

## Stroud Train Station

Date of visit: 29<sup>th</sup> August 2018

### **Experience**

My experience from start to finish with GWR was very poor. I called the assisted travel helpline over a week in advance to inform them of my planned journey and my requirements for the day, I arrived in plenty of time and went to customer services on arrival at Cheltenham Spa station. My PA spoke to customer services to inform them of my arrival and a member of staff followed me down to the platform and assisted me onto the train, the train had quite a few carriages and he took me down to the very last carriage.

As the train was arriving into Stroud train station an announcement was made that due to Stroud being a small station, passengers were only able to exit via the first few carriages. It is not possible to move from carriage to carriage if you are in a wheelchair as the aisles are not wide enough and I had been placed in a carriage that was not over a platform, meaning I could not exit the train. After speaking with the train manager, the only resolution was for me to travel all the way to Swindon and back again, by time I arrived back in Stroud this had added two hours to my journey.

This was quite an inconvenience as I had somebody waiting to meet me at Stroud, meaning they were left waiting for two hours. Other than the inconvenience, this could be very distressing for disabled passengers, particularly people with a mental disorder or somebody travelling alone without a PA or family member.

My return journey from Stroud to Cheltenham Spa wasn't much better. Due to the fact I was two hours delayed, I had missed my original train home. My PA spoke to a member of staff at Stroud station to advise them which train I would be boarding instead and that we would require wheelchair assistance on and off, the staff member advised us that they had called the train staff ahead to inform them of my requirements. As the time got closer to my train arrival time my PA went to find a member of staff to ensure they would be helping me on to the train, she was told that somebody would get off the train to assist me.

The train arrived and nobody got off to assist, my PA flagged the train manager down at the rear of the train to inform her we needed assistance. She was told they had not been made aware of the assistance required and due to the train already being delayed they could not help. My PA insisted that they helped us on to the train and briefly explained what had already happened earlier that day, after a somewhat heated conversation (all the time causing more of a delay) they assisted me on to the train.

### **Accessibility**

On arrival at Stroud station it is immediately obvious the accessibility issues you are faced with as a wheelchair user. It is a small train station with only 2 platforms, one either side of the station. There is a footbridge which is up a flight of stairs to take you from one platform to the other and there is no ramp or lift option. I looked around the station for some instruction on an alternative to get to the other side of the station other than the stairs, to

which I could find nothing. It was only after I was informed by a member of the public that there was a noticeboard on the outside of the station with some instruction, this is located close to where taxis are stationed and is not easy to see or get to.

On this noticeboard is a map on how to get to the other side by leaving the train station and heading towards the town centre, walking under an underpass and round to the other side of the station. There are several issues I faced whilst attempting this journey:

- Firstly, looking at the map it was not clear which side of the station I was on, a 'you are here' icon would be useful on the map on the noticeboard.
- The map is not very big, it was impossible for me to read with a sight impairment. Large printed options should be provided in the station for people to take.
- On the map it advises you to take the left-hand side pathway on Station Road, there is no dropped kerb to mount the pathway on this side making it physically impossible for most wheelchair users to use this path.
- Travelling along the right-hand side of the pathway we were faced with a mountain of rubbish which belonged to the flats above, a member of staff from a taxi office kindly helped us to move the rubbish bags which were swarming with flies.
- Following the map I then crossed the road along Russell Street on the left hand-side, when turning onto Rowcroft I was then faced with a dead end in terms of a footpath. Forcing me to turn around to try and find another route.
- I then travelled further along Rowcroft in the opposite direction to find a dropped kerb to cross the road safely. These roads are busy with lots of traffic, this could be quite daunting for somebody travelling alone in a wheelchair.
- Once you reach the bottom of Rowcroft which is a long steep decline you cross the road again to travel back up a steep incline on Cheapside, this long incline could be challenging or even impossible for somebody in a manual wheelchair.

This journey took between 10-15 minutes, if you arrived at the train station unaware of these problems you're faced with it would be easy to miss your train. Missing your planned train is more complicated as a wheelchair user than it is for a regular passenger as you need to call the assisted travel line ahead of time meaning they would be expecting you at the other end and you would also need to re-book the assisted travel for the next train you intend to board instead.

There is only one self-service ticket machine located within the station which is on platform 1, this would be inconvenient if you needed to buy a ticket from the station and travel from platform 2, this would require doing the 15-minute walk outside of the station and back again.

Ticket office opening times are as below, if you are travelling outside of these times and needed information for example on how to get to the other platform this would prove difficult. You can call the assisted travel line which is open 06:00am-11:00pm who are able to give some direction over the phone, however this is national line and not specific to Stroud so it is likely the operator will not have been to the station itself.

<b>Day</b>	<b>Opening Hours</b>
Weekdays	<b>06:00 - 18:00</b>
Saturday	<b>07:00 - 14:30</b>
Sunday	<b>09:45 - 17:00</b>

There is a help point on each platform, this is placed very close to the bin on platform 1 and not very easy to get to in a wheelchair.

### **Parking**

There is a car park on either side to the train station, each side having two disabled parking bays. You can park for free here with a blue badge permit, you are required to enter your registration at the machine and get a ticket.

### **Toilets**

There is a disabled toilet on platform 1 with a sign on the door 'key available from ticket office staff'. Meaning the toilet is out of use when the ticket office is closed. Inside the toilet is very spacious with plenty of room to turn your wheelchair around in and for somebody to assist you. The soap, toilet roll dispenser and hand towels are too high for somebody in a wheelchair. The handrails are at an appropriate height as well as the emergency cord, the lighting was sufficient, and the hygiene level was standard.

### **Café**

There was a café on platform 1 but this was not open when I visited. This would also be no good for passengers in a wheelchair travelling from platform 2 due to how long it would take them to get to the café.

### **Recommendations**

- If the only option for wheelchair users is to walk around to get from one platform to another, then a printed map should be available from the station
- It should be clearly signposted inside the station with a large universal disability sign so disabled passengers can easily see where they need to go for the information they need.
- Clearly sign posted when leaving the station how to get around for example 'Station disabled access this way'
- Extended platforms so all carriages can exit on the longer trains.
- The best option would be for a lift to be installed for disabled passengers to be able to use the footbridge, the same as you would find at Gloucester station.
- Another possible avenue to explore would be a ramped footbridge which could be installed the opposite end to the station. Similar to the bridge at Ashchurch station in Tewkesbury.
- A radar key for the disabled toilet so that it is always accessible for disabled passengers.