Locomotion -
The National Railway Museum at Shildon: Ensuring access for all
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With a notable proportion of their visitors over 60, Locomotion embarked on a journey to improve accessibility, helping to ensure that every visitor has the best possible experience and visits again.

Locomotion is a large, partially open-air attraction that houses over 60 vehicles. It has a number of refurbished historic buildings plus an eco-friendly ‘Collection’ building.

Museum Manager, George Muirhead talks about their approach to improving the quality of the visitor experience.
What did you do to make the facilities more accessible?

The first thing was access from the car parks to the museum. We have three car parks on the site and one is quite a distance away. So we introduced an accessible bus, with four wheelchair spaces, which brings visitors right to the entrance of the museum.

Six wheelchairs are available to book in advance at both ends of the site. Anyone with limited mobility and elderly visitors who may get tired can use these wheelchairs.

The train exhibits can be quite high and difficult to view. So we have built platforms for visitors to walk along at door height.

The museum also runs a passenger-carrying railway. As you would imagine, old railway carriages are not particularly easy to make accessible. However, a Friend of the Museum, who is a wheelchair user, recommended an appropriate ramp, which we bought from a local supplier. So now all visitors can board the train and ride without having to get out of their wheelchairs.

“We have provided an accessible ramp, in addition to steps, so that all visitors can access and experience the exhibits”

“We have provided an accessible ramp, in addition to steps, so that all visitors can access and experience the exhibits”

“In the past a wheelchair user came up to the wrong door and had to turn around and go to the other. We have now set them so they open automatically both ways”
How do you make information about the museum accessible?

Intellectual access is another key consideration and our website has achieved AAA standard. There’s information about access on the website as well as in our standard information leaflet. Visitors can download a pdf of this in large type from the website and the leaflet is also available in braille.

A visually impaired visitor offered to transcribe the museum’s Explainers’ Information Pack into braille. Two copies are available on request at our reception desks. This means that visitors who have a visual impairment are able to read about our exhibits.

How can businesses learn good practice on accessibility?

Go and visit other attractions to see what everyone else is doing. You can usually learn something, even if you might need to change it to work for your own business. These are ‘free’ ideas and don’t need to become major projects.

Who worked with you to make Locomotion more accessible?

Our partner, the National Railway Museum at York has a permanent Access Advocate whose role is to look at new developments from an accessibility point of view. He came to the museum to advise us when it was being set up.

How do your staff help to make Locomotion more accessible?

All our staff are encouraged to be friendly, help in a common sense way and take into account the needs of all visitors. Everyone has been on a Welcome Host course and more are attending Welcome All.

“We were careful to make the size of text on our displays as big as possible”

“Go and visit other attractions to see what everyone else is doing”
What else is Locomotion planning?
We have received a grant from MLA North East for a sensory garden to include plants that would naturally grow around railways.

We are planning better signage to tell visitors that one car park is a five-minute walk to the main museum; signs will also point visitors with limited mobility to other car parks nearer the main site. We will also change the path from ash to tarmac and remodel the ramp.

What advice would you give to businesses wanting to be more accessible?
Don’t say that you’ve ‘done’ access and that it’s finished. You need to look regularly at how visitors use your attraction and ask: if we changed something how would it improve the visitor experience?

There are benefits for everyone. Someone with a disability is as equally entitled to have as good a day out as everyone else. Also, it’s in your own interests as a business to make sure every visitor has the best possible time, so they will come again.

“'It's in your own interests as a business to make sure every visitor has the best possible time, so they will come again’

Visit www.nrm.org.uk
For guidance on how to improve accessibility please visit www.visitengland.org/access