

# Accessibility Action Plan

Research Report  
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 neurodiverse or have an invisible disability, as well as those with learning or developmental impairments; and 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.

***'Nothing about us,  
without us.'***





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

- Six wheelchair users.
- 13 people from the blind community.
- Two who were hard of hearing or deaf.
- 11 neurodiverse people or those with neurological or cognitive conditions.
- Three people with invisible disabilities.
- Eight participants from Age Concern.
- 14 bus drivers.



Participants were asked to take us, step-by-step, through a common public transport journey; and 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 Report, 2022
- [Waka Kotahi 'Transport experiences of disabled people', 2022](#)

### **The limitations of our 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.'**

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

### 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'.

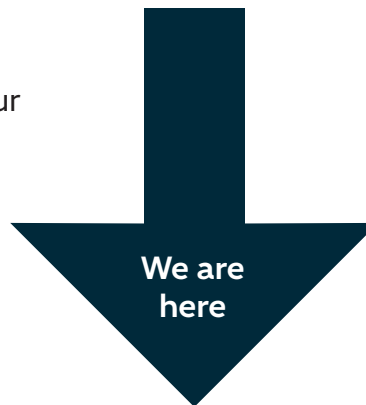
We then engaged with the disability community to identify their 'pain points' when travelling on public transport.

### 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.

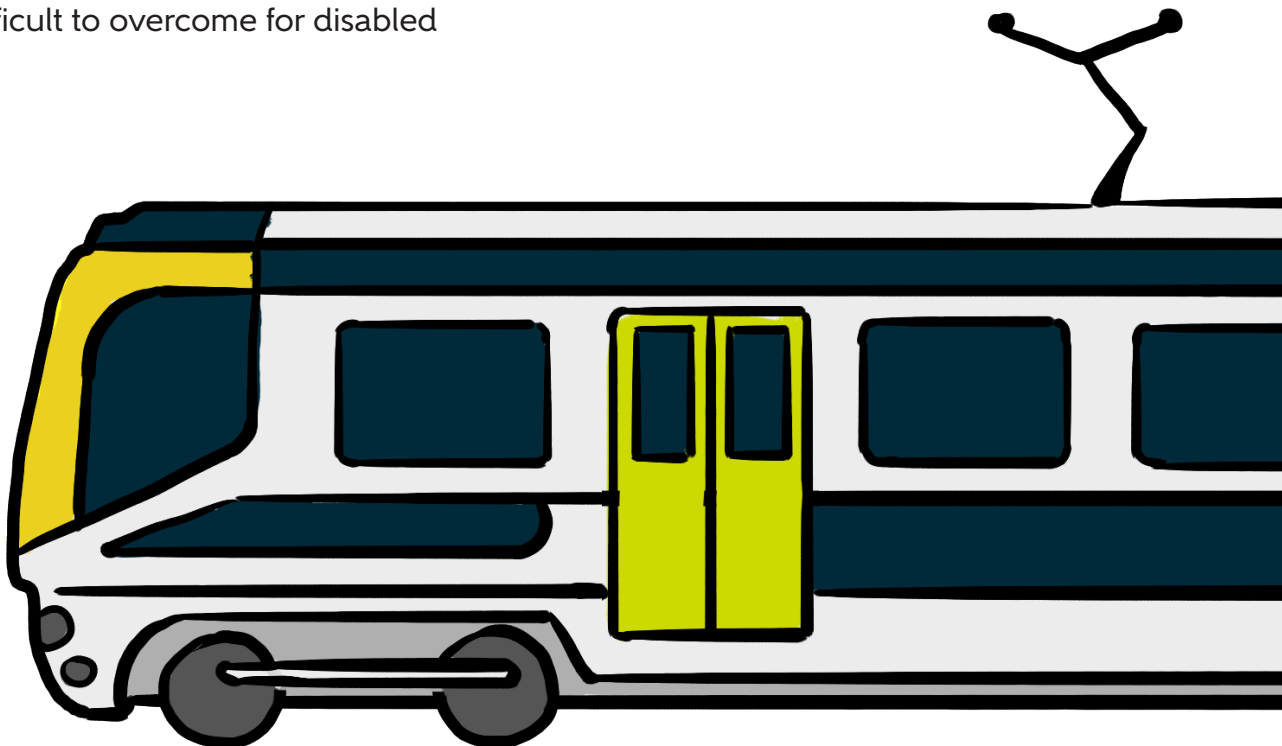




## What we learned about people's journeys

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; and 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.

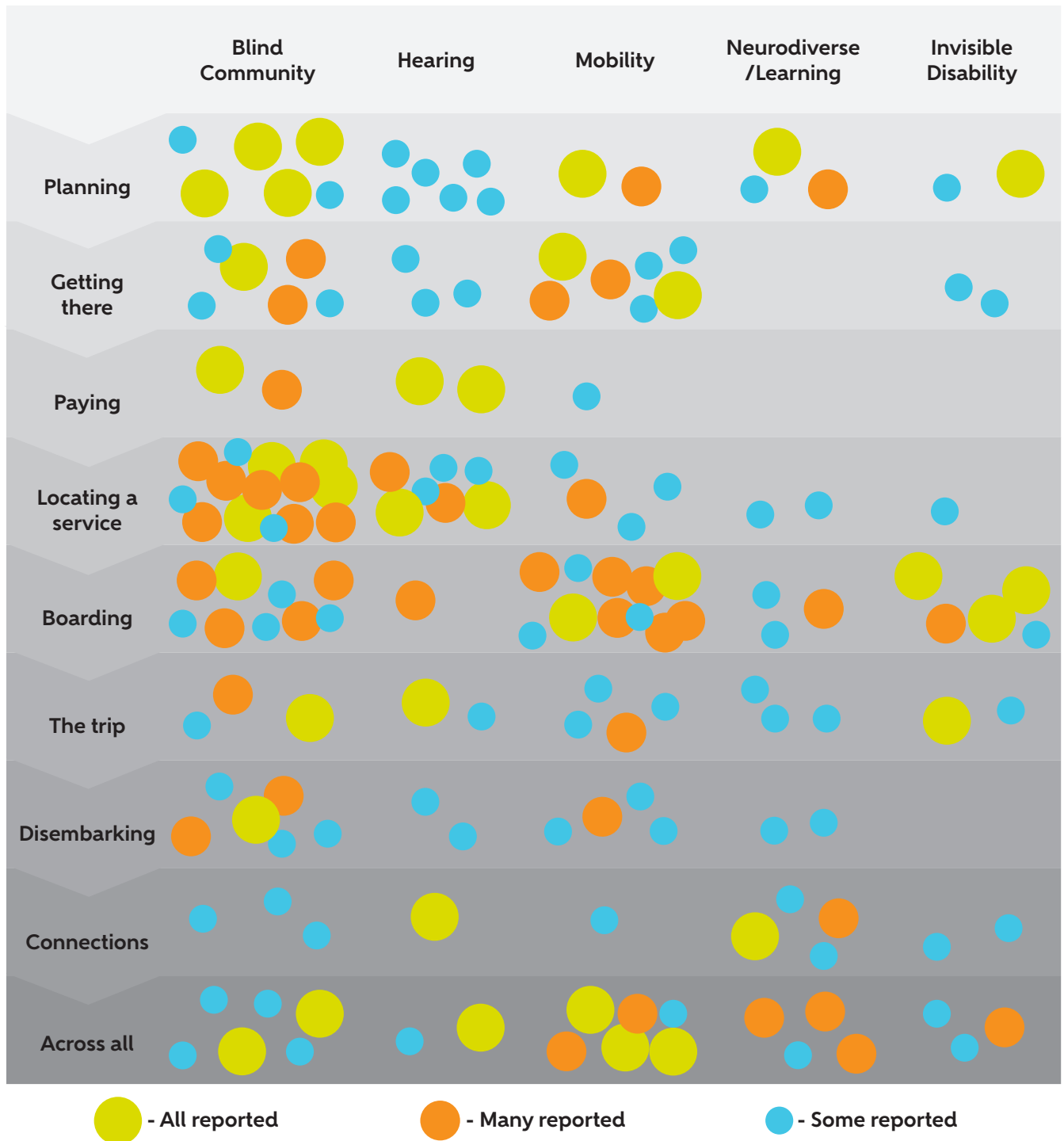




## The results

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', and 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 issues 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. We also found there were some centralised themes that were expressed across the study and we have also included these observations.

	Blind Community	Hearing	Mobility	Neurodiverse /Learning	Invisible Disability
Planning	'I call the contact centre to plan or check departure times. The journey planner assumes times and routes for able-bodied people.'		'If buses replace trains - then I won't travel.'	'I need support to plan and need to rely on the journey going as planned - disruptions are very stressful.' (Learning)	
Getting there			'I can't trust accessible statements about stations. I have to check it for myself.'		
Paying	'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.'	'I avoid interacting with staff as they don't know how to respond to a deaf person.'			
Locating a service				'The conditions around me, especially when there are a lot of people and bus sounds, can make travel very stressful.' (Neurodiverse)	
Boarding	'Bus designs are different, so I need to re-orientate. I've sat on many laps.'		'The gap between the kerb and bus, or platform levels make boarding difficult or impossible. Some bus drivers will just drive by and avoid me.'		'Will I get the seat I need? People can't see my mobility need' (Stress)
The trip	'Knowing where I am on a bus journey takes a lot of effort.'	'Changes are usually announced in audio - I have to hope that someone notices me and helps.'		'I don't want to cause a scene, so if a bus doesn't stop or something changes, I may end up stranded.'	'Who will ask people to give up a priority seat? Do I have to ask or can the train manager/driver help?'
Disembarking			'Train managers have to remember me or I get stuck on the train.'		
Connections	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.				
Across all	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.				

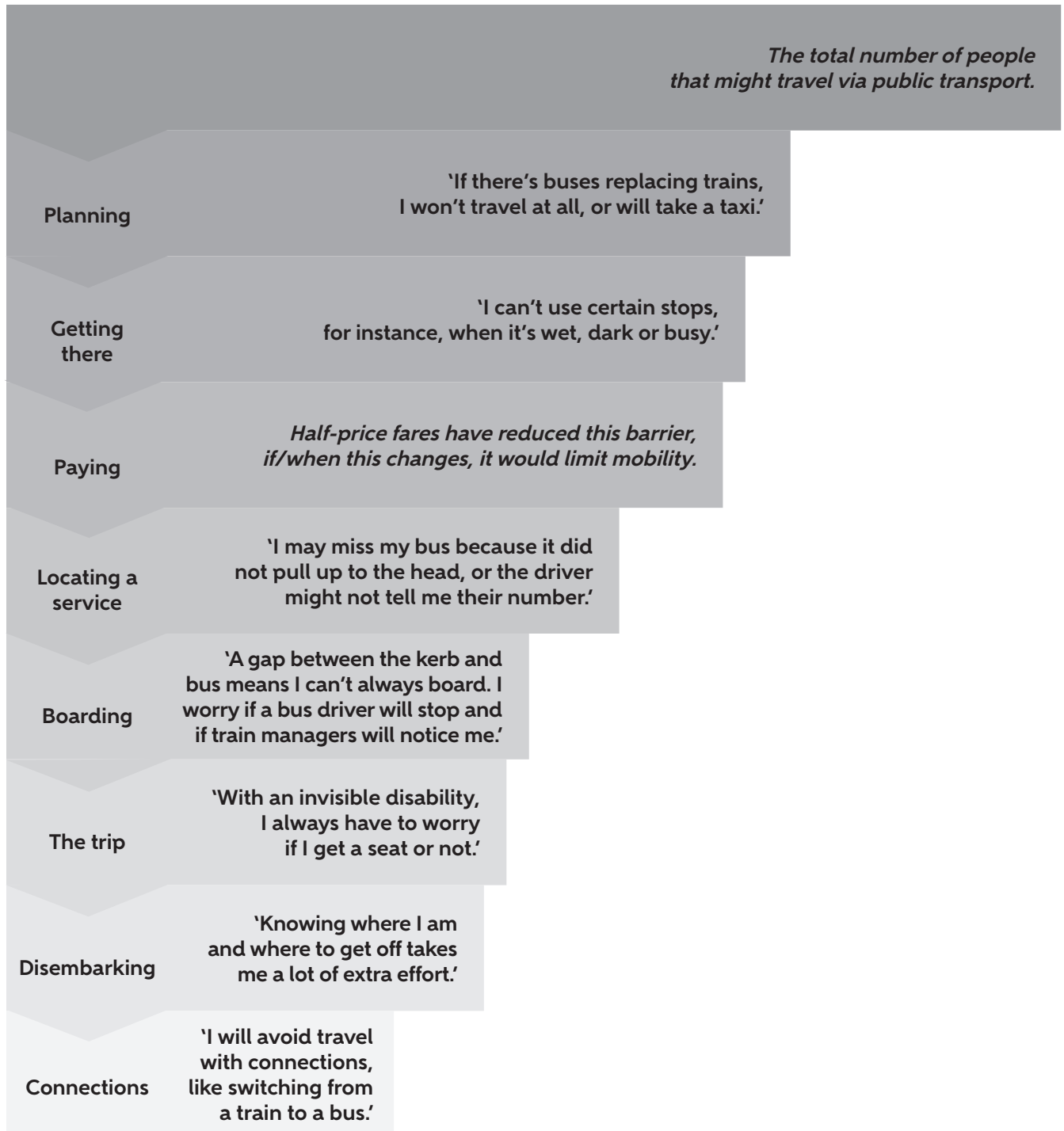




## The cumulative effect of barriers

Each step of the a 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 greater Wellington public transport network.



*This chart does not include people with accessibility needs who do not use public transport. The identified 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:

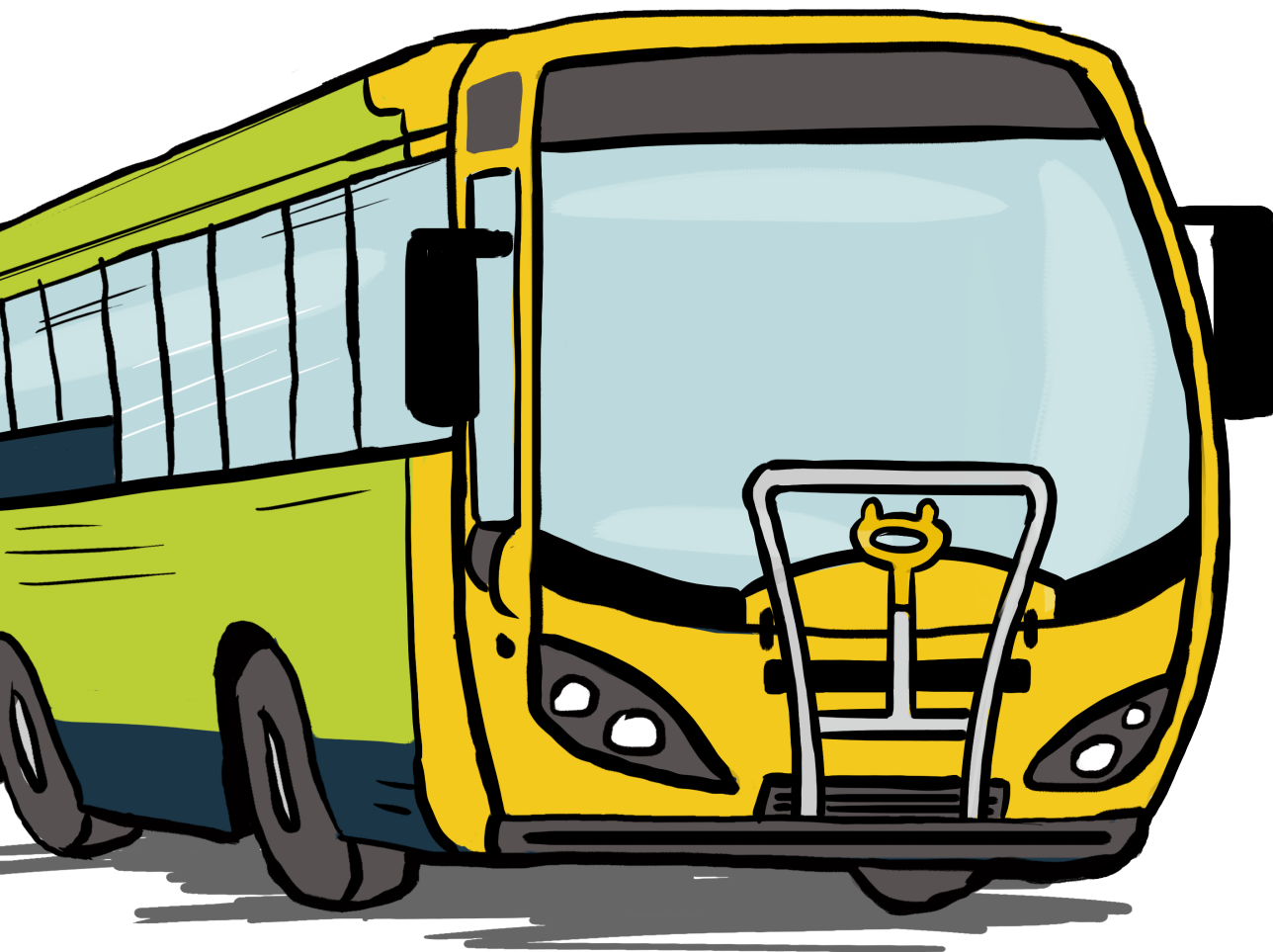
- 1% of total bus boardings in 2022 used an accessible concession.
- 6% of the population in the greater Wellington region have an 'activity limitation'.
- People without an 'activity limitation' boarded on average 42 times in 2022, while people with an 'activity limitation', only boarded seven times 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 it at all' one or more of the following activities: walking, seeing, , cognition, self-care, and communication. (Statistics 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, or more infrequent public transport users. Either way, the proportional ballpark should be over 20,000.*





**Buses replacing trains & ramp operation**

## People's individual journeys

### Going on a Journey with Louise

Louise uses a **wheelchair** to get about. She lives in a hilly Kapiti suburb, often works from home and has a young daughter. She sees public transport as a part of a normal life and makes a concerted effort to use it, even if it means extra effort.

**6** On the train station she has worked out where on the platform the accessible carriage normally pulls up. Once she gets on board things are quite nice. She would never do any one-off trips though without preparation.

*'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... If I've got to go somewhere I've never been to before, we'll do a 'reckie' at the weekend with my partner.'*

**Bus stop design**

**Access to station in poor weather**

**1** Louise is signed up to text alerts for service changes regarding 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** It took over a year for Louise to scout the pathways, crossings and bus stops in her neighbourhood. She knows exactly what bus stop she can use under certain 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.'*

**3** At the bus stop she hopes for a bus driver who knows her already, as she has had negative experiences, which have impacted how her daughter feels about public transport.

*'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... It made my daughter feel like she didn't want to do it because the driver was always grumpy.'*

**5** Today Louise disembarks at the train station. This is pretty straight forward as the bus can properly pull up to the kerb and put the ramp down. She has 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. She hopes that this will be changed by the time her daughter will go to this school.


*'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.'*

**Bus stopping**

**Bus stop design**

**4** On the bus, Louise makes her way to the priority seat. Here she needs to get ready for a safe trip and even though this bus driver is doing his best to go easy, the windy roads mean there's always a challenge.

*'Some drive like a bat out of hell, so you've got to hold on tight... My chair can skid a bit. A more textured surface could benefit something like that.'*

 - Break points



## Buses replacing trains

### Going on a Journey with Joe

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



**1** Joe takes the train into Wellington and connects to the city by bus on regular journeys. He is 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. Trains are the same layout, so Joe is well-practiced navigating them, but it can be harder on buses.

*'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... 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.'*

**3** Joe arrives in Wellington. He can take several different buses to his work in town – he chooses the stop that is safer for him.'

*'Wellington Railway Station is really inaccessible. It's 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... 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 top. Stop B has a pole. It's a reference point. There's nothing for me to walk into.'*

**6** When trains are replaced by buses, Joe's journey becomes stressful. It's not always consistent where the buses will stop on his way home.

*'With buses replacing trains, all the technology goes out the window. There's no update from Metlink with real time information. Platform ten is absolute chaos. I just wander up there to this chaos in the hope that someone will see me... 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.'*

## Travel & progress information

### Locating service & bus stopping

**5** On the bus, Joe really focuses to keep track of where he is. Inconsistencies in bus design can make orientation difficult, like the placement and sound of the 'stop' button.

*'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... 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.'*

### Station & bus stop design

**4** One of the trickiest things is to know that the right bus has pulled up. He holds up his cane to let drivers know he needs help.

*'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... 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.'*

- Break points



## Going on a Journey with Helen

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

**1** Helen has a meeting at Hutt Hospital today, which is a longer trip than what she usually takes. She enters the addresses into Google to get information about her journey.

*'The Metlink app is terrible. I've given up on the app.'*



**Payment interaction & communications**

**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 has 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.'*

**5** She boards her train and finds a seat.

*'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.'*

**Communication if something changes**

**4** Helen arrives at the train station and looks for information about what platform her train is on. She knows she has to buy a ticket for the train now, but is looking forward to the time when Snapper is available on trains – but this is still not a perfect solution.

*'The big board at the Station is a big improvement... 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 as resolved a 'break point' for Helen.*

**Payment interaction & communications**

- Break points



## Going on a Journey with Jonathan

Jonathan is a young man with a **learning disability**. He goes to school where he learns the skills to have an active life, as independently 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.

**1** Jonathan is getting ready for school in the morning, he is looking forward to seeing his friends. 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.'*

### Discreet communications with driver

**3** Jonathan gets on the bus and shows the driver his Total Mobility card.

*'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.'*  
- Jonathan's support worker

**6** There are some school children on the connecting bus. Jonathan keeps listening to his music. He recognises his bus stop by the buildings around him, gets off, and joins his friends at school.

*'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.'* - Jonathan's support worker

### Safety in transit

**5** Jonathan crosses the road, as he has learnt how to get to the next bus stop, which connects him to his school. 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. Jonathan waits for 20 minutes until the connecting bus arrives.


*'My aunty took me for bus lessons and told me the bus numbers and the right bus to get on... I can't go home when the bus is cancelled because the connections take too long... 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.'*

### Adapting if something changes

**4** On the bus Jonathan enjoys his music. He notices that it's his stop a little late and some people are already exiting the bus. He gets up quickly trying to make it. He makes it just in time and gets off the bus.

*'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.'*

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 for others and we need to find solutions for those unintended consequences.

 - Break points



## Going on a Journey with Tia

Tia has a **silent disability** and is a student at Victoria University. She 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 being bumped or standing around. She is a frequent user of public transport, but needs a seat to travel comfortably.

**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 city. 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 is only so far that she is able to walk, so she decided to go to Porirua station as there are often a few more spots there. More accessible parking spots would really help.

*'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.'*

**Discreet communications with driver**

**Not enough Total Mobility parking**



**3** 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 and asking people to move can be an uncomfortable experience.

*'Standing on a train with chronic pain can be difficult when I have pain flare ups and the train bumps around... 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.'*

**5** The next train that pulls up started just one stop before Porirua, so it's almost empty. Tia boards the train and takes a seat. Now she can focus on her day.

*'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.'*

**Certainty to get a seat**

**4** 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 again.

*'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?'*

- Break points



## 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 accessibility 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. 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.

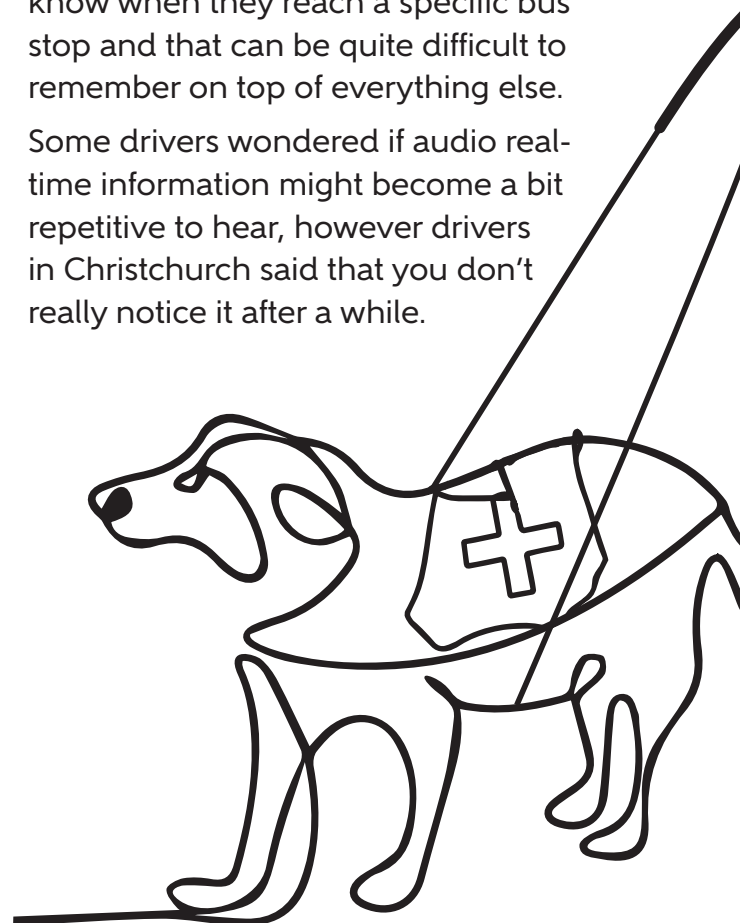




## The experiences of bus drivers

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 & 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 deaf 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 themselves 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 real-time information, as well as other service-finding 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 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 Disabled Persons Assembly 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 from nearly two decades 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 peoples' 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

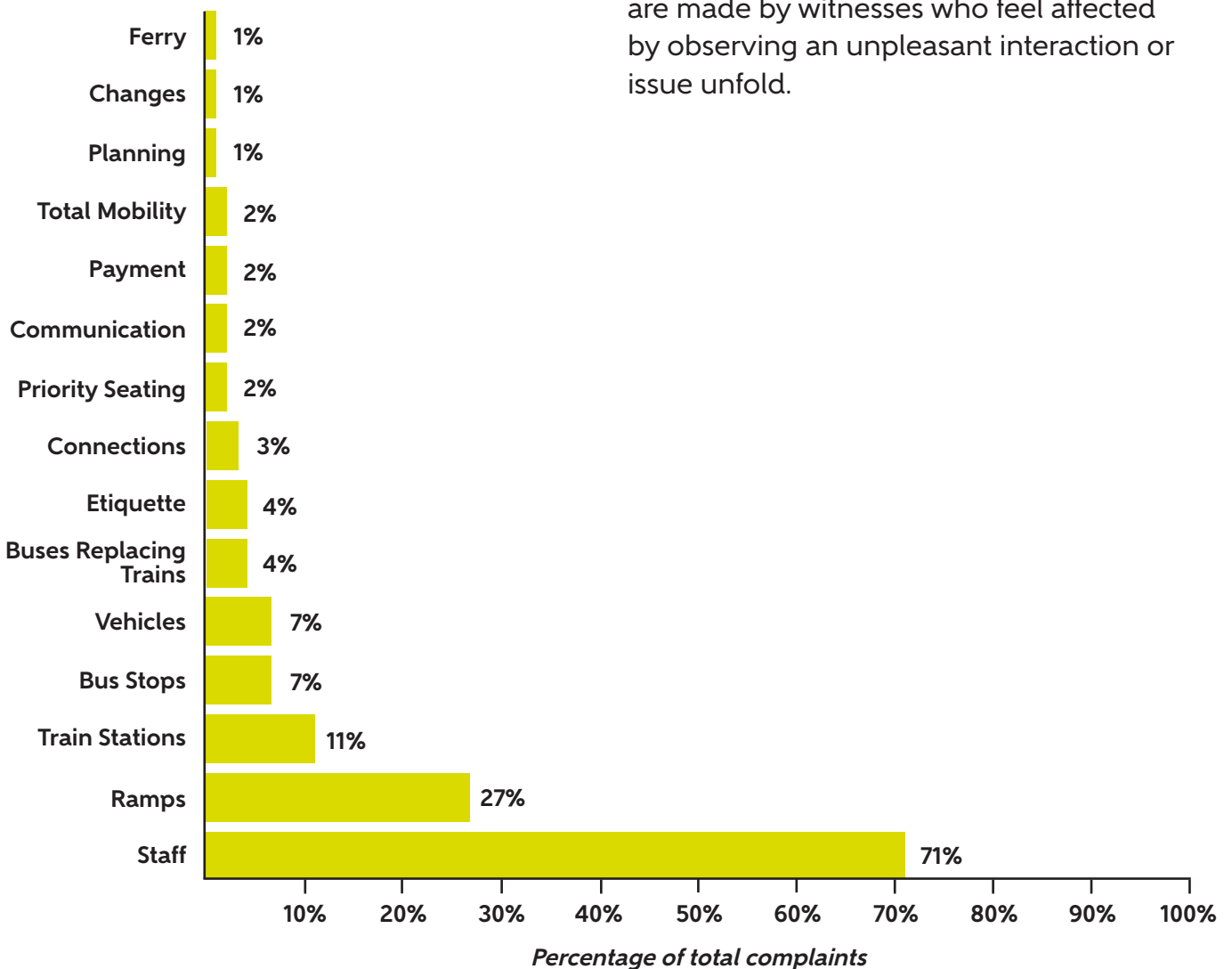
Direct customer complaints are an important way for us to learn about concerns that need to be resolved. There will also be a central metric for improvement throughout the implementation of the Metlink Accessibility Action Plan.

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 and 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.





## Appendix

### Mentions of barriers counted across the accessible journey

This table shows each individual barrier and a count of how often it was mentioned by people in the different groups across the accessible journey.

	Blind Community	Hearing	Mobility	Neuro-diverse/ Learning	Invisible Disability
<b>Across all</b>					
Lack of services at the 'right' time	1		3	2	1
Affordability	1	1	1	2	1
I avoid buses as much as possible	1		4		
Experiences with stress, anxiety & unfriendly people	6	2	5	2	2
Driver willingness to help & kindness	7		5	1	
Removal of cash excludes people					
I'm not taking any one-off trips on public transport, always taxi or car	2		3		
<b>Planning</b>					
Service disruptions & cancellation	4		2	2	1
Call the Call Centre to plan	4	1			
Metlink website/app not accessible	5	1		3	3
No device or data to plan/get info	1	1			



	Blind Community	Hearing	Mobility	Neuro-diverse/ Learning	Invisible Disability
<b>Planning continued...</b>					
Planner assumes able-bodied caller	5				
No instant text-based service e.g. planning	2	1			
Poor quality & clarity of timetables (e.g. large print)		1			
If there's buses replacing trains, I won't travel	2	1	6	1	

<b>Getting there</b>					
Don't trust station accessibility, I check myself	3		5		
Station safety & lighting	1				1
Inaccessible roads, crossings & footpaths	1		3		
Station/services not always open			1		
Not enough or no accessible parking		1	1		1
Access ramps are always a long way out, takes more time			5		
Slippery conditions make even ramps dangerous			2		
Bus stop design creates 'noise' (e.g. placement of poles, totems, shelters)	3		1		
Shelter & seating at stop not suitable/ enough	1	1			





	Blind Community	Hearing	Mobility	Neuro-diverse/Learning	Invisible Disability
<b>Paying</b>					
Cycling lane at hospital bus stop a big hazard	5	1			
Staff don't understand me/are not trained to respond	4	2			
If something goes wrong with tagging on, I won't know		2			
Remembering to top up/pre-purchase					
No ticket office, vendors not close, need cash, no ATM at station (train)			1		
Fare is unclear at the beginning of journey (unless you plan ahead)					
Snapper app & kiosk accessibility, usability & validation location	2				

<b>Locating a service</b>					
Many announcements & updates are given via audio		1			
I can either stand in the shelter or be seen by the drivers & be noticed	1	1			
Digital displays less visible	2	1			
BRT is always late, you wait too long while others make arrangements					
Platform 10 is chaos during BRT, very difficult to navigate & find help	1	1	1	1	
Tech support solutions don't work during BRT, new info not available	1		1		



	Blind Community	Hearing	Mobility	Neuro-diverse/ Learning	Invisible Disability
<b>Locating a service continued...</b>					
Temporary bus stops - finding & accessible	2	2			
Staff don't understand me and are not trained to respond	2	2	2		
Knowing what service to catch - has the right train/bus pulled up?	5				1
Bus drivers give inaccurate info	2				
Bus blinds and signage unclear	2	1	1	1	
Buses don't pull up to the head, they just take off	5				
I lift up my cane and ask driver their number - don't always respond well	6				
How do I know the bus that did go past wasn't my bus?	4				
I have to wait for audio announcement to know what platform (WLG)	2				
Knowing where train will stop & where accessible door will be	2				
Trains run on different platforms - some less accessible, have to check			1		
<b>Boarding</b>					
BRT buses are inaccessible	2		1	1	
Do I get a seat?					2



	Blind Community	Hearing	Mobility	Neuro-diverse/ Learning	Invisible Disability
<b>Boarding continued...</b>					
Who gets the priority seats if lots of people need?			1		2
Concern of holding other people up	2	1	2		
Gap between bus and kerb or platform	1		4	2	
Buses will just drive by to avoid having to pick up wheelchair user	1				
Have to wait for train managers or driver, hope they spot me			4		
I'm the last one to get boarded & get off			3		
No consistent door buttons - do doors open automatically?	3				
Ramp too steep or flimsy			2		
Ramps are clunky and make a loud bang when they come down			2		
Driver are not aware, or are not able to use ramps			2		
Bus design not done with accessibility in mind	4		2		1
Different seat formations, need to re-orientate even on the same line	2				
No enough accessible seats/don't want to use them	2		2		2
Being given enough time to get to a seat	1			1	1
Driver/user - who asks people to give up their seat?	1		1		



	Blind Community	Hearing	Mobility	Neuro-diverse/ Learning	Invisible Disability
<b>The trip</b>					
Wheelchair faces everyone else in the bus - makes me feel embarrassed			1		
Don't like sideways/back orientation of accessible seats	2			1	
Driver speed & braking			1	1	1
Passenger etiquette			1		2
If something changes - info is always given in audio - deaf passengers lost		2			
Knowing where I am & when to get off	6	1		1	
If I have no phone, data, battery, I don't know where I am	1				
I have to work extra to hold on tight in a bus to stay safe			2		

<b>Disembarking</b>					
Where do I press the bell to alert the driver? Will I hear it? Can I reach it?	2	1		1	
Bus stops' bells are inconsistent, sometimes not loud & clear enough	1	1			
How do I get off if the bus is full?	1		1		
Getting off at the front without blocking anyone	4				
Being given enough time to get off at my pace				1	



	Blind Community	Hearing	Mobility	Neuro-diverse/ Learning	Invisible Disability
<b>Disembarking continued...</b>					
Train managers have to remember to get me off the train - chance to get left			2		
Platforms are uneven and difficult to travel on with a wheelchair			1		
Trains - left or right?	2				
Buses don't stop at stops (e.g. so people have to walk over grass)	1				
Literally being trapped within a bus stop due to barriers			1		

<b>Connections</b>					
Poor connecting journeys, especially to regions	1	2	1	3	1
Wayfinding: Where to wait, which platform?	1				
Connecting changes, disruption no communications				1	
Bus too fast/doesn't wait				1	
Tactile and visual cue to navigate between					
Connecting bus is full or doesn't arrive - potentially stranded mid-journey	1			2	1



## What barriers our internal teams were aware of, compared to the community

The table below shows a count of total mentions of a barrier in each group.

	Metlink	Community
<b>What Metlink and our community mentioned that was similar</b>		
Service disruptions & cancellation	4	11
Inaccessible roads and footpaths, crossings, curbs, hi-viz, grass rails and step edges	5	4
Bus stop design can impede egress (e.g. placement of poles, totems, shelters)	4	4
Bus blinds and signage unclear	3	4
Certainty that my service will be on time	4	3
Over-reliance on digital material & services to get info	2	3
Temp bus stops - finding & accessible	2	4
Driver speed & breaking	2	3
Passenger etiquette - awareness of 'non-visible disability'	2	3
Top up outlets/options - how do I find one? Access?	2	3
Snapper app & kiosk accessibility, usability & validation location	2	3
Journey Planner time calculation based on able-bodied people - not applicable to me	3	2
Shelter & seating at stop not suitable/enough	3	3



	Metlink	Community
<b>What Metlink and our community mentioned that was similar continued...</b>		
Is there room for me on the bus? How do I know? Do I get a seat?	3	2
How do I get off if the bus is full?	3	2
Service change alert arrives to late/not at all	2	2
Planning to disembark - left or right	2	2

<b>What our community mentioned, but Metlink did not</b>		
Experiences with stress, anxiety, unfriendly people	3	17
Driver willingness to help & kindness/attitude	1	15
Gap between bus and kerb or train and platform	3	10
Lack of services at the 'right' time	1	8
Visually 'eye-balling' or learning the route & stations, physically mapping out the route prior to travel to ensure it's actually accessible	1	8
Knowing where I am & when to get off: No stop announcement on bus, only stop names on trains	1	9
Metlink website is not good/user-friendly	0	8
Knowing what service to catch - has the right train/bus pulled up	3	8
If there's buses replacing trains - I won't travel	1	8



	Metlink	Community
<b>What our community mentioned, but Metlink did not continued...</b>		
Not enough or no available accessible seats/don't want to use them	1	7
Buses will just drive by to avoid having to pick up wheelchair user	0	7
Bus design not done with accessibility in mind, difficult to navigate	0	7
The potential consideration of holding other people up - speed to get on/off	4	6
What if multiple buses arrive? Will the bus move to the head of the stop?	4	6
Affordability for those on restricted incomes	1	7
Poor connecting journeys, especially between Wellington city and regions	1	7
Generally, I avoid buses as much as possible.	0	7
Staff don't understand me / are not trained to respond to a disabled person	0	7
Cycling lane at the hospital bus stop a big hazard, particularly for the blind community	0	6

<b>What Metlink mentioned, but the community did not</b>		
Third party info, their accessibility & links to us	5	1
Limited public transport info for non-English speaking	3	0
Can't afford a Snapper or \$5 minimum top up	3	0





	Metlink	Community
<b>What Metlink mentioned, but the community did not continued...</b>		
I just won't bother; I know no wheelchair accessible vehicle will be available when I need it	3	1
Stop not safe with adequate lighting & sanitisation	3	1
No shortage of information available - it's knowing how to find it	2	0
Is stop/station and the approach accessible? Ramps, subways	2	0
Limited places for bicycles/ active modes to be securely stored	2	0
Number of people travelling	2	0
Connecting changes, disruption with accessible communications	2	0
Total Mobility shortage of services	1	0
Perception that it takes too much energy to plan	1	0
Fare calculation while planning	1	0
Poor quality and clarity of timetables (e.g. large print)	1	0
No reliable (realistic) info on website that tells me about the accessibility of my stops	1	0
Metlink map doesn't show distance from my house to my bus stop	1	0
Logical facing maps and landmarks	1	0
Caregivers - do they need to sit in regular area?	1	0



## What solutions our internal team raised, compared to our community

	Metlink	Community
<b>What Metlink and our community mentioned that was similar</b>		
Visual and on-board announcements, route progress maps - te reo and sign language (with passenger input)	3	4
Metlink open data for third party apps (e.g. Blindsquare)	2	3
Printed timetable book & large print Braille timetables	3	2
Accessible carriage always the same position, route marked by wheelchair symbol on outside of train	1	3
More accessible spots at public transport car parks	2	2
Wayfinding: larger, bolder more visible, 'hub' wayfinding	2	2
Improve reliability of services	1	2
Accessible vehicle requirements in all new contracts	1	2
Access ramp at front of Wellington Station. Improving accessibility to railway stations	1	2
Larger space for wheelchairs to turn if a bus/train is busy	1	2
Priority boarding	1	2
Fully accessible payment & non-tech options for paying	1	2
Digital channels accessible & training - voice command planning, changes, notifications	2	1
Info on whether station, bus or buses replacing trains are accessible	2	1



	Metlink	Community
<b>What Metlink and our community mentioned that was similar continued...</b>		
Custom journey planning via contact centre, voice, text, email	2	1
Light beacons & lightning improvement	2	1
Total Mobility review (MOT)	1	2
Find people to engage that will give a fresh perspective - not always the same people	1	2

<b>What our community mentioned, but Metlink did not</b>		
Awareness training for staff and operators, clear guidelines for all	5	11
Talking bus audio announcements outside bus (but on bus)	4	9
Improve service offerings from regions & suburbs - frequency could increase	2	6
On-demand accessible small vehicles in fleet	1	6
Buses need to pull up to the head each time	0	6
More opportunity to take taxis with half price fare	0	7
Gap free boarding at stop, ensure kerb/platform level with bus/train	3	5
Bus drivers have improved noticeably - giving people time to sit before driving off	0	5
Customer etiquette campaign	1	4



	Metlink	Community
<b>What our community mentioned, but Metlink did not continued...</b>		
Trains/buses need to wait for one another on some connections	0	4
Phone record message of alerts, e.g. 'Tellme'	1	3
Info needs to be available via multiple channels, not digital focus	0	4
Better tactile wayfinding in Wellington station, fewer tripping hazards	0	3
Wayfinding & announcement audio & visual	0	3
Stations need to be open more with services & options like coffee shops	0	2
Walkways & ramps covered to ensure not slippery, getting wet	0	2
Improved ramps to be less steep, handle more kerbs, safer to use. Electric ramps	0	2
A way of showing discretely that one has a disability need drivers'/ guards' help	0	2
Be able to register a disability/mobility need on your Snapper card	0	2
Test digital channels with real people	0	1
Service disruptions – provide as much notice as possible	0	1
Station shelter needs to be improved	0	1
Staff available to help you navigate stations, so people can learn it for themselves	0	1



	Metlink	Community
<b>What our community mentioned, but Metlink did not continued...</b>		
Textured surfaces so wheelchairs don't slide	0	1
Consistent seating & bell configurations & sounds - at least on the same line	0	1

<b>What Metlink mentioned, but the community did not</b>		
Audible RTI (to stop or to device) & visual RTI	5	2
Buses replacing train services to be Contract Managed by Metlink	3	0
Operator standards align with Metlink standards	2	0
Tawa On Demand (TOD) design standards & guidelines - infrastructure collaboration	2	0
More generous travel times (especially off peak)	2	0
Push alerts for things near you - stop alerts etc	2	0
Braille consistency. Route flash cards for blind	2	0
Top up on vehicle, drivers can top up	2	0
Getting councils to adhere to their parking policies so we can ensure enough bus space to align with kerb	1	0
Bus stop guidelines and enforceable standard by Waka Kotahi	1	0
Legislative requirement to make public transport accessible	1	0



	Metlink	Community
<b>What Metlink mentioned, but the community did not continued...</b>		
Train managers' tech to talk with bus, train and ferry tech	1	0
Community stands with multiple languages & utilise translation services	1	0
Save journeys in app	1	0
Google Maps for journey planning & VR directions. Google Street View - inside stations, ramps, subways	1	0
After-hours outsource Contact Centre?	1	0
Chat bots for simple requests	1	0
Real time information system and sign upgrade	1	0
Real time locator free seats	1	0
Uber like visibility	1	0
Announcements to help wayfinding	1	0
Hub maps and directories at connections	1	0
Dual wheelchair spaces on buses	1	0