

BRIEFING NOTE · SEPTEMBER 2026

Bus Network Accessibility Plans

What the new duty requires, how it fits with wider policy, and what it means for passenger information and technology

1 April 2027

Every local transport authority in England must publish its first plan

Every 3 years

At least, or sooner after a substantial change

0 to 5

Rating for each of 10 parts of the journey

At a glance

Every local transport authority (LTA) in England must publish a Bus Network Accessibility Plan (Bus NAP) by 1 April 2027. The plan assesses how well the whole bus journey works for disabled people and commits to improvements.



Passenger information is central. DfT's guidance names RTIG's inclusive passenger information guidance as a benchmark for judging information provision.

1 Apr 2027

First plans due

3 years

Maximum review cycle

10

Journey components assessed

0 to 5

Rating scale for each component



The duty

Section 113BA of the Transport Act 2000, in force since 1 April 2026. DfT guidance followed on 28 August 2026.



The method

Describe existing features, rate each part of the journey from 0 to 5, then set out dated Commitments and longer-term Ambitions.



The process

Co-design with disabled people, statutory consultation with disabled people and operators, and accessible publication.



The context

The Accessible Information Regulations reach their final compliance date on 1 October 2026, and national policy is moving accessibility information into structured open data.



For RTIG members

Expect demand for information audits, accessibility data, audible information at stops, consistent on-bus announcements and accessible digital channels.



Gaps

There is no dedicated funding, scoring may be inconsistent between authorities, and the guidance arrived five months after the duty began.

The duty at a glance

The first plan is due by 1 April 2027 and must be reviewed at least every three years.

Item	Detail
Legal basis	Section 21 of the Bus Services Act 2025, inserting section 113BA into the Transport Act 2000
In force	1 April 2026
Guidance	DfT, Creating and managing a Bus NAP , with a template, published 28 August 2026
First plan	By 1 April 2027
Review	At least every three years, or sooner after a substantial change to local services
Must consult	Disabled people who use or might use buses, or their organisations, and local bus operators
Coverage	Any local service with at least one stop in the area; England only



Triggers for an early review

- ▶ A new or significantly changed franchising or Enhanced Partnership scheme
- ▶ Major changes to routes, fleet, ticketing or concessionary travel
- ▶ A major interchange redevelopment
- ▶ Adopting a network-wide stop design



First plans can be proportionate

Authorities may take a proportionate approach to the **depth** of the assessment, but not its **scope**. They must be open about limits, assumptions and data gaps.

What a plan must contain

A plan must describe, assess and act, across the whole journey rather than vehicles or stops alone.

1 · Describe

The existing features that help disabled people use buses, and how mature each one is (for example pilot, new or fully implemented).

2 · Assess

How far those features let disabled people travel “independently, safely and in reasonable comfort”.

3 · Act

Commitments (specific, dated, within the authority's or partners' control) and Ambitions (longer term, may depend on funding).

Plans also record options rejected and why, with performance indicators and review points for each action.

The whole journey: ten components

The guidance names ten parts of the journey to assess. Information and data matter in every one, and are central to eight.



01 • INFORMATION CENTRAL Information and journey planning

Central: websites, apps, journey planners, printed timetables



02 • INFORMATION CENTRAL Ticketing and concessions

Central: Clear fares and concession information, accessible retail



03 • INFORMATION CENTRAL Network design and availability

Central: Knowing which services run and are accessible



04 • INFORMATION CENTRAL Stops, stations and access to them

Central: Stop accessibility data, wayfinding



05 • INFORMATION CENTRAL Signage and at-stop information

Central: live displays, audible departures



06 Driver training and assistance

Assistance cards, published training statistics



07 • INFORMATION CENTRAL Vehicle design and use

Central: On-bus audio and visual announcements, vehicle feature data



08 • INFORMATION CENTRAL Disruption management

Central: live disruption information in every channel



09 • INFORMATION CENTRAL Interchange with other modes

Central: Connection information, multimodal data



10 Complaints and redress

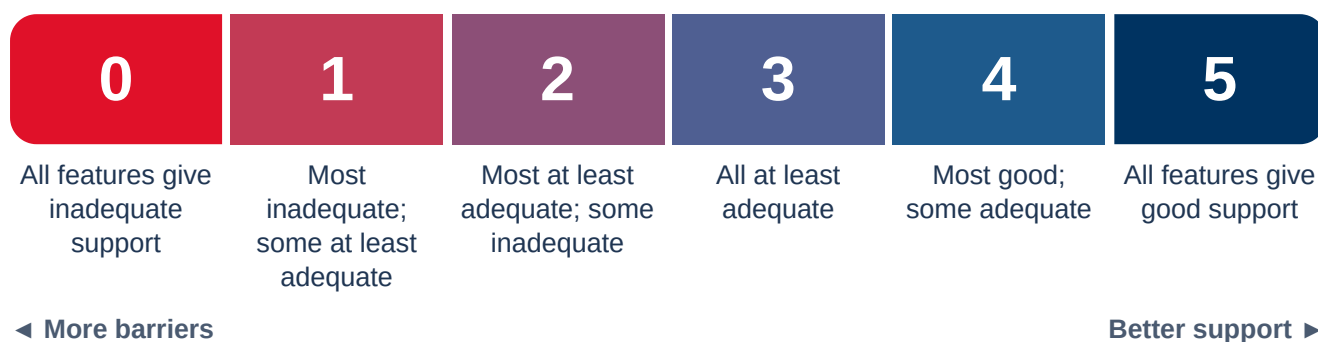
Accessible routes to complain, helplines



The scope also covers authority and operator policies. Home-to-school services, demand-responsive transport, community transport and coaches providing local links are optional.

Rating each component from 0 to 5

Each journey component is rated from 0 to 5, based on how many of its features give inadequate, adequate or good support.



What the terms mean for information

INADEQUATE Does not meet the needs of disabled people with certain types of impairment.	ADEQUATE Accessible to disabled people with all the main types of impairment.	GOOD Tailored to disabled people with particular types of impairment.
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Every assessment must consider

PHYSICAL	SENSORY	COGNITIVE	LEARNING	NEURODIVERSITY
MENTAL HEALTH	CHRONIC CONDITIONS			

...and the risk of transport-related social exclusion. The guidance applies the **social model of disability**: the question is what barriers the system creates, not what is wrong with the passenger.



The RTIG benchmark

In the guidance's worked example for information, one sign of inadequate provision is information that *“does not comply with government guidance or industry best practice, such as the RTIG (Real Time Information Group) guidance on inclusive passenger information”*.

Its example of adequate at-stop provision is live information given *“visually, audibly and through accessible online media”*.

Co-design, consultation and publication

The guidance treats statutory consultation as the minimum and expects co-design throughout.



Co-design

- Disabled “experts by experience”, paid for their time and covering visible and less visible impairments
- Operators, passenger representatives, officers responsible for bus policy and relevant elected members
- Agree up front what can realistically change
- Report back on how input was used



Statutory consultation

Must include disabled people who use or might use buses, or their organisations, and local bus operators. Highway authorities are recommended.

Consultation should:

- follow the Gunning principles: a formative stage, reasons given, enough time, responses genuinely considered
- use accessible materials in digital, printed and in-person forms, with extra time
- reach disabled people of different ages, including non-users
- end in a published report showing what was accepted or rejected, and why

Consultation can be combined with consultation on an Enhanced Partnership or franchising scheme.

Three published outputs



The full Bus NAP

An accessible digital document, with free alternative formats such as Braille, audio and Easy Read



Passenger summary

A short webpage and leaflet on key features and planned improvements



Accessibility Guide

A practical guide for disabled passengers on what features exist, where, and how to use them

How it fits with other policy

The Bus NAP is where several national policies come together locally, and it should feed into Local Transport Plans and Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs).



Each card shows the policy's status, then its link to the Bus NAP (►).

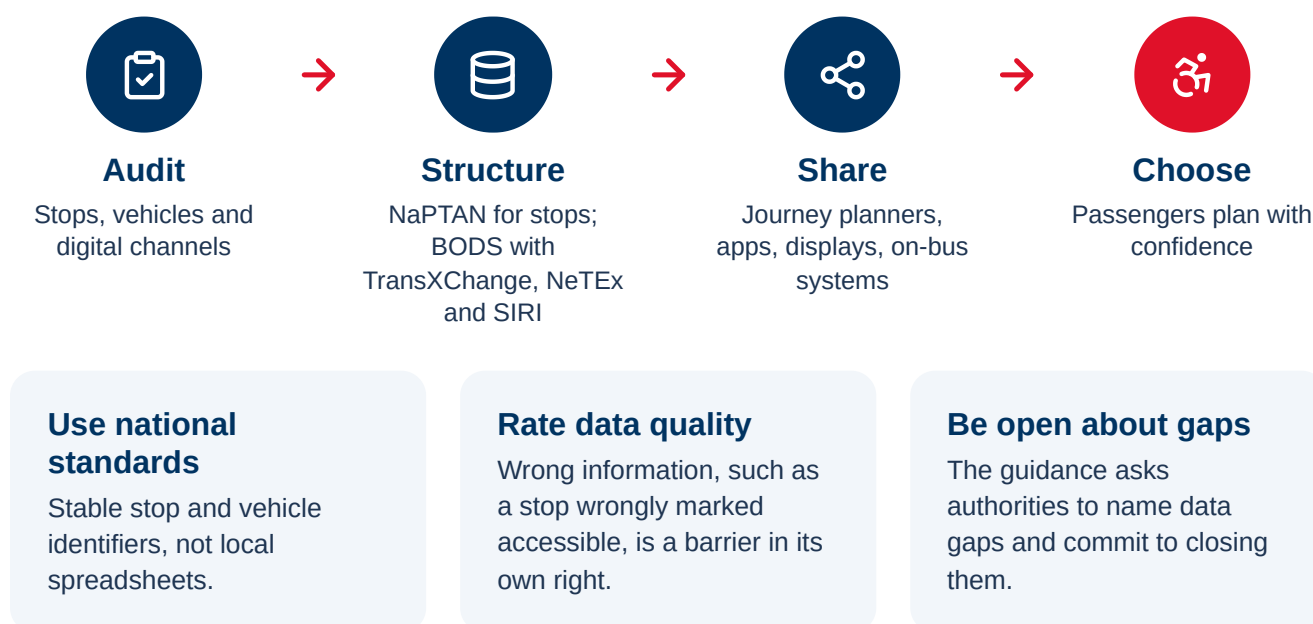
Information, data and technology: the RTIG view

Information is where accessibility is won or lost: a step-free bus is little use if a passenger cannot find out whether it is coming or where to get off. These are suggested RTIG positions for members to test.

 Before travel	 At the stop	 On the bus	 When things go wrong
RECORD AS THE BASELINE Accessibility of authority and operator websites, apps and journey planners	RECORD AS THE BASELINE Printed timetables, live displays and how reliable they are	RECORD AS THE BASELINE Compliance with the Accessible Information Regulations	RECORD AS THE BASELINE How disruption reaches passengers
COMMIT TO Public-sector digital accessibility standards; stop and vehicle features shown in journey planners	COMMIT TO Audible departures wherever live displays exist; RTIG legibility and audibility guidance for all displays	COMMIT TO Consistent voicing and stop names across operators; Auracast alongside hearing loops	COMMIT TO Live disruption in every channel, including audio; a helpline covering all operating hours

Audit once, publish everywhere

The guidance says auditing stop accessibility “allows data to be provided to end users through open data feeds”. Audit results should go into national formats so every system can use them.





Auracast

The guidance describes it as “a Bluetooth standard that allows the broadcast of audio, including on board announcements, to people with equipped devices”. It offers “Auracast on all vehicles by a set date” as an example Commitment.

The Accessible Information Regulations do specify hearing loops, so Auracast can only be optional. Many hearing aids do not yet support it, so it should run alongside hearing loops for now, using the same announcement feed.

See RTIGT061 for more information about Auracast.



Compliance is not enough

Meeting the Accessible Information Regulations covers on-bus next-stop information only.

On its own it makes one part of one component “adequate” at best.

What it means for members

Authorities own the plan, but operators and suppliers will feel it through data requests, specifications and procurement.



Local transport authorities

WHAT TO EXPECT

A three-year review cycle, public 0–5 scores open to comparison, and co-design and publication costs

WHAT TO DO

Baseline the whole journey including information; write standards into Enhanced Partnership and franchise specifications; budget for co-design, accessible formats and data



Operators

WHAT TO EXPECT

Requests for fleet accessibility, on-bus system status, training statistics and complaints data; Commitments passed on through schemes and contracts, such as the accessibility charter, assistance cards and accessible apps

WHAT TO DO

Treat accessible information compliance as the starting point; supply data in standard formats linked to vehicle and stop identifiers; join co-design groups early



Suppliers and consultants

WHAT TO EXPECT

Demand for stop audits, data tools, audible stop information, Auracast-ready systems and accessible apps; interoperability tested more closely

WHAT TO DO

Show compliance with open standards; be ready to evidence performance (for example how often audio is available), not just installation counts

Early reactions and open issues

The whole-journey approach is welcomed, but funding, consistency and enforcement remain open questions.

✓ Strengths

- ✓ Whole-journey scope and an explicit social model of disability
- ✓ A transparent scoring method that can be compared between areas
- ✓ Paid co-design with experts by experience
- ✓ Names specific technologies and standards, including RTIG guidance and Auracast

⚠ Concerns

- ⚠ No dedicated funding; ambition depends on existing grants
- ⚠ Accessible formats are a “should”, not a “must”
- ⚠ Risk of missing disabled people who cannot use buses today, though the guidance does ask for non-users to be included
- ⚠ Scores may differ between authorities without shared definitions
- ⚠ Still no single complaints route; campaigners want binding rights rather than a voluntary charter
- ⚠ Guidance arrived five months after the duty began, leaving about seven months to deliver
- ⚠ England only

Key dates

The next fixed date is the publication of the first Bus NAPs on 1 April 2027.

26 Jan 2026	●	Floating bus stops statutory guidance published
1 Apr 2026	●	Bus NAP duty came into force
2 Apr 2026	●	Better Connected integrated transport strategy published
28 Aug 2026	●	DfT Bus NAP guidance and template published
21 Sep 2026	●	DfT voluntary accessibility standards for bus manufacturers published
23 Sep 2026	●	Section 25 bus information consultation closed
1 Oct 2026	●	Final accessible information compliance date for most local buses
1 Apr 2027	●	First Bus NAPs must be published
2027	●	Further floating bus stop guidance expected
Feb 2029	●	Law Commission review of transport accessibility law expected to report
By Apr 2030	●	Latest date for the first three-year review (sooner after a substantial change)

Grey: already happened. Navy: coming up. Red: the Bus NAP deadline.

Recommended actions and how RTIG can help

With about six months to the deadline, authorities should start co-design and information audits now.

Five things to do now

- 1** Set up co-design now, using experts with lived experience.
- 2** Audit the information baseline: stops, vehicles, digital channels and disruption.
- 3** Ask operators for data early: fleet, on-bus systems, training and complaints.
- 4** Use RTIG's inclusive passenger information guidance as the benchmark for information scores.
- 5** Publish what you collect as open data, and name the gaps in the plan.

Sources

- ▶ [DfT, Creating and managing a Bus Network Accessibility Plan \(28 August 2026\)](#)
- ▶ [DfT, Bus NAP publication page with template](#)
- ▶ [Bus Services \(No. 2\) Bill explanatory notes](#)
- ▶ [DfT, Better Connected: a strategy for integrated transport \(April 2026\)](#)
- ▶ [DfT, Bus Services Act 2025: improving information about local services \(consultation, 2026\)](#)
- ▶ [DfT, Accessibility standards for bus manufacturers \(21 September 2026\)](#)
- ▶ [RTIG, Summary of the Accessible Information Regulations](#)
- ▶ [RTIG, Inclusive passenger information \(RTIGPR003-D002\)](#)
- ▶ [RTIG, Auracast™ Bluetooth Briefing Note \(RTIGT061\)](#)
- ▶ [Government response to Access denied \(May 2025\)](#)



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