



# Making rail accessible

Guide to policies and practices

Valid from November 2016

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# 1. Our strategy

We'll maintain and improve current standards of accessibility of our services for people with disabilities, or whose mobility is impaired. We continually strive to deliver a high standard of care to all our customers through our staff and our use of the Passenger Assist booking system. We will prioritise plans and policies that improve accessibility according to value for money in terms of customer service benefits to all customers.



Details of our plans for improving access and services are explained in section 4



# 2. Management arrangements

This policy is in compliance with the Passenger Operator's and Station Operator's Licences held by West Coast Trains Ltd. It has been approved by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and the Executive Group of Virgin Rail Group Ltd, which is the parent company of Virgin Trains and will be formally reviewed every year by this group and the ORR.

The requirements of this policy are integrated into our Business Plan, and into the planning stage of station and rolling stock projects. This is achieved through briefings and provision of the Code of Practice and this policy to our designers, architects and Project Managers. Where projects are undertaken we will review the impact these have had on our customers.

The Executive Group of Virgin Rail Group Ltd is responsible for setting this policy, and the Executive Director of Operations of Virgin Trains is accountable for its implementation.

Through training and briefing all managers and staff are made aware of their responsibilities to help disabled customers.

Our Franchise Manager will make sure our commitments to this policy are carried out through internal checks and regular review of feedback received from disabled customers. We'll consult with the ORR when we believe that these commitments are not being met.

### 3. Monitoring and evaluation

We aim to provide easy access and excellent customer service, for all customers. We regularly review our arrangements and services and will continue to introduce improvements as quickly as is reasonably practical. We recognise that sometimes small changes, such as clear signs or the clarity and audibility of announcements, can make a significant improvement to the journey of all customers, especially those with disabilities.

We welcome customer comments and will take these into consideration in reviewing and implementing this policy. We'll consider customer feedback in developing spending plans where this suggests specific enhancements that would improve accessibility of our stations or trains.

Where a customer has made a complaint about the service they have received we'll investigate with the responsible line manager and appropriate action will be taken where necessary. We will also consider appropriate compensation depending on the circumstances.

As well as taking direct feedback from customers, we also conduct market research through an independent agency twice per year with customers who have used the assisted travel service, to assess reliability of delivery and satisfaction with the service. This feedback is reviewed by our cross-functional Journey Care group, which meets regularly. We will also take note of research findings from surveys undertaken by Transport Focus.

We will provide a report to the ORR each year explaining our progress towards meeting the objectives within this policy, and detailing the outcome of market research undertaken in order to understand levels of customer satisfaction with various aspects of the service provided. Any problems with any aspects of the policy will be raised with the ORR as they arise.



## 4. Access improvements

We'll adopt the services, standards and guidance in the Department for Transport's "Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations: A Code of Practice" (March 2015) (The Code of Practice), with regard to activities within our direct control, and also take into account requirements within the Equality Act 2010. We will work with other rail industry partners to ensure complementary activities such as station services are supplied under contract. This policy will be reviewed when updates to the Code of Practice are made by the Department for Transport (DfT).

If dispensation from the Code of Practice or PRM/TSI is needed for rolling stock refurbishment, or new, renewed or improved facilities and services on trains or at stations, this will be sought at an early stage in the design process, but only after every effort has been made to meet the standards in the Code of Practice and also the PRM/TSI.

We've made substantial improvements to accessibility at stations we manage. The facilities and arrangements currently provided for disabled customers are detailed in the publication "Making Rail Accessible: Helping Older and Disabled Customers".

We have implemented a programme of minor works to deliver improvements in accessibility at all the stations we manage. This has covered areas such as improved signage, accessible toilet modifications, improving handrails, installation of low-level ticket office counters and improvements to arrangements for meeting customers who have arranged assistance, and will be developed to accommodate further similar projects in the future.

### ***4.1 Improvements Delivered in the Years April 2014 - March 2016***

Some examples of accessibility improvements made at our stations during the two years to March 2016 include:

- A "Changing Places" toilet at Crewe station with a changing facility for disabled people who require special facilities such as hoists
- Staircase handrails at Preston Station
- A power-operated door into the booking hall at Oxenholme
- Improved signage to help wayfinding around the station at Wolverhampton
- Improvements to accessible toilets at Birmingham International and Lancaster
- Installation of some automatic doors at Lancaster and Warrington Bank Quay

## 4.2 Improvements Currently Underway

The list of works which are due to be completed in the year April 2016 – March 2017 includes:

Carlisle	Installation of new auto doors to station entrance. Upgrade surfacing to overbridge to make ramps more accessible. Open out customer services office and install new counter to make it wheelchair accessible. Conversion of a ticket counter to be wheelchair accessible.
Birmingham International	Alter layout of concourse toilets to make Ladies and Gents fully accessible.
Coventry	Resolving level access issues throughout station. Installing new ramps to customer services offices and auto-doors.
Macclesfield	Refurbishment of accessible toilet on platform 1 to be fully accessible for wheelchair users.
Stafford	Platform waiting rooms - automate existing doors. New auto doors to overbridge waiting room.

## 4.3 Schemes Involving Third Parties

Where third parties contribute funds towards station improvements we'll make sure that accessibility improvements form part of these schemes. For example our customer reception office has been improved at Stockport with low-level counters.

## 4.4 Future Plans

Working with the DfT we'll continue to explore more ways to improve our stations through the Railways for All Small Schemes fund.

Through the Rail Industry's Access for All fund, a new footbridge with lift access to both platforms at Penrith station, is due to be completed in Autumn 2016.

## 5. Working with others

Many of our customers start or finish their journeys with other Train Operating Companies, or at stations operated by other companies. We'll liaise with these operators to review interchange arrangements for all customers and improve them where we can.

We've consulted with the Disabled People's Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), Transport Focus and London TravelWatch, and will continue to consult with them and the ORR when proposing changes to this policy. It is a living document, which will be reviewed and updated as necessary. It will be submitted to the ORR annually from the date of approval and no changes will be made without the agreement of the ORR.

We also liaise with national disabled organisations, such as RNIB and Motability, as well as groups of disabled people such as the National Rail Accessibility Forum and Network Rail's Built Environment Accessibility Panel. All suggestions for improvement are reviewed by our cross-functional Journey Care group, which meets regularly to review policy issues and customer feedback.

## 6. Staff training

Disability awareness is a part of our staff customer service training programmes and includes all definitions of "disability" including, for example, those temporarily disabled through illness, injury or surgery, sufferers from epilepsy, ME, arthritis, or cerebral palsy, and people with learning difficulties, dementia, impaired vision or speech impediments, in addition to wheelchair users.

Other staff, including management, are also briefed to improve disability awareness and we continuously improve the quality of our training programmes through consultation with individual customers and specialist bodies. We also provide training in using accessibility equipment such as ramps and induction loops, and also in communication skills with people who may have difficulty speaking, hearing or understanding. Details of our staff training, including the numbers of people trained, will be provided to the ORR annually or as otherwise requested.

As an example of progress being made, 235 West Coast onboard and station staff underwent disability awareness training during 2015 as part of their orientation course. In addition, all staff in our JourneyCare call centre completed an e-learning training package produced by ATOC. This includes a module on disability awareness and in total over 60 agents and support staff went through this training.

## 7. Emergency procedures

We recognise that disabled customers may need extra assistance at times of train or station evacuation. We have written procedures for our station and on board staff to follow in such circumstances that deal specifically with assisting disabled customers.

Procedures vary from station to station, and by type of train. As a general principle, disabled people will be assisted along with all other customers at times of evacuation. Where this may not be physically possible, or cannot be achieved safely, disabled customers would be helped to a place of safety to await developments, and in some cases the attendance of the emergency services.

## 8. Communications strategy

We make our Disabled People's Protection Policy available through our website and advertise its existence on posters at stations. We will also circulate it to disability groups we meet from time to time.

### 8.1 Telephone

Where provided, such as in our Customer Relations and JourneyCare call centres, our textphones have a dedicated telephone number. Recorded information provides an option to be connected to an operator.

### 8.2 Websites

Our website takes into consideration the needs of disabled people with a variety of impairments. In developing our new website which was launched in September 2015 we have done our utmost to ensure it adheres to level A of the W3 Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, and we are now working towards achieving level AA.

We promote the availability of the assistance service to our disabled customers through this website.

### 8.3 Signage

We work with local authorities to make sure that directions to our stations are clearly signposted and we'll address any deficiencies with the relevant local authority.

Where signage improvements are planned within our stations, we will take account of the good practice guide published by the RSSB into Wayfinding at Stations.

## 9. Car parking

At our stations the level of legitimate usage of 'blue badge' holder car parking spaces will be monitored regularly, as well as the level of usage by motorists who do not hold these badges. Where misuse of blue badge spaces is discovered, a suitable notice will be placed on the vehicle advising of the relevant byelaw being contravened.

We will review requirements and, if legitimate demand regularly exceeds the available 'blue badge' spaces, we will provide extra spaces if we can. Any new disabled parking spaces or spaces that are re-lined will be compliant with the dimensions specified in the Code of Practice.

