

Wheelchair/Scooter bus users survey May 2016



FOREWARD BY HELEN DOLPHIN MBE



Where I live in Norwich there is a very good accessible bus service into the city centre. My nearest stop is one of the first on the route so I have never had an issue getting into the city as the wheelchair space has always been vacant. However, getting back has sometimes been problematic as the bus driver will not allow me on when the wheelchair space is taken up with a pushchair. To ensure I can get on the bus I have to go some distance out of my way to make sure I am at the start of the bus route where I have a sporting chance of getting on. However, my being in the wheelchair space rarely prevents pushchairs from coming on as when parents see I'm in the space they usually just put the pushchair in the aisle or fold it

up. At no point does the driver ever tell people with pushchairs that they can't come on as I'm already in the wheelchair space. I therefore cannot understand why pushchairs can not always be moved when a wheelchair user needs to get on. I have to admit that the difficulty of ensuring a space on the bus on my return has meant I try to avoid using the bus and will now use my car instead wherever possible. I appreciate that I am lucky to have this option and so I believe more must be done to ensure disabled people can use the bus with the confidence that they will be able to board wherever they get on. The other issue I have when travelling on the bus is that my wheelchair tends to slip and slide about. This is made worse by the fact that as a quadruple amputee I do not have the ability to hold onto the pole next to the wheelchair space which should help the sliding problem. On one notable occasion my chair ended up sliding completely out into the aisle when the bus went round a sharp bend. If I am travelling with someone else then I usually ask them to put their foot in front of my chair to stop it moving but this is not a very satisfactory remedy. I have spoken to other wheelchair users about this issue and although I've heard some terrible stories of people's chairs falling over when a bus has gone round

the bend others have never experienced any problems with this at all. To find out more about the experience of other wheelchair and scooter users when travelling on the bus I designed a short survey. This survey had two main aims; firstly to find out whether disabled people are still being refused access to the bus and the reasons being given for this refusal. Although the wheelchair space being occupied by pushchairs is a widely recognised problem which prevents disabled people from being able to travel I wanted to find out exactly how big this issue is and whether there are other factors preventing disabled people from travelling. Secondly this survey aimed to find out more information on the experience of wheelchair and scooter users on the bus and whether others like me find travelling unsecured an unpleasant experience. I also wanted to discover how wheelchair and scooter users would respond to being secured on a bus if a securement system could be operated by them independently. On both these important issues I wanted to hear what disabled people had to say on the matter and discover what bus travel is really like for disabled passengers in 2016.

DATA COLLECTION

Hard copies of the survey were handed out to wheelchair and scooter users attending the Mobility Roadshow at Silverstone in May and an online link was also sent out via twitter to follows of Disability

Rights UK, Scope, RICA, Queen Elizabeth Foundation, Meningitis Now, Fish Insurance, Disability Now and other smaller disabled organisations as well as individuals. Respondents could either fill

the survey in anonymously or provide their name and address if they wished to be entered into a draw for a £25 M&S voucher. In total 185 people completed the survey.

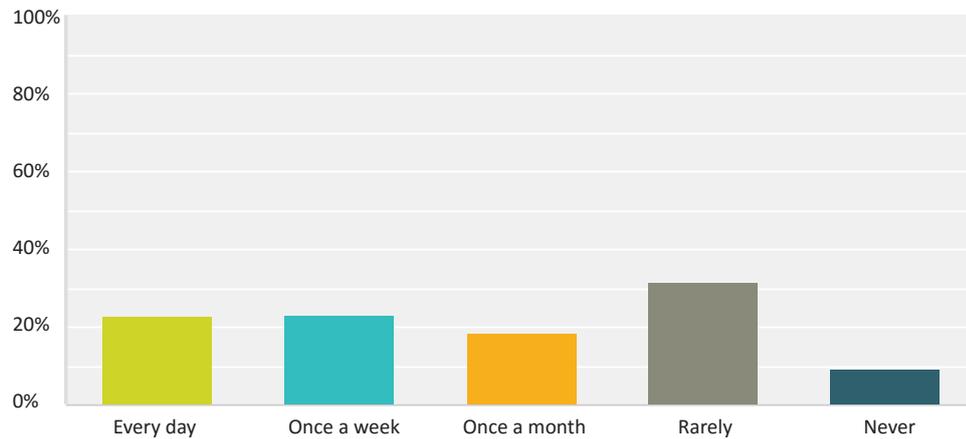
RESULTS

How often do disabled people use the bus?

The first question asked respondents how often they used the bus. The results show that 23% use the bus every day, 24% use the bus once a

week and 18.5% once a month. Therefore the majority of people completing the survey (65.6%) use the bus regularly. Although 9% said they never user the bus

many provided an explanation usually that there was no bus service where they lived or they used their car instead.

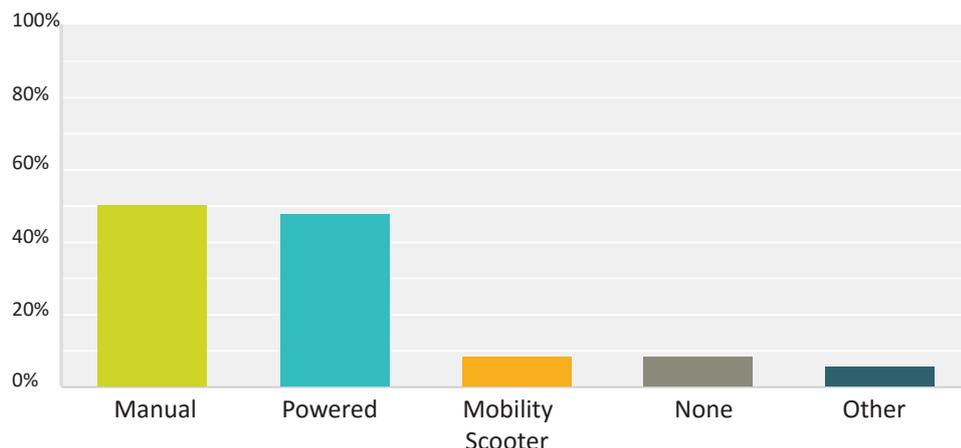


What type of mobility equipment do people use?

The next question respondents were asked was what type of mobility equipment they used. The choice given was manual wheelchair, powered chair, mobility scooter, other or none. Respondents were able to tick more than one option as many disabled people do not always travel in the same type of wheelchair. 50% of respondents used a manual chair,

48% powered chair and 8.5% a scooter. I was surprised that there were so few using a scooter but this may be due to the fact that the organisations that tweeted the survey were organisations for disabled as opposed elderly people who are more likely to use a scooter. Where people had ticked that their mobility equipment was other (6%) many explained that it was a manual

chair with an additional motor of somekind so neither manual nor powered. Those that stated that did not use any mobility equipment generally stated that they were the carer of someone who was a wheelchair user and so had ticked that box too. However, the results show that the majority of people completing the survey were either manual or powered chair users.

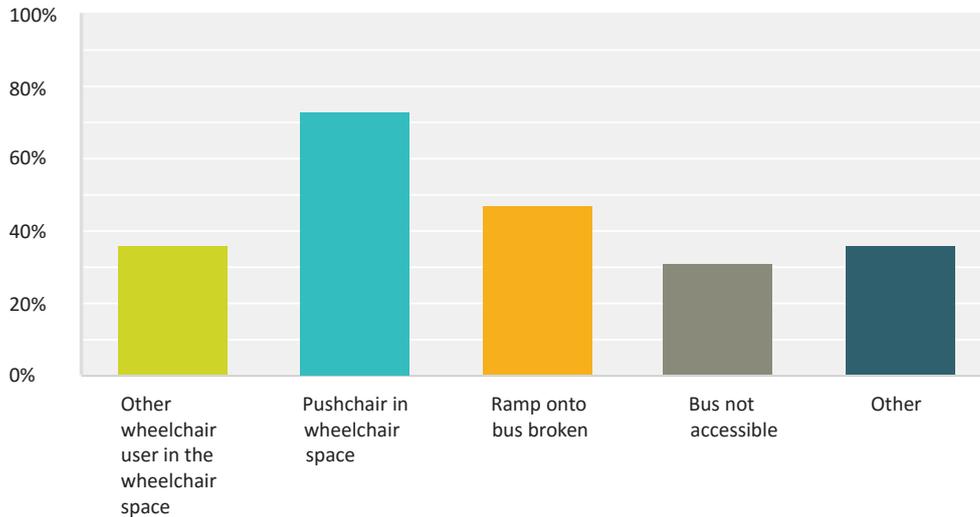


Have you ever been refused entry onto a bus?

The next question asked respondents whether they had ever been refused entry on the bus. Shockingly 64% of respondents said that they had. Respondents were then asked

why they had been refused entry and respondents could choose multiple options. 36% said that it was because there was already another wheelchair user on the bus, 72% said it was

because there was a pushchair in the space, 47% because the ramp was broken, 31% because the bus was not accessible, and 35% gave other reasons.



Space was provided on the survey for people to elaborate on why they had been refused entry onto the bus where they had chosen “other” as the reason for refusal. These reasons seemed to fall into a number of different categories:

Mis-information/misunderstanding

“Chair too big according to driver.”

“The bus driver thought my wheelchair was not allowed on the bus although it had been accepted by TFL and I was in possession of a card to prove it. After showing the card the driver still refused.”

“Bus driver said power chairs are too heavy for the ramp.”

“Bus driver insisted I needed a licence to board bus - head office confirmed no licence needed after.”

“Driver wrongly claimed powered chairs were not permitted.”

“I was asked to remove the batteries from my powerchair & when I refused to do so, he refused me access onto the bus.”

“My disability means that when I can walk, I have very poor balance. I was refused entry because the driver thought I was drunk. This has happened a number of times.”

“Suitcases in wheelchair space.”

Bad attitude of the driver

“Bus driver refused to move forward to allow room for ramp to be lowered.”

“Ramp was too steep and bus driver refused to kneel bus.”

“Driver wouldn’t get out of his seat to put down the ramp.”

“Driver verbally aggressive towards me “You disabled people do my head in” the driver stated.”

“Driver said he did not have time to put the ramp down as it was a Cheltenham Race day.”

“Rude driver refused, ranted at me to get a taxi closed doors and drove off.”

“Driver couldn’t be bothered to get the ramp out.”

“On one occasion the driver was stuck in his cab and couldn’t get out!”

“Driver point blank refused to put the ramp down.”

“Refusal on the bases of simply ignoring me and driving off.”

“Driver refused to get ramp out cos he didn’t want to. Also another time cos he said my wheelchair was a scooter & they aren’t allowed to carry scooters.”

Health of driver

“Driver had a bad back. Boohoo”

“Bus driver pregnant.”

Other reasons

“Because I tried to go on the same bus as my partner. who is also a wheelchair user”

“Scooter not allowed on bus without certificate.”

“Two wheelchair users travelling together.”

“Bus was full.”

“I can’t ensure there will be an accessible bus for my return journey.”

Does your wheelchair move about when you are travelling on the bus?

The next question asked respondents whether their wheelchair/scooter moved around a lot, a little or not at all when they were travelling on the bus. 20% said their chair moved

around a lot, 50% a little, 30% not at all. There seemed to be very little correlation between whether the wheelchair was manual or powered as to whether the respondent said a lot or

a little. However, this is quite subjective so what some people consider to be a lot may not be the same as others.

Has your wheelchair ever fallen over when you were travelling on the bus?

Respondents were then asked if their wheelchair had actually fallen over whilst travelling on the bus. 6% of all respondents

said that they had indeed fallen over which is a significant number of disabled bus travellers. Many people gave

further information on their experience of either falling over on the bus or skidding about.

Experience of wheelchair users falling over/moving about

“The driver was already in a mood because I needed the ramp and he drove too fast and too quick round corners, my wheelchair hit two people one old lady and a child.”

“The bus in Cambridgeshire countryside sped around the corners and tipped me out - I injured my foot, bruised the rest of my body, broke my wheel and therefore limited my mobility for rest of my trip.”

“There was one occasion that the driver was driving erratically and my manual chair tipped sideways injuring my son’s companion who tried to stop the chair from tipping over.”

“Harsh braking causes my chair to tip and cornering causes my chair to turn within the wheelchair space. A few times my carer has had to grab hold of me as I’ve almost tipped over despite having the brakes on.”

“My brakes cannot cope with the jerky bus movements.”

“Although the wheels on my powerchair appear to stay still, the chair tilts and leans when the bus is going round corners.”

“My wheelchair slips and has been known for a wheel to lift off the ground when the vehicle corners.”

“I fear falling out or hitting other passengers on the bus with my chair due to my chair moving around.”

“There are no seatbelts and nothing to hold on to, when the floor is wet I slide around everywhere.”

“When the driver brakes suddenly the wheelchair will move even if you have the brakes on. The assistance bar in the wheelchair spot is not in an appropriate safe place.”

“I skid forward and the bar does not prevent me from skidding sideways. When the space is on the left, I have skidded 90 degrees sideways.”

“When the bus corners at speed my wheelchair slides sideways.”

“My wheelchair skids on the floor of many London buses when they go round corners, often sending me into those sitting in front on some buses which have seats for older and mobility impaired directly in front of the wheelchair space. I always try to warn people this may happen. In the newer Boris buses there is more space so I am only likely to hit people who insist in standing there, or if the odd pushchair squeezed back in.”

“Despite brakes (and my fiance) my wheelchair will move about a lot. It will swing out into the gangway, move down the bus, swerve side to side, tilt back on braking, move back and forth and jars back on emergency stops.”

“Too bumpy a ride, too much movement of the chair (and movement of my manual wheelchair was even worse, so I never took it on a bus again).”

“I was sitting backwards as directed by the driver and I fell over when the driver accelerated from a stop.”

What other issues make you feel unsafe travelling on the bus?

Respondents were then asked what made them feel unsafe while travelling on the bus. The answers tended to either concern wheelchairs moving about or the attitude of other passengers or the bus driver to them.

Fear of treatment from other passengers

“I avoid using the bus because the wheelchair space is frequently blocked by pushchairs and I don’t want the resentment of asking someone to move it.”

“I don’t like having to deal with pushchairs and unhelpful mothers.”

“The behaviour of other passengers can be intimidating.”

“People with buggies wedging them in front of the chair.”

“People not giving up the wheelchair space for a disabled traveller.”

“Aggressive passengers if I try to get on when buggy owners are on the bus. I have also had people shouting at me that I shouldn’t be on this bus and should be on a bus for disabled people.”

“Crowded buses leave me feeling like a piece of furniture. I have been climbed on, sat on, and even had buggies dumped on my feet. The drivers pretend not to notice and I am the one that gets abuse from other passengers if I protest.”

“I would never travel on my own, as manoeuvre is difficult into the wheelchair space as people won’t move.”

“Aggression from parents with push chairs and people with luggage in the wheelchair space.”

Attitude of the bus driver

“Speed of the vehicle and lack of understanding of the driver transporting disabled people.”

“I never know if I’m going to get a helpful driver or one who when he sees me just drives off. They always complain about having to get out to put the ramp down especially if it’s raining”.

“I won’t travel on my own as I hate the way I’m treated by the bus driver. The one on my route is always muttering under his breath when he sees me.”

Lack of space to manoeuvre

“One of the main problems is getting in and out of the wheelchair space. The space might be big enough to lower a chair into. But not steer. Also when it is raining the floor of the bus gets really wet. Like a skating rink.”

“Difficult to manoeuvre powered chair around the bus pole.”

“Getting on and off is difficult in my powered wheelchair as there is never enough room to manoeuvre.”

“My assistance dog has no real space to lie down apart from in the aisle. People interfere with him every time they get on and off.”

Fear of wheelchair moving about

“I travel with an assistance dog, I’m always scared my chair will slid into him and squash him. As it is other passengers don’t give him room.”

“Despite the weight of the powerchair, it is only held by its brakes. It would be helpful if there were seatbelts attached to wall of the bus which would allow wheelchair users to be better restrained.”

“The seats are not the right way to restrain a manual chair with normal breaks they will not hold a chair in place with sharp breaking a restraint is needed.”

“I feel very unsafe if I’m forced to sit sideways if something else is in the wheelchair space.”

“There are no seatbelt or clamping mechanism and I worry about sliding about.”

“Not being restrained”

If there was a system on the bus which would secure you and your chair automatically would this encourage you to use public transport more?

Finally respondents were asked if there was a system on the bus which would secure you

and your chair automatically would this encourage you to use public transport more? 60%

that this would encourage them to use the bus more and 40% said it wouldn't.

REPORT CONCLUSIONS

This survey has given a snapshot of what bus travel is like for many disabled people across the UK. The most significant finding was that a pushchair in the wheelchair space is the most common reason for disabled people being unable to travel and 72% of respondents gave this as their reason for being refused entry onto a bus. Until more is done to ensure the wheelchair space is kept free for wheelchairs the problem is not going to be resolved. The ramp being broken was also a significant reason and shows that more needs to be done to ensure equipment is properly maintained and only buses with working equipment are dispatched. Although these two reasons were the most common for people not being able to get on the bus sadly many people were refused entry due to incorrect information about wheelchairs being too heavy or not being allowed on, or the poor attitude of the driver who in some given examples just refused to put down the ramp. Although there is a requirement for buses to be accessible it is of little consequence when the driver refuses to activate the ramp to allow the disabled passenger to board. More

training is required for drivers and the ability for disabled people to report such incidents easily must be improved.

This report has also highlighted that many wheelchair users are just not safely secured when travelling on the bus. The majority of wheelchair passenger reported that their chair moved about when they were travelling on the bus and a significant number felt that their chair moved a lot. In many of the examples given people described how their chair skidded and slid about and some described how they had actually knocked into people. Out of all the 185 respondents 6% said their wheelchair had actually fallen over when they were on the bus. This is very dangerous both for the wheelchair user and other passengers who may be injured by the fall. However, even people who did not report falling over cited poor experiences of knocking into and injuring themselves and others. This is not surprising considering wheelchair brakes were not designed to hold wheelchairs securely whilst travelling, they were designed to hold wheelchair users in place at the dining table so it is of

no surprise that many disabled passengers are not safely secured on the bus.

When asked if they would use public transport more if they were safely secured there is an overwhelming positive response. With automatic securement systems now available for bus passengers bus operators should be encouraged to include them in new buses specifications, as clearly these would help make bus travel safer for disabled people and encourage more disabled people to use the bus. As well as lack of securement passengers also reported that a fear of poor treatment from other passengers and the driver made them feel unsafe. Both these issues could be improved with education and training. Although bus travel has improved for disabled people and there is now an obligation for all single decker buses to be accessible more must be done to ensure that disabled people are not prevented from using the bus due to incorrect use of the wheelchair space and lack of driver training.

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