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On the right track?

Transport experiences of
people who are deaf or
have hearing loss

Formerly
RNID •)))

Introduction

There are 11 million people in the UK with hearing loss; that's one in six of us.¹ But despite this prevalence, our beneficiaries continue to tell us that the transport system often neglects to take their needs into account. So we wanted to find out the extent to which transport in the UK is accessible to people with hearing loss and deafness. We focused on the rail and bus systems², given that these are two of the most popular modes of public transport in the UK.³

Creating accessible transport networks is important, not only because people with hearing loss and deafness are entitled to the same service as everyone else but it also makes business sense. By appealing to those with hearing loss, transport operators can capitalise on the purple pound: the spending power of disabled people and their families which is estimated to be £249 billion in the UK.⁴

Summary of the findings

Overall, our results suggest that there are still issues with accessibility on the bus and rail network. Generally, findings between buses and trains were similar. The only exception was that experiences of using audio-visual (AV) screens on trains, tended to be better than on buses. This was expected since there's stronger legislation on the implementation of AV screens for trains than there is for buses.

Our survey of 291 people with hearing loss found that:

- **Good quality visual real-time information is still lacking.** For example only 37% of respondents said that buses visually announce the next stop.
- Worryingly, this absence of real-time information can create potentially dangerous situations: nearly a third (31%) of people we asked said that, due to a lack of visual information, there'd been an **emergency situation** on a train and they did not know what to do.
- There is a **willingness of staff on buses and trains to help** people with hearing loss but **deaf awareness skills amongst staff could be improved.**
- **Vehicle and station design could be improved to enhance accessibility.** Background noise is the most problematic aspect of navigating a station or bus, followed by glass screens at tickets desks.

¹ Action on Hearing Loss (2015), Hearing Matters Report

² By bus we mean local bus services, not coach travel. By rail services we mean all services except underground, metro, light rail, or tram systems.

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/661933/tsqb-2017-report-summaries.pdf

⁴ The Department for Work and Pensions (2016) [The spending power of disabled people and their families in 2014/15, and changes since 2012/13](#)

Findings

1. General Transport use

1.1 Frequency of transport use

Driving is by far the most popular everyday mode of transport for our respondents, as shown in table 1, with eight in 10 (80%) using the car daily or weekly. Bus and train travel are the next most popular modes, with half (50%) of respondents using the bus daily or weekly and a fifth (21%) using the train over the same time period.

Table 1: On average, how often do you use the following modes of transport?

Mode of transport	Daily or weekly	Monthly	Every few months or yearly	Never
Car or motorbike	80%	3%	5%	11%
Bus	50%	19%	25%	5%
Train	21%	25%	47%	6%
Underground / metro / light rail / tram	16%	12%	49%	22%
Cycle	10%	5%	10%	76%
Taxi or Private Hire Vehicle	6%	10%	63%	21%
Ferry	1%	0%	43%	55%
Coach	0%	2%	42%	56%
Plane	0%	0%	69%	31%

1.2 Difficulty travelling across the transport network

The train network, compared to other modes of transport, proves more difficult for our respondents, as table 2 demonstrates. Over eight in 10 (81%) participants said they have some or a lot of difficulty on trains. Air travel is also problematic: over half (56%) of respondents said they have difficulty going by plane.

"Travel by airline is especially difficult because there is no loop system, and no visual system either at the airport or on board the plane." Survey respondent

The mode of transport which presents the least difficulty, by far, is the car or motorbike. Making public transport harder to use than the car does not encourage people with hearing loss to use the public transport system. This is a challenge for transport operators who want to encourage people to use their services.

Table 2: Overall, does your deafness or hearing loss present any difficulties for you when using the following modes of transport?

Mode of transport	A lot of difficulty	Some difficulty	No difficulty
Train	18%	63%	19%
Plane	25%	56%	20%
Underground / metro / light rail / tram	14%	51%	35%
Bus	12%	50%	39%
Taxi or Private Hire Vehicle	6%	53%	40%
Ferry	12%	48%	41%
Coach	11%	46%	44%
Cycle	15%	29%	56%
Car or motorbike	4%	25%	72%

2. Buses and trains

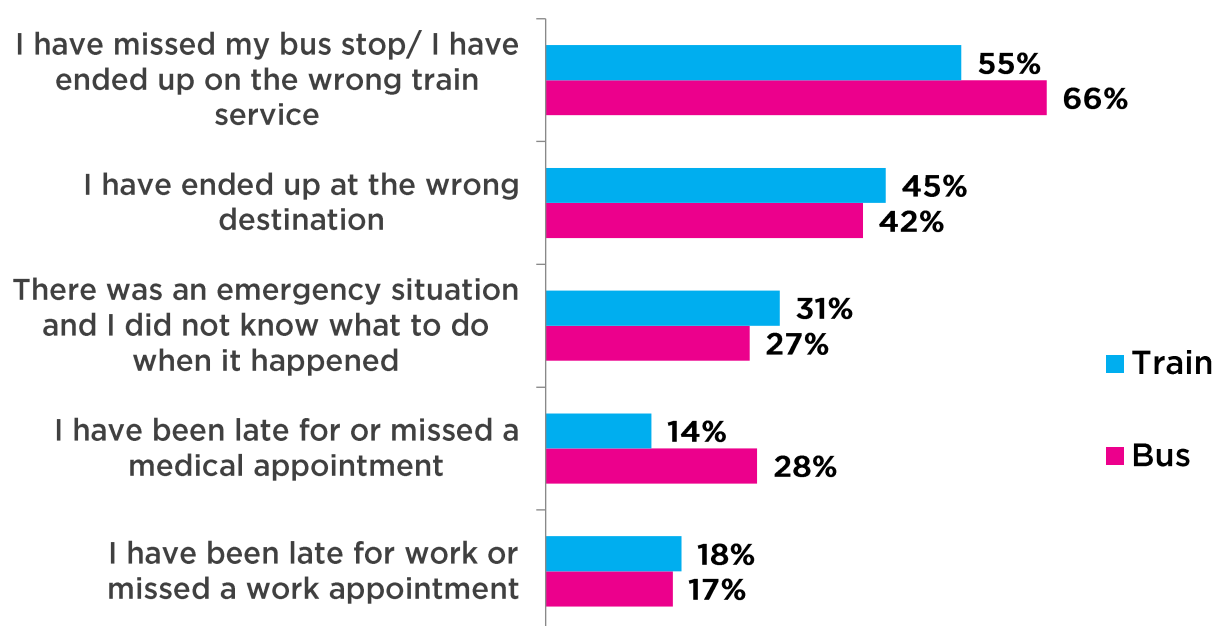
2.1 Visual information

Visual information at every point in the journey is crucial for someone with hearing loss. As can be seen in figure 1 overleaf, **failure to provide this means that travelling by bus or train for someone with hearing loss can be both disruptive and, in an emergency situation, potentially dangerous.** Two-thirds (66%) of respondents have missed their bus stop through lack of visual information and nearly a third (31%) of respondents said that during an emergency situation on a train, they didn't know what to do when it happened.

"I was on a train that had stopped due to an emergency but due to being unable to hear I was unaware of what had happened and that we were being asked to evacuate the train" Survey respondent

Not only are passengers inconvenienced by a shortage of visual information; so are the services and workplaces that passengers are travelling to. Over a quarter (28%) of bus users in the survey said that lack of visual information had meant they'd been **late for or missed a medical appointment**. Nearly a fifth (18%) of respondents have been **late for work or missed a work appointment** due to the train lacking visual information.

Figure 1: Have you experienced any of the following due to a lack of visual information being available on a bus/train journey?



2.1.1 Pre-journey information

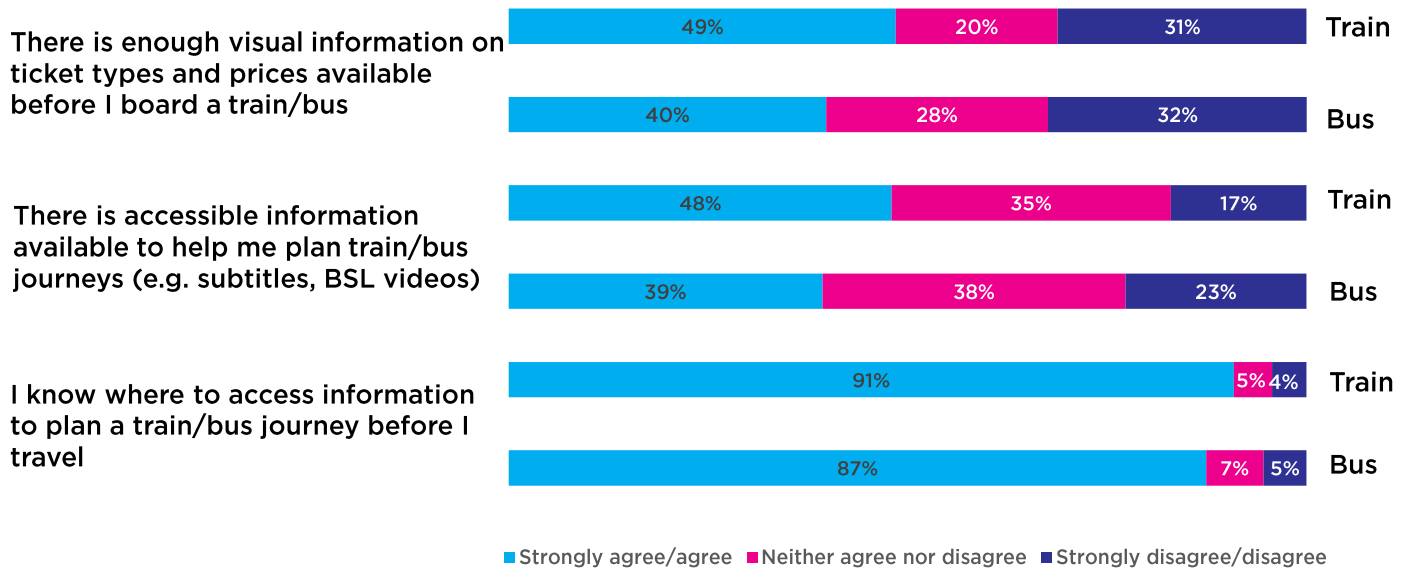
Figure 2 shows the amount of visual information available before someone boards a train or bus. Although it's good to see that people are confident in knowing where to find information before they travel⁵, a third say there is not enough visual information about tickets and prices before they board a train or bus.⁶ A fifth of respondents⁷ said that there isn't accessible information available to plan their journey, such as subtitles on videos or content in BSL. Having accessible visual information to plan travel reduces the need for someone with hearing loss to communicate with a member of staff, which can be difficult at a noisy station.

⁵ 91% said they're confident accessing rail information and 87% say the same about bus information.

⁶ 31% say this about the train and 32% about the bus.

⁷ 17% for train journeys and 23% for bus

Figure 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



2.1.2 Audio-Visual Displays

When there are changes to the journey, visual real-time information becomes crucial. That is, information that is given at the time of the event, for example alerting passengers when they're near a station or communicating when there's an alteration to the journey such as a last minute platform change. Currently, the predominant method of providing this visual real-time information, is via audio visual (AV) displays in stations and on buses and trains.

Government legislation now includes the implementation of AV displays on board vehicles. The legislation for buses and trains is different and they are at different stages of the legislative process. Secondary rail legislation was brought into force in 1998 and says that most new trains are required to have AV displays which display delays of more than 10 minutes, diversions from the planned route, and emergency announcements.⁸ The Bus Services Act 2017 creates powers to implement regulations about the provision of AV screens on buses in Britain. However secondary legislation hasn't been enacted and therefore the provision of AV displays isn't mandated. Although the Department for Transport is currently consulting on what form the secondary legislation should take. Our results of the survey reflect the differing stages of these processes and suggest that the legislation has worked. In other words, our respondents found AV provision was better on trains. However, although the rail system looks to be ahead of the bus network in terms of AV displays, our survey highlights that both networks continue to have issues.

⁸ The Rail Vehicle Accessibility (Non-Interoperable Rail System) Regulations 2010

Prevalence of AV screens

As outlined above, the difference in legislation suggests why only 1 out of 10 (10%) respondents reported that working AV displays are rarely available on trains, while a third (32%) said this was the case on buses.

Quality of the information displayed on vehicle AV screens

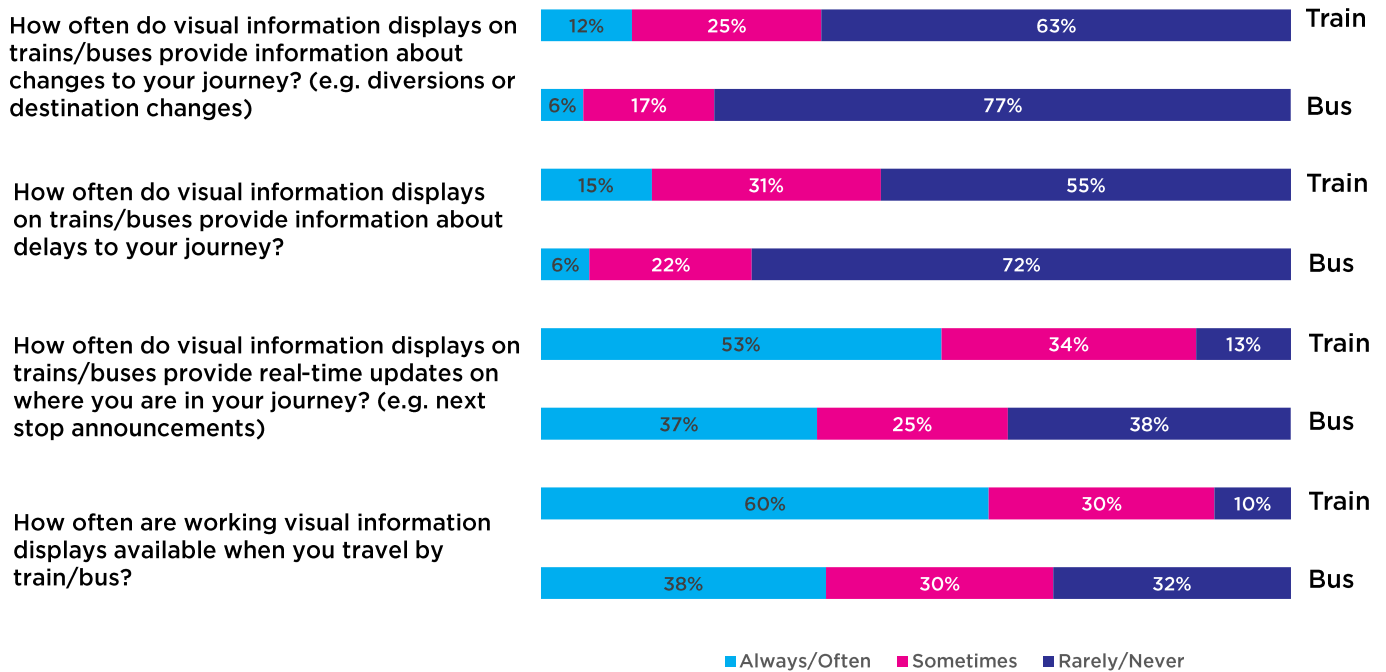
Even if displays are available on trains and buses, our survey results suggest that they aren't displaying **all real-time information, particularly information about changes in the journey**. As can be seen in figure 3, visual information often isn't available to give next stop announcements: just over half of respondents (53%) said that trains provide this and only 37% said the same about buses. This is imperative for people with hearing loss. A missed stop can have a huge impact on a journey, particularly if the stops are far apart.

Worryingly, only 1 in 10 (12%) of respondents said that train visual displays show information about changes in the journey, such as destination changes and only 6% said that buses visually display this information. This is both inconvenient and anxiety inducing.

"I recently caught a train from London to Sandwell. As it stopped at Birmingham New Street it started to make a return journey back to London. I felt a slight sense of panic as I felt the train heading in the wrong direction. There was no visual announcement and as I approached the conductor he made it clear that the train was indeed heading back to London and was not even stopping at Coventry. This meant I had to get off at Milton Keynes and organise alternative trains. I did not arrive home until 11pm that evening and felt confused and frustrated in what had gone wrong with the journey." Survey respondent

As well as unsatisfactory levels of provision, **the information given via AV screens can also be wrong**. For example, respondents gave examples of when screens have displayed the return journey next-stop information, so that they're unsure when the next stop is. As we can see in figure 4, two in five (40%) respondents said that information on the visual display screens has been wrong on trains, and a third (33%) said the same about buses.

Figure 3: Please tell us how often visual information displays are available in the following situations when you travel by train/bus



Location of AV screens

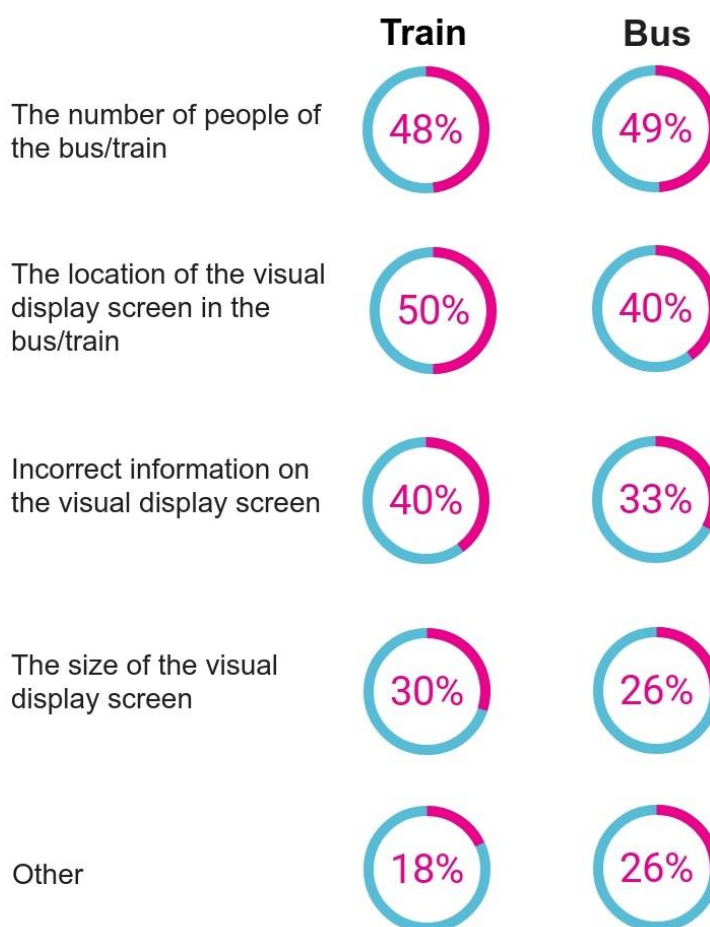
Another issue with AV screens is that **passengers might not always be able to see them**. As figure 4 demonstrates, crowded buses and trains play a large part. Half of our respondents (50%) said the location of screens was an issue on board trains and two-fifths (40%) said the same about buses.

"The train is often so full that all seats and aisle are full with people standing – I cannot always see boards." Survey respondent

It was also highlighted in a survey response that priority seating for older people is not always by the screen. Seven-in-10 (71%) of over-70-year-olds have hearing loss⁹ and so it's important that this is given consideration when designing vehicles.

⁹ Action on Hearing Loss (2015), *Hearing Matters: Deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss in the UK*

Figure 4: Have any of the following affected your ability to use visual display screens where they were available?



If screens are unable to show visual equivalents of audio messages, or if passengers can't see them, then other methods of communicating visually need to be implemented. For example, staff could walk down the vehicle with tabards with key messages. This is particularly applicable in emergencies. Survey respondents also told us about innovative practices which would be very beneficial to people with hearing loss. Lothian Airlink buses, for example, have screens which show tweets from the organisation's feed, which can be helpful for finding out about delays.

2.1.3 Travel apps

One way that passengers can receive real-time information is via travel apps; many of which can give notifications of changes to journeys. Some, like Google maps, can now also alert the user when a stop is approaching. However, although these apps are potentially beneficial, our survey results suggest that **advertising these apps could be more widespread**: only 27% of our survey respondents use bus apps and 25% use train apps. But nine in ten (87%) train users and eight in ten (80%) bus users said that they'd find apps or texts that alert passengers to real-time information useful. Those who currently use apps use a range of them, with Google maps, apps by bus and train operators, City Mapper and National Rail being the most popular.

Although apps do have the potential to fill a gap when on-board technology isn't available, they depend not only on passengers having smart phones but also on mobile signal, which is by no

means ubiquitous in the UK. Indeed, research by Ofcom shows that the UK still only has 46% 4G coverage.¹⁰ Therefore, until technology improves and awareness is more widespread, apps cannot be relied upon to be the sole dispenser of real-time information.

2.2 Staff

Responses to our survey indicate that there is a **willingness of staff on buses and trains to help people with hearing loss but deaf awareness skills could be improved**. Only 8% of respondents said that bus drivers are unwilling to help them when they need it and 5% said that staff on-board trains are unhelpful. Whereas over half (54%) of participants said that poor deaf awareness amongst bus drivers has affected their ability to communicate with them and over four in 10 (44%) participants reported that poor deaf awareness among on-board train staff has affected their ability to communicate with them. Qualitative responses from the survey also indicate that hearing loss and its impact on travel is not understood by staff:

"train and station staff do not show the same awareness when dealing with hearing disabled customers as they do with customers who have other disabilities." Survey respondent

"I think as I can speak people do not believe me when I advise them I cannot hear." Survey respondent

Responses to our survey also suggest that staff availability can be an issue, with two-thirds (66%) saying that there have been a lack of available on-board staff to help them.

"If train journeys go to plan I have no difficulty in travelling by train but if there is a problem (such as delays or having to change trains due to breakdown, adverse weather etc.) I find it very difficult. I cannot hear announcements and staff are usually near catering or in 1st class so I've had to go and find someone to ask what's happening or rely on fellow passengers." Survey respondent

Operators have begun to realise the importance of staff awareness and understanding of disabled passengers' needs. To this end, some have released assistance cards which the passenger with hearing loss can show to a member of staff to communicate what assistance they might need.¹¹ These are welcome additions and we have anecdotal evidence that these are useful for some of our beneficiaries. However, it's important to note that some passengers may not want to carry these or they may not be aware of them. Training must therefore still be implemented so that staff are aware of the issues faced by people with hearing loss, rather than relying on passengers telling them this through the assistance cards.

2.3 Vehicle and station design

The environment of a bus, train, or station can make a huge difference to someone with hearing loss. Figure 5 shows how background noise is the most problematic aspect of navigating a

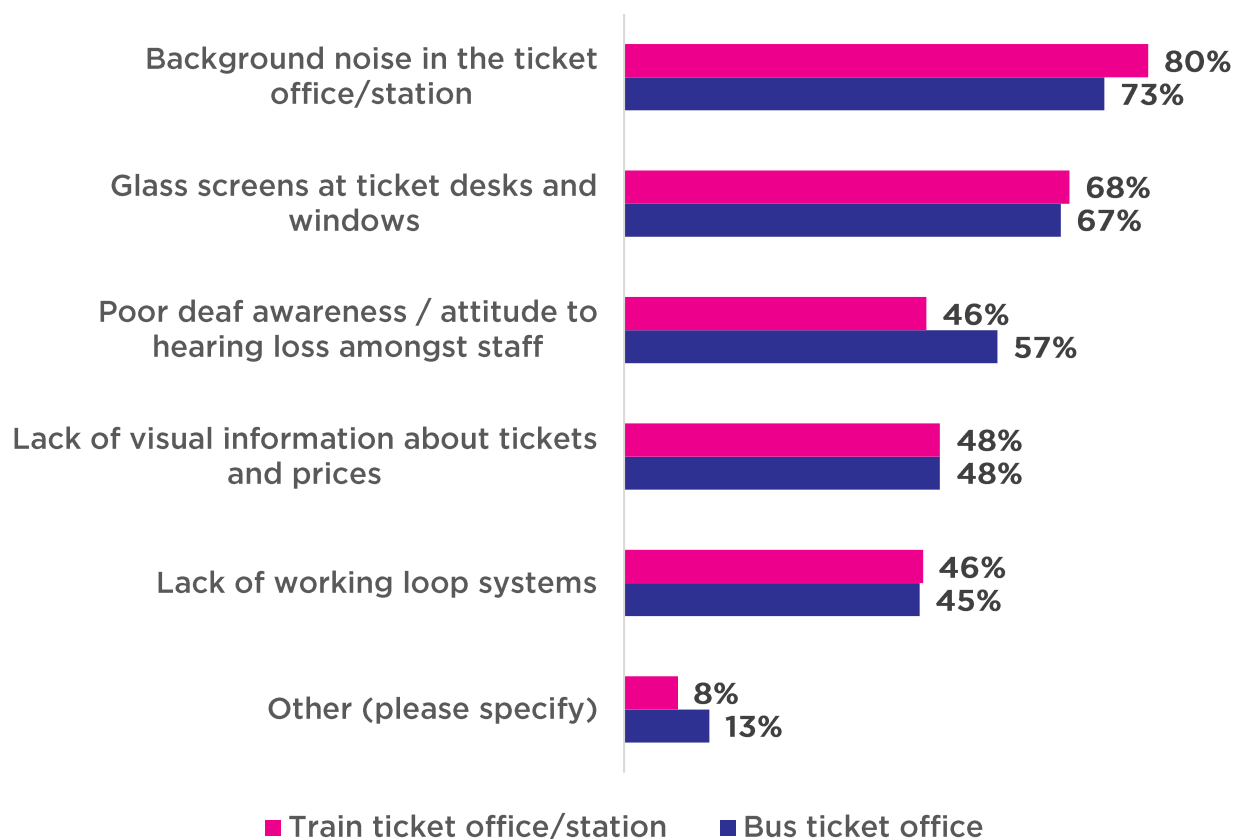
¹⁰ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/108843/summary-report-connected-nations-2017.pdf

¹¹ For example, see [Govia Thameslink](#)

station or bus, followed by glass screens at tickets desks. These issues need to be considered when designing stations.

"I used [a train] to get to Birmingham, absolute nightmare. I had to ask directions from staff and couldn't hear properly because of back ground noise. I couldn't hear the person selling tickets as there was no loop and a sheet of glass between us and a desk." Survey respondent

Figure 5: Have any of the following affected your ability to communicate when buying a bus/train ticket at a ticket office/station?



The vehicles themselves are equally as difficult as stations. Some 73% said that background noise on a bus affected their ability to communicate with bus drivers and eight in ten (80%) said the same about trains. Further, two-fifths (46% on trains and 45% on buses) said a lack of working loop systems affect their ability to communicate with staff on-board the vehicle.

What action needs to be taken?

Transport operators should:

Visual information

- Provide a range of options for people to access real-time information: apps; trained and available staff; and working visual screens.
- Factor in the location of information screens when designing vehicles. For example, ensure that the screen can be seen if sitting in a priority seat.
- If transport operators have apps which send some real-time information, these should be advertised to increase awareness.

Innovation

- Money should be invested in improving the accessibility of transport. For example, developing a tool which would translate what is orally said over a tannoy, into a message on visual screens. Apps could also be designed or improved to include more real time information.
- Continue to promote any 'assistance cards', which passengers can show staff to communicate how they might need help.

Station and vehicle design

- Hearing loops should be installed, signposted, and tested regularly to ensure they're working.
- If glass screens are needed, then they need to be kept clean to enable lip-reading for people with hearing loss.

Staff and help points

- Ensure that staff are trained to understand how to communicate with and support a passenger with hearing loss. For example, understanding that they need to face someone when talking or that they need to make sure that they always have a method of writing information, such as the Big Words¹² app or a pen and paper.

¹² <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/big-words/id296290510?mt=8>

- There should be one member of staff other than the driver on board each train.
- There should be help points and desks which are in a quieter part of the station. These should be reserved for people with disabilities.

Government should:

- In addition to transport operators, Government should also invest in developing accessible technology. For example, developing a tool which would translate what is orally said over a tannoy, into a message on visual screens. Apps could also be developed which deliver better real-time information.

Rail and bus regulators should:

- Ensure that station and vehicle licences are granted on the condition that they are accessible for people with hearing loss and that the Bus Services Act 2017 and the Rail Vehicle Accessibility (Non-Interoperable Rail System) regulations 2010 are adhered to.
- The regulator should continually monitor the accessibility of operators.

Action on Hearing Loss will:

- Promote good practice of operators.
- Continue to work with different transport bodies to promote the messages in this report, including feeding into consultations.
- Provide quality training and services, such as loop installation, to enable organisations to best meet the needs of people with hearing loss.

People with hearing loss should:

- Make Action on Hearing loss aware of any issues they encounter on the public transport system.
- Complain to the transport operator if information was missed during travel as there was no suitable visual announcement.

Annex

Methodology

Action on Hearing Loss conducted an online survey of people with hearing loss aged 16 or above across the United Kingdom. The survey was conducted online between 26 March – 12 April 2018 and 291 people started the survey.

Because this is not a representative sample of all people in the UK with hearing loss, these results are indicative. If these results are quoted elsewhere, the figures must be communicated as 'survey respondents' rather than 'people with hearing loss.'

Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding or multiple answers. Base sizes for each question differ as respondents will have chosen not to answer every question. For base sizes please contact Action on Hearing Loss for further information.

Sample

Three-quarters (75%) of the sample describe themselves as having hearing loss and a similar proportion (77%) said they wear hearing aids. A quarter (24%) described themselves as Deaf/deaf and 2% said they use British Sign Language. In terms of age, 80% of the sample are between 55 and 84.

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID) is the largest UK charity helping people who are confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss.

We give support and care, develop technology and treatments, and campaign for equality.

We rely on donations to continue our vital work.

To find out more, visit **actiononhearingloss.org.uk**

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