SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

Only when desperate

Review of accessible toilets on railway stations

April 2008

This report is the latest in a series on aspects of passenger safety and comfort prepared by the Soroptimist Rail Safety Task Force. It collates the findings of a survey by clubs in England & Scotland of what some ordinary rail users encountered when they sought to use “accessible toilets”. It does not purport to be a comprehensive tally of all that may actually have been there.

Soroptimist International is a major voluntary organisation for women in management and the professions with 95,000 members around the world. Key action areas include health, education, the environment and the creation of a safer society. Through research, reports and practical projects, it seeks to ensure that women are part of decision-taking at all levels. Further information on its work can be found on www.sorop.org

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ONLY WHEN DESPERATE

Review of accessible toilets on railway stations

Executive Summary

Thirty nine stations run by Network Rail and TOCs were visited to check how their accessible toilets were catering for travellers with mobility problems. Considerable investment has been made to comply with disabled access requirements, and some premises were well designed and maintained. Most staff were helpful if travellers asked to use accessible facilities. But many people, including some staff, were confused about who was eligible to use them. Elderly people with heavy luggage and parents with young children queued at turnstiles or struggled to get to standard facilities because they were unaware they could use alternatives.

Signage and narrative information were erratic. Many travellers thought the wheelchair symbol meant that only severely disabled people might use the facility. Locked entry doors with this symbol reinforced their impression. At some places a member of staff came promptly when asked to undo locks, but at others there were delays and hassle. Within the premises themselves, ventilation, cleanliness and maintenance varied widely and clinical waste raised some health issues.

The report suggests:

- a nationally agreed definition of "accessibility" to reduce public and staff confusion, and a common set of clear formats conveying this information system-wide;
- review of some hygiene issues, especially for young babies, associated with clinical waste; and
- franchise conditions and performance assessments that treat decent toilet facilities as a necessity for all travellers, not just those with limited mobility.

Buzzer and remote unlock features should be installed at unattended accessible toilets to speed up entry. The report also favours removal of turnstiles in ordinary facilities to make them more accessible.

The report offers a series of practical recommendations about signage, ventilation, cleaning and maintenance in accessible toilets that local managers should address as an important part of any well-run operation. Users should be able to report defects, indicate their overall view of the facility and offer suggestions for improvement. These low cost measures would help to provide better quality and better value from expenditure on increasing accessibility.

CONTENTS

	Executive summary	iii
Chapter 1	Introduction	1
	What this report is about	
	What we did	
	Structure of the report	
Chapter 2	Finding what is available	3
	a. Knowing who is eligible	
	b. Wayfaring signage and maps	
	c. Use of pictograms	
	d. Staff assistance	
	e. Siting	
Chapter 3.	Getting in and out	9
	a. Doors	
	b. Locks and keys	
	c. Bells, buzzers and intercoms	
Chapter 4.	Using the facility	13
	a. Unpleasant smells	
	b. Poor cleaning	
	c. Maintenance failings	
	d. Reporting problems and satisfaction levels	
Chapter 5.	Some health issues	19
Chapter 6.	The way forward	21
Annex A	Checklist for action	25
Annex B	Stations surveyed	29
Annex C	Survey questionnaire	31

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

What this report is about

1.1 The Association of Train Operating Companies invited us to look through women users' eyes [1] at how well train companies are delivering passenger accessibility. We decided to focus on what the industry flags up as "accessible toilets" at stations.

1.2 Public toilets are not generally held in high esteem. One woman we interviewed summed it up — *"I only ever use them when desperate"*.

1.3 In fact, most of us get desperate at some time or other when travelling — or our children do — especially those making long journeys. Station facilities have to cater for people worried about missing trains, confused by unfamiliar surroundings, carrying bags and heavy luggage or struggling along with baby buggies. For disabled people and others of limited mobility it can be crucial to know before setting out what will be available and how to access it.

1.4 Unfortunately many accessible toilets are in premises built in a different era for different purposes. Some now have Heritage Listed status. Moreover, property departments are keen to let the most accessible concourse space to commercial undertakings with goals other than enabling travellers to deal with calls of nature. But awkward structures and poor locations are not the only problems users face. That is what this report is about.

What we did

1.5 Teams of women from Soroptimist Clubs around Britain visited a cross section of local stations ranging from mainline hubs run by Network Rail to medium and small stations run by several different TOCs. For obvious reasons, only unisex and women's facilities were inspected, using a detailed checklist of items. The visits were spread across several months. Some premises may since have improved and others worsened.

1.6 The teams looked in particular at:

- clarity and accuracy of signage and other aids to wayfaring;
- ease of entry on arriving at the premises; and
- quality and cleanliness.

1.7 They also talked with users and staff who happened to be on the spot. They heard anecdotes of people's experiences, good and bad. From all this, some common problems and some examples of good practice were identified and discussed at informal meetings with Network Rail, Southeastern, Passenger Focus, RSSB, and the Department for Transport.

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[1] Since 1996, Soroptimist International have published a series of reports on rail passenger safety and problems, most recently on the design of ticket machines.

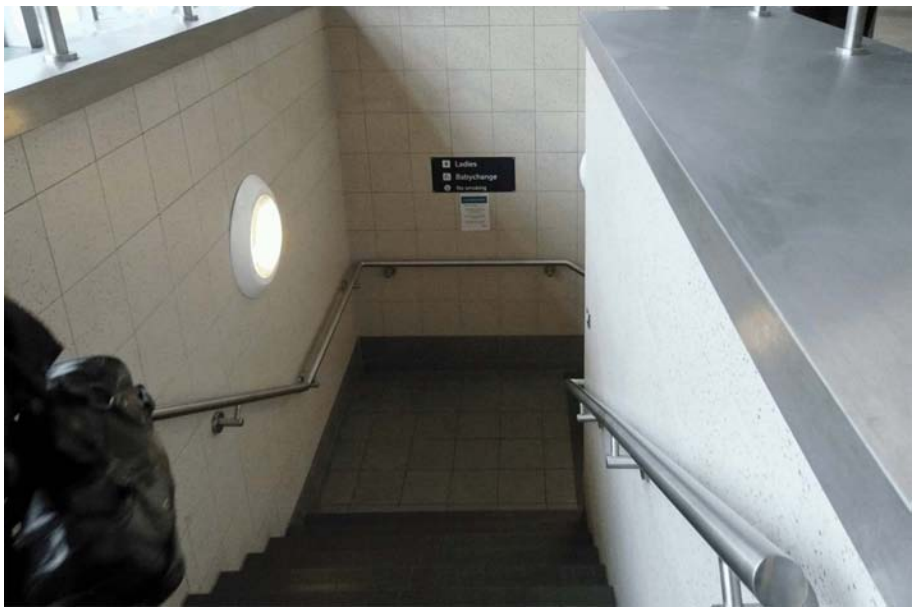
1.8 There was much interest in our investigation from both users and providers, as welcome and timely. Many said they felt that not enough attention had been given to this topic in the past. We were also told that getting the provision right would be important for meeting new EU obligations as well as those of national anti-discrimination legislation, and that this might be a consideration in the letting of franchises. The emphasis has shifted from preoccupation with measurements and standards to a wider view of what users need in order to travel in comfort and safety.

Structure of the report

1.9 We found wide variation in all aspects of the facilities looked at, from excellent well maintained provision in some places, to mediocre premises in others or in some cases none at all. The chapters that follow look in turn at the three main parts of the access process, namely

- finding what is available;
- getting access to it;
- using it, including baby change facilities.

The concluding chapter reviews the overall picture that emerged and identifies some general issues that need a coordinated response across the railway system as a whole. The annexes show the survey questions and stations inspected, and give a check list of all the recommendations made throughout the report.



17 down and 17 up with the baby gear

CHAPTER 2. FINDING WHAT IS AVAILABLE

a. Knowing who is eligible

2.1 People find their way to an accessible toilet by following signs, looking at maps or asking staff. They do none of these things if they think they are not entitled to use it. Instead, they head for the standard facilities. Sometimes that involves a long trek, awkward stairs, and maybe a turnstile as well.

2.2 There is widespread confusion among both the public and staff about who has a right to use an accessible toilet. Many of those with whom we talked had only a hazy notion. We observed at turnstiles old people struggling to lift awkward luggage over the barrier and families manoeuvring young children and baby buggies through. Staff were not always in view to help. Where they were, some were friendly and smiling. At other places the opposite was the case, deterring all but the boldest from asking for help or information.

2.3 The standard disability pictogram of a wheelchair conveyed to many users that only severely disabled people and RADAR key holders were eligible for the alternative provision. It certainly did not convey that pregnant women, elderly people with walking problems, or those encumbered with heavy luggage might also use it.

> *"It's just for people in wheelchairs isn't it, or if they've got something really serious wrong with them."*
>
> *"I know it's for children too, but it doesn't say so."*

2.4 We were surprised to find that nobody could provide us with a standard definition of eligibility. We saw some references (often in small print amongst a sea of other information) to people with luggage or children but these were rare and the wording differed from place to place.

2.5 We were told that staff are trained to adopt a flexible approach to someone asking to use the accessible toilets. This was plainly not percolating through, going by some of the responses encountered. Flexibility seems desirable. Confusion is not.

> *"I'll have to ask the station supervisor first and he's busy with something important at the moment"(member of staff at train enquiry desk).*
>
> *"I tried to get the key off the bloke at the office this morning for somebody who couldn't get into the toilets because they were being cleaned. I was told that was a security risk and I couldn't have it. "(member of platform staff)*
>
> *"I couldn't really say. You get some funny characters so you have to use your judgement." (station manager)*

2.6 Others thought it placed a difficult burden on them to adjudicate:

> *"I'd let an old woman with heavy luggage in, only I know if the other people saw me doing it, they'd want to use that toilet as well. Yesterday a young woman, like about 18, who saw me let in an old woman, she used shocking language to me when I wouldn't let her in too".*

Conflicting messages

2.7 The Department for Transport and Passenger Focus both told us they were clear that wide eligibility was intended. The consultation on the latest EU interoperability requirements to meet the needs of people with mobility problems would make this clear. It includes the elderly, pregnant women and those with heavy luggage. We note however that the draft update of the Disabled Persons Protection Policy document also out to consultation, rests on the DDA definition of disability rather than that of impaired mobility. This document will be regarded as the definitive good practice guide for TOCs since their franchises and licences will depend on compliance with it. Care will need to be taken in its final wording — and title — not to entrench any confusion and misunderstanding about who is then allowed to make use of "accessible" toilet provision.

2.8 It is plainly overdue for a standard form of words to be agreed for use throughout the railway network to clarify who is eligible for what, and for this to be made widely known to the public and to staff.

2.9 As a part of this, there would be advantage in consistent and meaningful staff titles. It is a welcome reflection of the new approach of "transport for all" that terms like "DDA Compliance Officer" are being dropped in favour of the more proactive "Accessibility Officer" with its obvious meaning and link with signage. But another recently coined term, "Inclusion Manager", may be less helpful in clearing up public confusion.

We recommend that:

- *A standard definition should be agreed of which passengers may use the facility.*
- *This should be well publicised and applied across the network and in all forms of railway literature and publicity.*
- *All staff should be briefed on this and able to give clear advice.*
- *A copy of the definition should be placed by all entrances to toilets.*
- *Staff titles and job descriptions should emphasise accessibility rather than compliance.*
- *DfT and other regulatory bodies should ensure that TOCs and the public are not confused by the wording they use.*

b. Wayfaring signage and maps

2.10 Passengers in a hurry need to locate facilities on stations quickly and easily. Clear and accurate signage is essential. We found many instances where the signage fell short of this ideal. Some typical comments were:

"It needs to be better signposted."

"You get so far then the signs stop."

"I couldn't find a map."

Hidden accessible toilet sign

2.11 Specific problems were:

- Misleading or hard to spot signs

  "Access was easy but misleading signs led to problems — it took at least 10 minutes to eventually find the correct facility. There's more than one set of signs"

  "Loo clearly identified when you actually find it — signs were misleading"

  Reasons for this included:

  i. insufficient information in places where passengers first looked;

  ii. blocked line of sight;

  iii. writing too small;

  iv. visual distraction of commercial advertising.

- Insufficient care about replacement information during building works

  "Temporary facilities were difficult to find";

  "I got so far then the signs stopped".

- Poorly located and sometimes out of date station maps.

  "I hunted up and down looking for a station map. When I did find one in a dark corner I had a long walk with my case to where it said. Then when I got there I discovered it had been moved to a completely different place. Nobody had updated the map."

We recommend that:

- *Signs should be in prime locations in every station.*
- *Signposting is clear and accurate.*
- *Temporary facilities are meticulously signposted.*
- *Station maps should be easy to find and kept up to date.*
- *Staff are instructed to report where passengers questions indicate that better signage is needed.*

c. Use of pictograms

2.12 Symbols are easier to read than words and do not need language skills. The male and female toilet pictograms are recognised worldwide. The standard wheelchair pictogram is also widely recognised but interpreted narrowly by most people. Some stations have resorted to putting up an array of symbols, which become burdensome to interpret, and may still not include all categories of restricted mobility. We recognise that it is desirable to have international standards in these matters, to which all conform. At the same time the limitations of the wheelchair design need to be seriously addressed in relation to the intended meaning of "accessible". Pictograms, like words should leave people in no doubt what they mean.

We recommend that:

- *Signs should indicate clearly the categories of passengers entitled to use the facility.*
- *Consideration be given to a pictogram "accessibility" design that reflects this.*

d. Staff assistance

2.13 If signs or words are not immediately visible it is natural to ask the nearest person associated with station services, for directions. This might be a member of staff in uniform, a kiosk holder or the person who serves in the café. Some women will only ask another woman for information or assistance.

2.14 At some larger stations we encountered excellent examples of staff being on hand to offer assistance where needed. At others only male staff were visible or it was necessary to queue at an enquiry desk.

> *A Mum with a buggy was about to descend the stairs when a floor-walking attendant intercepted and directed her to the accessible loo.*
>
> *When I hesitated by the entrance, one of the women receptionists immediately said, "Are you looking for the toilet? It's right there."*
>
> *The presence of floor-walking staff to assist facilitated easy access.*
>
> *There was a queue of people asking about train times and I had to wait quite a while for my turn. I think some women would have been too embarrassed to ask in front of a lot of strangers.*

We recommend that:

- *Staff are briefed to volunteer directions & assistance to people plainly hesitating.*
- *Those working in café & retail outlet/kiosks etc. are briefed to give accurate directions.*

e. Siting

2.15 It is no easy task to insert modern well-sited facilities into stations inherited from the Victorian Age. Often much ingenuity had been used to provide an extra facility to conform with the DDA. However not all the solutions adopted are equally successful.

2.16 An ideal location is beside the main toilets flagged up with their high visibility male and female signs and with staff on the spot to help. This also reduces the risk of misuse. Turnstiles at some of these are one of the main bugbears for passengers encumbered with push-chairs or luggage. Without these they might not need to seek out a separate accessible toilet. Removing the turnstiles would immediately improve access for a wide group of travellers. There are alternative methods of making charges if these are essential.

2.17 In a few stations the accessible toilet was:

> "*Well placed on the concourse*".

One mainline station had placed the accessible toilets centrally and advantageously as part of a walk-in main inquiry facility and had done away with RADAR locks.

> *"The toilets were under surveillance of the station counter staff & therefore did not need to be locked"*

2.18 However, in some other stations the accessible toilets were tucked away in a corner, located in converted storage rooms or offices, sometimes off passages. Rail property managers - like those at airports- would rather rent out prime locations to shops and cafes than reserve them for basic facilities for travellers. In many of the smaller stations the accessible toilet could be reached only via the platform and then from one platform only.

2.19 The former Rail Passenger Council (now called Passenger Focus) picked up the importance of location in their report "*What passengers want from stations*" (June 2005):

> *"Some …. thought a staffed toilet at smaller stations might be possible if it was inside the station near to the booking office"* (page 24)

Excellent entrance — pity about the turnstiles

We recommend that:

- *Wherever possible accessible toilets are sited in the central area or main concourse along with the main facilities.*
- *The distances encumbered passengers have to walk should be minimised.*
- *Serious consideration should be given to the removal of turnstiles on all toilets to make them more accessible.*

CHAPTER 3. GETTING IN AND OUT

a. Doors

3.1 On many stations the accessible toilets had anonymous doors, perhaps with no more than a small notice or wheelchair symbol to indicate their function. Such doors are rather intimidating and negative. They are usually kept locked and only accessed by a RADAR key reinforcing the image "Keep out. This is for wheelchair users only".

Anonymous

3.2 Sometimes the wording on the door itself reinforced the message — negating the word "accessible" by affirming "This is for disabled passengers only". We also saw examples of *ad hoc* messages posted up on doors which seemed inclined to discourage inquiries.

3.3 A more inviting approach was offered where the door to the accessible loo/baby change area had a glass panel so would- be users could see in before they entered — the cubicles being beyond this area. The message here "Open — please do walk in". We noted that the draft DPPP guidance favours clear panels in doors.

3.4 Because many accessible toilets are ad hoc conversions the door is often flush to the wall without any entry "porch" to wait in. Passengers can feel somewhat embarrassingly conspicuous waiting there for what is clearly a lavatory. In one mainline station the waiting spot was a draughty through passage with jostling passers-by and somewhat shady characters hanging around. In another it was off a poorly lighted lobby.

Good door — once you find it

We recommend that:

- *The wording of signs on, or at, the door should be given careful attention;*
- *Wherever possible glass panels should be fitted on the outer doors to the accessible toilets.*
- *Attention should be given to where people have to wait to get in, balancing privacy and security.*

b. Locks and Keys

3.5 Many of the facilities were locked, quite understandably in some cases given the risk of vandalism and abuse. Some bore no indication how to get in other than the obvious one that a special key was needed. This meant finding a member of staff to unlock them. The time taken to gain access varied from 30 seconds to well in excess of 30 minutes. This did not seem to equate with the size of station – good and bad were found at both the large mainline stations and the small local stations.

3.6 An unhappy experience at one mainline station was an adapted office facility where not one but two locked doors had to be negotiated. The door onto the platform was unlocked on request by a member of staff, and shut again behind the user who on traversing the inside passage found a second locked door. It took some time to catch the attention of "rescue" staff to open the second door. On complaining, the user was told "*Well we usually prop that other door open*".

3.7 At a small local station our researcher observed that ease of access was dependent on ticket office business since there was only one train ticket/manager on duty at one time.

> *There was only one attendant who was busy with other duties.*
>
> *The station attendant was very willing to help but pointed out his difficulties if he was the only person on duty.*

3.8 It goes without saying that prompt access is usually essential when a toilet facility is needed. Users certainly should not have to queue up to ask for a key. People in the middle of a journey are anyway highly conscious of pressure of time. It is no comfort to be told that the keyholder is busy with something else and they will have to wait. Local access systems need to minimise the time taken not only to locate someone able to unlock the door, but also for the unlocking process to be gone through.

We recommend that:

- *No accessible facility should ever require negotiating two sets of RADAR locks.*
- *Clear instructions on how to obtain speedy access should be posted in a prominent place.*
- *In "single staff" premises the use of a remote unlock facility should be installed like those used on entry to blocks of flats.*
- *Where toilets do have to be kept locked against misuse and vandalism, easy access should be facilitated without undue hassle or delay.*
- *Every station should set a time target for gaining access, and monitor that this is met.*

c. Bells, Buzzers and Intercoms

3.9 Good practice at some stations was a bell by the door. Help arrived promptly and the passenger was able to gain access immediately. At another, not only was the response prompt, but an intercom provided an assurance that someone was on the way.

3.10 If the bell or buzzer alert signal were accompanied by CCTV coverage, staff elsewhere could buzz the lock open and need only attend when they think what they see on the TV screen looks "iffy". As noted above, this would be particularly useful where there is only one member of staff on duty. But it would be helpful at all locked premises.

3.11 However systems are only as good as their maintenance. At two of the stations visited, the bell installed was not working on the day of our survey — though this was only ascertained by trial and error. Fortunately a glass panel in the door allowed those inside to see the person trying to gain access. A series of women already inside each opened the door for the next arrival.

We recommend that:

- *Bells and buzzers should be installed at unattended accessible loos so that passengers can ring to gain entry.*
- *Automatic door release systems should be installed to operate from a distance.*
- *Consideration is given to the possible use of two-way communication by the door possibly monitored by CCTV.*
- *Instructions as to what to do if the bell is not working should be posted beside the door.*
- *Where a "call for help" system is known to be out of action, the door should be temporarily kept unlocked.*

Good door & bell systems — but one bell was not working

CHAPTER 4. USING THE FACILITY

4.1 The Rail Passengers Council 2005 report already quoted[2] found that people "would only use toilets if they were much cleaner and warmer than they are now". Comments by our inspectors included

"There were grubby looking floors."

"The whole area needed a good clean."

"The loo was shabby, sanitary ware was chipped and the floor dirty. This together with poor ventilation made the experience unpleasant."

4.2 Three common defects were identified :

a. unpleasant smells;

b. poor cleaning;

c. maintenance failings.

There also appeared to be little or no effort to capture users criticisms and ideas.

a. Unpleasant smells and poor ventilation

4.3 These two things went together. Smell is usually the first thing to make an impact on entering a building or room. Savvy shops, hotels and people keen to sell their houses give this careful attention. It carries key messages about cleanliness and quality.

4.4 Some premises smelt clean and fresh, up to the standard one would expect in a hotel. They were warm, which is something users like. But this was not always an advantage in an enclosed space without windows. Some comments were

"The disabled loo was too claustrophobic."

"There was a general unpleasant aroma."

" It stank!"

4.5 Faulty drains, urine spills and powerful cleaning materials all contributed to problems. At one station with a marked whiff of drains, TOC staff said they were aware of the problem but could do nothing about it. Faulty main sewerage was for Network Rail to fix. The pipes ran under the track and doing repairs would disrupt train services. This was a basic defect for which there was not an obvious quick fix, but which was nonetheless unacceptable.

4.6 Elsewhere there were easier solutions well within the compass of local management. Spilled urine can be cleaned up, or design improved to reduce the problem. Product selection and rinsing can avoid excessive fumes from cleaning materials. Everywhere, good general ventilation can make a big difference. In theory building regulations should ensure proper standards. However, some windows were painted shut. Even where the windows were open-able, they were sometimes hard to reach and it was not obvious who if anyone might open and shut

[2] *What passengers want from stations*, June 2005.

them as circumstances required. Moreover, many toilet premises had no windows. Extractor fans were vital in these. Some fans were not working or were inadequate for the task judging by the air condition.

We recommend that:

- *The split of responsibilities between Network Rail and TOCs should not create delays in attending to faulty sewerage.*
- *Windows should not be painted shut.*
- *Station and cleaning staff should be briefed to open and close windows as appropriate*
- *Extractor fans of adequate capacity should be installed and regularly checked for efficiency.*
- *Cleaning practices should have regard to the need to air rooms thoroughly after strong smelling products are used.*

b. Poor cleaning performance

4.7 It is important for any spills that happen to be cleaned up speedily and thoroughly. Premises need to be kept looking as well as smelling clean, with careful attention paid to the hand-basins. This is of course one of the tasks of staff in attended toilets, who mostly did a good job. But on the spot cleanups are no substitute for a good standard of regular cleaning with "deep cleans" at appropriate intervals. The standards we encountered were very mixed.

4.8 Several examples were seen of a dirty floor with spillages and discarded paper. This is unpleasant and potentially dangerous. The problem is not unique to railway toilets and has to be dealt with by a well managed cleaning regime.

4.9 Walls and fittings were sometimes grubby looking, particularly where unsightly piping and plumbing had been installed along the cheapest routes. This made their cleaning difficult even when the will was there.

4.10 We were told that at the large stations contractors carried out cleaning whereas in the smaller station it was the job of platform staff as part of their routine duties along with many other tasks. Some were plainly much more closely managed than others, which lacked toilet paper and soap or had overflowing rubbish bins.

4.11 Whoever does the cleaning, there needs to be a system for checking that all tasks are being completed to a required standard. Only a few premises had a daily cleaning chart on display and these had not always been kept up to date.

> *"There was a chart for loo cleaning which was meant to be done every hour but it was quite obvious that this was not being done."*

Cleaning chart

4.12 Cleaning rotas need to be regularly posted for the public to see. It is important for management also to look in unannounced quite frequently to check what their customers encounter.

4.13 Equally, some of the excellent cleaning standards we saw deserved management recognition of the staff concerned.

Sparkling clean with materials provided

We recommend that:

- *All cleaning schedules should be regularly reviewed to check that frequencies are right, and work monitored to ensure it is done properly.*
- *Management should take a close personal interest in this frontline part of their domain.*
- *Surprise inspections should be carried out.*
- *Consideration should be given to having a merit/reward system for super-cleaners.*

c. Maintenance failings

4.14 A lick of paint would have helped keep some places fresh and clean. Good lighting is also important particularly for partly sighted people. General shabbiness gave a very negative impression:

"Clean but scruffy";

"A little on the shabby side";

"Damp and a bit dismal".

4.15 Toilet paper and a doorlock that works are both a must. Yet both are sometimes missing. Moreover nobody wants to put possessions on a public toilet floor, even if not obviously dirty or wet. This adds to the importance of having a clean shelf and hooks at hand to put handbags and other items. These should always be provided and always kept maintained. At an even more basic level, the shabby accessible toilet cum baby-change premises at one major station used daily by thousands of people had a broken tap

and the lavatory cistern was taped up with industrial tape. The same slack management style was apparent in the uncleaned ordinary women's toilets just along the same platform.

4.16 Daily cleaning staff are well placed to check and immediately report any missing or damaged item. Routines to put matters right promptly should be set in place. A well managed premises should treat all these matters as normal good practice.

We recommend that:

- *Facilities should be regularly repainted as a quick and inexpensive way of making them brighter and more attractive.*
- *Instructions should be given to cleaning staff about regularly checking and reporting maintenance items.*
- *The arrangements should provide for repairs to be carried out within a set deadline.*

d. Reporting problems and concerns

4.17 A good feedback system from the public is a valuable source of management information about where action is needed to maintain basic quality standards. This applies to accessible toilets as elsewhere. We did not observe any systematic approach to this during our surveys.

4.18 In most of the stations surveyed there were no notices in the accessible toilet premises about alerting staff to problems encountered. At those stations where guidance was provided, it took a variety of forms:

- a poster saying "*Contact a member of staff if cleanliness doesn't meet requirements";*
- a notice saying that if there were any problems, contact the station manager (no further details given)
- copies of a leaflet which gave an address & telephone number for complaints;
- a dog-eared notice by a cleaning contractor announcing they looked after the premises.

4.19 Every set of premises ought to have a clearly visible notice posted over the wash basin urging users to report any immediate problems or equipment defects. A posted-up cleaning schedule as recommended earlier is one obvious benchmark. It goes without saying that this should not involve a complex and time consuming process, and that there should be response arrangements to ensure the matter is followed up. Ideally the station should post up publicly the complaints received each month and what had been done in response.

4.20 An illustration of why response systems need to be checked was the experience of one user who decided to test the system by reporting a toilet that demonstrably had not been cleaned that day.

> "*I went to what seemed a senior level of platform staff- the inquiry desk. The person there was plainly disinterested, said "Yes yes" before turning back to chit chat with a colleague, without making any note of the matter or asking for more details. I doubt if it was ever passed on. The strong message was "don't bother reporting things*".

4.21 A Mystery Shoppers survey from time to time would help management check if its reporting arrangements were working properly. At the least those who report matters should be received with courtesy and left feeling that it was worthwhile to have taken time out on their journey to do so.

4.22 Management also needs a mechanism to record customer opinion more generally as an indicator of where a closer management look at the product being offered would be desirable. In some motorway service stations the toilets have a simple system of three buttons marked good, satisfactory or below standard, for customers to choose on exit. A similar system could usefully be trialed within the accessible toilets.

4.23 We should also like to see the inclusion of station toilets in Passenger Focus general surveys to help to pinpoint the aspects that most concern the public and which need concentrated management attention.

4.24 We did note one example of good practice on this in one main line station. A notice in the accessible toilet invited regular users with mobility problems to get in touch with the local users panel (the contact details were set out) and to take part in their surveys and assessments. Sadly, when we complimented the station manager on this initiative he dismissed it saying *"Oh is that still there? It was something a woman who used to work for us was rather keen on"*.

We recommend that:

- *Every toilet should have a clearly displayed notice saying how passengers can alert staff to problems so that deficiencies are dealt with promptly.*
- *Those with mobility problems should be encouraged to join users panels to offer ideas.*
- *Effective management systems should be set in place to record and respond promptly.*
- *"Mystery Shoppers surveys" should be used to test what happens when people follow the invitation to report specific problems.*
- *Systems should be put in place to assess general levels of customer satisfaction.*

Good facility, friendly attendant

CHAPTER 5. SOME HEALTH ISSUES

5.1 One important aspect of cleanliness is rubbish disposal. Where this rubbish contains items like disposable nappies and soiled dressings it constitutes clinical waste. We had concerns about practices we saw in some premises for dealing with this, especially those where unisex facilities were shared with provision for baby changing.

5.2 A particular feature of baby change facilities is the large amount of soiled nappies and baby wipes they generate. This makes premises very smelly unless particularly well ventilated with frequent bin emptying. Closed bins are essential. However in some premises we saw open bins with nappies and similar rubbish. In another with a closed bin we saw dirty baby wipes left on top of it. Not only is this unpleasant, but it is a possible health hazard.

5.3 We think a notice reminding parents about hygiene for their own baby's sake as well as that of others would be useful. Good practice might also be encouraged if a vending machine was installed dispensing antiseptic wipes. In any event, routine cleaning schedules should pay particular attention to the baby changing shelf and surrounds.

5.4 The same notice might ask users to report immediately if they find the bins full or any dirty items lying around. Since most parents carry mobile phones, a hotline might be offered to encourage this. It is for consideration if a hot line of this sort should also be offered to all users of the accessible toilets to report problems.

5.5 The adult binned waste in accessible toilets also needs especial vigilance since it can contain items for specialised medical care. We note the draft DPPP guidance mentions both a waste bin and a sealed container for incontinence pads and other disposables. It was not immediately clear if the latter was mandatory. In our surveys we saw premises without a sealed bin and also some open rubbish bins demonstrably containing adult soiled dressings among other things. As a minimum, clear guidance is needed for users about what it is appropriate to put in the open bins. One option would be to require all bins in the premises to be closed.

5.6 As regards emptying, we were told that women's sanitary bins on all stations were always closed bins emptied under contract once or twice a week by specialist firms, not station staff. We think this should apply to all clinical waste, whether nappies or other forms.

5.7 As a public health matter, it seems desirable for there to be a systemwide view about types of waste bins and how they are to be handled rather than leaving it to individual TOCs to decide their own arrangements. If there are HSE or other rules, we should like to see them widely promulgated.

5.8 We had a second hygiene concern where the facilities were being shared by babies and adults. This was shared working surfaces. Adults changing dressings need a clean area to put things down, but not all premises we visited had one. Equally babies need clean changing shelves with no risk that colostomy bags, medical dressings or other such items might have been temporarily parked on them. There seemed more risk of this, where there was no easily accessible shelf provided for other users. We think this should be obligatory rather than advisory. For

both this and the baby changing shelf, cleaners should have specific instructions about the cleaning techniques to be used.

5.9 A third hygiene hazard we noted for babies in shared unisex facilities was that careless male users have a propensity to spray the surrounding area rather more widely than do female users. We asked ourselves, who wants to change their baby in a public urinal? And certainly no mother should be expected to breastfeed her baby in one.

5.10 We note that current advice refers to the risk of delays to disabled users where facilities are shared with parents tending to babies. This is mentioned in the draft DPPP document as a reason for keeping baby change provision separate if at all possible. However we have not seen any discussion of the above hygiene issues which seem to us to carry equal weight in considering separate provision. We feel this would be timely.

We recommend that:

- *All disposal bins should have lidded tops and special attention be paid to ventilation in shared premises.*
- *Notices should be posted up encouraging hygienic behaviour and consideration should be given to having a vending machine for dispensing antiseptic wipes in all accessible toilets.*
- *Users should be given a hotline to report when bins become full and prompt action taken.*
- *An easily accessible shelf besides that for use by babies should always be provided.*
- *All surfaces should be regularly cleaned with appropriate products to minimise the risk of transmitting infections.*
- *Separate baby-changing facilities should be provided in preference to shared facilities.*

Continence pad included

CHAPTER 6. THE WAY FORWARD

6.1 Public conveniences are a necessity for many travellers. They should be easy to find, well-equipped and clean. People shun premises, whether or not deemed accessible, where they expect them to be of low quality. This applies at railway stations as elsewhere. It seemed to us these points have not been given sufficient weight by some station managers. There are a number of reasons why they should.

- Poor toilets signal to the public a slackly managed undertaking, insensitive to its customers. A big retail group a few years ago attributed a significant rise in footfall and market share to their special effort put into improving Rest Rooms. They had taken this step because focus groups had put good toilets at the top of women's list of what they expected of a good store where shoppers felt comfortable and relaxed.
- Past Soroptimist research on local toilets has shown that women with young children, elderly people and tourists all attach high importance to being able to access well-designed clean facilities quickly when out and about.
- A company that has compiled many disabled access information guides across Britain told us that accessible toilets are everywhere the top concern of local groups they consult.
- Network Rail research has also found that toilets are a top priority in the list of facilities that people want at their stations. With the introduction of more trains without toilet facilities on them, the need for station provision will increase.
- Meanwhile, National Travel Surveys regularly find that poor train toilets are a major passenger bugbear.

6.2 At many smaller stations the long-running trend has been to close public toilets or open them only at limited times or "on demand" for limited groups of people. Leaving aside the question of whether this is a desirable strategy, it increases users' need to know about what is still available, and to be confident about the standards they will find when they arrive there. Providing what users actually want is directly relevant to achieving value for money in the big programme of station accessibility improvements in hand, the standards being set in franchise agreements and routines for performance audits at stations.

6.3 This review has led to a number of good practice recommendations that are mainly for station managers to address. But it has also highlighted three general matters that need to be tackled across the industry as a whole, rather than just by individual TOCs.

6.4 First, as noted in Chapter 2, a standard form of words is needed about who can use accessible toilets to remove public confusion about this. There is a strong signal of exclusivity in the fact that the public have a locked door to negotiate before getting access. Those without a RADAR key have to seek permission and help from staff before they can enter. So clear general understanding of eligibility is important if all this if this is not to be an unintended barrier.

6.5 There has to be a system-wide approach that conveys clearly what is intended and then translates it into action. This cannot be left to individual TOCs to work out their own versions.

We recommend that

- *The Department for Transport, ATOC and the RSSB get together urgently to agree a national definition of accessibility, and a common set of formats conveying and applying this information system-wide.*
- *This should be reflected in and promoted through the appropriate regulatory and grant making systems.*

6.6 Second, the hygiene matters discussed in the previous chapter are a public health matter. They too merit a more general review of the respective roles, training and waste disposal standards and practices of contract cleaners and platform staff generally. There needs to be good and safe practice uniformly across the rail system.

We suggest

- *The hygiene matters raised in Chapter 5 should be reviewed by the Health and Safety Executive, ATOC and RSSB.*

6.7 Third, our survey focussed on accessible toilets. However the importance of good quality toilet provision generally in people's overall assessment of the "railway experience" needs to be taken seriously at all levels for all the reasons discussed in this report. Nobody wants to use dank premises where the smell is unpleasant, there are obvious spillages, the toilet-roll holder is empty, and there is nowhere to put down a bag save on a wet and dirty floor. The reaction is to avoid such premises if humanly possible. They also attract anti-social behaviour. To shut down public facilities rather than manage them better is not an appropriate response where such important provision is concerned.

6.8 Inclusion of quality criteria in franchise requirements, local performance assessment systems and station audits would sharpen up delivery. So too would a requirement in all franchises that a check should be carried out by the TOC itself of all their accessible toilets within a defined period, and a report made of the steps taken to put them to rights.

6.9 The quality of station toilets is also a matter of interest to the towns they serve. We have avoided naming and shaming individual stations where we found serious failings, since that was not the purpose of this survey. Because of their importance as tourist destinations however we mention here two specific stations our inspectors found wanting. In the case of Liverpool Lime Street the comment was

> "*This is a very busy facility but a little on the shabby side and still like a station toilet from a bygone age. It needs to be revamped, especially for all the visitors in 2008.*"

In the case of Stratford on Avon comments were:

> "*A very poor welcome to a major tourist area!*" and
>
> "*World Class Stratford. They [the toilets] really were a disgrace and a real turn-off for tourists arriving as I did after 50 minutes in a non-corridor train.*"

We recommend that

- *All TOC managers should review all their station toilet facilities, and not just those designated as accessible, and consider the management issues our review has raised.*
- *The Department for Transport should take these issues into account in setting criteria for franchise awards, and performance inspections.*
- *Local authorities in major tourist areas should take a close interest in the standard of facilities offered at their local stations and that these are kept in peak condition of cleanliness and maintenance.*

6.10 Throughout this report we have offered practical recommendations that do not need heavy money outlays. They are largely a matter of better management. Indeed we think that attention to all our suggestions will secure improved value for the large sums currently being expended on "access for all" as well as provide a better quality experience for rail travellers generally.

6.11 Some of them could be built into the programmes of rebuilding planned or already under way. Removing turnstiles would make general facilities much more accessible and user- friendly to a great many people with reduced mobility. If charging is a must, there are other ways of doing this.

6.12 The goal should be a national railway system where nobody, when asked if they would use station toilet facilities, replies "*Only when desperate*".

Annex A: Check-list for action

Knowing who is eligible (Chapter 2(a))

Agree a standard definition of who is eligible.

Publicise this through all forms of media.

Brief all staff.

Post up a copy by every toilet entrance.

Review staff titles and job descriptions.

DfT and other regulatory bodies review consistency of their messages.

Wayfaring signage and maps (Chapter 2(b))

Put signs in prime locations.

Check navigation signs are clear and accurate.

Meticulously signpost temporary facilities.

Make station maps easy to find and up to date.

Instruct staff to report inadequate signage.

Use of pictograms (Chapter 2(c))

Indicate clearly all eligible categories of users.

Consider new pictogram to convey “accessibility”.

Staff assistance (Chapter 2(d))

Brief staff to volunteer directions & assistance.

Ensure café & retail staff can give accurate directions.

Siting (Chapter 2(e))

Co-locate accessible toilets with ordinary facilities.

Minimise distances to be walked.

Remove turnstiles at all toilets.

Doors (Chapter 3(a))

Use appropriate wording on doors.

Fit glass panels.

Review waiting areas by entrance doors.

Locks and Keys (Chapter 3(b))

Remove duplicated RADAR locks.

Post up clear instructions for entry.

Instal remote unlock facilities.

Put in place arrangements to provide speedy entry.

Set and monitor target times for access.

Bells, Buzzers and Intercoms (Chapter 3(c))

Provide bells and buzzers at doors.

Respond speedily with automatic door release systems.

Instal two-way communication and CCTV.

Post up instructions about what do if bell not working .

Keep door unlocked if bell out of order.

Unpleasant smells and poor ventilation (Chapter 4(a))

Agree protocols between Network Rail and TOCs for dealing with faulty sewerage.

Check windows are not painted shut.

Brief staff to open and close windows.

Instal and regularly check adequate extractor fans.

Air rooms thoroughly after strong smelling products are used.

Poor cleaning performance (Chapter 4(b))

Keep cleaning schedules under review and monitor performance.

Demonstrate close management interest.

Arrange surprise inspections.

Institute merit/reward system for super-cleaners.

Maintenance failings (Chapter 4(c))

Repaint regularly.

Instruct cleaning staff to check maintenance needs.

Carry out repairs within a set deadline.

Reporting problems and concerns (Chapter 4(d))

Display notices advising passengers how to report problems.

Encourage those with mobility problems to join users panels.

Instal effective recording and response systems for reported problems.

Use “Mystery Shoppers surveys” to test performance.

Set up systems to assess general levels of customer satisfaction.

Some health issues (Chapter 5)

Require lidded disposal bins and pay special attention to ventilation in shared premises.

Post up hygiene advice and trial vending machines for antiseptic wipes.

Provide hotline number to report when bins become full and ensure prompt response.

Instal easily accessible shelf for general use.

Specify special cleaning arrangements of shared surfaces to minimise infection risks.

Provide separate baby-changing facilities rather than shared ones.

The way forward (Chapter 6)

The Department for Transport, ATOC and the RSSB urgently to agree national definition and systemwide formats.

Departments to reflect this consistently in regulatory and grant making systems.

HSE, ATOC and RSSB to review hygiene systems.

TOCs to review their management standards for all their station toilet facilities, not just those designated as accessible.

The Department for Transport to take general toilet standards into account in setting criteria for franchise awards, and performance inspections.

Local authorities in major tourist areas to take close interest in the local station facilities.

Annex B: Stations surveyed

Network Rail Stations:

Birmingham New Street
Edinburgh Waverley
Gatwick
Glasgow Central
Liverpool Lime Street
London
- Cannon Street
- Charing Cross
- Euston
- Fenchurch Street
- Kings Cross
- Liverpool Street
- London Bridge
- Paddington
- Victoria
- Waterloo

TOC operated Stations:

Ashford International
Bexhill
Blackpool North
Chatham
East Croydon
East Grinstead
Fareham
Glasgow Queen Street
Gravesend
Headcorn
Lingfield
Longfield
Maidstone East
Meopham
Paddock Wood
Peterborough
Preston
Rainham
Rochester
Staplehurst
Stratford on Avon
Strood
Waterloo East
West St.Leonards

Annex C: Survey Questionnaire

Survey of identified loos

Survey by
Contact details

Station Network Rail/TOC

A. Location of loo

Where is the loo located? _____
Is it clearly identified? Y/N
Are the signs leading to it clearly visible? Y/N
Are there pictogram signs? Y/N
Are the signs in other languages? Y/N
Are these signs accurate and up-to-date? Y/N
Do the signs make it clear that these are accessible loos *(not disabled only)*
Y/N
Is the loo generally kept locked? Y/N
Is it easy to gain access – by key/member of staff? _____
How long did the process of getting access take? _____ minutes

B. Quality of the facilities inside

Is the door wide enough for a motorised wheelchair/double pushchair? Y/N
Is the door easy to open for both entrance and exit? Y/N
Is the cubicle big enough for wheelchair/pushchair to manoever once inside? Y/N
Are these facilities adequate and easily reached?

- Washbasin? Y/N
- Mirror? Y/N
- Soap dispenser? Y/N
- Water supply adequate? Y/N
- Dryer? Y/N
- Hooks or shelf? Y/N
- Sanitary and nappy bins? Y/N

Are there baby changing facilities? Y/N

On the general nature and quality of the facilities, how would you rate the following? (Excellent. Good. Average, Poor, Very poor)

- Cleanliness _____
- Paper provided _____
- Locks _____
- Hooks and shelves _____
- Lighting _____
- Ventilation _____

Are any other facilities not listed provided? State which.

C. General comments on the ease and time taken by the whole process:

i.) Time taken and ease of access

ii.) General experience

iii.) Are there procedures posted for reporting problems?

iv.) Suggestions for changes to improve the service

v.) Would it have been useful to know in advance about the facilities?

vi.) Please give an overall rating of 1-10 (10 being the highest score)

Continue on separate sheet if necessary with any anecdotal evidence.

Thank you for your response.