PRESS RELEASE

TUESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2026

Major report reveals public transport inaccessible to millions of deaf people

A first-of-its-kind report released today has warned that people who are deaf or have hearing loss are being excluded from public transport across the UK – with millions facing stress, anxiety and a loss of independence.

Clear Signals, a report from RNID - the national charity supporting the 18 million people who are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus - reveals that shockingly, **over three quarters (77%)** of people with hearing loss who use public transport experience accessibility barriers – with consequences that go far beyond the journey itself.

According to RNID, people with hearing loss in the UK are being let down by a transport system failing to meet their needs, and face significant challenges across services such as trains, buses, metro systems, domestic ferries and trams.

The report highlights how barriers - including the inability for people with hearing loss to access critical real-time information and a lack of deaf awareness from staff - can make even every-day journeys feel impossible, requiring immense emotional effort and planning.

As a result, people with hearing loss describe journeys by public transport as stressful, overwhelming and chaotic. Others said they are forced to restrict or adapt their travel behaviour, and in some cases, stop using public transport altogether - affecting people's ability to work, socialise and travel independently.

In the report, **41%** of passengers who are deaf or have hearing loss said barriers limit their independence whilst **over a third (35%)** of those surveyed said they **avoid** using public transport whenever possible.

76% of people who are deaf or have hearing loss and **81%** of BSL (British Sign Language) users said that inaccessible information makes travelling **stressful,** whilst nearly four in five **(79%)** said they feel the need to stay 'on alert' during journeys.

In anticipation of barriers, **68%** of people **over-prepare** and plan ahead for journeys, and **83%** say they build in extra time to make their journeys because they cannot rely on information being accessible to them when travelling.

Produced with funding from the Motability Foundation, RNID's report is the first-ever published research focusing specifically on the real-life experiences of people who are deaf or have hearing loss on public transport in the UK.

The charity is calling for coordinated action by governments, regulators, transport authorities, operators and manufacturers to implement its recommendations, including:

- **Policy and regulatory reform** to enable a consistent approach to accessible information. This should include alignment of legal requirements for audio information and an obligation to make audio information more accessible to people with hearing loss.
- **Support for innovation** through investment in trials of new technology such as Auracast which transforms audio accessibility. People with lived experience should be involved throughout testing, implementation and evaluation.
- **Improved service delivery and accountability** by embedding accessibility improvements in transport plans at national and local level, ensuring complaints processes are genuinely accessible - including for BSL users - and universal deaf awareness training for all public facing staff.

Victoria Boelman, Director of Insight and Policy at RNID, said: *"No one relishes the idea of a rush-hour journey on public transport - but if you are deaf or have hearing loss, everyday journeys can seem like an impossible prospect that leave millions feeling lost, anxious and - often - simply unable to get where they need to be.*

"People with hearing loss shouldn't be left on a platform as people stream past them, wondering if their life is at risk. Nor should they have to sacrifice their own independence because of the immense stress and planning it takes simply to make a journey.

"Our report clearly shows - for the first time - the extent to which travel inequality in the UK means deaf people are having their freedom undermined, and face unacceptable and unnecessary stress and anxiety simply to get from A to B.

"In 2026, it's completely wrong that millions of people are at the mercy of a transport network that fails to meet their needs. Now is the time for coordinated action from the Government and transport sector, so everyone has the opportunity for safe and independent travel."

Nigel Fletcher, Chief Executive of Motability Foundation who funded the report said: *"This important work further confirms what disabled people have been saying for years: that our transport system isn't working for them and the time for change is now.*

"Opportunity, independence and freedom are thwarted when buses don't stop, platforms aren't accessible or digital travel tools don't work for you. We are proud to stand with RNID and the wider disability movement to call for change so everyone can make the journeys of their choice."

Charlotte Young, 44, from Carlisle, has hearing loss and wears a cochlear implant.

She said: *"I have to travel on public transport quite a lot. But if I'm travelling on my own, it can be quite nerve-wracking. It can make me anxious, because there are a lot of unknowns around announcements and train times changing.*

“There’s a sense of having to rely on public transport and knowing that there’s going to be reactive changes, and it can be quite difficult to navigate that. There’s always a layer of nervousness if I’m travelling: ‘What if something happens and I don’t hear it? What if I miss something?’”

Emily Forrington is 49 and lives in Cardiff. She began to lose her hearing in her 20s and has now lost all hearing in her left ear and has severe-to-profound hearing loss in her right ear.

She said: *“As a hard of hearing user of public transport, it is very stressful using unfamiliar routes or being on journeys where announcements are made over tannoys that I cannot hear properly.*

“Accessible information has improved in recent years through smartphones and transport apps, but ‘on the spot’ situations like the bus driver unexpectedly saying something makes me nervous and I unnecessarily panic.”

Read the full RNID report HERE

To read more, visit rnid.org.uk/clearsignalsreport