

Metlink Accessibility Action Plan

Research Report

21 August 2023

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About this report

In 2021, Metlink adopted an [Accessibility Charter](#) with a key focus on increasing accessibility and improving safety on our public transport network, between 2021 and 2031. This report shows the research processes and the findings that contribute to our Accessibility Action Plan. The plan is also built with co-design work that will start after the analysis phase is done.

By engaging and listening to people within the accessibility community, and to front-line staff and bus drivers, we were able to contextualise the ongoing concerns and issues that public transport users with accessible needs face every day. Observations by our operators and staff on their work with disabled people are important in finding practical actions.

We learned that to work towards a truly accessible network, it is critical to have the input from those in our community who are affected, along with the Metlink team and associated partners. For this reason, our adopted mantra is, 'Nothing about us, without us' and it will be employed throughout this project. There are a number of excellent reports that identify the barriers physically disabled people face. We wanted to build on these ideas, include new aspects and look at the accumulative effects across the whole journey. We included people who are neurodivergent or have an invisible disability, as well as those with learning or developmental impairments. We also sought advice from support workers and Age Concern advocates.

Our Methodology

We engaged with 43 public transport users that have different accessibility needs and followed their public transport journeys, in order to understand the barriers they face, during each stage of travel on Metlink services in the greater Wellington region. While some participants contacted us directly, we found the majority through our professional contacts and accessibility specialists, along with requests that were sent to sector and community organisations that support people with disabilities.

We worked with the following cross-section of public transport users that have accessibility needs:

- 6 wheelchair users
- 13 people from the blind community (blind, vision-impaired, deaf-blind, and low vision)
- 2 who were hard of hearing or deaf
- 11 neurodivergent people or those with neurological or cognitive conditions.
- 3 people with invisible disabilities
- 8 participants from Age Concern
- 14 bus drivers

Participants were asked to take us, step-by-step, through a common public transport journey. We listened to their ideas and to why their request for improvements is important to them.

Our desk research

Metlink reviewed accessibility initiative examples from overseas and also connected with the Auckland transport team managing their Accessibility Action Plan.

Our team also looked at past reports relevant to accessibility and our research:

- [Human Rights Commission Inquiry 2005](#)
- Disabled Persons Assembly 'Accessible Journey' 2019
- DHB transport 2022
- Waka Kotahi '[Transport experiences of disabled people](#)' 2022

Limitations of this research

Availability issues, along with access to accessibility communities meant we did not have a statistically accurate representation of the different types of disabilities, amongst our participants.

We considered these factors when weighing up the different barriers and concerns that were raised by our participants. Further testing and the co-design process will help account for this and aim to fill any gaps.

How we got here

One of the central policies in our Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan 2021, is to 'Improve the accessibility and safety of the public transport system for customers, workers and the general public.

Counsellor David Lee said: 'Accessibility improvements are one of the key areas of focus in the 2021 Regional Public Transport Plan and Metlink Strategic Roadmap for 2021-2031.'

The Charter

We started this process in 2021 by talking to our trusted advisors about how we proceed and in the same year, the Metlink Public Transport Accessibility Charter was adopted by the Transport Committee, providing a pathway to achieving our commitment to increase accessibility on our public transport network.

The Charter's vision is to ensure that 'The Metlink public transport network is accessible for all with ease and dignity'. We then engaged with the disability community to identify their 'pain points' when travelling on public transport.

What's next?

Our team will continue to work with this community to both identify issues and prioritise solutions. Through co-design, we will build an Accessibility Action Plan, and using its findings, our team will apply for funding. The agreed activities will be included in Greater Wellington's 2024 Long Term Plan and Regional Land Transport Plan. The Metlink team will then begin to run the viable and budgeted actions.



What we learned about people's journeys

The 'Big Rocks'

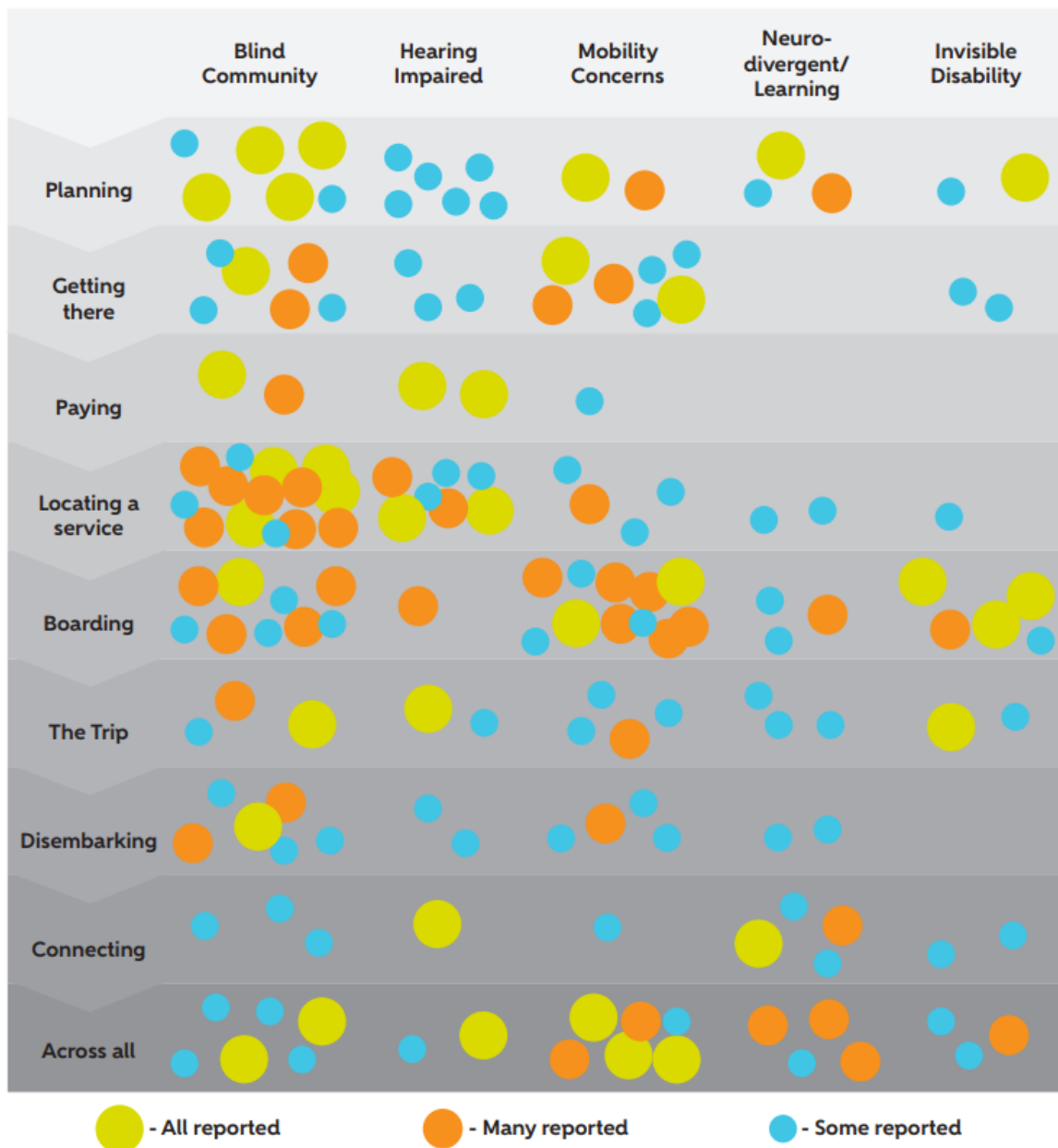
We identified four 'big rocks' while talking with public transport users who have accessibility needs:

1. **Discomfort and barriers are cumulative across the journey** - when disabled users face a sequence of minor (and sometimes major) issues it ultimately leads to a level of anxiety. Every participant described that they feel stress when using public transport, so they often avoid travel altogether.
2. **Many people avoid journeys with connections** - travel with connections have the potential to double the issues users experience while using public transport, as many people we talked to said they had been left stranded, due to a missed connection and this is more difficult to overcome for disabled people.
3. **Buses replacing trains (BRT) is a huge challenge** - most people we spoke to will cancel plans, pay more for other transport or not travel at all when they know train services are replaced by buses (both planned and unplanned), which makes planning for bigger events and social engagements less reliable, or even impossible.
4. **Barriers differ for each disability** - naturally, boarding is a bigger issue for people using wheelchairs or a walking aid, while orientation is more of a concern for the blind community. A common finding was knowing where they were on a journey and when to disembark, this proved to be a challenge for all people we spoke to, sometimes for different reasons, but often with similar solutions.

The Results

The heatmap below provides a visual look at what barriers during a journey can cause stress for users with accessibility needs. It is clear that each disability has different 'pain points'. Understanding the context and accumulative effect of such barriers, will be the best way to identify impactful actions. The barriers of users with invisible disabilities can be experienced by many people, the differentiator for this study is whether they needed a seat to travel without stress.

We noted that stressors bundle at different points depending on the users disability, for instance the blind community have anxiety around the planning and locating of a service, while people with mobility concerns are more focussed on how to get to the stop or station and then boarding.



Below are just some of the thoughts shared by the participants who took part in our research study.

Blind Community:

- I call the contact centre to plan or check departure times. The Journey Planner assumes times and routes for able-bodied people.
- Knowing if my bus turned up is a major issue. Buses don't pull up to the head of the stop, drivers need to tell me their number. They sometimes don't.

- Bus designs are different, so I need to re-orientate. 'I've sat on many laps.'
- Knowing where I am on a bus journey takes a lot of effort.

Hearing:

- I avoid interacting with staff as they don't know how to respond to a deaf person.
- Changes are usually announced in audio – I have to hope that someone notices me and helps.

Mobility:

- If buses replace trains – then I won't travel.
- I can't trust 'accessible' statements about stations. I have to check it for myself.
- The gap between kerb and bus or the platform levels make boarding difficult or impossible. Some bus drivers will just drive by and avoid me.
- Trains: Train Managers have to remember me, or I get stuck on the train.

Neurodiverse/Learning:

- I need support to plan and need to rely on the journey to go as planned – disruptions are very stressful. (Learning)
- The conditions around me, especially when there are a lot of people and bus sounds, can make travel very stressful. (Neurodiverse)
- I don't want to cause a scene, so if a bus doesn't stop or something changes, I may end up stranded.

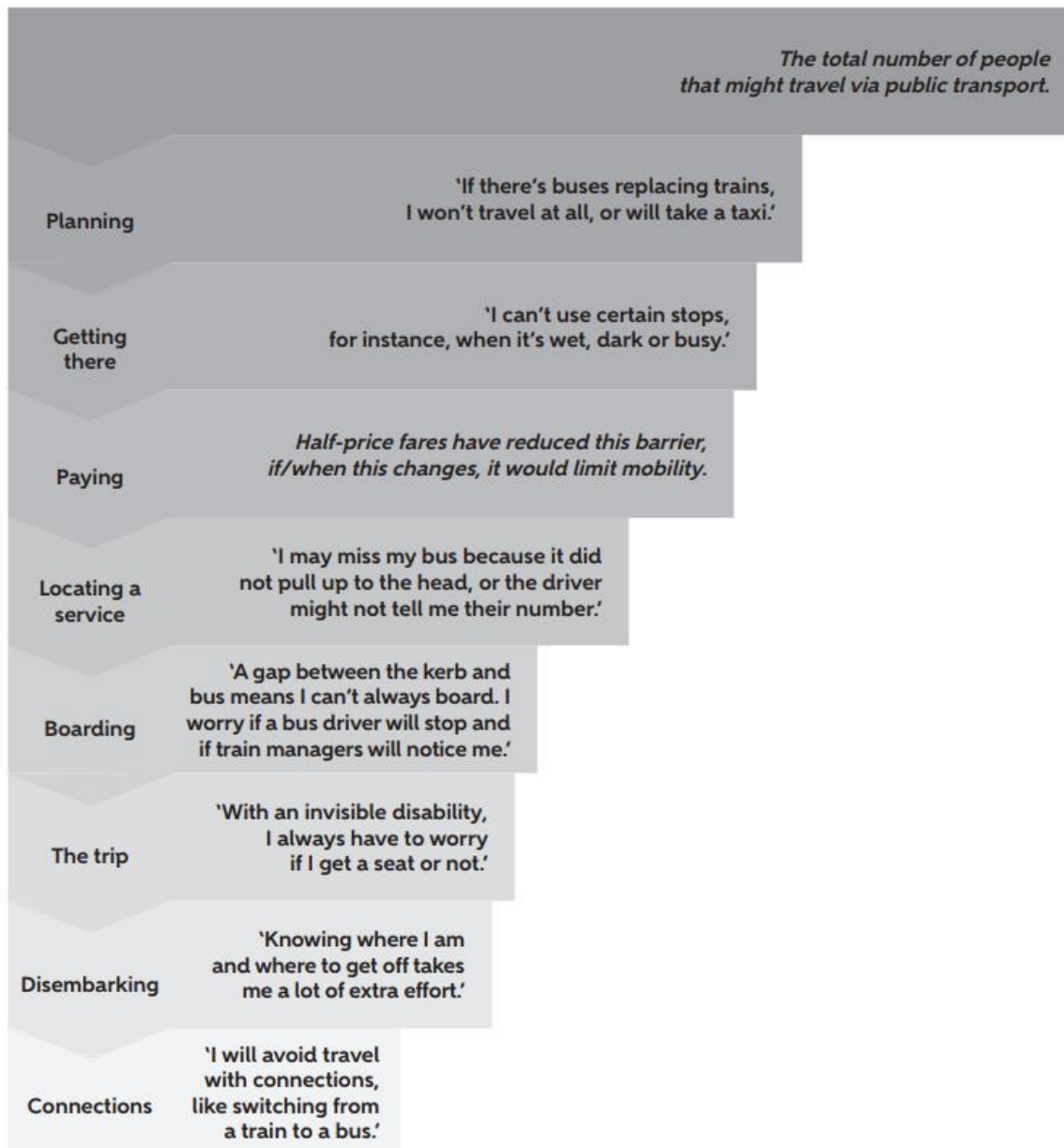
Invisible disability:

- Will I get the seat that I need? People can't see my mobility need.
- Who will ask people to give up a priority seat? Do I have to ask or can the Train Manager/Driver help?

Across all: Connections multiply the barriers, uncertainty, and stress. If there are disruptions, it's way more difficult to recover/adapt. Many people with disabilities avoid journeys with connections if at all possible. All people reported experiences with brash, indifferent staff. Travelling on public transport always comes with stress and anxiety for people with accessible needs. Many avoid unfamiliar or one-off journeys altogether

The cumulative effect of barriers

Each step of the journey has a different barrier and this can have a cumulative effect on the stress experienced by a user with accessibility needs. Making it harder to travel on the Metlink's greater Wellington public transport network.



This chart *does not* include the disabled people who don't use PT in the first place. The barriers shown here may be the reason that they use other means of transport or live with limited mobility.

Accessible boardings

Figures* show that the proportion of people with disabilities who use public transport in the greater Wellington area is very low:

- 1% of total bus boardings in 2022 had an accessible concession.
- 6% of the population in the Greater Wellington region have an 'activity limitation'
- People without an 'activity limitation' boarded on average 42 times in 2022, while people with an 'activity limitation', only boarded 7 times on average.

- This means that proportionally, 25,000 of the 30,000 disabled people in the Greater Wellington region may not have used public transport in 2022.

* An 'activity limitation' is when a person has 'a lot of difficulty' or 'cannot do at all' one or more of the following activities: walking, seeing, hearing, cognition, self-care, and communication. [Source Stats NZ](#)

Trains are generally perceived to be more accessible so the numbers may be higher for train boardings. However, none of the trips in our study were solely train trips.

We can't be certain if the bus boardings represent fewer frequent public transport users, more more infrequent users. Either way, the proportional ballpark should be over 20,000 people.

People's individual journeys

1. Going on a journey with Louise – regular PT user in a wheelchair

Louise is a wheelchair user. She lives in a hilly Kapiti suburb, often works from home and has a young daughter. Access to public transport enables her to be independent and she makes a concerted effort to continue to part-take in it, even if it means extra effort.

Her journey (including quotes):

1. Louise is signed up to text alerts for service changes around her bus and train services. Still she's had experiences in which a service did not turn up, so she checks the website/app before she intends to go somewhere
 - *"If I find I need to do a more impromptu trip I know what's going on. If I receive loads of cancellations, I won't do a journey as I don't want to get stranded."*
2. She has scouted the pathways, crossing and bus stops in her neighbourhood over months.
 - *"It took me a good year to year and a half to find it."*
3. She knows exactly what bus stop she can use under which conditions. If it rains, she won't use the bus stop that's closer, as she'll get her legs wet on the way.
 - *"I'd have to go through a tunnel and there's mud. It goes all through my house."*
4. At the bus stop she hopes for a bus driver who knows her already. She's had negative experiences.
 - *"They're not keen to put the ramp out. They'd say I needed a support person. I was reluctant to report this because there aren't many wheelchair users in my area and they'd know it was me. But they can't speak like that to anyone. It happened a lot."*
5. It has impacted how her daughter feels about PT.
 - *"It made my daughter feel like she didn't want to do it because the driver was always grumpy."*

6. On the bus, Louise makes her way to the wheelchair area. Here she needs to get ready for a safe trip.
 - *"Some drive like a bat out of hell, so you've got to hold on tight."*
7. Even though this bus driver is doing his best to go easy, the windy roads mean there's always a challenge
 - *"My chair can skid a bit. A more textured surface could benefit something like that."*
8. Today Louise disembarks at the train station. The bus can properly pull up to the kerb and put the ramp down. She's been trapped at a bus stop before, where the concrete pad of the stop was sunk onto a bank. There was no way for her to exit this pad and the kerb was too high.
 - *"I was trapped so I had to call someone to help. They collected my daughter and I had to wait an hour for the next bus."*
9. She hopes that this will be changed by the time her daughter goes to this school.
10. On the train station she has worked out where on the platform the accessible carriage normally pulls up.
 - *"The main stressor with taking the train is being spotted so they can come and get the ramp out for you. You're hoping they see you. You wave or look around."*
11. Once she gets on board things are quite nice. She would never do any one-off trips without preparation.
 - *"If I've got to go somewhere I've never been to before, we'll do a 'reckie' at the weekend with my partner."*

2. Going on a journey with Joe – member of the blind community commuting to work

Joe lives in Mana and works in the city, sometimes at odd hours too. He's a member of the blind community and gets about with his cane and his phone. He's very skilled with digital tools that help him navigate his environment and always keeps up to date with new ideas coming out.

His journey (*including quotes*):

1. Joe takes the train into Wellington and connects to the city by bus on regular journeys. He's well familiar with the schedule and uses the digital tools on his phone to confirm his timing.
 - *"On my phone I've set up all the stops I use and made them favourites and put them on my home screen. It will tell me when the train is due."*
2. Getting to the train station and finding his train is not too difficult, as there's only one platform each way and each train is announced. Each train is the same layout, so Joe is well-practiced navigating them.
 - *"I get on the train and walk down the aisle. People notice my cane and they say: 'There's a seat on the right'. But it's on their right, my left."*
3. It can be harder on buses:

- *"A lot of the buses have different seating formations. I have no idea which one it is. Occasionally the driver might tell me where there's a spare seat but that's rare."*
4. Joe arrives in Wellington.
 - *"Wellington Railway Station is really inaccessible. It has a great echo with a smooth floor. I don't know where I am. Snapper transponders are right in the middle of nowhere and have tactiles."*
 5. He can take several different buses to his work in town – he chooses the one at the stop that is safer for him:
 - *"Only reason I'd venture to stop A if there was a big delay. It's a mess, there's a garden bed and a tree and it always whacks me in the head. There's nothing obvious to tell me it's a bus stop. Stop B has a pole. It's a reference point. There's nothing for me to walk into."*
 6. One of the trickiest things is to know that the right bus has pulled up:
 - *"New electric buses are quiet. I normally look up at sun and see the shadow of the electric bus pass my face. I can also hear other people and the snapper beep."*
 7. He holds up his cane to let drivers know he needs help:
 - *"I always ask the driver, 'what number are you?' I hold up my cane. Some are confused. Most of the bus drivers will see my cane and they'll say the number. But not everyone. There's this awkward silence."*
 8. On the bus, Joe really focuses to keep track of where he is.
 - *"I try to stay focused as I can easily lose where I'm at. There's a bump there and a certain turn there. A 90 degree turn from Lambton Quay into Hunter Street. When we go around that corner, Willis into Manners, I'll push the bell."*
 - *Update August 2023: Audio stop announcements are in trial and will be rolled out over the next months on all buses.*
 9. Inconsistencies in bus design can make orientation difficult, like the placement and sound of the 'stop' button:
 - *"It's not always easy to find the button, especially if it's crowded and you're sitting in a place that you're unfamiliar with. And the sound varies. You get a quiet beep or a big 'dang, dang, dang'. Some of the beeps sound like a turning indicator."*
 10. When trains are replaced by buses, Joe's journey becomes stressful:
 - *"With BRT all the technology goes out the window. There's no update from Metlink with RTI on BRT. Platform 10 is absolute chaos. I just wander up there to this chaos in the hope that someone will see me."*
 11. It's not always consistent where the BRT buses stop on his way home:
 - *"I've had situations where I don't know where the bus has stopped. There could be a howling northerly so you can't really hear. Can I cross the road? I'm trying to listen for the front of the bus. No pedestrian crossing. It's a dangerous experience."*

3. Going on a journey with Helen – travelling to a meeting as a deaf customer

Helen lives in Brooklyn and works in Newtown. She's deaf and takes public transport when it's convenient – there's no good link between Brooklyn and Newtown unfortunately.

Her journey (*including quotes*):

1. Helen has a meeting at the Hutt Hospital today, which is a longer trip than what she usually does. She enters the addresses into Google to get information about her journey.
 - *"The Metlink app is terrible. I've given up on the app."*
2. Helen walks to the bus, waits for it to arrive, gets on and uses her Snapper card to pay. The bus is busy with people close behind her, so she tries to move as fast as the others. She hopes that the payment as worked.
 - *"I can't figure out if I haven't paid. I'm assuming it worked and wait for the driver to tell me I haven't. When they call you, they wonder why you don't turn around. They'll often have an accent [it's more difficult for Helen to lip-read foreign accents]. They might talk to me but I still don't understand them."*
3. The bus is taking its normal route through town and Helen can follow along as she knows the area and where to get off.
 - *"If the bus changes route and they call the information back I don't get that. That sometimes happens and I don't have a clue. I wait and hope I get where I want to be, but I don't know. I'm very much reliant on my own guess work and what I can get."*
4. Helen arrives at the train station and looks for information on what platform her train is on.
 - *"The big board at the Station is a big improvement"*
5. She knows she has to buy a ticket for the train now.
 - *"You have to buy tickets at the station by talking to them, when you don't want to talk with anyone. It's easier not to talk to people. Best to be independent."*
 - *Update August 2023: The introduction of Snapper on trains has resolved this point for Helen.*
6. She's looking forward to the time when Snapper is available on trains – while that's still not a perfect solution.
7. She boards her train and finds a seat. She recalls:
 - *"One time I caught the train and everyone got off. I got off and I found someone. I looked around to see who was okay to talk to. They explained there was a breakdown and we had to wait for the next train and they were unsure how long it would be. I was the last one off the train because I didn't know what was happening. There were two guards and they assumed that everyone could hear the message. It's typical. "*

4. Going on a journey with Jonathan – the way to class for learning disability

Jonathan is a young man who goes to school where he learns the skills to go about an active life, as independent as possible. He loves music and learning about different people and their cultures. He lives in Petone and his best friend lives in Upper Hutt.

His journey (*including quotes*):

1. Jonathan is getting ready for school in the morning, he's looking forward to seeing his friends there. His mother makes sure he leaves at the right time to catch his bus. He takes the same bus every day at the same time.
 - *"My parents go with me when I go somewhere new."*
2. He arrives at the bus stop and waits. It's a sunny day so it's an easy wait.
 - *"Sometimes there isn't a bus shelter at the stop, so you wait in the rain."*
3. Jonathan gets on the bus and shows the driver his Total Mobility card.
4. *Jonathan's support worker: "We teach them to wear their card around their neck on a lanyard because we want drivers to know that. You can't always see the disability and that they might need help."*
5. On the bus Jonathan enjoys his music. He notices that it's his stop to get off a little later, some people are already exiting the bus. He gets up quickly trying to make it.
 - *"I'm reluctant to shout [out to the driver to stop when they don't]. I don't shout as I need to be aware of people around me."*
6. He makes it just in time and gets off the bus.
7. Jonathan crosses the road as he's learned to go to the next bus stop that connects him to his school.
 - *"My aunty took me for bus lessons and told me the bus numbers and the right bus to get on"*
8. The next bus seems to be taking a long time. Other people around him begin to walk off and soon he's the only one there.
 - *"I can't go home when the bus is cancelled because the connections take too long."*
9. Jonathan waits for 20 minutes until the connecting bus arrives.
 - *"The number 83 is always cancelled. Annoying! I'm not happy when the bus is cancelled."*
10. There are some school children on the connecting bus. Jonathan keeps listening to his music.
 - *Jonathan's support worker: "We get them on the earlier buses to come into school. When they're coming later they might get bullied by the school kids. It happens quite a lot, so we try to avoid it."*
11. He recognises his bus stop by the buildings around him, gets off, and joins his friends at school.

Update August 2023: The introduction of Snapper on Rail has been tricky for some of our younger customers with learning disabilities, as this means remembering to tag on and to tag off. This teaches us at Metlink that

improvements for some can be difficult to adapt to for others and we need to find solutions for those unintended consequences.

5. Going on a journey with Tia – commuting with an invisible disability

Tia is a student at Vic Uni and splits her time between her partner's flat in Aro Valley and her family home in Paremata. She has a condition that can easily be triggered by standing or being bumped around. She is a frequent user of PT, but needs a seat to travel comfortably.

Her journey (*including quotes*):

1. Tia starts her day at her family home in Paremata. She has a few seminars today and gets ready to make her way into town. She knows the train schedule well, so she just leaves her house at her usual time. She takes her car from her house to the train station.
2. As she pulls up to Paremata station, she finds that there are no free parking spaces. There's only so far that she can walk and be fine, so she decided to roll down to Porirua station, as there are often a few more spots there.
 - *"A lot of my journey is designed around ensuring I can get a car park. They're usually full or far away by a certain time. I would go to the Porirua Station car park rather than Paremata because it fills up really early on because it's a much smaller car park or less reliable."*
3. More accessible parking spots would really help.
4. At Porirua station she makes her way to the platform as a train pulls up. She can see that the train is quite full, a quick scan confirms that there are no free seats.
 - *"Standing on a train with chronic pain can be difficult when I have pain flare ups and the train bumps around."*
5. Asking people in the first place is not very nice.
 - *"I don't want to ask people to move. Who else has to beg for a seat? I look young, healthy and fit so no one is going to be offering me a seat."*
6. Another train pulls up, she gets up and has a quick look around. This train is full and there's no free seat to be seen. Tia has to wait some more.
 - *"The additional mental arithmetic on the way to work can be quite draining. What if I get on this train and I'm standing and I start feeling pain, will I be able to get a seat? Will I have the confidence to ask someone to have a seat. How much do I tell people about my physical condition?"*
7. The next train that pulls up started just one stop before, so it's almost empty. Tia boards the train and takes a seat. Now she can focus on her day ahead in earnest.
 - *"It's a very unpleasant way to start your morning being reminded of your physical needs. Do I make a rash decision to get on the train if*

there's a seat or not? Or do I have to wait at this train station for 20 minutes wasting my time? It's really quite unpleasant."

A few surprises

- Many participants said that they saw a tangible improvement with bus drivers waiting for passengers to be seated before driving off and found this to be very positive and promising.
- Snapper on rail is highly anticipated and Age Concern participants welcome the idea of a Snapper Gold card. (Update - This has since been implemented.)
- Half-price fares has meant that Total Mobility users are taking more taxis as they remove the anxiety and accessibility issues of using public transport. (Update – Half-price concession fares have now been established through central government policy.)
- [Research by the Ministry of Transport](#) has identified that many customers usually travel within a 'triangle' between home, work and places like supermarkets or doctors and we found this to be true in our study.
- Travel limitations sometimes stem from misunderstandings - a few participants assumed that the Wairarapa train was not accessible for wheelchairs or those with walking frames, which is not the case, so possibly people may limit travel when they didn't have to.

A look inside

Metlink teams discussed their perceptions of the barriers faced by public transport users with accessible needs and the possible actions that may improve their journey.

In most cases the internal thoughts of our team matched what we learned from our research participants. Overall, we have a fair understanding of what the reality is for public transport users who have accessibility needs. However, through this process we identified some other factors that were not initially obvious to our team:

- We assumed that customers want information ahead of time if a station or a bus/train is accessible and while there is a need for that, people fundamentally don't trust this information and have learned to only rely on their personal experience and research.
- 'Accessible' for some users, is still inaccessible for others, some people have to visit an unfamiliar location with a support person to ensure it will work for them.
- While Metlink teams discussed the different channels available to share information, as users don't trust our messaging, we need to cover the basics first, as we may unintentionally increase digital information barriers.
- Only a few customers raised issues with shelter and seating at stops, or services at stations, it appears to be a lower priority in contrast to finding the right service or having a seat on the bus.

- We assumed that people want more accessibility seating and this may be true, but the main feedback we heard was that people don't like using the accessible flip-down seating as it has to be set up, is uncomfortable and means travelling sideways – which members of the blind community find disorientating.

The experiences of bus drivers

Drivers shared their insights, concerns and recommendations to improve and streamline an accessibility journey:

- There is currently no targeted training for bus drivers about working with disabled customers, the drivers learn in practice and sometimes from sharing stories with each other.
- Communication is key - the bus drivers we spoke with actively approach disabled customers to see 'if and how' they want to be aided, but they are aware that some customers don't want help
- Many drivers said they appreciate it if they can spot a Total Mobility card, a cane or a button to make them aware of any conditions.
- A few drivers said they wish there was a signal on the bus to indicate to people at bus stops, if their bus is at capacity.
- It is not clear to bus drivers what is expected of them when they have a nearly full bus, should they prioritise the wheelchair user, or board several of the other customers waiting at the same stop - this issue is heightened when there are a lot of cancellations.
- Bus stop design and environment is unanimously the one thing that could be improved, to make accessibility easier for drivers and their customers.
- We identified that drivers have an in-depth knowledge of what bus stops present issues and why.
- To accommodate people at difficult stops, drivers often pull over before or after the stop, where they can kneel the bus or lower the ramp safely, this sometimes upsets other customers who don't realise why the bus is not at the designated stop - when planning for an action like this it highlights the need for communication and prior knowledge of the conditions.
- Drivers echoed what we heard from
- blind and low-vision customers - that drivers tell them what number bus they are and many thought an announcement at the bus stop and audio real-time information (RTI) would be a big help.
- Sometimes drivers have to let several different users (including tourists) know when they reach a specific bus stop and that can be quite difficult to remember on top of everything else.
- Some drivers wondered if audio real-time information might become a bit repetitive to hear, however drivers in Christchurch said that you don't really notice it after a while.

More support and clarity would benefit all

- Many bus drivers know the regular public transport users with disabilities on their routes, especially in the suburbs - they often know their names and regular stops and this neighbourly relationship assists both the driver and customer.
- Interactions with hearing impaired users are not front of mind for bus drivers and a few raised that they frequently try to have interactions with customers, but because they are wearing noise-cancelling headphones, they're not aware that they are being addressed.
- Users with higher-impact learning disabilities or those on the autistic spectrum can be challenging to interact with, as they require consistency.
- One bus driver told us about a set of 'bus rules' she wants to create to help a frequent rider to continue using the bus without being a risk to them self and others - however not all bus drivers approach such interactions the same way and this points to the need for consistent training and support.
- In our conversations, no drivers mentioned feeling under pressure to meet schedules in relation to working with disabled customers and said they had been told to 'do what it takes'.

Bus drivers as our partners in co-design

We identified several positive takeaways from our discussions with bus drivers:

- Bus drivers are aware that bus stop improvements are difficult and costly, so their first-hand knowledge of what works in practice is 'gold' for prioritising actions in our Accessibility Action Plan.
- Drivers said they would be thrilled to offer advice on which stops cause the most issues for them and disabled customers.
- Equally, an active collaboration with experienced bus drivers on how to design a training program for staff promises great returns.
- Clarity on what is expected, along with support and knowledge on how to interact with users that have less common disabilities, would also be well received.
- Audio RTI, as well as other servicefinding and orientation tools will benefit users and drivers alike.

How our work fits into existing research

A strong voice from the existing research

In past research there is a clear consensus on the barriers, as well as the positive impactors that effect the a journey for disabled customers who use public transport.

Positive Impactors:

- Improved driver interactions based on increased awareness of mobility access

- issues.
- Improvements in transport mode accessibility.
- Travel subsidies which help with the cost of transport to healthcare appointments.
- Work by Greater Wellington to improve customer experience and accessibility.

Barriers:

- Limited availability of public transport options, particularly for those living in rural locations.
- No direct transport links to hospitals.
- An unreliable and inaccessible public transport system with poorly designed bus stops and stations.
- Limited availability and supply of accessible taxis.
- Lack of awareness by drivers in regard to disability issues and discriminatory behaviour

Our research adds to these previous findings by also looking at the accumulation of barriers across a journey. And we identified specific nuances for our region that will assist us during solution design, this along with the viewpoint of bus drivers and train operators will be invaluable .

Imagine Better - 2022

This study followed disabled people's journeys using public transport to access three DHB healthcare services and they identified the following insights:

- 'There is a high personal cost disabled people experience travelling on public transport. This cost is not purely financial. Disabled people often bear the heavy burden of both emotional and physical labour to attend their DHB appointments'.
- Rescheduling health appointments due to transport limitation is a frequent burden and a health outcome risk.

Disabled Persons Assembly - 2019

Working towards an accessible public transport system in Wellington, the DPA working group identified five priorities:

- Inclusion of disabled people in decision-making.
- Improved physical infrastructure.
- Better access to information, both before and during travel.
- Measures to increase supply for Total Mobility.
- Disability responsiveness training.

The same recommendations over a decade ago

In 2005 there was a [Human Rights Commission Inquiry](#) and it found the need for:

- A mandatory provision for the participation of disabled people in all public land transport planning, funding and implementation processes.

- Industry wide training in disability awareness with the training requirements to be included in driver licensing and contract service delivery.
- Disability competency to be a requirement for all public land transport personnel.
- Immediate improvements to visual and audible information at staffed stations, timetabling displays and on-board announcements.
- Territorial authorities to review the number and location of set down and pick up places for disabled passengers using taxis and rigorously enforce clear bus stops.

Then in a 2022 Waka Kotahi report about the Transport Experiences of Disabled People in Aotearoa New Zealand, they identified that:

- The persistent challenges faced by disabled people using transport in Aotearoa New Zealand have not changed in any measurable way, since the Human Rights Commission Inquiry almost two decades ago.
- There is no accountability for disabled people's journeys in the transport sector, and no evaluation of the ways that investments in transport improve those journeys.
- There is poor flow of information and feedback between the transport sector and disabled people, and vice versa, limiting potential for meaningful improvements to make transport more accessible to more people.

What have we done?

Metlink has delivered a number of accessibility initiatives, including:

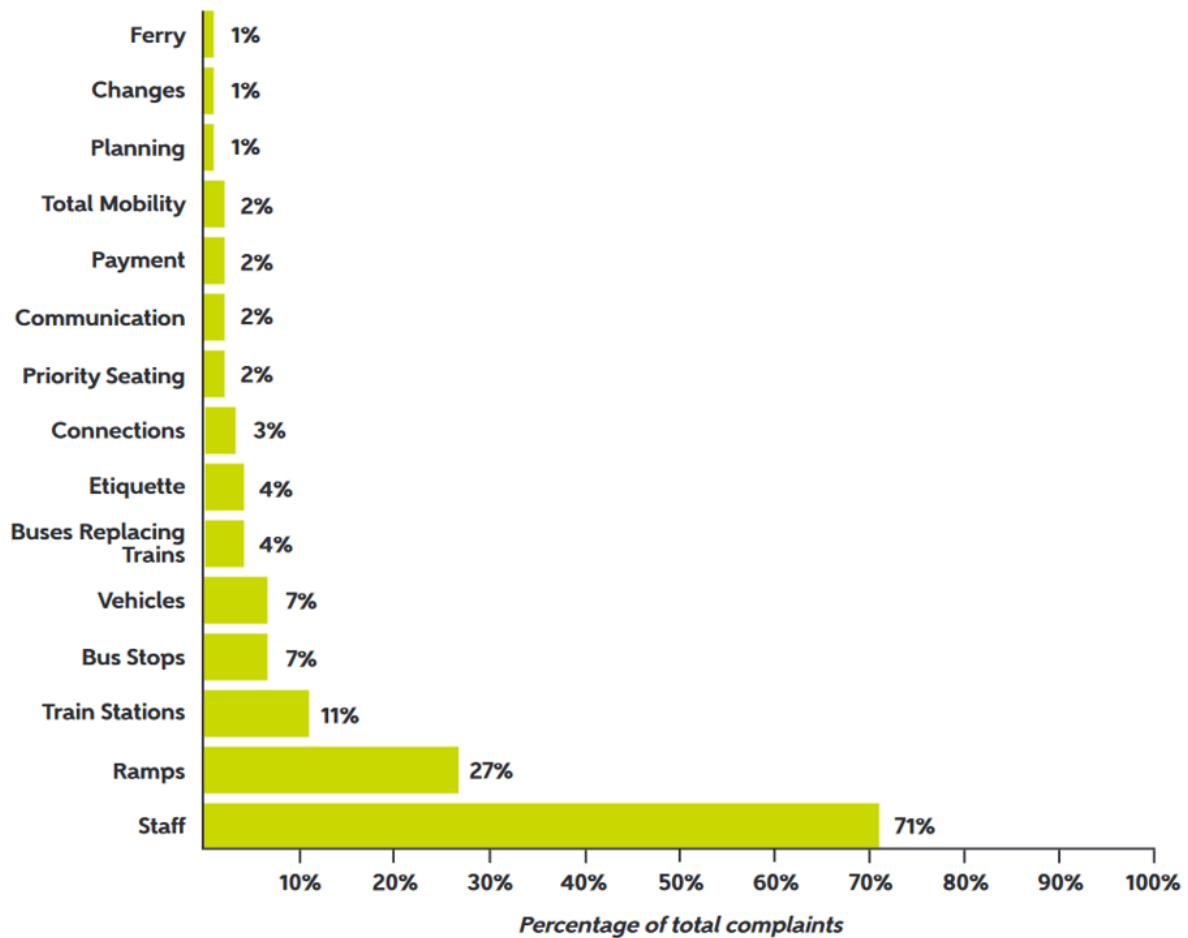
- New fully accessible trains and buses.
- Bus stop and train station improvements.
- Website and app upgrades in 2020. (Update July 2023 - Metlink app has again been upgraded with a much improved user experience.)
- Targeted engagements and the formation of a Public Transport Accessibility Group.

It is perceived by many that our initiatives have been ad-hoc and without an overall vision, slow to deliver and non-consultative. We hope the Metlink Accessibility Action Plan will not only improve the public transport journey for those with accessibility needs, but also assist in changing this impression within our greater Wellington region community.

Customer Complaints

Direct customer complaints are an important way for us to learn about concerns that need to be resolved. They are will also be a central metric for improvement throughout the implementation of the Metlink Accessibility Action Plan.

The below graph is a breakdown of the accessibility related complaints between June 2022 and July 2023.



With complaints about staff conduct sitting at 71%, it is by far the main reason that people contact us around accessibility. Coming in second at 27% is 'Ramps', which includes concerns about ramps at stations and the design of ramps on buses and trains. The majority in this category, however, are instances where bus drivers have refused to deploy the ramp for people who were not wheelchair users. This alone makes up 19% of all accessibility complaints.

Notably, a large proportion of complaints are made by witnesses who feel affected by observing an unpleasant interaction or issue unfold.

The path to our Action Plan

The vision for our actions

As previously mentioned, we learnt that our approach has to be 'Nothing about us, without us'. This is the principle of involving disabled people in the decisions that affect them. It also applies to our people at Metlink and our partners. To work towards a truly accessible network, all parties' need to be heard.

Our vision is to involve customers & sector groups or individuals that represent disabled people in our community. It is also critical to include people who run the network and to incorporate their ideas and feedback into the Accessibility Action Plan.

The process from here

The next step is to bring the Metlink team involved in the process together and collectively deliberate the barriers and possible actions. To succeed, we need to build a level of understanding about each possible action by identifying what it would take to succeed, the involved costs and also the associated risks.

We then need to share this information with our co-design partners and ask them to rank each idea in relation to their personal or professional experience.

The purpose of this is to not necessarily have everyone come to the exact same conclusions – but to end up with an action plan that’s well contextualised between the diverse groups involved. It is at this point that we have an Action Plan that we can present to Greater Wellington.

[You can read the Accessibility Action Plan that was the result of all this here.](#)

