## 

## RNIB Scotland response to ScotRail's Consultation on Passenger Assistance Meeting Point Signage Design

### Introduction

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Scotland is the country's leading charity working with blind and partially sighted people. We support children and adults with sight loss and help them to live full and independent lives, campaigning for their rights.

We understand the Office of Road and Rail (the rail regulator) has instructed train providers to supply signposted designated passenger assistance meeting points at all staffed and unstaffed stations. ScotRail has negotiated a timeframe for implementation with delivery planned in 2024.

We have not been able to consult a wide range of visually impaired individuals on this given the relatively short time to respond. However, we present information from pre-existing RNIB and RNIB Scotland consultation responses, reports and information from blind and partially sighted people, where we think relevant.

### Questions

### Question 1. What image is preferred and why?

#### Prompts to consider: arrow direction, circle design (inclusive or non-inclusive), shape of accessibility symbol (square, rounded edges), are there enough symbols, are some missing, are there too many?

Within the consultation document there are three pictorial representations of designs for signage with words and symbols displayed. RNIB's 2020 publication "Accessible Maps, Images and Signage"[[1]](#footnote-1), provides some helpful guidance for creating clear and accessible signs for people with visual impairments, some key points are detailed below:

* Good visual contrast between the background and letters/symbols is recommended. The legibility of signs is improved for people with sight loss if, white or light-coloured lettering is set on a dark background. Judging by the designs presented in the consultation document there seems to be good visual contrast with white lettering against a dark blue background.
* Tactile signage is essential for people with no sight at all or those whose vision is only sufficient to locate a sign but not distinguish individual characters. It is unclear whether the signage in the consultation document will include raised large print and braille letters and symbols. These can be read by sight and touch and may be helpful for people with visual impairments. Embossed letters, signs and symbols as opposed to engraving is often preferred. Specific guidance on using embossing on signage is available in the RNIB document mentioned above.
* Where symbols or pictograms are used, they should be of a standard public information design, and be as simple and uncomplicated as possible. Images one and two for ScotRail's signs contain the "eye symbol" along with other impairments which may be seen as more inclusive for people with sensory impairments.
* Sentence case (first letter only capitalised) lettering is generally easier to read, and this appears within the draft designs in the consultation document.
* Fixing the sign at eye level (between 1.4 and 1.6 metres above floor level) with easy access for close-up viewing is an advantage for all. The positioning of signs is covered more in response to question 3 below.
* The surface on which the signage will appear is also important for accessbility - to minimise glare, it is recommended to avoid reflective glass cases and ensure that the sign has a matt surface.
* Braille is useful on appropriate signs. Some thought needs to be given to the positioning of braille signs, so the user can stand and read it with ease as opposed to crouching down.

More detailed guidance is available via the Sign Design Guide produced with UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF)[[2]](#footnote-2) and information from "BS ISO 17049:2013 Accessible design – Application of braille on signage, equipment and appliances".[[3]](#footnote-3) RNIB Business services can also create bespoke signs (please see contact details at the end of this document).

### Question 2. At booking offices, the following text is proposed to be added "If the ticket office is closed, please make your way to your departure platform where you will be assisted by train crew."

#### a. Is this wording satisfactory?

This wording could cause confusion, for instance by instructing users to make their way to their departure platform, it assumes people can find their departure platform and navigate to this location. For people with sight loss finding their correct platform can be problematic, particularly if they are unfamiliar with the railway station layout.

The reliance on "train crew" also suggests there may be a lack of staff on hand to assist customers within railway stations themselves and again could cause confusion for those who need assistance at the railway station at the start of their journey, for instance to purchase the correct ticket or find their departure platform.

We are concerned about moves to reduce opening hours of ticket offices and limit the availability of staff from ticket offices at railway stations.

In 2023, RNIB, in conjunction with RNIB Scotland, and alongside many disabled charities, ran a successful campaign to stop the proposed closure of ticket offices. The proposals would have closed most ticket offices in England and included the Avanti Rail Ticket Office at Glasgow Central Station. The campaign received overwhelming support and moves to close ticket offices were halted.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The role ticket offices play for blind and partially sighted people cannot be underestimated. Ticket offices are a fixed location that blind and partially sighted people can rely on as the first point of contact for many kinds of staff assistance: staff can ensure the appropriate concession is applied to a ticket purchase, make sure passengers have the correct ticket, let passengers know when facilities like lifts are out of use, advise on any changes to their journey that may be required, and provide or arrange for sighted guidance through the station and safely on to the train.

RNIB research demonstrates the importance of ticket offices. According to our recent survey:

* Only 3 per cent of blind and partially sighted respondents said they could use a ticket vending machine without problems.
* 76 per cent said they would prefer to buy tickets from a person at a ticket office.

If information or instructions rely on visual information alone, without audible or tactile cues, blind and partially sighted people are excluded from being able to travel independently.

### Question 3. The Office of Road and Rail (ORR) requires signage to be available at stations (including platforms). From a customer perspective, what factors should be considered when placing the signage?

Feedback from blind and partially sighted passengers has been that help points can be difficult to locate. At some stations, the help points are positioned on the platforms and therefore are not immediately accessible to passengers arriving at the station wishing to obtain ticket or timetable information prior to travel.

Other factors which need to be considered include:

* Adequate lighting levels. Signs are difficult to identify and read if they are positioned against a background of low-level sunlight or artificial light.
* The placement of signs at eye level so they can be reliably detected is helpful. If they contain embossed signs, letters, and symbols these should be within reasonable distance so a person can touch these.
* Noise – such as locations next to audio speakers, alarms, lifts, and escalators, may be disorientating.
* Passenger Assistance Points need to be clearly displayed with minimal obstruction caused from other passengers boarding or alighting from trains during peak travel times.
* Locations near shops, waiting areas, seats, and facilities such as self-service ticket machines, vending machines, toilets, ticket barriers, and escalators also need careful consideration.
* If signage is placed on the platform, it must be located as far away from the platform edge as possible to ensure those waiting on assistance always remain safe.

### React Boards

RNIB Scotland acknowledge that React Boards are currently available at eight stations in Scotland ([Accessible travel | ScotRail](https://www.scotrail.co.uk/plan-your-journey/accessible-travel)). We would welcome installation of additional React Boards as a means of sharing key information about stations ([Kate's Story – React Accessibility (react-access.com)](https://react-access.com/jos-story-2/).

### Digital Technology

For individuals who can utilise digital technology, [Navilens](https://www.navilens.com/en/) can also offer greater opportunities to independently navigate the station environment. It is important though that these provisions are in addition to, rather than in place of, in-person support as not everyone will be able to access digital information.

There are other electronic systems available which can be used as a means of calling for assistance or for direction finding. This is a rapidly developing area and designers might investigate making provision for incorporating such devices in the future.

### Induction Loop System

An induction loop system may help those with a hearing impairment. Designers should be aware of the various factors that can adversely affect the performance of induction loops or infra-red systems. For example, high gloss floors and wall finishes can cause reflection of infra-red beams and seriously distort sound reproduction. The correct installation of such systems requires specialist knowledge. People who are deafblind have a combination of impairments which create difficulties that exceed the sum of the individual impairments.

Organisations such as Sense, Deafblind UK and RNIB can offer help in this area. Technology now exists for deafblind people to, for example, be made aware of visitors to their home via an app which activates a vibrating ring and flashing signal.

Contact details  
RNIB Scotland

Email: RNIBScotland Mailbox [RNIBScotland.Mailbox@rnib.org.uk](mailto:RNIBScotland.Mailbox@rnib.org.uk)

1. Accessible Maps, Images and Signage, (RNIB Business Services, 2020). Available at: <https://media.rnib.org.uk/documents/Accessible_maps_images_and_signage_brochure_2020.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [G029-UKAAF-Sign-Design-Guide-Additional-Information-July-2021.pdf](https://www.ukaaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/G029-UKAAF-Sign-Design-Guide-Additional-Information-July-2021.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ISO 17049:2013 Accessible design Application of braille on signage, equipment, and appliances [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Rail ticket office closures in England scrapped in government U-turn | Rail industry | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/oct/31/rail-ticket-office-closures-in-england-train-operators) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)