

# **MOBILITY AND ACCESS COMMITTEE FOR SCOTLAND**

## **WRITTEN SUBMISSION**

1. Given the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee's call for information on challenges to access at specific key Scottish rail stations, this document, compiled by the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) notes specific issues relating to access, infrastructure and intermodal change at individual stations in addition to overarching concepts attributable to all stations. Service issues, including those associated with Passenger Assist are not included as they were not part of the brief issued by the Committee. This document includes personal experiences highlighting barriers to access and their impact on independent travel.

### **Notes**

2. The term “technically unmanned” used in this document refers to the level of staffing as denoted on the 'Stations Made Easy' page for individual stations provided on the National Rail Enquiries website. Times at which stations are manned as given on these pages do not always reflect reality on the ground and therefore can be misleading for passengers, especially those requiring additional assistance at the station.

### **General Issues**

3. There is often confusion over the ownership of responsibility for land and infrastructure immediately surrounding or connecting with stations, brought to light in particular when station service providers engage in consultation with interested stakeholders when planning for major improvements or when access issues are reported. This often leads to a delay in establishing constructive dialogue between all parties concerned, especially where potential improvements may be the responsibility of those other than the station's owner or management. This was most recently seen during engagement with Haymarket station with respect to accessing the tram infrastructure opposite the station entrance. It took considerable time before it was eventually established that the land outside the station was the functional responsibility of the City of Edinburgh Council and not the tram operators. Similar confusion lead to delays progressing discussions over access issues at Dundee and Edinburgh Waverley stations.

4. There is an increased emphasis on point-to-point ticketing and smart ticketing spanning multiple modes of transport, especially as included in the new Abellio ScotRail franchise agreement. However, infrastructure at stations does not lend itself to making the transition from one mode of transport to another accessible for people with a range of disabilities particularly where this involves leaving the station premises, as is the case with all of the key stations identified for evaluation by the ICI Committee. Issues relating to aspects such as signage, information on the location and timing of connecting services (which may be infrequent leading to additional disruption and anxiety on the part of the passenger if connections are missed) and information on accessible bus or taxi transport especially affect those with learning difficulties or sensory loss as there is already generally acceptable support for those

experiencing mobility challenges. Examples of this are cited under the sections for Aberdeen and Stirling stations.

5. MACS have been invited to comment on the Network Rail Inclusive Design Strategy, which aims to provide a seamless journey experience for the passenger by defining standards that can be implemented at all stations offering a uniform outlook and simplifying the learning curve for passengers. This is particularly important for frequent travellers who use a number of stations, who rely on familiarity of the design and routes through the station, and who can be negatively impacted by unforeseen change. Our key focus will be on improving accessibility of stations and wherever passengers access Network Rail's infrastructure. This principle can be extended to all stations, even those not managed by Network Rail and one would hope that operators would take the strategy and its implications on board for future development or routine maintenance.

6. Although not fully categorised under access or intermodal change, it is important that all customer-facing and decision-making staff are aware of the wide range of disabilities into which they may engage. This includes not only visible disabilities such as those experiencing mobility challenges but those with sensory loss, disabilities on the autistic spectrum, learning disabilities and long-term illness. It is also important to understand that a physical adaptation is not always the only solution to overcome challenges disabled passengers may face. Although service is not within the scope of the brief issued by the Committee, it is essential to note that much of the 'assistance' that may help disabled passengers is provided by staff at stations as service, incorporated into that with which all passengers are provided.

## **Aberdeen Rail Station**

### Access issues within the station

7. There are a significant number of obstructions that preclude direct line of sight access to the ticket barriers and platforms from all entry points to the station. This includes ticket machines, which, for example, are particularly close to the entrances of the cafe and WH Smith, requiring pedestrians to navigate around these obstructions. This makes it difficult for, for example, visually impaired passengers to navigate towards the ticket barriers and platforms from station entrances as there is no clear 'landmark' upon which they can focus to help guide them to their intended point. This is in contrast to stations such as Inverness and Stirling, which have relatively straightforward access to the gate line.

8. In contrast to the point above, there are some parts of the station concourse, which, at certain times, have a considerable amount of empty space that makes it difficult to determine a landmark on which to focus to assist with wayfinding, a particular concern for visually impaired users. This includes at times when the ticket barriers are unmanned between 05:26 and 07:03. As ticket gates are left open, it is easy for passengers to lose a sense of direction and inadvertently wander onto the platform at a time when there are practically no staff on the concourse to assist.

9. It is difficult to locate staff during times when the station is technically unmanned as they do not always have a presence on the concourse, and there are no obvious points from which to notify them of arrival onto the station, e.g. in the case of

passenger assistance having been booked in advance. This can pose problems if, for example, taxi drivers dropping disabled passengers at the station are unwilling to locate a member of staff or wait until the staff member has arrived to meet the disabled passenger. There is also no obvious meeting point or point from which to call the main station office where staff may be present.

10. At times of high station passenger utilisation or when several trains are waiting at platforms, it is sometimes difficult to hear audio announcements, especially those that are given by staff using the PA system as opposed to those, which are automated.

#### Intermodal access and change

11. Access to Aberdeen bus station is via either the Union Square shopping centre or a circuitous route around the shopping centre and Jury's Inn by way of the external Union Square pedestrianised area. The former presents access issues including varying lighting conditions, lack of visible signage, ground level obstructions caused by temporary stalls and notice boards. The latter route presents comparatively fewer obstructions other than security bollards close to the Jury's Inn entrance that are difficult to see from a distance due to their short height.

12. There are often long queues for taxis, particularly at peak travel times or during late night opening hours at the adjacent Union Square shopping centre. There are no seating facilities where passengers with mobility issues may wait whilst waiting for pickup. Some taxi operators without a valid permit refuse to pick up from the station and use a point close to the foot of the stairs leading to Guild Street as a pickup point. There are safety issues reaching this due to the need to cross the access road entering/leaving the station, which is not equipped with a controlled crossing. The road also has a 'blind' spot where pedestrians use the same crossing as one cannot see vehicles approaching from under the bridge and vice versa until they are on the road itself. It should be noted that the station owner/operator owns neither the road nor the crossing.

### **Stirling Rail Station**

#### Access issues within the station

13. As a positive, there are no pedestrian obstructions between the station entrance and gate line. This makes it significantly easier for passengers, including those with disabilities, to navigate to a point where they can engage with station staff for assistance if needed.

14. The height of each step on the stairs leading to and from the bridge over the main railway tracks is significantly less than at stations with similar infrastructure. Although it therefore takes longer to climb and traverse the bridge, it is also much easier for those unable to climb steeper stairs including the elderly, those with mobility issues or whom are carrying luggage. This is a positive point in favour of the station and one that can be cited as an example of good practice.

#### Intermodal access and change

15. There is poor contrast at ground level on the station side of the road to the left of the station entrance for the road crossing which pedestrians must use before crossing the bridge that allows access to the bus station. It is therefore difficult to

orientate oneself correctly to ensure one can line up with the correct location on the other side of the road when travelling from the rail station towards the bus station. Pedestrians may inadvertently wander onto the access road leading from the station, which presents a safety risk. This risk could be mitigated by use of a controlled crossing with appropriate tactile and high visibility markings.

16. As a positive taxi access to and from the station is relatively straightforward given that the taxi rank is immediately outside the station entrance and on the same side of the road. This ease of access is replicated at Glasgow Queen Street.

## **Inverness Rail Station**

### Access issues within the station

17. As a positive, there are no pedestrian obstructions between the station entrance and gate line. This makes it significantly easier for passengers, including those with disabilities to navigate to a point where they can engage with station staff for assistance if needed.

18. In contrast to the point above, there are some parts of the station concourse, which, at certain times, have a considerable amount of empty space that makes it difficult to determine a landmark on which to focus to assist with wayfinding, a particular concern for visually impaired users. This includes times when the ticket barriers are unmanned as ticket gates are left open, it is easy for passengers to lose a sense of direction and inadvertently wander onto the platform at a time when there are practically no staff on the concourse to assist. For example, the station is technically unmanned after 20:00 however, a number of regional services arrive or depart from the station after this time including the Caledonian Sleeper to London Euston.

### Intermodal access and change

19. Inverness bus station is not directly visible from either of the two rail station entrances and is accessed from the side entrance adjacent either to WH Smith or via a circuitous route from the front entrance onto Academy Street. Access to the bus station from the side entrance requires crossing at least one public access road without a controlled crossing and passing along the side of the stands from where buses arrive or depart. The area is technically and significantly outside the jurisdiction within which station staff are permitted to operate and assistance to the bus station is therefore dependant on the goodwill of individual personnel.

## **Edinburgh Waverley Station**

### Access challenges within the station

20. The width of some platforms are narrow which can make it difficult for passengers with mobility issues, especially those using wheelchairs to navigate when there is a high volume of passenger traffic, e.g. on platform 19 which is used by longer Virgin Trains East Coast intercity services.

21. Walking distances between key points within the station, such as between the station entrances at taxi ranks and the passenger assistance point within the Station Management Centre are long, at times in excess of 200m. Resting areas allowing passengers to stop for breaks whilst walking have not been provided which presents a

barrier to these passengers' ability to use the station comfortably. The same issue presents for passengers leaving the station via the Market Street entrance wishing to catch a taxi, as there is a long walk to the front of the taxi queue. Facilities for access to luggage trolleys do not appear to have been provided at all entrance and exit points.

22. Lighting levels are not equal throughout the station, which may present issues to visually impaired station users, especially when moving from areas of high natural light to lower florescent lighting. It may take passengers minutes to adjust to the differing lighting levels and there are not always safe areas to stop for recovery time that are outside the usual pedestrian flow. Differing lighting levels may be a particular concern in summer where the high position of the sun may contribute to additional glare as it is refracted through the glass roof within the station.

23. It is often difficult to hear audio announcements within the station due to its volume. The echo compounds this, which is present given the station's design. A high audio volume may help to mitigate this.

#### Intermodal access and change

24. Although this is not within the jurisdiction of station management, there is an incongruence between the labelling of bus stops on online mapping services such as Google Maps and that found on the physical bus stops outside the station. For example, users using Google Maps to plan their onward journey from the station may be guided to bus stop PM, however no such label is present on the available bus stops. This makes it difficult for people to locate their required stop without relying on local knowledge or enquiring with bus drivers individually.

### **Perth Rail Station**

#### Intermodal Access and Change

25. Perth has two bus stations; the primary station in the city centre used by local and stopping services and a layby outside the city used by long-distance coaches. The primary station is a 10-minute walk from the rail station however there is little (and in some cases, no) signage directing passengers between the two points of transit.

26. There is little prominent information within the rail station advising passengers which bus station they should use to continue their onward travel. As a point of interest there is also no designated point within the station, including via digital display, where such information is obtainable.

### **Dundee Rail Station**

#### Access issues within the station

27. Dundee rail station is currently undergoing redevelopment as part of a major overhaul of the waterfront area and the Victoria and Albert museum. During the engagement process with the station owner/management and other interested stakeholders, an issue has emerged surrounding the availability of toilet facilities. Toilets are available in the cafe however this is not open at all times when the station itself is open and in use by passengers. The station does not currently have toilet facilities that are open at all times or which overlap times when the cafe is closed,

save for those on the platform. This would be a major concern to all passengers and particularly those with complex needs, babies and young children.

#### Intermodal Change and Access

28. Dundee Bus Station is some distance from and outwith the scope of the rail station however there is insufficient signage directing passengers to their next point of transit and, by extension, advising on service timings and availability. As with other stations, there remains an issue surrounding the ability of passengers to obtain assistance when transferring between the two modes of transport given the change in jurisdiction and responsibility, something that is of particular concern to those with sensory loss or complex disabilities owing to the noisy environment and busy roads surrounding the station.

### **Haymarket Rail Station**

#### Access issues within the station

29. As a positive, there are no pedestrian obstructions between the station entrance and gate line. This makes it significantly easier for passengers, including those with disabilities to navigate to a point where they can engage with station staff for assistance if needed.

#### Intermodal Access and Change

30. Since the introduction of the tram link to Edinburgh Airport, it is necessary to cross a road outside the station in order to reach the platform for boarding the tram. Tram staff do not operate this platform and therefore it is often necessary for staff from Haymarket Rail Station to accompany disabled passengers across the road to this point.

31. As with tram access, the taxi rank has been moved during and after the development of Haymarket station. Although drop off is permitted in the turning circle immediately outside the station, the rank is across from the station entrance meaning Haymarket Terrace must be crossed to access it. This requires staff to leave and move away from the station premises should passengers require assistance to or from the taxi rank. This also has insurance and liability implications, which are complicated given that the taxi rank is on land over which the City of Edinburgh Council and not the station owners/management have responsibility.

32. Given that different parties operate different modes of transport connecting with the station (bus, tram) there is the potential for communication issues and delay when attempting to establish jurisdiction over different points at which passengers interact with services. This also affects passengers using these services who require support for connecting with transport for their onward journey across these points. Likewise, issues may arise around cooperation for planning or amending services, accessibility or logistics. As a point of interest, just such a scenario was experienced by MACS when engaging with the station over accessibility approaching the station on foot relating to ground level and platform signage.

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**MACS**

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