

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Seilwaith a Sgiliau/ Economy,
Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Masnachfaint Rheilffyrdd a chyflwyno Metro / Rail Franchise
and the Metro

Ymateb gan RNIB Cymru / Evidence from RNIB Cymru

About RNIB Cymru

1. RNIB Cymru is Wales' largest sight loss charity. We provide support, advice and information to people living with sight loss across Wales, as well as campaigning for improvements to services and raising awareness of the issues facing blind and partially sighted people.
2. We welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to this inquiry into Welsh Governments plans for the railway network and will use this opportunity to highlight the needs of blind and partially sighted users of the Wales and Borders franchise and the South Wales Metro, to ensure that any potential or real barriers to the use of trains are addressed to help encourage vision impaired people to have the confidence to use the services.
3. Access problems on public transport are one of the most persistent topics raised by our members. Train travel can pose problems for people who have sight impairment and this can range from poor lighting and signage, to inaccessible ticket machines and poorly trained staff. We hope that the recommendations that emanate from this inquiry will help make rail travel a more pleasant experience for everyone.

About sight loss

4. There are currently 106,000 people in Wales living with sight loss. It is estimated that the number of people living with sight loss in Wales will double by 2050 (1). Blind and partially sighted people are often reliant on public transport for making essential journeys. Thus it is obvious that the need for an accessible, effective and integrated transport system is becoming even more critical.
5. Sight loss has a huge impact on individuals. For many people, loss of sight results in increased dependence on others. In a survey of blind and partially sighted people conducted by RNIB, 60 per cent of respondents stated that they needed help to get out of the house because of their sight loss (2). Nearly half of blind and partially sighted people report feeling 'moderately' or 'completely' cut off from people and things around them (3), with 43 per cent saying that they would like to leave their homes more often (4). This sense of isolation inevitably has an impact on people's mental and emotional wellbeing.
6. Blind and partially sighted people rely on public transport for most of their every day journeys. The ability to go shopping, get to work and keep medical appointments are all underpinned by both the availability and accessibility of a functioning public transport system.
7. Despite the importance of the public transport system, over a third of people with sight loss experience restrictions in accessing local train or bus or services (5). Thus we welcome this opportunity to highlight the importance of accessible infrastructure and services when considering the franchise specification and Metro delivery, to ensure rail services meet the needs of all current and future travellers.

Rail services and infrastructure

8. RNIB Cymru welcomes the Welsh Government's planned improvements to increase the accessibility of train stations. Our surveys show that 11 per cent of blind and partially sighted people frequently travel by train, and this is likely to rise as accessibility improves. Research also shows that 54 per cent of those who currently use trains (at least some of the time) experience some degree of difficulty in doing so (6).
9. Trains are an integral mode of transport for many blind and partially sighted people. Whilst we agree in principle with Welsh Government's high level outcomes for rail in the Wales and border area we believe that these high level outcomes should be set over and above legislative minimums so that compliance with the Equalities Act 2010 for example, is a requirement, not an aspiration.
10. For a sight impaired person, travelling in a busy train can be quite a traumatic experience particularly if they have to stand for any length of time. Most of the current rolling stock has few 'priority seats' for disabled customers and space for service dogs is also at a premium.
11. It is important to ensure that during peak times there are sufficient staff available and clear aural updates to help those who need it. Whilst we understand that there will inevitably be occasions where the number of passengers exceeds the number of seats available, it is important that the needs of blind or partially sighted people are considered in advance.
12. We believe that train companies should be required to provide high quality announcements on stations and trains and assistance must be available at all stations.
13. There are opportunities to improve the accessibility of train services for blind and partially sighted people via the next

Wales and Borders rail franchise. We would hope to see the franchise address the accessibility of vehicles; all rail vehicles, both heavy and light rail, must be accessible by no later than 1 January 2020.

14. All new rolling stock has to comply with the standards set by The Rail Vehicle Accessibility (Non Interoperable Rail System) Regulations 2010 (RVAR 2010) or the European technical specification for interoperability for persons with reduced mobility (PRM TSI), but it also has to be retrofitted to all rolling stock by 2020. We believe that these standards should be mandatory from the start of the next Wales and Borders franchise.
15. We firmly believe that all rolling stock, will need to meet RVAR2010 and PRMTSI standards as a minimum, we would also highlight the need for visual and audible passenger information systems which will help make trains more accessible for visually impaired people.
16. With regard to access to the train and to the facilities and services provided on the train, the key issues to be addressed are;
 - Boarding/alighting through the doorway and the interface between the platform and train floor;
 - Circulation within the train;
 - Seating and/or sleeping accommodation;
 - Access to the facilities and services on the train (toilets, catering etc.);
 - Provision of information (on board and outside the train) (7)
17. Consideration should also be given to the use of highly visible and tactile indications on or adjacent to all power operated

controls throughout the train. The height of tactile indications above floor level should also be consistent.

Station facilities

18. We recommend that the RNIB Good practice Guide for making train services accessible for blind and partially sighted people (8) provide the baseline for considering which facilities need the most improvement.
19. Disrupted train journeys are of intense frustration and concern to most people, no matter how caused, but can be of particular concern to blind or partially sighted passengers. We believe that an operator should be required to set out its expectations for customer service, including assistance for passengers with sight loss, if disruption is unavoidable. One of the issues often reported by our members is the lack of assistance available when there are unplanned route alterations or delays with trains.
20. Often, any arrangements for passenger assistance that have been made in advance then fall through, with no alternative available, leaving blind and partially sighted people to struggle alone.
21. Any systems put in place to keep passengers informed of delays or disruptions must be accessible to blind and visually impaired people and there must be clear protocols for ensuring that alternative arrangements are clearly communicated through a range of mediums and the relevant support and guidance are on hand to help people who may find themselves on an unfamiliar station for example, or not know how wide the gap is when alighting the train.
22. If Welsh Government wishes to deliver its vision of a truly integrated transport system in Wales, it is important to ensure that the new Wales and Border franchise operator takes a

proactive approach to engaging with a range of other rail franchises, local authorities and other transport providers.

23. We also believe that regular dialogue with community groups and the third sector should also be encouraged to ensure that the service is accessible and demand led in order to encourage patronage and increased usage.

Staff training

24. One of the priority areas for operators is ensuring that all staff are given interactive sight loss awareness training as a minimum. This is extremely important not only for frontline staff on trains or stations, but also for office staff to enable them to give considered advice and information to blind and partially sighted passengers when required.
25. The need for station and train staff to be adequately trained to identify people who are having problems is vital.

Note

We have included a copy of RNIB's 2014 Good Practice Guide on the Passenger Experience which we feel is imperative to providing an exemplary standard of service for blind and partially sighted people. Welsh Government should be keen to adopt these practices identified in the report will help to provide a good service to all customers.

References

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- (3) Pey, T, Nzegwu, F and Dooley, G, "Functionality and the Needs of Blind and Partially Sighted People in the UK: An interim report", 2006

- (4) Douglas, G, Corcoran, C, and Pavey, S, "Network 1000: Opinions and circumstances of visually impaired people in Great Britain", University of Birmingham, 2006
- (5) McManus S and Lord C, "Circumstances for people with sight loss: secondary analysis of Understanding Society and the Life Opportunities Survey", NatCen report for RNIB, 2012
- (6) Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, "Functionality and the Needs of Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in the UK", 2006. 1,155 blind and partially sighted people interviewed about their experiences in a range of life situations.
- (7) European Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research 335, "Passengers' Accessibility of Heavy Rail Systems, Final Report of the Action European Commission Directorate General Transport", 1997 Ibid
- (8)) RNIB, "The passenger experience: Key ways to make train services accessible for blind and partially sighted people", RNIB Good Practice Guide, 2014

Rhian Nowell-Phillips,
Policy & Campaigns Officer,
Rhian.nowell-phillips@rnib.org.uk,