

# Plugging the gap:

the need to improve the EV charging experience for disabled drivers

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transportfocus 

# Foreword

Many disabled people depend on travelling by car to make journeys as independently and seamlessly as possible. But for some that may be under threat as electric vehicles become more common and the charging network isn't able to meet accessibility needs.

For individual users, this might be about the weight of the cables, the space to manoeuvre within a parking bay, the complexity of the information or payment systems, the knock-on impact of a chargepoint being unexpectedly out of order or the lack of assistance. The impact may be felt by wheelchair users, those with impaired mobility, strength or dexterity, older users, or those who are neurodivergent. Where charging is accessible it generally offers a better experience for both disabled and non-disabled road users.

For the industry this is a huge and complex problem. Accessibility needs weren't factored into early roll out. Standards have since been introduced but they have been difficult to apply in practice and aren't mandatory. The pressure is on to meet government targets and supply fast charging to meet growing current and

future needs. Conflicting demands for valuable land, commercial pressures and energy supply issues must be navigated.

There are some positives out there with chargepoint operators trying to bridge accessibility gaps and improve the charging experience for disabled users. But this lacks the consistency required to allow disabled people to travel with confidence knowing they'll be able to charge.

Through this report Transport Focus highlights key areas where there are challenges that need to be addressed with charging provision on motorways and major 'A' roads. Our discussions with stakeholders including services operators, Office for Zero Emission Vehicles, National Highways, disability charities, advocacy groups and more have highlighted barriers but also a keen sense that everyone wants to work together to solve these problems.

Electric vehicles have been on the roads now for many years and the market response has not adequately



provided for disabled people. The time to act is now and we need confidence that there is a plan that will genuinely deliver. If we don't tackle this swiftly, effectively and consistently then some disabled people are going to be left behind, unable to confidently transition to driving electric vehicles. We will continue to challenge chargepoint operators to do what they can to make improvements. We will also engage with Government about the role regulation can play, and the need for ongoing assessment and transparent reporting to allow progress to be tracked.

**Louise Collins**

Director

# Introduction and context

## What prompted this review?

Transport Focus published a report in May 2025 highlighting the challenges faced by motorists when charging their electric vehicle on England's motorways and major 'A' roads. The research<sup>1</sup> clearly highlighted that charging provision for disabled users warranted further examination, given the unsatisfactory experiences respondents reported and the barriers they encountered.

## Why it matters?

Estimates suggest that there are currently as many as two million disabled drivers in the UK<sup>2</sup> and travel by car accounts for around 58 per cent of all their trips<sup>3</sup>. It plays an essential role in enabling people to manage their daily lives with a greater flexibility and independence than they might otherwise have. It is therefore essential that the charging infrastructure provides for the needs of all electric vehicle users.

<sup>1</sup> Electric Vehicle Charging Survey (EVCS), April 2022 – March 2024, 321 EV Drivers. Strategic Road User Survey (SRUS), April 2022 – March 2024, 460 EV Drivers. Motorway Services User Survey (MSUS), 2022 – 2023, 668 EV Drivers.

In the coming years, the number of electric vehicles are forecast to dramatically increase with the phasing out of traditional ICE (internal combustion engine) vehicles in line with government targets limiting the sale of petrol and diesel vehicles.

As a consequence, we can also expect the number of disabled EV drivers to rise and the demand for accessible public electric vehicle charging infrastructure to continue to grow – especially when we consider that a significant proportion of disabled users' homes are not suited to the installation of a home charger.

## Our intent

Making transport safe and accessible for all users is a key part of our business plan and improving the experience of charging vehicles is a key part of this. The current lack of accessible chargepoints must

<sup>2</sup> [The Transport Accessibility Gap report](#) (Motability, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> [UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences](#) (House of Commons Library, 2024).

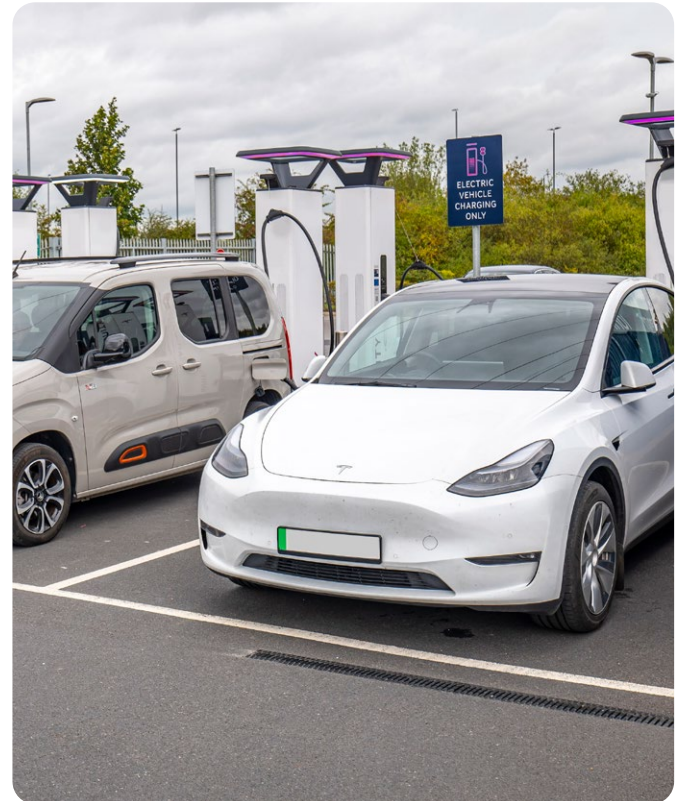
be addressed to avoid a growing cohort of disabled motorists being excluded by charging infrastructure that continues to disregard their needs.

This report signals our intention to drive progress by influencing stakeholders across government and industry and encouraging actions which will drive improved outcomes for disabled users.

### **Our approach**

We undertook a review that drew on our engagement and insights from stakeholders across the sector - alongside our previous research, industry knowledge and, what users tell us from motorways and major 'A' roads.

In this report we explore the barriers disabled users currently face when charging, or attempting to charge, their electric vehicles before we look at the wider challenges affecting operators and their provision of chargers. Finally, the report sets out what needs to change to address the situation and to improve the provision and experience for users.





# What needs to change summary



## **Urgent focus on delivering a network of accessible electric vehicle charging infrastructure**

There is a critical need to act now to deliver accessible chargepoints across the motorway and major 'A' road network with provision that meets both current and future demand.



## **Explore the need for regulation to secure better outcomes for disabled drivers**

There is a significant risk that the market will continue to fail to meet the needs of disabled motorists without a mandatory framework to drive change and track progress.



## **Ensure the accessible electric vehicle charging standards fully meet disabled users' needs and are straightforward for commercial providers to interpret and implement**

A holistic consideration of disabled users' needs will be necessary to sufficiently address the range of issues for charging.



## **Ensure outcomes are appropriately monitored**

Ongoing assessment, continued co-design and transparent reporting is needed to ensure progress can be sustained and tracked.



## **Address immediate gaps in the accessibility of existing electric vehicle chargepoints**

To improve usability for disabled motorists as quickly as possible until a fully accessible network can be delivered.



**User challenges:  
barriers and pain  
points when charging**

# Barriers faced by disabled users at the chargepoint

**Stopping to charge on the motorways and major 'A' roads is a critical moment for all drivers but for neurodivergent, disabled and older motorists, the experience can be particularly challenging given the barriers they face.**

Our 2023 Motorway Services User Survey found that nearly a third of drivers arrived at motorway services feeling stressed tired and frustrated - feelings that can be exacerbated by inadequate charging provision.

Users have reported encountering significant barriers including:

## **Charging bay constraints**

It can be difficult to move around the vehicle in a standard charging bay, especially for those motorists who need more room to manoeuvre, like those with reduced mobility including wheelchair users. Kerbs, bollards and raised plinths can make the experience more difficult or even impossible.

Additionally, queuing for a particular bay, typically on the



*"As a disabled motorist these bays are far too small to get in and out of my car."*

Female, aged 45-54



end of a row, can make the experience more stressful for motorists. They need the ability to exit and re-enter their vehicle while charging and not be prevented from doing so by a car charging in the next bay.

### Physical challenges

The weight of cables and the force required to connect them can be a significant obstacle to wheelchair users and drivers with limited upper body strength, including some older users. Faults with the chargepoint - such as the plug becoming jammed - only compound the existing barriers some users already face.

In addition, the position of instructions and controls means they can be placed out of reach for some users while poor lighting or glare, at different times of day, can reduce the visibility of the display screen, *"these chargers are so unreliable. The payment screen/reader is impossible to see due to their positioning in direct sunlight"*. This makes the experience more difficult as can poor maintenance of the devices with some users reporting scratches, *"the card reader is so badly scratched that you cannot read any prompts"*.



## Reliability issues

The number of out of order chargepoints can lead to additional issues and delays for motorists. Our research identified several instances where drivers were only aware the chargepoint was broken when they attempted to use it, *"No sign on charger saying fault reported"*. Others reported a sense of frustration with having to battle *"malfunctioning chargers"*.

While this creates a poor experience for all electric vehicle users, it can take an even bigger toll on those with mobility impairments. Getting in and out of the vehicle can be more difficult and having to change bays adds stress.

For neurodivergent users, some of whom carefully plan in advance to reduce anxiety around their journey, the unpredictability of these experiences can prove particularly challenging. For example, when it takes multiple tries to charge with *"four attempts to get a charge started"* or when the *"machine stopped charging after ten minutes"*. These moments can be especially stressful for those who find navigating unexpected situations hard.

*"The mechanism is very heavy and difficult to align. Anyone who is non-disabled or below normal strength struggles greatly."*

Male, aged 55-64

*"It is stressful having to back out and find another chargepoint and challenge another driver taking another place."*

Female, aged 55-64

*"Had to move my car into a fourth bay after four attempts to find a working charger."*

Female, aged 55-64

## On-site environment

A **lack of space** to wait for an available chargepoint at busy times, poor lighting, unclear signage on site and less well-defined safe walking and wheeling routes were also identified as issues by disabled users, especially when chargepoints are located some distance away from the facilities.

Users reported frustration with the **lack of a clear queuing process** and the stress this placed on them *"Location in busy car park totally rubbish. Nowhere to queue. Access difficult" and "Not all chargers working and once all full there is no system to queue – it's a bit dog eat dog!"*.

Even when no issues were encountered on a specific visit some users were still mindful of the potential for difficulties, *"we were fortunate to drive straight up to a charger. Had we had to wait it would have been much more of an issue as the parking layout doesn't lend itself to waiting in any sort of queue"*.

Once their vehicle was in place to charge, accessing different parts of the site proved difficult for some users, especially

at busy times. The poor quality surface of the paths and car parks, in some locations, could also be potentially hazardous.

A feeling of vulnerability was also reported by some users, especially at night, and when the chargepoints felt isolated from other facilities. Clearly, this impacts user's confidence to charge their vehicle whenever they choose, or need to, and again raises users' levels of anxiety.

*"The footpath was not smooth in some of the areas. It was not too bad for me but for another person it might not be."*

Male, aged 55-64

*"Not happy.... In quiet locations at night with a phone and credit card visible... not able to be aware of the surroundings."*

Male, aged 55-64

## Lack of on-site assistance

The proportion of disabled drivers needing on-site support and assistance while charging their vehicle at services is generally higher, as is the impact on these users when it is not available.

Far from being able to charge independently and confidently disabled motorists can be left relying on the goodwill and understanding of strangers and other motorists nearby in order to access the help they need in the moment. While helpful, this is far from a reliable or predictable solution for users.

While on-site support was offered by some providers, we found that in reality, it was not always executed well. The support was not clearly communicated, readily available or effective with staff unsure how to help.

## The impact of these barriers

It is clear that a reliable and accessible charging experience plays a key role in enabling users to charge and travel more seamlessly and independently.

*“Although accessible EV charging infrastructure is important, it alone won’t solve the issue of inaccessibility for disabled drivers. For many of us, putting fuel in our cars was just as challenging—but staffed petrol stations provided a workable solution.*

*“We need to take a broader approach. This includes a combination of staffed charging locations—both at dedicated hubs and in public car parks—alongside efforts to reduce the cost of charging away from home, and of course, increasing the availability of genuinely accessible EV chargers.”*

Helen Dolphin MBE

## Barriers faced by disabled users at the chargepoint

Given the challenges disabled users encounter with charging, it is understandable that some users are hesitant to transition.

The results of a survey published by Motability<sup>4</sup> in June 2025 found that, given the issues with public charging, 65 per cent of their disabled customers would not move to an electric vehicle unless there was no other option.

*"We are asking disabled people to transition to an electric vehicle, despite knowing that there is not enough accessible EV charging provision."*

Graham Footer, CEO, Disabled Motoring UK

<sup>4</sup> EV Transition Tracker, Motability Operations, June 2025. 'The Headlight community is an opt-in online community made up of Motability scheme customers





Case study

**Disabled EV driver, Nigel Melly**

"I have been driving an EV since they were first available, and while charging at home is usually straightforward, motorway journeys are a different story.

"The lack of accessible chargepoints, I plan my journeys so I stop at places I know I am familiar with. I always head for a charging bay at the end of a row, to give me enough space to manoeuvre in and out of the car. This 'workaround' is generally always successful for me, but I have friends who struggle more with charging than I do and often need to ask other drivers charging their vehicles for help.

"Years of experience and careful planning, my charging routine on long distances is shaped as much by accessibility barriers on the public network as it is by battery levels."



*"I love my EV and have had one since first available through Motability. Despite problems with public charging, I can thoroughly recommend switching to an EV to anyone. As demand increases and EV charging infrastructure continues to roll out at pace there needs to be action now to improve the provision for disabled users or we will be left behind/excluded."*

Nigel Melly



## **Industry challenges and mitigations**

# Industry mitigations to bridge gaps in accessibility

Despite limited commercial incentives or regulatory pressure, providers have explored initiatives to reduce barriers on-site and improve the charging experience for users.

## **Larger bays**

Larger footprint charging bays have been introduced at some motorway service area sites, to allow more room for motorists to manoeuvre around the vehicle. While not necessarily meeting full accessibility standards, these flexible spaces provide a better experience for all drivers – both disabled and non-disabled.

## **Broken chargepoints flagged**

Chargepoint hoods, or out-of-service covers, have been deployed by some providers to show when a charging bay is out of use and prevents users having to enter a bay, and exit their car, before they are made aware of an issue. While particularly helpful for disabled users, clearly flagging out of order chargepoints improves the experience for all users.



## On-site support

Given that disabled motorists can face a number of barriers at electric vehicle chargepoints — such as the force required to connect — on-site support and assistance can be particularly helpful. There are examples on motorways and major 'A' roads, where support is available and staff have been trained to assist motorists should they need help charging.

Provided it is communicated well and delivered effectively and consistently, this can give motorists the practical support they need and help foster greater confidence in the network.

While helpful, these measures have been implemented on a piecemeal, provider-by-provider basis. As a result, there is little alignment or uniformity across the sector when it comes to good practice to bridge accessibility gaps in the short term. Users would benefit a more consistent approach across the charging network.



# How did we get here?

Having engaged across the electric vehicle charging sector, we recognise that there are challenges providers, both chargepoint operators (CPOs) and motorway service areas, face in delivering accessible chargepoints on motorways and major 'A' roads.

## **Commercial pressures**

There is significant upfront investment required in providing chargepoints and commercial operators can be reluctant to incur additional costs.

Given their larger footprint, introducing accessible charging bays and devices, may increase costs and complexity. It can mean sacrificing the total number of overall parking spaces at a site or reducing the number of standard charging bays provided– both of which potentially impact overall throughput and profitability for a chargepoint provider.

## **Capacity growth**

The need to grow charging capacity, as the number of electric vehicles rises, has been a recent area of focus.

As part of the government's rollout plans, targets have been set in support of this objective with a minimum number of ultra rapid chargers on major roads set, specifically 6000 high power chargers by 2035.

There are currently no known government targets for the number of accessible charging bays.

## **Fragmentation**

Different operating models exist on motorways and major 'A' roads, with some MSAs directly owning and controlling the chargepoints on their site, while others have adopted a landlord-tenant approach. This means that some motorway service areas effectively rent space to a chargepoint operator who then manage charging on their site independent from the MSA. Efforts to upgrade the network, in line with accessible standards, can be hampered by a lack of clarity on responsibilities and accountabilities between the different parties.



## Space, planning and energy considerations

Where the power supply enters a site can restrict the location of electric vehicle charging within a service area. This can mean the location of chargers isn't the most suitable for disabled users.

Whilst rare, new MSA sites have a better opportunity to plan for this and factor in the needs of disabled users from the start rather than having to retrospectively make adaptations to existing infrastructure.

An existing MSA must work within the limitations of the site they have. Simply expanding is not always a viable option and the neighbouring environmental impact must be taken into account.

*"At Roadchef, we are committed to ensuring that the transition to electric vehicles is inclusive and accessible for all road users. We are working closely with our charging partners to integrate accessibility features into future EV charging installations across our motorway service areas, from improved physical access at charging bays to clearer signage and wayfinding. We recognise that a consistent, nationwide approach, supported by a stronger regulatory framework, could help accelerate progress and give customers greater confidence. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with government, industry, and advocacy groups to ensure that no driver is left behind in the UK's EV journey."*

Paul Comer, Director of EV Implementation, Roadchef

*"As the leading provider of ultra-rapid EV charging points across the UK motorway network, Moto has ensured 16% of its 589 high-power EV charging bays are specifically classed as accessible. Efforts include placing bays as close as possible to amenity buildings and providing safe pathways. We are also trialling signage to keep accessibility bays as available as possible. Moto supports a clearer regulatory framework for accessibility in EV charging, prioritising future installations while recognising retrofitting limitations.."*

Moto



## Standards framework

Many of the difficulties faced by disabled users are addressed in the PAS 1899:2022 standard which provides technical guidelines on accessible chargepoints including placement, information provision and usability.

Although not a regulatory requirement, chargepoint operators are encouraged to adopt the standard as best practice. A compliant chargepoint has the benefit of improving the experience for all users.

The chargepoint sector has struggled to apply the PAS 1899:2022 standard in practice - in part because of a lack of understanding and awareness but also because of difficulties in sourcing devices. The international nature of manufacture has meant that chargepoints have been designed to meet other markets' requirements and chargepoint operators say securing chargepoint devices that meet the standards has not always been possible.

With no mandatory requirement to implement accessible charging it can be difficult for providers to build business cases that support change.

While providers tell us they try to design in line with the standards, our work to date suggests that there are currently no audited and approved chargepoints anywhere on England's motorways and major 'A' roads.





**Achieving better  
outcomes**

# Calls for action from other organisations

To date the market has failed to adequately provide accessible chargepoints. If this lack of EV charging provision is not addressed, a growing cohort of disabled EV motorists will continue to feel marginalised by the barriers they face. Yet, this issue is not new and has been highlighted previously by a number of oversight bodies and advocacy groups.

*“The sharp increase in public chargepoints expected over the rest of the decade needs to include a greater focus on where the chargepoints are located and how accessible they are.”*

*“Should these issues remain unresolved during the continued growth of the chargepoint installations in coming years, large portions of the future network could be inaccessible to drivers with disabilities.”*

National Audit Office Report: Public chargepoints for Electric Vehicles, 2024

*“It is clearly unacceptable that it has been possible to build EV charging infrastructure without accessibility.”*

Baroness Grey-Thompson, All-Party Parliamentary Group meeting for electric vehicles, 2024

*“The Department for Transport should set out the outcome of its review of the PAS 1899 standard and explain what actions it is taking to ensure that public chargepoint accessibility is improved. It should also assess whether mandating compliance with accessibility standards is necessary to ensure equitable access for disabled people.”*

Transport Select Committee report, Access Denied: Rights Versus Reality in Disabled People's Access to Transport, March 2025



*"We are risking baking a serious injustice into the fabric of a major part of our national infrastructure. The needs of disabled drivers are being ignored and they have been left behind in the rollout of public chargepoints."*

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Chair of the UK Public Accounts Committee, report on the delivery of public chargepoints for electric vehicles, March 2025

*"If we don't prioritise accessibility now, we're locking millions of people out of electric driving for years, possibly even decades.... Without it, we risk facing costly and avoidable retrofits down the line."*

Vicky Edmonds, Chief Executive of EVA England, June 2025

*"DMUK is working hard to shine a spotlight on this issue. From research we have carried out, we know that 40 per cent of our members live in a dwelling that doesn't allow for a home charger."*

Graham Footer, CEO, Disabled Motoring UK March 2025

*"Recharge UK is calling for Government to mandate that all public charging sites, where feasible, must have accessible charging mandated, as we believe electric vehicles are for everyone." "PAS 1899 acts as a great tool for chargepoint operators and landowners... but without a mandate, adoption is inconsistent."*

Matthew Adams, Transport Policy Manager at REA, (Association for Renewable Energy and Clean Technology), on behalf of Recharge UK, 2023

*"It is critical that we recognise the reality of challenges presented when it comes to the delivery of safe and accessible charging infrastructure... Mandatory standards must now be introduced to ensure nobody is left behind."*

Kate Tyrrell, CEO of ChargeSafe, All-Party Parliamentary Group EV meeting, 2024

# What needs to happen

In an effort to help drive progress and improve outcomes, we have identified the following areas where a different approach by chargepoint providers, service operators and government, could help improve the situation for those users who currently face barriers when charging.



## **Urgent focus on delivering a network of accessible electric vehicle charging infrastructure**

There is a critical need to act now to deliver accessible chargepoints across the motorway and major 'A' road network with provision that meets both current and future demand. We will be asking Government and industry to prioritise accessibility in the chargepoint rollout through:

- allocation of resources
- targets as part of the wider chargepoint rollout.

CPOs

Government

Service operators

Chargepoint manufacturers

National Highways

## Explore the need for regulation to secure better outcomes for disabled drivers

There is a significant risk that the market will continue to fail to meet the needs of disabled motorists without a mandatory framework to drive change and track progress. We believe that the standard should be made mandatory as soon as possible, but if the Government chooses not to do this it should set out a clear timeline and targets for the deployment of accessible chargepoints, including trigger points for mandatory action if progress is not made. Requiring every service area on the motorway and major 'A' road network to provide a minimum number of fully accessible chargepoints should be considered.

Government

## Ensure the accessible EV charging standards fully meet disabled users' needs and are straightforward for commercial providers to interpret and implement

The PAS 1899:2022 review, with the participation of the charging industry, service operators, disabled users, charities and others, is welcome. Following the review, evaluating the extent to which changes are delivering the intended outcomes for users is essential.

Provisions should be made for ongoing assessment and continued co-design to ensure sustained effectiveness and responsiveness. In addition, a more holistic consideration of disabled users' needs will be necessary to sufficiently address the range of issues for charging at sites on the SRN – such as on-site assistance and routes for safely walking or wheeling when the chargepoint is a distance away from the services' facilities.

CPOs

Government

Service operators

Chargepoint manufacturers

National Highways

## Ensure outcomes are appropriately monitored

Monitoring should follow any introduction of regulation with a focus on compliance, specifically the number, reliability and location of compliant accessible chargepoints available on motorways and major 'A' roads. We ask the Government to:

- Start systematic reporting of the provision of available accessible chargepoints for compliance purposes – mandatory reporting would be one possible way of achieving this to ensure progress can be sustained and tracked.
- Make this easily accessible to ensure that disabled users can make use of it in journey planning.

Government

## Address immediate gaps in the accessibility of existing EV chargepoints

To improve usability for disabled motorists as quickly as possible until a fully accessible network can be delivered. Service operators should consider clear, consistent short-term mitigations, such as: staff are trained to provide support, ensuring that assistance is consistently available when needed and targeted operational adaptations, for example, measures to clearly signal broken chargepoints.

CPOs

Service operators

Chargepoint manufacturers

National Highways

# Driving progress

Achieving change will require doing things differently. Fragmented efforts have not so far managed to produce the outcomes users need.

Making the charging infrastructure more accessible will not just improve the experience for neurodivergent, disabled and older users but will benefit all electric vehicle motorists. It will help drive trust and confidence in using the electric vehicle charging network across England's motorways and major 'A' roads.

We'll be talking to Government about its plans, criteria for success and the role regulation could play in a longer term solution as well as chargepoint providers about immediate improvements to drive improved outcomes for users.

Meaningful progress can best be made with collaboration across the sector - Government, disability charities and advocacy groups, motorway service operators, chargepoint operators and manufacturers - and there is a keen sense that everyone wants to work together to solve these problems.

*"Without collaboration from users, policy-makers and manufacturers, the execution and practical take up is falling short of expectations in accessibility. This can have a huge impact on users and those considering switching to Electric Vehicles. Futureproofing infrastructure of the UK's roads is imperative to avoid barriers being created and getting this right a real opportunity to make positive change, as well as a benchmark for what good looks like. The report provides a welcome insight into what needs to be considered."*

Tanvi Vyas MBE



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Transport Focus is the operating name of the Passengers' Council

### Transport Focus

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We protect the interests and champion the needs of all transport users today and ensure they're at the centre of tomorrow's policy decisions and future investment.