

Our Consultation response

GM Transport Strategy & Delivery Plan

About Together Trust Charity

We are a specialist education, care and support charity based in Cheadle, delivering more than 40 services across the North West, with a strong presence in Greater Manchester. We provide care, support, therapeutic, community and education services for neurodivergent people, disabled people, people with learning disabilities and children in care.

About our consultation response

Several train stations near our services lack step-free access, including **Ashburys, Reddish South, Walkden, Woodsmoor, Davenport, Brinnington, Patricroft and Eccles**. While some of these train stations are included in the Delivery Plan, others - such as Ashburys and Reddish South - remain excluded, restricting people's independence and ability to travel safely.

There are also train stations near our services that are step-free or partially step-free - such as **Stockport, Cheadle** and **Romiley** - but broader accessibility improvements are still essential to meet the needs of the people we support.

We believe that accessible travel is essential to enabling disabled people to live full and independent lives. In the following questions, we provide evidence informed by our research on train station accessibility near our services, our engagement with decision-makers, and feedback gathered from Together Trust colleagues and students at Bridge College and Inscape House School. This includes insights from 14 colleagues who took part in our internal survey, including disabled colleagues, alongside the experiences of the children, young people and adults who access our services.

Charity number 209782

Which of our network ambitions are most important to you, rank 1 – 7, with 1 being the most important and 7 being the least important to you.

1. Inclusive and affordable
2. Reliable
3. Safe and secure
4. Integrated
5. Well-maintained and resilient
6. Healthy
7. Environmentally responsible

Explain your answer:

This ranking reflects feedback from 14 colleagues across the Together Trust. Inclusive, affordable and reliable transport was consistently prioritised. Many of the people we support - as well as colleagues - cannot use the network without services that are accessible affordable and dependable. Accessibility remains a significant barrier.

Do you have any comments on the proposals in Map 1 - Deliver?

This map includes schemes with significant funding allocated and where the case for change has been demonstrated. Most of these schemes will, subject to final funding and business case approvals, be delivered (or will be in delivery) before 2032.

We welcome the inclusion of **Reddish North** and **Levenshulme train stations** in Map 1 for step-free access. Since 2022, we've been working closely with grassroots campaigner Nathaniel Yates, who has cerebral palsy and has campaigned tirelessly for accessibility at both stations after sustaining a serious injury at his local station, Reddish North, in 2018. Given the long-standing need for these improvements, alongside the strength of local campaigning and lived-experience evidence, we strongly support these schemes being completed in full and delivered without delay.

We also welcome the inclusion of **Walkden train station**, which is close to two Together Trust services: **Haines House**, a residential home for autistic children with complex needs, and **Sportside**, a supported living service. For the young people here, accessible local transport is essential for independence and community participation. We are keen to

work with partners to ensure their needs are reflected in the final proposals.

A few months ago, the Together Trust campaigns team ran a workshop at **Inscape House School**, our specialist setting, alongside grassroots campaigner Nathaniel Yates. The session gathered feedback from 15 autistic children about their experiences of using trains. Although the closest station to Inscape is **Cheadle train station**, it remains a considerable distance away and is difficult to access for many students and colleagues.

Most of the students we spoke to had used trains before and generally felt neutral to positive about rail travel. However, many highlighted uncertainty caused by accessibility barriers and sensory overwhelm - issues that autistic young people in particular identified as significant challenges.

Students were very clear that stations without step-free access are unfair and exclusionary for disabled people. They described features such as **clear signage, ramps, lifts, quiet spaces, and predictable environments** as essential for feeling safe and confident when travelling. Autistic students especially emphasised the need for **human staff** support rather than relying solely on automated systems. They explained that being able to approach a real person if they are confused, overstimulated, or anxious provides vital reassurance and helps them navigate unfamiliar or unpredictable situations. Automation without human alternatives increases stress and reduces accessibility for autistic travellers.

When describing their ideal station, young people prioritised **accessible infrastructure, sensory-considerate spaces, and reliable, visible staff**. Their key messages to transport leaders focused on the need to **proactively consider disabled and autistic people's lived experiences**, improve physical and sensory accessibility, retain human assistance, and ensure public transport remains affordable. This feedback highlights how inclusive design - particularly for autistic and neurodivergent young people - must combine accessible environments with consistent human support to make rail travel genuinely safe and usable.

Colleagues whose closest train station is **Cheadle train station** highlighted challenges for colleagues and service users, including steep steps, indirect routes, long connection times and

difficulty reaching the station from our headquarters and specialist school. These barriers reduce the practicality of rail travel for many.

“I work from home but travel to Cheadle about 4 times during school times. I will go to Stockport and catch a taxi from there rather than travel to the Cheadle station, which has loads of steep steps, and then I often have a long wait for a bus - it's a long journey. I feel sorry for anyone having to do that journey every day”. **Together Trust colleague**

Our **Newbridge Centre** is close to **Stockport train station**. Newbridge is an inclusive and creative day service supporting adults aged 18-30 with autism, learning disabilities and complex health needs. While Stockport rail station has step-free access, colleagues raised concerns about high fares, particularly for travel outside GM boundaries, and unreliable, infrequent services.

“Our main issue around train links is the excessive cost of fares. Costs are too high for train travel to be a regular form of transport our young people are able to use - even though some of them would enjoy using train services. GM travel passes allow for travel around the Greater Manchester area, but any journeys outside of this boundary are often quite expensive - and fares for staff also incur a high price, making it an impractical method of transport.

Even if using train links within the Greater Manchester region, trains are very unreliable (often being cancelled) and can be quite infrequent on weekdays outside of commuting hours. Consequently, we do not use trains regularly but prefer other Bee Network services (bus and Metrolink) as these are affordable, reliable and regular and are more appropriate for those who access our service”. **Together Trust colleague – Newbridge Centre**

Our service users would benefit significantly from more affordable and dependable rail options, enabling them to travel independently, access local opportunities, attend community activities and maintain social connections. Improved reliability and affordable fares, alongside continued investment in accessibility, would make Stockport train station a genuinely viable and empowering transport option for the people we support.

Do you have any comments on the proposals in Map 2: Develop and deliver?

This map outlines future transport priorities that, subject to final funding and business case approval, have the potential to be delivered by 2037.

We welcome the inclusion of **Woodsmoor train station** in the Delivery Plan. We recently met with local councillors at the station to discuss the significant accessibility barriers that remain. Woodsmoor is currently not step-free, with too many steps for disabled, neurodivergent people, and colleagues to navigate safely.

This is especially concerning because two Together Trust services - **Archer Street** and **Linden** - are located nearby. **Archer Street** provides three supported-living tenancies where each person lives in their own flat and receives support with daily living, recreation and community access. **Linden** is a home for up to four children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, learning disabilities, and often complex histories of trauma, who require consistent support to recover, stabilise and prepare for their futures.

A colleague also highlighted to us that there are “*too many steps at Woodsmoor*”, making the station effectively unusable for many disabled and neurodivergent people.

For both services, step-free access, such as the installation of ramps, would significantly increase independence, safety and community participation. While we welcome its inclusion in the Delivery Plan, we remain concerned about the lack of clarity on when improvements will be delivered, and whether the lived experiences of disabled people will meaningfully shape the final design. We would strongly welcome the opportunity to be involved in future discussions to ensure that accessibility work at Woodsmoor genuinely reflects the needs of the children and adults we care for and support.

We welcome the inclusion of **Davenport train station** in the Delivery Plan. We have a Together Trust service close by - **Corbar Road** - which provides a home for up to five young people who are recovering from early life experiences and preparing for their future. Having an accessible local station is essential in supporting their confidence, independence and connection to their community.

“Davenport currently has steep steps to reach the platform towards Stockport, making it inaccessible for many disabled people. The platform towards Hazel Grove has wider steps that can accommodate bikes and pushchairs, but it is still a struggle for wheelchair users and many neurodivergent people who require predictable, step-free routes. As a result, I often have to use Heald Green or Stockport stations instead, both of which require additional bus or taxi travel, increasing cost and journey times”. **Together Trust colleague**

We welcome the inclusion of **Brinnington train station** in the Delivery Plan. We have a Together Trust service close by - **Berwick Day Service** - which supports adults with special needs through bespoke weekly programmes designed to build confidence, develop leisure skills and ensure regular access to the local community. For the people we support at Berwick, reliable and accessible public transport is essential for maintaining independence, social inclusion and community participation.

We welcome the inclusion of **Patricroft train station** in the Delivery Plan. We have a Together Trust service nearby, **Hastings Road**, a supported tenancy where we provide 24-hour care for two gentlemen with complex behavioural needs. Improving accessibility at Patricroft Station would make a meaningful difference - removing barriers to essential travel, reducing reliance on costly alternatives, and supporting the gradual development of independent travel skills.

Do you have any comments on the proposals in Map 3: Explore and develop?

This map includes longer-term transport priorities that will be subject to further investigation and development. Subject to final funding and business case approval, early delivery may be possible in some cases.

We welcome the inclusion of **Eccles train station** in the Delivery Plan; however, we are concerned that it currently sits within the longer-term transport priorities. Our closest service, **Portland Road**, supports two young men with autism who live in their own home and receive bespoke, person-centred support. Our team works to reduce barriers, build communication and develop leisure skills, helping them remain active and independent within their local community.

An accessible station would significantly improve their ability to travel safely and confidently. For the people we support, step-free, predictable and affordable travel is not optional - it is essential. We would strongly welcome the opportunity to be involved in future discussions to ensure that accessibility improvements at Eccles fully reflect the needs and lived experiences of disabled and neurodivergent people.

Do you think anything important is missing?

Yes

If yes, please provide more information on your answer.

We are disappointed to see that **Ashburys** and **Reddish South train stations** are **not** included in the Delivery Plan, despite both being critically important for the disabled young people and families we support.

Ashburys is the closest train station to Bridge College (0.3 miles away), our specialist college for students aged 16-25 with disabilities, complex health needs, learning disabilities and/or autism - yet the station is **completely inaccessible**.

The exclusion of Ashburys from the step-free access delivery plan raises serious equality implications. Ashburys is the nearest public rail access point for disabled students, yet many cannot use it at all due to multiple steep staircases.

In October 2023, Bridge College students and our campaigns team met **with Andy Burnham** as part of their Bridge Gives Back initiative and raised their concerns about Ashburys. A commitment was made to escalate the issue with Manchester City Council.

In January 2024, the Together Trust campaigns team and rail accessibility campaigner Nathaniel Yates visited Bridge College to gather evidence specifically on Ashburys.

Students and colleagues overwhelmingly expressed that:

- It is unfair that their nearest station is unusable.
- The station's inaccessibility blocks access to education, work experience and community life.
- Improving Ashburys is a basic equality and human rights issue - disabled young people should not be excluded from public transport.

According to **colleagues** who work at Bridge College:

“Some young people do not travel by train because the local station does not have a step-free access”.

“The lack of step-free access at Ashbury's station means that many of the students at Bridge College cannot use the train to access off-site trips or work experience. The students comment that it is unfair that they cannot access the train from college. Considering Ashbury's station is so close to an SEN college where there is a high need for an accessible station, it is disappointing that this is not a priority if local need is being considered in planning.”

“Make Ashburys accessible - it is a human right to be safe when travelling and not to be excluded from public services. It is a disgrace that this issue has been raised with the Mayor of GM and MPs and there are still no plans to adapt the station.”

“Anyone with a physical disability or mobility issues cannot use Ashburys station. This includes our students who then have to use other means of transport, often costly taxis just to get to their place education. The same applies to staff.”

Reddish South train station is close to our Together Trust service **Norvent**, a small therapeutic home for two children with complex needs. Step-free access at their local station would make a significant difference to independence, confidence and community participation. Its absence from the Delivery Plan is concerning for us.

Ashburys and Reddish South are critical access points for disabled and neurodivergent children and young people, and they must not be left behind.

We also recently raised this concern with a TfGM representative during the drop-in consultation at Manchester Library.

We urge GMCA and partners to:

- Reconsider and prioritise Ashburys and Reddish South for step-free access.
- Recognise the significant equality and inclusion implications of excluding stations so close to SEN services.
- Involve Together Trust and disabled young people directly in future planning discussions.

Do you have any general comments or suggestions, that haven't already been covered in your previous responses, about Greater Manchester's Transport Strategy 2050 and Delivery Plan?

Romiley train station is near our **Woodlands Short Breaks Service**, which supports children and young people with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, complex health needs, autism and sensory support needs. However, the station remains only partially accessible, which continues to limit safe and independent travel for many of the families we support. We are keen to understand whether any specific plans are being developed for Romiley - especially as it was ranked 45th in the 2022 Access for All funding list. We would be very happy to discuss this further and ensure that future improvements reflect the needs and lived experiences of disabled and neurodivergent young people who rely on the train station.

We urge GMCA and partners to prioritise step-free access and wider accessibility at the train stations mentioned in our response. Improving accessibility at these locations would remove significant barriers to travel and enable the disabled and neurodivergent people we support to make fuller use of local opportunities, travel independently and participate more fully in their communities. It would also support access to work experience, employment, education and training - aligning with wider government priorities around inclusive growth, improving labour market participation and reducing health and disability inequalities.

It is equally vital that disabled and neurodivergent young people are actively involved in shaping these decisions, with their lived experiences informing the design and delivery of accessible train stations. Their voices - alongside those of families, campaigners and frontline

staff - must be central to the process to ensure that no one is excluded or disadvantaged when travelling across Greater Manchester.

We would welcome the opportunity to be involved in future discussions to ensure that planned improvements genuinely reflect the needs of the people we support - including disabled and neurodivergent people, children and young people in care, and those with social, emotional and behavioural needs.

If you would like any additional information or wish to discuss this response in more detail, please contact:

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