assessed through compliance with regulatory requirements. While this has driven widespread delivery and coverage, it has not consistently translated into reliable, high-quality assistance in everyday practice.

A key opportunity lies in reframing success around performance and passenger outcomes, rather than training completion alone. This includes exploring how behavioural expectations, operational metrics and passenger experience indicators might be better aligned, and how evidence of "what good looks like in practice" can be generated, tested and refined within real-world rail contexts. This reflects a clear evidence gap identified during Discovery, namely the absence of robust, rail-specific approaches for assessing behavioural change and assistance reliability in practice.

Developing and trialling more robust, rail-specific approaches to evaluating behavioural change and assistance reliability would help address a clear gap identified during Discovery.

5.2. Enabling trained staff to act within operational reality

Discovery findings repeatedly show that staff willingness, values and training are often undermined by operational and system-level constraints, including staffing coverage, dispatch pressures, rigid standard operating procedures, and uncertainty during disruption. These conditions can limit staff discretion and create situations where trained staff are unable to deliver the support they believe disabled passengers need.

An important opportunity for further work is therefore to explore the operational conditions that enable or inhibit inclusive practice, rather than focusing solely on individual capability. This could include targeted examination of priority standard operating procedures, escalation and override pathways, staffing models and decision-making frameworks, with the aim of identifying where greater flexibility, clarity or support could safely improve assistance reliability. Such work would help address current gaps in understanding how operational design interacts with training and culture, and where system changes could have the greatest practical impact. Small-scale pilots in this area could generate practical learning about how operational design interacts with training and culture.

5.3. Strengthening coordination across operators, modes and journey elements

Assistance failures were found to cluster particularly around handover points, including station-to-train transitions, interchanges and multi-operator journeys. These are moments where responsibility can become unclear and where even minor breakdowns in communication or coordination have disproportionate impacts on disabled passengers' confidence and experience.

This presents an opportunity to focus on journey-level reliability rather than isolated interactions, exploring how handovers, shared accountability and information flows can be strengthened across organisational boundaries. Further work in this area would help fill gaps in evidence about how coordination failures arise in practice and which interventions are most effective in reducing them. Testing approaches to

improving coordination, shared standards or joint performance measures could help address one of the most persistent sources of assistance failure identified during Discovery.

5.4. Embedding engagement and co-design as ongoing practice

Discovery confirms strong evidence that involving disabled people improves the relevance, credibility and legitimacy of training and other interventions. However, it also shows that engagement can presently be limited to specific moments such as training development, rather than embedded within continuous organisational learning and decision-making.

A further opportunity lies in exploring how co-design and lived experience input can be embedded more systematically across multiple aspects of delivery, including reviewing standard operating procedures, piloting and evaluating new initiatives, and informing feedback processes. This reflects a gap in evidence about how engagement can be sustained and governed over time, rather than treated as a one-off activity. This is less about introducing new engagement activities and more about testing governance, resourcing and accountability models that support and draw on sustained involvement over time, such as engagement activities already being delivered within community rail.

5.5. Improving feedback, data and learning loops

Discovery identified significant limitations in how assistance reliability, Turn Up and Go provision, complaints and redress are currently measured and used for learning. Where data exists, it is often partial, inconsistent or difficult to connect to specific operational or training changes.

There is therefore a clear opportunity to explore how feedback and data can be better integrated into learning loops, enabling organisations to identify recurring failure patterns, test changes and monitor their effects. Addressing these gaps would help build a stronger evidence base for understanding what interventions are most effective, and for supporting continuous improvement across the sector. This could include piloting clearer data standards, more accessible feedback routes for disabled passengers, and structured processes for translating insights into action.

5.6. Designing a more consistent, lived experience informed training offer for all roles

An additional opportunity lies in developing a more consistent and sector-wide training offer for both frontline and non-frontline staff. Discovery evidence shows wide variation in how training is designed, delivered and accessed across the workforce, with non-frontline staff often receiving limited or no accessibility training.

Embedding lived experience throughout training design and ensuring content reflects what works well in practice, such as multi-modal, interactive and skills-based approaches, could help align staff capability and support more predictable, inclusive behaviours across roles and functions. Further work in this area would help address gaps in understanding how different roles contribute to disabled passengers' experiences and how training can best support that contribution.

Strengthening training for all roles can also help contribute to wider cultural change, ensuring that accessibility and inclusion are understood not only as frontline responsibilities but as organisational values shaping policies, decision-making and everyday practice.

6. Conclusion

The On Track Discovery phase revealed a consistent picture: while disability awareness and inclusion training is well established across the rail sector, disabled passengers continue to experience significant and avoidable barriers when travelling. These challenges arise not only from gaps in staff capability, but also from systemic, operational, environmental and cultural conditions that shape whether trained staff are able to apply inclusive behaviours in practice. Evidence from desk-based research and our mixed methods research points to wide variation in staff experiences of training, passenger confidence, and the alignment between policy expectations and day-to-day service delivery.

From these findings, the Discovery phase has identified a range of opportunities for further exploration and testing. These include operational, cultural and coordination challenges where targeted change could help bridge the gap between policy and practice and enable more consistent and inclusive experiences for disabled passengers. Taken together, these opportunities provide a clear direction for

translating insight into practical change, grounded in evidence and shaped by lived experience.

The opportunities identified should be understood as areas for focused exploration, rather than a set of commitments, and any future work in this area must be considered in the context of the rapidly evolving landscape of rail reform, alongside growing activity within community rail to engage disabled people and address barriers.

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Appendix A

Disability Equality Training in the UK Rail Sector: An Overview of Requirements & Compliance



Introduction

The United Kingdom rail network plays a vital role in national infrastructure, carrying with it a substantial responsibility to guarantee equitable access and inclusive travel for all passengers. At the heart of this commitment lies the competence and attitude of frontline staff, which is largely shaped by the provision of disability-focused training. The requirement for such training is driven not only by ethical considerations but also by legal duties, most notably those arising from the Equality Act 2010.

Disability training in the UK rail sector is underpinned by statutory requirements and regulatory guidance. Oversight is provided by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), which serves as the independent safety and economic regulator for Britain's railways, as well as the monitor of National Highways, England's strategic road network. The regulatory framework extends beyond a general obligation to train staff, instead prescribing specific outcomes, frequency, and content for disability training programmes (ORR, 2019).

This short report provides a summary of the ORR's explicit requirements, as detailed in the Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) Guidance, and evaluates the progress made by rail operators in meeting these standards. Additionally, it considers the Department for Transport's (DfT) REAL Disability Equality Training programme, a comprehensive resource designed to cultivate a culture of understanding and exemplary customer service across the transport sector, including rail.

By examining these core components, this report offers a current perspective on the requirements and level of compliance concerning disability equality training within the UK rail industry.

Regulatory Requirements

The Office of Rail and Road (ORR), serving as the rail regulator in Great Britain, has released several essential documents and progress reports regarding disability equality training for rail employees. These publications offer updates in alignment with the requirements outlined in the ORR's Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) Guidance, which establishes rigorous standards for operators supporting passengers with disabilities.

Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) Guidance

The ORR's revised ATP Guidance, first published in 2019 and revised in October 2025, represents the legal and regulatory baseline for staff training. It superseded the former Disabled Persons' Protection Policy and significantly enhanced the obligations on train and station operators (ORR, 2019 & 2025). The core training requirement established here is threefold:

- **Mandatory Involvement:** Training content must be developed in consultation with, and be informed by, the **lived experience and expertise of disabled people**. This ensures the training addresses real-world barriers and challenges (ORR, 2019; DfT, 2020).
- **Recurrence:** All passenger-facing staff must receive **refresher training** on disability and equality at least once every two years following their initial induction (ORR, 2023).
- **Competency:** The training must ensure staff are competent in areas such as effective communications, accessibility at stations, and the safe and reliable provision of assistance (ORR, 2023).

Making the Grade (ORR, 2021a)

This pivotal progress report issued in March 2021 marked the ORR's first formal review of operators' compliance with the new ATP training obligations. The deadline for initial compliance (new induction training) was set for July 2021. This report highlighted the following points:

- The ORR initially expressed concern that only a minority of operators (four out of 24 reviewed) had submitted sufficient evidence to assure compliance by the deadline.
- However, the report noted a significant positive shift, confirming that the process for training tens of thousands of staff was underway, with operators assuring the regulator that **nearly 30,000 frontline staff** would complete the new training by the end of 2021.

- The ORR highlighted examples of **good practice**, such as Great Western Railway (GWR), which had already trained all 4,600 of its frontline staff, and the commitment of many operators to involve disabled people in the training development and delivery.

Refresher Training Progress (ORR, 2023)

This update released in June 2023 addressed the first wave of mandatory two-year refresher training for staff who had completed the new induction under the ATP Guidance.

- **Focus on Quality and Assurance:** The ORR's review focused on the quality of the refresher training plans, specifically checking if the training was developed in consultation with disabled people and whether there was a means of assuring that staff had understood and could apply the content.
- **Positive Assessment:** The regulator welcomed the progress, reporting that most operators demonstrated good practice in these areas.
- **Best Practice:** The ORR also highlighted operators like Grand Central, Greater Anglia, Merseyrail, and Network Rail for planning to deliver refresher training to *all* staff, extending the requirement beyond just passenger-facing roles. The report also noted that operators were providing training to accompany the rollout of the Passenger Assist staff app, which has the potential to improve communication and service reliability.

Mandatory Training for Rail Operators

Appendix D of ORR's latest Accessible Travel Policy - Guidance for Train and Station Operators (October 2025) specifies the training outcomes for rail staff working with disabled passengers. The training is structured around 9 key areas that all rail operators must cover:

1. **Understanding Disabled People and Everyday Challenges** Staff must learn about the diversity of disabilities and their impact on rail travel, including challenging misconceptions, understanding physical and attitudinal barriers, and recognizing disability statistics.

2. **Equality Legislation** Training on the Equality Act 2010, focusing on anti-discrimination requirements, the duty to make reasonable adjustments, and the benefits of an accessible railway system.
3. **Defining Disability** Staff learn various disability definitions including the Equality Act 2010 definition and social model, plus appropriate terminology for communicating with disabled people.
4. **Recognising Passengers Who Need Assistance** Comprehensive training on identifying both visible and non-visible disabilities, and tailoring assistance for people with sensory, cognitive, learning, and physical impairments.
5. **Railway Regulatory Framework** Awareness training on relevant regulations including RVAR, PRM-TSI, Accessible Travel Policies, and GDPR requirements related to Passenger Assist services.
6. **Passenger Assist** Detailed training on the Passenger Assist process, covering how to provide various types of assistance whether pre-booked or requested on a "Turn Up and Go" basis, including boarding help, navigation, ticketing, and luggage assistance.
7. **Communication** Training on respectful communication techniques, including voice tone, pace, and body language when interacting with passengers with various disabilities including visual impairments, hearing difficulties, speech impairments, and cognitive conditions.
8. **Accessibility in Stations** Staff must learn about accessible features in their workplace and key network stations, including accessible toilets, seating, ticket office windows, tactile paving, and induction loops.
9. **Providing Safe Assistance** Practical safety training on using ramps correctly, operating station wheelchairs safely, and properly guiding visually impaired passengers.

Operators have flexibility in how much emphasis they place on each area, but all outcomes must be covered to ensure staff can effectively assist disabled passengers throughout their rail journey.

The DfT's REAL Disability Equality Training

The REAL Disability Equality Training programme is a comprehensive, free, and modular training package developed by the UK's Department for Transport (DfT). Launched in December 2020 as part of the wider Inclusive Transport Strategy, the programme is designed to significantly improve the transport sector's confidence and skills in delivering inclusive and accessible journeys for disabled passengers (Department for Transport, 2020a). The central purpose is to foster a culture of understanding and excellent customer service that addresses the systemic barriers disabled people face in accessing public transport.

Core Philosophy and Framework

The training package is built upon a fundamental ethos summarised by the acronym **REAL**:

- **Respect:** Underpinned by the legal requirements and duty to treat disabled people as equal citizens.
- **Empathy:** Encouraging an understanding and appreciation of the challenges faced by disabled passengers.
- **Ask:** Promoting proactive and non-judgmental questioning to understand individual needs.
- **Listen:** Emphasising the importance of hearing and acting upon the feedback and specific requests of disabled people.

This framework encourages transport staff to move beyond minimal compliance and adopt a person-centred approach, aligning with the principles of the **Social Model of Disability**, which identifies societal barriers (rather than individual impairment) as the main source of disability (DfT, 2020b).

Content and Audience

The REAL training is highly flexible and ready-made, including videos, training slides, e-learning content, and comprehensive 'Train the Trainer' guidance. The materials are unique in that they were developed in collaboration with transport sector professionals and, crucially, people with lived experience of disability, including various disability organisations such as Scope and Disability Rights UK. This co-production ensures the content is relevant, authentic, and reflects the genuine difficulties and needs of disabled travellers.

The package is split into:

1. **Core Modules (CM):** These non-mode-specific modules can be used in any training programme. Examples include:
 - What is Disability? (Focusing on the Social Model).

- Inclusive Communication.
- Customer Service Face-to-Face (F2F).
- Inclusive Transport During a Pandemic.

2. **Audience-Specific Modules:** Tailored materials are provided for key transport modes to address unique challenges and operational procedures. These cover:

- Bus and Coach
- Rail
- Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle (PHV)
- Aviation
- Maritime.

The training is intended for a variety of staff, from frontline customer service and operational teams (e.g., drivers, captains) to call centre personnel and managers responsible for service delivery across the transport network (Department for Transport, 2020b). Training managers can use the resources to construct diverse agendas, ranging from short induction briefings to full-day programmes and refresher courses (Department for Transport, 2020a). By encouraging widespread and consistent usage, the DfT aims to harmonise the passenger experience across the UK's public transport system.

Conclusion

Disability equality training is an essential, legally mandated, and continually monitored component of the UK rail sector's operations. The Office of Rail and Road's Accessible Travel Policy Guidance provides a clear and stringent framework, dictating not only that training must occur, but how often (at least every two years for passenger-facing staff) and what it must cover (nine core competency areas).

Critically, this regulatory framework mandates the central involvement of disabled people in the design and delivery of the training content, ensuring it is grounded in real-world experience. The DfT's free, co-produced, and flexible REAL training programme serves as a crucial resource to help operators meet these high standards, promoting a consistent, person-centred approach based on the values of Respect, Empathise, Ask, and Listen.

While initial compliance reviews demonstrated some challenges, subsequent ORR progress reports confirm that operators are making significant, demonstrable headway in training tens of thousands of staff.

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Appendix B

Cross-sectoral Evidence Review of Disability Awareness, Equality and Inclusion Intervention



Photo: Community Rail Lancashire

Introduction

Background and Rationale

Disability awareness, equality, and inclusion (DAEI) interventions have become an increasingly important area of focus across various sectors, with particular emphasis on the transport industry. This shift reflects a growing recognition that accessible transport is not only a matter of convenience, but a basic human right that plays a crucial role in promoting social inclusion. In the past, the emphasis was predominantly on improving physical infrastructure to facilitate access. However, there has been a noticeable transition towards addressing staff attitudes and interpersonal skills, indicating a move towards a more holistic approach to accessibility.

This evolution underscores the importance of service quality and the nature of interactions between staff and passengers. Ensuring that disabled travellers receive equitable and dignified travel experiences is particularly significant, given the size and diversity of this demographic. Research indicates that a lack of staff awareness and ineffective communication can create substantial barriers, severely impacting the mobility and dignity of disabled individuals. While numerous initiatives have been introduced to address these issues, a persistent gap remains in training programmes that deliver measurable improvements in empathy, communication, and overall service quality.

Purpose and Focus of the Review

This review positions DAEI training as a key intervention for fostering empathy - the ability to understand and share the feelings of others - and for strengthening communication skills. These elements are closely linked: an increase in empathy leads to better communication, which in turn contributes to higher service quality and greater passenger satisfaction.

The primary aim of this review is to synthesise empirical evidence regarding the outcomes of DAEI interventions, including training programmes, across different sectors with a particular focus on transport. The review seeks to identify best practices and highlight ongoing challenges.

The objectives are to:

- Assess the current state of knowledge regarding the impact of DAEI (Disability Awareness, Equality, and Inclusion) interventions on empathy and communication.
- Identify and assess effective practices within DAEI interventions that contribute to improved service quality for disabled individuals.
- Identify and synthesise both the limitations in the evidence base and areas where consensus or disagreement exist.

Ultimately, these insights are intended to support the creation of more inclusive transport services and enhance the travel experiences of disabled passengers, with practical applications for the rail sector.

Scope of Evidence and Intervention Types

This review offers a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge in relation to DAEI interventions. Drawing on a dataset of 24 academic studies, the majority of which are peer-reviewed, the review examines the wide variety of interventions currently in use. These include approaches such as virtual reality simulations, didactic workshops, and educational curricula developed in partnership with disabled individuals and organisations.

The review assesses the evidence for the effectiveness of these interventions in influencing attitudes, enhancing knowledge, fostering empathy and communication, and ultimately changing behaviours towards disabled people. By compiling and synthesising findings from a range of industries - with a special emphasis on the transport sector - the review aims to showcase best practices that can inform future intervention and training initiatives. This is of particular importance for the rail sector, where there is a recognised need for improved disability awareness and inclusion among staff who interact directly with the public.

Methodology

This section details the methods employed to identify, assess and synthesise the existing literature concerning DAEI interventions, including training programmes, with a focus on the transport sector. Given the novel and fragmented nature of the subject area across different academic and grey literature sources, this evidence review adopts an exploratory rather than a systematic review approach. The purpose is to provide a comprehensive overview of the field, charting the breadth, types and

quality of available interventions, thereby identifying key themes, gaps and practical implications for the On Track project, of which this review is part.

The principal aim of this review is to examine and assess documented interventions aimed at enhancing disability awareness, equality, or inclusion among staff and stakeholders across various industries, with a particular emphasis on the transport sector, especially rail.

An exploratory evidence review methodology was selected to ensure comprehensive inclusion of diverse sources, such as academic publications, governmental reports, industry documents, and professional (grey) literature. This strategy facilitates a flexible approach to searching, which is essential in emerging research areas where terminology varies, and relevant materials may be found on unconventional platforms. The methodology emphasises broad coverage and the development of an overarching field overview, rather than the focused and exhaustive analysis typical of systematic reviews targeting narrowly defined questions. The resulting synthesis provides a foundational perspective on prevailing practices, areas of agreement and disagreement, and the robustness of available evidence within this domain.

Search Strategy and Sources

The search was conducted using a combination of targeted databases, specialist repositories and advanced web searching tools. The selection of search tools was specifically designed to ensure coverage of both peer-reviewed research and industry-specific documentation vital to the transport sector.

Database Selection

A total of five databases and search platforms were meticulously selected to ensure comprehensive coverage. These included platforms known for academic rigour, as well as those that capture policy, technical, and industry-focused documentation. The databases included are: Google Advanced Search, Google Scholar, SciSpace, EU Publication Office, and TRID (Transportation Research International Documentation).

The following table provides a summary of the databases used, along with their primary function and the type of content they are designed to capture:

Database / Platform	URL	Primary use in this review
Google Advanced Search	https://www.google.co.uk/advanced_search	Extensive searching of the open web and grey literature; effective for identifying publicly available documents.

Google Scholar	<i>scholar.google.com</i>	Comprehensive identification of peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, theses, and pre-prints across a wide academic spectrum.
SciSpace	<i>https://scispace.com/</i>	Retrieval of academic papers and research, with AI-aided filtering and contextual exploration of scientific literature.
EU Publication Office	<i>https://op.europa.eu/en/</i>	Identification of official European Union documents, policy papers, directives and reports from funded programmes.
TRID	<i>https://trid.trb.org/</i>	Specialist database focusing on transportation research, including technical reports, conference proceedings, and research studies.

In addition to the above-mentioned databases, searches were also conducted on the websites of the project partners and funder (CRN, RNIB and Motability), as well as the following organisations:

- Department for Transport (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport>)
- Office of Rail and Road (<https://www.orr.gov.uk/>)
- International Union of Railways (<https://uic.org/>)
- European Passengers' Federation (<https://www.epf.eu/wp/>)
- European Union Agency for Railways (<https://www.era.europa.eu/>)
- National Centre for Accessible Transport (<https://www.ncat.uk/>)
- Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (<https://www.ridc.org.uk/>)
- Transport for All (<https://www.transportforall.org.uk/>)
- Scope (<https://www.scope.org.uk/>)

Search Term Construction

The search strings were developed using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to combine key concept groups related to the intervention topic and the sectoral context. This strategy ensured that documents discussing any type of relevant intervention were linked to the specific industrial context of interest.

The search terms were structured into three primary concept groups:

1. **Intervention focus** (What is the document about?):

- "disability" AND "awareness" OR "equality" OR "inclusion"

2. **Intervention type** (What form does the intervention take?):

- "training" OR "education" OR "intervention" OR "workshop" OR "programme"

3. **Context** (Where is the intervention applied?):

- "rail" OR "transport"

The final search logic applied across all platforms combined these groups using the AND operator, where search functionality permitted this level of complexity. Initial broad searches were conducted to identify key terminology, which then informed the final search string to ensure high sensitivity (capturing relevant documents) while maintaining sufficient specificity (excluding irrelevant documents).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The screening process involved the application of precise criteria to ensure that only the most relevant and methodologically appropriate documents were included in the final synthesis. The inclusion criteria focused on four essential dimensions: content, document type, language, and availability.

Documents were required to meet all of the following criteria to be selected for the final review:

- **Content relevance:** The document must focus on an intervention (defined as a structured activity, course or programme) designed to improve disability awareness, equality, or inclusion among staff.
- **Sectoral context:** The intervention must be explicitly implemented, and evaluated, within the rail, public transport sector and other sectors as relevant.
- **Document type and language:** Only full-text documents were accepted. The document must be published in English.
- **Publication Date:** From 2010 to date (November 2025).

The following document characteristics resulted in automatic exclusion:

- Documents exclusively focusing on physical accessibility/infrastructure without an awareness/training component.
- Documents discussing disability or transport in a general sense without detailing a specific intervention.

- Non-English language documents.
- Documents available only as an abstract or that required a payment or subscription.

Screening and Selection Process

The search and screening process involved a reduction of the initial document set down to the final dataset for review, following a staged approach commonly employed in evidence synthesis.

First, the search strings were applied to the five selected databases and platforms. The additional websites of relevant organisations were also searched. This initial stage resulted in the identification of approximately 150 unique documents across all sources.

Secondly, this list of documents was subjected to a scan of titles and abstracts or executive summaries, where available. This stage focused on rapidly eliminating clearly irrelevant documents (e.g., those on unrelated transport topics, or purely theoretical studies without an intervention component). This scan identified approximately 60 documents that appeared potentially relevant based on their title and abstract or exec summary.

The third stage involved the retrieval of the full-text and reading of each document against the defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This scrutiny resulted in the retention of 24 documents that met all the defined criteria for detailed consideration in the evidence review and synthesis. Notably, most of these documents were found through SciSpace and Google Scholar.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

The final 24 documents were subjected to structured data extraction as follows:

- **Document descriptors:** Author, year of publication, publication type (e.g., journal).
- **Study details:** Study methodology (if applicable, e.g., pre-post test, qualitative interviews), population sample (e.g., public transport drivers), geographical area, sector.
- **Evaluation:** Key findings, limitations, conclusions and practical applications.

The synthesis of the extracted data was qualitative and thematic, consistent with the exploratory nature of the review. Findings were grouped into overarching themes to construct the map of the field, highlighting commonalities, unique approaches, and notable gaps in the existing body of evidence. This thematic analysis forms the basis of the next sections of this report.

Characteristics of the Evidence Base

The dataset informing this review encompasses nearly two decades of scholarly publications, beginning with the meta-analysis by Flower et al. (2007) and extending to recent work published in 2025 by Neves et al., Bonenberg and Linowiecka, and Fortuna et al. The selected studies reflect substantial geographical diversity, including research conducted in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, South Africa and the Asian continent.

The review includes a methodological mix of 8 secondary research studies (systematic reviews, meta-analyses and scoping reviews) and 16 primary research studies (experimental studies, pilot programmes and qualitative inquiries). This combination allows for broad statistical evidence of effectiveness - such as Lajante et al. (2023) reviewing 44 studies in healthcare and Rotenberg et al. (2022) synthesising 78 global studies - and detailed insights from smaller qualitative studies such as the Participatory Action Research by Hicks et al. (2022).

The studies considered in this review cover a diverse range of sectors, as detailed below:

- **Transport (8 documents):** This represents the largest portion of the evidence, covering taxi services, bus, rail, metro and aviation. Notably, the rail-specific evidence is about an app co-designed with disabled passengers, rather than a disability training programme. The interventions in this group emphasise practical assistance, communication strategies and improvements to the physical environment. Key studies include the co-design of disability training for bus drivers by Neves et al. (2025), the evaluation of communication partner training for adapted transport by Tessier et al. (2021), and the investigation into hidden disability programmes in airports by Tata et al. (2024).
- **General workplace, community and social care (7 documents):** This category includes studies on promoting disability awareness, empathy and

inclusion across a variety of workplaces including social care. It provides insights into organisational culture and barriers to disability inclusion, such as Kulkarni et al.'s (2018) work on workplace disability awareness in India, and Kuno's (2009) analysis of Disability Equality Training (DET) in the Asia-Pacific region.

- **Law enforcement (3 documents):** These studies examine disability training for police officers. The evidence here is notably scarce, with Nguyen (2021) and Viljoen et al. (2016) identifying significant gaps in the literature through their systematic reviews, while Gulati et al. (2023) provide rare empirical data from a pilot study in Ireland.
- **Education and culture (4 documents):** These papers explore the use of simulation to teach accessibility standards and empathy. This includes Bonenberg and Linowiecka's (2025) comparative study on education about inclusive design, and Fortuna et al.'s (2025) scoping review of museum staff disability training.
- **Healthcare (2 documents):** These large-scale reviews by Lajante et al. (2023) and Rotenberg et al. (2022) focus on improving clinical competence and the reduction of health disparities through empathy training.

One noteworthy outcome of this review is the evident lack of peer-reviewed, empirical academic research specifically assessing the impact and effectiveness of DAEI training programs undertaken by rail operators. Although broader studies exist regarding disability training within public services and other transport sectors - such as accessible taxi initiatives - the distinctive operational characteristics of the rail network, which include complex high-risk environments, specialised technical equipment (such as ramps and lifts), and time-sensitive service delivery, have not been comprehensively examined in relation to DAEI interventions by academic researchers.

Key themes and Findings

Importance of the Social Model of Disability

A fundamental theoretical evolution observed throughout the reviewed literature is the shift from the "Medical Model," which views disability as an individual deficit, towards the "Social Model," which frames disability as a consequence of societal and environmental barriers. The evidence suggests that the theoretical grounding of an intervention significantly influences its outcomes. The transition from the medical

model to the social model of disability is identified as a critical factor in changing not just attitudes, but actual behaviours.

Igei (2020) concluded that learning the social model can partially improve taxi drivers' behaviour, noting that Disability Equality Training (DET) encouraged drivers to understand disability as a societal issue. The practical implication is highly specific: the combination of DET and practical support training significantly reduced the time drivers spent getting out to support passengers, indicating a tangible efficiency gain. The study suggests that changes in public attitudes are essential for social participation because the individual model of disability remains predominant among the general public.

Kuno (2009) supports this in the context of developing countries, concluding that DET offers an opportunity for participants to critically examine disability from an alternative perspective, challenging dominant values like meritocracy. The practical implication is that DET serves as a practical tool for disability education that empowers disabled people to explain the Social Model to non-disabled individuals, acting as agents of change.

Higashida et al. (2020) also evaluated DET in Mongolia, concluding that participants' attitudes changed in line with the social model and that actions were taken by individuals and organisations following the training. Their practical advice is that DET sessions should be adjusted based on the needs and contexts of participant groups, and that the sustainability of such training needs to be secured for long-term impact.

Furthermore, the review highlights a growing consensus on the necessity of involving people with disabilities in the design and delivery of training—a practice that moves beyond compliance towards genuine co-creation, as championed by Neves et al. (2025) under the principle of "Nothing about us without us".

The Efficacy of Direct Contact and Co-design

There is strong convergence in the literature regarding the value of direct contact with people with disabilities, particularly when this contact is elevated to the level of "co-design" or "co-creation."

Contact-Based Learning

Castillo and Larson (2020), in a systematic review of 35 studies from around the world, identified "contact" and education as the primary tools for effective

intervention. They found that 31 of the 35 reviewed studies demonstrated positive attitudinal changes, where interventions based on contact helped reduce communication barriers and increase social connections.

In the healthcare sector, Rotenberg et al. (2022) reviewed 78 studies and found that training programmes that explicitly involved people with disabilities - whether in the delivery of training, community placements, or interactive sessions - were the most effective in improving staff knowledge, confidence and self-efficacy. The authors add that normalising disability training is crucial. Systemic-level change is required to ensure consistency and continuity in the training.

Participatory Co-Design

Moving beyond simple contact, the literature highlights the superior efficacy of "co-design." Neves et al. (2025) provided a detailed account of the "InCLUSIVE Co-Design Approach" (ICDA) used to create the "Better Trip Training Program" for bus drivers in Victoria, Australia. By involving a team of seven experts - including bus drivers and advocates with lived experience of disability - over a 12-month period, the project adhered to the principle of "Nothing about us without us". The resulting training was highly relevant to the drivers' operational realities while authentically reflecting the needs of passengers.

In the rail sector, Vollenwyder et al. (2020) concluded that participatory design helped create a mobile app that achieved a comparable user experience for visually impaired travellers while fostering a thorough understanding of the user perspective among staff. Involving internal stakeholders (like railway employees) in these design processes creates synergies with other projects and raises awareness of digital accessibility at all organisational levels.

Similarly, Strickfaden and Devlieger (2011) described a longitudinal ethnographic study of the Brussels metro system spanning two decades. They found that the co-creation process, which evolved from asymmetric interactions (designers knowing best) to symmetric collaboration with visually impaired users, allowed designers to develop "techné" (embodied know-how). This deep, sustained engagement resulted in a navigation system embedded with tactile and acoustic information, far superior to the initial visual-centric designs.

In the museum sector, Fortuna et al. (2025) concluded that disability awareness training is a crucial, yet often overlooked, component and that effective changes require buy-in from all stakeholders. Their primary practical advice is to involve

people with disabilities in the decision-making process for inclusive programming and to implement collaborative partnerships with community organisations to assist with outreach and feedback.

The Controversy around Disability Simulations

A significant and contentious theme emerging from the reviewed literature is the efficacy and ethics of disability simulations. These interventions, which typically involve non-disabled participants simulating an impairment (e.g., navigating a space in a wheelchair or wearing distinct glasses to simulate visual impairment), yield highly polarised results depending on the context and theoretical framing.

Several studies suggest that when simulations are embedded within a rigorous educational framework, they can enhance specific learning outcomes. In the field of architecture education, Bonenberg and Linowiecka (2025) conducted a comparative study with 68 female university students to evaluate Simulated Disability Training (SDT) against expert-led workshops. They found that the group participating in SDT (Group A) retained 15% more information regarding accessibility standards and legislative requirements three months post-training compared to the group that attended expert-led workshops. Furthermore, 100% of the simulation participants believed the experience helped them remember accessibility features, and 93% felt "sensitized" to the needs of people with disabilities. However, the authors caveat that the method must be balanced with ethical concerns and is best suited for experts rather than the general public.

Similarly, McKenney (2018) found that simulation activities conducted during a study abroad programme helped 10 undergraduate students transition from feelings of sympathy to empathy, and ultimately to advocacy. Crucially, McKenney noted that this success was dependent on the use of the "social model of disability" as a theoretical lens and the inclusion of intensive debriefings.

In the disability support sector, Wilding et al. (2022) investigated the feasibility of a Virtual Reality (VR) programme named "IMercyVE". While the sample size was small (n=9), the study found that VR provided a safe, novel learning environment that deepened empathy without the logistical risks associated with real-world simulations. The authors noted that VR helped participants emotionally connect with the lived experience of intellectual disability, suggesting it could be a viable method for remotely delivered staff training.

Reynolds (2010) also found positive results in the transport sector. In a study of 18 taxi drivers completing an Aging and Disability Awareness Training (ADAT) programme, 97% of participants rated the simulations of ageing-related disabilities as beneficial. This component, combined with videos and discussions, contributed to a statistically significant 12% improvement in mean scores on the Palmore Ageing Quiz, leading to reduced ageist views and improved knowledge of ageing.

In stark contrast, a substantial body of evidence critiques simulations for failing to produce meaningful attitudinal change and for potentially reinforcing negative stereotypes. A meta-analysis by Flower et al. (2007), which synthesised data from 10 studies involving both adults and children, concluded that disability simulations are largely ineffective. The study reported a weighted median effect size of only .17, which was considered negligible. The authors emphatically stated that the data does not support simulation as an effective practice and argued that direct interaction with people with disabilities is a far superior approach for modifying attitudes.

Qualitative research by Hicks et al. (2022) provides a deeper insight into why simulations may fail. Using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology with 12 participants - including disability advocates and community members - the study found that traditional simulations often induced negative emotional states such as "fear, frustration, and embarrassment". Participants described these exercises as evoking pity (sympathy) rather than genuine empathy, arguing that they fail to capture the true, complex lived experience of disability. Instead of simulations, Hicks et al. (2022) propose and validate "I2Audits" (Inclusive Interdisciplinary Audit Toolkit). In this model, participants audit environments for barriers alongside people with disabilities, shifting the focus from the individual's impairment to the environmental barriers, which empowers participants and fosters shared discovery.

Sector-Specific Findings

Transport

This sector represents a significant portion of the reviewed evidence, covering taxi, bus, rail, adapted transport, and aviation environments. The evidence consistently points towards the benefits of specialised communication training and the social model of disability.

Tata et al. (2024) highlighted a critical gap in the aviation sector regarding hidden disabilities. Their interview study involving 10 participants (HR and inclusion managers) across six Australian airports revealed that staff training was inconsistent

and often lacked standardisation. The study identified that terminal designs remained suboptimal for passengers with sensory sensitivities due to bright lights and noise, causing stress. Furthermore, the study noted a lack of resources and awareness, recommending that the International Air Transport Association (IATA) design a standardised training manual to address these disparities.

In the taxi sector, Igei (2020) provided evidence via a randomised control trial of 127 drivers in South Africa. The study found that Disability Equality Training (DET), which focuses on the social model, significantly improved drivers' understanding of disability. Crucially, when DET was combined with practical support training, it reduced the time drivers spent assisting passengers with disabilities, indicating a meaningful improvement in behavioural efficiency.

Similarly, regarding adapted transport, Tessier et al. (2021) evaluated a 5.5-hour Communication Partner Training programme for 13 drivers in Quebec. The study found significant improvements in drivers' relational communication, specifically in dimensions of "Involvement/Affection" and "Receptivity/Trust". Drivers also significantly increased their use of gestures and visual supports to aid passengers with aphasia and other communication disorders. These findings were supported by an earlier pilot study (Tessier & Croteau, 2018) which also noted improvements in face-to-face interaction and gesture usage.

In the bus sector, the work of Neves et al. (2025) demonstrated that co-designed training programmes (the "Better Trip Training Program") were highly rated by both drivers and disability advocates for their inclusivity and relevance. In rail, Vollenwyder et al. (2020) showed that participatory design projects can serve as a vehicle for broader organisational learning. By involving 34 visually impaired travellers in the testing of a rail app, the project raised awareness of digital accessibility among 60 employees of the Swiss Federal Railways.

Healthcare

The healthcare sector provides the most extensive quantitative evidence for the efficacy of empathy training.

Lajante et al. (2023) conducted a mixed-methods systematic review of 44 studies involving over 6,800 professionals, primarily physicians and nurses. They found that empathy training significantly increased empathy scores in 68.2% of the selected studies. The review identified four key empathic skills targeted by these interventions: communication, relationship building, emotional resilience and

counselling. Importantly, this training also had a protective effect for staff, mitigating professional burnout and improving their ability to cope with emotional distress.

Rotenberg et al. (2022) reviewed 78 studies globally and found that training programmes involving people with disabilities were the most effective. The review noted that while most training occurred in the pre-qualification stage (e.g., for medical students), there is a critical need for standardised, cross-disability tools to evaluate the long-term impact of these interventions on patient care.

Law Enforcement

A systematic review by Viljoen et al. (2016) identified only three empirical studies between 1980 and 2015 that evaluated disability sensitivity training for police officers. While these studies reported improvements in attitudes towards intellectual disability, they were limited by methodological issues and small sample sizes. Nguyen (2021) reinforced this finding in a separate systematic review, identifying only nine relevant articles and concluding that academic research in this area is "scarce" and requires significant improvement to determine best practices.

A recent pilot study by Gulati et al. (2023) involving 23 Irish law enforcement officers provided promising results. The study evaluated a 90-minute interactive seminar also involving video interviews with people with disabilities, grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). UNCRPD is an international treaty that identifies and promotes the human rights of people with disabilities, ensuring they have the same rights as everyone else and can fully participate in society. The research found statistically significant improvements in self-rated knowledge and communication skills among the participants in the training. This suggests that short, well-structured interventions grounded in human rights frameworks can be effective in this sector.

Education and Culture

Bonenberg and Linowiecka (2025) provided compelling evidence for the use of simulation in architecture education. The study demonstrated that architecture students who participated in disability simulations retained technical knowledge of accessibility legislation more effectively than those who attended traditional lectures, and reported heightened awareness of the needs of individuals with disabilities. The authors note, however, that this approach should be carefully balanced with ethical considerations and is most appropriate for professionals rather than the general public.

Fortuna et al. (2025) conducted a scoping review of nine articles regarding museum staff training. They found that while training is crucial for staff confidence, it is often an overlooked component of accessibility practices. All included studies reported the use of collaborative partnerships with local organisations or people with disabilities, highlighting the sector's reliance on community engagement.

General Workplace, Community and Social Care

Studies grouped in this category highlight the complexities of implementing disability training in general workplace settings.

Kulkarni et al. (2018) offered a cautionary finding from an interview-based study of 33 employees across five industries in India. They found that while sensitisation workshops successfully raised awareness, they could paradoxically reinforce "othering" by highlighting differences, particularly if the wider organisational culture was not already inclusive. The practical implications for Human Resource managers are to ensure follow-up events and evaluation to assess outcomes rather than just administering training, and to engage employees in reflection exercises to examine their own biases regarding disability.

In the social care sector, Kuno (2009) and Higashida et al. (2020) examined the implementation of DET in the Asia-Pacific region and Mongolia, respectively. Higashida et al. (2020) found that DET helped participants transition from a medical model to a social model perspective, with many attempting to change their social environments post-training. However, Kuno (2009) noted that the persistent influence of the medical model and meritocratic values in developing countries remains a significant challenge to the success of these programmes.

Devine and Ash (2022) conclude that the existing literature on diversity training is "amorphous and complex," making definitive conclusions challenging. They highlight potential negative outcomes, such as backlash, associated with these programmes. Their recommendations emphasise integrating training with broader workplace diversity strategies, securing support from senior leadership, and involving historically marginalised groups in the planning process.

Areas of Agreement and Disagreement

Agreement

- **The need for multi-method approaches:** The evidence suggests that single-method interventions, such as standalone lectures, might be insufficient.

Rotenberg et al. (2022) found that lecture/didactic methods alone showed less significant improvements compared to studies that combined multiple methods. Reynolds (2010) also supported this, demonstrating the effectiveness of a programme that combined quizzes, videos, discussions and simulations.

- **The "Nothing About Us Without Us" principle:** Across all reviewed sectors the literature agrees that involving disabled people in the design and delivery of training is non-negotiable for legitimacy and effectiveness. Neves et al. (2025) explicitly state that policies designed without the target population cannot be certain of their impact, and Rotenberg et al. (2022) identify involvement of disabled people as a key factor in training success.
- **Systemic change and leadership commitment are essential:** Training individual employees is usually ineffective if the overall system remains inaccessible. Devine and Ash (2022) highlight that diversity training often falls short because it emphasises personal, self-reported changes rather than broader organisational objectives, and may even provoke resistance. Support from senior leaders is also crucial. Similarly, Kulkarni et al. (2018) observe that sustainable progress happens only when an organisation already has an inclusive culture.

Disagreement

- **The role and ethics of simulation:** As detailed in the key themes, this is the primary area of contention. While studies in the education sector (Bonenberg & Linowiecka, 2025) and some transport studies (Reynolds, 2010) support simulation for teaching spatial awareness and physical empathy, disability studies scholars and advocates (Hicks et al., 2022; Flower et al., 2007) view it as ineffective, promoting a "tragedy model" of disability, and inducing negative emotions like pity.

Limitations of the evidence

The reviewed studies highlight several recurring methodological limitations that constrain the generalisability of the findings:

- **Sample Sizes and Sampling Methods:** Many studies rely on small, convenience samples. For instance, Neves et al. (2025) based their findings on a co-design team of just seven people, and Wilding et al. (2022) had only nine participants for their VR study. Similarly, Hicks et al. (2022) utilised a sample of

12 participants. Viljoen et al. (2016) noted that the few existing studies on police training also suffered from small sample sizes and a lack of detailed background information.

- **Lack of Longitudinal and Behavioural Data:** There is a scarcity of data regarding the long-term persistence of training effects. Rotenberg et al. (2022) noted that the lack of follow-up evaluation makes it difficult to assess the longevity of training impact. Igei (2020) also acknowledged that their study only examined very short-term impacts. Furthermore, Devine and Ash (2022) highlighted the lack of rigorous research focusing on systemic outcomes and long-term impacts.
- **Measurement of Effectiveness:** There is a disconnect in how the "effectiveness" of the interventions is defined and measured. Many studies, such as Lajante et al. (2023) and Gulati et al. (2023), rely on self-reported confidence, knowledge, or attitude scales. Devine and Ash (2022) criticise the overreliance on such self-reported outcomes. In contrast, fewer studies measure objective behavioural changes.
- **Publication and Geographical Bias:** Lajante et al. (2023) noted that their review might have missed essential papers due to the variability of the empathy concept and the exclusion of grey literature. Rotenberg et al. (2022) highlighted that while their review was global, there was a lack of information on unpublished examples.
- **Limited Rail-Specific Research:** It is noteworthy that this review includes only one study related to the rail sector, which does not focus on a disability training intervention but on a co-designed app for disabled passengers. Consequently, the findings require adaptation to be applicable within the rail context.

Conclusions and Practical Implications

Analysis of these 24 sources found broad consensus regarding effective practices for disability awareness, equality and inclusion interventions.

- Although the efficacy of simulation is debated - endorsed for technical skill retention yet critiqued for lacking emotional fidelity - the literature consistently

recognises the importance of the **Social Model of Disability** and **co-design** approaches.

- While the **integration of technologies** such as virtual reality offers potential benefits, it is essential to carefully assess their application to ensure they are context-appropriate and aligned with defined training objectives.
- Practical recommendations applicable across sectors, including rail, indicate that training should be **ongoing** rather than episodic, **co-developed** with disabled individuals and representative organisations instead of being solely about them, and reinforced through systemic organisational measures embedding inclusion at all levels, with full **senior leadership support**.
- To achieve measurable improvements in behaviour, future initiatives should move beyond fundamental awareness and deliver focused training in **empathy, communication, and operational skills**, addressing **various types of impairments and disabilities**.
- Training interventions must be **assessed** using reliable, consistent methods to accurately gauge effectiveness. Many studies highlight the limitations of current evaluation approaches, noting an overreliance on self-reported outcomes such as confidence, knowledge, or attitudes. Few studies measure objective behavioural changes, making it challenging to assess actual impact. Furthermore, the lack of longitudinal and follow-up data in much of the reviewed research raises questions about the persistence of any observed effects over time. Evaluating training interventions requires a combination of short-term and long-term assessments. These should include objective measures of behavioural change, overall organisational outcomes, and service quality for users like disabled passengers.

The evidence synthesised in this review provides valuable guidance for organisations, including those operating within the rail sector, aiming to deliver impactful disability awareness and equality training. It is important to recognise that the rail environment exhibits several similarities with other transport settings such as taxi, bus, and metro services. These shared attributes include frequent high-pressure interactions, the necessity for safety-critical communications, and the challenge of addressing a wide spectrum of passenger requirements.

A key implication arising from the review is the need for organisations to move away from passive, compliance-driven instructional approaches. Instead, there should be a deliberate shift towards active learning methods that are co-designed, and assessed, with stakeholders, particularly those with lived experience of disability. Such models should place emphasis on the development of practical skills, especially empathy and effective communication, while also fostering systemic organisational inclusion. This approach ensures that training is not only relevant and engaging but also capable of driving meaningful behavioural change and promoting a more inclusive service environment.

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Annex 1: Table of Included Studies (sorted by sector)

Citation	Sector	Methods / Type of Study	Population / Sample	Key Findings
Igei (2020)	Transport (Taxi)	Randomised Control Trial (RCT)	127 taxi drivers in South Africa.	"Disability Equality Training" (Social Model) + practical support significantly reduced time taken to assist passengers.
Neves et al. (2025)	Transport (Bus)	Co-design / ICDA	7 co-designers (drivers, researchers, advocates).	Co-designing with disabled people created a highly relevant training programme; validated "Nothing about us without us."

Reynolds (2010)	Transport (Taxi)	Pre/Post Evaluation	40 drivers selected, 18 completed all modules.	12.44% improvement in ageing knowledge; 97% found simulations beneficial; reduced ageist views.
Strickfaden & Devlieger (2011)	Transport (Metro)	Longitudinal Ethnography	People with visual impairment, transport staff (20-year span).	Co-creation fostered "techné" (embodied know-how) and empathy, improving the design of the Brussels metro.
Tata et al. (2024)	Transport (Aviation)	Interview / Qualitative	10 managers (HR/inclusion) from 6 Australian airports.	Identified gaps in "Hidden Disability" training; staff awareness is inconsistent; need for standardised training.
Tessier & Croteau (2018)	Transport (Adapted)	Pre-Post Design	13 adapted transport drivers.	Preliminary results showed drivers used more communication strategies (gestures, visual support) after training.
Tessier et al. (2021)	Transport (Adapted)	Exploratory Single-Group	13 drivers; 11 people with communication disabilities.	Communication Partner Training (CPT) significantly improved drivers' knowledge, relational communication, and gesture use.
Vollenwyder et al. (2020)	Transport (Rail)	Participatory Design	34 visually impaired travellers (testing); 10 advisory board members.	Co-designing an app improved usability and raised digital accessibility awareness across the organisation.
Lajante et al. (2023)	Healthcare	Systematic Review	44 studies (6855+)	Empathy training improves staff empathy scores (68.2% of studies) and reduces

		(Mixed Methods)	professionals).	burnout; lacks research outside healthcare.
Rotenberg et al. (2022)	Healthcare	Global Narrative Systematic Review	78 studies (5,665 articles screened).	Training involving people with disabilities is most effective; multi-method training outperforms didactic methods.
Gulati et al. (2023)	Law Enforcement	Pilot Study (Pre/Post)	23 Law Enforcement Officers (Ireland).	Interactive seminar grounded in UNCRPD improved self-rated knowledge and communication skills.
Nguyen (2021)	Law Enforcement	Systematic Review	9 articles.	Research is scarce; most studies show positive but limited findings due to small sample sizes/short-term focus.
Viljoen et al. (2016)	Law Enforcement	Systematic Review	3 studies (1980–2015).	Limited evidence exists; studies showed short-term attitudinal improvement but had methodological flaws.
Bonenberg & Linowiecka (2025)	Higher Education - Architecture	Comparative Study	68 architecture students (38 simulation, 30 expert-led).	Simulation group retained 15% more accessibility knowledge and showed higher sensitivity than the expert-led group.
Flower et al. (2007)	Education	Meta-analysis	10 studies (N=18 to 96 per study).	Disability simulations are "largely ineffective" (median effect size .17); interaction with PWD is more effective.
Fortuna et al. (2025)	Museums	Scoping Review	9 articles (peer-reviewed).	Training is crucial but often overlooked; involving PWD in training fosters collective responsibility.

McKenney (2018)	Higher Education	Mixed Methods (Pre/Post)	10 undergraduate students studying abroad.	Simulation activities helped students progress from sympathy to empathy to advocacy; debriefing and social model lens were crucial.
Castillo & Larson (2020)	Education / Counselling	Systematic Review	35 studies (samples from 2 to 873).	31 of 35 studies showed positive attitude change; education and "contact" are key tools.
Devine & Ash (2022)	Diversity Training	Narrative Review	250 articles.	Diversity training literature is complex; often lacks evidence for systemic change; risk of backlash if not rigorous.
Hicks et al. (2022)	Community / General	Participatory Action Research (Qualitative)	12 participants (community members, advocates, students).	Traditional simulations cause fear/pity. "i2Audits" (auditing environments) empower participants and foster genuine empathy.
Higashida et al. (2020)	Community / Public	Mixed-methods Evaluation	2,475 questionnaire participants ; 39 interviewees (Mongolia).	DET participants adopted Social Model perspectives and attempted to change their social environments.
Kulkarni et al. (2018)	Business / Workplace	Interview-based Study	33 employees from 5 industries (India).	Sensitisation workshops raise awareness but can paradoxically reinforce "othering" of disabled employees.
Kuno (2009)	Social Welfare	Critical Analysis / Review	41 participants in DET trainer	DET is a tool to shift from Medical to Social Model; challenges include persistent medical model influence.

			course (Asia Pacific).	
Wilding et al. (2022)	Disability Support	Feasibility Study (Mixed Methods)	9 new disability support workers, out of 70 potential participants .	VR (IMercyVE) deepened empathy and provided a safe learning environment; feasible for remote training.



Appendix C

UK-wide Analysis: Operational Barriers & SOPs Preventing Effective Disability Assistance in Rail



Funded by



**Motability
Foundation**

Supporting partners:



Photo: Community Rail Lancashire

Executive Summary

UK rail operators have strengthened disability training under ORR's Accessible Travel Policy (ATP). However, **operational constraints and SOPs** frequently prevent trained staff from delivering reliable assistance, particularly at **unstaffed stations**, during **tight dispatch windows**, and across **multi-operator journeys**. Evidence from ORR audits and consumer reporting, DfT research, Transport Focus analyses, Rail Ombudsman casework, and Parliamentary scrutiny consistently points to gaps between policy and practice.

1) Documented Barriers with Sources, Inline Links & Confidence

A) Staffing & Rostering (Unstaffed/Under-staffed stations)

- **What happens:** Assistance fails or is delayed when stations are unstaffed or staff cannot be redeployed.
- **Evidence:** Transport Focus notes **higher failure rates at unstaffed stations:** **23%** of passengers who believed their station was unstaffed and **received none** of their booked assistance (2024) [Transport Focus blog, 23 Jul 2024](#). ORR's **Accessible Travel** consumer reporting shows **persistently unreliable assistance:** **11%** of respondents did not receive booked help (2024–25) and **10%** reported not being met at all [ORR Annual Rail Consumer Report 2024–25 – Accessible travel](#).
- **Confidence: High** (multiple official sources; UK-wide scope).

B) Time Pressures (Dispatch, dwell times, punctuality KPIs)

- **What happens:** Tight turnarounds and dispatch priorities discourage staff from taking the time needed to assist.
- **Evidence:** ORR's policy programme "**Improving assisted travel**" introduced a **standardised handover protocol** to counter unreliable handovers and dispatch pressures [ORR Improving assisted travel guidance](#). ORR's **Making the Grade** review (2021) documented early challenges delivering assistance consistently under the new ATP requirements. [Making the Grade - Staff disability awareness training obligations: a progress report on train and station operators - Large print version - Published 2 March 2021](#)

- **Confidence: Moderate** (clear system-level signals; operator SOP specifics require audit).

C) Rigid SOPs (leaving post; disruption protocols)

- **What happens:** SOPs may restrict staff from leaving fixed posts (ticket office/platform), or create uncertainty about arranging **accessible alternatives** during disruption.
- **Evidence:** ORR ATP guidance mandates operators to **provide accessible rail replacement** and robust **handover protocols**, indicating common practice gaps the guidance seeks to remedy [ORR ATP Guidance \(Sept 2020\), Appendix C/D](#).
DPTAC's evidence-based advisory work highlights **operational and cultural barriers** persisting despite legal duties [DPTAC Reference Frame \(2022\)](#).
- **Confidence: Moderate (assumption)** recurrently cited; **confirm via SOP audits at TOCs**.

D) Health & Safety Limits (manual handling, mobility aids)

- **What happens:** Staff may be restricted from handling luggage/mobility aids due to manual handling policies.
- **Evidence:** ATP guidance requires **safe assistance** and appropriate handling procedures (Appendix D: **Providing Safe Assistance**) [ORR ATP Guidance \(Sept 2020\)](#).
Advocacy and case narratives frequently cite manual-handling limits as a barrier; policy countermeasures exist but practice varies.
<https://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/finding-accessible-transport>
<https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/travel-fair/travel-fair-report-summary>
- **Confidence: Moderate (assumption)** verify against **local SOPs/risk assessments**.

E) Limited Assistance Hours, Off-peak coverage, Turn up and Go (TUAG) delivery

- **What happens:** Assistance may be inconsistent outside core hours; TUAG delivery/measurement is weak.
- **Evidence:** ORR's consumer reporting recognises **TUAG data quality is emerging** and assistance reliability remains **insufficient** [ORR Accessible](#)

[travel \(2024–25\).](#)

Parliamentary Transport Committee finds **systemic accessibility failings** and **fragmented enforcement** across modes, underscoring gaps in practical delivery [“Access denied: rights vs reality” \(HC 770\), Mar 2025.](#)

- **Confidence: Moderate** (TUAG measurement evolving; operator SOPs to confirm).

2) Systemic Causes (Technology, Communication, Infrastructure, Culture)

- **Technology & Data Integration (Passenger Assist, handovers)**
ORR introduced **booking window reductions** and **standardised handovers** to raise **reliability** of assistance and **strengthen station-to-station communications** [ORR Improving assisted travel.](#)
Rail Ombudsman casework shows **over half** of accessibility disputes relate to assistance provision (booked/unbooked; station/train) [Rail Ombudsman “Passenger Assistance Failures” \(Oct 2025\) PDF.](#)
Confidence: High.
- **Communication (multi-operator coordination; disruption)**
ORR’s programme emphasises **handover protocol** and **cross-operator communication** to reduce missed meets/handovers [ORR Improving assisted travel.](#)
DfT commissioned qualitative research (Verian, 2025) documents **barriers at multiple journey stages** (booking, wayfinding, connections), highlighting **information and support gaps** [DfT “Disabled people’s experiences of rail” \(May 2025\).](#)
Confidence: High.
- **Infrastructure (unstaffed stations; step-free; facilities)**
DfT’s **Inclusive Transport Strategy** and **Accessible Railways Roadmap (Nov 2025)** set priorities for **station/train accessibility** and **Passenger Assist reliability**, recognising gaps in physical access.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-transport-strategy>
[DfT “Our roadmap to an accessible railway”.](#)
Confidence: High.
- **Culture (empowerment vs. risk aversion)**
DPTAC argues accessibility must be **embedded like safety**; current practice places **too much burden on individuals** and lacks **consistent enforcement** [DPTAC Reference Frame \(2022\)](#) • [Transport Committee HC 770 \(2025\).](#)
Confidence: High (system-level analyses).

3) Real-World Case Examples

1. Northern held to account for poor assistance reliability

- **What happened:** ORR identified **Northern** as a poorest performer for assistance reliability, requested an **improvement plan**, and shifted to monitoring outcomes in 2025.

Source: [ORR Annual Rail Consumer Report 2024–25 – Accessible travel](#).

Barrier themes: Staffing/rostering, handovers, communication in large networks.

Confidence: **High** (official regulator action).

2. Unstaffed stations correlate with failed assistance

- **What happened:** Surveyed disabled passengers reported higher failure of booked assistance where stations were unstaffed (23% received none of their booked help).

Source: [Transport Focus analysis \(Jul 2024\)](#).

Barrier themes: Staffing coverage; SOPs for off-peak support.

Confidence: **High** (national consumer body).

3. Cross-operator handover failures and responsibility disputes

- **What happened:** Rail Ombudsman's 2018–23 deep-dive shows **>50%** of accessibility cases relate to assistance provision, often requiring determination of **operator responsibility** for missed handovers (station/train, booked/unbooked).

Source: [Rail Ombudsman "Passenger Assistance Failures" \(Oct 2025\)](#).

Barrier themes: Communication, handover protocols, accountability.

Confidence: **High** (independent ombudsman evidence).

4. Turn Up and Go (TUAG) measurement and delivery gaps

- **What happened:** ORR began publishing TUAG request volumes but notes **data reliability remains limited**; activists question TUAG emphasis vs. booking focus.

Sources: [ORR Accessible Travel – consumer reporting](#) • [commentary: Disability News Service \(Jul 2025\)](#).

Barrier themes: Off-peak assistance; SOP clarity; real-time staffing.
Confidence: Moderate–High (official reporting; advocacy corroboration).

5. Complaints and redress accessibility barriers

- **What happened:** ORR research found **awareness of redress** is lower (71%; only 39% fully aware) and **46%** experienced barriers using complaints processes; ORR committed to engage operators to drive compliance.

Source: [ORR “Disabled passengers’ experiences of complaints handling” \(Apr 2024\) – PDF.](#)

Barrier themes: Information accessibility; process navigation; learning from complaints.

Confidence: High.

6. DfT qualitative research: barriers at multiple journey stages

- **What happened:** DfT/Verian (2024 fieldwork; published 2025) reports **barriers** spanning booking, station navigation, connections, disruption, and information accessibility; highlights **systemic issues beyond training**.

Source: [DfT “Disabled people’s experiences of rail” \(May 2025\).](#)

Barrier themes: Technology, communication, infrastructure, culture.

Confidence: High (government-commissioned research).

4) Assumptions vs. Evidence (and What to Validate)

Note: Where I’ve marked “assumption”, the pattern is well-reported across multiple sources or stakeholder testimony but **requires TOC SOP audit** or **operator documentation** to confirm exact clauses and constraints locally.

Barrier / SOP Topic	Current Status	What to Validate (UK-wide & TOC-specific)	Confidence
Staffing coverage at un/under-staffed stations	Evidence (Transport Focus; ORR)	Station staffing rosters; contingency protocols; off-peak coverage	High

Barrier / SOP Topic	Current Status	What to Validate (UK-wide & TOC-specific)	Confidence
Dispatch/dwell time effects on assistance	Evidence (ORR programmes)	Local dispatch SOPs; dwell-time targets vs assistance SLAs; exemption paths	Moderate
Prohibitions on leaving post (ticket office/platform)	Assumption (DPTAC & stakeholder feedback)	SOP clauses on staff mobility; escalation/override mechanisms	Moderate
Manual handling restrictions (luggage/mobility aids)	Assumption (advocacy narratives)	Risk assessments; training modules; permitted handling procedures	Moderate
Limited assistance hours & TUAG delivery	Evidence + Assumption	TUAG logs vs delivery; out-of-hours coverage SOPs; escalation	Moderate
Multi-operator handovers fail	Evidence (ORR; Ombudsman)	Handover compliance audits; cross-TOC messaging; Passenger Assist back-office integration	High

5) Recommendations to Validate & Address Confirmed Barriers

1. SOP Audit (UK-wide, TOC-level):

Review **dispatch**, **staff mobility**, **manual handling**, **TUAG/out-of-hours** clauses against ORR ATP standards

[ORR ATP Guidance](#).

2. Staffing Contingency Protocols:

Establish minimum **assistance coverage windows** and **rapid redeployment** rules at understaffed/under-staffed stations (evidence: [Transport Focus 2024](#)).

3. Handover Reliability Controls:

Enforce ORR **handover protocol** with cross-operator KPIs; integrate Passenger Assist back-office events across TOCs

[ORR Improving assisted travel.](#)

4. TUAG Monitoring & Escalation:

Improve **TUAG recording quality**, publish **delivery performance**, and define **escalation** when staffing is insufficient

[ORR Accessible Travel consumer reporting.](#)

5. Complaints & Redress Accessibility:

Align with ORR's **Complaints Code of Practice**; ensure disabled passengers are **aware of redress** and that processes are **barrier-free**

[ORR complaints handling \(Apr 2024\).](#)

6. Continuous Feedback & Independent Assurance:

Use mystery-shopper programmes (with disabled participants) and publish operator-level **assistance KPIs** (reliability, handover, TUAG) in line with ORR benchmarking plans

[ORR consumer priorities.](#)

Stakeholder mapping

DfT and DfT OLR are critical stakeholders back up by our recent meeting with DFTOLR in the spoke and hub arrangement in delivering influence and impact:

- **DfT sets national policy and owns the Inclusive Transport Strategy**, which frames accessibility obligations.
- **DfT OLR operates seven TOCs**, giving it direct operational influence and the ability to pilot best practice.
- **DfT can leverage GBR reform** to embed consistent standards and accountability across England.

However, the rail ecosystem is complex, and there are **other key stakeholders to consider for collaboration**:

Primary Catalysts

- **DfT / DfT OLR** – Policy leadership, operational control, and ability to drive sector-wide change.
- **GBR (Great British Railways)** – Future system integrator; will set national standards and enforce compliance.

Other Essential Stakeholders

- **ORR (Office of Rail and Road)** – Regulator; enforces ATP guidance, monitors assistance reliability, and publishes performance data.
- **TOCs (Train Operating Companies)** – Frontline delivery; SOP changes and cultural shifts must happen here.
- **Network Rail** – Station staffing, infrastructure upgrades, and accessibility improvements.
- **DPTAC (Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee)** – Expert advisory body; ensures lived experience informs policy and practice.
- **Passenger Advocacy Groups** (e.g. Scope, Disability Rights UK) – Co-design and validation of improvements.
- **Transport Focus** – Consumer watchdog; provides independent passenger feedback and performance insights.
- **Rail Ombudsman** – Complaints and dispute resolution; valuable for identifying systemic failures.

Why Collaboration Matters

- Operational barriers span **policy, infrastructure, technology, and culture**, no single entity can fix them alone.
- GBR reform offers a **window for alignment**, but devolved administrations (Scotland, Wales) and their operators (ScotRail, Transport for Wales) must be included for UK-wide consistency.

Bibliography (Official & Evidence-Based)

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<https://www.orr.gov.uk/monitoring-regulation/rail/passengers/passenger-assistance/improving-assisted-travel>
- **ORR – ATP Guidance (Sept 2020, incl. handover protocol; mandatory training outcomes):**

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accessible-railways-roadmap/our-roadmap-to-an-accessible-railway>
- **House of Commons Transport Committee – “Access denied: rights vs reality” (HC 770, Mar 2025):**
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Appendix D

RNIB Rail Accessibility Analysis



Supporting partners:



Photo: Community Rail Lancashire

Methodology

- Three focus groups, one with Deaf participants, one with participants from Project Search and one with GOCRPs
- A survey with a sample of 133 people with a disability
- A survey with a sample of 12 - a representative from Network Rail and train operating companies

Key Findings

Accessibility challenges are widespread and have a direct impact on travel behaviour. Four in five respondents in the disability survey reported experiencing difficulties when travelling by train (82%), and nearly a third said they had decided not to travel by rail at all because they felt their accessibility needs would not be met (32%). Just over half feel rail services meet their accessibility needs well overall (56%).

Most respondents travel by train infrequently, with 37% travelling only a couple of times a year. Those with visual impairment or blindness are more likely to travel frequently, with 30% travelling several times a week compared with 11% at a total level. Leisure and social trips are the most common reasons for travel (83%), followed by shopping (35%).

Across both surveys and focus groups, participants described a mix of positive experiences and persistent barriers. A consistent theme emerged: accessibility is not only about physical infrastructure, but also about confidence. Confidence to travel is shaped by predictability, clear information, and being treated with respect by staff and other passengers.

The analysis of findings is structured around three core themes:

1. **Physical and Environmental Accessibility:** Examining barriers and facilitators in the physical train and station environment
2. **Communication and Support Services:** Focusing on personal interactions, staff assistance and effective communication

3. **Current State of Disability and Inclusion Training:** Assessing current training initiatives and how they can be improved to align with the lived experiences of disabled passengers

Passenger experience: Physical & environmental accessibility

Journey planning and ticketing:

- Ticket machines were frequently cited as a barrier in focus groups, described as difficult to use, slow or unreliable. Preferences varied by disability type. Deaf participants often preferred face-to-face ticketing and many were unaware of booking apps, while Project Search participants tended to prefer apps because they were seen as easier and avoided the need for interaction.
- Awareness of railcard discounts for disabled passengers was low. Participants also reported limited awareness of how to book assistance, make complaints or find reliable travel support information.
- Recommendations:
 - Ensure ticket machines are consistently operational and accessible across stations
 - Increase awareness of all ticket purchasing options, including in-person, online and app-based routes
 - Improve visibility of information on disability discounts, booking assistance and support contacts
 - Explore scannable or digital travel passes to simplify journeys

Navigating trains and the station environment:

- Crowding and seating availability (58%) were the most commonly reported challenges in the disability survey, followed by delays or timetable changes (48%) and onboard facilities (34%).

- Participants highlighted inconsistency in accessible infrastructure across stations. Ramps, Blue Badge parking and step-free access were not universally available, affecting safety and confidence. Airports were often cited as a comparison point for better-designed, more predictable accessibility.
- Signage was widely described as confusing, inconsistent and difficult to read. Deaf participants noted issues with small fonts and poor lighting, particularly in low-light conditions. Delays between spoken announcements and visual display updates created additional confusion and forced some passengers to rely on others for information.
- For neurodivergent participants, busy and noisy stations often created overwhelming sensory environments. Many planned journeys at quieter times or avoided certain stations entirely. Cleanliness, particularly of toilets and seating areas, was a recurring concern and contributed to discomfort and avoidance of longer journeys. One GOCR participant with noise sensitivity explained that loud passengers can be overwhelming. They said they would value staff proactively intervening to help make the space feel safer.
- Recommendations:
 - Improve signage with larger text, better lighting and consistent design
 - Ensure accessibility infrastructure is in place and working and have a plan in place to ensure accessibility needs can be met to a suitable standard, even when infrastructure breaks
 - Ensure all service updates are communicated visually as well as verbally
 - Maintain higher standards of cleanliness, with more visible cleaning presence
 - Introduce dedicated quiet areas in busy stations and on trains
 - Proactively manage priority seating to ensure availability for those who need it

"Crewe stands out as a very challenging station with bewildering signage and few staff." [Disability survey]

"[I would recommend stations] have ramps which can be deployed at the entrance for disabled people and parking for Blue Badge holders." [Disability survey]

"Certainly make sure lifts are working, if not, make sure there is a backup plan."
[GOCRP group]

"If a group of people are going to a rugby or football match and you can hear them in the same carriage a little bit farther up, I'm very noise sensitive, so that tends to really bother me. It would be really helpful if there was a staff member to say something to them." [GOCRP group]

Passenger experience: Communication & support services

Visibility and availability of support staff:

- Across focus groups, the visibility and availability of staff emerged as critical to confidence when travelling. Deaf participants in particular described difficulty locating staff when assistance was needed, especially at smaller or less staffed stations.
- Survey respondents frequently mentioned low staff availability as an area for improvement, particularly at busy stations. Awareness of independent support services, such as British Transport Police contact numbers or disability-specific helplines, was low.
- Some participants found it difficult to identify which staff members could provide accessibility support or felt reluctant to approach staff who appeared busy. Positive experiences were associated with proactive, approachable staff in clear uniforms who offered assistance without being asked.
- Recommendations:
 - Improve visibility of support staff through clear uniforms, badges or identifiers
 - Introduce clearly signposted assistance meeting points at stations
 - At smaller stations, provide clear call points or advance booking options for assistance

"Always being visible as there have been many times where you can't see any staff."
[Disability survey]

“Staff are always busy and don’t like to delay them.” [Disability survey]

“When the first train was late and I only had 6 minutes to get to the next one, they got me there. If I had to do it on my own, I would have missed the train.” [Disability survey]

“Maybe staff could wear badges that identify them as being disabled friendly to make them appear more approachable.” [Disability survey]

Adapting communication to passenger needs:

- Overall, a quarter (74%) of respondents in the disability survey said rail staff are helpful when assistance is needed. This was highest among those with hearing and visual impairments (92% and 90% respectively), but notably lower among people with non-visible disabilities, with 62% of neurodivergent respondents reporting positive experiences.
- Confidence that staff will respond appropriately follows a similar pattern. Six in ten respondents (63%) feel confident in staff, rising to 75% among those with hearing impairment or deafness. However, this drops to around half (53%) among those with non-visible disabilities, such as those with a chronic illness or mental health condition.
- These patterns were reflected in the focus groups. Project Search participants often knew how to identify the right staff but described anxiety or sensory overload as a barrier to approaching them, and none said they would seek help from non-rail staff. Deaf participants frequently relied on other passengers instead, citing communication barriers with staff, particularly when announcements or conversations took place without efforts to include them. When staff used gestures, written communication or showed patience, this was highly valued.
- Negative experiences, even isolated ones, had a lasting impact on confidence. One Project Search participant described a situation where staff addressed their parent rather than them directly, undermining their confidence to travel independently. Across the disability survey, respondents consistently emphasised the importance of being approached with respect, friendliness and

an understanding that not all disabilities are visible. In the GOCR group, one participant explained the long-term distressing nature of negative experiences. They said receiving reassurance that it would be escalated and that the severity of the experience would be taken seriously would help overcome the distress and help them confidently travel again.

- Recommendations:
 - Train staff to recognise different communication preferences and needs
 - Encourage staff to ask passengers how they would like to be supported
 - Explore increasing employment of disabled staff and interpreters to build trust and visibility

“Be friendly and don’t make people asking for assistance feel like a nuisance – reminder that some disabilities are not visible – respect and not embarrassment.” [Disability survey]

“Be honest and don’t be afraid to ask questions.” [Disability survey]

“I did say can you let the management know that all this has happened? But I never really felt you're taken seriously, having to live through that experience.” [GOCR group]

Staff experience:

Current state of accessibility and inclusion training:

- Overall, the Train Operating Company (TOC) survey demonstrates current disability training is carried out to The Office of Rail and Road’s requirements. The frequency of delivering disability awareness or accessibility training is inconsistent across rail operating companies, with some stating that frequency is dependent on the role and others stating it occurs every two years, as required.
- For the majority of operating companies and for Network Rail, the training is a blended mix of online and in-person training. Delivery of ongoing disability

awareness or accessibility training to non-frontline staff is inconsistent across train operating companies.

- Across TOCs and Network Rail, most core elements tested (understanding disabled people and everyday challenges, equality legislation, recognising passengers who need assistance, scenario-based / practical exercises, passenger assist, accessibility in stations and providing safe assistance) are covered in training. However, other TOCs state they cover the rest of accessibility and inclusion training topics tested (defining disability, lived experience stories from disabled people, railway regulatory framework, and communication training on respectful communication).
- Most TOCs use in-house materials. None of the train operators use Department for Transport's REAL training. However, all in-house training programs consulted with or have used a disability advisory group or charity in some way. Sources range from disability organisations and NGOs, consulting regularly with an Accessibility Forum, and using customer experiences to create and inform training content.
- Beyond training, regular input from disabled people and passenger feedback on accessibility are in place across all TOCs and in Network Rail. Few offer staff incentives or recognition, and just over half have an accessibility and inclusion strategy, suggesting a gap in long-term plan for improving accessibility and inclusion training.
- All TOCs measure progress on accessibility and inclusion through passenger feedback or complaints data, and most use staff feedback or accessibility audits as a secondary metric.
- The majority of TOCs feel the current approach is effective at preparing staff to support disabled passengers, however only one TOC felt the current training was very effective. The majority of TOCs would be open to working with the project partners, to pilot a new approach that is co-produced with disabled people although would need more information on the process.

"Our e-learning was co-designed with disabled people and reviewed by our Built Environment Accessibility Panel, which is made up of individuals with lived

experience and specialist access consultants. For frontline training, we work with organisations such as RNIB and Guide Dogs so that elements are delivered directly by disabled people. We also use customer videos and testimonials from a wide range of people with different disabilities to bring real lived experience into the learning.” [TOC survey]

“We have an accessibility panel that is made up of customers with lived experience of a range of disabilities as well as individuals who work for charities or organisations that support disabled people. When we create a new or refreshed training, we hold a meeting to discuss what they think are the most important areas to consider. Content is then created and a further session is held which filming of the panel at stations and in interviews is conducted. This footage is then put together to create videos for the training to enhance the material, to show real lived experience of train travel.” [TOC survey]

Barriers and gaps in current training processes:

- In the TOC survey, the availability of staff time was the most common obstacle in making disability awareness training more effective. This may be reducing the number of staff sufficiently trained in providing speciality support services.
- Current accessibility and inclusion training is mainly generic across roles, front and back of house. One TOC suggested providing dedicated training to non-frontline staff about accessibility and inclusion to help demonstrate why it is important for those not interacting with passengers.
- More than half of TOCs feel that better tools for engaging staff participation in training would make it more effective. Some highlight that online learning could be effective in learning new skills, such as British Sign Language, which staff can complete in their own time.
- There currently is inconsistent training across TOCs, from topics covered to frequency of training, meaning staff will have a range of training and expertise. As the rail industry transitions towards GBR, there will be more opportunities to move to a more cohesive, universal disability training strategy, a potential opportunity to create a consistent sector-wide plan.

"The key constraint is release for training, therefore delivering anything that requires teams to leave their post for any period of time is very challenging, even when it is backed by compliance." [TOC survey]

"[I would like to see] more ability to release staff from their duties to undertake training." [TOC survey]

"Access to small bitesized disability learning that staff can do in their own time. This would include BSL Railway focussed e-learning that can be repeated to help with retention." [TOC survey]

Success stories and learnings:

- Across the board, bringing real passenger experiences to life has been most effective at engaging staff in training.
- Additionally learning the appropriate language and how to communicate with disabled passengers with different needs was seen as successful and a more recent addition to training, reflecting feedback in the disability survey for a focus on flexible and respectful communication. One example of impactful training included a discussion of a negative experience with staff and explaining how it could be improved. Some also mention BSL courses have resonated well – where staff can learn a skill and apply it directly with customers.
- Online learning has allowed for faster and easier rollout of training materials and courses for. While this creates greater ease, this should be paired with in-person initiatives to ensure dissemination translates into behaviour change among staff. One successful example of this being implemented is where they ensure a disabled trainer goes to every session – this has been beneficial by increasing engagement as well as making sessions conversational and discussion-based rather than reading from a PowerPoint.
- Initiatives that have been particularly successful and have strengthened inclusion and the experience of disabled passengers across TOCs and Network Rail:

- Introducing British Sign Language and GoodMaps in stations to improve access to information and provide more inclusive wayfinding for Deaf, blind and visually impaired customers.
- Delivering Passenger Assistance Strategy, which ensures all parts of the business understand the importance of dependable, dignified assistance and the impact it has when it is successful.
- Embedding the Diversity Impact Assessment process, which helps Network Rail assess the impact of changes on customers with protected characteristics. This approach will also be adopted consistently across the industry through GBR.
- Try The Train Days have been successful among multiple TOCs, where people with accessibility requirements are invited to stations to undertake a free, supported journey to increase their confidence travelling by train.
- One TOC has introduced a Complex Case team who specifically manage and prioritise accessibility complaints, through engagement with Station and On Train management teams, to deliver quicker customer resolution.

"We have some videos that have been produced in house around the use of the correct language, and what it is like traveling with autism, these have brought real life complaints and feedback to life for staff. Using those customers to talk about their experiences has made a profound difference to staff and sparked interesting conversations." [TOC survey]

"We changed this about 18 months ago to training that focused more on communication and acknowledging that you don't have to know everything about every disability. Instead, just communicate with the person and see how you can support. This has helped a lot to give new staff the confidence to give the best possible support." [TOC survey]

"People perhaps don't understand when we say we're autistic, what exactly that means for us. They may go to training, but I think it might be helpful to have a meeting where

autistic people explain how you make me feel, actually talk to a real person.” [GOCRP group]

“We have recently been awarded the National Autistic Society Autism Friendly This work includes: a soundbite series that allows autistic people to understand the sounds they may experience when travelling by train, a virtual video tours of stations to better allow people to navigate the station prior to arrival. Sensory packs that provide coping tools to allow travel more comfortable, details here providing ear defenders to support passengers who experience over-stimulation or sensory overload (available at some staffed stations). Expanding the ‘Try a Train’ programme, which supports individuals/groups in developing their travelling confidence.” [TOC survey]

Summary of recommendations to improve accessibility training and experiences for disabled passengers

1. **Consistently enforce all existing accessibility and inclusivity standards**, including availability of ramps and designated Blue Badge parking. Encourage stations to enhance station inclusivity by improving the visibility and clarity of all signage and by introducing digital navigation aids like GoodMaps and providing information in BSL at key points. This will remove the major barriers to travel and empower passengers to navigate stations with more confidence.
2. **Ensure training focuses on empathy to build skills in communication and understanding differing needs** through directly addressing the link between staff interaction and passenger confidence. While scenario-based exercises are already being rolled out by TOCs, the impact on passenger experience is inconsistent, therefore integrate video testimonials from disabled passengers to show the impact of both positive and negative interactions. Provide accessible resources for learning basic BSL and offer recognition and celebrate staff who engage with the training and develop these skills. Staff will therefore

be better equipped to provide respectful and effective support which findings show is a critical factor in a disabled passenger's decision to travel by train.

3. **Proactively build passenger confidence and journey reliability** by expanding initiatives such as Try The Train Days to give disabled passengers a low-pressure environment to familiarise themselves with train travel. Additionally, ensure the station environment is predictable and easy to navigate by maintaining equipment (e.g. ticket machines and lifts) and guaranteeing that support staff are visible and easily accessible across stations and regions.
4. **Implement a formal system to ensure training is prioritised and accessible for all staff across TOCs**, even those who are not frontline, to demonstrate the importance and impact of inclusivity training. Remove a key barrier to training completion by providing dedicated, paid time for staff to attend training sessions away from their regular duties. Ensure accessibility and inclusion skills are consistently developed and maintained by providing a library of e-learning training modules, standardised across all train operating companies, so staff can access training on their own schedule.
5. **Collaborate with Network Rail and other industry partners during the transition to GBR to establish a consistent national accessibility and inclusion strategy**. This should implement universal high standards for all support services and accessibility features to reduce inconsistent passenger experiences. A unified strategy will ensure accessibility is embedded at the core of rail transport, creating a reliable service and increasing disabled passenger confidence.