

Arriving in London

You may arrive in London by train or coach from inside the UK, or by *Eurostar* or by air from abroad.

By rail

As there are so few journeys 'inside' London that it is possible to make by NR without major access problems, we are describing the network in detail in this section under *Arriving*.

National Rail (NR) services

There is a huge network of rail lines through the London suburbs. It is more dense south of the river, where there are fewer tube lines. In addition the lines end at about ten different stations, most of which are some distance from the central area/s (see the rail links map). The reason for this is that a Royal Commission in 1846, declared that central London was a no-go area for railway line construction.

Virtually all the central main line stations, being termini, have step-free access nearly everywhere. Most have taxi pick-up points just outside, or inside the station, and these will all be 'accessible' black cabs.

Kings Cross/St Pancras, London Bridge and Waterloo link to 'accessible' underground stations. Charing Cross is very central and within 500m of Trafalgar Square, while Blackfriars is actually in the City. Nearly all of them have accessible toilets, usually with a NKS lock.

You can pick up an excellent overall map of the system called *London Connections* from a number of information points, or from **National Rail Enquiries** Tel: 0845 7484-950 Textphone: 0845 6050-600
website: www.nationalrail.co.uk.

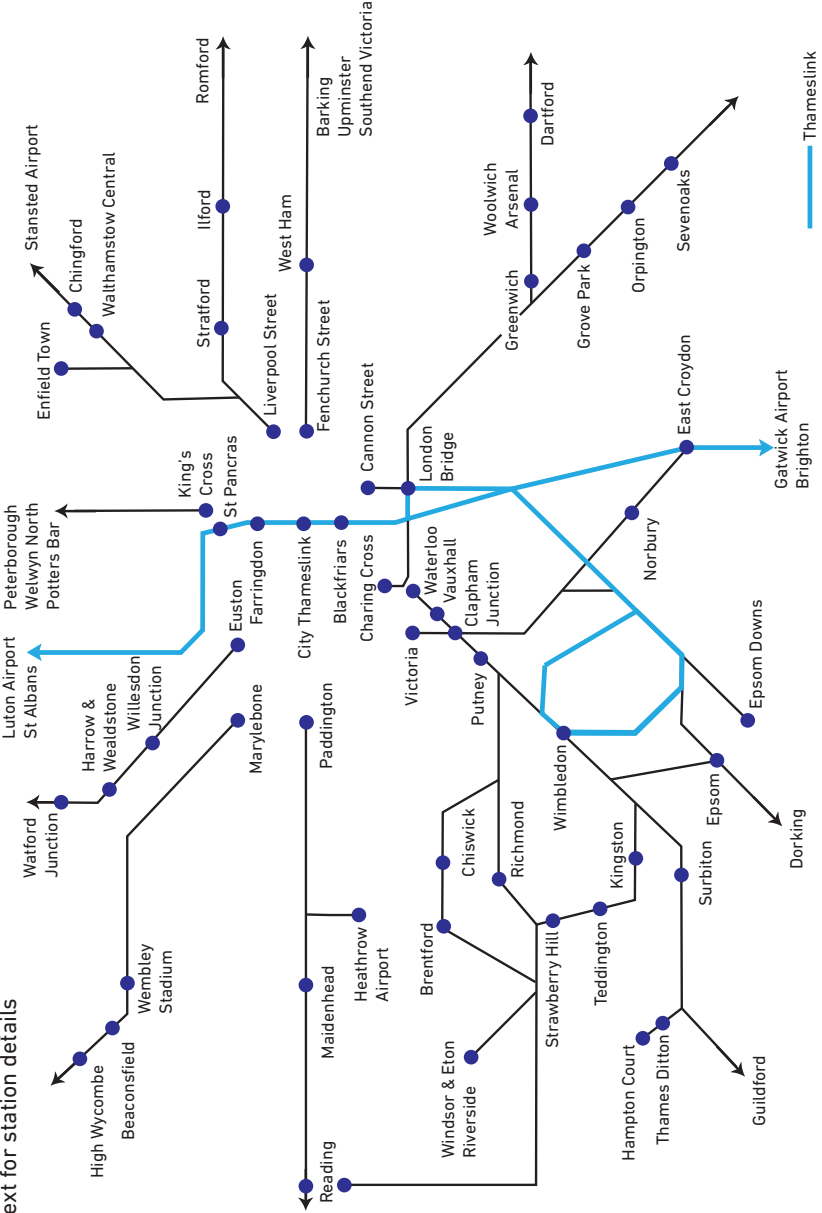
Note that chair users wanting to travel by a NR train, can reasonably easily travel with/near able-bodied companions, but if two or more chair users travel they will be located in different compartments on many/most trains.

The principal access issue connected with using trains, even at an 'accessible' station, is the substantial step that remains for getting into the carriage. At an increasing number of stations there are portable ramps available to facilitate boarding but use of the ramps is dependent on there being staff help available.

This is usually OK at big busy stations, but not always possible at smaller stations which may only be staffed part-time, or may even not be staffed at all. When using such stations it is almost certainly necessary to make arrangements in advance with the rail companies *Assisted travel* service, unless you are travelling with strong and resourceful friends.

Links to and from 'Accessible' NR Stations

See text for station details



Thameslink

The ramps can be a solid piece of engineering, and may quite heavy to handle. Staff need training in their use. There are some newer and lighter ramps made of aluminium coming into use. These are slightly narrower, making it easier to fit into the doors. There are even some fibreglass ramps available which can fold up like a suitcase, and these are currently being used on First Great Western. Hopefully, good practice over the provision and use of ramps will be shared around among the different operators.

If you are using a smaller station, possibly one that isn't always staffed, most operators ask for at least 24 hours notice of your travelling plans, so that they can provide any assistance which is needed. If you are travelling with friends, so that assistance isn't needed, make sure that you don't depend on a staff operated lift at a place with no staff!

A booklet called *Rail Travel for Disabled Passengers* is available. This includes practical advice and contact phone numbers. It also contains details of concessionary fares, and of the **Disabled Persons Railcard**. This offers reduced fares for you and an adult companion. It is valid for a year, and at the time of writing cost £20.

Cards are available from **The Disabled Persons Railcard Office**,
PO Box 11631, Laurencekirk, AB30 9AA

Tel: 0845 605-0525 Textphone: 0845 601-0132 e-mail: disability@atoc.org

The booklet and other leaflets are available at main stations and it can be downloaded from www.nationalrail.co.uk.

Access in London is not a guide about rail travel in the UK, and we are only looking at how to get to London easily from towns in the counties which border Greater London. There are, however, a few 'accessible' stations and potentially useful journeys within the M25.

We've made a map showing the principal lines into London's main stations, together with some of the useful links from various suburban stations. *London Overground* has a separate and more detailed map. The links south of the river are generally of greater interest/importance, since the rail network is more extensive there. North of the river the Underground and *Overground* are dominant.

Thameslink runs generally north-south and passes through the newly 'accessible' Blackfriars station. It provides some useful links, and from 2018, Crossrail will provide additional east-west links.

One major thing that has changed is that there are now helpful phone contacts available - once you've found your way through several multiple choice menus - and the people who answer will generally try to get correct information, and to facilitate a smooth journey for you. The phone numbers in are in the Table on the next page.

**Contact details for arranging Assisted Travel using the different train operators
(as indicated on their websites in 2012/13, and checked when we wrote the book)**

Operating company	Contact phone number	Textphone/ Typetalk	From (main line station/s)
<i>c2c#</i>	01702 357-640	18001+ 01702 357-640	Fenchurch Street
<i>Chiltern Railways</i>	08456 005-165 (selecting option 3 then option 3 again)	08457 078-051	Marylebone
<i>East Coast</i>	08457 225-225	18001+ 08457 225-225	Kings Cross
<i>East Midlands Trains#</i>	08457 125 678 option 3	08457 078-051	St Pancras
<i>First Capital Connect (Thameslink & Great Northern)</i>	0800 058-2844*	0800 975-1052*	St Pancras, Kings Cross, London Bridge, Blackfriars
<i>First Great Western</i>	0800 1971-329*	18001+ 0800 1971-329	Paddington
<i>London Midland</i>	0800 092-4260*	0844 811-0134	Euston
<i>Greater Anglia</i>	0800 028-2878*	18001+ 0800 028-2878	Liverpool Street
<i>South West Trains#</i>	0800 528-2100*	0800 692-0792*	Waterloo
<i>Southeastern#</i>	0800 783-4524* or 01732 77 00 99	0800 783 4548*	Victoria, Charing Cross, London Bridge
<i>Southern#</i>	0800 138-1016*	0800 138-1018*	Victoria, Charing Cross, Cannon Street, London Bridge
<i>Virgin Trains</i>	08457 443-366	08457 443-367	Euston

* Note that the 0800 numbers are FREE when you call from a landline

There is a map on their website showing the 'accessible' stations.

Note that if you need help, you should check on whether staff will be available.

If you are not sure what train company you are travelling with, contact National Rail Enquiries *Tel:* 08457 484 950 *Textphone:* 0845 605-0600

In researching this section, we found that access information for disabled travellers is fragmented, and presented in a different way on each of the various company websites. Various menus eventually led to an *Assisted travel* page. Some sites had a map showing accessible stations, some had a Freephone number for making enquiries, but only after visiting several websites did we find this vital statement:

- *“We participate in the national ‘Assisted Passenger Reservation System’ (APRS) used by all train operators. We can book assistance for your whole trip, including on trains and stations run by other operators. We will enter your trip details into APRS which automatically tells other operators if assistance is required at one of their stations. We will contact other operators directly if this is necessary to ensure your booked assistance is delivered”*

The official policy of most station/train operators is that passengers requiring assistance should give 24-hours notice of their intention to travel. This is certainly necessary if you are making a journey which needs a train company organised taxi to complete it. However, if you are simply travelling between well staffed stations, giving notice isn’t usually needed.

If you need help it is obviously sensible to arrive in good time, and to negotiate with the staff who are on duty. If you’re making a journey for the first time it might be a good idea to ring first to check as to whether there are likely to be problems, and if you need help to get on or off the train you need to make sure that the station is adequately staffed when you want to travel.

There are useful links to/from ‘accessible’ step-free stations like Reading, Maidenhead, Guildford, Watford, Sevenoaks, Romford, St Albans and Watford. There are also useful ‘internal’ links (inside the M25) from places like East Croydon, Wimbledon, Chiswick, Stratford, Willesden Junction, and many more.

National Rail (NR) has moderately good information about their stations, most of which can be found at: www.nationalrail.co.uk/stations_destinations/ The information includes a bar entitled *Accessibility and Mobility Access* in which there are details about which platforms can be reached step-free. It also provides a station map with a clever system of symbols so that when you ‘hover’ over them there are photos of each facility (which show seats, help point and steps). The written description doesn’t always accord with the station map.

As is common with this kind of data, it is input according to a fixed pattern which doesn’t deal well with different circumstances and station layouts.

The format was almost certainly both designed and input by able-bodied people, who don’t necessarily understand what the disabled traveller needs to know, but are ensuring compliance with the ‘standard format’.

It is not clear when the information was provided/updated, and we were told several times that updating is irregular, and may take a long time.

For many of the fairly straightforward stations like (say) Charing Cross or Wimbledon, the description and the diagram are reasonably adequate. For slightly more complicated stations like, for example, Willesden Junction or Stratford, more explanation is needed. We found some instances where the information was incorrect, incomplete and in some instances seriously misleading, like that about Twickenham where access to all the platforms is via steps. Even though we reported the mistake/s, nothing changed on the NR Stations website for months. **Where there are NR and TfL services operating from the same station, the station ‘map’ may only show the area regarded as belonging to NR, while common sense would suggest that the whole of the station should be shown. The outcomes are sometimes seriously confusing, as parts of what to the passenger is simply ‘the station’ aren’t shown.**

Stations in and around London with step-free access, some via service lifts

NOTE that a * indicates that there is some reservation, either about the whole of the station having step-free access, or about the hours of operation, or that the station is not staffed at all. If the station is listed without comment, there should be step-free access throughout the day and staff assistance to get on board.

This section is best used in conjunction with the *London connections* map.

c2c

website: www.c2c-online.co.uk

Fenchurch Street

on two levels. The lower concourse at ground level is approached from Fenchurch Place. There’s a **wheelchair toilet (NKS)**, and lift (D125 W150 L190) up to the 4 platforms, both to the left of the entrance

West Ham

* with step-free connections to the District and H&C line platforms, and to the JLE and DLR via three service lifts. The station is listed as not being staffed, and there are only ticket machines, and no ticket office

Barking

* all eight platforms can be reached using a service lift (D180 W180 L200) off the concourse down to platform 1. Then there are steepish ramps down to a subway, and then up to the other platforms, and longish distances are involved. There is an **accessible toilet (NKS)** with BCF off the upper walkway. It is inside the ticket barriers. There is step-free interchange with the District line platforms

Upminster

* level access to platform 1 via a new ticket office by the Station Approach CP. Service lift (D200 W200 L200) to platforms 2, 3, 4 and 5 so that interchange between Fenchurch Street trains and the District line is possible. **Wheelchair toilet** on platform 1

Southend Central

* there is ramped access to both platforms, but (looking at Google maps) the only step-free route from one side to the other is via the bridge on the High Street, involving a distance of around 750m. There's an **accessible toilet (NKS)** with BCF on the concourse by platforms 3/4.

Chiltern Railways

website: www.chilternrailways.co.uk

Marylebone

off the main concourse, shops and ticket office area there are two **wheelchair toilets (D100 ST85 NKS)**. They are just inside the door to both the womens and the mens toilets. Both have BCF

Wembley Stadium

* lifts from each platform to overhead bridge. The station is not generally staffed

Beaconsfield

* ramped access from both sides, but it's about 800m via the Station Road bridge to get from one side to the other. The station is not always staffed, particularly in the evenings

High Wycombe

* flat access to platforms 1 and 2. Platform 3, for trains to Marylebone, is reached via a ramped underpass from platform 2.

East Coast (plus First Capital Connect FCC)

website: www.eastcoast.co.uk

Kings Cross

recently redeveloped with step-free access to all platforms. The **accessible toilets** are past the ticket barriers for platforms 9-11, where there's a *Changing places* facility, or on the 1st floor in the new shops/cafés development with lift access. 30p charge at the entrance. There's a good **accessible toilet** in *The Parcel Yard* pub near platform 9 and with lift access. The toilet is discreetly located at the left end of the long corridor reached by going to your right as you come into the pub

Potters Bar (via FCC services)

* there are steepish ramps up to the platforms

Welwyn Garden City (via FCC services)

there is ramped access from both sides of the station, and lifts down to the platforms.

Peterborough

step-free to platform 1 where there is an **accessible toilet (NKS)** with BCF. At the north end of the station there's a bridge with steepish ramps to and from all the platforms. In addition there's an electric golf-type buggy to take a chair user and/or disabled walkers plus their luggage over the bridge to platforms 3/4/5.

East Midlands trains and Eurostar

websites: www.eastmidlandstrains.co.uk & www.eurostar.com

St Pancras International (has its own website: www.stpancras.com)

the main station concourse is below the platforms, all of which have lift access. There are two **accessible toilets** and BCF. One is on the side of the Arcade by the Eurostar Ticket Office. The other is to the right from the main entrance in Pancras Road and reached via the Circle. They are by the cash dispensing machines

Luton Airport

step-free via lifts to all platforms

Bedford

lift access via the bridge to all platforms. **Accessible toilet (NKS)** on platform 1

First Capital Connect (Thameslink)

website: www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk

Blackfriars

there is lift access to all 4 elevated platforms from both ends of the bridge. On the south bank there is a ticket office before the lifts, with the same provision on the north (City) side. Two platforms handle the through trains, including those on *Thameslink*. There are toilets on the north side at ground level, to the left past the ticket office. These include an **accessible toilet** with a separate BCF, but when visited (in October 2012) turnstiles had been installed and a gate, and it looked as though it might all become a 'pay' area.

East Croydon

steepish ramps lead to and from all platforms. **Wheelchair toilet (D95 ST90 NKS)** on platforms 3/4. Tramlink stops nearby.

Gatwick Airport

Step-free via lifts to all platforms

Brighton

two **accessible toilets (NKS)** near the WHSmith bookstore.

First Great Western

website: www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk

Paddington

step-free throughout with lifts up to the mezzanine at the back of the station. Access to platforms 13 and 14 for suburban services is via a ramp which is half way along platform 12. Most of the trains that go to and from Reading start on the main line platforms. **Two wheelchair toilets (D80 ST75)**, one with BCF, inside the first aid room signed Station Reception, near the start of platform 1. There's another 24-hour **accessible toilet (NKS and Changing Places)** with BCF by the end of platform 12 on the other side of the station

Heathrow Airport

via the Heathrow Express (www.heathrowexpress.com) and Heathrow Connect

Maidenhead

* step-free access via lifts from a subway to all platforms, and **accessible toilet (NKS)** with BCF on platforms 4/5

Reading

step-free access via lifts to and from the bridge. Step-free link between First Great Western and South West Trains. **Accessible toilet (NKS)** with BCF off the main concourse and ticket office area. The 'accessible' toilet off the Waiting Room on platforms 8/9 has very restricted ST space.

London Midland & Virgin Trains

websites: www.londonmidland.com & www.virgintrains.co.uk

Euston

both side entrances to the station have steps (+4 from Melton Street, +14 from Eversholt Street). Ramped entrances from the Euston Road and the bus station. **Two wheelchair toilets (D75 ST80 NKS)** off the concourse near the end of platform 1. The BCF a little further along are said to be inaccessible to a chair user

Harrow & Wealdstone

lifts to all platforms, and interchange with the Bakerloo line. **Accessible toilet** off main concourse, but you may have to ask staff to unlock it

Watford Junction

* lifts to all platforms. **Wheelchair toilet (D95 ST75 NKS)** by the ticket office.

Greater Anglia

website: www.greateranglia.co.uk

Liverpool Street

on two levels, with lift (D90 W145 L210) access near the huge overhead departures board. **Wheelchair toilet (D85 ST75 NKS)** some 50m off the main concourse between platforms 10 and 11

Stratford

large interchange station with step-free access everywhere using lifts

Romford

* steepish ramp to the left of the main station bypasses +11+12 steps. All the platforms have ramped access

Southend Victoria

terminus station with step-free access. **Accessible toilet** at the end of platform 1

Enfield Town

* ramped access to the platforms. **Accessible toilet (NKS)** with BCF off the main concourse but just inside the ticket barriers

Walthamstow Central

* ramped access from either side, but it's some 500m via the Hoe Street bridge to get to the other side

Chingford

* step-free terminus station. **Accessible toilet (NKS)** with BCF off platforms 1/2

Stansted Airport

South West Trains

website: www.southwesttrains.co.uk

Waterloo

there are 19 platforms in this elevated station. The Eurostar platforms are out of use as the services have transferred to St Pancras. Step-free access everywhere, including Waterloo East via lift and ramps. **Wheelchair toilet (D70+ ST70+ NKS)** in the foyer by the womens, off the main concourse in line with platform 19. The BCF here involve steps. There's another **wheelchair toilet (NKS)** on Station Approach Road just outside, where the 211 buses pull in. Step-free station exit through the arch by the big central clock, and through to the taxi rank (and the toilet is just to the left of the arch/exit). Note the accessible link to the JLE via the lift in line with platforms 5/6, which also gets you down to the Waterloo Road level

Vauxhall

work is in hand to provide lift access to all the NR platforms, and in 2016 there will be lift access to the tube station as well

Clapham Junction

a large and very busy station where there's a split in the lines going south and west. It's an important junction with the *Overground*. The 17 platforms are linked by either an underground tunnel or an overhead footbridge. **There is now a lift to and from every platform from the footbridge reached step-free via the St Johns Hill entrance from Brighton Yard. Accessible toilet (NKS)** with separate BCF just inside the ticket barriers.

Also note that the station has a path for blind or partially-sighted passengers, making it easier to use the footbridge. This is the first time a UK station has been equipped with a guided path. There are also tactile and Braille signs at the top of each stairwell leading to the platforms

Putney

work is in hand to provide lift access to all the platforms

Chiswick

* flat/ramped access to both sides, and there are portable ramps on both platforms. Not always staffed, and it's nearly a km to go over the road bridge to get from one side to the other

Brentford

* there's a lift at either end of the footbridge over the line, with step-free access on either side. A road bridge also links the two platforms, but it's about 750m to go from one to the other. The angle of the track means that the step getting on and off trains is particularly big on both sides. **Accessible toilet (NKS)** with BCF off the ticket hall on platform 2

Richmond

* a key station on the District line tube, South West Trains, and at the end of an *Overground* line. The platforms are reached via -22 steps, but there are staff operated lifts (D160 W190 L290) to all platforms. There is alternative step-free access from the CP alongside the station. **Wheelchair toilet (D90 ST200 NKS)** with BCF at platform level near the end of platform 6

Wimbledon

lift access to all platforms, and link between NR trains, the District line and Tramlink. The **accessible toilet (NKS)** on the lower level was temporarily closed when we surveyed

Kingston

step-free to all platforms via lifts to and from the subway. **Accessible toilet (NKS)** with BCF on platforms 1/2, by the waiting room

Surbiton

lift access to all platforms from the bridge. **Accessible toilet (NKS)** with BCF on both platform islands

Woking

lift access via a bridge to all platforms. **Accessible toilet (NKS)** with BCF on platform 5/6

Guildford

step-free access to all platforms from the main entrance in Walnut Tree Close. via steepish ramps from a subway with no handrails. **Accessible toilet (NKS)** with BCF on platform 2.

Windsor & Eton Riverside

* step-free until 20.00 after which there are +3 steps and assistance may be needed

Hampton Court

* has +2 steps at the entrance kerb which can be bypassed by a ramp at the side, towards the back of the station, otherwise step-free with **accessible toilet (NKS)** on concourse.

Southeastern

website: www.southeasternrailway.co.uk

Victoria

big terminus station with 19 platforms, and a bus station outside. There will be a step-free tube link in 2018. **Wheelchair toilet (D70+ ST70+ NKS)** by the main toilets on the right side of the station, looking towards the platforms (in line with platform 17)

Charing Cross

small terminus station with 6 platforms. Close to the Strand, Trafalgar Square and Covent Garden. **Wheelchair toilet (D70+ST80+ NKS)** with BCF off the central corridor linking the concourse to the street

Cannon Street

To the left of the steps, there's a lift up to all 7 platforms. Two accessible toilets (NKS) with BCF, near the ticket office

London Bridge

has lift access up to the main concourse with 13 platforms, including some for through trains (such as those of *Thameslink*). At the time of writing, the station was being completely redeveloped, with a programme which will not be complete until 2018. A new toilet block has been built at ground level, off Joiner Street (which is an underground passage linking Tooley Street and St Thomas Street). About half-way along Joiner Street there's a side passage (called The Vaults), lined by small shops and stalls. This leads to escalators and a lift, taking people up to the station concourse. The toilets (with an entry charge) are to the right of the escalators, and include an **accessible toilet** and separate BCF. There's a second **accessible toilet** on platform 5. Lifts go to both the JLE and Northern lines, but the stations are separate, and are nearly 500m apart.

Greenwich

* step-free links using a lift and underpass are not shown on the NR station map - and when we queried this we were told that this route was a TfL responsibility ! Note the link to the DLR

Woolwich Arsenal

* ramped access to both sides of the station through gates which can be opened using an intercom. **Adapted toilets (ST60 NKS)** on platform 1. Link to the DLR

Dartford

* platforms accessible via lifts to and from the bridge. **Wheelchair toilet (D140 ST95 NKS)** just inside the womens entrance

Lewisham

* lift access to and from both subways under the lines. **Accessible toilet (NKS)** on platform 2 but with inward opening door

Orpington

* lift access to all platforms via the bridge. **Accessible toilet (NKS)** on platforms 3/4

Sevenoaks

* lift access to all platforms via the bridge. **Wheelchair toilet (ST70 NKS)** just past the ticket barriers

Southern

website: www.southernrailway.com

Victoria, London Bridge and *Clapham Junction* have already been described

Norbury

step-free access to platforms via steepish ramps

West Croydon

* there's a step-free entrance on either side of the station, quite a distance from the bridge over the railway where the ticket office is. On one side there's a CP with a gate and intercom while on the other the gate (for platform 4) is by the Tramlink stop on Station Road. It is an *Overground* terminus

East Croydon

steepish ramp access to all platforms. **Accessible toilet (NKS)** on platforms 3/4. Tramlink stop outside.

*Gatwick Airport**Brighton*

terminus station with step-free access to all 8 platforms. Two **accessible toilets (NKS)** off the main concourse

Sutton

* lift access to all platforms via a bridge. **Accessible cubicles** in both the mens and womens toilets on platforms 1 and on 2/3

Epsom Downs

* terminus station with ramped access

Epsom

* ramp down to subway under the platforms with lift access described as 'staff-operated'

By coach

Coach travel not only offers good value, but there are some routes where it will be even easier to make the coach journey than to use trains. These may include some which go to some of the airports, particularly Heathrow where there is an extensive hub.

Department of Transport regulations require that all vehicles seating more than 22 people must comply with accessibility requirements by 2020, and *National Express*, the biggest coach provider in England, plan to have made their entire fleet accessible by the end of 2013. However, what this will mean in practice, and in practical terms is not entirely clear - and coach travel won't appeal to everyone.

National Express

Tel: 0871 781-8178 *website:* www.nationalexpress.com/coach

There's a list of currently accessible coach routes on the website.

An 'accessible' coach has a wheelchair lift at the front entrance to bypass the steps. A chair can be locked firmly in place, with access to a three-point seatbelt. Each coach has only one such space. A disabled walker can ask to use the lift which provides access to a step-free upper level.

It is essential to book use of the lift at least 36 hours in advance via the Assisted Travel Helpline *Tel:* 0871 781-8179 (option 3 then option 2)

or you can *e-mail:* DPTH@nationalexpress.com

Note that the on-board toilets in coaches, where provided, are tiny, and for all practical purposes should be regarded as 'inaccessible'.

Megabus is another big company providing inter-city services to and from London.

Tel: 0871 2663333 (general enquiries); 0900 1600-900 (bookings)

website: <http://uk.megabus.com/> *e-mail:* enquiries@megabus.com

If you use a wheelchair and need to remain in it, or have other access needs, don't purchase your ticket online, but *Tel:* 0141 332-9841.

London's central coach station and the arrival and departure point for most coach services to places all over Britain and the continent is at Victoria. It comes under the TfL umbrella, and you can find information and a plan on the TfL website www.tfl.gov.uk under *Coaches*.

Victoria Coach Station (VCS) 164 Buckingham Palace Road, SW1W 9TP

Tel: 020 7222-5600 (the TfL number) *DisEnq:* 020 7027-2520 (Mobility lounge at VCS)

It is some 500m from the Victoria train (and underground) station.

The main entrance is on the corner of Elizabeth Street. There are two separate sections to the station on either side of Elizabeth Street, the smaller one for arrivals, and the larger one with numbered bays, for departures. There is step-free access throughout, with good signage.

If you need assistance, there is a Mobility Lounge, near the Ticket Hall on the Buckingham Palace Road side and near Gate 21.

There are **four accessible toilets (NKS)**, one in Arrivals, two adjacent to the National Express office and one inside the Mobility Lounge opposite Gate 21 in Departures. BCF are located next to the toilets in Arrivals, and next to the toilets by gates 2 and 12 in Departures.

Arriving at St Pancras International

St Pancras is a large station built on two levels. The platforms are the upper level with lift access down to the main concourse with its shops and cafés.

The underground station is ‘accessible’ with lifts, linking the two surface rail stations (St P and Kings Cross) with six tube lines, three deep underground (Northern, Piccadilly and Victoria) and three near the surface (Circle, H&C and Metropolitan). It’s a good hub if all the lifts are working. Quite long distances are involved, up to 1km from Kings Cross platforms.

The station is on the inner ring road A501 Euston Road, just north of Bloomsbury, and there are a variety of buses going into central London.

By air

If you fly into London, you will have needed to find out from your airline about access problems en route, and their policies regarding disabled passengers. Unfortunately, all the airlines seem to have slightly different rules and approaches.

It is essential for you to tell your airline of your needs, since they (and not the airport) are responsible for your various transfers getting on and off the plane and through the airport system.

Note that assistance dogs can only travel if they are registered with The Pet Travel Scheme (PETS), and if allowed by the airline.

We include information about meet and greet valet parking which may be of use to UK travellers going abroad from the big London airports.

There are five relevant airports, the two largest being Heathrow and Gatwick (to the west and south). In addition there are Stansted and Luton, both to the north, and London City, very near the centre.

Airports were among the first places to provide facilities for disabled passengers, and on a relative basis, they are quite good from an access point of view. Note that:

- if you use the biggest airports, there should be step-free access through

the terminal to the aircraft door, but occasionally this may not be so, either because of a breakdown, or possibly for security reasons. Chair users quite often have to transfer to an alternative ‘loading’ chair in order to get to a seat on the plane;

- at both Heathrow and Gatwick, very long distances are involved although both have little buggies to take elderly and/or disabled walkers through the terminal to their departure lounge;
- at certain times, airports can become extremely congested. For example, it is wise to avoid Friday evenings and bank holiday weekends if you possibly can;
- a big problem for most travellers tends to be handling their luggage, getting to the airline desk, and simply finding out where that is for a start ! Most terminals now have a Help Desk near where you first come in;
- for passengers arriving, luggage handling on to whatever transport is used to reach the hotel or other accommodation is a potential hassle;
- at smaller airports (like London City), access to the aircraft will be via a flight of steps.

There’s a useful guide available at www.parkat.co.uk/disabled-travel-guide.pdf with advice and information for a wide range of disabled travellers.

If you make prior arrangements it is normally possible to ease your passage through the system, including the security and passport checks. This must be done directly with your airline when you book, and if you can, we recommend that you get some kind of proper acknowledgement (a note or e-mail) confirming the arrangements. If you have difficulty in walking long distances then it is almost certainly a good idea to organise appropriate assistance, and possibly the use of a wheelchair to facilitate transfers inside the airport.

Virtually all airports have accessible toilets on both sides of the security desks. However, there are only a limited number. If you want to use a toilet you would almost certainly be wise to do so before the departure gate. Don’t let ‘the system’ whisk you through too quickly without giving you the chance of going to the loo, as the ones on the plane will be quite small, and will be inaccessible to some. There are usually accessible toilets in the arrival areas where you are waiting for luggage, and off the corridors leading to passport control, but they’re not always well signed, and you may have to ask.

Transport links to and from the airports

There are ‘accessible’ transport links to and from the five airports we’ve mentioned.

What is practical for you depends on:

- where you are going (you will probably want to go first to where you are staying);
- the comparative costs of different routes; and,

- the various practicalities, including how much luggage you have. Handling it on and off trains and buses can be a considerable hassle.

The ideal way of arriving, of course, is to be met by a relative or friend who has appropriate transport and/or who knows the local system. Many people, however, have to make their own arrangements, and much depends on whether you are in a group (including, perhaps, some resourceful able-bodied people) or are on your own.

As London is such a big city, you may have a long way to go, and cost becomes an issue, particularly if you are using a taxi or minicab. Pre-booked minicabs are generally (but not necessarily) cheaper than using a taxi, but apart from London City, the airports are a long way out.

All the airports have ‘accessible’ rail links into central London, and taking the train and then using a taxi for the final bit of your journey may be the best way overall. Heathrow also has an ‘accessible’ tube link on the Piccadilly line (see the detailed write-up about using the Underground).

The *Heathrow Express* train goes to London Paddington, the *Gatwick Express* to London Victoria, and the *Stansted Express* to London Liverpool Street.

Note that while some airports have ‘accessible’ black taxis which you can take from outside (again, see the detailed write-up about taxis), at both Gatwick and Stansted, the taxi contract has been given to a company who use conventional cars. If you need an ‘accessible’ vehicle it would be wise to pre-organise this.

Gatwick airport, Gatwick, West Sussex, RH6 0NP

Tel: 0844 892-0322 (and passengers with special needs should select option 2)

Parking: 0844 811-8311 or *e-mail:* gatwick.customerservice.apcoa.com

Meet and greet valet parking: www.firstchoiceparking.co.uk

website: www.gatwickairport.com

There are two terminals with a short train link between them which has step-free access. Overall, the site is large, so be prepared for long distances, and at busy times for congestion and crowds of people. If you have walking difficulties, make sure that your airline knows about it, and use the buggies provided to make things easier.

Travel-care offer advice and information to anyone who has a problem connected with special needs. They may be able to ease your passage, and can be particularly useful if you are travelling alone.

Contact details *Tel:* 01293-504283 *Fax:* 01293-503317

e-mail: travel.care@btconnect.com

There are numerous parking options which are advertised on the net, but you will need to check on the accessibility of the transport used to get to and from the CP. Some are quite difficult to find. The meet and greet service we mention above, avoids those potential hassles.

One feature at Gatwick is that the taxis in use are conventional cars, and not the ‘accessible’ black cab (see the section on *Taxis and minicabs*). Thus if you want an accessible vehicle, it would be wise to book it in advance through:

Airport Cars Gatwick *Tel:* 01293 550-000

website: www.airportcars-uk.com/airports/gatwick-airport-taxis

e-mail: enquiries@airportcars-gatwick.com

They are associated with Road Runners Ltd which has at least 25 wheelchair accessible vehicles locally.

Heathrow airport, The Compass Centre, Nelson Road, Hounslow, Middlesex, TW6 2GW

Tel: 0844 335-1801 *Textphone:* 0844 571 7410 (for enquiries related to check-in, lost baggage, flight delays and cancellations, please contact your airline)

website: www.baa.com (look at the pages on ‘special needs’ under Heathrow airport guide)

Meet and greet valet parking providers include:

- www.fastparkheathrow.co.uk,
- www.mbwparking.co.uk, and,
- www.prontoparking.co.uk.

There are three terminal areas, three (1, 2 & 3) of which are linked by underground passages with step-free access, although there are several hundred metres between them. Terminals 4 and 5 are on quite separate sites, some distance away. They can be reached by the underground with only single steps involved (getting on and off the trains). In one direction you have to go via Hatton Cross and change trains. You can also use the Heathrow Express train/s which link the different terminal areas.

Note that at the time of writing, Terminal 2 is closed for rebuilding. It is due to reopen in 2014.

Travel-care *Tel:* 020 8745-7495 *e-mail:* heathrow_travel_care@baa.com can provide information and assistance for passengers with special needs although they say that many of their past functions in smoothing people’s journeys, have been taken over by the airlines themselves.

London City airport, Royal Docks, E16 2PB

Tel: 020 7646-0088 *website:* www.londoncityairport.com

The Terminal entrance is located on Hartmann Road, E16 2PX.

London City is a small airport, so boarding the aircraft involves steps. Assistance with boarding can be arranged, and you can be ‘transferred’ up the steps in a narrow, powered, ambulance-type chair. They use a chair called S-Max aviation (see www.aat-online.de). Although aircraft boarding is slightly more of a hassle than at the other London airports, the terminal itself is small, and is just 200m from the accessible DLR station. There are nearby hotels (see the *Accommodation* chapter).

Luton airport, Navigation House, Airport Way, Luton, Bedfordshire, LU2 9LY
Tel: 01582 405-100 *website:* www.london-luton.co.uk
e-mail: disabledfacilities@ltn.aero

Luton has a small terminal, and passengers who cannot manage the steps up into the aircraft can be ‘loaded’ via an Ambulift (a pod using hydraulics which can lift a chair user up level with the ‘plane door’). Make arrangements for assistance with your airline before travelling.

The rail station is nearly 1km away, with an ‘accessible’ shuttle bus to facilitate transfer to and from the terminal.

Stansted airport, Enterprise House, Bassingbourn Road, Essex, CM24 1QW
Tel: 0844 335-1803 *Textphone:* 0741 571-7410
website: www.stanstedairport.com

There are Long Stay and Mid Stay CPs run by the airport, with ‘accessible’ buses linking to the terminal.

Meet and greet valet parking providers include:

- www.ukparkandfly.co.uk
- www.looking4parking.com
- <http://stanstedvaletmeetandgreet.co.uk>

Stansted has a relatively small terminal. The rail station is directly underneath, and the platforms are reached via ramps or lifts.

There are some ‘air bridges’ to facilitate step-free transfer into the aircraft, but not all flights use these, so sometimes there are steps involved. If necessary you can be transferred up or down to get on/off the aircraft by Ambulift or using a powered stairclimber. As well as informing the airline, you can contact ISS, the special assistance provider at Stansted, *e-mail:* stn.prm@uk.issworld.com. There’s a page on the website headed ‘Request special assistance’ with a list of airline phone numbers, and the instruction to book such help 48h in advance.

Train access for wheelchair users is via a portable ramp, and assistance will be provided by National Express staff. Assistance should be pre-booked if possible by calling the National Express helpline on 0845 600 7245.

The company **24x7** operate a 24hour taxi service with their main desk in the International Arrivals concourse and a courtesy phone in the Domestic Baggage Reclaim area.

Tel: 01279 661-111 *website:* www.24x7stansted.com
e-mail: stansted@24x7Ltd.co.uk

A taxi journey into London for one to four people costs about £100, depending on the exact destination. Most of the vehicles are conventional cars, but wheelchair-accessible vehicles are available on request. They also operate an interesting ‘shared taxi’ scheme to help people minimise the cost.

Stansted was one of several places where we found it very difficult to get the information we required, and it took several months and a lot of persistence !

