Climate and disability resource for local authority transport planning

A resource to support local authorities to create sustainable transport policy and projects that are equitable for Disabled people

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This document is part of a set of local authority resources developed by Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership's Climate and Disability project and the Sensing Climate research project. The Climate and Disability programme is part of the Community Climate Action Project, coordinated by Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership and funded by the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund.

The resources are designed to support local authorities to understand the impact that climate and nature projects can have on their local communities of Disabled people. The resources feature recommended actions that can be taken to make projects inclusive and just for Disabled people. As well as department-specific resources, there are also supplementary resources on co-production and inclusive engagement. We welcome any local authority to use the resources to support their work.

Introduction

For many Disabled people, transport is a key issue in shaping community and societal participation and engagement. Transport policy plays an important role in influencing who can access safe mobility, when and how.

There are many examples of transport changes made for sustainability purposes that have improved journeys for some Disabled people. Unfortunately, there are also many cases where changes have created additional barriers for Disabled people. These barriers can build distrust within the community, and create tensions between Disabled people and those advocating for the green agenda.

We appreciate that transport is a vast, complex and nuanced arena, where changes are reliant on multiple actors and budgets, and often involve projects that councils have been working hard to deliver for decades. This inevitably means that some changes are (or are perceived) as being beyond council control.

This resource highlights several issues that are not in council control. Their inclusion here is not intended to put undue onus on council transport departments but to ensure that council workers are aware of these issues, because they inevitably impact on opportunities for Disabled people to interact with projects that are within the council's control, and they have important knock-on-effects concerning the accessibility of local transport for the Disabled community. Relevant issues covered later in this document include, for example: reliable, affordable and safe public transport; ensuring taxi drivers do not pass on costs.

Despite such challenges, we appreciate that many council officers do try to ensure projects are accessible, and we hope this guide will constructively support this ambition by offering insights from disability and climate justice perspectives.

While many Disabled people are concerned about climate change and wish to make more sustainable choices, there are a large number of disabling barriers that hinder the use of public transport, as well as other greener transport options. Efforts to decarbonise the transport system could address these barriers, provided the needs and priorities of Disabled people are taken into account from the outset.

Disabled people travel by a diverse range of modes of transport. UK

Government statistics from 2025 found that Disabled adults made over 60% of all trips by car in 2023, a similar statistic to non-disabled people, but that a higher proportion of their total trips were as car passengers than non-disabled people (20% compared with 12%). Meanwhile, 28% of Disabled adults live in households which don't have access to a car, compared with 15% of non-disabled adults. On average Disabled adults took a similar proportion of their trips by bus (5%) to non-disabled adults (4%). 6% of their trips were made by other modes of transport.

Lack of access means that the average number of trips made by Disabled adults in England is 25% lower than the average number of trips made by non-disabled adults. Improving the accessibility of sustainable transport offerings would encourage more Disabled people to use them and enable Disabled people to travel more, supporting their independence, and driving up the number of sustainable journeys made. This is just one example of how decarbonisation and accessibility can support one another synergistically, as both represent opportunities to change from the current situation.

Areas of climate and health-related transport policy that risk making mobility harder for Disabled people include:

- **Clean Air Zones (CAZ) and other traffic reduction schemes without appropriate exemptions or reliable alternatives –** while these schemes are positive for respiratory health, they need to be accompanied by: appropriate exemptions for blue badge holders and for personal assistants/caregivers who provide mobility support(1); reliable, affordable and safe public transport and community transport options; financial support to replace older more polluting vehicles (while recognising the barriers to using electric vehicles, discussed below); and efforts to ensure that

(1) The design of appropriate exemptions could be informed by traffic reduction schemes introduced elsewhere e.g. while London's Ultra Low Emission Zone created many challenges for Disabled people, the London congestion charge was more carefully designed. In the latter, all blue badge holders can register for an exemption and, on any given day, can register up to two cars to be exempt (i.e. their own and the car of a personal assistant who might be helping them to access work/health care appointments etc. that day).

taxi drivers do not pass the extra costs of new charges onto passengers. When clean air zones are designed and implemented, not only must care be taken to ensure that traffic is not diverted to alternative areas of the city where communities are already disproportionately exposed to unsafe levels of pollution, but best practice would entail going further to provide transparency on pollution levels after the CAZ has taken effect, particularly for those who spend more time at home due to experiences of disability.

- **Electrification of transport –** the costs of electric vehicles remain prohibitive for many Disabled people, and there are a number of accessibility issues, both with the design of electric vehicles themselves and with the UK's electric vehicle charging network. These issues include the weight of the cables, the lack of space to manoeuvre within parking bays, the presence of obstacles such as kerbs and raised plinths, poor usability of controls, lack of onsite assistance, and no government-led targets for increasing the availability of accessible charging bays.

- **Liveable streets and active travel –** The increasing trend towards liveable streets and neighbourhoods, including the introduction of measures that prioritise walking, cycling, and reduced car dominance, can create challenges for Disabled people who rely on car travel to access city centres. Where accessible parking bays are removed to create space for cycle lanes, these issues are further compounded. While cycle lanes promote healthy forms of mobility, they also create mobility barriers for Disabled people when: they are not wide enough for adapted cycles; accessible bike parking close to buildings is not provided; and financial support is not available to subsidise the extra cost of adapted cycles (compared to standard bicycles). New schemes also need to ensure accessible pavements with regular drop kerbs (with a safe drop gradient), and to minimise safety risks introduced by floating bus stops and shared spaces.

- **Introduction of dockless bike and e-scooter schemes –** these schemes are problematic when not accompanied by designated off-pavement parking schemes, and when people are allowed to leave the bikes/e-scooters in the middle of pavements. Doing so creates trip hazards for long cane, stick, wheelchair and scooter users. The speed at which users move and the lack of a warning sound is also problematic for blind and partially sighted people, especially when compounded with the wider challenges of navigating shared spaces.

- **Climate resilient public transport –** in addition to addressing the range of barriers that are currently experienced by Disabled people in using public transport, it is important to mitigate new barriers experienced as the climate changes. For example, ensuring air conditioning on buses and trains, shelter from the rain, wind and heat when waiting for buses/trains, contingency planning to support Disabled people to get home safely when roads or rail tracks are flooded, and ensuring reliable access to transport to reach community rest centres/emergency hubs (be it in an acute weather event or to access community cool and warm spaces).


Credit: Evoke Pictures

Introducing Taylor

Taylor is an autistic ambulatory wheelchair user who finds the rattle, busyness and unreliability of buses difficult, such that they only feel comfortable travelling with their brother, who is also a wheelchair user. They cannot travel together on buses as there's only space for up to one wheelchair user on each bus, and their brother has been struggling to afford the costs of driving his wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) since a clean air zone was introduced, as it did not include blue badge exemptions. His WAV is diesel and there is not a suitable electric vehicle that meets his needs (or budget). The recent pedestrianisation of key parts of the city centre has added extra challenges as there are only two accessible parking bays which do not meet the levels of need across the city. Taylor and their brother looked into adapted cycles to see if the network of newly introduced cycle lanes could offer a way into town but the cost was prohibitive and the cycle lanes are too narrow in places. Taylor has had to give up their part time job in the city centre as a result and is feeling increasingly isolated.

(Taylor is a fictional composite character taken from the real lived experiences of multiple Disabled people.)



Key questions for planning

- **Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), local government has a legal requirement to show 'due regard' for how their transport plans could affect Disabled people, and some decision-makers conduct Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIA) to support this process. The value of EqIAs would be strengthened by ensuring they are carried out and/or informed by people with varied forms of lived experience of disability to fully understand the nuances of how proposed schemes will impact on the diverse needs and priorities of local Disabled people. To capture these insights and show 'due regard' with necessary rigour, have you:**
    - Considered impairment-specific effects? E.g. extra sensitivity to overheated public transport amongst people with impaired thermoregulation or high sensitivity to temperature extremes, a reliance on personal vehicles for people with energy limiting conditions and other mobility impairments, difficulties in navigating complex online systems for booking travel or passenger assistance when learning disabled etc.
    - Taken intersectionality into account? E.g. the financial barriers to upgrading to cleaner vehicles or affording adapted cycles when already experiencing transport poverty, the risks of stigma and abuse on public transport when experiencing multiple forms of marginalisation etc.
    - Worked with a pan-impairment Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) to review and feed into the EqIA to identify potential gaps?
    - Enabled their organisations to feed in from the perspective of communities who may not specifically identify as disabled but who often experience high levels of impairment or illness? E.g. people who are homeless, van dwellers, refugees and asylum seekers?
    - Set out tangible actions to address any identified gaps in the plans?

- **Are you able to work with a Disabled people's organisation?**
  - Transport plans that have not been consulted on adequately with Disabled people can create new barriers and instigate significant public backlash. Commissioning a DPO to audit or review plans for new transport projects can facilitate suggestions that mitigate against new barriers, significantly reduce costs that arise from retrofitting a scheme for accessibility after it has already been introduced, and increase public buy-in toward projects.
  - Could you involve DPO representatives within an equalities partnership to embed such insights and EqIA processes into your long-term transport planning?

- **If you are introducing plans to reduce car travel (e.g. via liveable neighbourhood schemes, clean air zones etc.), have you:**
  - Included appropriate exemptions for people who cannot use public transport or active travel e.g. retention of sufficient accessible parking bays, and exemptions for blue badge holders, vehicles with a disabled tax class, caregivers (including guardians of Disabled children) and personal assistants?
  - Ensured provision of reliable, accessible and comprehensive public transport from and within the areas where car travel is being reduced, where there is scope for influence? Where there isn't scope for influence, can you improve community transport offerings? Multiple dimensions of access need to be considered, from physical presence to the timing of provision and use of concessions, the sensory environments on and whilst waiting for public transport, appropriate reporting mechanisms when issues are encountered, provision of accessible public toilets and Changing Place facilities at transport hubs, and ensuring the carriage of assistance dogs etc.
  - When bus or train services are run by multiple private operators for-profit, it can be difficult for local authorities to address barriers caused by fragmented, uncoordinated,

unreliable or overpriced services, or to use income from profitable routes to subsidise less-profitable routes that are nonetheless still essential for some Disabled people. We appreciate these situations put councils in a difficult situation. Where there is scope and when options fall under the council's control, can you explore alternatives such as franchising options? When contracts are awarded, can accessibility, reliability and accountability to Disabled people be included as key considerations?

- When Disabled people cannot use public transport and have no access to private transport, they are often reliant on taxis. Yet taxi services do not always have the accessible vehicles or training required to provide an adequate service to Disabled people. The cost of taxis can also be prohibitive for Disabled people, particularly given the additional costs of being Disabled and the disproportionate levels of poverty in the community. When taxi firms have to invest to meet the costs of new car reduction schemes (e.g. in response to the introduction of clean air zones or congestion charges), it would be helpful to explore ways of preventing these costs from being passed onto Disabled taxi users who are trying to access key services. For example, can community transport services be improved to address key gaps in service provision for Disabled people? Can local taxi services be engaged with to encourage them to support accessible and affordable offerings?

- **If you are introducing plans to enhance active travel, have you:**
  - Ensured that cycle ways do not create extra barriers for Disabled people e.g. barriers created by the introduction of shared spaces or floating bus stops?
  - Ensured that cycle ways are step-free, wide and smooth enough to support people using adapted cycles (including barriers and gates), with accessible bike parking provided close to buildings for people who do not have strength to lift their bikes or who have adapted bikes and trikes?
  - Addressed barriers created by e-scooter use e.g. by ensuring

e-scooter parking spaces are off the pavement in designated parking docks, including sound on e-scooters so people can hear them coming, and educating people to park their e-scooters in a way that does not create a trip hazard?

- Where funding can be accessed, addressed the extra costs of adapted cycles e.g. via subsidising purchase costs or creating easy-to-use affordable hire schemes?

- **If you are introducing new charging points for electric vehicles, have you:**
  - Included accessible charging bays, recognising current issues with the weight of the cables, the lack of space to manoeuvre within parking bays, the presence of obstacles such as kerbs and raised plinths, poor usability of controls, and lack of onsite assistance? (The Mobility Foundation's report on Accessible Electric Vehicle Charging can be referred to for further detail on such issues.)
  - Improved access to charging points for people who use electric wheelchairs and mobility scooters (e.g. at mobility hubs, train or bus stations) so that people who cannot afford or access electric vehicles can still get out, around and home safely?



Credit: Evoke Pictures

Case studies

Bristol's Red Route Rapid transport service: Bristol's red route is an ambitious public transport plan to create a new north-to-south corridor in the city, with initial upgrades focused on bus priority measures to improve journey times. A DPO, WECIL (West of England Centre for Inclusive Living), was commissioned to make sure Disabled people's voices were heard in consultation. WECIL reported the bus scheme as being an example of a project that successfully engaged with accessibility considerations from the start. There was an audit of the five key areas and current infrastructure, and support with mapping proposed plans. Engaging a DPO from the start ensured Disabled people's voices could be heard.

Even in a good practice example, however, there is room for improvement; in this case, had the Council highlighted more widely that they had engaged with WECIL it might have helped to alleviate community fears that Disabled people had not been listened to in its design.

East Bristol Liveable Neighbourhoods scheme: Originally introduced as a pilot, this scheme aimed to reduce accidents, reduce car use and pollution in areas of East Bristol, and increase wheeling, walking and cycling. Although an EqIA was conducted prior to rolling out the pilot, the scheme was implemented without a full accessibility audit and without working with a DPO.

The pilot scheme has created considerable barriers for local Disabled people in accessing essential services, which were exacerbated by the pilot scheme not putting in temporary access measures, such as ramps. Such oversights have adversely affected the success of the pilot scheme to date, increasing the price, contributing to bad press, and instigating negative feedback from large parts of the community.

These issues could have been addressed through meaningful coproduction with local Disabled people from the outset and a ringfenced budget to implement accessibility features.

Areas to prioritise

These priorities are taken from Bristol's community climate action plan by and for Disabled people, which was co-produced with the local community. The full plan includes actions that offer more detail about each priority. We understand that many of the priorities rely on action from actors beyond councils, but include them to ensure that councils have these priorities in mind and consider how they interact with schemes that are within their control.

- Ensure all new transport projects are accessible.
- Make public transport more accessible.
- Ensure Disabled people can travel more via walking and wheelchair by improving pavements and tackling pavement parking.
- Ensure that Disabled people who need to drive can still do so, with financial support to drive in a way that minimises damage to the planet.
- Reduce reliance on driving by opening (and maintaining) more accessible public toilets and Changing Spaces across the city.
- Ensure that Disabled people can access affordable hire or purchase of mobility equipment.
- Ensure that Disabled people who would like to cycle can have an accessible experience.
- Work with taxi providers to increase access to affordable taxis that meet the needs of Disabled people.

Read the full list of actions to consider around transport in Bristol's community climate action plan by and for Disabled people.

Further resources

- C40 Cities 'Mainstreaming disability inclusion through mobility action in cities' Policy paper: https://c40.my.salesforce.com/sfc/p/#36000001Enhz/a/Hp000000GZBI/1SQ1jA5Y7K.qIzeeconuWD_MwCG1oXXbtFW13XTqte8
- Transport Focus 'Plugging the gap – the need to improve the EV charging experience for disabled drivers': https://d3cez36w5wymxj.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/24232639/Plugging-the-gap-the-need-to-improve-the-EV-charging-experience-for-disabled-drivers.pdf
- Energy Saving Trust and Motability Foundation 'EV design and disability inclusion' report: https://www.motabilityfoundation.org.uk/media/dg0bgzyd/est0062-motability-report-v15.pdf
- Community Climate Action, 'Realising Our Inclusive Transport Vision: A toolkit for communities': https://bristolclimatenature.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Transport-Vision-A-Toolkit-for-Communities-2025-Final.pdf
- House of Commons Transport Committee, 'Access denied: rights versus reality in disabled people's access to transport': https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/47122/documents/244036/default/
- Bristol City Council's Full Council Golden Motion Make Bristol the UK's Most Accessible City: https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=2522
- Campaign for Inclusive Cycling, Wheels to Wellbeing : https://wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk/

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Credit: Wheels for Wellbeing