# **Challenge Two: Travel Assistance Services**

### **Document Intent**

This document sets out the second challenge in our programme. It explains the barriers disabled passengers face when using travel assistance services, the opportunities for innovation, and what we are (and are not) looking to fund. It is intended to guide applicants in shaping proposals.

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### **1. Overview**

Travel assistance services are a vital support for many disabled passengers. However, they are often complex, inconsistent, and unreliable. This reduces autonomy and increases stress.

We want to improve and expand assistance services, so they are reliable, personalised, and empowering — giving passengers more confidence and real-time control from journey planning through to arrival.

### **2. The Challenge**

**Question:** How might we improve and expand travel assistance services to give disabled passengers greater autonomy, confidence, and real-time control over their journeys, from planning through to arrival?

### **3. Evidence from Disabled People**

Disabled passengers report barriers at every stage of using assistance services:

* **Complex planning**: arranging assistance is difficult, often requiring advance booking and extra effort. In the ncat Transport Barriers database, planning a journey and arranging and paying for services were both highlighted as barriers.
* **Unreliable delivery**: assistance is inconsistent across transport modes. Passengers may be unsure if ramps will be deployed, whether staff will wait until they are seated, or if stops will be announced.
* **Poor communication**: passengers often lack accurate, real-time information about whether assistance or equipment is ready. In the [Transport for All’s ‘Are We There Yet?’](https://www.transportforall.org.uk/blog/2023/12/05/are-we-there-yet-barriers-to-transport-for-disabled-people-in-2023/) survey, it identified the lack of accurate real-time bus information as a barrier.
* **Limited accessibility**: both digital and non-digital tools present challenges, with unclear procedures and missing visual/auditory cues. Over a third (36%) of survey respondents still rely on printed timetables to plan journeys.
* **Lack of accountability**: weak feedback and complaints systems leave passengers feeling powerless when things go wrong.

These issues create uncertainty, increase emotional stress, and place a disproportionate responsibility on disabled passengers to manage their journeys. There is a clear need for more responsive, reliable, and human-centred services.

These findings are from ncat Research: visit the below links to access the resources

* [Resource Collection](https://www.ncat.uk/projects/the-resource-collection/)
* [Transport Barriers Database](https://www.ncat.uk/what-we-do/transport-barriers-database/)
* [Understanding and Identifying Barriers to Transport](https://www.ncat.uk/projects/understanding-and-identifying-barriers-to-transport/)
* [Translating Research Into Design Challenges](https://www.ncat.uk/projects/translating-research-into-design-challenges/)
* [all ncat Projects](https://www.ncat.uk/what-we-do/projects/)

### **4. Opportunities**

We are looking for projects that:

* Enhance or redesign how assistance is arranged, tracked, and delivered.
* Improve the visibility, reliability, and consistency of assistance points, staff, and interfaces.
* Expand appropriate tech-based tools (e.g., real-time updates, navigation aids) that support independence while complementing human support.
* Allow passengers to personalise assistance preferences and receive tailored updates.
* Create integrated systems that work across different transport modes and operators.
* Support a human-centred culture shift through better training, behaviour, and accountability.
* Enable effective feedback and transparency mechanisms to build passenger trust.

### **5. Requirements**

* Projects must directly address the challenge.
* All projects should reduce, not increase, the responsibility placed on passengers.
* Projects must comply with UK accessibility laws and guidance (Equality Act 2010, Inclusive Mobility, BS 8300).

### **6. Out of Scope**

We will not fund solutions that focus on:

* Physical station or vehicle infrastructure changes (unless directly tied to how assistance is delivered)
* General awareness or culture-change campaigns not linked to assistance services
* Full system overhauls of national scheduling, routing, or staffing structures
* Technology dependent on long-term regulatory change or proprietary cross-operator integration that cannot be prototyped or piloted
* Solutions that increase the burden, time, or responsibility on passengers