



# Thinking Outside the Bus

## London's accessible bus service

October 2013

# Introduction

Last year we held our first Thinking Outside The Bus event. One year on we have learnt a lot from our passengers. This has allowed us to continue to make improvements.

Many bus operators have also built up good relationships with local organisations. For example, Go Ahead with Guide Dogs and Merton Seniors, Metroline with Age UK London, and Stagecoach with Transport for All.



# Europe's most accessible bus service

London's bus service is the most accessible in Europe, carrying almost 2.3 billion passengers a year – the highest level since before 1960.

There are many elements that work together to make the bus service accessible:

- All 700 routes are low-floor wheelchair accessible
- All 8,500 buses are fitted with an on-board, next-stop audio visual system to let passengers know which bus they are on and when they are approaching their stop
- Staff training is continuously improving to offer the best possible service to older and disabled passengers. In our latest Accessibility Mystery Traveller Survey, 98 per cent of people surveyed found the staff to be polite, helpful and patient
- Destination displays are becoming bolder and simpler. A mix of upper and lower case print makes them easier for people with visual and reading impairments to understand
- All buses must enter service with a fully operating wheelchair ramp, and if a defect develops the vehicle must be substituted. Regular on-road checks show that around 99 per cent of buses have working ramps
- Seventy-one per cent of bus stops meet all our criteria to be fully accessible, up from 61 per cent last year. We are working with the London boroughs and other agencies towards a target of 95 per cent being fully accessible by Spring 2016
- London's bus service is at its most reliable since records began, which contributes to keeping crowding to a minimum. This makes the service more attractive to many older and disabled people who tell us overcrowding puts them off travelling by bus

Providing a fully accessible bus service requires more than infrastructure. Approachable and knowledgeable staff who provide a consistent level of service are just as important for giving older and disabled customers greater confidence to use buses.

# Skilled bus drivers

## Driver training

We have been working with Age UK London and Transport for All to develop additional training that is being rolled out to every London bus company. The training package includes a short film, which has been produced with input from older and disabled customers and will enhance the training already delivered.

The film is accompanied by a workbook and will be used as part of an interactive training session given to every London bus driver by September 2014.

In addition, all bus and coach operators in the UK must provide their drivers

with 35 hours of refresher training every five years, known as the Certificate of Professional Competence. London's bus drivers undertake an additional 40 hours of learning in the form of a bespoke BTEC within their first year of service. This includes a one-day course exploring disability and diversity awareness, designed and delivered in conjunction with older and disabled people.

## The Big Red Book

Every bus driver is supplied with a copy of the Big Red Book. This staff handbook is updated every 12 to 18 months with input from groups representing older and disabled passengers.

The book gives London's 24,500 bus drivers clear guidance about the level of service expected from them. It includes a comprehensive section about meeting the needs of older and disabled customers, including pulling in close to the kerb at bus stops, kneeling the bus, giving passengers time to hold on or get to a seat before driving off, and advice on the best way to offer help. It also includes guidance on how to assist visually impaired passengers and wheelchair users, as well as the guidelines surrounding assistance dogs and the types of mobility aids that can be carried safely.



**All Aboard!**  
Our new training film for London bus drivers

# Making travel easier

## Mobility aids



We introduced a new Mobility Aid Recognition Scheme in the summer of 2012. It advises passengers and bus drivers which mobility aids fit in the wheelchair space. Primarily aimed at people with mobility scooters, the scheme can also be used by people with other types of mobility aid, such as powered wheelchairs or mobility walkers. Users are invited to contact our Travel Mentoring Team to find out more or arrange an accompanied journey to help them find the best way to board and alight from buses. Advice can also be given on the easiest way to manoeuvre in and out of the wheelchair space. Users will be given a Mobility Aid Card to show the bus driver that their mobility scooter will fit.

One year on, research among the users of the scheme showed that 85 per cent of cardholders were satisfied overall, while 91 per cent would recommend the scheme to others. This has helped to improve the confidence of mobility scooter users and the understanding of bus drivers. We will continue to ensure bus drivers recognise the card as part of our 'All Aboard!' accessibility training.

## Travel Support Card



How you can help me:	My name is:
<i>Please tell me if I'm on the right bus for Victoria Station?</i>	<i>Simon Brown</i>
	My emergency contact number is:
	<i>07123 456789</i>
Thank you.	<small>This is not a ticket and does not entitle the holder to any discount.</small>

This card can be used on all our modes of transport, by any passenger with a mobility, visual or learning disability. It is mainly aimed at people with

# Making travel easier (continued)

communication difficulties and those who lack the confidence to ask staff for help. However, they can be used by any older or disabled passenger to communicate a key message to the bus driver, such as waiting until they are seated before pulling away from the stop.

During 2012, more than 10,000 cards were requested by individuals, hospitals and groups representing older and disabled people. During the same period, nearly 1,500 were downloaded from our website.

Feedback from the card users has shown how much they value the assistance it gives them when travelling around London.

## Passenger information

Countdown is the largest real-time bus information system in the world, providing passengers with information about London's bus service. Bus arrival information for all of the capital's 19,000 bus stops is available via text messaging or any device with internet access.

The text message service is particularly useful for visually impaired passengers as they can use the 'text to speech'



facility on their mobile phone to access the information. On-bus visual and audio 'next stop' and destination announcements make it easier for passengers with hearing or visual impairments to travel independently, and is useful for anyone making an unfamiliar journey.

We have refreshed all bus arrival signs at stops to make them easier for those with visual or reading impairments to use. Five hundred new signs have been added to the system, bringing the total number to 2,500. New features include improved contrast (amber on black), use of upper and lower case letters and improved letter height. These changes have improved readability, especially for visually impaired passengers. Research

shows that around 830,000 London bus journeys are informed by live bus arrival information each day.

Building on this success, we have developed a new way of delivering live bus arrival information to a range of public locations, such as hospital waiting rooms, college receptions or shopping centre foyers. This means that real-time bus arrival information can be provided to passengers who may not have access to the internet, a mobile or smart phone, or a bus stop with a Countdown sign. There are now 13 digital screens with many further applications being progressed.

### **The New Bus for London**

Currently operating on routes 11 and 24 and soon to run on routes 9 and 390 with more to come, the New Bus for London has been designed with accessibility in mind. Features include a wheelchair priority area that is longer than the regulations require, designed in consultation with wheelchair and buggy users.

There are three doors for boarding, which makes it easier for passengers to access priority seats if required. Access to the wheelchair space is through the centre door where a powered ramp is fitted.

The vehicles also include a T-loop system for hearing-impaired users, a second front-facing 'next stop' display screen in the lower deck and a wider range of seats to suit different passenger needs, including space under some seats for assistance dogs.

Customer Assistants are now being introduced to offer help. This could be something simple like asking the driver to wait until a passenger is seated or reassuring the passenger that they are on the right bus.

They will also assist in managing the wheelchair priority area if a buggy is already in the space and a wheelchair user wishes to board.



# What we said we would do

## Helping wheelchair users to travel on the bus network

Customer complaints and feedback from the Accessibility Mystery Traveller Survey indicated a need to understand tensions around use of the wheelchair space from a range of perspectives, so we commissioned research to look into the issues.

Inconsistent experiences with using the space are the major cause of stress for

wheelchair users, people with buggies and bus drivers.

The research showed that both passengers and bus drivers wanted clarity over the guidelines. This includes what priority means in practice, the folding down of buggies, and at which door buggies may board. Bus drivers also need support so they can provide passengers with a more consistent service.





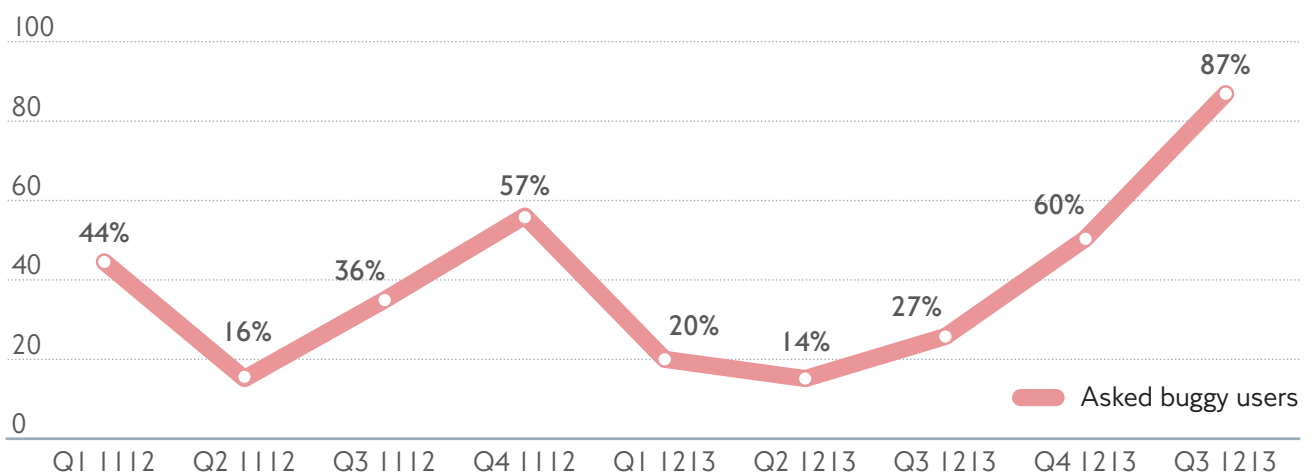
In December 2012, we published a marketing campaign targeted at buggy users that reinforced the need to make space for wheelchair users. This involved clearer signs in the wheelchair priority area, as well as posters on buses and at bus stops. We also took the opportunity to communicate with bus operators so they understood the purpose of the campaign and to ensure clarity over the guidelines.

Nine months on, we have seen a reduction in complaints, better compliance from buggy users and

increased understanding of the guidelines by drivers and passengers. The graph below shows that, as a result of the campaign, there has been a huge improvement in drivers asking buggy users to share, move or fold their buggies for wheelchair users.

However, we still feel that this initiative needs to continue for some time. In the longer term we intend to work with buggy manufacturers and retailers to develop information about buggy purchasing choices and considerate behaviour when travelling by bus.

### Driver asked buggy users to fold buggies to make space for you



# Other transport modes in London

London's entire transport network has become more accessible in recent years:

- The Tube has seen record levels of investment to help reduce overcrowding, a barrier to travel for many older and disabled people. A total of 66 Tube stations are now step-free from street to platform, and there are plans for eight more to be step-free by 2018. Ramps are also currently available at 32 Tube stations



- Approximately 40 per cent of all National Rail stations in London are step-free. There is currently a programme of works to introduce more step-free interchange facilities at many National Rail stations
- London Dial-a-Ride, our free door-to-door transport service, made 1.4 million trips in 2012/13
- In 2012/13, 1.6 million Taxicard trips were made. Taxicards provide subsidised travel for people with mobility impairments
- Every day, 170,000 journeys are made on the bus, Tube, London Tramlink and Docklands Light Railway using the disabled person's Freedom Pass
- Most River Bus and River Tour services are wheelchair-accessible and newer boats have accessible toilets. Staff are on hand to help and, with advance notification, many boat operators are able to cater for disabled groups. All eight piers operated by London River Services are wheelchair-accessible, including Greenwich Pier – the first in the UK to be installed with a 'ramp rider' to enable easy access at all states of the tide

# Helpful contacts

## TfL Customer Services

0343 222 1234  
(08:00-20:00 Monday to Friday)  
[tfl.gov.uk/contact](https://tfl.gov.uk/contact)

## TfL website

[tfl.gov.uk](https://tfl.gov.uk)

## 24-hour travel information

0343 222 1234 or text 60835  
Textphone 020 7918 3015

## Live bus arrivals

[Countdown.tfl.gov.uk](https://countdown.tfl.gov.uk)

## London Dial-a-Ride

0845 999 1999

## Mobility Aid Recognition Scheme

020 3054 4361

## Travel support

[tfl.gov.uk/accessguides](https://tfl.gov.uk/accessguides)

## Travel Mentoring Team

020 3054 4361

## Oyster helpline

0343 222 1234  
(08:00-20:00 every day)

## Lost Property Office

0343 222 1234  
(08:00-16:00 Monday to Friday  
except public holidays)

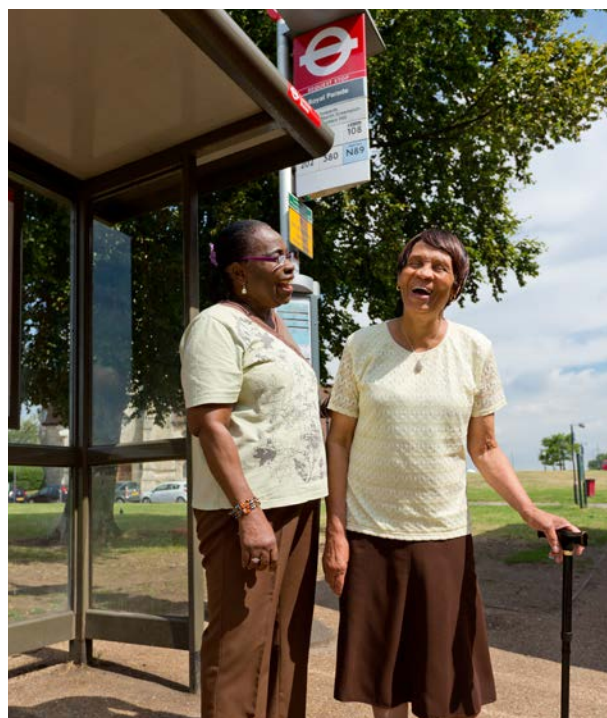
## Twitter feed

@TfLAccess

This provides advice on getting the most out of the transport network, updates disabled passengers on improvements to their services and advises of any planned changes to the network that may affect the journeys of disabled people.

## Report It

Report disruptive roadworks at [tfl.gov.uk/roadworks](https://tfl.gov.uk/roadworks) or by tweeting @report\_it with the hashtag #roadworks



© Transport for London  
Windsor House  
42–50 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0TL

October 2013

[tfl.gov.uk](http://tfl.gov.uk)

TOTB\_Brochure\_250913