

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Wirral Transport Museum

HERITAGE
BIG



Introduction

This document serves as the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for the planned redevelopment of Wirral Transport Museum. The project aims to modernise and expand the museum's facilities to improve educational offerings, accessibility, and overall visitor experience. This EqIA assesses how the redevelopment plans will impact various groups, particularly those with protected characteristics, to ensure the museum serves as an inclusive public space.

This assessment has been conducted to identify and address potential impacts of the redevelopment on diverse groups, ensuring no group is disproportionately disadvantaged, to comply with legal frameworks such as the Equality Act 2010 and to promote inclusivity and accessibility in all aspects of the museum's redesign and programming.

We have worked with key stakeholder groups to gather information on current museum usage and accessibility needs.

Interviews with special education experts and representatives from disability advocacy organisations have also been conducted to provide us with a set of guidelines to maximise accessibility throughout the redevelopment programme and in the running of the museum.



It's not just about travel. It's about *people*.

Wirral Transport Museum houses a remarkable collection, but struggles to engage with marginalised audiences and currently has a number of barriers to inclusion for people with physical and learning disabilities. Our goal is to create not just a sustainable museum, but a community asset that accessible to all.

Disability Access study:

A member of the Big Heritage staff with experience in accessibility - herself disabled - conducted a thorough assessment of the Transport Museum project. Her findings and suggestions are covered in detail on the following pages.

A quick note on terminology: in this document we refer to *neurodivergent* museum visitors. This includes individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), ADHD, ADD, dyslexia or other neurological or developmental conditions that cause the brain to work in a different way to the vast majority of people (classified as 'neurotypical'). This differs from the term *neurodiversity* which encompasses all individuals, both neurodivergent and neurotypical.



Key take-aways:

1. The single most important thing we can ensure is staff training on accessibility. An informed and educated staff is our most valuable asset. This can comprise showing staff videos to familiarise them with different disabilities and typical access requirements, alongside a breakdown of what accessibility features our company and museums have available so they are able to answer questions and offer support to museum visitors.
2. Disabled people should be consulted directly. The '*Nothing about us, without us*' approach is best practice.
3. Disability access should be embedded into the entire museum experience and disabled museum visitors shouldn't be made to feel any different from non-disabled visitors due to their access needs. There should not be a 'mainstream' museum experience and a disabled museum experience, they should be one and the same (i.e. disability-inclusive, not disability-specific programming).
4. When it comes to neurodivergent accessibility in particular, many museums focus mainly on children and families and fail to address the access needs of adults.
5. There is no one-size fits all when it comes to disability access. This means implementing a range of features and being open to feedback from museum visitors.

Common ways to improve access

Below are some of the common accessibility features that are taken into consideration for disabled museum visitors, which many people will be familiar with:

1. Level access for wheelchair users and people who use mobility aids like walkers, canes, and crutches. This includes alternative routes, such as ramps or lifts, where stairs are required to access areas of the site and museum (c.f. tram-lines and dropped curbs in the transport museum will need to be taken into consideration). Stair climbers may be used where ramps/lifts are not possible.
2. Automatic doors or door stays for maintaining door opening hands-free and all doors of sufficient width for wheelchair access.
3. Accessible design for any installations and exhibition spaces to ensure adequate manoeuvring space for wheelchairs, heights of text/displays, access to hands-on elements.
4. Wheelchairs and walkers with fold-out seats or portable seating available to borrow.
5. Hearing loops and subtitles or text copies of audio installations for d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing museum visitors.
6. Regularly scheduled BSL guided tours for Deaf museum visitors (BSL lead is preferred, over translated tours, but requires a larger project).
7. Braille, described audio, audio tours, and tactile access for blind and visually impaired museum visitors.
8. Accessible design for installations; in particular text-size, contrasting colours (for cases, walls, floors, not just text), for maximum legibility and maneuverability for blind and visually impaired museum visitors.
9. Adequate lighting and clearly identified routes through any areas of low-light.
10. Information welcoming users of assistance dogs, and any potential information required for their navigation of the museum site (e.g. in the transport museum in-situ road markings, in-use tram lines, etc).
11. Multiple methods to contact museum staff (e.g. telephone, contact form/e-mail, live chat, etc).
12. Disabled toilet facilities, including changing table facilities for older children and adults with disabilities than can be used independently and by carers if possible (see: [Changing Places Toilets \[changing-places.org\]](https://www.changing-places.org/)) If one is not provided, then the location of the closest one should be noted
13. Benches and seating opportunities through the museum for individuals with limited mobility and who require regular opportunities to rest (e.g. people with chronic pain).
14. Tickets for carers/companions of d/Deaf and disabled museum visitors.





Additional ways to improve access

Although not yet standard, there are also several features that can - and should - be considered to make museums more accessible for neurodivergent individuals:

1. Resources to help people prepare for their visit ahead of time (e.g. visual stories), maps of museum layouts available for download (with sensory information and routes included), a list of typical busy and quiet times, FAQs to cover common information requests (e.g. what you can expect when you visit, how to identify staff, etc). This should include:
 - 'How to get to the museum' and a local public transport guide.
 - Multiple ways to get in touch with the museum (e.g. telephone, e-mail/contact form, etc).
 - Specific opening sessions with low-sound, low-light, limited numbers, sensory activities etc (c.f. there are pros and cons to these sessions which should be discussed and considered).
2. A dedicated quiet room for individuals to access at any time.
3. Menu of any on-site cafes and facilities and whether bringing your own food is allowed.
4. Ear defenders and sunflower lanyards for hidden disabilities that can be borrowed without requiring pre-booking.
5. Sensory backpacks that can be borrowed (often include maps, activity suggestions, (stim) toys, ear defenders, lanyards, communication cards, dark glasses, etc).
6. Museum programming designed for specific neurodivergent groups (c.f. there are pros and cons to these sessions which should be discussed and considered).
7. Simplified interpretation available and embedded within displays and exhibitions.
8. Alternatives for queuing during busy times for entry or activities (e.g. sunflower lanyards or a quiet room with a waiting time system).
9. Dedicated apps for museum accessibility (e.g. Infititeach).

How do we make getting to the museum more accessible?

1. We need to review all current methods of getting to the museum site (e.g. walking, cycling, driving, public transportation, etc) and provide detailed information on how to use them, where to park car, nearest accessible parking, etc.
2. Do we consider a shuttle from the ferry terminal (during peak times)?
3. They may be a divisive subject in some areas, but rentable e-scooters and similar personal mobility vehicles may be an option for some museum visitors to get between sites.
4. Research travel mentors and travel guides. Could we help to offer sessions on how to familiarise yourself with public transport, how it's used, etc? Many people with disabilities rely on public transportation, but many neurodivergent people find using public transportation a particularly stressful and overwhelming experience. [It's everyones journey - making transport more inclusive](#) (autism.org.uk)
5. The IWM Duxford offers accessible on-site transportation, available by request on the day. Beamish does similarly and their WAVs are historic vehicles, rather than modern ones: [Accessibility at Beamish. The Living Museum of the North](#)
6. On open days, when parking may be limited, offering a disabled persons drop-off point close to the museum would be recommended.
7. A map with recommended accessible routes both to and on site should be provided.

How do we make heritage transport more accessible? How have others done this?

1. Due to the age, design and historic nature of trams in the collection, there is likely to be a high step to board, between 30 to 40cm above the ground and there will often be one further step inside the tram of around the same height. We will need to research whether a level access platform can be provided, as well as a temporary ramp (such as those used at National Rail stations) to make any trams/buses wheelchair accessible. This may not be possible for all vehicles currently in use.
2. Evacuation procedures would need to be considered for visitors with limited or restricted mobility.
3. Crich Tramway Village requires booking ahead of time for their wheelchair accessible tram (which uses a wheelchair lift installed in the tram): [Access-Information-for-Visitors-2023-Review.pdf \(tramway.co.uk\)](#) Booking in advance is not ideal, but if required due to limits of staffing etc it should be considered as an option.
4. Crich also provide a buggy park for those riding the tram, which is a great idea.
5. In addition to level access, internal seating should be reviewed and assessed, where possible accessible seating should be made available (e.g. in trams where only narrow wooden benches currently exist). These adaptations can potentially be removable to be fitted only when required.
6. The historic trams on-site can be quite an intense sensory experience; they can be very loud and ear defenders should be available for anyone wanting to visit the outside of the museum and for those riding the trams. We should also provide a detailed 'what to expect' when on the trams guide (e.g. you may feel it shudder or thump, explain track points, etc). However, it should be noted that not all neurodivergent people experience sensory stimulus the same way and for many museum visitors these loud noises are a big part of the fun!
7. Dedicated viewing points for the moving trams with a key/legend on what to look out for, where to get the best views, etc.
8. For the stationary vehicles within the transport museum, for those that will be open for the public to access, we should ensure level access where possible and alternative methods to view any inaccessible areas (e.g. second levels that require the use of stairs that cannot be made accessible due to the historic nature of the collections).

Is there a known link between people with autism and an interest in transport?

The focus of special interest subjects is wide-ranging, however some sources report that approximately 20% of autistic children would consider 'transportation and vehicles' one of their special interests. There are less specific figures available for autistic adults, it would follow that it would be 20% or less and anecdotally it remains a common enough special interest subject to often be a stereotype of ASD. There is some research to suggest that autistic men are more likely to have a special interest subject in transportation, but this is not to say that autistic women won't also have an interest in this subject!

Special interest subjects are a key feature of autism and research shows that engaging with special interest subjects (when not excessive) was significant for the self-reported wellbeing of autistic adults (Special interests and subjective wellbeing in autistic adults - PubMed (nih.gov))

There are many features of transport that might interest autistic individuals:

1. Wheels and mechanised parts with repetitive motions may appeal to sensory interests, such as watching them and stimming objects similarly.
2. Many vehicles can be categorised into different models, types, sizes, etc. For some individuals with ASD, the ability to organise objects into categories is very appealing.
3. Transport often comes with schedules, routes, and timetables. This, too, appeals to many people with ASD and is in line with a need for predictability and the inclination to memorise and recite information.
4. Transportation has features that can support an enduring and developing interest across a lifetime. For instance, many children love the train characters in videos and TV shows such as Thomas the Tank Engine (which is its own area of special interest for many autistic children). For older children and adults, model trains can be fun to build and have mechanical features that can be interesting to take apart and reassemble.
5. Plus, transport is ubiquitous and can be accessed in some form relatively easily on a day to day basis.

For individuals who do have a special interest in features of the Transport Museum (be it buses, trams, engines, transport routes, timetables and schedules, etc) every person will want to engage with those subjects in different ways. Some people may be interested in speaking with others about them, interacting with them in a tactile way, reading and learning as much as possible, completing collections of models, drawing and making their own records, etc.

Autistic museum visitors should be able to indulge in their special interests comfortably and we should provide a way for them to express their desires if we are not fulfilling those needs (e.g. a way to tell us 'I would like to be able to...').

Individuals with a special interest in transportation who are made to feel welcome at the Transport Museum may be interested in a type of entry ticket that allows for multiple visits, rather than single one-off entry as they are likely to want to return again and again.

There's no real digital presence for the site, will changing this help with access? Live streaming?

In recent surveys on museum accessibility, 95% of disabled respondents report seeking access information ahead of time and 85% of those respondents first point of enquiry is a museum's website. If access information is unavailable or unsuitable, the majority of these individuals may change their intention to visit the museum, particularly neurodivergent individuals.

This suggests it is very important that we provide an online presence for the site and one which addresses the needs of potential museum visitors.

YouTube is an incredibly popular platform for people with specialist interest subjects, which includes transportation. YouTube videos can easily be shared on other social media platforms, directing people to a single resource rather than splitting production across different profiles. A regular online presence, even with a simple production value, can increase both museum visitors but also raise the profile of the museum with an online audience who may not be able to access the museum site itself.

(For reference: [Cultural Content - Good YouTube, Bad YouTube](#) (substack.com))

However social media platforms such as TikTok should not be discounted either, each platform meets a target different audience although there is some overlap. A great example is the meteoric rise of 'celebrity trainspotter' Francis Bourgeois, from geeky beginnings to his own star-studded TV show and railway-themed Gucci collaborations. His infectious enthusiasm (and good looks) has had a profound effect on the public perception of 'trainspotters', making it seem like a classically quirky British pastime rather than a niche interest with no wider appeal.

YouTube allows for livestreaming and given the popularity of channels belonging to individuals with special interest subjects in transportation, it may be that having 'guest streamers' is a possible collaboration to explore (e.g. plane and train spotters). Many neurodivergent individuals also experience and seek out ASMR, which has large presence on YouTube, and there may be aspects of the Transport Museum that can fulfil this remit as well (e.g. 'slow television' of engine re-building, the repetitive sound of machines, etc). There's a new wave of both professional presenters and amateur content creators challenging the 'geeky' perception of hobbies. From legendary names like James May and Bruce Dickinson to breakout Youtubers like Mark Rober, Simone Giertz, engineering, history, and the love of giant machines are no longer of the preserve of a small minority. The trick for our museum is simply making it accessible, fun, and...endearingly quirky enough to attract a wider audience.

A recent report looked into the reasons why people follow museum and heritage organisations on social media across different platforms, so we may want to consider this when developing any strategies: [TEA Break | Following Arts and Cultural Organisations on Social Media](#)



Thoughts from a potential volunteer

JAMES LONGMAN

James is a young adult from Birkenhead with a passion for trains, trams and buses. James has Autistic Spectrum Disorder and lives with his parents. He is now too old to access many of the activities and services he used to enjoy provided by the local authority. He works one day a week in a Café, but struggles to find other meaningful activities throughout the week.

James has visited Wirral Transport Museum on many occasions and would love to be able to volunteer his time and knowledge if the infrastructure was in place to support him to do this. We invited James and his older brother Dan to look around the museum, and tell us what things he liked and disliked, how we could make all aspects of the museum and its collection more accessible to him.

IN JAMES' WORDS:

“ I like being able to sit on all the buses and trams, even when they are not moving. I'd like to come here every week and help out. I am very good and cleaning things carefully, so I would like to come and clean the buses and make them shiny. I would be proud of my work. I would make new friends here and would like to have a pint in the pub over the road after work was done. ”

IN HIS BROTHER DAN'S WORDS:

“ James' passion since childhood is transport, and we've taken him all over the UK to enjoy this hobby. It's always been a disappointment that he can independently travel to Wirral Transport Museum, but no provision exists to allow him to volunteer in some capacity. He puts 100% effort and focus into any task he's given, so he would be an asset to the museum if there was some basic structure in place for him to follow.

Big Heritage's intentions for the museum collection are exciting for all Birkenhead residents, but especially the many people with ASD like James who have an affinity for transport. It's the first time anyone has ever meaningfully asked James for his opinion and advice on something like this. What a refreshing approach. ”



Thoughts from a current volunteer

DAVE BIRCH

Dave is a retired bus driver who currently volunteers at Wirral Transport Museum. Dave brings over decades of bus experience to the table and was awarded multiple national awards by Arriva and Crosville before retirement, making him one of the safest bus drivers who's ever worked in the UK.

In recent years, Dave's wife and son have both passed away. He has a daughter who he still sees regularly, but his two days a week volunteering at Wirral Transport Museum are his main social activity during the week.

Older Men at the Margins was a two-year study to understand how men aged 65 and over from different social backgrounds and circumstances experienced loneliness and social isolation. It also explored the formal and informal ways they sought to stay connected with others and feel less lonely.

For all of our plans to bring new volunteers into the museum, it is for these reasons that we are committed to supporting the current volunteer group.

IN DAVE'S WORDS:

“ I get so much out of volunteering here, and it allows me to meet up regularly with friends to work on a project together. I'd love to do more though. I spent my life driving buses, and I would happily volunteer to drive the vintage buses every day of the week for my own enjoyment and for the enjoyment of visitors.

I'm excited about the future plans....the place needs new young members, some new ideas. It's looking tired, but just needs some care to bring it back to life. ”