



## Draft Transport Accessibility Action Plan Consultation: UK Theatre and SOLT's response

### Why we are responding

The consultation states: *'For many people a lack of mobility or confidence in using the transport system is a barrier to employment, education, health care, and to a social life.'* Theatre is part of that employment, education and social life. Therefore, Society of London Theatre and UK Theatre welcome the Draft Transport Accessibility Action Plan.

One of the priorities set out in UK Theatre's business plan is to support the theatre and performing arts sector in making sure audiences and the theatre workforce include more D/deaf and disabled people (we take this phrase to include learning disabled people, those who are blind or partially sighted, and people with mental health issues).

We will work with our members on a programme of work which will include sign posting of resources, including transport information.

We have included a number of points in response to the consultation that impact on both those with transport access requirements that go to the theatre and those that work in them.

We recognise there are still many barriers to D/deaf and disabled people accessing theatre, and we would like to work with national and regional government to ensure that transport is not one of those barriers; and that their travel experiences are good.

### About us

- [SOLT](#) and [UK Theatre](#) are the trade associations and members' organisations representing the interests of those engaged in the production and presentation of medium to large-scale dramatic and lyric theatre in the UK. Their memberships are drawn from both subsidised and commercial theatre.
- The combined box office income of SOLT and UK Theatre's membership was more than £1 billion across London and the rest of the UK, with 34 million tickets sold in 2016.
- SOLT represents approximately 200 London-based producers, theatre owners and managers, including all the major subsidised theatrical organisations in London. SOLT also runs [OfficialLondonTheatre.com](#), the London Theatre Guide and publishes the Access London Guide, which highlights Accessible Performances across the West End
- UK Theatre represents approximately 220 theatres, concert halls, dance companies, producers and arts centres throughout the UK. UK Theatre also operates as a professional association, supporting over 1,000 individuals working professionally in theatre and the performing arts in the UK.

### What we'd like to see

- **Wherever possible public transport should be accessible**

*'It is hard to understate the importance of transport. If we cannot travel around our communities we cannot be a part of them. We cannot work or seek work, study, visit friends and family, be a part of faith communities, engage in sport, culture and leisure pursuits. Neither can we attend to the basics of everyday life like shopping for food, attending medical*

*appointments, and gain other support we need. All the things that every citizen has a right to expect are denied us.*<sup>1</sup>

We'd like the Government to ensure that D/deaf and disabled people, and those with access requirements such as elderly people, are able to use public transport easily; and that they are able to get to and from the theatre if they desire, whether to work, to see something, to volunteer, or take part in something.

We agree with the consultation that it is important to unlock '*the barriers to employment for disabled*' and the above quote from Derbyshire Mind describes well the reasons why we agree.

### **Good information, in a variety of ways**

We particularly found Radar's [Doing Transport Differently](#) a useful starting place on good information – ensuring that people with access requirements can plan their journeys and travel with confidence.

We'd also like to highlight that, people need to access information in different ways too. An example of this is that there is a need for information at transport hubs such as bus stops and rail stations etc. to be provided in different formats. For instance, at the moment, a Deaf person at a railway station often has no way of being alerted to platform changes, as these often last-minute announcements are usually made over a speaker system.

### **Everyone should be able to access the UK's rich cultural life**

The UK's creative industries continue to outgrow the rest of the economy generating £87.4bn during 2015<sup>2</sup> and therefore we were encouraged to see the Creative Industries named as one of the five early sector deals in the Industrial Strategy Green Paper.

Arts and culture, including theatre and the performing arts contribute much to Britain's future prosperity, national identity and to both national growth and also local growth, directly through employment, and through attracting visitors to areas which develop satellite businesses and infrastructure around theatres – including restaurants and transport.

Theatre is central to the UK's international image and soft power, and brings benefits to the wider creative economy and we are rightly proud in the UK of our dynamic and world leading theatre industry. However, for the sector to continue to make a strong contribution to the creative industries, we need to make sure that our sector's needs and those that work within them and visit them are heard and represented.

### **Night-time Economy - travelling**

Theatre and the performing arts are a crucial part of the night-time economy across the UK. Theatre contributes to the cultural identity of a place at night, often setting the tone for a location, and in addition often leads to financial health of a locality – both directly and through secondary spend and employment in the hospitality trade. Night after night, incredible work is performed on, off and around stages, representing movement of leisure and work travellers.

We want to ensure there is safe and accessible transport infrastructure to get those who work in or visit the theatre there during night-time hours. Further to this, we urge the Government to remember that this does not just apply to cities, but rural communities and towns too. Visiting the theatre should not just be limited to those living in cities. Rural

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.derbyshiremind.org.uk/pdf/MHPublicTransportReport.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thecreativeindustries.co.uk/uk-creative-overview/news-and-views/news-creative-industries-add-%C2%A3874bn-to-uk-economy>

services may be able to get someone who works in theatre there, but they also need to be able to get home at the end of the evening.

### **The Purple Pound and theatre**

We want to ensure that the UK's transport system allows everyone to visit and work in theatres. Aside from what people will gain culturally and educationally from these engagements, the economy also stands to benefit. We agree with the draft plan, that the *'lack of access to transport and the built environment can result in shops and businesses missing out on this potential revenue and can mean the choice and opportunity for disabled people is reduced.'* It is also important to think about this in light of Visit Britain's figures that *'more than one in six people in England and Wales have an 'activity limiting' health problem or disability. British and international visitors from this market segment currently spend over £3 billion on overnight tourism trips in England each year.'*<sup>3</sup>

### **The whole package**

We would also agree with Visit Britain that all businesses, and that would include transport businesses, both in person and online, need to make reasonable adjustments to: Customer service and training; Information and marketing and Physical facilities.<sup>4</sup>

### **Tourism**

We would like to see that as part of the Plan, the Government thinks not just about UK tourism, but about international tourists with access needs too, and not just in capitals, but across towns and rural areas up and down the country. We know that when tourists visit the UK, they visit theatre in London - Shakespeare's Globe is in the top 20 paid for attractions; but they also visit the regions – for instance Mac Birmingham was in the top 20 free visitor attractions in 2016<sup>5</sup>.

Moreover, famous theatres such as The Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford Upon Avon, The Minack in Cornwall or the Pitlochry Festival Theatre for example, should also be easily accessed.

This also means that whether a tourist has an access requirement or not, they should be able to travel confidently and easily between cities, and not just to and from London, especially as the development of cultural clusters and hubs in the regions develop. For instance trips within the Northern Powerhouse: people visiting Hull's City of Culture may then want to go across to Liverpool's Maritime Museum.

### **Coaches**

We urge the Government to think about private coaches as part of their strategy. We know that coaches are a popular way for groups to visit theatres. We would like to see joined-up thinking between coach companies and other publicly-owned transport systems.

SOLT are working closely with Westminster Council, as well as Transport For London and the Coach providers to facilitate working together.

### **Accessible Streets**

It is great that there are plans to make certain parts of the UK vehicle free, however, there is also a knock on effect in terms of streets being accessible; it impacts on people being able to easily access theatres. This impacts taxis as well as public transport. We urge the Government to consider what these changes mean for people with access requirements.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.visitbritain.org/providing-access-all>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.visitbritain.org/providing-access-all>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.visitbritain.org/annual-survey-visits-visitor-attractions-latest-results>

There is also then the potential for streets surrounding pedestrianised areas, to be difficult to access for disabled people.

### **Parking and Theatres**

SOLT are working to include in The London Theatre Guide<sup>6</sup> parking bays for disabled drivers and to highlight all the level access drop off points at each theatre, to make it easier for drop offs. In light of this, it would be good to see cities across the UK working on digital assets to show where best drop-offs are for those that require disabled access.

### **Systems Approach**

This consultation does not stand alone; it should be seen as part of the wider movement to ensure that D/deaf and disabled people do not meet barriers when accessing work and support to work, such as through Access to Work and PIP.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.londontheatre.co.uk/theatres/theatreland-map>