



Motorway services: improving the visitor experience for disabled people

September 2025

Introduction

Our Motorway Services User Survey tells us that disabled users of motorway services are generally satisfied with their visit, with similar satisfaction levels as non-disabled people. But they are less likely to rate the toilets and car park layout as good and when specifically asked whether their impairment was catered for well, two thirds agree but a third disagree. This leaves room for improvement.

We also know that disabled people on average make 25 per cent fewer journeys than non-disabled people¹. Improving the visitor experience for disabled people at Motorway Service Areas (MSAs) could increase confidence in making journeys, unlocking wider opportunities such as access to work, healthcare, social interactions, and play a role in reducing the transport accessibility gap.

We have worked to understand more about the experience for disabled people at MSAs and to identify areas for improvement.

What can operators do?

We analysed data from our Motorway Services User Survey across 2022 and 2023 to understand what operators could do to make things better for disabled visitors. Grouping the findings together we developed five overarching recommendations.

1. Maintain existing facilities to a high standard

- ✓ Keep all areas clean and free of litter.
- ✓ Maintain and keep toilets clean, ensuring all surfaces are dry and hygienic. Make them easy for people to use, for example offer a facility to call staff to unlock accessible toilets rather than having to look for them or consider how they can be left unlocked altogether.

2. Make sure it's safe and easy to move around

- ✓ Ensure signage and wayfinding inside and outside is clear and accurate and potential trip hazards are minimised.
- ✓ Provide handrails, and where stairs are unavoidable, make them high contrast (and maintain to a good standard).
- ✓ Ensure queues for food and drink outlets are well managed and do not block the route through the building.

¹ [Department for Transport, National Travel Survey, 2023](#)

3. Improve the sensory environment inside the building

- ✓ Minimise echoing and excessive background noise.
- ✓ Consider ways to mitigate noise from items like hand-driers and coffee machines where possible.
- ✓ Minimise strong smells and high temperatures.
- ✓ Maximise natural light where possible.
- ✓ Provide quieter, calmer areas for those that need it.

4. Make the most of staff and their great potential to improve the visitor experience

- ✓ All customer-facing staff should be aware and understanding of the wide variety of impairments and conditions that visitors may have, both visible and non-visible.
- ✓ Staff should also be aware of the impact they can have, for better or worse, including simply their presence and body language. Training should emphasise the importance of simple friendliness and proactive alertness to potential customer needs.

5. New builds and refurbishments should have accessibility built in throughout the design

- ✓ This should encompass both the more obvious features like accessible toilets/changing places, step-free access and parking, as well as providing for hazard-free movement around the space, and consideration for the ambience and needs of neurodivergent visitors and staff.
- ✓ New builds and refurbishments should be co-designed with disabled people, access consultants and representative groups.

The findings in more detail

The general pattern of satisfaction among MSA users highlights:

- User satisfaction with the experience of visiting an MSA has increased over time. When we started measuring satisfaction with motorway services, scores for some individual sites were commonly as low as 62 per cent, but the trend has been on the up ever since. This pattern is seen for all users including disabled users as a cohort.
- Overall, 92 per cent of disabled users were satisfied with their visit compared with 93 per cent of non-disabled users. There is a difference in how satisfied they were – 64 per cent of non-disabled users were very satisfied, compared with 59 per cent of disabled users.
- For many measures and attributes, there is no difference in perceptions between disabled and non-disabled users. Examples of these are the Net Promoter Score (where people rate their likelihood to recommend on a score from 0-10), 'impression of the inside of the building' and 'quality of food and drink consumed on site.'
- On some other factors satisfaction for disabled visitors is lower than for non-disabled visitors. These include 'layout of the parking area', 'the toilets overall' and to a lesser extent 'overall cleanliness' and 'range of facilities available'.

The importance of staff

Many disabled users talked about how motorway services staff made their experience better. Disabled users were more likely to agree that they were made to feel valued – which is generally attributed to staff. Their friendliness and proactivity were particularly noticed.

*"I use a walking stick and cannot carry a tray. **Before asking for help a member of staff said go find a table and I'll bring this over.** She then asked if there was anything else I needed."*

Mobility and sensory impairment

*"The staff were very friendly **which made me feel comfortable when I was anxious.**"*

Learning/cognitive/mental health conditions

"My husband has Parkinson's and the staff were very patient and kind."

*Mobility, sensory and learning/
cognitive/mental health
conditions*

There are often intersections between different types of disability and other factors

Disabled motorway service users are not one uniform group. It is not always the case that the disability overrides other characteristics of the person or the journey. A wheelchair user may also be a mother using baby change facilities or a person with a visual impairment may want access to a prayer room. Similarly, the same person, disabled or not, will have different requirements on different days depending on where they are going and who they are travelling with. Ultimately, making everything easy to use and accessible for disabled people will have a positive effect for all users.

Bringing the industry together

We held a workshop in January 2025 to share these learnings and recommendations. We heard from Helen Dolphin MBE, an accessibility expert with lived experience, and Jean Hewitt, an inclusive environments technical lead. The workshop brought together people from across the industry who can make a difference to disabled users' experience of MSAs.

Some clear themes emerged in the discussions:

- the importance of staff always being available to help
- ease of accessing the building
- access to outdoor space
- clear signage and good layouts
- availability of certain items (for example dietary requirements)
- access to and maintenance of accessible toilets.

Operator pledges

Transport Focus wanted to use the findings from our survey and workshop and turn them into real action that would make a difference for disabled users. We're pleased to share that all operators that attended the event, Moto, Roadchef, Welcome Break, Extra and Getlink Customs Services have all signed up to our accessibility pledge.

1. Enhanced staff training

Ensuring all staff have undertaken disability awareness training and understand their vital role in improving the experience for all disabled customers. Introduce measurements to monitor the effectiveness of the training.

2. Create an industry working group

To share best practice and agree accessibility standards to be implemented across all Motorway Service Areas so customers can be confident they will receive a consistently good service. Initial focus areas should include accessible toilets, wayfinding and signage, quiet spaces and facilitating better journey planning information.

3. Greater engagement with disabled users

To consult and co-design with disabled users and representative groups prior to every new build or site refurbishment. Host a site audit with disabled users and senior executives to identify issues and deepen understanding of the experience for disabled visitors. Each operator to host one site audit per year.

4. To reconvene with Transport Focus in May 2026 to report on progress and next steps

Transport Focus is pleased by the industry's appetite to work together to improve the visitor experience for disabled people at Motorway Service Areas.

Contact Transport Focus

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