

# News story: Government signals commitment to improving bus access for wheelchair users

New measures to ensure that wheelchair users can safely access on-board wheelchair spaces on buses will be introduced by the government.

This follows a Supreme Court judgment last year concerning the 'reasonable adjustments' which bus operators should provide for passengers in wheelchairs, and will be aimed at challenging the barriers still faced by some people with disabilities when using bus services.

Today (8 March 2018) the Department for Transport announced that it will begin [developing proposals to ensure that wheelchair users can access buses](#) and that drivers can fulfil the duties given to them by the courts.

Transport Minister Nusrat Ghani said:

Passengers with disabilities must have the same opportunities to travel as other members of society, and it is essential that the services they rely on are accessible and work for them.

Where people live, shop, go out, or park their car should not be determined by their disability and accessible transport networks are vital if we are to support those with disabilities to live independent lives and fulfil their potential.

This follows close engagement with representatives from passenger groups, and the government will continue to work closely with these groups and other stakeholders as plans progress. This will include drivers, disabled people and members of the public travelling with young children, in order to ensure the plans are informed by those most affected by them.

In order to fully understand the implications of the judgment for all passengers and for the bus industry, and to identify actions for the government and others to take to ensure that any adjustments can be provided on buses, the DfT established a stakeholder 'task and finish group on the use of wheelchair spaces on buses'.

Keith Richards, Chair of Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee, said:

The committee welcomed the speed of the department's response to the Supreme Court's judgement on the use of wheelchair spaces.

Fighting for what is essential space should not be part of the day-

to-day experience wheelchair users have when using buses. We hope the department will maintain its pace into the implementation phase, to ensure that wheelchair users no longer face these challenges or have to fight for facilities provided for them in law. Without a greater degree of certainty over the use of the space confidence in using public transport will be difficult to achieve.

The group considered the impact of the current situation on disabled passengers and the options available to address them, and we now need the jigsaw of interventions proposed to be put in place to make a meaningful difference for wheelchair users.

People with disabilities make 10 times as many journeys by bus as by rail, so accessible buses are crucial in supporting them to live independent lives and fulfil their potential.

The implications of the Supreme Court ruling are that passengers who do not require the wheelchair space should be required to move when it is needed by a wheelchair user.

Today the government has announced its acceptance of expert legal recommendations aimed at ensuring that wheelchair users can access bus services.

In January 2017 the Supreme Court handed down its judgment in the case of *Paulley vs FirstGroup PLC*, concerning the “reasonable adjustments” which must be provided by bus operators to enable wheelchair users to access the on-board wheelchair space.

The Supreme Court judgment states that FirstGroup’s policy with regard to use of the wheelchair space was insufficient to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, and that bus drivers should be required to do more than simply request that a person vacates the wheelchair space, including suspending the journey if needed.

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## **Statement to Parliament: Response to advice on the use of wheelchair spaces onboard buses**

Government believes that where people live, shop, go out, or park their car should not be determined by their disability and recognises the importance of accessible transport networks in supporting disabled people to live independent lives and fulfil their potential.

In January 2017 the Supreme Court handed down its judgment in the case of Paulley vs FirstGroup PLC, concerning the “reasonable adjustments” which must be provided by bus operators to enable wheelchair users to access the on-board wheelchair space.

The Supreme Court judgment states that FirstGroup’s policy with regard to use of the wheelchair space was insufficient to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, and that bus drivers should be required to do more than simply request that a person vacates the wheelchair space, including suspending the journey if needed. The judgment did not provide clarity on precisely what action a service provider should require its drivers to take or how the needs of both passengers in wheelchairs and other bus users, disabled or otherwise, should be taken into account.

In order to understand the implications of the judgment for disabled people, the bus industry and other passengers, and to identify actions for government and others to take to ensure that required adjustments can be provided on buses we established a stakeholder ‘Task and Finish Group on the Use of Wheelchair Spaces on Buses’ (the group).

The group’s report to ministers stated that:

Our view is that drivers need to play an active role in ensuring that the wheelchair space is made available for passengers in wheelchairs, which includes requiring other passengers to move where necessary, but that drivers also need more powers than they have currently to enable them to do this effectively.

The group agreed that that whilst wheelchair users should be granted access to the on-board wheelchair space they may not be the only passengers who rely on using it, but that where other passengers do not have such a need they should be expected to vacate the space in order that it can be occupied by a wheelchair user.

The group made 4 specific recommendations:

1. That the Public Service Vehicles (Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors, Conductors and Passengers) Regulations 1990 (the Conduct Regulations) are amended to enable drivers to remove passengers from the bus who unreasonably refuse to move when requested from the wheelchair space
2. The associated guidance is amended to better reflect the behaviours expected from drivers and passengers with respect to use of the wheelchair space
3. Further work is conducted to consider how best to raise public awareness of the behaviours expected from passengers with respect to the wheelchair space, for example a public awareness campaign, or improved

signage on buses

4. That conditions of carriage and disability awareness training best practice guidance are updated to reflect the fact that passengers will be required to move from the wheelchair space should it be required by a passenger in a wheelchair

I am grateful to the group for their careful consideration of this complex issue.

Government agrees with the group that the wheelchair space should be available to those who need it and that the balance of measures proposed, supporting bus drivers to facilitate access to the wheelchair space, and creating an environment where the needs of disabled passengers are recognised and respected should help to overcome the barriers still faced by some disabled people when using bus services.

In [accepting the group's recommendations in principle](#) we will begin a process of further engagement to understand the specific experiences of a range of stakeholders affected by the wheelchair space issue, including wheelchair users, parents travelling with young children, and bus drivers – with a view to bringing forward a package of measures in 2018, informed by the group's recommendations and our further consideration, to support access to the wheelchair space.

Disabled people make 10 times as many journeys by bus as by rail, and it is essential that the services they rely upon to access education, employment, social and leisure activities are accessible to them. We hope that in supporting access to the wheelchair space for those who need it we will help many more disabled people to travel with confidence.

Copies of the Task and Finish Group's report to ministers and accompanying letter have been placed in the House libraries.

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## [News story: £450,000 of HS2 government funding to deliver woodland hub for communities in heart of Buckinghamshire](#)

- HS2 Minister Nusrat Ghani announces £450,000 grant for Wendover Woods Recreational Development project near Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire
- Minister Ghani visits site today (8 March 2018) to see how it will

benefit from a share of £40 million HS2 Phase One Community and Environment Fund

Plans for a new woodland hub with an adventure trail, café and parking for 600 visitors at Wendover Woods have been made possible thanks to a £450,000 government grant, HS2 Minister Nusrat Ghani announced on a visit to the area in Buckinghamshire today (8 March 2018).

Ms Ghani visited the Wendover Woods recreational development project near Aylesbury to see plans for a £4.45 million redevelopment of the site, one of the largest areas of publically accessible open spaces in the region. The £450,000 grant is the largest funding award given to any single project so far from a £40 million HS2 Phase One Community and Environment Fund (CEF) and Business and Local Economy Fund (BLEF).

Nusrat Ghani, HS2 Minister, said:

HS2 will be the backbone of our national rail network – supporting growth and regeneration and helping us build a Britain fit for the future. Whilst we know there will be disruption as we deliver one of Europe’s biggest infrastructure projects, we are absolutely committed to minimising the effects of building the new railway.

It is great to see so many exciting local projects such as the Wendover Woods recreational development project benefit from this fund, helping even more people access and enjoy our beautiful countryside. Funding such as CEF and BLEF will help to ensure that the legacy of HS2 is shared by everyone for generations to come.

The funds were established to support a diverse range of projects, from refurbishing community centres, nature conservation and measures to drive jobs and local economies, along HS2’s route from London to the West Midlands. A further £5 million has also been made available to help communities along the HS2 Phase 2a route from the West Midlands to Crewe, bringing the total available funding to £45 million.

The first round of funding in January, announced by the minister during a [visit to Crewe](#), gave more than £245,000 of grants. These include funding for the renovation of Steeple Claydon Methodist Church in Buckinghamshire, helping a pre-school in Northamptonshire build their first playground and setting up schemes in Camden to engage residents in environmental and health issues.

Cathy Elliott, independent chair of CEF and BLEF said:

This latest round of funding is another milestone for us and I’m delighted to be showcasing the Wendover Woods recreational development project to demonstrate how this money can benefit communities along the line of route for many years to come. More

funding is available for eligible applicants throughout the construction of HS2 Phase One and we look forward to announcing many more funded local projects in the future.

Joanne Mason from the Forestry Commission said:

Wendover Woods is a hugely popular recreation resource for families living across the Chilterns and further afield. This grant from the HS2 CEF fund will enable much needed new toilets, seating and expanded café facilities to be established ensuring that the forest can continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

HS2 Ltd chief executive Mark Thurston said:

As we deliver HS2, we have the opportunity to leave a positive legacy for the communities along the route of the railway. Our Community and Environment Fund, and its twin Business Fund, are starting to support important local initiatives, including building renovations and environmental projects. We're encouraging local people to come forward with other opportunities, such as community-led nature projects for people and wildlife which could contribute to the 'green corridor' we're creating alongside the railway.

This grassroots activity is in addition to the national benefits of HS2, which will rebalance the economy by connecting 8 out of our 10 biggest cities, increase rail capacity on the current system and reduce journey times, while also creating thousands of jobs across the UK.

The CEF and BLEF funds are managed for the government by Groundwork UK, who published its [annual report](#) today.

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## **[News story: First year celebrations for the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network](#)**

The event, held during National Apprenticeship Week 2018 at the House of Commons, welcomed Helen Grant MP and Chair of the [Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network \(ADCN\)](#) along with existing and new member employers and apprentices. Addressing the audience alongside Helen Grant were Neil Bentley from WorldSkills, Jodie Williams from Yorkshire Water, Gp Capt Steve

Dharamraj from the Royal Air Force and Mike Thompson from Barclays, Elaine Billington from United Utilities and Claire Paul from the BBC, alongside Sue Husband, Director of the National Apprenticeship Service.

Speaking at the event, and discussing the impact of the network since its launch during National Apprenticeship Week 2017, Helen Grant MP said:

It is wonderful to celebrate the impact of the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network over the past 12 months. We now have over 50 employers in the network who are all committed to ensuring that their workforce includes apprentices, from all backgrounds, as well as pledging to tell other employers about the powerful impact apprentices can bring.

I am delighted that the hard work we have undertaken to increase the number of apprentices from diverse backgrounds is making a difference and our impact report, launched today, highlights this success.

Having so many ADCN members in the room, alongside new members, is great for the network and for apprenticeships and it's great to celebrate our success as part of National Apprenticeship Week 2018.

National Apprenticeship Week 2018 – themed 'Apprenticeships Work' – is the 11th annual week-long celebration of apprenticeships and during the week employers and apprentices from across England will come together to showcase the success of apprenticeships whilst encouraging even more people to choose apprenticeships as a pathway to a great career.

New members of the ADCN were also announced today – including Channel 4, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, and ITV.

Gp Capt S J Dharamraj from Commandant Royal Air Force Central Training School said:

Diversity is of absolute paramount importance to the RAF, and indeed to our apprenticeship programme.

Greater Diversity in our workforce allows us to draw on a range of different experiences, select the best recruits, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, and better reflect the society we seek to protect. Improving diversity and inclusion is in itself a challenge but we are working hard through our outreach programmes and our own diversity champions to ensure we inform communities of what an apprenticeship provides to the RAF and the benefits that apprenticeships can bring to them – in sum, what it means to be an RAF apprentice.

We are proud to stand up as a champion, and work with other members of the network to ensure we deliver lasting and positive change.

The event concluded with news that the new parent's apprenticeship information leaflets are now being produced in Polish and Punjabi. The event also highlighted developments to show the Disability Confident logo on apprenticeship vacancies on [find an apprenticeship](#), the service for searching and applying for apprenticeships. This will help support Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LLDD) by giving them the facility to search for appropriate apprenticeship opportunities and will be fully functional by April 2018.

Sue Husband, Director of the National Apprenticeship Service concluded:

The 11th National Apprenticeship Week is well underway and it is magnificent that we can recognise the employers committed to apprenticeships diversity as part of our week long celebration of all things apprenticeships.

It is important that workforces reflect the community they serve and these employers are working to ensure that the reach of apprenticeships is extended to diverse groups. Apprenticeships work – for individuals, employers, for local communities and for the economy – and the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network is working hard to make sure this message is being spread to secure a more diverse workforce for the future.

You can find images from the event on the [National Apprenticeships Service Flickr page](#).

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## [News story: Dstl supports new science challenge for girls in Salisbury](#)

As the world marks International Women's Day, staff at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) Porton Down have been leading the way in an initiative to inspire girls to take up careers in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

The Salisbury Soroptomist STEM challenge put to girls in years 8 and 9 in Salisbury schools was to research, design and develop a sustainable prototype to improve life for people living in poverty in the developing world. The teams entering this first year of the event in Salisbury have produced some innovative ideas for supporting vulnerable communities.

Organisers are part of the Soroptomist International, a global women's voluntary organisation, which is setting up a new club in Salisbury.

Lisa Scandling, who has worked at Dstl as a scientist for 30 years, is one of the organisers of the challenge. She said:

This challenge has been enthusiastically supported by Dstl, and it fits in well with Dstl STEM initiatives. Dstl has provided judges and mentors for the event, and it's a fantastic way of working with the local community to inspire more girls to follow STEM careers.

The Soroptomists focus on transforming the lives of women and girls, locally, nationally and globally, through education, empowerment and enabling initiatives. We hope that the challenge will encourage pupils to look at how they can use their talents and skills to help others too.

The final judging and award ceremony will take place at South Wilts Technical College on March 19, when the winners will be announced by the Mayor of Salisbury.

More information on the event can be found on the [Soroptomist International website](#)