

1. Accessible public transport still remains one of the biggest issues. It is a huge concern to the disabled community that all trains will not have to be accessible until 2020, another eleven years to wait. Nothing is mentioned about accessible train stations. All single decker buses will not be accessible until the year 2016, double deck busses 2017. All coaches will not need to be accessible until 2020. This is a huge period of time to wait to have the same freedom as able bodied people in this country. A large amount of our disabled community will not live to see this happen. What is the life of a bus/train/coach? I could not find anything anywhere about the life expectancy of a bus. Since the DDA was introduced in 1995 it would appear that a twenty five years grace has been offered on this. This is far to long for people to wait for accessible transport.

2. Many bus stations over Scotland are in a severe state of disrepair and most are not fully accessible/useable. Falkirk bus station has, I believe, the wonderful title of worst bus station in the whole of Europe. This bus station is no more than a lean to. There is no seating, no toilets, no supporting staff, no security and to be quite honest it actually offers very little shelter from the elements. It is miserable and unsafe environment during the day and a no go area for most disabled people during the night. When the bus company and council are approached about this they merely say that there have been a lot of talks about it. Such an eyesore and disgrace needs attention now. It would appear that all the decision makers on this one do not use public transport and do not see this as a priority.

3. Access to information is another area which is sadly neglected. Blind and partially sighted people have no access to any public transport information. Timetables,

notifications of change (i.e. bus route/time table changes and holiday information etc), news bulletins, newspapers, bus stance information, route finding information etc. None of these are made available in alternative formats. We are now in the 21st century and do not embrace its technology. In England there are talking bus stops in stations which advise you of timetables and bus routes. Talking buses which advise you where you are and when to get off. Most bus stations have security, toilets, eating areas, shelter etc. Scotland feels like it is back in the 19th century, providing the bare minimum requirements and does not meet the needs of its 21st century customers.

4. The National Entitlement Card is another problem area. I initially applauded the Scottish Government on this as it looked as though they had recognised the needs of disabled and elderly passengers. However, this was short lived. Many of the ideas and initial implications were lost. Initially we were advised that the card would be automatically detected when boarding the bus. However, this is not the case. The passenger has to place the card on a machine the right way up and the right way around. This may seem a small point, but is a big issue to the visually impaired community.

The card also allows certain disabled groups to be accompanied by a companion. Another area which I applauded the Government. It is known as the plus one component. As a blind person I was advised by the help line that I could travel on any mode of transport all over Scotland with a companion free. This is indeed the case for bus travel. However, on any other mode of transport it is stated that the companion MAY have to pay. In some areas it is a third of the cost. Others it is half fare and in other areas it is full fare. If it is deemed that it is recognised that some individuals require a companion to use a bus, then it must be deemed that the same level of support is required for all modes of transport. At this time,

my NEC clearly states that I can use any mode of transport all over Scotland and to Berwick and Carlisle absolutely free of charge. However, I can only be accompanied by a companion free of charge on buses. As I can't go anywhere where I have not been orientated to on my own, I am limited to where I can go without a companion. Even though my pass indicates plus one. I have tried to get clarity on this and been advised that the rulings are the responsibility of each and every local authority. This makes no sense as when travelling to say Inverness, you have to pass through different local authority areas. Also, why call it a Nation Entitlement Card, when it is in some areas and not in others? This is another area which results in the disabled community not using the entitlement card in the right way as they don't know what it actually does. The cards were issued without any accompanying information. Mine arrived at my home address with a compliment slip. I could go on, but better not. It could take up the rest of your day.

5. Many of our disabled people feel very vulnerable when travelling and sometimes the behaviour on some of our public transport is extremely threatening. Our public transport is supposed to be safe and comfortable. Unfortunately this is not so. I have spoken with bus companies and rail companies about this and it has always been to no avail. On occasions when travelling by bus and train I have felt extremely uncomfortable and unsafe and I am not an elderly passenger. This is an area which does need to be dealt with. There should be an acceptable standard of behaviour on all public transport. I have travelled on public transport where food has been consumed and then thrown on the floor. Where bottles have been thrown at passengers. Where people play loud music on their mobiles and use threatening language to anyone who dares ask them to turn it down. My guide dog

sometimes gets nervous when this activity goes on and I would rather stay at home than travel in that manner.

6. Cars parking on pavements and at bus stops is another area for concern. A car which blocks the pavement can cause a huge problem for any public transport user and it is even worse when cars park in the actual bus stop lay by. This is always happening and as a result, people with mobility problems cannot get on the bus.

7. On trains, the disabled carriage always seems to double up as a bicycle and push chair area. I have travelled many times on the train where the disabled area has been full of passengers who appear not to have any form of disability. In addition to this, I have been asked to leave the disabled bay to allow bicycle users and push chair users in to the carriage. Although I move and I am capable of moving, I use this area so my guide dog is out of the aisle area. If a wheelchair user got on I would have no problem in moving to another carriage as their need is much more than mine. However, when being asked to move for someone who does not have a disability, this makes you feel like a second class citizen. On one occasion I was asked to move by a conductor because he thought that a fare paying customer had more rights to a seat than a non paying NEC holder. It all felt like I was back holding my tin can out.

8. There is a need to ensure that all public transport workers have disability training. Although many public transport employees are exceptional and know what they are doing, there are many more who do not. This should be a requirement of the job and should be an on going training need.

9. It would be nice to know what is happening in relation to our public transport provision. There are too many items in

the news which provide negative feedback on how public transport has failed the community. I think we need to get more positive about the good things which are happening out there. Maybe some sort of yearly ceremony which provides awards to those who have made a special contribution to public transport. Let the public nominate and be involved.

10. More involvement of the disabled community please