

A more accessible road network?

July 2021

Progress report

Currently 21 per cent (14.1 million) of people living in the UK report having a disability¹. Three per cent of all licensed vehicles in the UK are in the disabled tax class. Car travel remains the most popular form of transport among disabled adults and around a third of these journeys are made as a passenger².

In November 2018, Transport Focus published *An accessible road network?* which made several recommendations following our research into the experiences of disabled road users. These recommendations were aimed at improving the experience of people travelling on England's motorways and major 'A' roads. Highways England subsequently announced the establishment of the Roads for All Forum which was launched to examine the recommendations in our report and develop

other initiatives to make the road network more accessible for all.

Since then, the Roads for All Forum has taken steps to address the recommendations we made. These centre on improving information about motorway and major 'A' road facilities and the assistance available to road users should they encounter difficulties. This will enable road users to plan their journeys better and travel with confidence. We also recommend that regular reviews be undertaken of facilities specifically for disabled people to ensure they are adequate and available to use.

Transport Focus has been a member of the Highways England Roads for All Forum since its establishment in 2018. This report details the progress of the forum in implementing our recommendations, and developing some further, to improve the accessibility of the network.

Anthony Smith

Chief executive

¹ *Family Resources Survey: financial year 2018/19* (www.gov.uk)

² *Transport: Disability and Accessibility Statistics, England 2019/20* (publishing.service.gov.uk)



Transport Focus recommendation to Highways England:

Publicise who to call if your vehicle breaks down and how to stay safe when someone in a vehicle cannot follow the standard safety advice.

Highways England has:

- Printed and distributed 40,000 copies of a leaflet on advice for disabled people using Highways England's motorways, which includes tips for safe motorway driving, what to do in the event of a breakdown and who to call.
- Signed up to SignLive, a Video Relay Service to enable users of British Sign Language to communicate with the Highways England customer contact centre, and also introduced a text message service for roadside assistance.
- Produced a YouTube video for disabled road users on how to stay safe, which was shortlisted for a Business Disability Forum 'Disability-Smart' Award.
- Worked with Disabled Motoring UK to include specific advice for disabled people in the 2019-20 Motorway Safety Campaign.
- Addressed disabled road users' concerns about breaking down on the motorway as part of the 2021 Breakdowns campaign. This included developing a breakdowns advice video in British Sign Language³ and working with disabled social media influencers to share key safety advice directly with disabled communities.
- Committed to having a presence at key exhibitions for disabled road users to deliver key messages around road safety, speak to disabled road users and raise awareness of initiatives to make the road network more accessible.



Transport Focus recommendation to Highways England:

Provide information about facilities for disabled road users at services on its roads (and provide it as open data for any organisation to use).

Highways England has:

- Engaged AccessAble to conduct accessibility audits of the 114 motorway service areas in England. The audits cover key areas including parking, disabled toilets, petrol stations, shops and restaurants. Online guides for each service area will be produced, using 360-degree imagery to enable virtual journeys of the site to gain a greater understanding of the layout. The access guides will be launched in summer 2021.
- The audits will include the accessibility of electric vehicle charging points.
- Separate reports will be sent to each motorway service operator and Highways England specifying the improvements that need to be made to make each site more accessible. The list of improvements will be grouped into quick, medium and longer term categories to assist operators with prioritising improvements.

³ An estimated 150,000 people in the United Kingdom use British Sign Language as their main or sole means of communication.



Transport Focus recommendation to Highways England:

Review the layout of roadside services across its network, taking steps to provide more disabled parking spaces, curb their misuse by ineligible drivers and reduce the distance between these and key facilities.

Highways England has:

- Included measurements of the distance between disabled parking spaces and key facilities in the scope of the AccessAble audits. The audits will also highlight instances where the distance needs to be reduced and make recommendations to increase the number of disabled parking bays, where appropriate.



Transport Focus recommendation to Highways England:

Review disabled toilet provision at services across its network to ensure they are appropriately designed and routinely available for use.

Highways England has:

- Included the design and availability of disabled toilets in the scope of the AccessAble audits. The final online guides to individual motorway services will include the provision for live updates if disabled toilets have become temporarily out of service.
- Agreed to commission a report into the investment required to bring all accessible toilets at motorway services up to modern accessibility design standards.



Transport Focus recommendation to Highways England:

Work to improve road signage to make it clear for those who have cognitive impairments.

Highways England has:

- Improved engagement with groups representing people with cognitive impairments, including autism, learning disabilities and dyslexia, in relation to variable message signs, which are typically used to inform road users of special events. The feedback from these groups will inform future practice and the development of new signs, where possible.



Transport Focus recommendation to petrol retailers:

Must ensure they are compliant with the Equality Act 2010, making reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled customers are not disadvantaged.

Petrol retailers are:

- Exploring initiatives for the development of an app through the Roads for All Forum that will enable disabled road users to give advance notice to fuel stations that they will require assistance upon their arrival.



Transport Focus recommendation to the Department for Transport:

As promised in the Inclusive Transport Strategy, finance should be made available to help with the installation of more 'Changing Places' toilets to expand provision of facilities suitable for people with severe physical and cognitive disabilities.

The Department for Transport has:

- Confirmed £2 million in funding to increase the provision of Changing Places toilets, which subsequently resulted in 22 motorway service areas securing co-funding for these toilets to be installed. A second round of Government funding has since been launched; this time extended to include services on 'A' roads⁴.



Transport Focus recommendation to Highways England

Transport Focus recommended that every organisation involved in roadside services and recovery should review and improve disability awareness training.

Highways England has:

- Partnered with Driving Mobility UK to work with traffic officers to produce a series of training videos on common vehicle adaptations and non-visible disabilities.

⁴ *Disabled people to benefit from better journeys thanks to service station funding - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)*



Transport Focus commentary

Transport Focus is pleased to see the results of its research into the experiences of disabled road users translate into initiatives that make England's motorways and major 'A' roads more accessible for all. The work of the Highways England Roads for All Forum has led to welcome improvements in information provision for disabled road users. Going forward, it will be important to ensure that online information is available in accessible formats and that those without internet access can find the information by alternative means. Non-digital alternatives need to be well publicised.

We look forward to seeing action to address our remaining recommendations. This includes publicising information about the help available to disabled road users who become caught in a traffic jam and require urgent assistance, and making improvements to road signage to make information clearer for those with cognitive impairments. While the development of an app to help disabled road users buy fuel is welcome, work remains to be done to ensure disabled customers have a good experience at

services on Highways England's roads.

Highways England is also consulting with disabled people on the development of designs for the Lower Thames Crossing and the A303 tunnels, as well as on the refresh of the Equality Impact Assessments for road schemes to ensure the diverse needs of road users are covered. Consulting with disabled people early on in design processes is key to developing an accessible road network.

Transport Focus will continue to work with Highways England and the Roads for All Forum to improve the accessibility of England's motorways and major 'A' roads and achieve the shared long-term goal of a road network that is accessible to all. As specialist vehicle adaptations advance and the number of older people in the population grows, we can expect more disabled and older people to use the road network so the important work of the Roads for All Forum will benefit a growing proportion of road users. Transport Focus will pay particular attention to the needs of disabled road users in its future work, including those using electric vehicles.



A more accessible road network?

"Having that voice heard, and having autistic drivers and passengers considered when building in services and support, it means moving forward that autistic drivers and passengers might find travelling a lot easier."

Bethan Davies, engagement manager, Autistica

"The Roads For All Forum gives us a great opportunity to be part of a wide network of stakeholders. Working together, we can increase accessibility and inclusivity that will really improve people's journeys."

Ross Mendenhall, senior operations executive, Extra MSA Group

"Our partnership with Highways England is unique really. It's somewhere we can go to pass on our members experiences and wishes, and to really feel that we can contribute in actually changing the face of mobility for disabled people. It's been a two way thing. Highways England has listened to what disabled people's ideas and needs are, and actually seen the problems."

Alan Norton, chief executive officer, DMUK

Contact Transport Focus

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Transport Focus is the operating name of the Passengers' Council

Transport Focus is the independent consumer organisation representing the interests of:

- bus, coach and tram users across England outside London
- rail passengers in Great Britain
- all users of England's motorways and major 'A' roads (the Strategic Road Network).

We work to make a difference for all transport users.