



'Transport'

**Report of the Lewisham People's
Parliament September 2025**

This report is written in plain English

The Lewisham People's Parliament

The People's Parliament is here to represent the views of people with learning disabilities who live in Lewisham. It is a project run by Lewisham Speaking Up and it is currently funded by the City Bridge Foundation.

There are six Lewisham People's Parliament reps who are elected by other people with learning disabilities. They are paid above the London Living Wage for their work with Lewisham Speaking Up.



Background to this report on Transport

This Lewisham People's Parliament was held to find out what people with learning disabilities think about public transport.

Last year at our elections for our People's Parliament reps, we asked people what topics they would like to see and transport was one of the most suggested topics. It is also a topic that many people asked about at our Question Time event with the Lewisham MPs.

We held a Big Group about transport in August 2024, where Jonathan and Chloe from Transport for London came to hear about people's experience using public transport. We discussed many different topics, but in particular, lots of people said they had experienced hate crime and sexual harassment on buses. They said using public transport is too complicated because there aren't enough accessible signs and buses are often late.

We have been involved in the Transport for London Learning Disability forum for many years. In 2023 the forum was relaunched by the British Institute of learning disabilities and People First, and we have attended two of those forums. We were able to share our views on accessibility of stations, bus stops, and trains and buses. This project has now ended and Transport for London will be working with self advocacy groups to learn from the views of people with learning disabilities, but some self advocates are worried their voice won't be heard without the forum.

We also decided that we would talk about Freedom Passes and free Taxi Cards. Our 1:1 advocates have helped people get their Freedom Passes and Taxi Cards when they are entitled to use them. Lots of people report to us that they have issues with these schemes. We co-chair the council's learning disability partnership board, and Mencap told us at the board that people who go to their groups have had their Freedom Passes removed without warning. We also work with Entelechy Arts to promote self advocacy for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, and members have told us that they sometimes miss their sessions because their free taxis are late or don't show up.

The Parliament meeting



Tom chairing the meeting

The meeting was held in the Lewisham Council Chamber. We would like to thank Lewisham Council for letting us have the rooms for our meeting.

We invited people to join us on the 19th September and **42** people with learning disabilities came in person.

This included guests from Generate Voices, Advocacy In Greenwich, Bromley Together, and People First. We would like to thank them for joining us.

The meeting was chaired by People's Parliament rep Tom Beard.

Tom welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through some ground rules. Then he made a speech to open the Parliament.

Tom said that we would be talking about:

- How can public transport be more accessible?
- How can we stay safe from hate crime and sexual harassment on public transport?
- What problems do we face when we use freedom passes and taxi cards?

Tom said that transport is important to people because it helps them feel independent and part of their community. Tom said that he avoids using public transport unless his colleagues are with him, because it makes him feel anxious and overwhelmed. He said that many other people with learning disabilities feel the same way, but some people with learning disabilities feel very confident using public transport and are good at it.

Tom said that if you are feeling overwhelmed with public transport, you can speak to a driver or staff at the stations. He said this feels scary, but staff should be trained to help.

Tom also told everyone that he is working on a project with the National Autistic Society about supporting people to learn to drive. He said that he is passionate about everyone being able to learn to drive if they want to.

Tom then introduced our first guest speakers: Naje Busia from the DLR community assist team.

Naje told us about the community assist service for the DLR.

The community assist team can help people travel on the DLR if they have any access needs, and they can give advice to parents and carers.

They offer schemes for people who want to build confidence using the DLR. One of the team can meet you and support you with using the DLR until you feel more confident. They will also help you to use the ticket machines and travel apps.



Naje giving his presentation

Then Tom introduced a video by United Response about their report on disability hate crime on public transport

The video shared different people's experience of hate crime on public transport. They said that they were called names, threatened or hurt by people, or someone stole their belongings. They said that other people on public transport didn't help. More than one third of people that United Response spoke to said that they will rarely or never use public transport again because they experienced a hate crime.

You can watch the video here: [Journey to Safety: our report into disability hate crime on public transport](#)

Finally, Tom invited our final guest, Jonathan Baggs from Transport for London

Jonathan told us about work that Transport for London are doing to make transport more accessible.

Only 30% of tubes in London are step-free, but they are aiming to make 50% of tubes step-free in 15 years' time. It takes a long time because the tubes are old.

Transport for London are working with councils to make bus stops more accessible, and all bus drivers have disability training.

They also want to stop hate crime on public transport by using more CCTV at bus stops and on trains, and training the public with bystander training to help people when hate crime happens.



Jonathan giving his speech

Jonathan took some questions from the audience. There were a few mums in the audience who asked him about prams on buses, and said the buses sometimes stop too far from the curb. Someone asked about travel assistance on buses. Some people asked about what Transport for London can do to stop people vaping on buses.

Tom then invited everyone to join one of three workshops:

- A workshop on 'accessibility on public transport'
- A workshop on 'hate crime and sexual harrassment'
- A workshop on 'Freedom Passes and Taxicards'

Workshop 1 – Accessibility on public transport

This workshop was run by Bruce and Amelia, who are Transport Planners and Station Wayfinders, and volunteered at the People's Parliament

What are the big problems we face on public transport?

- Bus diversions
- Some train lines don't have level boarding for wheelchairs
- Traffic problems
- People using bus lanes when they shouldn't
- Drivers driving away from disabled people
- Sometimes ramps don't work or are too slow to get on or off
- Too big a gap between the bus and the curb for wheelchairs or prams
- Anxiety because there are too many people
- New bus stops should have bigger boards to see the bus times
- People calling us names on the bus and the drivers not helping
- People ignoring people who need a seat

What would help us to use public transport?

- Easy Read signage
- Better ramps that come out quicker and more safely
- Level boarding trains
- Having an oyster touch in the wheelchair space on the bus
- Training programmes on attitude and how to support people with disabilities
- Have another person with us on the bus or train to go ahead and check that it isn't too busy



Workshop 1 feeding back from their discussion

Workshop 2 – Hate crime and sexual harassment

This workshop was led by Lewisham Speaking Up

What are our experiences of hate crime and sexual harassment on public transport?

- Someone called me “cheeky” when I asked them to give me more space
- Someone wouldn’t let me off the bus at my stop
- I was standing on the bus and there was nowhere to sit, and a woman pushed me to get out the way for an elderly woman to sit down. That could make me fall or have a fit
- A man touched my leg and I told him to get his hands off me. I don’t always have the confidence to do that
- My experience gave me anxiety attacks and I had to see the doctor
- Other passengers mouthing off for no reason

What kind of things do we worry about when using public transport?

- Hate crime is on the rise
- Police often record hate crime as something else like antisocial behaviour, and they can’t help as much
- Upskirting – where people secretly take a picture up somebody’s skirt
- Men talking to women or about women in a derogatory way
- Sexual harassment is getting worse because of men listening to people like Andrew Tate, and they want to hurt women
- Disabled women get targeted more because people think we are vulnerable

What support do we need for hate crime and sexual harassment on public transport?

- Always report it. It helps other people even if they can’t help you!
- More training for police from people with learning disabilities

- More initiatives between Transport companies, the MET police and charities. For example, our women's group could work with them about sexual harassment for women with learning disabilities
- CCTV records everything on buses, we need the same on all of the tubes
- Buses have a big red button for emergencies, more people need to know about it



Workshop 2 feeding back from their discussion

Workshop 3 – Freedom Passes and Taxicards

This workshop was led by Lewisham Speaking Up

What do we think about applying for Freedom Passes and Taxicards?

- It's hard to apply for a Freedom Pass
- The application process is hard, you need lots of documents and it's hard to advocate for yourself
- If you lose your pass it is easier to get a new one online rather than phoning
- You need assistance to apply for a Freedom Pass, don't try to do it on your own
- Why can't we get our Freedom Passes at the town hall – why has that stopped?
- When you reach retirement age, you need a different pass. I'm still waiting for mine
- It was difficult to apply, my mum had to help me
- I have to apply for me and my son so it's a double challenge
- I find the biggest challenge is getting the medical form completed by the GP to confirm your disability
- It's not easy to apply online for a Taxicard
- If you need a new pass it can take a long time to arrive

What do we think about using Freedom Passes and Taxicards?

- If your Freedom Pass doesn't work it is scary, but most drivers let you on
- We want Freedom Passes to be valid for 24 hours a day on the train. It takes away your freedom and choice of when to travel, and it makes it harder to get a job if we can't travel before 9:30am
- We want Freedom Passes to work in a wider area
- We would like our passes to work across the country – your disability doesn't stop in London
- I'm still disabled even though I'm older but my older people's pass has more restrictions on when I can use it

- There should be free travel for companions, carers and supporters
- You have to book in advance to use a Taxicard

After the parliament, we spoke to some people with learning disabilities and their carers, who wanted to come on the day but couldn't because of transport problems.

One person said that their taxi did not come, and this happens a lot. Even though they haven't actually used a taxi, they lose credit on their taxicard.

Another person said that they couldn't come because their wheelchair is not suitable for them. Their carers are unable to push the wheelchair very far because it is too heavy. This means they can't get out into the community very much. They also said that sometimes when they get taxis using their taxicard, the taxi comes and has to leave because their car cannot carry their wheelchair. We wanted to share these comments in the report, because it is important to hear from people who can't access the People's Parliament due to transport problems.



Summary

Transport is an important topic to talk about, because we spend a lot of our lives using public transport. It means we can go to work, socialise, get our shopping and be part of our community.

People with learning disabilities said that they do not feel completely safe or welcome as users of public transport. Many people have experienced a hate crime, or sexual harassment, and public transport is often busy and rowdy, with lots of arguing. This makes people feel anxious about using public transport.

Lots of people shared positive experiences using accessibility tools like apps, large print maps, talking trains and support from transport staff. Lots of people feel very grateful for their freedom pass as it allows them to go wherever they want, and they would not be able to live the life they want to without it. Some people have taken part in schemes like travel assistance, or have done training to build their confidence using public transport. Many people with learning disabilities feel that accessibility is getting better, but that the progress is too slow. It takes a long time to make stations step-free, or to bring in talking trains, or accessible signage in stations.

Other people said that the process for applying for Freedom Passes is difficult, and they have to wait too long to get a new one if they lose it. This puts people's life on hold, as they cannot get to their usual activities. Many people also feel that there are too many restrictions on the Freedom Passes.







We wanted to hear more from people who use Taxicards, but only one person on the day had one. When we spoke to people afterwards, many said that they tried to come to People's Parliament but could not make it because their taxi did not come.

People felt that it is important for transport companies to speak to people with learning disabilities about their experience, and co-produce accessibility services with people with learning disabilities. It is important that everyone in the community can access public transport, and we cannot know that is happening unless we come to them and hear what they have to say.

What did people say about the Parliament?

To evaluate the success of the People's Parliament on Transport, we used an accessible method with facial expression stickers.

We asked people with learning disabilities to rate the Parliament by choosing a face sticker. 35 out of 42 people (83%) put up a sticker. This is what they thought about the Parliament meeting:

Stickers	Number of stickers
Yellow smiley face (good)  =	31
Orange unsure face (in the middle)  =	4
Red sad face (bad)  =	0
Total of all stickers  +  +  =	35

What Next?

These are the things that the People's Parliament will do next:

- Share this report with Transport for London, Heidi Alexander (Secretary of State for transport), Lewisham's Freedom Pass team and London's Taxicard scheme
- Send this report to Local Members of Parliament, Lewisham Council, service providers in Lewisham and other people who may be interested
- Present this report to the Lewisham Learning Disability Partnership board and the "Life with Opportunities" subgroup
- Send this report to Learning Disability England and other self-advocacy groups around the country
- Sign up to United Response's disability hate crime charter

For more information or to discuss anything to do with this report, contact Lewisham Speaking Up.

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