

Age Friendly Transport: Are We There Yet? 18th June 2018

What Did We Learn?

The purpose of this event was to hear from people and organisations in Bristol in relation to transport, specifically focusing on visions for how transport can become more age friendly. A range of local older people and professionals told us their views and experiences of cycling, walking, public transport and community transport. Together we learnt about the barriers to Age Friendly transport and the possible short-term and long-term solutions.

We will use the learning from this event to further develop Bristol's Age Friendly action plan ahead of our submission to the World Health Organisation.

A key theme to emerge is the way in which all forms of transport overlap. Taking the bus, for example, necessarily involves walking to the bus stop while negotiating cars and cyclists. Going for a walk around the park may involve getting the bus or driving to get there. It is important to remember that when talking about one form of transport, other types of travel and transport are often involved too.

What is working well?

5 main themes emerged from the event in terms of what is currently working well:

1. Accessibility on the buses
2. Bus routes (for some)
3. Free bus pass for older people
4. Improvements in cycling infrastructure
5. The impact of community transport services

➤ **Accessibility on the buses**

Legal accessibility requirements mean that buses are much more physically accessible than they used to be, for example all buses now have low floors and are fitted with a ramp, making it easier for people to get on and off the bus. Some new buses also have increased space for wheelchairs and pushchairs, although this does unfortunately mean that there is a longer walk between the door and the seats for those who are unsteady on their feet.

Announcements on buses are also helpful for those going to an unfamiliar area or who have poor eyesight. Other useful features involve colour-coded routes and electronic information screens in the city centre. Some bus companies have safe journey cards which an individual can discretely show to the bus driver when they board the bus, letting the driver know they may need additional time or assistance.

➤ **Bus routes (for some)**

There are a large amount of bus routes in the city centre, which work well for those who live nearby or who do not have any mobility difficulties. For those who are able to use public transport, the city is well connected to many other locations, enabling some people to travel beyond Bristol fairly easily. However for those who do not live near the city centre or who want to travel from one area of the city to another without changing buses, the routes can become more of a barrier as there are fewer routes and lower frequencies as you get further from the city centre.

➤ **Free bus pass for older people**

The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) is a national scheme enabling older people to have free bus travel. In Bristol this applies to those who are state pension age, for travel after 9am on weekdays and anytime at the weekends. In many other parts of the country this free travel starts at 9:30am, meaning the time restrictions in Bristol are slightly better than the national average.

➤ **Improvements in the cycling infrastructure**

There have been some recent improvements to the cycling infrastructure in the city, for example there are now more cycle racks available and more traffic-free cycle routes. The council is encouraging cycling as a form of transport by continuing to invest in it. The 20mph speed limits have also made cycling a safer activity. Similarly, there has been an increase in the number of electric bikes which make cycling more accessible for older people.

➤ **The impact of community transport services**

Community transport services are a major part of the lives of many customers, and can often be the only time some older people leave the house or have a conversation with others. In this way, community transport plays a role in reducing loneliness and isolation. They also allow customers to maintain independence, for example being able to choose their own food from the supermarket instead of having meals brought in to them.

What are the barriers to Age Friendly transport?

5 barriers to age friendly transport were identified during the event:

1. Lack of information about transport options
2. Inaccessible pavements and facilities on route
3. Large number of community transport providers with different geographical remits
4. Public attitudes towards older people and lack of understanding about their transport experiences
5. Safety of some cycling routes

➤ **Lack of information about transport options**

There is currently a lack of clear, accessible information regarding all forms of transport. This includes timetables and routes of public transport, the process of requesting community transport and a lack of clarity about who to ask if any further information is needed. Information is often available online, but it can be difficult for those who are not confident using the internet or do not have internet access to know where to go for this information or how they can speak to somebody face-to-face.

➤ **Inaccessible pavements and facilities on route**

For those with mobility difficulties or who feel unsteady on their feet, walking around the local area can be a barrier to getting other forms of transport. For example uneven pavements, cars parked on the pavement and a lack of dropped curbs can make it difficult to walk to the bus stop, particularly if it is not nearby. Similarly, a lack of benches and toilets on route may create anxiety and create barriers to travelling around the city.

➤ **Large number of community transport providers with different geographical remits**

There are currently a large number of community transport providers – 45 in the West of England Combined Authority area – with different geographical remits. This patchwork of providers creates difficulties when an individual wants to travel between certain areas of Bristol using community transport, as it may not fall within the remit of any one provider and may be difficult to accommodate. Furthermore, many community transport providers are at maximum capacity and find it difficult to meet the increasing demand for their services.

➤ **Public attitudes towards older people and lack of understanding about their transport experiences**

Some older people can experience public attitudes towards them as a barrier to travel and transport. For example, other customers might not offer them a seat on the bus or the driver might start the bus before they have sat down. Other difficulties arise from people using disabled spaces even when they may not have a disability, and from pavements being obstructed by rubbish bins. Some of these difficulties may come from negative attitudes towards older people, while others may come from a lack of understanding and awareness.

➤ **Safety of some cycling routes**

Some key cycling routes in the city centre are unsafe, for example the St James Barton roundabout (the Bearpit) and the Jacob Wells Road. Other routes are safe for cyclists, but people are unaware of them. People often automatically cycle the same route that they would take in a car and are unaware of alternative routes which are safer and more appropriate for cyclists.

What are some possible ways forward?

13 possible ways forward emerged from the workshops and discussions during the event:

1. Improve the transport information available
2. Age Friendly training for those who interact with customers
3. Improve the infrastructure of bus stops, benches and toilets
4. Joined up working among community transport providers
5. Extend the free older person's bus pass before 9am
6. Support older drivers to feel more confident when driving
7. Improve the accessibility of pavements
8. Improve the cycling infrastructure further
9. Match volunteer drivers with individuals who need transport
10. Improve the availability and awareness of safe journey cards
11. Encourage a change in travel etiquette
12. Maximise the use of minibuses
13. Introduce an age friendly standard for taxi companies

➤ **Improve the transport information available**

A key area for improvement is the provision of clear, accessible transport information. In terms of buses, this could involve making sure that all bus stops have electronic information that is easy to read and which clearly shows any changes to the usual route (for example due to roadworks). These screens would need to be well maintained and fixed quickly when broken. Information also needs to be provided in advance in a format that is not internet-based. To help those with visual impairments, it would also be valuable for these screens to announce which bus is approaching.

➤ **Age Friendly training for those who interact with customers**

Those who work in the transport sector could receive customer service training which includes a focus on being age friendly. This could include bus drivers, taxi drivers, train station staff and those who work in customer service for transport companies. Training could involve a greater understanding of the experiences of older people when using transport and focus on communication skills. It would be more sustainable for this training to be incorporated into broader customer service training delivered by providers, rather than a one-off training brought in externally.

➤ **Improve the infrastructure of bus stops, benches and toilets**

Bus stops need to have a well-lit shelter and a bench located underneath this shelter, ideally one which is comfortable to sit on instead of slanted. For many older people the journey is made more difficult by weather conditions such as rain, snow and darkness. Having an adequate bus stop which feels safe and comfortable can encourage older people to use the bus as well as providing a place to rest while walking. Similarly, sometimes there is a large distance between the bus stop and the road, which can make it difficult for some older people to stand up in time and make themselves visible to the bus driver.

Age friendly transport also involves other factors during a journey, not just the transport itself. There needs to be enough public toilets and benches on the street so that people can rest during a journey or when walking between the bus stop and their destination. These all form part of an older person's journey and anxiety about these issues can deter some people from leaving their house.

➤ **Joined-up working among community transport providers**

To help older people navigate the many different community transport providers in Bristol, there could be a central place to make a request for community transport. This would improve the experience of older people and may make it easier to accommodate requests which cross geographical boundaries.

It would also be valuable for community transport to have a voice when strategic decisions about transport are made in the city. This would be aided by joined-up working so that this is a united voice. In order to have this voice, it may first be useful to demonstrate the value and impact of community transport, for example through a Social Return on Investment (SROI) study.

As part of this joined-up working, community transport services could involve one-to-one support workers in order to reduce dependency on the service. While some people will need community transport for a long time, others may only need it for a short while (for example while they recover from an illness). It is important for community transport services to be available to those who need it, but also to support those who can to return to using other forms of transport in order to free up capacity.

➤ **Extend the free older person's bus pass before 9am**

It would be valuable to extend the free bus pass so that it starts earlier in the morning, or can be used at any time of day. This would allow older people to attend appointments in the morning, especially as they may be unable to change their appointment time and may have to travel quite a distance to get to their destination.

➤ **Support older drivers to feel more confident when driving**

One way to support older drivers to feel more confident on the roads could be to develop a scheme where an advanced driver provides additional driving support to somebody who feels less confident. The older person could take the lead on deciding the direction of this support, for example they may want to practice a route they use regularly such as to the shops. This would be a more informal and friendly environment than driving lessons, where the advanced driver has received age friendly training.

➤ **Improve the accessibility of pavements**

A key way to improve walking in the city is to improve the accessibility of pavements. This includes making sure pavements are level, having enough drop curbs and reducing the number of bins and cars on the pavement. Currently the pavement is the only place for some people to put their bins, meaning that improving pavement accessibility also involves developing new storage solutions for rubbish bins. It would also involve raising public awareness of the difficulties which can be caused by bins left on the pavements.

As a place to start, it may be useful to develop a map giving information about the location of drop curbs so that individuals can better plan their route. There also needs to be a system to prevent cars parking on the pavements, and a way to notify people when pavement works are due to be undertaken. Pedestrian crossings can also be made more accessible by introducing a countdown timer, as this would help those with mobility problems to know how much time they have left to cross the road.

➤ **Improve the cycling infrastructure**

It would be valuable to improve the signage for cyclists, making it easier to find traffic-free cycle routes and improving the cycle lane markings on the roads. The cycling infrastructure should encourage e-bikes by increasing the number of charging points around the city. Flats and other types of housing should have safe bike storage on the ground floor, so that bikes do not have to be carried up stairs, particularly as e-bikes can be very heavy. It would also be useful to raise awareness of how standard bikes can be adapted to become electric, and to improve the process for these adaptations.

➤ **Match volunteer drivers with individuals who need transport**

A key part of being independent is being able to make your own choices and have your own preferences. However it is difficult for the current transport system to take people's individual preferences into account. One possible way to do this is to match volunteer drivers with individuals who need transport. This could be a formal volunteering scheme or simply a way for people to connect with each other and make their own arrangements.

➤ **Improve the availability and awareness of safe journey cards**

There is a lack of awareness about safe journey cards, which an individual can show to a bus driver to indicate that they need extra time or support when using the bus. It would be useful for these to include other forms of transport, including all bus providers and on the trains for station staff. The system for issuing these safe journey cards could be improved by automatically issuing them when the free older person's bus pass is issued. They could also be available to pick up from bus drivers, at newsagents and train stations.

➤ **Encourage a change in travel etiquette**

Campaigns to change travel etiquette would help to make public transport more age friendly. These might include tips for small things you can do when on the bus or other ways to be helpful and considerate. There is currently a lack of awareness about the difficulties older people face when using public transport; a public campaign may help to raise this awareness and encourage a change in behaviour.

➤ **Maximise the use of minibuses**

Minibuses, particularly those that are accessible, are expensive and therefore difficult for many community groups and transport providers to purchase. To overcome this barrier, better use could be made of existing minibuses within the city. Some organisations (for example schools or care homes) may already own a minibus which is only used occasionally. It may be useful for community groups and transport providers to partner with these organisations and use their minibus at times when it would otherwise be unused. The group borrowing the minibus would need to train some of their staff or volunteers to drive it, and may wish to have a pool of possible drivers.

Another option may be for private companies to contribute money towards buying a minibus for a community group, as a form of sponsorship or as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy.

➤ **Introduce an age friendly standard for taxi companies**

For some older people getting taxis, it can be difficult to know whether the taxi company will be age friendly and able to accommodate their needs. For example if they are able to provide wheelchair-accessible taxis at any time of the day or night, if they do not charge extra for a wheelchair user and if the driver will come out of the car and knock on their front door to let them know they have arrived. One possible solution is to introduce an age friendly standard, which taxi companies can sign up to if they meet a certain set of criteria.