Wiltshire Inclusive Bus Project **Handbook**

WiltsCIL

IMBERBUS
Providing a classic bus service across the Salisbury Plain to the lost village of Imber

Salisbury **reds**

Foreword

by Peter
Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill

I'm really delighted to write a foreword to this brilliant handbook. The bus is the predominant form of local public transport, and it's therefore really important that bus services serve every part of our society. Accessible vehicles themselves are fine, but no use if the rest of the offer – information, bus stops, kerbs and pavements, the bus drivers themselves – are not part of a seamless journey.

This great work sets out clearly and simply what will help Wiltshire users the most, and is valid everywhere else as well as in the county it was done in. I congratulate the User Engagement Team at the Wiltshire Centre for Independent Living for what they've done. I'm also particularly pleased that Imberbus was able to contribute to the cost of the work from the funds raised from our annual bus service to Imber.

This handbook has been created by Wiltshire Centre for Independent Living.

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Let's talk buses.

The Wiltshire Inclusive Bus Project is a project led by disabled people in Wiltshire. We are calling upon all involved in the bus industry to join our campaign for more inclusive and accessible bus travel across Wiltshire.

This project was launched in March 2022 by Wiltshire Centre for Independent Living and ImberBus with support from Salisbury Reds. Over the past 9 months we have spoken to over 200 disabled people from across Wiltshire, as well as bus drivers, employees and managers throughout the bus industry. People have shared with us their experiences of bus travel and have come together to re-imagine what an accessible and inclusive bus service could look like.

This handbook is simple but has the potential to be powerful in improving accessibility on Wiltshire buses and beyond. It is divided in three core sections:

Our Research & Ideas - A presentation of our research and the recommendations and ideas generated from it aimed at making bus travel more accessible.
Our Neighbours - How other regions are supporting disabled people and what we can learn from them.
Our Resources - Resources that have been created throughout the project which are available for all bus companies in the UK to use. This includes our disability awareness training course which has been made by disabled people and has been designed to be used as part of initial and CPC (Driver Certificate of Professional Competence) bus driver training.

This project gives bus companies, local authorities and all those involved in the bus industry the opportunity to connect with their disabled passengers. Making bus travel more accessible will not only benefit disabled people, but will bring positive changes for all customers and will encourage more people to utilise our local bus services.

Disabled people are talking. This is your chance to listen.

We held focus groups around Wiltshire asking disabled people about their experiences of bus travel

We met with bus drivers and experts in the industry to gather a wide perspective of bus travel

We produced an online survey to gather more people's ideas and experiences

Wiltshire Inclusive Bus Project

We want to make bus travel more accessible & inclusive in Wiltshire, and we need your help!

Share your experiences of bus travel & ideas for the future in our online survey

SCAN ME

Or visit
https://forms.gle/4J1hKMVu3WWf3vTy9

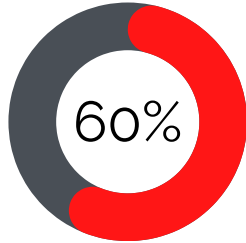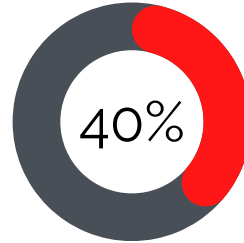**We created and filmed a disability awareness training programme to be used by staff in the bus industry**

Our Research

We talked to over **200** disabled people across Wiltshire.

60%
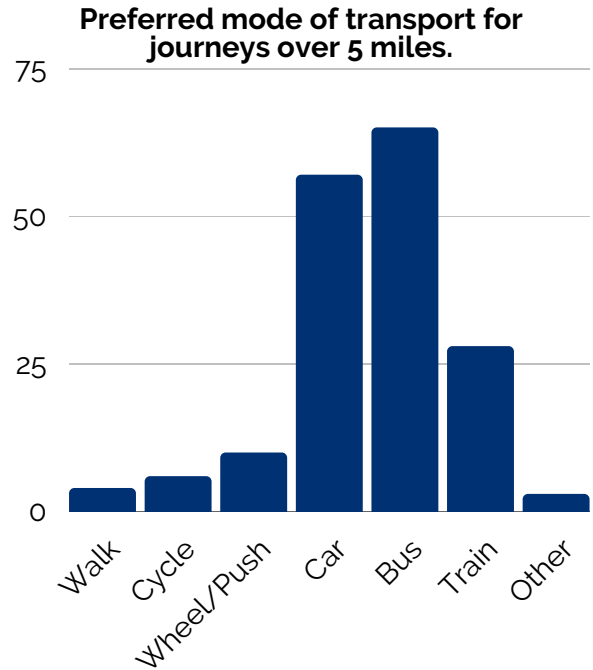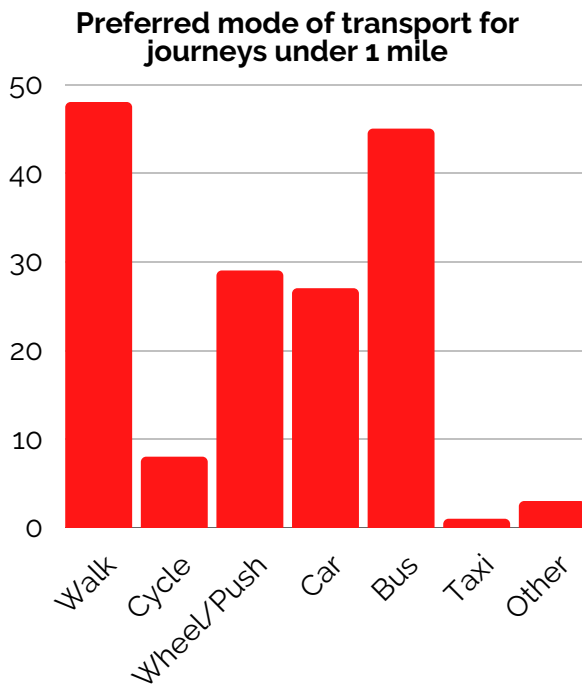
of people participated via our online survey.

40%

of people met us face to face in group discussions or 1:1 interviews.

Just under 50% of people who participated use the bus every week. Travelling by bus was people's preferred mode of transport for journeys over 5 miles.

Preferred mode of transport for journeys under 1 mile

	Value
Walk	48
Cycle	8
Wheel/Push	29
Car	27
Bus	45
Taxi	1
Other	3

Preferred mode of transport for journeys over 5 miles.

	Value
Walk	4
Cycle	6
Wheel/Push	9
Car	57
Bus	65
Train	27
Other	4

Just under half of people who took part had a bus pass.

Do you have a bus pass?

Yes	Disabled Person's Pass / Older person's pass
No	

(scale: 0 — 20 — 40 — 60)
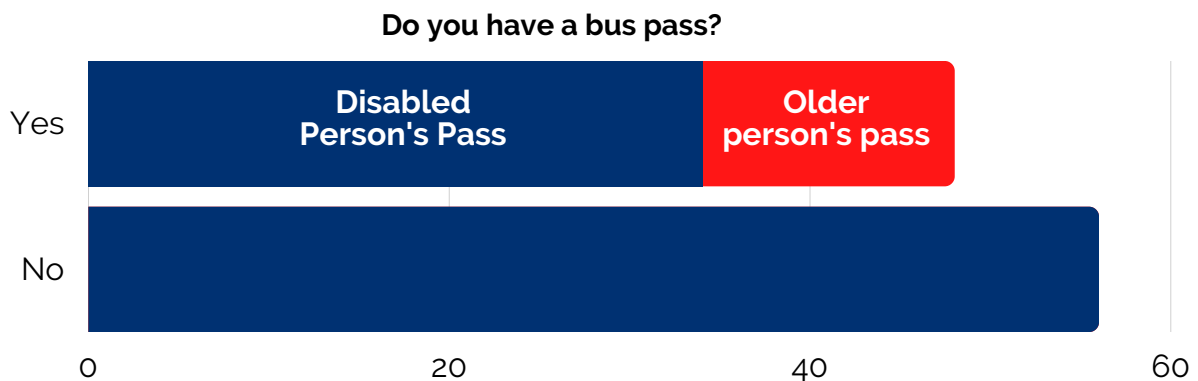
People of all ages took part in this project. The most common age range was 55-74 years old.

Under 18
3.4%

18-25
14.7%

26-54
32.2%

55-74
36.7%

75+
13%
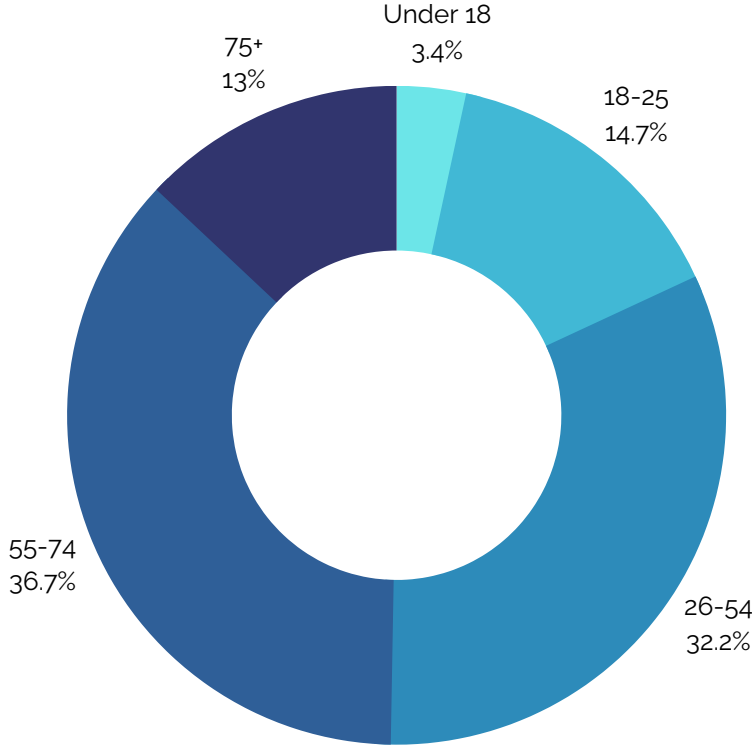
The project engaged with people across the county, with the largest amount of people coming from South Wiltshire.

North Wilts
Central Wilts
West Wilts
East Wilts
South Wilts
Swindon
Out of County

0   25   50   75   100
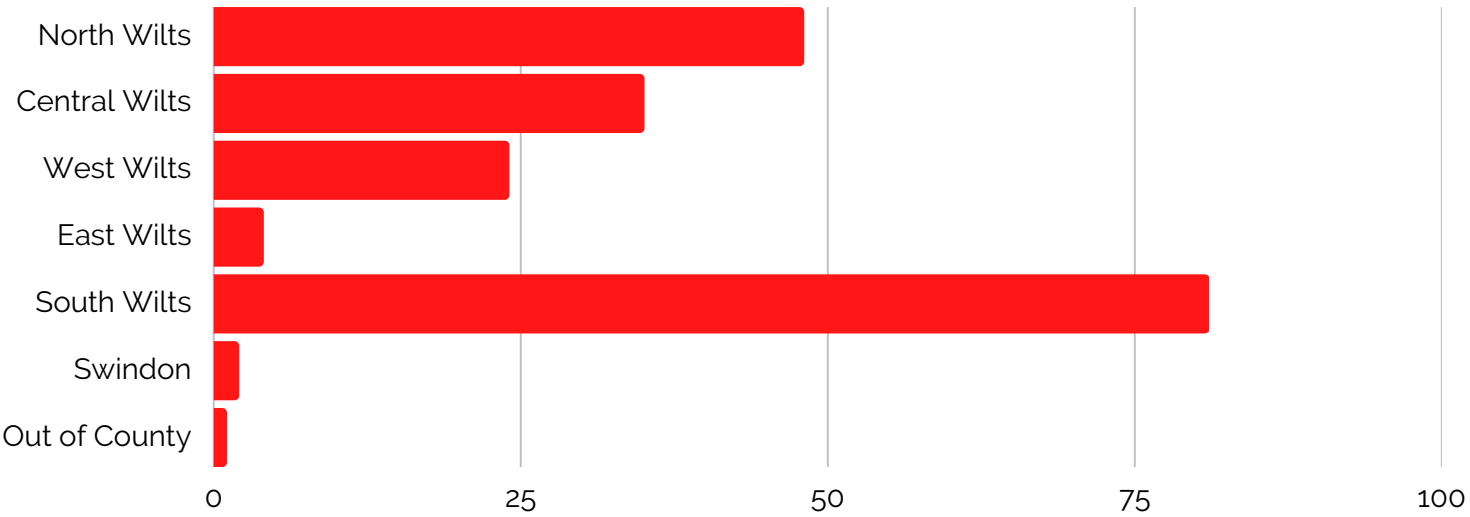
First
Coachstyle
Stagecoach
Salisbury Reds
South West Coaches
More Bus
Beeline
Faresaver
**Swindon's Buses**   Other
Frome Bus

We also asked people which bus operators they use regularly. Salisbury Reds was the most popular answer followed by Faresaver and Stagecoach.

*Text size denotes popularity

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Accessing Bus Stops

Every journey starts at a bus stop, so in the first section of our research we discussed the accessibility of bus stops in Wiltshire. We asked people to rate how accessible they found their local bus stops. People rated on a scale from 1 - 5 with 1 being completely inaccessible and 5 being fully accessible.
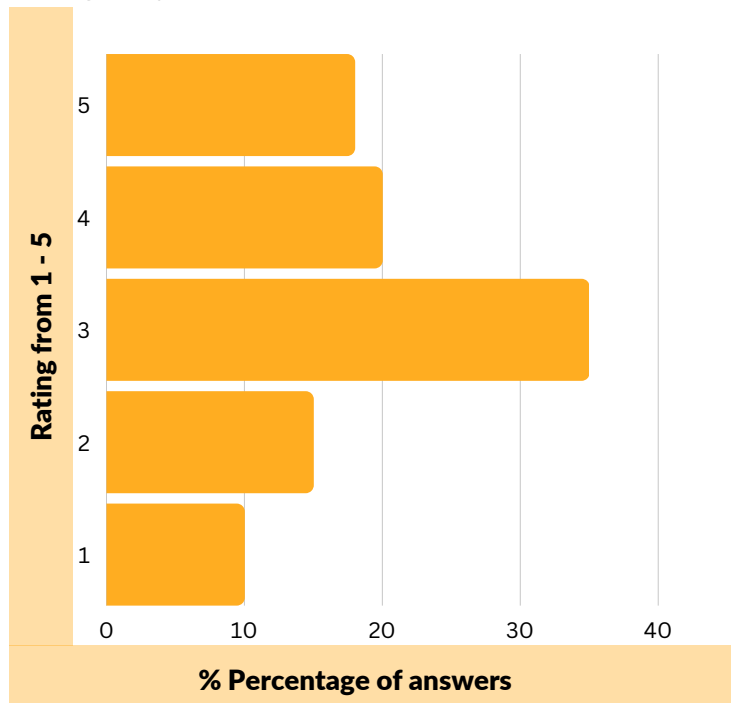
People rated bus stops across the full breadth of the scale. The most popular answer given was 3, which accounted for 35% of the answers.

We further broke down the data, to compare the ratings between different areas of Wiltshire. Interestingly, we found the average rating for each area to be very similar. Each region ranked between 3.1 -3.75. The area with the highest rating was the East (3.75) and the lowest rated was the West (3.1).

A rating of 3 suggests that although many of the bus stops in Wiltshire are accessible to a point, there are still improvements that need to be made.
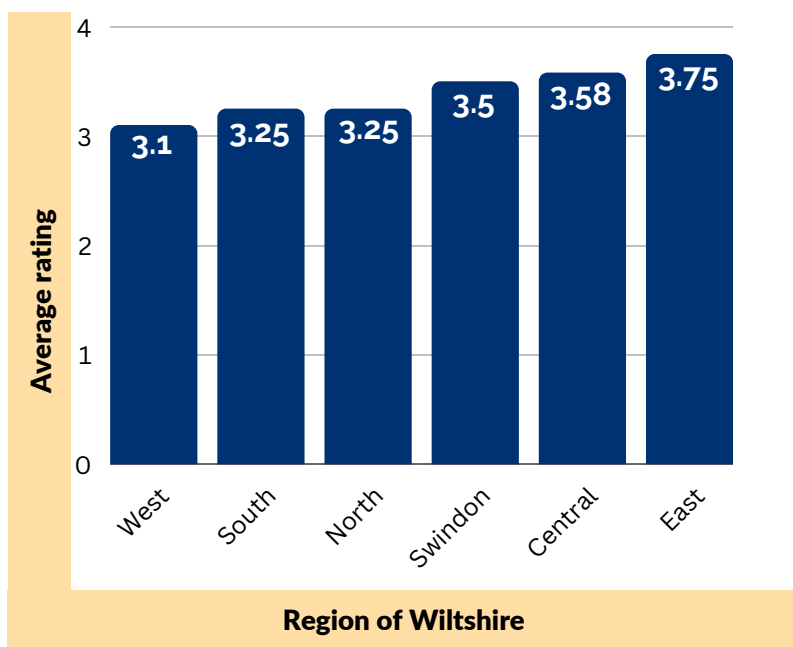
Those who gave low ratings then went on to share some of the issues they have experienced at bus stops in Wiltshire.

Unclear Information was the most common answer given. Specifically, people said that it was not always clear which side of the road they needed to be on. They said that the information of routes and timings were difficult to understand, and timetables were often out of date. Some people noted that there is a lack of audible announcements at the bus stops.

The Infrastructure of the bus stop was also identified as a common issue. In particular, people described bus stops with no seating areas as inaccessible. People also preferred stops which had some shelter.

The Surrounding area also had an impact on the accessibility of the bus stop. Uneven pavements around some stops made them difficult to access. Likewise, bus stops which were far away from safe crossing points or dropped kerbs made them much harder to use. This issue was more prominent in rural areas.

"There are no marked bus stops in Pans Lane where I live. We have no shelter to wait for the 2 buses per day."

"The seats are swamped in brambles so can't be used. The only crossing point on Cockhill /Trowle Common is a busy fast road with poor visibility, it needs a crossing. There is also a lack of shelter."

Our Research

To gain a better understanding of what an accessible bus stop looks like, we asked people to identify what features of a bus stop were important to them. We provided a list of suggestions, alongside the facility for people to add their own ideas.

Feature	% of participants who regard it as important
Sheltered Area	78.4%
Screen with live updates	73%
A seat	56.8%
Timetable at the bus stop	49.5%
Raised Kerbs	45.9%
Printed Leaflets	24.3%
Audible Accouncements	21.6%

Having a sheltered area was regarded to be the most important feature of an accessible bus stop, closely followed by having a screen with live updates.

For some areas in Wiltshire, these two features are already common practice. Live update screens are used in Salisbury and Swindon, but largely this does not extend beyond there. Many of the operators in the area have real time bus information on their websites and apps, however this is not necessarily easily accessible for people waiting at a bus stop.

Around half of participants considered a seat to be important for making a bus stop accessible. A similar amount of people also thought having a timetable on display was vital.

Our Ideas

As shown above, there are many different factors which determine whether a bus stop is accessible. As a result, in order to improve accessibility, we need commitment from numerous different parties - including the local authority and bus operators. From our conversations and research, we have identified 3 key recommendations for ensuring bus stops are accessible to as many passengers as possible:

Sharing Information

Have bus times and information available at bus stops in both urban and rural areas. Present this information in a variety of different formats.

Essential Infrastructure

A sheltered area, seating and raised kerbs should be considered essential bus stop infrastructure.

Surrounding Areas

The area around a bus stop needs to be well maintained, particularly in rural areas.

Accessing Bus Stops

Sharing Information

People value real-time bus information. It gives them confidence when using buses and reduces anxiety. We would like to see real-time bus information available across Wiltshire, in both urban and rural areas.

This information should be presented in a variety of different ways, in order to make it accessible to as many people as possible.

"I have an app for the bus I use and I help people a lot. People struggle to read the timetable and if they don't have the app, they won't know where the bus is and when it's due."

Digital Screens - On digital screens at bus stops are how people prefer to access bus information. Whilst it may not be possible to install them in all locations, we want to see them used outside of Salisbury, into more of our towns. Consideration should be given to the types of screens used to ensure they are a sustainable option.

> » Roll-out digital screens to more areas across Wiltshire.
>
> » Explore alternative, more sustainable options for digital screens eg. solar-powered screens.

App-based - A well-designed app is a good way to receive bus information. However it can be difficult to know which app to use for which routes, especially if you live in an area with multiple bus operators, as much of Wiltshire is. For those who do not use smartphones, this is not an inclusive way to access information, therefore an app should not be the only way customers can receive travel updates

> » Advertise which app people need to use to access your bus times at the bus stop. Include QR codes with links to your website or the app-store.
>
> » Co-produce your app with disabled people to ensure that it is accessible and functional.

"I don't know which app I need for my buses. I would like to use a timetable app."

Auditory Options- Having an auditory option for reading timetables is important for people with various disabilities, including sight impairments and learning disabilities. There are a range of ways you can install auditory timetables:

> » NaviLens is an application used widely at bus stops across Europe. Similar to a QR code, users can scan an image to receive auditory information including which services stop at that bus stop and the times of the next scheduled bus.
>
> » Other forms of talking bus stops involve a fob-based system.

Printed Timetables - Whilst utilising technology is a great way to share information, it is not accessible to everyone. For almost half of disabled people, a printed timetable at a bus stop is still very important. For those who do not, or cannot access technology, this will be one of the only ways for them to see a bus timetable.

> » Have up-to-date printed timetables mounted on bus stops.

"Timetables need replacing as some are so faded you can't read them."

Essential Infrastructure

To make bus stops accessible, there is certain infrastructure that is considered essential to have in place.

> » A shelter - with space for mobility scooters and wheelchairs underneath.
>
> » Seating
>
> » A raised kerb- to reduce the height difference between the bus and pavement.

Surrounding Areas

The area surrounding the bus stop needs to be assessed and maintained to be accessible. Particular consideration should be given to:

> » Surrounding vegetation should be managed so not to impede on the bus stop infrastructure.
>
> » The pavement around the stop should be level and safe.
>
> » Consider safe crossing spaces near the bus stop, with the appropriate dropped kerbs.
>
> » Rural areas should not be forgotten about when maintaining of pathway and access points to bus stops.

Boarding the bus

The next part of a journey we considered was the accessibility of boarding the bus. Again we asked people to rate on a scale of 1 - 5 the accessibility of boarding buses in Wiltshire. 1 was completely inacessible and 5 was fully accessible.

How would you rate the accessibility of boarding the bus?

% Percentage of answers

The most popular ratings were 3 and 4, which combined accounted for 61% of answers given. Only 17% of people rated boarding the bus as a 1 or 2, and 22% of people rated it at a 5.

We compared the ratings given between people who use mobility aids and those who don't. We found that overall there is no significant difference, with the average rating for both groups being 3.2. However, people who do use mobility aids were more likely to rate the experience as 1 or 5. Whereas those who do not use mobility aids were more likely to rate at a 3 or 4.

■ Uses Mobility Aid
■ Does not use Mobility Aid

% Percentage of answers

This suggests that for people with mobility aids, the experience of boarding a bus is more likely to be either very good or very poor. Whereas for those without mobility aids it is more likely to be OK or good.
Many people did find bus drivers to be helpful when boarding the bus.

"I love going on the bus and get no bother at all. Drivers are always polite and go out of their way to help me. To get on they have to lower the bus and put the ramp out and I don't have to ask." - A wheelchair user
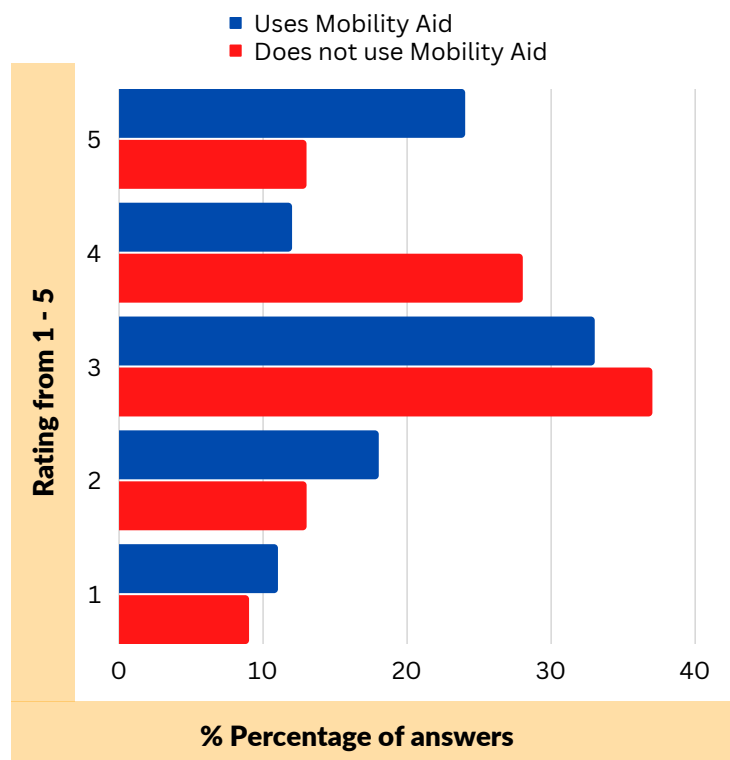
However, a considerable amount of people have experienced issues when boarding a bus in Wiltshire.

Bad attitude when getting ramp out
Unable to manoeuvre into wheelchair space
Driving off before getting seated
Bus not lowered
Driver not stopping at the bus stop
Refused the ramp
Wheelchair space taken
Bus too far from pavement
Rude bus driver
Unable to get up ramp
No edging on bus step

*Size of text denotes popularity

The most common issues reported were drivers refusing to deploy the ramp, drivers not lowering the bus and drivers not waiting until people were seated before driving off.

"The driver moves on before I'm seated so I'm nervous to go upstairs.

"They don't always lower the bus, I have to pull myself up with the bar."

We then asked people to tell us what features are important to them when boarding the bus.

Feature	% of participants who regard it as important
Waiting till seated before driving off	85%
Lowered Floor	51%
Driver to say where the bus is going	42.5%
Ramp	38.7%
Ramp Request Button	19.8%
Physical support from driver	1%

The vast majority of people (85%) consider it important that the driver waits until passengers are seated before they move off. Over half of passengers also think it is important for the driver to lower the bus before boarding.

Physical features aside, we found the thing that makes the single biggest difference to someone's experience of boarding a bus was the attitude of the driver.

There were various different scenarios in which people had experienced a driver with a bad attitude. The most common was drivers either refusing to deploy the ramp when requested or deploying the ramp whilst displaying signs of annoyance (eg. rolling the eyes, exasperated sighs etc).

"When drivers are not so helpful, that makes me feel like I shouldn't be out because I need help."

"You can always tell when a bus driver doesn't want to put the ramp out. It may be subtle, an eye roll here or a sigh here, but you pick up on it. It makes me feel like an inconvenience and embarrassed ."

Some people also reported that they had found drivers to be impatient if they were slower at boarding the bus, or if they wanted to ask the bus driver a question.

As part of our research, a small group of disabled people conducted 'secret shopper' trips out on the buses. During one of the trips, a participant boarded the bus and asked the driver for clarification of where the bus was going. The driver did not respond and instead waved her along. Our participant again asked where the bus was going and was curtly told to sit down.

These examples do not represent everyone's experience of boarding the bus. Many people shared that they found drivers to be polite and patient.

"The drivers are very good and lower the bus for people. No complaints at all."

"I travel a lot and the drivers are always polite."

"Last time we used the bus, the bus driver as soon as he saw the wheelchair got out, put the ramp down and offered if we needed help manoeuvring into position which was lovely."

Boarding the bus

In our research we found that people had very mixed experiences of boarding the bus in Wiltshire. In general the accessibility of boarding the bus was OK, with some people having great experiences whilst others had very poor experiences. There are examples of brilliant practice throughout the county but there are also undoubtedly improvements that could also be made. We have bought together the top recommendations and ideas from disabled people in Wiltshire on how to improve accessibility when boarding the bus.

Attitudes

Improve disability awareness amongst all bus drivers in Wiltshire.

Boarding Assistance

Better utilise existing boarding assistance facilities to benefit more people.

Bus Design and Planning

Consider accessible boarding in the design of buses and timetabling.

Attitudes

There are many bus drivers who show a brilliant understanding of supporting disabled passengers. Invest in making this normal practice amongst all bus drivers in Wiltshire.

>> Adopt the Wiltshire Inclusive Bus Project training course into the CPC training for new and existing bus drivers - see 'Our Resources' for more details.

>> Create opportunities for disabled customers to regularly feedback their experiences, and quickly act upon any improvements that need to be made.

Boarding Assistance

There are already good physical features in place which support disabled passengers to board the bus, however these should be utilised more often to benefit more passengers.

Standard Practice - Make particular accessibility support standard practice for all passengers, regardless to whether they have a visible disability or impairment. Remember many disabilities are not obviously visible on appearance, so ensuring standard practice will help better support those with hidden disabilities.

>> Always wait until everyone who intends to sit down is seated before moving off.

>> Lower the bus everytime someone boards or alights the bus.

>> Tell all passengers where the bus is going when they board the bus.

Ramps - The ramp is often considered to be a 'wheelchair ramp' - something which enables wheelchair users and people with mobility scooters to board the bus. However, using a ramp may benefit many more passengers with mobility and access requirements.

Consider the ramp as an option for anyone who finds it challenging to step onto the bus. This includes but is not limited to: individuals with walking sticks and aids, pushchairs, people with a visual impairment, people with reduced mobility.

During our research we heard instances of bus drivers not deploying the ramp because it was reported to be broken. Ramps should be well maintained and if, for any reason, the ramp has broken then that vehicle is not fit for use.

Some people expressed that they would like automatic ramps, similar to those used in London. The driver is able to deploy the ramp via a button in the drivers cab. In our consultation with bus drivers, they shared concerns about these ramps in Wiltshire. However being a county of both urban and rural bus stops makes it challenging to design an automatic ramp which works for every environment. They feared this would make them more difficult to use and more likely to break down than the current manual ramps.

> » Offer to deploy the ramp to anyone who may find it challenging to step onto the bus as listed above.
>
> » Ensure all buses have a working ramp at all times. If a ramp is broken, then that bus should not be used until it is fixed.

"Some drivers may be reluctant to use the ramp as they may think it takes a lot of time. In reality it takes no longer than getting stuck at a red light or caught in traffic. Time concerns should not be a reason not to offer or use the ramp. It is not just designed for wheelchair users but for all people who would benefit from it."
- Senior Bus Operator Manager.

Additional Support - Some people may require additional support when boarding a bus. There are a few different ways in which someone may indicate to you that they need more support. These include but are not limited to; use of a mobility aid, wearing a sunflower lanyard, communication cards that they present when boarding the bus, having an assistance dog with them or using a white cane.

Communication cards are cards a person can show when they get onto the bus to quickly communicate their accessibility needs. Some bus companies already have their own branded cards for passengers to use. However, people thought it would be better if bus companies all used the same cards, with no branding for any specific company. This card would be recognised on all buses, unlike current branded cards may only be recognised on by one operator. We recommend adopting the use of Thistle Assistance, an existing communication cards scheme established in Scotland, to be used by operators throughout Wiltshire and beyond. See 'Our Resources' for more information.

> » Adopt and promote the use of Thistle Assistance across all operators.
>
> » Ensure all drivers are familiar with communication cards and sunflower lanyards.
>
> » If someone is waiting at a bus stop with an assistance dog or white cane, stop the bus and tell them which bus it is regardless of whether they have indicated for the bus to stop.

Boarding the bus

Bus Design and Planning

Making bus travel accessible goes beyond the bus drivers. There a numerous ways bus design and planning could improve accessibility, ranging from small, quick changes to larger, more expensive changes.

Contrast Lines - Contrast lines are a brightly coloured strip, such as yellow, that is painted onto the step of the bus. This supports people with visual impairments to be able to see the step against the pavement.

> ⟫ Have a contrast line painted on to the step of all buses.

Accommodating Wheelchairs - The majority of buses in Wiltshire have 1 designated space for a wheelchair. However during our research we spoke to both wheelchair users and bus drivers alike who identified that 1 wheelchair space per bus is often not enough.

"If a bus arrives and someone is already using the wheelchair space then you have to wait until the next bus. I once had to wait in the rain for 4 buses to come and go before one arrived with a free wheelchair space. It's time our buses were designed with more spaces."

Wheelchair users also reported some difficulty boarding the bus on account of the ramp and navigating into the wheelchair space. Some people found the ramp too steep to manually push themselves up it. On occasion, people reported that the bus driver had offered to help if they were able to which has at times made a big difference to people.

"Some bus drivers are really helpful and have got to know me very well because I use them regularly. I do find the ramps quite difficult to get up on my own because they are quite steep. Sometimes the drivers give me a little gentle push on the back of the wheelchair which helps me. This helps me use the bus independently which is very important to me."

Some wheelchair users said that they found it difficult to manoeuvre into the designated space when there was a fixed safety bar. Everyone we spoke to about this preferred buses with a moveable safety bar and appreciated when the driver was able to lift it open and closed for them.

> ⟫ Explore and co-produce bus design to accomodate more than 1 wheelchair per bus.
>
> ⟫ If physically able, encourage bus drivers to offer physical support to passengers if needed.
>
> ⟫ Incorporate a functionality into the real-time app facilities which say whether a wheelchair space is occupied on the bus so wheelchair users can make informed decisions when waiting for a bus.
>
> ⟫ Continue to enforce amongst passengers that pushchairs must be folded if a wheelchair user needs to board the bus.

On the Bus

The final part of a journey discussed in our research was people's experiences travelling on the bus. Once again we asked people to rate on a scale of 1 - 5 how accessible they found travelling on the bus. 1 was completely inaccessible and 5 was fully accessible.

How would you rate the accessibility on the bus?

Rating from 1 - 5

% Percentage of answers
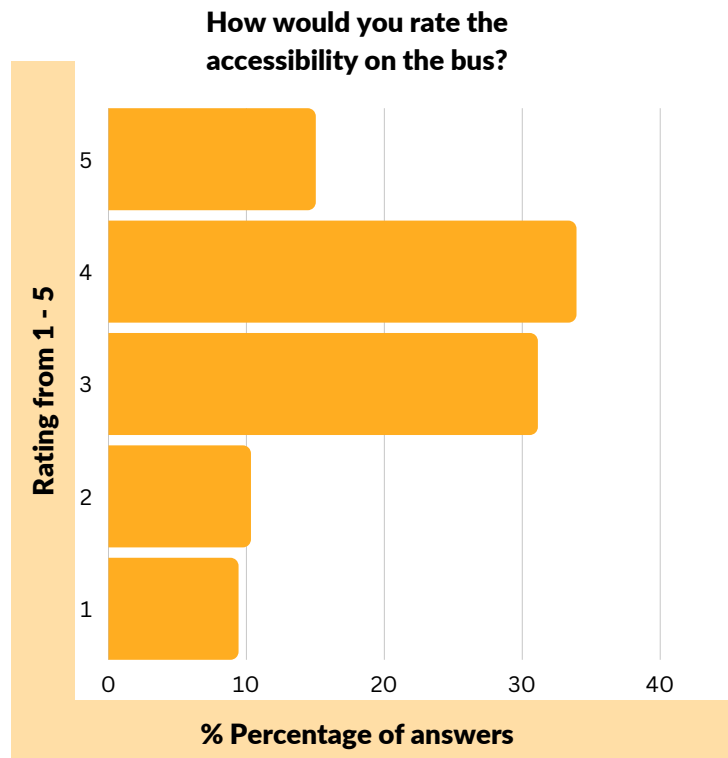
Similar to the previous questions, the most popular ratings were 3 and 4, which combined accounted for 65% of answers. 19% of people rated it a 1 - 2 and 15% rated travelling on the bus as a 5.

So whilst travelling on the bus is accessible for many people, almost 1 in 5 people still consider it to be completely, or very inaccessible to them. This shows us that there are still improvements we can strive to make in this aspect of bus travel.

As on other questions, we then asked people to share what accessibility features on the bus were important to them. We asked people to consider their experience from the point of finding their seat to leaving the bus.

The most popular answer, which was deemed important by 65.4% of participants was rails to hold when sitting down. These include the long rails up the length of the bus and the hand grip rails on the headrest of individual seats. People described how they helped them keep steady as they sat down and got up, especially if the bus was moving.

The second most popular answer was visual information about the route and stops. By this we mean, information displayed on a screen which says what the next stop will be and the bus route number. This information is crucial in giving people confidence when travelling on the bus.

Feature	% of participants who regard it as important
Rails to hold when sitting down	65.4%
Visual Information about route and stops	63.6%
Priority seating close to the door	51.4%
Wheelchair Space	41.1%
Auditory information about route and stops	34.6%
Wheelchair specific stop button	31.8%
Space for unfolded pushchairs	0.9%

"I find it hard to know where buses are heading, what the next stop will be, when it's appropriate to get on the bus or leave to stand up. I often find it hard to hear the bus driver."

"You can't always talk to the driver to ask about the route. I find it quite confusing with all the different routes. An audio or screen display on the bus would be good."

We then asked people to share any issues they have encountered on buses in Wiltshire which is represented in the graphic below.

The most common issues people shared concerned interactions with other passengers.

Some of the issues described involved the bus driver. Some people shared occasions where a bus driver had been rude or impatient. Others described time when they had requested a stop by pressing the button on the bus and the driver has not stopped.

Limited leg room

Dirty

Don't know when to get off
Not enough wheelchair spaces

Other passengers

Driver not stopping when requested

Rude or impatient driver

Stop buttons are too high

No space for shopping trolley

*Size of text denotes popularity

"I am a wheelchair user and was travelling by bus on my own. I pressed the wheelchair button to get off which makes a different sound to the usual buttons so the driver knows I need the ramp. My stop came, the driver opened the doors, let the other passengers off and then closed them and drove off. I called down the bus to say that I needed to get off too, and pressed the button again but they ignored me. At the next stop exactly the same thing happened. In the end, I had to asked another passenger to go to the driver and make them put the ramp out. By this point I was quite a long way away from where I needed to be. It completely rattled my confidence in using the buses. When you rely on the ramp, you are putting a lot of trust in the driver. As soon as that ramp is folded away, you are essentially trapped. It is so important that the drivers notice and act when you press the wheelchair stop button. It's actually very scary feeling trapped on a bus."

"Some drivers don't stop at the next stop if they've only just stopped."

"I got shouted at by a bus driver when I had not realised he was asking me to move further along. He angrily shouted 'Is she deaf or something!' I have an auditory processing disorder which meant that I had not heard him. My autism probably contributed to me not realising I needed to move along in the first place."

On the Bus

As with the previous sections, our research generated a range of ideas from both passengers and people within the bus industry on how to make travelling on the bus more accessible. These ideas can be broadly categorised into the three points below:

Attitudes

Improve disability awareness and knowledge of different disabilities amongst both bus drivers and other passengers in Wiltshire.

Sharing Information

Develop existing systems that display route and stop information and install this technology on buses throughout Wiltshire.

Bus Design and Planning

Consider accessibility in the future design of buses, including creating additional wheelchair spaces on buses throughout Wiltshire.

Attitudes

Other Passengers - As described in our research, some of the issues people face when travelling on the bus relates to interactions with other passengers. Whilst the behaviour of other passengers is largely beyond the remit and control of a bus company or local authority, it does not mean there is nothing we can do to improve this.

Many of the negative interactions with passengers described in our research originated from a lack of understanding, awareness and tolerance of disability. This issue is not isolated just to the transport industry, but is found across society. As such, it is not something that can be solved by a single group or individual. Bus companies and local authorities have important roles in working with and supporting existing disability awareness campaigns to amplify their messages. Engaging with the Wiltshire Inclusive Bus Project, and making positive actions based on the ideas and recommendations is just one way this can happen.

» Engage with the Wiltshire Inclusive Bus Project and make changes to your service / practice based on the ideas and recommendations.

» Support and amplify the messages of disability awareness campaigns.

» Have posters explaining the different accessibility features you have and support on your bus. This includes but is not limited to; sunflower lanyards, communication cards, disabled bus pass, use of the ramp on request etc. Check out 'Our Resources' for posters you can download and use.

Drivers and bus industry staff - Invest and expand the awareness and knowledge that staff have of disability. Extend this beyond a simple understanding and strive for staff to have a broader knowledge base including, but not limited to; autism and learning disabilities, basic signs in British Sign Language and communication differences.

> » Adopt the Wiltshire Inclusive Bus Project training course into the CPC training for new and existing bus drivers - see 'Our Resources' for more details.
>
> » Invest in all staff's understanding of disability - extend this training beyond just bus drivers.

Sharing Information

Visual and auditory information - For some people travelling by bus brings a lot of anxiety. This is amplified when travelling to a new place, or when you find yourself unsure of where you are. Having good quality information on the bus that shows the bus route and the next stop is hugely significant in reducing this anxiety and facilitating independence.

> » Have digital screens on all buses which displays visually and audibly which bus route it is on and which stop will be next.
>
> » Use symbols and images on the digital screens to communicate information.

Bus Design and Planning

Stop Buttons - Many of the suggestions around stop buttons are already common practice in Wiltshire. However, we have still listed them to highlight the importance of keeping these existing systems in place.

> » Have seperate stop buttons for people in the wheelchair space which make a different noise to alert the driver that the ramp is needed at the next stop.
>
> » Place stop buttons at lower positions in the priority seating area to make it easier for people to reach from a seated position.

Wheelchair Spaces - As previously described, people said that there are not enough wheelchair spaces on buses in Wiltshire. This is not just to accomodate people with wheelchairs, but also those who use walking aids, shopping trolleys and push chairs.

Additional Comments

In the final stage of our discussions, we asked people if there were any additional comments they would like to make about bus travel in Wiltshire. A range of answers were given, most of which fell into one of these three key themes.
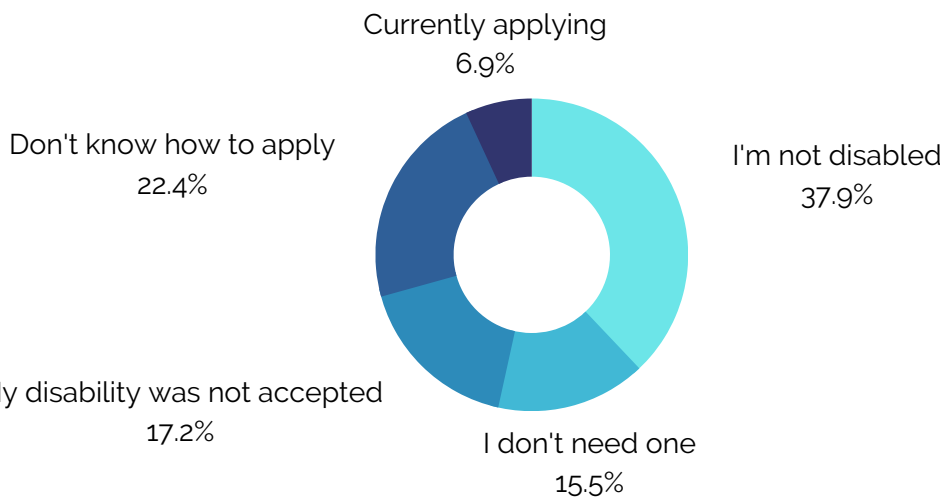
Concessionary Bus Passes

Building Confidence

Area Specifics

Bus Passes

Eligibility - At the time of writing, a concessionary bus pass is supplied by Wiltshire Council for people who qualify by age (state pension) or because of their disability. People may either choose to apply for an individual bus pass, a bus pass plus companion or taxi vouchers.

Just under half (46.7%) of participants in our research held a bus pass. 70% of these people had a bus pass due to their disability and 30% due to being at state pension age.

Currently applying
6.9%

Don't know how to apply
22.4%

I'm not disabled
37.9%

My disability was not accepted
17.2%

I don't need one
15.5%

We went on to ask why some people did not have a bus pass, of which the answers are reflected in the graph opposite.

37.9% said they did not consider themselves disabled, with a further 15.5% saying they did not need one. This was often due to having alternative forms of transport available to them like driving.

22.4% said they were either not aware that concessionary bus passes existed or they did not know how to apply for them. 6.9% of people said that they were currently in the process of applying.

Do I qualify because of my disability? ✖

You qualify if you are within one of the seven categories listed in the Transport Act 2000, as shown below:

- Blind or partially sighted;
- Profoundly or severely deaf;
- Without speech;
- Has a disability, or has suffered an injury, that has a substantial or long-term effect on their ability to walk;
- Does not have arms or has long-term loss of use of both arms;
- Has a significant learning disability, that is, a state of arrested or incomplete development of mind which includes significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning;
- Would, if they applied for the grant of a licence to drive a motor vehicle under Part 3 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 have their application refused on the grounds of medical fitness. Examples of those who are currently barred are people with epilepsy, severe mental disorder and liability to sudden attacks of giddiness or fainting. This does not include those who have had their license refused/revoked through the misuse of alcohol or drugs.

The disability should be permanent or have lasted at least 12 months, be likely to last 12 months or be likely to recur, and should have a substantial effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Extract from Wiltshire Council website taken November 2022

The group we would particularly like to draw attention to here however is the 17.2% who were declined a bus pass because there disability was not considered eligible. Wiltshire Council outlines a range of disabilities on their website, as eligible disabilities for a concessionary bus pass - subject to application.

During our focus groups, we heard from numerous individuals who had applied for a bus pass, but had been declined despite having an eligible disability. They reported that the application process required you to be in receipt of Personal Independence Payment, or have a certificate of visual impairment to qualify for the bus pass.

As part of our research we went through the application process and found, as was reported to us, that the only option for showing proof of disability was to be in receipt of PIP or VI certificate. There appeared to be no mechanism for Wiltshire Council to independently assess an individual's eligibility, instead it relied solely on whether they received disability benefits or had a VI certificate.

This is a significant oversight in the application process. There are many people who should be eligible for a concessionary bus pass but are not currently in receipt of PIP. These people should have an equal opportunity to apply and be assessed for a concessionary bus pass based on their disability alone. Whilst PIP can be used as a qualifying criteria, it must not be the only criteria. In instances where people do not receive PIP, they should receive an independent assessment by Wiltshire Council which can be supported by medical evidence.

Timings - At the start of this project, in the Spring and Summer of 2022, we received frequent feedback from people about the restrictions over when you were able to use concessionary bus passes. Initially people were only able to use their bus pass after 9.30am. This made it difficult for those who used it to get to appointments or employment in the morning. However, from 1st September 2022 to 31st March 2023, Wiltshire Council changed this so concessionary bus passes were valid for any time of day if you are boarding in Wiltshire. This change was met with wide-spread positivity amongst our focus groups with the resounding hope that this change will be made permanent after the 31st March 2023.

Companion Tickets - Some people expressed confusion over when people were eligible for a companion ticket. There should be greater clarity over the companion ticket scheme.

"Some people can take a carer with them but it's not clear who can. When they assess they just look at mobility but I have a brain injury and it's more about my anxiety - will I get the right bus? Will I get the right stop? Will I have to talk to people?"

> ›› Create an additional form of assessment when applying for a concessionary bus pass that does not depend on the applicant receiving PIP or having a VI certificate.
>
> ›› Maintain the removal of time restrictions on concessionary bus passes in Wiltshire.
>
> ›› Provide clarity and additional information over the use of companion tickets.

Building Confidence

Explaining Buses - Some people said they would benefit from simple guides explaining how to use a bus. Videos and online guides would help people learn what to expect and build up their confidence before they use the bus.

"I wish there was more guidance for people who need stuff explained a bit more in depth. Like a guide on how to use the bus, what to do if you have a wheelchair, information about where bus stops are, how to recognise the bus you need. I have apps but find it confusing. I'm doing travel training at the moment with a volunteer but feel like it would decrease my anxiety to know things in advance. I think other people would benefit from that too."

Familiarisation Opportunities - Another way to help people build confidence in using the buses is to provide opportunities to "try a bus". Community groups, workplaces and education settings can request a visit from an off-service bus. People then have the opportunity to become familiar with the bus, gain confidence and practice getting on and off the bus. Providing this opportunity at community events is another way to help people gain familiarity on buses.

'Try a bus' days are currently used by Lothian buses, go to 'Our Neighbours' for more information.

Matt, a local powerchair user in Wiltshire, was one of the participants in the bus project. He attended one of our filming events and had the opportunity to practice getting on and off the bus in a low-pressured setting. Prior to this, he didn't think buses in Wiltshire were accessible to him, but since he has been able to try them out, he is now a regular bus user.

"I always thought there was only 1 bus I could use but recently I found out that now all buses are accessible to everybody. I recently used the Trowbridge to Bath Discovery bus and it was fab. Previously I always used to use the train but the good thing about using the bus is you don't have to book, you can just turn up to the bus stop. The bus is straightforward, I love it." - Matt

Area Specific

Some of the comments people gave related to a specific bus route or part of Wiltshire.

"My local buses are absolutely terrible, constantly skipping stops. They'd drive past me when I was standing at the bus stop."

"The timetables for Lyneham are all out of date."

"Coachstyle 31 were particularly supportive when I was on crutches."

"The X34 to Frome finishes too early, it is not available for those living in Frome but working in Chippenham."

"Kevin on the X31 is the best of the lot, friendly all the time and helpful. A good driver too. The X31 is usually very reliable."

"A R1 refused to let a service user with a wheelchair and learning disabilities on the bus. This was the second bus to do so. His excuse was there were two prams, but the children were around 5 and could have easily got out. I feel like wheelchair users should be more of a priority when children are older. "

"I wish there was a bus that stopped at Five Rivers, so much community stuff happens there but there are no buses."

Our Neighbours

During the Wiltshire Inclusive Bus Project, we made connections with other bus operators around the UK to learn from their good practice.

Lothian Buses

At the start of the project we met with the Accessibility and Inclusion Officer for Lothian Buses. They explained their role within the company and outlined the key ways in which Lothian support their disabled passengers. Lothian Buses serve the area of Edinburgh. Although Edinburgh and Wiltshire are geographically very different, there is still a lot that we can learn from Lothian's practices.

Investing in Accessibility

Lothian Buses employed a part-time accessibility and inclusion officer in 2020. The role has been crucial in developing inclusion across the company and has led to many new initiatives. In 2020 Lothian conducted a review of accessibility and inclusion within the company which led to a 3 - year improvement plan. The investment into this role has enabled Lothian to become a leading company in providing an inclusive and accessible bus service.
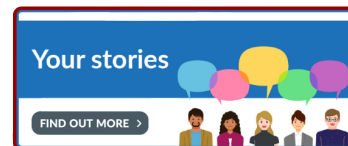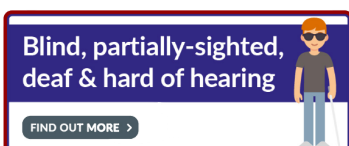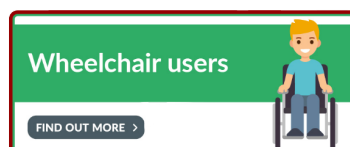
Web Inclusivity

Lothian co-produced their website with a specific section covering accessibility. They have sub-sections for families, wheelchair users, blind and hard of hearing, priority seating and hidden disabilities, safe places and personal stories.

They have invested into their website to make it simple to navigate and be compatible with screen readers. The website can be viewed at:
https://www.lothianbuses.com/accessibility/

"A lot of people plan their journey in advance so you need to give people the tools to plan as well as you can. You need clear information and inclusive language. You need to spend money on an audit to check the accessibility of your website. Work with charities and customers and ask for their opinions. Find out if it works with screen readers. And don't just ask for favours, you need to respect people's time." - Accessibility and Inclusion Officer.

Families
FIND OUT MORE >

Wheelchair users
FIND OUT MORE >

Keep Safe places
TravelHub
FIND OUT MORE >

Blind, partially-sighted, deaf & hard of hearing
FIND OUT MORE >

Priority seating and hidden disabilities
FIND OUT MORE >

Your stories
FIND OUT MORE >

Our Neighbours

Supported Journeys

As part of their role, the Accessibility and Inclusion Officer offers supported journeys. People can contact Lothian directly, or be referred via another organisation. The officer will work with the individual to build their confidence on buses by travelling with them on a journey. The boundaries of this service depend on who is using it and what they wish to achieve. Many people only use it once, to gain confidence travelling by bus for the first time. Some many use it a few more times before the gain reassurance to travel independently. There is no eligibility to this service, it is simply open to those who need it.

Lothian also provide a service where people can try out an off-service bus. Groups and organisations can request a visit, in which people can become familiar with the bus environment and practice getting on and off the bus. They may also take a bus along to community events with the same purpose of allowing people to build confidence around bus travel.

Thistle Assistance

Thistle Assistance is an initiative specifically designed to support people to communicate what assistance they need when using public transport. It can be downloaded for free as an app onto a phone, creating a digital card which can be personalised for people's individual requirements. You can also apply to receive a physical card which is designed to fit in a purse or pass wallet. As with the app, the card comes with symbol stickers which allows the user to personalise it for themselves. The initiative is well established in Scotland and there is scope for Thistle Assistance to be used across Wiltshire. We would like to invite all operators in Wiltshire to partake in discussion of how we can establish this to create a more streamlined service for disabled people across the county.

Examples of the customisation options available on the Thistle Assistance App.

Our Resources

We have created a series of disability awareness training videos, covering many of the key messages disabled people want bus drivers to know. The videos can be watched as a stand-alone piece of training, or embedded into an existing course. We recommend these videos are used as part of both initial and CPC (Driver Certificate of Professional Competence) bus driver training.

Each video has been made by disabled people and shares personal stories and experiences as well as educating on statistics and legal requirements.

There are 4 videos in the series, these are:

The Value of Transport:
An introduction to the series covering the legal requirements of accessibility for disabled people.

Physical Disabilities
Our key recommendations for accommodating for passengers with physical disabilities, including those with mobility aids.

Sensory Disabilities
Our key recommendations for accommodating for passengers with sensory disabilities including visual impairments, hearing impairments and speech and language differences.

Neurodivergence
Our key recommendations for accommodating for neurodivergent passengers including Autism, Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia, ADHD and Tic Disorders. It also covers hidden disabilities.

The videos can be accessed, downloaded and delivered free of charge from
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1VRVMF-LuzGSctYBeWm6pIdARqmnO3XvJ
or by scanning the QR code:

Alongside the videos, training recipients are to be given their own copy of the 'Wiltshire Inclusive Bus Project Drivers Guide'. This is a tri-fold leaflet which contains a reminder of the key content and recommendations from the training videos. This can also be downloaded from the above address.

Wiltshire Inclusive Bus Project Drivers Guide

Our handy guide to supporting disabled passengers on your bus.

Created by Wiltshire Centre for Independent Living as part of the Wiltshire Inclusive Bus Project

IMBERBUS reds

SCAN ME

A little help goes a long way

thistle
ASSISTANCE
Travel With Confidence

We all welcome a little extra assistance now and again, particularly when travelling alone. Thistle Assistance is an initiative to help you feel safer and more comfortable when using public transport.

thistleassistance.com

THANK YOU!

Thank you to everyone who has been involved with the Wiltshire Inclusive Bus Project. For those who attended focus groups, completed surveys, participated in 'secret shopper' journeys and created resources. Each and every contribution has been valuable and has made a difference.

And finally to ImberBus and Salisbury Reds for investing in a more inclusive and accessible future for bus travel. Thank you for funding and supporting this project.

IMBERBUS
Providing a classic bus service across the Salisbury Plain to the lost village of Imber

Salisbury **reds**

WiltsCIL