

Drive to improve motorway journeys for people with disabilities across the North

With around five per cent of the driving population classed as having a disability, Highways England has partnered with AccessAble, the UK's leading provider of detailed accessibility information, to help motorists plan where to stop for a break at any one of the 114 motorway service areas across England, including 34 services across the North.

Hull-based disability advocate and 'The Deaf Traveller' blogger, Ed Rex visited the Extra services at Leeds Skelton Lake on junction 45 of the M1 to test out the new guides.

Ed is profoundly deaf in both ears and relies on a hearing aid, cochlear implant and lipreading to communicate. Following his visit to the Yorkshire services, Ed emphasised that it's the little things that can make a huge difference for people travelling with hidden disabilities.

Ed said:

Being able to access the services they need is a big worry for Deaf people or people who have hearing loss. Sometimes it's just about making sure that the accessibility information is there so that people know, when they travel, that it won't be stressful, and they'll feel empowered to do it on their own and be independent.

One of the features of Highways England's access guides for motorway services is information about assistive listening, which is really helpful for people who are Deaf or have hearing loss, giving them confidence that support is there if they need it.

The new guides, available online or via the free AccessAble app, are 100 per cent facts, figures, and photographs to help motorists plan their visit to the services. They cover key areas including parking, toilets, petrol stations, shops, and restaurants, with detailed information on everything from staff training and hearing loops, to walking distances and designated places of safety.

In addition, Highways England and AccessAble have worked together to create virtual route guides for the services. This new type of guide, which uses 360-degree imagery, will enable visitors to 'virtually' explore routes to key facilities like accessible toilets and Changing Places, so they can find out exactly what to expect when they arrive.

Highways England Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, Julian Horsler, said:

We're committed to ensuring our customers with disabilities can travel safely on our roads. That's why we're introducing new services to break down barriers and help people reliably plan and feel confident about their journeys.

Whatever the nature of your disability, the access guides for motorway service areas take the guesswork out of journey planning, giving you the information you need about facilities along your route.

A spokesperson from Extra concluded:

Accessibility is not only an issue that applies to people with disabilities, but also an issue that affects everybody. An inclusive world is a better world. As a result, we want to be a part of that. Working with AccessAble and Highways England gives us that opportunity.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.