



GWR Accessibility News

2021-22 Look Back



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Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of our Accessibility News. This is the first in, what we hope to be, a series of annual publications looking back over the year at the key accomplishments in making the railway accessible for disabled and older people.

Covid has been tough for all, but more so for our most vulnerable customers. We are looking forward to welcoming back our regular passengers as well as many more as we look to reach out to build confidence in rail travel. Whether for those returning or those who have never travelled before.

This publication marks the first year of our growing accessibility team and documents some of the key achievements they have made.

We would like to take this moment to thank all of you that makes this possible. We can't provide an accessible railway on our own. Thank you to the frontline teams who provide the assistance. Thank you to the customer panel for their valuable insight. Thank you to the commercial team to seeking advice for inclusive design on future projects. Thank you to our GWR Customer Relations Team for the continued support to our customers and thank you to many more of our colleagues for their dedication to improving accessibility on the railway.

There is much more that has been done over this year than we could write about. If you would like to know more then please email the team at **mobilityandinclusion@gwr.com**

Ryan Jones
Head of Accessibility and Assurance

Meet the GWR Accessibility Team

With a wide range of experience working on the railway and backgrounds in working at stations and on train, the accessibility team is focussed on improvements for disabled and older passengers.



Tom Law – Accessibility Manager

I am the Accessibility Manager at GWR and my role involves ensuring we have processes and procedures in place to ensure that disabled passengers can travel with independence and confidence across the GWR network. I produce the company's Accessible Travel Policy and work with

employees across GWR championing the requirements of our disabled customers, ensuring that all new initiatives, projects and services have all our passengers at the centre of them.

My passion for working in accessibility comes from speaking to various disabled passengers across the GWR network. From hearing very personal and moving stories, it has highlighted the importance public transport has in various people's lives but also emphasises the work that needs to continue to happen to make the railway truly accessible.

Dan Pearce – Senior Accessibility Mentor



I started working on the railway in 2014. I was based at Bath Spa operating the ticket barriers. After two years I moved into the training department where I was based for five years. During this time, I taught colleagues across the business soft skills, customer service training as well as ticketing. I also delivered the Equality Awareness training. In 2021 I move into the accessibility team with the goal of making the railway more inviting for people with disabilities. I want to reach out to people who have never travelled by train or discounted it as a reliable means of travel and help build their confidence.



Coral Thomas – Accessibility Mentor

I joined GWR as a Service Delivery Assistant in 2019, moving to Customer Ambassador in 2020. Having worked in the railway, prison, care, and security industries, I've witnessed and experienced diverse challenges; many of which relate to accessibility. These experiences, coupled with my

want to make a difference, is why I joined the Accessibility team. I strongly believe it's our moral duty to provide an accessible for all, barrier-free environment where everyone can feel confident in travelling. Being a part of the accessibility team allows me to work on initiatives, policy, and practices, which enable equality and celebrate diversity.



Robin Owen – Accessibility Mentor

Having been self-employed for 15 years, I joined the railway in 2019 as a guard. This role meant that I met people from across the social spectrum and saw first-hand the challenges and barriers some people face when accessing rail travel. Seeing those issues and listening to passengers gave me the catalyst to

join the accessibility team so that I could help take those barriers away and provide dignified, thoughtful, expansive, and equal access to the rail network. I want GWR to lead the way in accessible transport and be seen as leading facilitators of equal access mobility.

Rebuilding after Covid

Over the last few years, we have seen the world change and suffer the huge impact of Covid. This resulted in many of the most vulnerable people, not being able to leave their homes, as well as, most of the country being told to stay at home. This resulted in the number of booked assistances dropping to just 2% of pre-pandemic numbers. Since then, we have seen the number of assistance bookings rise back to 85% and continue to grow.

Despite the low numbers of customers, we have been incredibly proud of our frontline teams who have worked throughout the pandemic to still provide a service for those who needed to travel. Ensuring key workers could still do their jobs or making sure people still had access to medical appointments, it was vital that they kept the railway going.

As the world has opened up again and restrictions have been lifted, we have seen customers returning. The satisfaction results of our assistance system has been such an encouragement that we have improved our service offer to encourage more people to travel. We now see 79% of customers saying they are very satisfied with GWR Passenger Assist and a further 8% are fairly satisfied. We have also seen 85% of customers say they would definitely use the GWR Passenger Assist service again and another 12% stating they probably would too.

Assistance Cards: Designed to make travel easier

Over the last few years, the support for people with non-visible disabilities has grown dramatically.

We have seen the sunflower lanyard grow from a trial at Gatwick Airport to a nationally recognised scheme. We have been supporting and promoting the sunflower lanyard scheme for the last two years and it has been used more widely during covid than ever before.

As we start coming out of the restrictions and back towards regular travel, we wanted to launch a scheme to help our less confident customers. This scheme would provide reassurance for the passenger, help in communicating as well as support them in conversations to get the assistance they need. As a result, we have created some assistance cards to do just that! All cards mentioned below are available to download and print at home, or available from GWR ticket offices.

"I just think they're a brilliant tool for staff and passengers. They help take some of the stress of travelling away for people, helping them be more independent and confident."



Assistance Travel Cards

The Assistance Travel card has been designed as an easy to carry item that contains some useful information that a customer may want to share. Folded twice it is an easy size to fit in a pocket or bag. With a clear indication on the front of the card requesting help, anyone who uses the card can start a conversation or communicate with a member of GWR staff.

The card has space for the customer to write their name and emergency contact if appropriate. There are sections for stations that are used regularly as well as travel to, so customers can indicate journey details. There is also a large open space for a customer to write or draw what help they may need. In addition, there are also the details of our assisted travel phone line as well as our customer service centre and twitter details.

"I found it helps me as being hard of hearing I don't have to keep trying to repeat myself when I ask for a ticket or help. I find it less embarrassing and stops other passengers looking round."

We have also created a dedicated card for those who are hard of hearing. This card has a lot of similarities with the standard assistance card. However, it contains some really helpful best practice tips for communicating with someone who has hearing loss. These tips can help break down the barriers between customers and colleagues as well as those between customers.

Assistance Dog Cards

One of the ways in which we help our guide dog users when travelling by train is by reserving a seat next to them, so their assistance dog has some space. This allows the assistance dog to be more comfortable, especially for longer journeys. However, this can be difficult to explain to other customers, or can lead to customers sitting on those seats without knowledge the dog is there.

To help with those conversations we have produced some cards that can be placed on the seat where the assistance dog is underneath. Available in A4 and A5, or as a seat reservation label (from ticket offices) to go into the back of the chair, it gives a clear indication of why that seat is empty. With a picture of an assistance dog and the words "Please do not sit on this seat" in large print it goes on to explain "My assistance dog is underneath. Thank you for understanding."

New Wave of Travel Training

With the addition of our team of Accessibility Mentors we have been able to start a new era of confidence building sessions for disabled and older passengers. In the last year we have run events for over 400 individuals, with a large number of these being seen more than once. These sessions take several forms but can be broken down into two main categories.

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Travel Training



Travel training is all about providing information, so a station or train is more familiar when someone comes to travel. These sessions are run in schools as well as taking place at the station. It is a great opportunity to explain how to navigate a station, purchase a ticket, give tips for travelling and what one might need to take, and most importantly, safety.

We know that train stations can be noisy and unfamiliar places and can cause a lot of anxiety. These travel training events give people an opportunity to understand what to expect whilst in a safe situation where they are not going to be travelling.

Try the Train

Try the Train events are focussed on putting into practise what has been learned through a travel training session. These events give people an opportunity to get on a train for a short journey. Usually starting with a recap and getting the attendees to find their train, it is a step towards planning and travelling themselves. It gives them an understanding of how to board a train safely and what to expect once on a train. It also allows those attending to see different stations, as they are stopped at on the journey as well as when they get off the train and 'plan' their return trip.

We have seen these sessions not only as an opportunity to get familiar with the railway but as steps towards independence for some. The confidence that has been built by many of those who have completed these sessions is clearly visible.

Who have we worked with?

We have worked with a wide range of groups over the last year. We have worked with schools specialising in various disabilities or Special Educational Needs as well as specialist departments within schools. We have also done some work with charities and local groups.

Some of the organisations we have worked with include:

- Bath Area Play Project
- Halow Project, Guildford
- Hartmore School, Gloucester
- Nancealverne School, Penzance
- Worcester New College
- And many more

An overwhelming success

We have had some amazing sessions with the groups over the last year. We have had opportunities to play games on the train, hold competitions and quizzes as well as talk to many GWR members of staff and see lots of stations. However, the true success is seeing the difference this training makes to individuals. The ability to open a whole world to explore through transport, the confidence for individuals to travel independently and for some, overcoming fears and anxiety around travel.

The feedback we have received from individuals and organisers of groups has been incredible.

"We just wanted to say a big thank you for inviting us to the Confidence to Travel at Okehampton Train Station today. Both ladies enjoyed the experience very much and are keen to start using the train. Tickets have [already] been bought for next week."

"Thanks once again. My debrief form is exploding with lots of feedback about the things our young people learnt in regards to various lifeskills. And the repetition of being at the same site and going for a train ride. They recognised and used many things we learnt the week before. We also had lots of new questions too."

"I wanted to say a huge thank you for today - we absolutely loved it!!

The students were full of it when we walked back to school and perfectly described the things they had learnt and the places they had seen today to those back in school - I think we will need to arrange another one as the staff and students back in class were so keen to come along next time!"

"Thank you so much for your help this term. You have really helped me grow in confidence around trains and platforms, as well as meeting new people"

If you are part of a group or charity that helps people with disabilities or older adults and would like more information on our travel training opportunities email us at: **accessibilitymentors@gwr.com**

Building Connections in the Community

We want to reach out to groups within our surrounding communities. Communities were an integral part of the railway when it first began in the 1800's and we want to see greater connections and relationships between them again. As part of this, the accessibility team have been reaching out to some organisations and establishments that interact with us.

Life Skills Bristol

Life Skills centre in Bristol is an incredible venue that supports year 6 school aged children to learn about safety in the home, the community and life skills. Targeting those who are about to leave for secondary education, it is an important time to look at safety before this important step towards independence.



As part of their training, they look at railway safety. With so many rail lines in and around Bristol, it is an important teaching point for the young people. Having an opportunity to visit the centre, to watch the scenarios unfold in a very realistic environment, to focus on the key safety messages was incredible. This project is not only supported financially by GWR but as a team we are working with the centre to update their rail scenarios for maximum effect.

For more information about the centre visit: **lifeskills-bristol.org.uk**

Exeter Deaf Academy

Exeter Deaf Academy held a celebration event last year to open their new extended campus. This campus shows the very best of inclusive design. As part of the event, we were invited along to see the new development, meet students and teachers as well as see the amazing work that is done.



As the Academy has living accommodation, many students travel home at the end of term using the trains. This has led to Exeter St Davids staff taking an unrivalled interest in learning British Sign Language (BSL). We have also worked with the Deaf Academy to curate a video celebrating diversity for National Inclusion week.

For more information on what the Deaf Academy does, visit their website: **thedeafacademy.ac.uk**

Autistic Minds

We have been working with Autistic Minds, an organisation in South Wales, that specialises in helping autistic people. They ensure they have a large proportion of staff at the charity who have autism, using it as an opportunity for them to develop skills as well as work to help others.

We are working together to create a video story of Rhys, who has become independent as a result of being able to travel by train to work. This video aims to show colleagues across GWR and Transport for Wales how important train travel can be to an individual's life, as well as sharing some best practice in communication.

If you would like to see what Autistic Minds does, more information can be found on their website: **autisticminds.org.uk**

Worcester New College

Worcester New College is a secondary education centre specialising in visual impairments. Based in Worcester, they have students that travel from across England. For many of them it is the first educational establishment that is specially catered for their disability. A number of the students use Worcestershire Parkway station which is one of the newest stations on the GWR network and provides a great travel experience for them, providing tactile information and braille.



As well as providing travel training for some of the students, we also visited the college to speak to them about how they find travelling by train. We discussed best practice that they have experienced as well as some of the technological advancements that can help them navigate. This information is being used as we consider how we can better design stations.

Find out more about the college at: **www.ncw.co.uk**





Training for Success

As a business, we are aware that we have a wide range of customers with a variety of needs. As part of our commitment to our customers we provide all colleagues who start in GWR with a full day's training on Disability and Equality awareness. This training includes lived experiences of people with disabilities as a central part of the training. Our training complies with the Office of Rail and Road's guidance on training for train operators and more information can be found in the Accessible Travel Policy guidance.

<https://www.gwr.com/travel-information/passenger-assist>

We want to provide as much support for our teams as possible. As part of that we have recently rolled out a refresher training course for frontline colleagues. This course was created to keep knowledge and skills up to date as well as update on our changing policies. The main focus was on our responsibilities as a train operator and how we can help our customers to ensure all have a great experience.

We have also invested in a deaf awareness online learning course. This course, coupled with our classroom based BSL one day training, gives colleagues the knowledge to communicate more effectively with the hard of hearing community. As BSL takes great steps towards more support and becomes legally protected we are encouraging our colleagues to take a greater interest in these courses. Once colleagues are happy with communicating in BSL they can get the BSL logo added to their name badge allowing customers to see they can talk to them more comfortably.

Contact Details and Information

If you would like more information about accessibility within GWR please email us at:

mobilityandinclusion@gwr.com

If you would like to find out more about our travel training and try the train events email us at:

accessibilitymentors@gwr.com

For more information about our passenger assistance and to find our assistance cards visit:

<https://www.gwr.com/travel-information/passenger-assist>

If you would like to book assistance for a journey visit our passenger assistance page above or call our contact centre:

Telephone: **0800 197 1329**

Typetalk: **18001 0800 197 1329**

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