

Transport for ALL the

The Unit for Disabled Passengers exists to make life easier for everybody who is 'mobility impaired', not just those with obvious physical problems



DID you know that up to a quarter of the people who use buses each day in the capital and about three per cent of those travelling by Underground can be described as 'mobility impaired'?

Now when you consider that there are more than six million 'passenger journeys' on London's bus and Tube services every single working day, that translates into an awful lot of folks who can't get around too well.



Andrew Braddock, Head of the unit since 1991

Of course, the phrase 'mobility impaired' covers more than just people who have wheelchairs. It also includes everybody from young mums dragging a couple of kids, their shopping and maybe a baby in a pushchair round the system, to frail old age pensioners who may have trouble tackling anything other than the gentlest of slopes.

When you also count tourists lumbered with heavy suitcases, then the problem of impaired mobility becomes somewhat more widespread than it may at first seem.

This is where LT's Unit for Disabled Passengers comes in. Despite its name, the unit exists to come up with suggestions and advice to help all of these groups - not just those with physical or sensory disability:

ties - use public transport in London. To do this, it works closely with engineers, designers, architects and representatives of disability groups to improve access to buses, Tubes and Underground stations.

"We have four main roles," said Andrew Braddock, who has been Head of the unit since January 1991.

"Firstly, we are here to offer advice to LT and LUL on how to improve accessibility for mobility impaired people at Underground stations, on Tube trains and on buses. It's a function we also provide under contract to the Docklands Light Railway, although that's no longer part of the LT family."

He said that the unit is currently working with LT Marketing and LUL on a study to identify the commercial case for making a significant number of stations on the Underground network fully accessible.

"There is clear evidence from more modern metro systems that the proportion of mobility impaired ridership could be increased to at least 15 per cent and that would represent substantial additional income to help meet the cost of installing lifts in a long-term programme of step-free access works.

"Our second major role is to supply information to mobility impaired and disabled people through, if necessary, alternative media," Andrew went on.

"This has included publishing large-print bus and Underground maps for partially-sighted people, as well as a talking timetable

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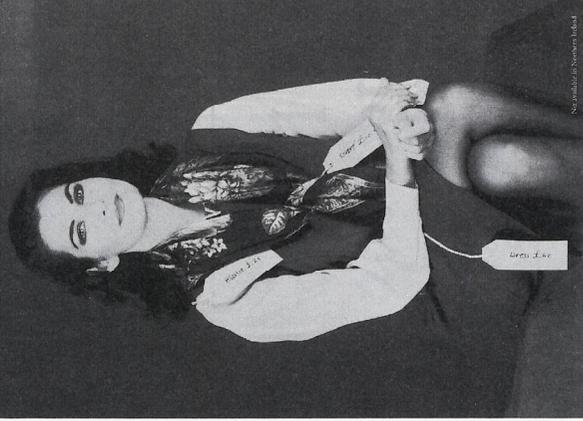
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for the Stationlink low-floor bus service, along with a Braille Underground map produced in conjunction with the Royal National Institute for the Blind."

Another of the unit's important areas of responsibility is in 'disability awareness training' for bus and Tube staff.

A range of courses teach staff how to recognise if someone has a disability, and the right way to offer help if needed.

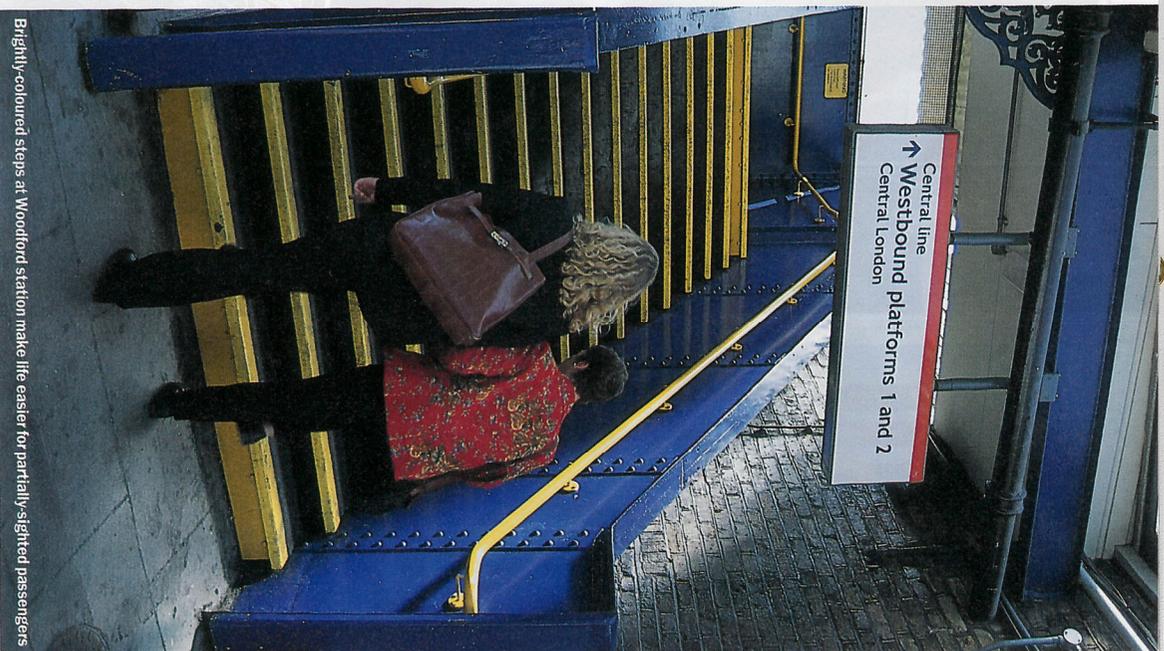
Andrew said the courses had been extremely popular.

"In fact we have a job keeping up with the demand from people who want to go on them," he said.

The unit's fourth key role is to fund the operation of Dial-a-Ride, the pre-booked, door-to-door minibus service for disabled Londoners, which is operated through six independent companies in various parts of the capital.

"I think the key thing to remember is that disability isn't an illness," said Andrew. "For most disabled people it is the environment they live in which is disabling.

"What we are trying to do is minimise that problem and make public transport open to pretty well everybody."



Brightly coloured steps at Woodford station make life easier for partially-sighted passengers

'Guinea pig' Peter does the wheelchair test

WHENEVER LT wants to test out a new idea for accessible transport, it sends for Peter Wright.

Peter, Information Assistant with the Unit for Disabled Passengers, is himself a wheelchair user and therefore able to pass first-hand judgement on accessibility schemes.

"I'm a bit of a guinea pig for LT," said Peter, who used to be a driver for London Coaches until he lost his legs in an horrific motorway accident on the M40 five years ago.

"There are loads of ideas which come up which I call 'draughtsman's dreams' – things which seem good on paper but don't work in practice, and that's what I'm asked to try out.

"Being in a wheelchair makes you look at things in a different way," he went on.

"Simple activities like using public transport, for instance, can become a

major difficulty for someone with a disability.

"I know that myself. I only live about one and a half miles from Hillingdon station, which has lifts between street level and the platforms. However, I can't use the Tube to get to work because the stations at the other end aren't accessible.

"Instead I have to drive to Slough and take Thames Trains into Paddington. From there I get on a low-floor, Stationlink bus which drops me at our office above Victoria Coach Station.

"One of my jobs here is to answer calls from the public, and many of those who do phone in are disabled.

"Sometimes they are angry at the lack of accessibility for disabled people on public transport in London. I understand that. In fact, they're not really angry, just frustrated."



Peter Wright – he's called in to judge accessibility schemes

Laurie's LT links

LIKE many people with disabilities, prisoner Laurie Hull relies on London's public transport system to get around.

Registered blind as well as disabled, she uses the buses and Underground every day, either to go shopping or when she has an appointment at the London Hospital. Consequently, she's highly qualified to comment on the service offered to people with disabilities.

"If I do have a particular difficulty it is in using the seats on the new Central Line trains," she told on the move.

"They are too shallow and low for disabled people, while the screen next to the priority seats isn't flush with the handrail. As a result, it's difficult for disabled people to pull themselves up from the seat.

"On the other hand, I like the way the seats are laid out so people aren't sitting back-to-back. Passengers can also see into the next carriage.

"In my case, I'm particularly pleased with the recorded announcement which tells you what the next station will be, as I can't see the station signs.

"I only wish they'd introduce something similar on the District Line."

Laurie said that the biggest problem faced by disabled people using the Underground was the amount of stairs at stations.

"I realise that our system is the oldest and deepest in the world, but I wish more could be done to make the system accessible to wheelchair users. The Government should give more money to LUL to make this possible."

As for the buses, she said that the new low-floor vehicles being used by Capital Citybuses on the 179 route in Woodford are "excellent".

"That low step is so much easier for people like myself to climb, while there are two single priority seats at the front of the bus near the entrance, and a double seat opposite. What's more, you can reach the bell to tell the driver when to stop from a sitting position, which is also a great help for those who are unsteady on their feet."