



CLEAR SIGNALS

Improving transport accessibility for
deaf people and people with hearing loss

Wales

**RN
I:D** | Supporting people
who are deaf, have
hearing loss or tinnitus

Funded by
 **Motability
Foundation**

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from Wales as part of a UK-wide study on the experiences of deaf people and people with hearing loss when using public transport. The research has been generously funded by the Motability Foundation. We hope that the findings and recommendations help the Welsh Government and transport authorities to deliver more accessible public transport for deaf people and people with hearing loss.



Key findings

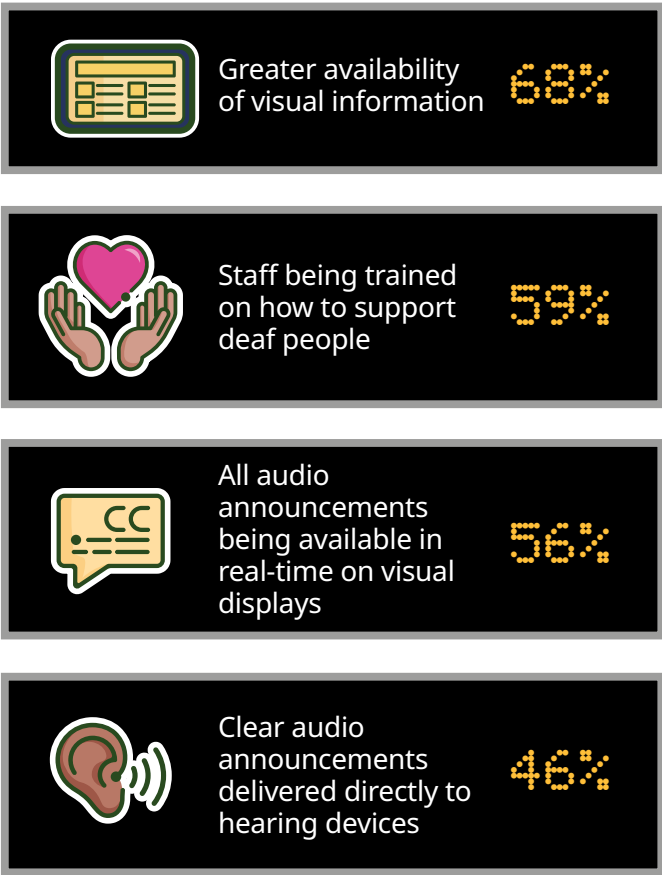
Accessibility barriers on public transport in Wales are a common experience for deaf people and people with hearing loss, with 80% saying they experience them at least some of the time.

The most common barriers are accessing travel information (76%), communicating with staff (59%), and the physical environment (69%).

These experiences affect emotions and behaviours. More than six in ten people (61%) feel anxious when travelling and 78% say they must stay on alert throughout a journey. Half (50%) avoid travelling at busy times, and 30% avoid public transport wherever possible as someone who is deaf or has hearing loss.

Deaf people and people with hearing loss told us what changes they wanted to see to increase their confidence, reduce stress, support independent travel, and encourage greater use of public transport:

The changes deaf people and people with hearing loss most want to see are:



Recommendations

Stronger action to improve transport accessibility for deaf people and people with hearing loss is needed across Wales.

We want to see:

- 1. Renewed leadership from Welsh Government through delivery of the Travel for All strategy, the Bus Services (Wales) Act 2026 and the Disabled People's Rights Action Plan.**
- 2. Investment in new passenger information solutions, including technologies that could support dual-language announcements and real-time BSL translation.**
- 3. Transport operators co-design services with deaf people and people with hearing loss: to improve staff deaf awareness; provide accessible customer service and complaints channels; and, trial innovative technologies such as Auracast.**

Using this research

Findings presented in this report are based on survey responses from 80 public transport users living in Wales. They provide valuable insight into their experiences but are not statistically representative of all deaf people and people with hearing loss in Wales. It is also important to note that responses may reflect experiences of public transport journeys both within and beyond Wales.

You can find the full UK findings, methodology and more transport related stories from our communities on RNID's website at [rnid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Clear-Signals-Final.pdf](https://www.rnid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Clear-Signals-Final.pdf)

The barriers to travelling on public transport



Prevalence of barriers

Barriers to accessible travel are a consistent experience for deaf people and people with hearing loss. Four in five (80%) experience barriers at least some of the time when using public transport, while just 6% never experience barriers.

Inaccessible information

The most consistent barrier is inaccessible travel information. More than three-quarters (76%) say that the way travel information is provided creates barriers for them. Of those who identified this as a barrier, nine in ten (89%) feel it affects their confidence using public transport.

Reliance on audio announcements

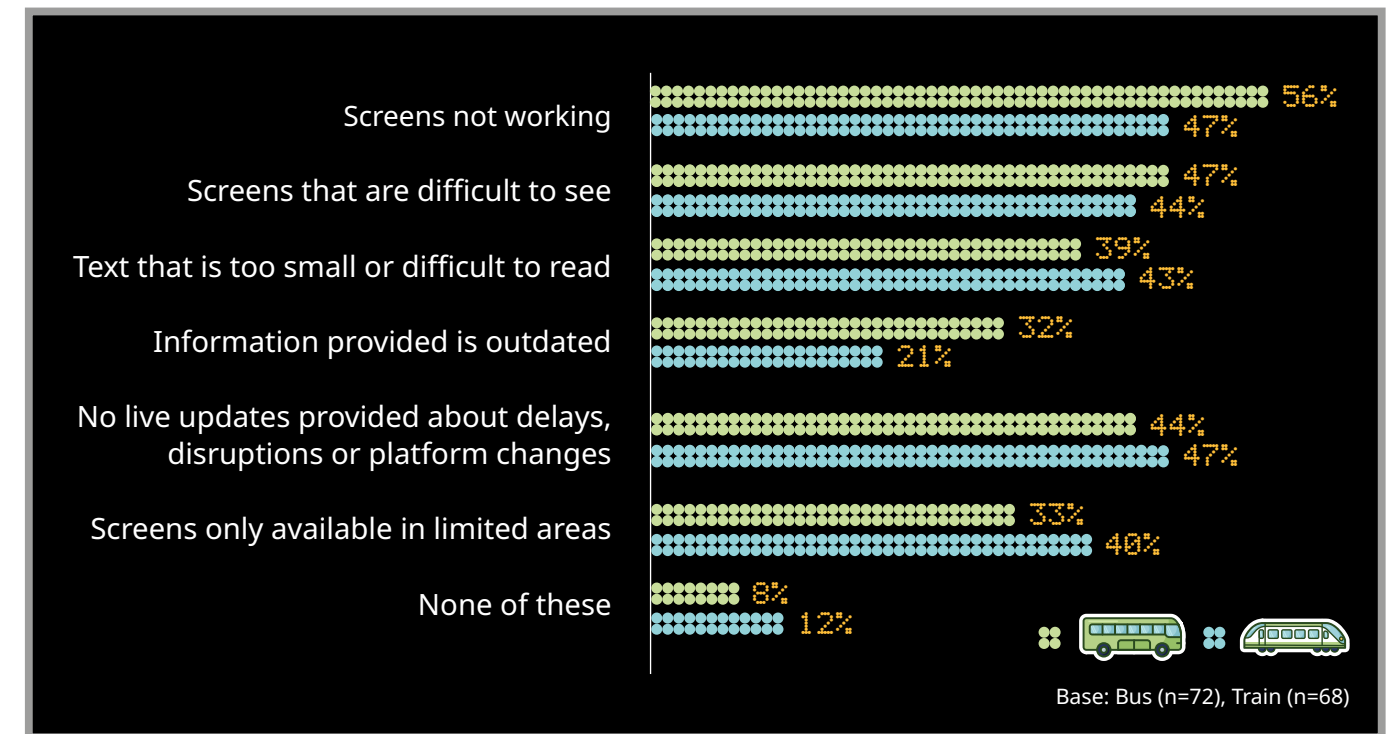
More than three-quarters (76%) say public transport relies too much on poor quality audio announcements, especially during delays or disruptions. Important information is often either unclear or totally inaccessible to deaf people and people who have hearing loss.

Inconsistent provision of visual information

Visual information is inconsistent and unreliable. Whilst 65% say it is always or often available whilst waiting for a train, this drops to just over half (53%) once on board. Almost a quarter (24%) say visual information is rarely or never available when travelling by bus.

The lack of consistent, accessible information creates uncertainty and anxiety for passengers. Four in five people (80%) agree that inaccessible information makes travelling on public transport stressful. Even where visual displays are available, they can be poorly positioned, have text that is too small to read, or display inaccurate or out-of-date information, especially during disruptions and delays.

Figure 1: Issues experienced with screens on different modes of transport



Staff communication

Communicating with staff or other passengers is another significant barrier, with 59% saying it creates barriers for them. However, when information is not accessible by other means, 61% rely on asking staff for help. Over half (54%) feel uncomfortable asking staff for help because of communication barriers. The attitude of staff is seen as fairly positive, with 63% saying they often or always encounter staff who are friendly or helpful. However, many appear to lack the training, knowledge or confidence to communicate with deaf people and people with hearing loss effectively, with almost two fifths (38%) saying staff rarely or never communicate in a way that is accessible to them.

"It is a very anxious time - I am very nervous that I have misheard or not heard. I have gone to speak to staff members and felt so embarrassed that I could not understand them I came away not having any further information." - 35-44, deaf

Physical environment

The physical environment, including noise-levels, overcrowding and lighting create barriers for more than two thirds of people (69%), of which 87% say this affects their confidence using public transport. More than three quarters (78%) say that noise levels always or often make it harder to access the information they need.

Emotional and behavioural impacts

The widespread barriers people who are deaf or have hearing loss face when travelling extend beyond practical inconvenience and affect how people feel when using public transport. Indeed, 61% say they feel anxious when using public transport and over half (55%) feel vulnerable. By contrast, just 6% feel safe and 1% feel reassured.

“I worry that looking down to check something for even a second may cost me valuable information. Like looking away from a screen or overcrowding on trains that cause a lack of visibility, it makes it feel like I’m completely lost”

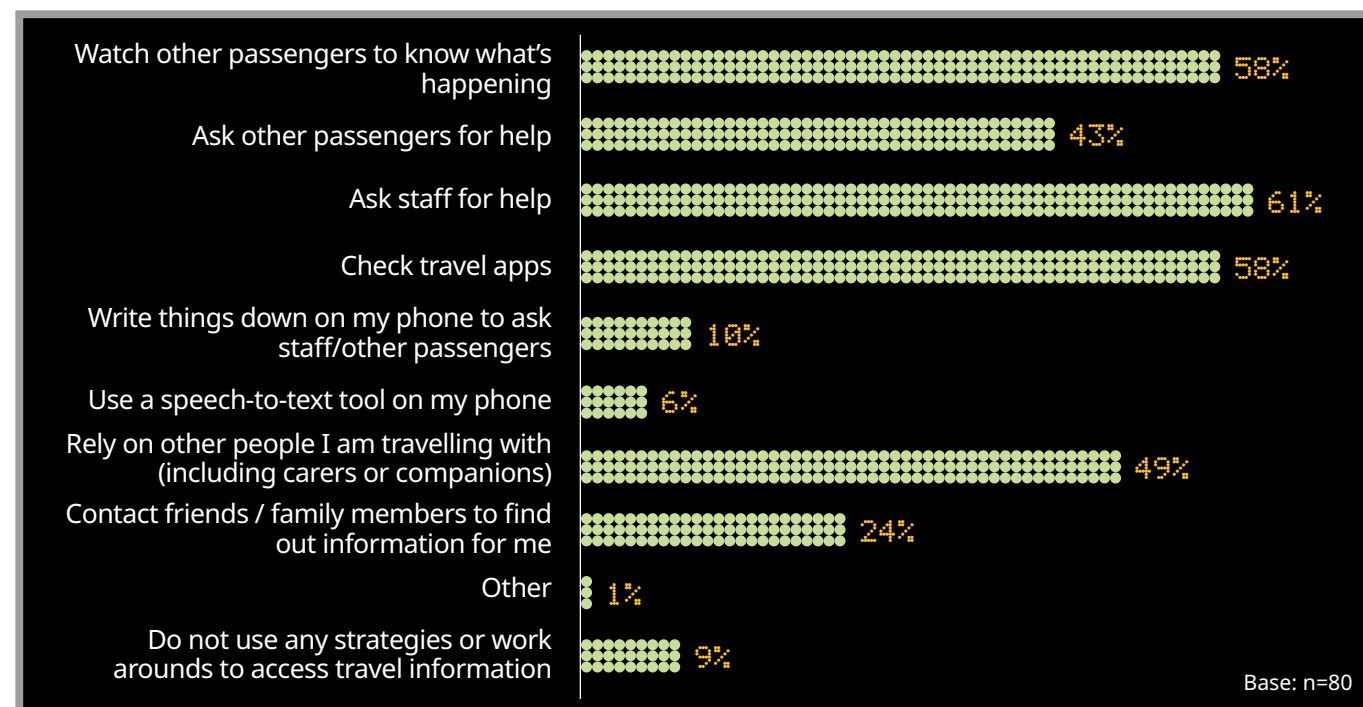
- 18-24, BSL user

Cognitive load and fatigue

Many deaf people and people with hearing loss report a heightened sense of concentration and focus during journeys. More than three quarters (78%) say they always or often feel the need to stay ‘on alert’ so that they don’t miss their stop or an announcement. This vigilance is tiring, with over half (53%) always or often experiencing fatigue from concentrating.

Deaf people and people with hearing loss often adapt their behaviour, relying on a range of coping strategies and workarounds to travel. More than nine in ten people (91%) use at least one form of coping strategy or workaround when travelling. 88% agree that when they can’t access travel information, they often have to work things out for themselves. This is particularly the case during disruptions where just 41% feel able to understand what is happening and plan an alternative route.

Figure 2: Coping strategies and workarounds used to access travel information



Extensive planning and preparation

Nearly two thirds (63%) over-prepare or plan ahead for journeys because they can’t rely on travel information being accessible. This includes nearly one third (31%) who plan an alternative route in case something changes, and they can’t access the information they need. Building in additional time is also common, with 85% giving themselves extra time to reach their destination.

People prioritise certainty, simplicity, and flexibility in their journeys even if this costs more or takes longer. This can include using familiar routes or opting for more expensive routes with fewer changes to reduce potential disruption. This reflects how the challenges people face lead to them adopting more cautious travel behaviours:

83%

Prefer direct journeys rather than changing, even if it costs them more

68%

Stick to routes I know well, even if they are slower or less convenient

66%

Prefer longer routes if they are easier to navigate or involve fewer changes

44%

Tend to buy flexible tickets, even if it costs more

Patterns of avoidance

Despite the use of coping strategies, many deaf people and people with hearing loss change how they travel because of barriers on public transport:

50%

always or often avoid travelling at busy times

40%

always or often avoid travelling on unfamiliar routes

38%

always or often avoid travelling on certain types of public transport

30%

agree they avoid using public transport whenever possible as someone who is deaf or has hearing loss

46%

always or often avoid travelling at night

Improvements and priorities for change

An accessible public transport system would transform journeys for deaf people and people with hearing loss by building confidence, supporting independence and improving the overall experience. Yet significant inconsistencies remain, with a clear need for system-wide improvements.

Key priorities

When asked to select up to five improvements that would make public transport more accessible (from a list of 21 options), the most commonly prioritised improvements focused on making information clear and accessible throughout the journey:

68% Visual information displays available at all stops and on board

59% Staff trained to support people who are deaf or have hearing loss

56% All audio announcements, especially disruption alerts, available in real-time on visual displays and/or mobile device

46% Clearer audio announcements delivered directly to hearing devices



Strong demand for visual information

Clear, consistent and reliable visual information is the top priority. More than two thirds (68%) want visual information displays available at all stops, stations, and on board.

Demand also extends to real-time updates. Over half (56%) prioritise having all audio announcements, particularly disruption alerts, available in real time on visual displays or mobile devices. This would ensure deaf people and people with hearing loss have equal access to information at the same time as hearing people.

The importance of staff support

Nearly six in ten (59%) prioritise staff training reinforcing the key role staff play in providing reassurance and assistance when technology is unavailable or does not meet their needs. Therefore, while technology is recognised as having an important role in improving accessibility, there is a clear desire for this to be balanced with human support.

Delivery of clearer audio announcements to hearing devices

Nearly half (46%) prioritise clearer audio announcements delivered directly to hearing devices. This type of technology and its benefits will be unfamiliar to most and so the level of demand is likely under-reported.

Our testing of Auracast, which provides this solution, demonstrates how transformative it can be for people. Unlike fixed visual information, streamed audio can provide people with direct access to announcements wherever they are. It can reduce the impact of background noise and reduce the need to locate and continually monitor display screens in busy transport environments.

You can find out more about Auracast on our website. rnid.org.uk/auracast-report

Impact of improvements

Improving accessibility would have a clear and positive impact on the experiences of deaf people and people with hearing loss:

65% would feel more confident using public transport

39% would feel more able to travel independently

35% would feel more empowered

59% would feel less stressed during journeys

33% would use public transport more often



Recommendations



Emily's story

Emily is in her 40s and lives in Cardiff. She began to lose her hearing in her 20s and has now lost all hearing in her left ear and has severe-to-profound hearing loss in her right ear. Below Emily shares her story:

Navigating public transport

Using public transport is very stressful for me when travelling on unfamiliar routes or when announcements are made over tannoy that I cannot hear properly.

Accessible information has improved in recent years through smartphones and transport apps that allow you to buy tickets and check routes without having to have a conversation with staff, but 'on the spot' situations like the bus driver unexpectedly saying something makes me nervous and I unnecessarily panic.

Platform alteration

Once I was waiting at the platform and my train disappeared off the screen. There was an announcement over the tannoy, which I couldn't understand, but I watched in horror as most of the people waiting on the platform suddenly left.

I asked someone in the crowd what was happening, but I couldn't understand her

either, and there were no signs or main screens to check on the platform. I followed everyone going downstairs and finally found the platform where my train had arrived, but it was too late... it left before I could reach it.

Delayed and frustrated

I was very annoyed and upset. It's frustrating that only a small thing like displaying 'platform has changed to X' on the screen could have solved the problem. It made me feel, as I have felt for years when not understanding people, that it was somehow my fault that I couldn't hear well enough to understand the announcement. Unexpected changes make me remember that I miss out on so much that other people don't.

A 'mind-blowing' solution

Being involved in a trial of Auracast at Bristol Temple Meads was very simply mind-blowing. The announcements delivered through Auracast were crystal clear, and I haven't been able to hear platform announcements properly for a few decades.

If Auracast were available on public transport, it would improve my confidence drastically and I would be able to travel more easily. I wouldn't have to panic that I wouldn't understand, or need back-up plans, or depend on other people to translate an announcement for me.

Welsh Government and the Deputy Minister for Transport should:

- Recommit to the Travel for All strategy and continue to embed its principles with stakeholders in Welsh transport.
- Make accessibility for deaf and disabled people a key component of future transport strategies, including implementation of the Bus Services (Wales) Act 2026, and delivering the co-designed outcomes of the Disabled People's Rights Plan 2025-35.
- Work with the UK government to deliver regulatory reform that aligns legal requirements for audio-visual information across modes of transport, including an obligation to make audio information accessible to people with hearing loss.
- Undertake further engagement with BSL users in Wales, collaborating with the BSL Advisory Panel and BSL Stakeholder Group, to understand their experiences and needs on public transport.



TfW Lab should:

- Encourage and support start-ups to develop solutions that improve passenger experience, particularly information provision, for people who are deaf or have hearing loss.
- Advocate for the involvement of deaf people and people with hearing loss throughout the design, testing and evaluation of solutions by start-ups supported through the Lab.

Transport for Wales and other transport operators in Wales should:

- Co-design services with deaf people and people with hearing loss.
- Increase staff availability, particularly during disruption, to support deaf and disabled passengers.
- Provide universal deaf awareness training for frontline staff.
- Offer accessible customer support at unmanned stations and stops, including video relay services and reliable free Wi-Fi where needed.
- Ensure complaints processes are genuinely accessible, including for BSL users.
- Work with Transport for Wales to set up pilots of Auracast on board public transport.



A registered charity in England and Wales (207720) and Scotland (SC038926).
Registered as a charitable company limited by guarantee in England and Wales No. 454169.
Registered office: Brightfield Business Hub, Bakewell Road, Orton Southgate, Peterborough, PE2 6XU