

# Building a better understanding of the transport lives of disabled people

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SUMMARY FINDINGS FROM  
MOTABILITY RESEARCH  
JULY 2020

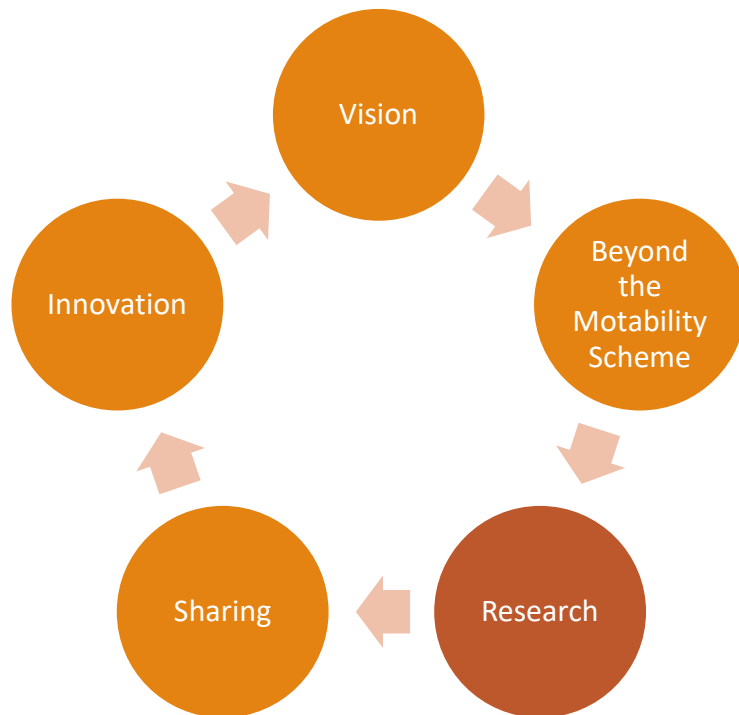


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# Why did we commission this research?



Motability the charity has a **vision**: to ensure that no disabled person in the UK is disadvantaged due to poor access to transportation.

This means that over time we need to maximise the **impact** of our resources on access to transport for disabled people.

The Motability Scheme has transformed millions of lives but we now have a responsibility to look **beyond the Scheme** at opportunities to transform transport for a broader population of people.

To help inform these broader ambitions we set out to answer some **big questions** on disabled people and transport. Working with sector-leading external partners, we commissioned **rigorous research** covering usage, challenges, and user experiences.

We want to **share our findings across the disability and transport sectors and with Government** so that others can benefit from these insights on transport and people living with disabilities.

This research will also guide our **innovation** work, supported by the new decision-making framework that we and Social Finance are developing with Motability staff and Governors, to help us work towards achieving our vision.

# What was our research approach?

## Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)\* with the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)

- We wanted to build on the existing evidence base, so we commissioned NatCen to summarise previous literature on disability and transport, including the Motability Scheme, disabled people's usage of and challenges with transport, and innovations and interventions supporting disabled people to travel. The literature review was **international**, covering both the UK and other countries.
- Methods included a systematic database search, resulting in 2,463 papers being screened, and WoE (Weight of Evidence) scoring. 30 papers were selected for more in-depth analysis.

## Secondary Analysis (SA) with NatCen

- To understand in greater detail disabled people's existing usage of and challenges with transport, we asked NatCen to complete a secondary analysis of the National Travel Survey (NTS) 2018.
- The NTS is a large-scale, nationally representative household survey about travel, based on a stratified, clustered, random sample of 12,852 private households in England. This is the first time this data has been analysed, using a combination of descriptive and inferential analysis, including logistic regression and multinomial regression.
- The analysis resulted in 250+ data tables describing in granular detail how disabled people in England use transport.

## User Research (UR) with Britain Thinks

- We felt it was important to include the voice of users in our approach, so we commissioned user research.
- Using an iterative, three-stage research programme, our partner first conducted desk research and expert tele-depths. Britain Thinks used insights from this stage to inform a qualitative online community with 42 disabled participants and 5 teledepth interviews; soft quotas were set to ensure a spread across disability type and three locations. The final stage was a quantitative online survey, with a panel of disabled people returning 1,504 responses\*\*; again, soft quotas were set, with the resulting sample broadly resembling the UK disabled population. We also received 2,877 responses from a separate sample of Motability Scheme users and their appointees.

\*All points presented in this document are cited as either REA, SA, or UR, corresponding to the projects above.

# A wide range of people self-identify as disabled, with different transport experiences, needs, and challenges

Impairment types reported by disabled people, 2018/19  
(% of disabled population)<sup>1</sup>



*“My journey begins from outside my doorstep, as it’s from there that I am leaving my safe environment to embark into the unknown” (UR).*

<sup>1</sup> Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (2020). *Family Resources Survey (FRS): financial year 2018/19*. Accessed via <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-201819>

# Worldwide, there is a limited understanding of “what works” in transport for disabled people (REA)



## Training

- interventions that support those living with mobility issues to have better access to and confidence using transport and mobility aids.
- centres to improve safety, offer training and advice, and help with buying vehicles and appropriate technology, such as the Forum of Mobility Centres in the **UK**.
- One evaluated course in **Australia** focussed on driving in later life, retiring from driving, and alternative transport and lifestyle planning; participants reported increased use of public transport and walking alongside greater reported satisfaction with transport.
- Courses focussing on navigating public transport, combining classroom discussions with local field trips, increase participants' knowledge in planning trips, such as the TIP SMART programme in the **USA**.



## Accessibility of the Built Environment

- interventions targeting street access, paving, and interchanges.
- Evidence from the **USA** and **Norway** suggests a number of bus innovations are effective including changes to bus layouts, loading platforms and bus stops.
- Complementary accessibility measures are also significant, including accessible signage, journey planner information and announcements, as evidenced by the A4A programme in the **UK**.









## Travel Programmes

- interventions including bus passes, voucher schemes, etc.
- Frequently cited international example is the **UK's** concessionary bus pass scheme.
- These programmes are positively received when they provide flexibility for service users, fill a gap in scheduled public transport provision, and are affordable.

# Disabled people take far fewer trips than non disabled people

- Nearly 1 in 3 disabled people say they simply don't make some journeys due to transport challenges (UR).
- Average number of trips per year per person made by mode:<sup>2</sup>**

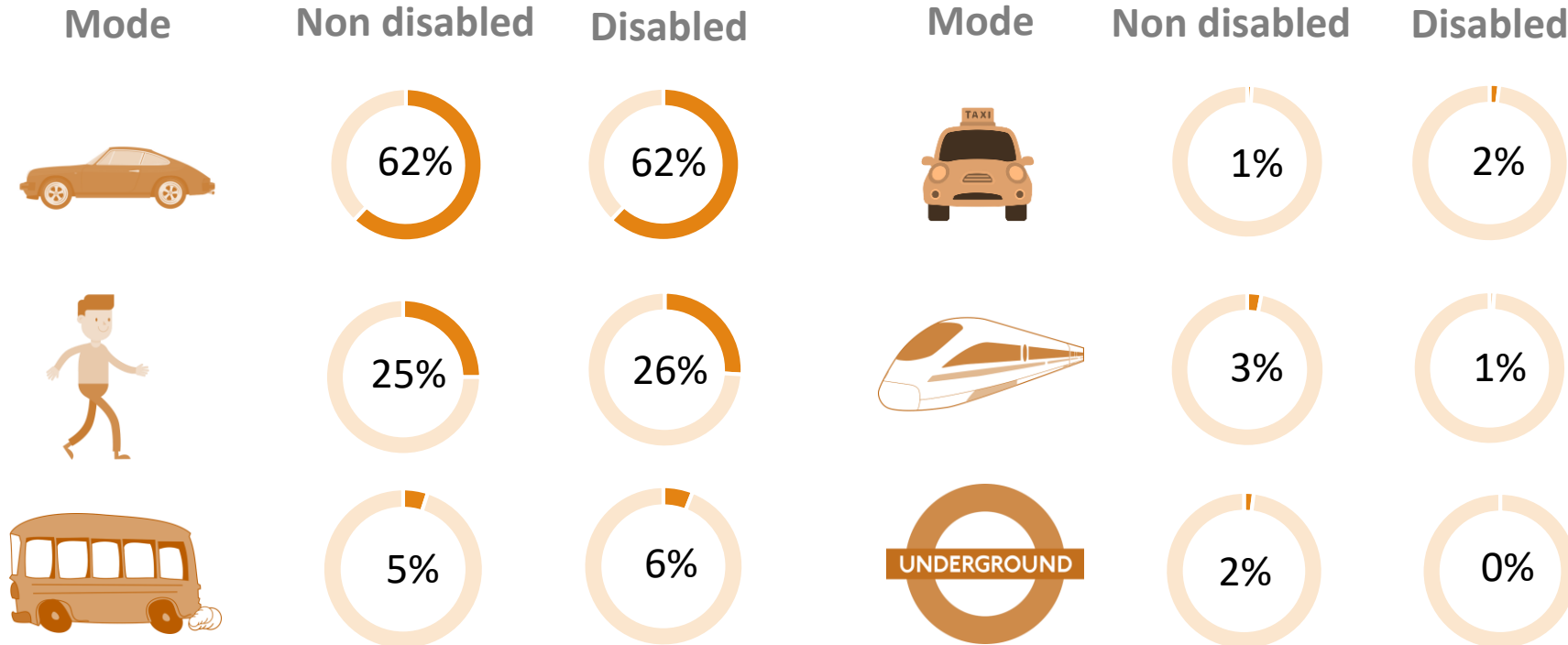
Mode	No difficulty	Mobility difficulty	Mode	No difficulty	Mobility difficulty
	651	411		10	21
	264	138		28	6
	51	35		14	1

*"I just have to either not go out or wait until I have someone with me."  
(UR)*

<sup>2</sup> Department for Transport (DfT) (2019). *National Travel Survey (NTS) 2018 Table NTS0709*. Accessed via <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/nts03-modal-comparisons#travel-by-car-access-household-income-household-type-ns-sec-and-mobility-status>

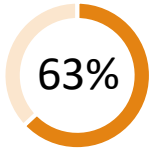
# But disabled and non-disabled people use similar modes of transport when they travel

Proportion of trips made by mode (SA)



“I prefer travelling via car because I don’t rely on anyone else, I can get up and get straight into my car and go” (UR).

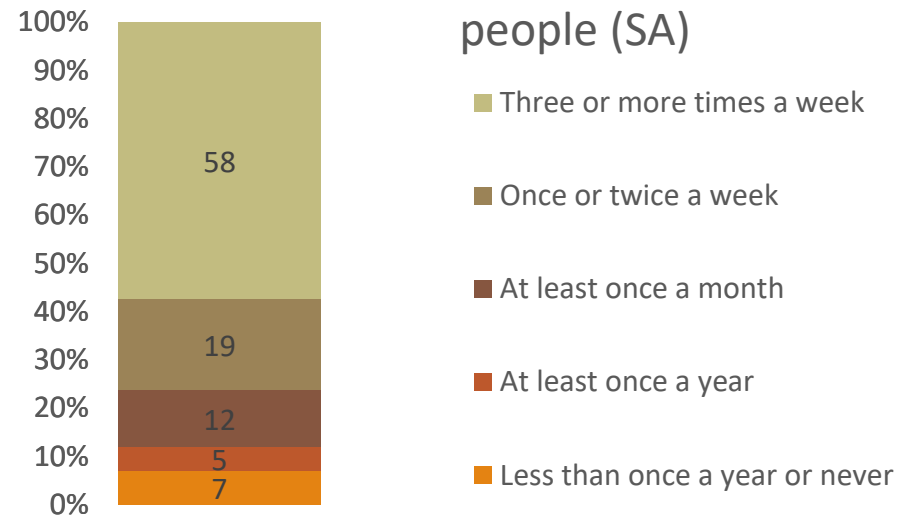




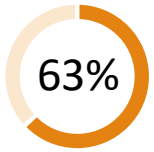
# Disabled people travel most often by car, but it is not always straightforward

- Nearly 3 in 5 disabled people use a private car three or more times a week (SA).
- Among disabled people who drive in their own vehicles, 9 in 10 have positive experiences; disabled people describe a preference for private over public transport overall (UR).
- Private travel, especially for those able to drive, was felt to be more convenient and predictable than public transport (UR).
- Issues still exist with not enough blue badge parking, a lack of information about whether blue badge parking is available at your destination, and toilets being located far away from disabled parking at rest stops, impeding long distance journeys (UR).

Frequency of car use among disabled people (SA)



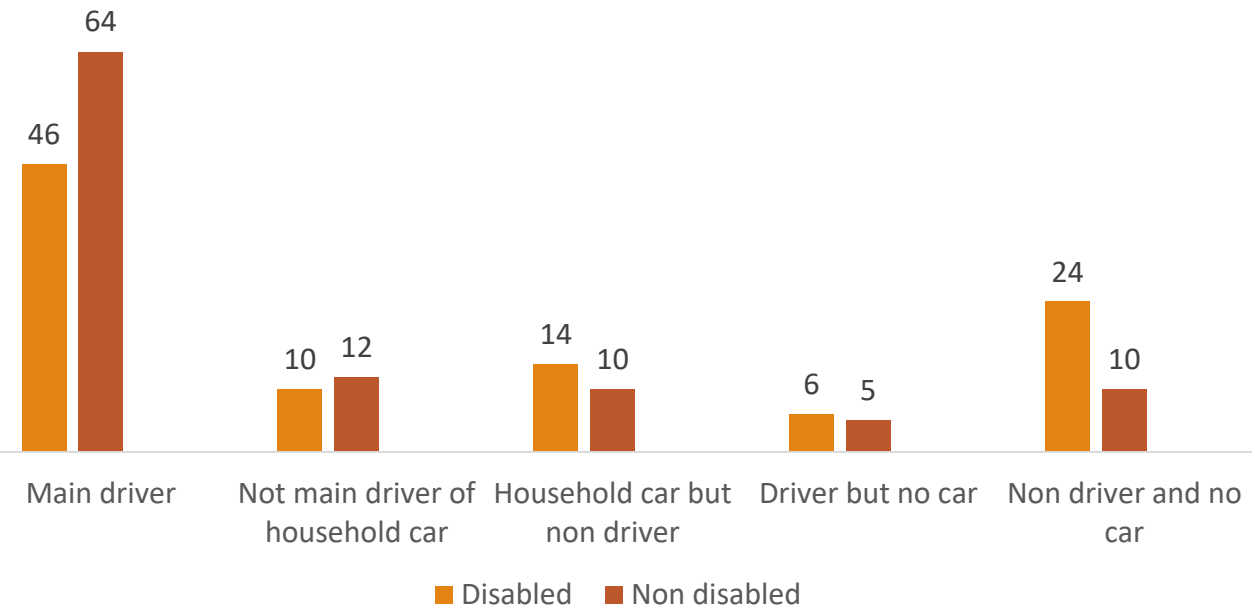
*Bethany stopped using public transport after finding it too unreliable. Standing waiting for too long causes Bethany great pain, so it has a big impact on her if the bus or train is late, or if she can't get a seat. Bethany now only travels by car, often calling ahead to her destination to make sure blue badge parking is available. If it isn't, Bethany doesn't make the journey. (UR)*



# Disabled people are twice as likely as non disabled people to have **no access to a car**

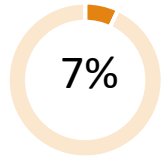
- 3 in 5 disabled people hold a driving licence, compared with 4 in 5 non disabled people. Among those with the most severe disabilities, this number drops to less than half (SA).
- Over 4 in 5 disabled people who can't drive said they were unlikely to learn in the future, compared with less than half of non-disabled people who can't drive (SA).

Proportion of people who have access to a car % (SA)



*“Being able to travel door to door is very important to me. My car is there whenever I need it as opposed to walking to and then waiting at bus stops or train stations” (UR).*

Public transport



# For a range of reasons, public transport feels off limits for many disabled people

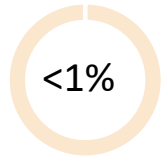
- Half of disabled people have negative experiences across different forms of public transport (UR).
- Half of disabled people never use trains or buses or use them less than once a year (SA).
- Key issues for buses and trains include lack of priority seating, the layout of train stations and the location of bus stops relative to starting/destination points, and unclear visual signage and audio communications (UR).
- 1 in 3 disabled people say they do not use the train because of how expensive it is (UR).
- Disabled people describe giving up on using public transport altogether and relying on their car and other's to drive them when needed. This was felt to have a significant impact on independence (UR).

*“Everyone knows the trains are awful, late and expensive. You pay through the nose for no seat!” (UR)*

*“My biggest issue is how tiring traveling is. To go by public transport is a killer, with all the walking, the waiting and the faffing about” (UR).*

Experience of using public transport, general panel sample (UR)



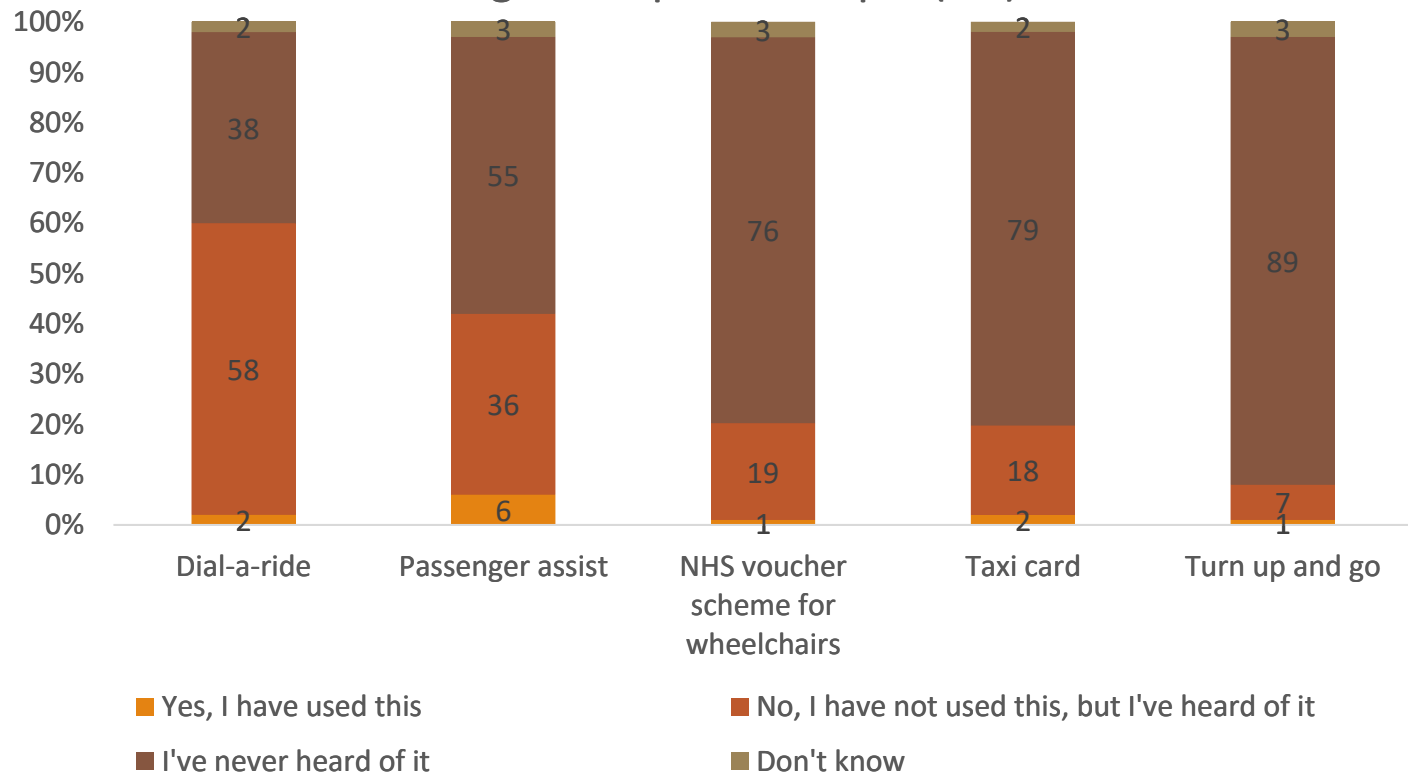


# There is very little awareness and usage among disabled people of **other travel services**

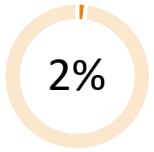
- About 2 in 5 disabled people aren't aware of any special transport services in their area (SA).
- Of disabled people who find it difficult going out on foot, using a local bus, or getting in and out of a car because of a disability or long-standing health problem, and who were aware of special transport services in their area, only 1 in 5 actually use these services (SA).

*“I don't use any travel initiatives any more” (UR).*

Awareness and usage of travel initiatives, general panel sample (UR)



Taxi/  
minicab



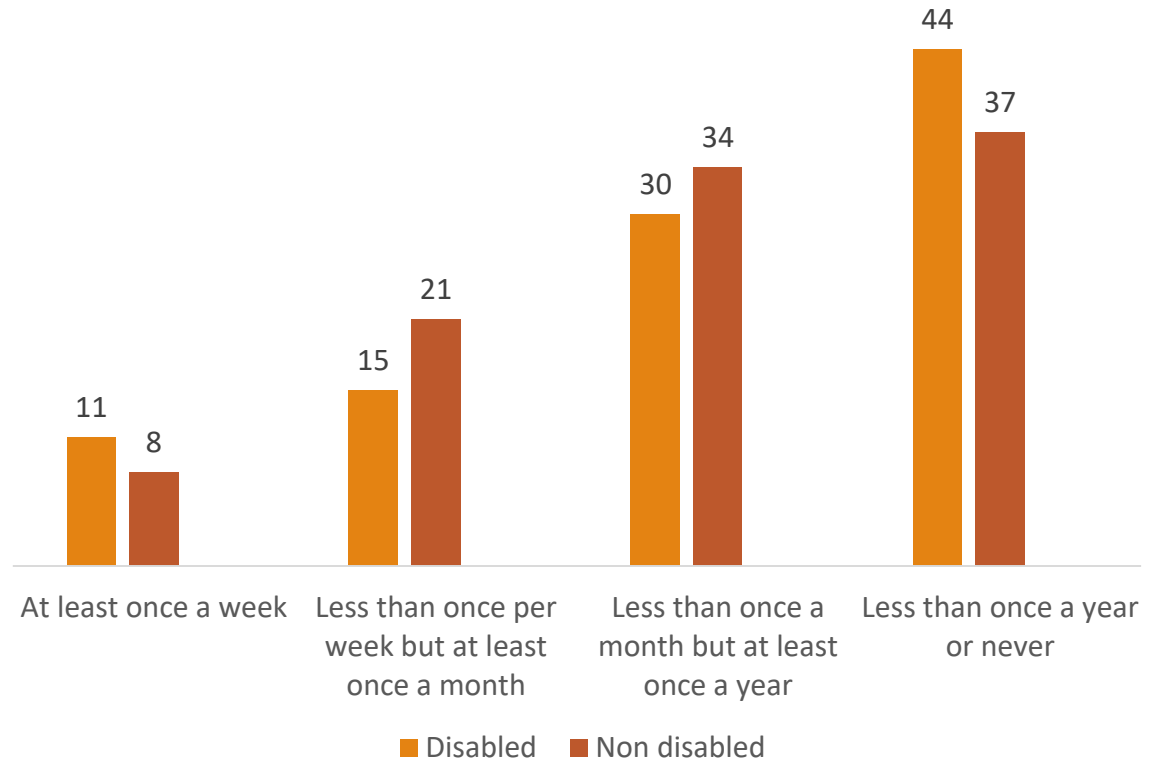
# Although taxis are a last resort, for many disabled people they fill an important gap

- Many disabled people use taxis as a last resort, e.g. if no one is available to drive them, with 1 in 10 disabled people using them at least once a week. For most, public transport is not seen as a viable option (UR).
- This is despite issues with accessibility; many report requesting an accessible taxi but an unsuitable vehicle arrived (UR).
- Moreover, 2 in 3 disabled people say they do not use taxis because they are too expensive (UR).

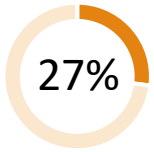
*“I can’t justify paying taxi fares, especially for short journeys” (UR).*

*“I’ve had taxi drivers moan about having to fold up the wheelchair to put in the boot or refuse to take me, even though I told the controller when I rang that I was in a wheelchair” (UR).*

Proportion who use taxis % (SA)



Active travel



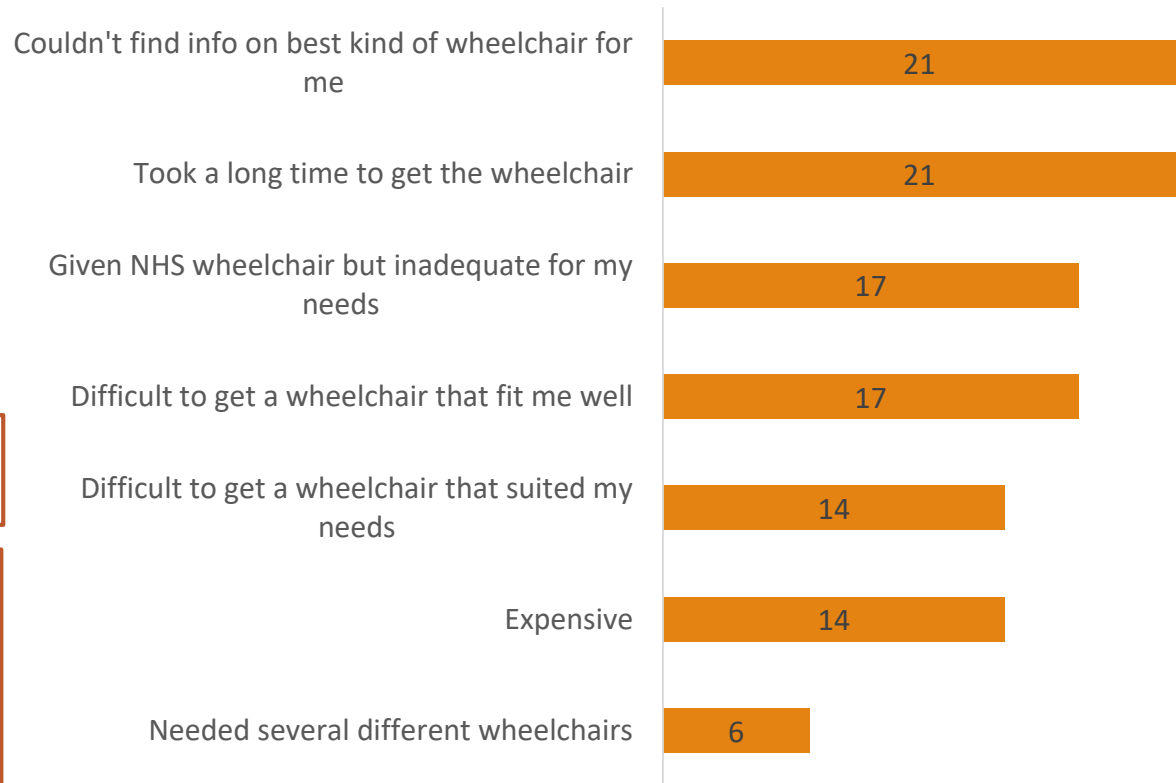
# Disabled people want to use active travel more but there are barriers to doing so

- 1 in 4 disabled people would consider using active travel more if their local area were more accessible for disabled people (UR).
- Disabled people are concerned about the built environment – such as dropped kerbs, adequate ramps, enough places to sit, and unexpected physical barriers (UR).
- Very few research papers on disability and transport recognise the door-to-door aspect of travel (REA).

*“Without an electric wheelchair I couldn't go to shops, hospital appointments and get out” (UR).*

*“I had to source a wheelchair myself and had no support. I ended up with a secondhand wheelchair from a family friend. I wasn't aware of any of the grants or schemes available to help with the cost of buying a chair until after I'd got the chair” (UR).*

Over two thirds of wheelchair users report challenges accessing a wheelchair (% experiencing each challenge, UR)



# Transport challenges for disabled people are widespread and compound each other

## Unreliability/ Frequent changes

Time	Destination	Plat	Expected
08:28	London Paddington		Cancelled
08:45	Cardiff Central	9	Delayed
First Class at the FRONT			
08:45	London Paddington	11	Delayed
09:03	London Paddington	-	Delayed
09:27	London Paddington	10	Delayed
09:42	Cardiff Central	9	Delayed
Calls at Didcot Parkway			
Page 1 of 2		10:42:34_	
Departures			

## Attitudes (Staff & Passengers)



## Travelling during Peak times



## Lack of information/ Planning burden



# Disabled people face major challenges on public transport due to **unreliability** and **frequent changes**

- Already having to manage their own often unpredictable conditions, the additional unpredictability of public transport represents a key challenge (UR).
- Journeys that require changes present numerous challenges associated with each individual form of transport used and the need to navigate intersections (UR).
- Inaccessible infrastructure at any point in the journey can derail the entire journey (UR).

*“Reliability is very important when you're a disabled person. When things go wrong it can be more than a nuisance, **it can be dangerous** for some disabled people” (UR).*

*Adrian is a wheelchair user and has a high preference for using private transport over public transport. Although Adrian cannot drive and is reliant on drivers, he finds public transport too unreliable. If Adrian is travelling on his own, he requires assistance to board the train/bus which is not often available. He has experienced judgment from rude passengers which impacts his mental health. Adrian finds there to be too many inaccessible points which impact his journey; for example, a lack of dropped kerbs make him feel vulnerable. Adrian is heavily reliant on there being less moments at which “things could go wrong”(UR).*



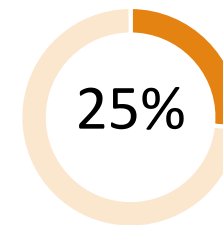
# Disabled people face additional public transport challenges due to the **attitudes** of other passengers, staff

- Attitudes and willingness to be helpful among other passengers and staff on public transport is extremely varied (UR).
- Those with hidden disabilities described particular difficulties getting a seat during peak times due to judgment from other passengers (UR).
- When requesting assistance from public transport staff, participants described experiences as varied and dependent on both staff willingness and ability to help, as a result of training and/or time available to do so (UR).

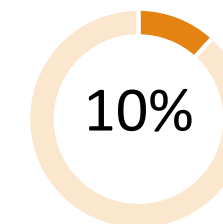
*“I have had many issues with bus drivers questioning my disability” (UR).*

*“Some people just can’t be bothered to help people. You get some really grumpy bus drivers that are always in too much of a hurry to help you” (UR).*

% experienced challenges on public transport due to the attitudes/behavior of other passengers, general panel sample (UR)



% experienced challenges on public transport due to the attitudes/behavior of staff, general panel sample (UR)

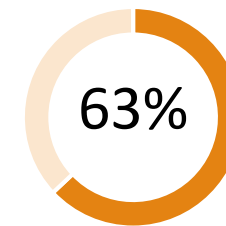


# On both public and private transport, travelling during **peak times** exacerbates other challenges

- Travel at peak times often exacerbates other issues such as a lack of priority seating or parking (UR).
- Wheelchair users in particular described difficulties accessing wheelchair spaces and those with hidden disabilities described feeling judged by other passengers for requesting a priority seat (UR).

*“The biggest challenge with travel is when it’s busy as I can’t stand for too long. I try to travel at less busy times...it isn’t always possible” (UR).*

% those with memory difficulties who experience challenges on public transport during peak times (UR)



*Jonathan was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis five years ago and describes this as an invisible illness. He finds that as the public generally views him as a young, healthy person, he is often judged for sitting, especially during peak travel times. Even when he is in pain, Jonathan feels he has to give up his seat for others, making travel very difficult. As a result of this, Jonathan avoids peak travel times, and reduces the amount of non-essential travel he does, such as for socialising (UR).*

# Across all transport, disabled people face challenges with a **lack of information** and the **planning burden**

- 1 in 5 disabled people say they spend a lot of time and effort planning journeys (UR).
- For many disabled people, this has become a necessary habit, with the majority undertaking detailed planning at each stage of a journey. The burden of planning increases for new and unfamiliar journeys (UR).
- Disabled people cite lack of information as a key reason for avoiding public transport, particularly on the train and underground. This includes information on out of order facilities (e.g. lifts or toilets), which are not kept updated (UR).
- The scarcity of other kinds of information, such as availability of blue badge parking, also affects private transport (UR).
- Existing information is also inadequate, particularly for those with sight or hearing impairments (UR).

*“On the bus and train I struggle to hear people or announcements, even with my hearing aids” UR).*

*“Information needs to be at wheelchair height and not hanging from the roof”(UR).*

*“I’ve had to start planning things better and in advance, so I could either have someone drive me or get a better plan. Any trip that’s an hour away also demands an overnight so I can rest before returning” (UR).*

*“Knowing about problems in advance would be helpful. Being able to plan a journey on an app would be great. I know you can phone various places for information, but having it all in one place would be great. Having a link to book tickets on any public transport would also help” (UR).*

# The impacts on the lives of disabled people are far reaching



Changes in travel

Work challenges

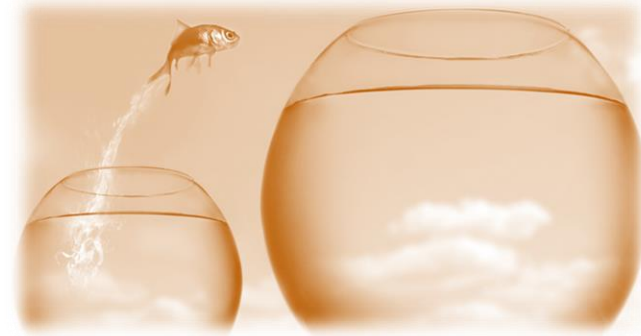


Difficulties being spontaneous

Poor wellbeing



Low expectations

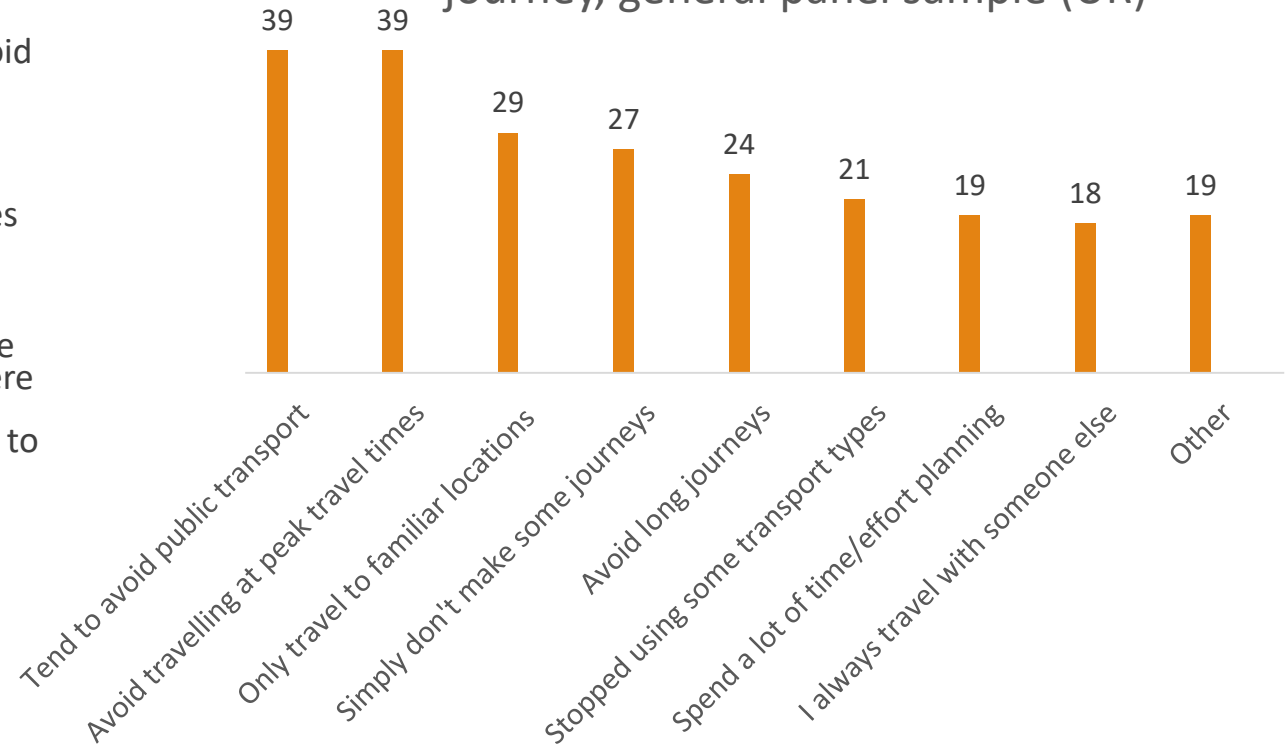


# Because of these transport challenges, disabled people **change** the way they travel

- *Long distance journeys:* can result in flare ups in pain and exhaustion (UR).
- *Travel during peak times:* difficulties getting a seat on public transport or getting a car parking space means that many disabled people alter their schedules to avoid travelling at peak times (UR).
- *Complex journeys with multiple forms of transport:* disabled people prefer private transport to engaging with multiple forms of public transport, and sometimes take on the unwelcome expense of a taxi to avoid a complex journey (UR).
- *Journeys to unfamiliar places:* disabled people describe limiting their travel to only complete journeys they were familiar with, as the risk of inaccessible infrastructure, lack of parking, and disruptions to journeys were seen to increase outside of familiar journeys (UR).

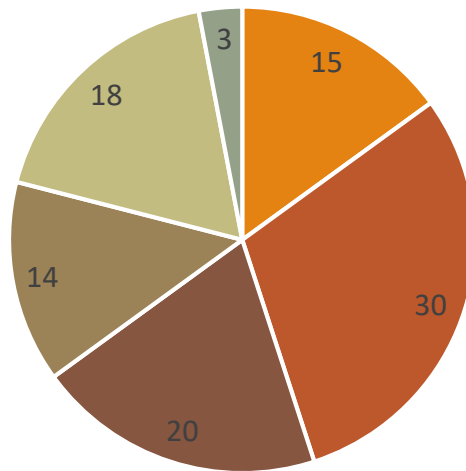
*“I never use transport during busy times. It’s difficult to get on and people are reluctant to move out of allocated spaces” (UR).*

% disabled people saying they avoid this kind of journey, general panel sample (UR)



# Disabled people find it difficult to travel spontaneously

% agreeing "I can't travel spontaneously as I need to thoroughly plan each journey,"  
general panel sample(UR)



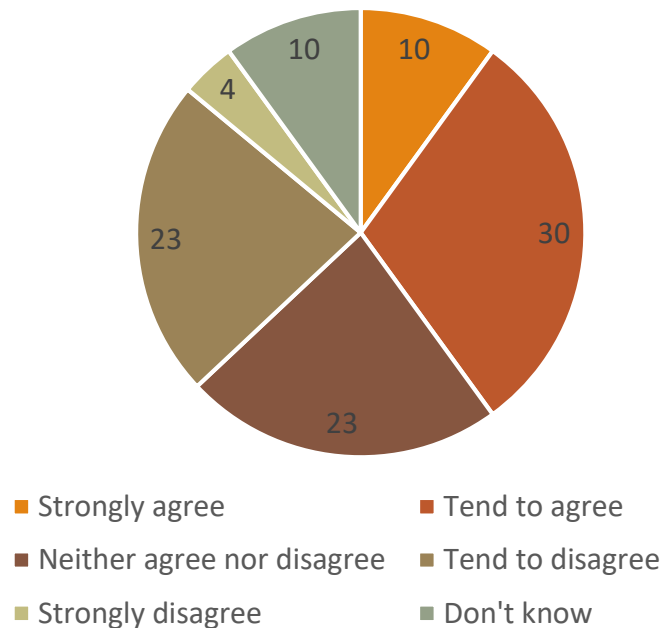
- Strongly agree
- Tend to agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Tend to disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

*"I get anxiety about finding dropped kerbs for crossing in unfamiliar surroundings" (UR).*

*"Many a time I've got to London and the underground escalators are broken and I've had to walk up the stairs. It would be great to know ahead of time where lifts are, if they're working and where blue badge parking is" (UR).*

# Disabled people have low expectations of transport in the future

% agreeing "I do not think public transport will ever improve for disabled people," general panel sample (UR)



- When considering potential changes to transport most disabled people focus on basic issues that are currently not working for them and prioritise “quick fixes” that can make an immediate difference (UR).

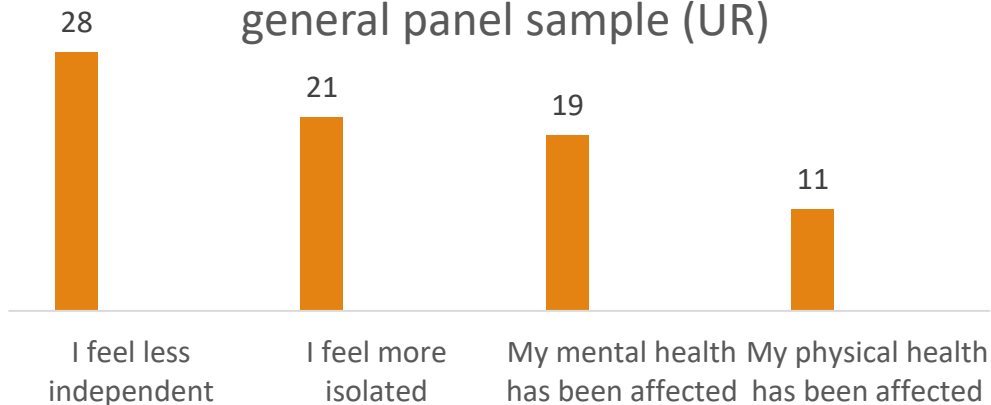
*“Improving the infrastructure has been suggested for years, but still in the 21<sup>st</sup> century public transport is often inaccessible” (UR).*

*“The whole of society needs to change to improve disabled access...people need to be more respectful of the rules” (UR).*

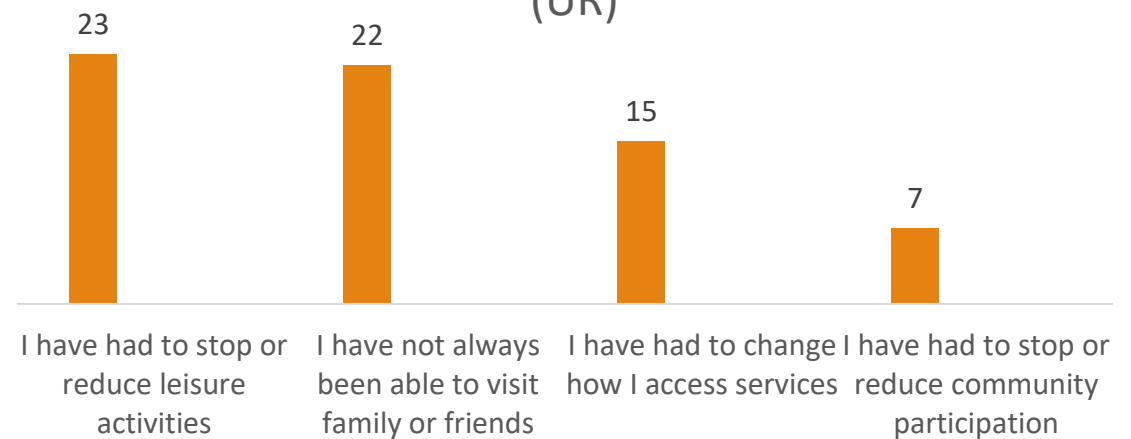
*“It should be a good, reliable and trustworthy service. Bus drivers or other relevant people should be trained on the basics of how to help disabled people (even though most of it should be common sense!)” (UR).*

# Transport challenges impact upon disabled people's mental and physical wellbeing

% agreeing, impact on wellbeing of transport challenges, general panel sample (UR)



% agreeing, impact on daily activities of transport challenges, general panel sample (UR)



*“I try to exercise by using my wheelchair outside occasionally. It’s good for stamina and building up fitness. But it depends on the outside accessibility conditions. Often ramps are not in place” (UR).*

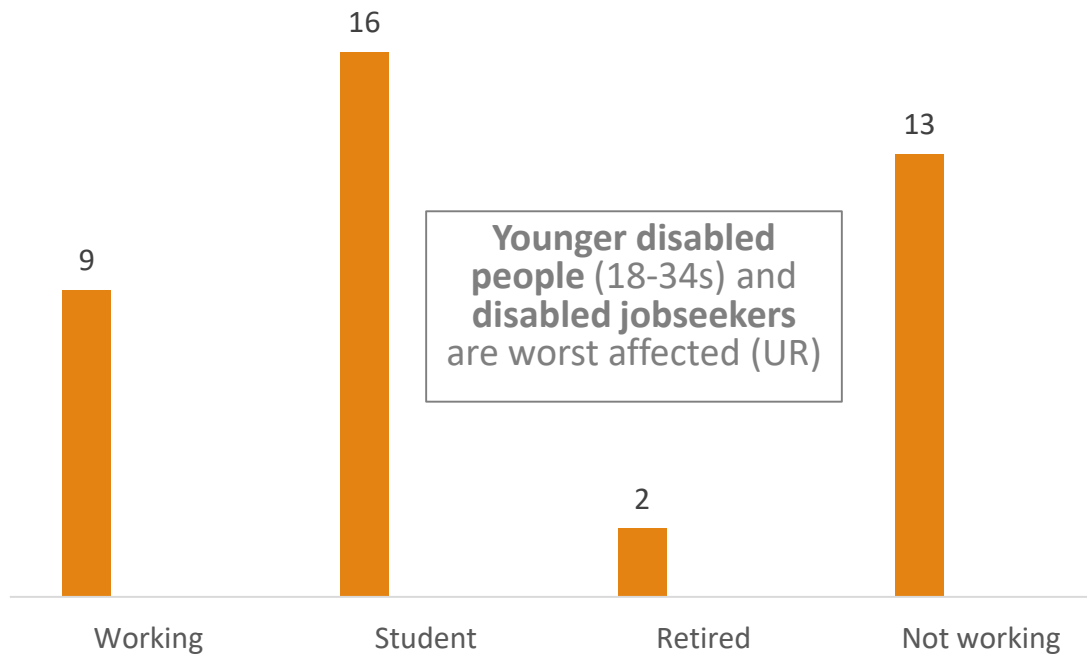
*“After saving up some money we purchased my first mobility scooter and never looked back. It gives me a feeling of independence, I love it” (UR).*



# Disabled people's employment opportunities are also affected

“I was unable to take a job, had to stop working, or had to change my hours as a result of challenges with transport” % (UR)

- Half of disabled people with severe disabilities reported difficulties travelling to work by private transport and 1 in 4 by public transport (SA).



# Further Areas for Exploration

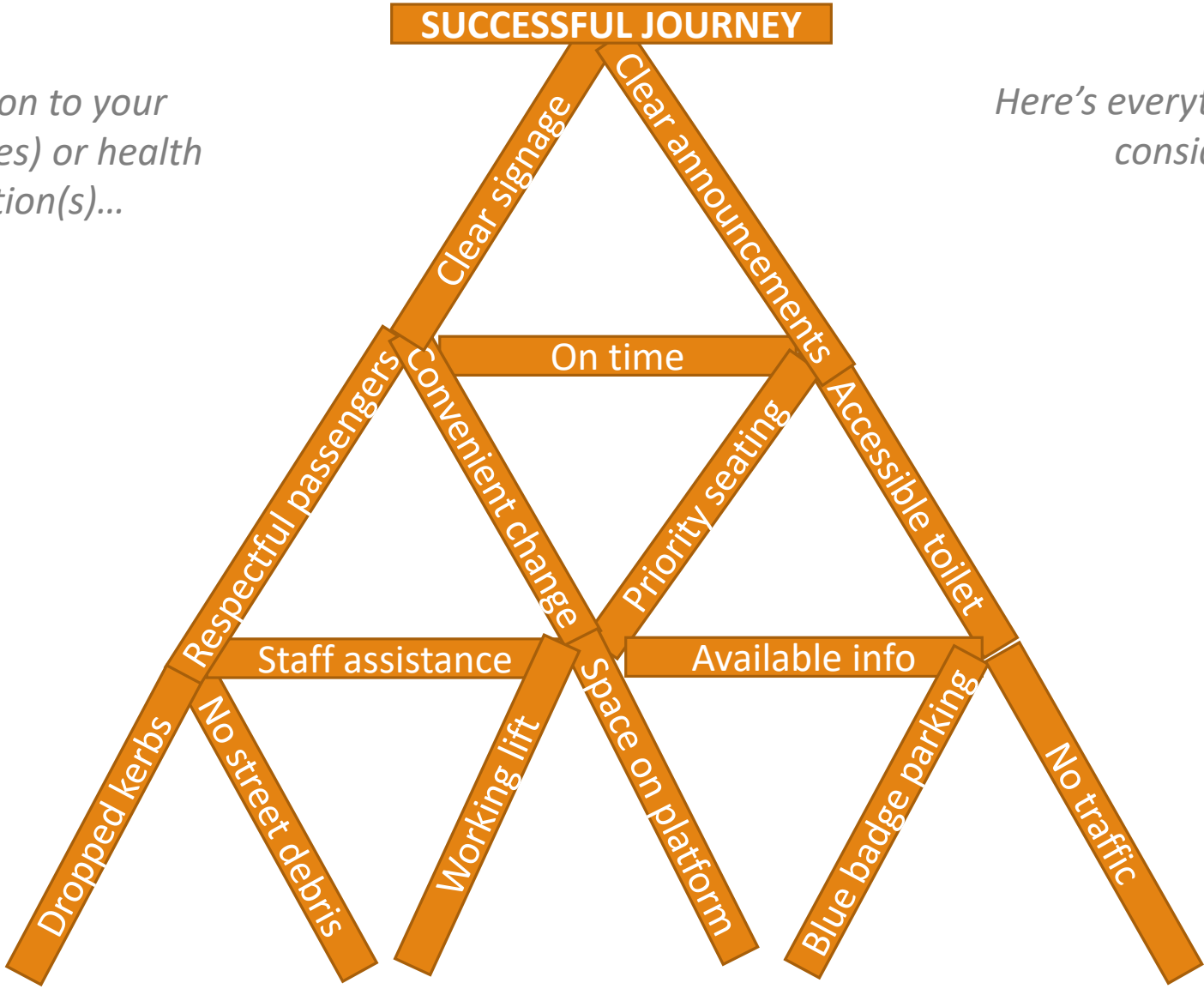
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- There are examples of best practice public transport in the UK, such as the **Nottingham tram system**, which merit further exploration (UR).
- The Secondary Analysis (SA) from NatCen uncovered lower rates of **wheelchair use** among the general population than one would expect considering NHS figures. Further research is needed to determine the number of wheelchair users and what would most help them, given the spread in needs and the range of issues they experience.
- There is limited research on the experience of people with **intellectual disabilities or mental health conditions** using public and private transport. Given the prevalence of mental ill health in the UK population, more high-quality research is needed to better understand the challenges for people living with these conditions, and the types of interventions or innovations which may improve their access to transport (REA).
- Any future research needs to move away from presenting older people as a homogenous group with frailty as a single condition, exploring the **complexities of multimorbidity** and its impact on access to transport (REA).

# CONCLUSIONS

*In addition to your disability(ies) or health condition(s)...*

*Here's everything else to consider...*



# Some Reflections

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The challenges disabled people face across all forms of transport are compounded by **uncertainty** each time they step outside their front door.

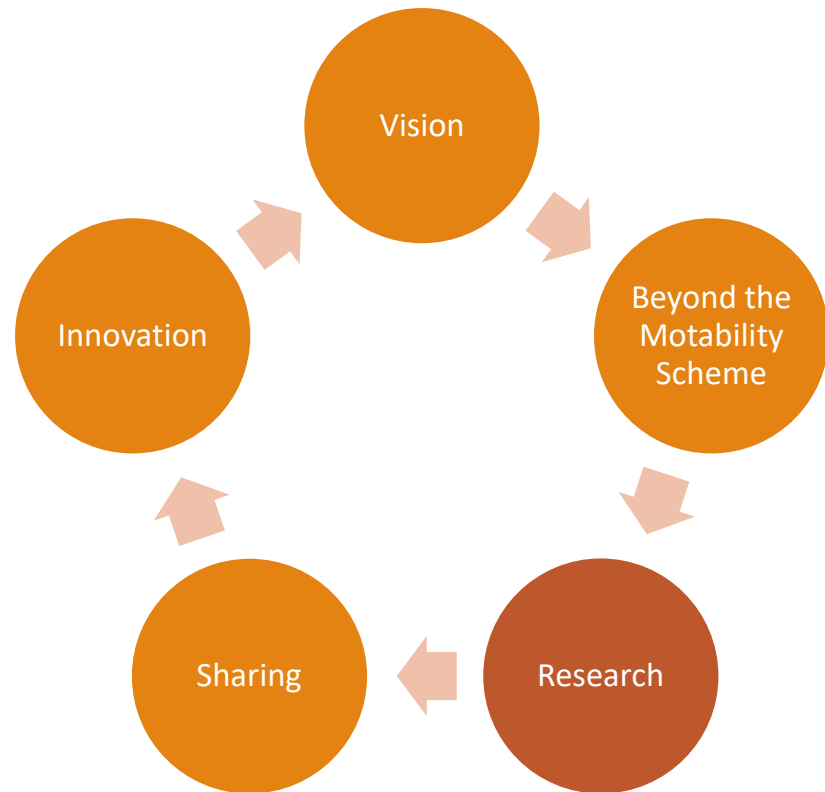
A journey is like a **'house of cards'** - if one minor thing goes wrong (a broken escalator, out-of-sight signage, derogatory remarks, or forgotten assistance) an entire journey can fail.

Consequently, disabled people **travel much less** than their non-disabled peers, especially by public transport. Missed journeys range from trips to the shops, to visits to see family and friends, to travel to job interviews or to work – things most people just take for granted.

Improving the transport lives of disabled people is a vital step to lowering the barriers that disabled people face in their everyday life and building an **inclusive society and economy** for the future.

# Next Steps

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This research will guide our **innovation** work, supported by the new decision-making framework that we are developing with Motability staff and Governors.

We also want to **share our findings across the disability and transport sectors and with Government** so that others can benefit from these insights on transport and people living with disabilities.

# Thank you!

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# Disabled people on **low incomes** are disadvantaged when it comes to transport access

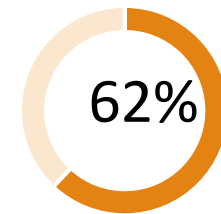
- 4 of 5 disabled people working full time or part time have a driving licence compared with only 1 out of 2 who are economically inactive (SA).

*“The downside of driving would have to be the costs involved – actually buying the car and then petrol” (UR).*

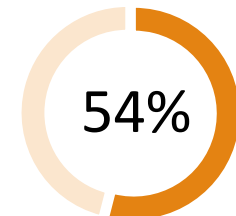
*“Reducing the cost of travel would help me the most” (UR).*

*“I would like to use the train more, but cost is an issue as we are on a lower income” (UR).*

% agreeing “I do not use taxis because they are too expensive,”  
general panel sample (UR)



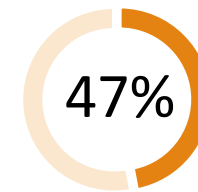
% disabled people experiencing challenges w/public transport cost,  
general panel sample (UR)



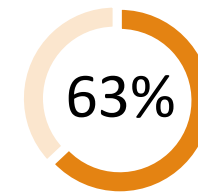
## People belonging to **ethnic minorities** and living with a disability are more likely to use taxis, trains, and buses

- Nearly 1 in 4 people belonging to ethnic minorities and living with a disability use taxis less than once per week but at least once per month, compared with 1 in 7 white disabled people (SA).
- People belonging to ethnic minorities and living with a disability are three times as likely to use trains at least once a week (SA).
- Over 2 in 5 people belonging to ethnic minorities and living with a disability use the bus at least once a week, compared with 1 in 4 white disabled people (SA).

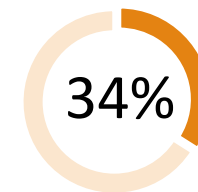
% disabled ethnic minorities w/ driving licence (SA)



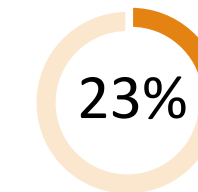
% white disabled w/driving licence (SA)



% disabled ethnic minorities non drivers, no car (SA)



% white disabled non drivers, no car (SA)



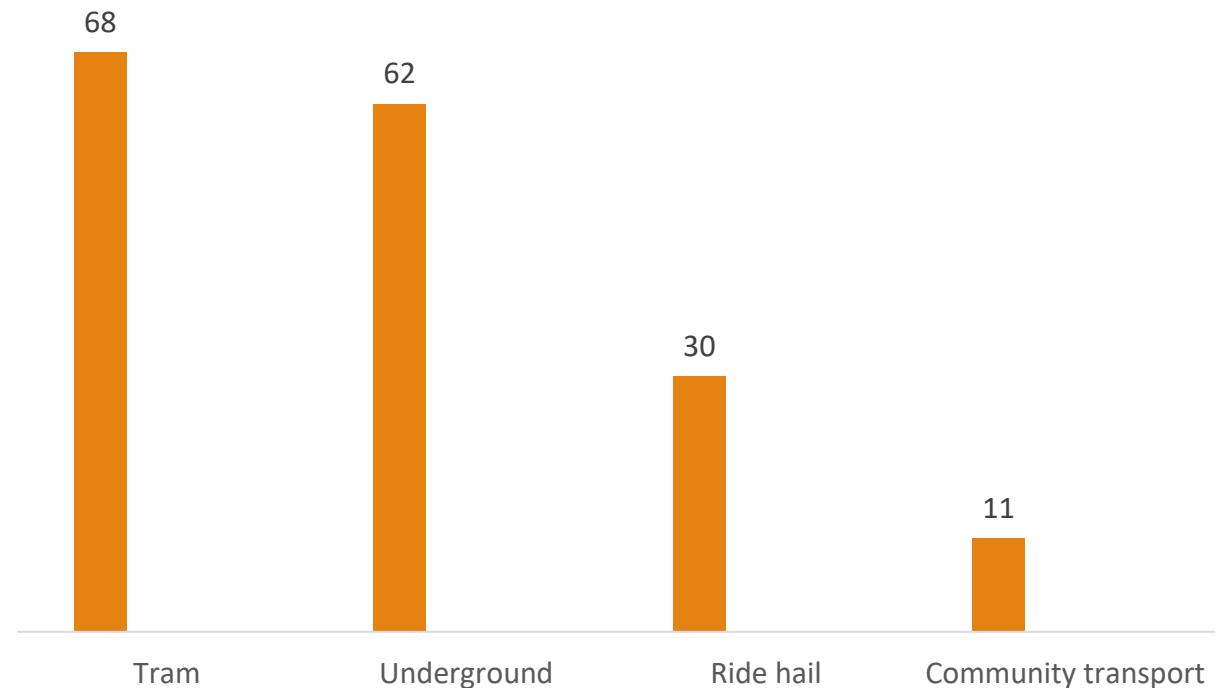


# Disabled people in rural areas do not have as many transport options available

- 1 in 6 disabled people living rurally has no access to a car, versus 1 in 30 with no disability (SA).
- Nearly 1 in 5 disabled people living in urban areas uses a taxi less than once per week but at least once per month, compared with less than 1 in 10 disabled people in rural areas (SA).

*[During Covid-19] "I've been so thankful for my Motability car during lockdown. I live in a rural location, and had no bus service for a few weeks" (UR).*

% agreeing "This form of transport is not available in my area," general panel sample (UR)



# There is variation among how disabled people use transport based on their **type of disability**

- People who report multiple disabilities (4+) are more likely to travel by taxi at least once a week (SA).
- Those with social or behavioural difficulties (85%) followed by those with mental health conditions (74%) are most likely to agree that they feel anxious when using public transport (UR).
- People with mobility and dexterity or stamina disabilities are the least likely to travel by bus (SA).
- People who report a difficulty with travel for non-work reasons are most likely to have mental health or sight disabilities (SA).

*"I don't see very well and I panic when I don't know where I am very well. This can make me anxious using public transport and I will often ask bus drivers to tell me where it's best to get off and to" (UR).*

