



TRAIN TRAVEL

INFORMATION SHEET

The ability to enjoy all forms of travel is important for the wellbeing of all people with spinal cord injury (SCI) and cauda equina syndrome (CES). Train travel can be a great way to travel locally, regionally, and internationally. It is a convenient alternative to car and bus travel allowing you to be independent and return to work and leisure activities. It is important to plan ahead to prepare for your trip. Whilst there may be unexpected issues that come up, we hope the following information will help you get ready for your journey.

Check out SIA's Travel and Mobility [video about train travel](#) and listen to our Access All Areas podcast: [Episode 3 - Everyday travel](#).

You can also connect with people who can share their experience and advice via your local [SIA Community Support Group](#).



PREPARATION AND PLANNING

General tips to help plan your train travel



- Use available journey planning tools like [National Rail](#).
- For disability or wheelchair accessible route planning and getting help during your journey, you can use the website or the [Passenger Assistance](#) app (see page 8).
- You can check each station's accessibility with the National rail's [Find a Station page](#), or search their [Interactive Accessibility Map](#).
- You can also use online search engines and tools like google maps and the train companies web sites who also offer planning tools.
- Think about yourself and your mobility and personal care needs, do you need or wish to use passenger assistance to help you on your journey (see 'Your mobility equipment needs' and 'Your personal care needs').
- How you are arriving at the station - Car, bus or taxi, or by foot/wheelchair?
- Do you need parking.
- Think about the time of day you need to travel – think about your total journey time including getting to the station and back again, plus what time of day you plan to return home.
- How far you are going – locally or a long distance? (this may change your decisions about your equipment or care needs) Intercity trains are generally more comfortable and have extras like power sockets and refreshments. Local trains are more basic and stop frequently.
- Which station you will leave from and arrive at? (as well as any changeovers or stops – check each stop you need to use is accessible or step-free).
- If you have luggage think about how you will manage to carry or transport it.
- What type of ticket you would like. How you want to book your ticket, will it be online or in person? (See 'buying your ticket' and 'passenger assistance').



PREPARATION AND PLANNING (WALKING WITH ASSISTANCE)

For those who walk/use mobility equipment some/all of the time, planning ahead will make your journeys more accessible. You can use this checklist to plan your travel.

Ask yourself: Do you want to use a mobility aid or book assistance to help you on your journey

Think about:

- Your whole journey from door to door.
- What activity will you have to do when you're travelling, will you spend more time walking or standing, will you have to carry luggage?
- How might this make you feel during the journey and afterwards? (tiredness, pain, spasms)
- Use apps like Google maps and include key words like 'step free' or 'routes with least amount of steps' to help reduce the amount of walking on your route.

YOUR MOBILITY AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS

If you are able to walk for some of the time/with the use of aids, ask yourself:

- If you might need to walk more than you are used to.
- Will your walking/journey affect your pain levels, how you feel, does excess walking cause increased pain, spasms or tiredness?
- Will there be space, seats and time to rest along your route?
- Would using an additional mobility aid such as a scooter or perhaps a wheelchair, or power add-on device help you go further and with more ease and comfort?
- Will you need to carry luggage and shopping and how do you plan to do this?
- Do you want to wear a Hidden Disabilities Sunflower ? (this helps show that you have a hidden disability)

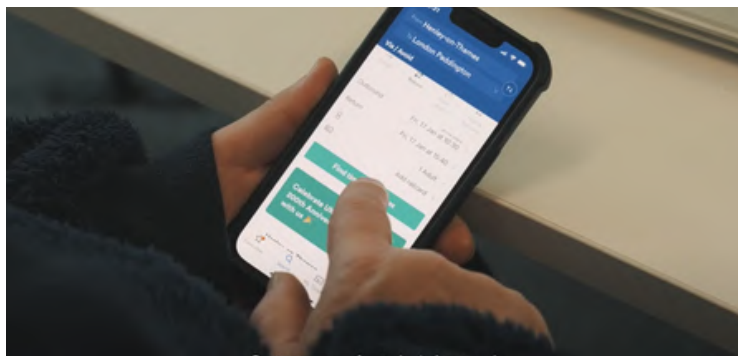


PREPARATION AND PLANNING (WHEELCHAIR USER)

For travellers that plan to use a manual wheelchair for most of the time, planning ahead will help make your journey accessible. Think about:

- Using passenger assistance services to make your journey easier.
- Your wheelchair skills and how confident you are in managing ramps, using lifts, going over different surfaces, and getting around crowds of people.
- How you plan to get to facilities like ticket machines and toilets on board the train.
- How you will manage your personal care e.g. carer

Use online or app services like 'passenger assist' from National Rail. Look for words like 'step free access', 'step free to platform' (meaning there is a ramp to get onto the train itself) and 'step free to train', and 'step free to train from street'. Each train operating company has an access page on their website.



PREPARATION AND PLANNING (POWERED WHEELCHAIR USER)

As a person using a powered wheelchair for the majority of the time, train travel is accessible with some preparation and planning. Think about:

- Using passenger assistance services to make your journey easier.
- Your wheelchair skills for managing ramps, lifts, variable terrain, and getting around people.
- How you plan to get to facilities like ticket machines and toilets on board the train.
- Your door-to-door journey needs.
- How you will manage your personal care e.g. carer.
- The distance you plan to travel including the return journey and battery life.
- Using online and app services like 'passenger assist' from National Rail. Look for the words 'step free access to train', 'step free access to platform' or 'step free access from street'.

YOUR MOBILITY AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS

If you are a wheelchair user:

- Are you comfortable with your wheelchair skills (using your wheelchair on different surfaces and going up/down ramps, for example) and do you know your abilities on different surfaces/ balance/ moving through crowds of people. Do you know how much you can do before you get tired?
- When using a train you may need to use ramps. Station staff will put these in place for you? For more information on using ramps see 'Getting on and getting off the train'.
- Always check that you are happy with the placement of the ramps before you use them. Ask for support if you need it.
- Sometimes a ramp might be quite steep. Ask for assistance to go up it if you need it. To come down it's sometimes easier or more comfortable to reverse. Only do this if you are sure you can do this safely, or ask for help.
- If you have advanced wheelchair skills you may not need to use the ramps.
- Trains have designated areas for wheelchair spaces. Look for signs on the outside of trains and on the platform.
- Sometime you may find that wheelchair spaces are taken up with luggage. If you feel you can, kindly ask the people to move their luggage so you can take your space. If not, speak to the train guard who may be able to assist.
- If you use a power add-on device, remember that this will make the size of your equipment longer. It will take a larger turning circle so the space in lifts and the train may not be large enough. You might need to use advanced wheelchair driving skills.
- Battery charge: If you are using battery powered equipment think about how far and for how long your battery will last. This is important if this is a full day out, and there are large distances between platforms, connecting trains and to and from your destination. Do you need to take a charger or spare battery?
- You should know the dimension and weight of your wheelchair. You may be asked the combined weight of you and your wheelchair to ensure it is safe for the ramp. The standard weight guideline is 300kg.
- National Rail use the government standard size for wheelchairs for making sure that a wheelchair space on a train is big enough. The standard size is (700mm wide by 1200mm long, weight 300 kg (including passenger)). There are a small number of older trains that can only carry wheelchairs that have a maximum width of 550mm.

YOUR PERSONAL AND CARE NEEDS

Plan what you will need for your personal health needs during your journey and during the day including your return journey and what time you expect to return home. Plan for possible delays. Think about your:

Toileting needs

- Find out where the toilet is onboard the train or station – usually near the disabled or wheelchair spaces.
- Use the train company website, or national rail online maps look up station facilities, or look for signs or ask for help.

Interactive Accessibility Map



- Take a toilet access key/ RADAR key with you. For more on RADAR keys and Changing Places accessible toilet facilities see (see 'further information').

Skin care

- Whilst travelling it's important to remember to do your usual routines, for example moving forward or side to side in your seat so you can help blood to move across your skin to stop 'pressure ulcers'. This is called 'pressure relief' and your healthcare professional can tell you about this. See skin factsheet in our knowledge hub.

Tiredness

- Remember that the efforts of your travel combined with the rest of your routine and the activities you want to do for your day can lead to increased tiredness. Allow rest time so you can enjoy your day and do what you had planned to do. Make sure to stay hydrated throughout the day.

YOUR PERSONAL AND CARE NEEDS

Emotional wellbeing

- Plan and prepare your trip so you feel more confident.
- Tell guards and staff what you want as clearly as you can.
- Check with the station staff to make sure that any assistance is ready for you at all the stations you are going to use on your journey, also on your return journey.
- If you need and want to use passenger assistance services, book this in advance where possible so you can have more confidence that support will be available for you.

Carers

- Plan ahead for their needs
- Carer ID for tickets/access
- Food and drink and breaks whilst travelling
- Seat booking for the carer
(a reduced rate is also available on disabled railcards)
- The return time and if this might affect your carer's working hours



Things to bring

- Essential documents including: tickets, ID – including carer's ID and any medical paperwork that you might need.
- Medication, including possible extra medication – depending on what activity you plan to do (extra walking or pushing) - you may need to bring extra medication with you in case you feel any more pain, fatigue (tiredness), spasms than usual or your travel is delayed.
- Supplies for the whole of your journey, including: catheters | wipes | pads (plus extra in case of delays).

Unexpected delays and weather

- Plan for all eventualities (including extra supplies for example).
- Checking the weather forecast.
- Making sure you have access to comfortable waiting areas.
- Bringing extra/suitable clothing.

PASSENGER ASSISTANCE

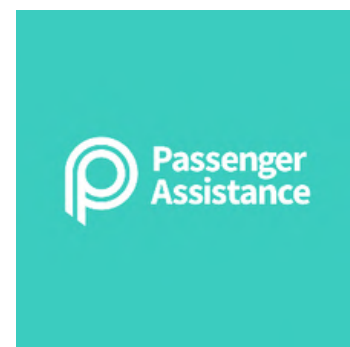
Passenger assistance offers a service to disabled travellers to be able to plan accessible routes and request help such as getting on and off the train, support travelling through a station, even carrying luggage. [Watch a video on 'how it works'.](#)

Passenger assistance is available on the web site, an app for your smart phone, or by phone call. You can also book through the ticket office or any train service company.

You can request assistance , such as asking for wheelchair access to get on the train , up to 2 hours before your journey. You can also just turn up and ask at the station.

“National rail says; You can ‘turn up and go’ without booking assistance in advance, but if you require assistance at short notice please make yourself known to a member of staff or use a Help Point when you arrive at the station.”

Remember although you don't have to book assistance in advance and you are legally entitled to turn up on the day and ask for assistance; your journey will have less risk of delays or problems if you have asked for help if you need it, before your journey.

A screenshot of the Passenger Assistance app interface. At the top, it says 'New Journey' and 'Hello, Helen! Where would you like to go?'. Below this, there are input fields for 'from: London Kings Cross' and 'to: Nottingham'. A 'Via/Avoid' link is at the bottom right. There are buttons for 'One way' and 'Return'. Below these are sections for 'Outbound' (Today, Now), 'Passengers' (1), and 'Connection Time' (None). A large teal button at the bottom says 'Find trains'.

PASSENGER ASSISTANCE

If you are buying your train tickets using online / web site based apps, you should book passenger assistance after buying your train ticket. The commercially available train tickets apps such as Trainline do not offer passenger assistance options.

However, you can buy your tickets and book assistance at the same time if you go direct to the ticket office or phone the train company or national rail enquiries to plan, buy tickets, and book assistance in one go.

You can find the right telephone numbers on the train company's website (look for "accessibility" or "special assistance"), or the National Rail list of train companies.



Passenger Assist - National Rail

You can also call National Rail 0800 022 3720.

If you book your assistance through Passenger assistance and on a smart device you can get important updates sent to your smart phone about your journey and services on route, such as lifts and trains.

It may be worthwhile to also print off your reservation and ticket details in case of phone battery failure.

More information on accessibility and facilities during train travel

- [National Rail access map](#).
- The train company's web site accessibility section, for example [Great Western Rail](#).
- Online websites like [AccessAble](#) that lists national locations and their access facilities.
- The National Rail also have a [Live Trains page](#) showing services and facilities on your train.

BUYING YOUR TICKET

- You can use National Rail Enquiries or go to the train company directly to plan your journey and buy tickets. This can be done online, on the phone or at the ticket office OR You can also use an online ticket booking company/app like Trainline. These are for buying train tickets only. It does not have options for booking assistance. Book assistance separately.
- When you buy tickets over the phone or at the ticket office it is possible you can book your assistance too if you want it.
- Any train company can also organise assistance for your entire journey, even if you are travelling on multiple services. You tell them where you want to travel and what your needs are. They can help book your assistance and tickets at the same time (only by phone) ***Remember buying tickets in advance is usually cheaper.***

Ticket collection

Think about your ticket collection options and what suits your needs and journey best – online, e-ticket, season ticket, or at the station at the ticket office.

Discount and rail card options

Rail cards are great options for further discount – especially the disabled persons railcard. The disabled persons railcard is available everywhere in the UK either online or at the ticket office in a station. It gives a 1/3 off eligible disabled adult train fares and for a companion meaning a carer can travel with a 1/3 off. See website for full terms and conditions.

Other regional and local discount passes may also be available (for example, the Freedom Pass for London residents) Visit your local council website for more information.





GETTING ON THE TRAIN (WHEELCHAIR USER)

It is likely that you will need to use a ramp to get on and off a train. Some trains have step-free access. Look for the signs showing the right place to get on the train. Staff should also be there to help you get on the train if you need it.

Some trains need ramp access:

- There are different types of ramps depending on the type of train.
- Be sure you are happy about where the ramp has been placed.
- Be sure you are able to use your wheelchair on a ramp - if you are not sure about this, ask for help.
- Going up a ramp/ entering the train: Ask for help to use an uphill ramp if you need it.
- For manual wheelchair users, be sure to say the best way staff can help you - where to place their hands, (on the back of your chair – it's not helpful if someone pushes you from behind on your shoulders) to help you up the ramp. It's helpful when pushing up a ramp to lean forwards a bit.
- For powered wheelchair users, be sure to say the best way to help you. Think about moving more slowly. Ask staff to guide you gently up the ramp. If you are not sure about driving yourself up the ramp, ask for help to drive with your control or the attendant control on the back of your wheelchair.





GETTING OFF THE TRAIN (WHEELCHAIR USER)

Going down a ramp/ getting off a train

- For manual wheelchair users. Be sure you are able to use your wheelchair on a downhill ramp. To help yourself it is useful to lean backwards a bit. Use a lap strap if you have one. Ask for help if you are unsure. If it is steep or if are not sure you can do it, it is possible and you may feel more comfortable to reverse down a ramp, with assistance.
- For a powered wheelchair user; it should be ok to go forwards down the ramp. Use a low speed. Ask for help if you are unsure about doing this. To help yourself you can make the chair 'tilt' backwards a little. This helps with your balance as you move downwards on the ramp. If it's a steep ramp you could also reverse down with assistance. If you use equipment like straps or harnesses that help support your balance, make sure you are using it before you do down a ramp.
- Remember if a lift or ramp is out of order or not available, alert a member of staff or use a station help phone and request support for your onward journey.



YOUR RIGHTS AND PROBLEM SOLVING

What to do when it goes wrong ...

It is frustrating and highly inconvenient when things don't work. When there's no ramp, or a lift is out of order, it can make you feel angry and stressed and it can ruin your day. But If something isn't right here are some tips of what to do.

Immediate practical and coping strategies;

- Take a moment to pause and take a breath. This will really help you think more clearly and speak with calmness.
- Think about your options – alert staff immediately – using help button, or asking someone.
- If the ramp or lift isn't working, ask for advice and support from the staff, who will help you with alternative travel to your destination (at the cost of the train company).
- Check available online resources or notices at the station – for nearby accessible routes and options.
- Think about and explain your needs clearly and calmly – what do you need, and ask for what the options and alternatives are. It is useful to remember about language differences and the words related to your individual disability. Use simpler language to explain where possible.
- It can be helpful to document what has happened if you are claiming later. For example, you could take a photo if its appropriate and safe to do, and make a note of the time, day and location. This can help in your compensation claim, advocating for support or change for better services.
- Remind yourself - its not your fault, and often not the person you are talking to either, but a larger system failure. Its ok to feel frustrated and you are not inconveniencing anyone by expecting basic access services. Be kind to yourself, managing unexpected barriers takes strength.

“I'm handling a tough situation the best I can”

YOUR RIGHTS AND PROBLEM SOLVING

If something isn't right you can take action!

If you want to make a formal complaint speak to staff or send your comments to National Rail, Transport for London (TfL) and via train company websites.

You can also speak to your Citizens Advice Bureau.



FURTHER INFORMATION

- Changing Places accessible changing rooms
- Hidden Disabilities Sunflower lanyard
- National Rail Enquiries
- National Rail information on accessibility at specific stations
- National rail information on Railcards
- National Rail interactive Accessibility Map
- National Rail Live Trains page with the services and facilities available onboard your train (for example, the location of disabled toilets)
- Passenger Assist app
- RADAR keys from Motability
- Train company information and contact details
- Trainline ticket booking app
- Transport for London
- Travelling confidently by train, leaflet by GWR
- Wheelchair skills from Back Up



For more information, visit our [Travel Hub](#) or contact us at:

Spinal Injuries Association, SIA House, 2 Trueman Place, Oldbrook, Milton Keynes, MK6 2HH

e: travel@spinal.co.uk t: 0800 980 0501 (freephone support line: Monday - Friday 10.00am-4.00pm)