



1. Background

This research looks at the experiences of disabled rail passengers in Great Britain. It examines the end-to-end journey experience, looking in depth at rail travel and when and how barriers may be experienced by disabled passengers.

Surface rail trips accounted for 2% of all trips made in England in 2017, but for some disabled people rail travel can be less frequent, problematic or not possible. The aim of this research is to better understand the experiences of disabled rail passengers to improve passenger experience and make rail travel more accessible.

The research was undertaken by the Department in collaboration with Transport Focus. Background research reports are available on the Transport Focus website.

The full research report can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/social-research-and-evaluation>

2. Methods

The research included a literature review, expert interviews, quantitative survey, qualitative interviews, and a stand-alone design-focused workshop strand.

The survey was conducted with over 1,400 online and 150 face-to-face respondents. Fifty qualitative interviews were conducted, with 15 also making a rail journey wearing a small wearable camera. Twelve expert interviews were undertaken.

3. Policy context

The Department for Transport (DfT) recognises the accessibility challenges of the railway as highlighted in the research, and the Inclusive Transport Strategy. The strategy includes commitments to making rail more accessible, including funding to extend Access for All to 2024.

This programme of work progressed by DfT to achieve our ambition to create a fully inclusive transport network by 2030.

1. Travel by rail

Disabled passengers use rail for similar reasons as all passengers: one third reported that they travel by rail because it is the quickest option, with one in five saying that it is cost effective.

Just over a third never book assistance in advance.



Half travel alone.



Just under a quarter had owned a Disabled Person's Railcard in the last year.

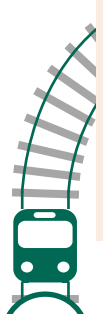
2. Frequency of barriers experienced when travelling by rail

One third of disabled passengers report that they don't experience any barriers when travelling by rail; two thirds reported experiencing at least one problem during their rail journey.



The journey stage with the highest level of reported problems was on board trains (23% of passengers).

The journey stage with the lowest level of reported problems was at the station (9% of passengers).



3. The end-to-end rail journey



1. Journey planning

Over half of disabled passengers who had a problem when planning a journey reported a lack of confidence.



2. Passenger Assist

Awareness of Passenger Assist was low, but users find it generally works well. Of those who experienced a problem, two in five reported a lack of “Turn Up and Go” services; a further two in five said assistance services weren’t available.



3. Network accessibility

Parking and car access were common problems when accessing stations. Problems with public transport or the cost of taxis were also common problems at this stage.



4. Ticketing

Almost two in five who experienced a barrier at this stage reported ticket offices not being open. Using ticket vending machines was the most commonly anticipated problem at this stage.



5. Stations

Multiple challenges were anticipated at the station, but experiencing problems was lower than expected. Almost a third who experienced a problem cited a lack of good, or any, toilets.



6. On-board

Almost three in ten passengers who experienced a problem on-board each cited a lack of toilets or the attitudes of others. Anxiety, and a perceived “hierarchy” around priority seating were also challenges.



7. Onward travel

At the onward travel journey stage, finding exits and onward travel at the destination station were the most commonly reported challenges.

4. Future travel

Just under half of disabled rail passengers reported that they anticipated problems with future rail travel, with those travelling for commuting purposes being the most likely to anticipate barriers.

Across all journey types, disabled passengers indicated that they would ideally like to travel by rail more frequently than they do currently.