

Passenger Accessibility

ATOC's View

- Train Companies strongly support the principal of accessibility for disabled people, both on the basis of compliance with legal obligations and as a commercial opportunity.
- The evidence suggests that the numbers of disabled people using the rail network has increased significantly in recent years but ATOC believes that considerable scope remains to increase usage still further.
- The rail industry is working hard to meet this challenge but the scale of the task is very large – for instance less than half of the stations on the rail network have level access.
- Whilst ATOC welcomes the government-funded 'Railways for All' scheme it believes that the Department of Transport and Network Rail (NR) are making slower progress on station improvements than we would like to see.
- ATOC believes that in many cases train companies could deliver station improvements more quickly and cost effectively than NR and we would welcome the opportunity to have a much greater role in delivery of the 'Railways for All' fund.
- As far as rolling stock is concerned, we believe that the inclusion of requirements for fully accessible rolling stock within franchise specifications is the best way to achieve full rolling stock accessibility – the 2020 end date imposed by the Disability Discrimination Act is arbitrary and clumsy.
- New European standards for new rolling stock and stations on the Trans European Network (TEN), mainly high speed intercity routes, came into effect in July 2008 (the TSI for People with Reduced Mobility). ATOC believes that the TSI standard for stations should apply to all stations not just those on the TEN network.

Background and key issues

- Under the Disability Discrimination Acts of 1995 and 2005 service providers are required not to discriminate against disabled customers. The 2005 Act extends this legal requirement to all aspects of rail travel. The Equality and Human Rights Commission estimate that there are upwards of 12 million people covered by the definition of disability used in the DDA.
- Improving accessibility is a major challenge given the scale of the task and the additional cost involved. The £380m allocated over 10 years to improve physical access to stations, under the Governments 'Railways for All Scheme', whilst welcome, means that progress to a fully accessible rail network is going to be gradual and slow.

- Since rail privatisation 5,000 new coaches have been brought into service, all with improved access for disabled passengers. Slam door trains, which were particularly difficult for some disabled passengers to use, were all withdrawn from service by 2005.
- The Rail Vehicle Access Regulations (RVAR) introduced in 2005 have a set cut off date of 2020 for operators to make all rail vehicles accessible.
- The Assisted Passengers Reservation Service (APRS) provides assistance for disabled passengers at stations, when boarding and on trains. Currently train companies assist 1.2 million customers every year with a success rate of 80%.

Relevant ATOC activity

- ATOC has vastly improved information about accessibility for disabled passengers through the 'Stations Made Easy' initiative which went live on the National Rail Enquiries website in December 2009. This provides hugely detailed information about stations including a full route planning service that allows passengers to plan their route through stations to avoid problematic features such as steps. See www.atoc.org/publications
- The Disabled Persons Railcard, entitling disabled passengers to a third off the price of most tickets, is a growing success. Uniquely this discount is also extended to an adult travelling with the disabled person. ATOC has also negotiated additional benefits to card holders, such as a 25% discount on Holiday Inn rooms worldwide. For the first time in its 28 year history more than 120K cards are now in use, with more than 3 million journeys a year being made using the Railcard.
- We are working to enhance the current APRS service with an improved service that focuses much more strongly on passenger needs.

Key documents/ links

- ATOC Disability Strategy
- Disabled Persons Railcard website
<http://www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk>
- Rail Travel Made Easy Passenger Leaflet
<http://www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk/information-downloads>

*Disabled Persons Railcard Market Research 2005 (Steer Davies Gleave)

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