

Release

LACK OF TOILETS CAN MAKE RAIL TRAVEL IMPOSSIBLE FOR DISABLED PEOPLE THIS CHRISTMAS

A new survey conducted by disability charity Leonard Cheshire has found that many disabled people will not even attempt to make rail journeys in order to spend this Christmas with family and friends due to the lack of accessible toilets.

Leonard Cheshire's 'Bog Standard?' campaign asked passengers to document whether there were usable accessible toilets on trains and in stations whenever they made a journey.

More than half (58%) of respondents said that the station that they travelled from did not have a usable disabled toilet, whilst **four out of five** (80%) did not find a toilet they could use on their train.

Figures produced by the charity also found that **nearly a third** (30%) of disabled people had missed an important social function, such as a family Christmas, a birthday or wedding, because of inaccessible transport. The figure for wheelchair users rose to **40%**.

Jo Champion, policy manager at Leonard Cheshire, said: "Some of the comments we received were appalling. One respondent was told to get off the train, go to the toilet in the bushes and then wait for the next train. No-one should be forced to put up with that sort of treatment."

Even when people did find an accessible toilet the survey uncovered numerous complaints including the toilets being too small, blocked up with mops and cleaning supplies or even kept permanently locked.

Jo Champion said: "The lack of accessible toilets is one of the biggest problems facing disabled train travellers. With so many trains and stations not having properly accessible toilets it is hardly surprising that many disabled people won't even try to travel by train this Christmas."

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Notes to Editors:

1. Leonard Cheshire asked people to check whether the trains that they travelled on and the stations that they left from had a usable disabled toilet. The survey found that of the 428 individual journeys logged, only 177 people said that their station had a usable accessible toilet. In total this meant that 58% of respondents did not find a usable disabled toilet at their station. Only 20% found that the train they were on had a usable accessible toilet.
2. A selection of comments received in response to the 'Bog Standard?' campaign:
 - "Do not travel on trains because of the lack of toilet facilities."
 - "Even if the journey is less than one hour I like to go the toilet before I get on the train to avoid the worry and stress of whether I'll make it to the other end."
 - "I asked the inspector about a toilet and he told me to get off at the next station and go behind some bushes at the station and wait for the next train – which I had to do. It was dark and I was travelling alone."
 - "The only thing you can do is not drink 2 to 3 hours before you travel."
 - "Have developed a thick skin about using a urine bag or bottle in situations on trains. The public increasingly understand and sympathise, but it's still embarrassing and stressful."
 - "The biggest barrier to travel of any kind can be the lack of accessible loos."
 - "The WC is an essential part of all but the shortest journey and the lack of proper provision is likely to determine the viability of the proposed trip."
 - "Many stations either keep the accessible toilets locked or in a filthy state."
 - "There was no disabled toilet on my train so I was told to change half way through the journey. I did this but it added one and a half hours to my journey."
3. Leonard Cheshire 'Mind The Gap' report (2003) looked into the social exclusion caused by inaccessible transport. 43% of those surveyed for the

report didn't get to see friends and family as often as they would like, with 52% blaming inaccessible transport. 30% had missed a major social occasion, for example a family Christmas, birthday or wedding due to inaccessible transport. For wheelchair users that figure rose to 40%.

4. Leonard Cheshire (www.leonard-cheshire.org) is the UK's largest voluntary sector provider of support to disabled people. It supports over 21,000 disabled people in the UK (85% in own homes, 15% in care homes) offering flexible services to meet their needs. The charity campaigns for the rights of disabled people in the UK and raises awareness of the issues affecting them. The charity also works with disabled people in 57 countries worldwide working in partnership with more than 255 autonomous and locally managed services and organisations.

Leonard Cheshire offers care at home services; care homes with and without nursing, including respite care; day services including resource centres and mobile day centres; independent/supported living units; acquired brain injury rehabilitation services; recreational services and education, training and employment support through Workability and jobability.com.