

# All aboard?

**R N I B**

Cymru

Golwg gwahanol  
See differently

**The challenges faced by blind and partially sighted bus users in Wales.**





Executive Summary

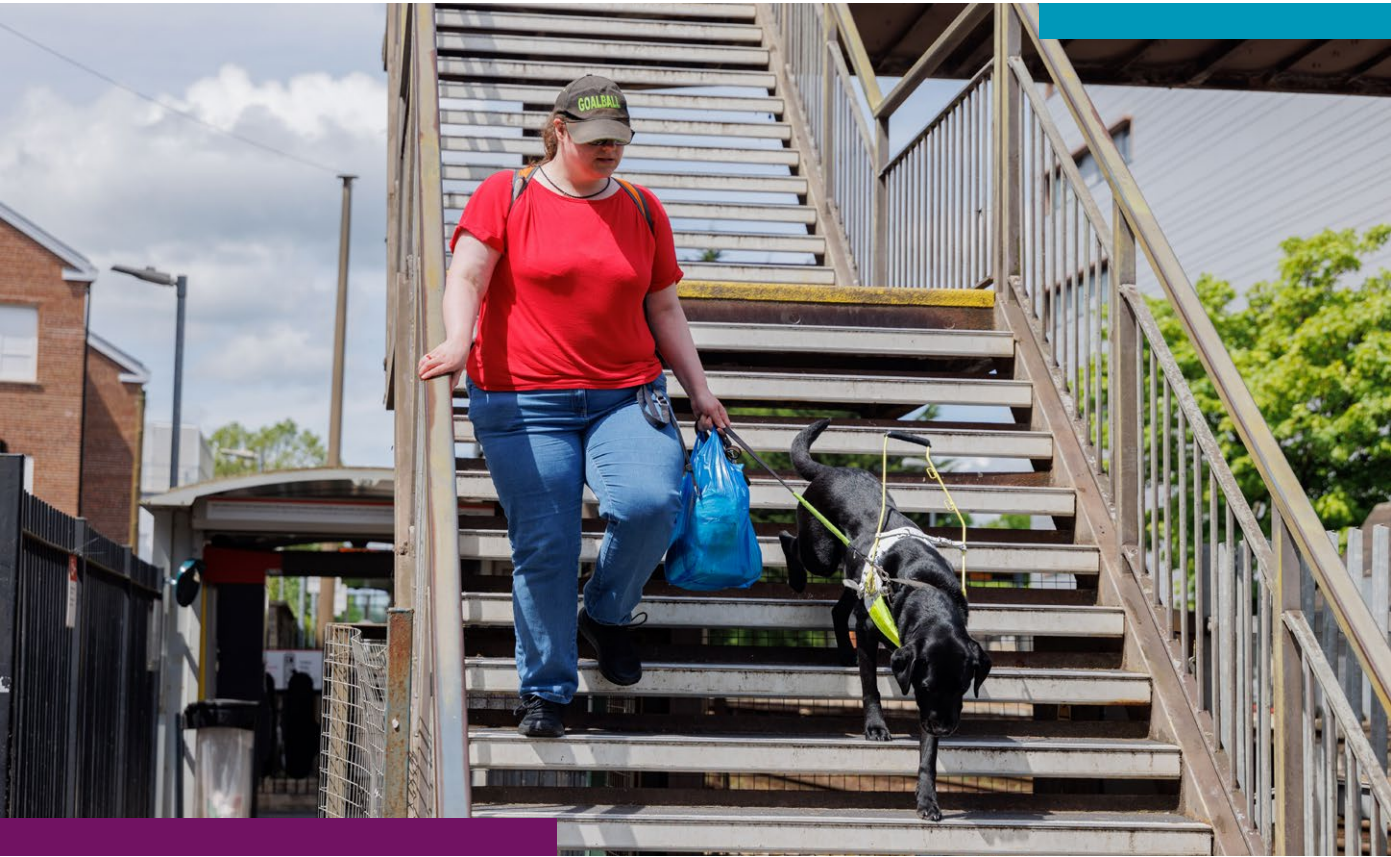
Bus travel is a lifeline for blind and partially sighted people. Sight loss affects a person’s ability to drive or cycle independently, so they have fewer transport options available to them.

For many, buses are their only way of accessing services, getting to work, meeting family and friends and connecting with their communities.

Blind and partially sighted people in Wales are far more likely to use buses than the general population.<sup>1</sup> Nearly half travel by bus several times a week and a quarter travel at least three times a month.

However, we know that making a journey by bus poses unique challenges to passengers with sight loss. In 2024, RNIB Cymru surveyed 146 blind and partially sighted people from across Wales to understand their experiences of travelling by bus. We aimed to identify common trends, pinpoint specific challenges they face and develop suggestions for how their journeys could be improved.

Our research showed that just one in ten people with sight loss were able to make all of the journeys they want or need to by bus. Nearly half (43 per cent) find making familiar bus journeys either fairly or very difficult and this rose to nearly nine in ten (87 per cent) for unfamiliar journeys.



This is due to barriers that occur at each stage of a bus users’ journey, including:

Journey planning

- Finding real-time, accessible information about bus services and timetables to plan journeys is challenging.
- Bus operator apps and websites are incompatible with assistive technology, including screen readers.
- A lack of non-digital journey planning tools.

Getting to the bus stop and catching the bus

- Difficulty with walking routes to and from bus stop and identifying bus stop locations.
- Dangerous bus stop designs force pedestrians to cross a cycleway to get on or off a bus.

On board accessibility

- Audio announcements, which are vital to help passengers identify the correct stop, are not reliably available and often of poor quality.
- Inconsistencies in bus designs and layouts, including poor lighting and insufficient priority seating areas with space for guide dogs.

Driver and passenger behaviour

- Bus drivers often lack awareness of how to support passengers with sight loss.
- Other bus passengers can be both a help and a hindrance to blind and partially sighted people in bus journeys.

Respondents reported that these issues reduce their confidence to travel and ultimately prevent them from making essential journeys. But, with a renewed focus on improving Wales’ national bus network, there’s never been a better time to tackle these barriers. The Bus Services

(Wales) Bill is the perfect opportunity for Welsh Government and Transport for Wales, as well as local authorities, Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) and bus operators, to come together to create an inclusive and accessible bus network for Wales.

<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government (2024) [Transport \(National Survey for Wales\): April 2022 to March 2023](#).



# The entire end to end bus journey needs to be reimagined with accessibility in mind. We need:



Accessible journey planning tools that integrate seamlessly with assistive technologies and allow blind and partially sighted people to plan with confidence.



Safe, obstruction free walking routes to enable people to get to and from bus stops with ease.



Consistent, inclusively designed vehicles and bus stop infrastructure to promote familiarity and enable independent navigation.



Reliable on-board accessibility features and supportive drivers to make it easy for people to reach their end destination.

Inclusive design is better design for everyone: people with sight loss, other disabled people, older people, people with children, and ultimately for all who wish to use buses.

## Key findings and recommendations

### 1. Journey planning

**Finding real-time, accessible information about bus services and timetables to plan journeys is challenging.**

Making the decision to take a bus journey should be straightforward, but it's often the point at which blind and partially sighted people encounter their first hurdle. Nearly two thirds (64 per cent) of the people we surveyed said that bus timetables are inaccessible and just two per cent said they can read timetables at the bus stop.

With a lack of accessible information available before travelling, one in four (25 per cent) blind and partially sighted people turn to friends or family to read this information for them and one in five (20 per cent) simply go to a bus stop and hope that a bus arrives. This problem is compounded by the fact that an overwhelming majority of survey respondents (85 per cent) do not feel they are given adequate notice of cancelled or rescheduled buses.

**Bus operator apps and websites are incompatible with assistive technology, including screen readers.**

Bus operators are increasingly using digital platforms, including websites and apps, to share bus schedules. When designed correctly, digital platforms can enable blind and partially sighted people to access information in the format of their choice.

Currently many transport websites and apps aren't designed with accessibility in mind. 38 per cent of respondents that use apps and 34 per cent that use websites for planning bus journeys said they were either fairly or very difficult to use. Many said they were incompatible with the assistive technologies like screen readers or magnification software. Others reported barriers created by inaccessible designs such as small font, low contrast text and the use of images without image descriptions to present information.



"I would prefer to use an app, but it doesn't work with a screen reader so it's impossible."

**RNIB Cymru bus survey respondent**

The One Network, One Timetable, One Ticket approach set out in the Bus Services (Wales) Bill provides an opportunity to standardise the provision of journey planning information across the whole bus network. Making this information available in an accessibly designed, real time digital journey planner, that works seamlessly with assistive technology, would be a game changer for most blind and partially sighted passengers.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are an internationally recognised set of standards which explain how to make web content accessible to a wide range of disabled people.<sup>2</sup> However, most websites are still not WCAG compliant.<sup>3</sup> The Welsh Government and Transport for Wales must make sure that any future bus

journey planning apps and websites are accessible by default, using WCAG as a framework. Blind and partially sighted people must be involved in the development and testing of these technologies to ensure a seamless user experience.

**A lack of non-digital journey planning tools**

While accessibly designed digital journey planning tools are a vital enabler for many blind and partially sighted people, we know that people with sight loss are less likely to be daily internet users than non-disabled people. In fact, 28 per cent say they either have never used the internet or do not have access to it.<sup>4</sup> Consideration must be given to this significant minority who rely on non-digital means to plan their bus journeys.

**Our recommendations to improve journey planning**

**RNIB Cymru call on the Welsh Government to:**

- Legislate to ensure all digital information about bus services on the national network adheres to the WCAG 2.2. 'AA' accessibility standard as a minimum.

- Require all bus operators who are awarded contracts to deliver services on the bus network to give passenger information including timetables, route details and changes to services in accessible formats such as large and giant print, braille, audio, and accessible digital files.

<sup>2</sup> W3C (2023), [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.2](#).  
<sup>3</sup> WebAIM (2025), [The WebAIM Million. The 2025 report on the accessibility of the top 1,000,000 home pages](#).  
<sup>4</sup> RNIB (2024), [Sight Loss and Technology](#)

**RNIB Cymru call on Transport for Wales to:**

- Make sure content on journey planning apps and websites is compatible with assistive technology, contains alternative text for images, captions for videos, audio descriptions for multimedia elements and supports offline functionality.
- Design digital ticket purchasing systems to accommodate screen readers and assistive technology, maintaining options to purchase physical tickets in person, on board, and at staffed service points.

- Work with blind and partially sighted people to co-design digital services.
- Offer real-time information on bus arrivals, route changes, and cancellations in a range of accessible formats, not just visual maps.
- Ensure all social media content is inclusive by following [RNIB's Top Tips for Accessible Social Media](#).
- Create accessible feedback channels for blind and partially sighted passengers to report any issues they encounter.

**2. Getting to the bus stop and catching the bus**

**Difficulty with walking routes to and from bus stop and identifying bus stop locations.**

Walking to a bus stop or station is as much a part of the journey as riding the bus, but more than half (57 per cent) of respondents to our survey told us that they find getting to bus stations either fairly or very difficult.

Street clutter and pavement obstacles have a significant impact on blind and partially sighted people's ability to find their way to a bus stop. Our research found that four out of five (82 per cent) had collided with an obstacle in the street in the three months leading up to November 2024.<sup>5</sup> E-scooters, pavement parking, advertising boards and street furniture were some of the most common obstacles.

"I am unfamiliar with the route [to the bus stop] as there has been a lot of building work over the last few years and I have avoided the area I therefore lack confidence and need refamiliarisation to learn where crossings and street furniture is."

**RNIB Cymru bus survey respondent**

<sup>5</sup> RNIB (2024) [E-scooters and dockless bikes ridden and left on pavements raises collision concerns for blind and partially sighted people](#)



Others reported unsafe road crossings as a key reason that they don't make all the bus journeys that they would like to. The most accessible crossings are signal-controlled, with pushbutton boxes allowing pedestrians to request traffic to stop and audio or tactile feedback to let pedestrians know when it's their turn to cross.

More than half (51 per cent) of respondents said that they had difficulty finding the correct bus stop when making familiar bus journeys. This rose to 61 per cent when making unfamiliar journeys. Reasons for this include obstructed views, lack of tactile paving and signage being too high or too small to read.

"It's really difficult to find bus stops as they are sometimes just a sign at the top of a pole and therefore very easy to miss."

**RNIB Cymru bus survey respondent**

The design of bus stops and stations can also cause access challenges. A fifth (22 per cent) said there was no shelter at their local bus stop, meaning they often had trouble locating it. Two thirds (67 per cent) said bus timetables at bus stops are not accessible to them. Improved lighting, large text, clear print timetables and audiovisual displays at bus stops with live updates

were identified by respondents as additional measures that would make bus travel much more accessible.

**Dangerous bus stop designs force pedestrians to cross a cycleway to get on or off a bus.**

Added to these challenges are new trends in bus stop design which incorporate cycle tracks at bus stops. These new styles of bus stop, known as floating bus stops, bus stop islands, or shared-use bus boarders, mean that cycleways run parallel to and intersect with bus stops, requiring passengers to cross a live cycle track to board and alight from a bus. They often lack vital accessibility features like tactile paving, demarcated kerbs, and signal-controlled crossing points.

These, and other shared use street designs, put blind and partially sighted people in real danger of collision with silent, fast-moving vehicles that they can't detect. Sadly, many blind and partially sighted people have told us they have lost confidence getting out and about, choosing not to use buses in areas where these bus stops have been installed<sup>6,7</sup>

Inclusive street and transport design is better for everyone, enabling whole communities to enjoy their area safely. Routes to and from bus stops should be kept free from obstacles, be well lit and contain accessible, pedestrian controlled crossings where possible to reduce barriers to bus stop access. All vehicles, including bikes, e-bikes and e-scooters, must be physically separated from pedestrians including at bus stops.

<sup>6</sup> Wales Online (28 December 2023), ["The genuine difficulty of walking around a city like Cardiff when you're blind."](#)

<sup>7</sup> BBC Cymru Fyw (29 September 2023), ["Council 'putting blind people at risk' with road changes."](#)

"In my area some bus stops have cycle lanes where passengers get off the bus. I can't see if I am walking into a cyclist as they weave through the waiting crowd of people in the cycle lane. This should not be allowed."

**RNIB Cymru bus survey respondent**

## Our recommendations to make catching the bus easier

### **RNIB Cymru call on the Welsh Government to:**

- Incorporate [RNIB Cymru's Key Principles of Inclusive Street Design](#) into all relevant guidance and standards relating to public realm and transport design.
- Fulfil their previous commitment to introduce a national ban pavement parking.

### **RNIB Cymru call on Transport for Wales to:**

- Develop consistent designs for bus stops, interchanges and stations that will be installed across the national network. These designs must include full accessibility features like tactile paving, audiovisual announcements and passenger information displays, high tonal and colour contrast, clear print and braille signage, tactile maps and wayfinding.
- In the interim, provide physical bus timetables at all bus stations in large, high contrast print as standard.
- Consider a tactile paving design to be used to detect bus stops, tactile ways to distinguish bus stop flags from lamp posts and other similar street furniture.

### **RNIB Cymru call on local authorities and CJs to:**

- Follow [RNIB Cymru's Key Principles of Inclusive Street Design](#) when developing new street designs, particularly in areas near bus stops.
- Stop building any shared-use bus stops, where passengers must cross or stand in a live cycle lane to get on or off a bus.
- Existing bus stops layouts which intersect with cycle lanes should be retrofitted to allow full accessibility features, such as detectable kerbs, tactile paving, clear signage, high tonal and colour contrast, and any crossing points must be signal-controlled.
- Monitor and maintain pavement quality in the areas surrounding bus stops.
- Minimise street obstacles (such as overhanging greenery, poorly placed street furniture and pavement parking) in the areas surrounding bus stops.
- Improve lighting at bus stops for their detectability, personal safety and to help bus drivers identify waiting passengers who may not be able to flag down the bus they need.

### 3. On Board Accessibility

**Audio announcements, which are vital to help passengers identify the correct stop, are not reliably available and often of poor quality.**

Even on board buses, blind and partially sighted passengers continue to face barriers that can significantly impact their travel experience.

wrong destination or missing their stop, causing inconvenience, delays and anxiety.

**Inconsistencies in bus designs and layouts, including poor lighting and insufficient priority seating areas with space for guide dogs.**

"One huge issue that I keep encountering as a blind person which I find highly frustrating and inconsiderate is the fact that the audio announcements on the bus which tells you which stop you are at each time are rarely switched on... I think all buses should have audio announcements switched on by default... That would definitely encourage me to catch the buses and travel independently or with minimal assistance."

**RNIB Cymru bus survey respondent**

A lack of on-board audio announcements is a major concern. Eight out of ten (80 per cent) blind and partially sighted people responded that audio announcements are "never, rarely, or sometimes" available. Only two per cent report always having access to audio announcements.

Among respondents who said that the buses they use do have audio announcements, one in three (35 per cent) reported that these were not at a suitable volume and of good sound quality.

When buses don't have audio announcements, blind and partially sighted passengers risk arriving at the

Inclusive bus design relies on several important factors, including lighting, accessible signage, and seating arrangements.

Appropriate lighting is essential for ensuring all passengers, particularly those with low vision, can navigate the bus safely. Consistent bus design and layout helps passengers with sight loss find an appropriate seat confidently. Signage and visual display units must present information in audio form or with high contrast, large font size or tactile features to be accessible. Advertising should be separated from important travel information so as not to make it difficult for passengers to find essential information.

It's also important that priority seating is available alongside clearly marked spaces for guide dogs. When asked what bus operators can do

to make their journey on board the bus accessible, one respondent commented:

"Consistent design of buses, so that I know where to find the seat which has the right amount of space for my guide dog. Designing seats with assistance dogs in mind."

**RNIB Cymru bus survey respondent**

### Our recommendations to improve on-board accessibility

#### **RNIB Cymru call on the Welsh Government to:**

- Require all bus operators that are awarded contracts to deliver services on the national network to provide consistent audio announcements on board their buses.

#### **RNIB Cymru call on Transport for Wales to:**

- Work proactively with bus operators and vehicle manufacturers to ensure buses have a consistent design across the network, including key elements such as tactile indicators and evenly distributed lighting, standardising the placement of colour contrasted card readers, and ensuring that accessible priority seating is suitable and comfortable for guide dogs.

#### **RNIB Cymru call on local authorities and CJs to:**

- Implement clear and consistent audio announcements on all buses in line with the duties of the Public Service Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023.
- Ensure audio-visual announcements are clear and audible throughout the bus.
- Promote respectful use of priority seating through signage and public information campaigns.





## 4. Driver and passenger behaviour

### Bus drivers often lack awareness of how to support passengers with sight loss.

An overwhelming majority of respondents (71 per cent) feel that bus drivers lack suitable training to support blind and partially sighted people. Among those who require assistance when boarding, more than half (52 per cent) rate the help they receive as “not very helpful” or “not at all helpful”. 39 per cent of respondents said they find drivers not very or not at all reliable at calling out their stop and 63 per cent said they cannot rely on drivers to alert if bus stops in a different place.

“I have often gone way past my destination because drivers did not stop for me or got annoyed as I had not pressed the button to stop the bus at the next stop or stand in the gangway so the driver could see me wanting to get off.”

**RNIB Cymru bus survey respondent**

41 per cent of respondents emphasised the need for improved driver awareness and attitudes. Respondents highlighted key points during bus journeys that they felt drivers should give assistance to blind and partially sighted passengers:

- stopping for all passengers waiting at bus stops.

- helping passengers find priority seating areas.
- helping passengers find card readers and scanners.
- waiting for passengers to be seated before pulling away.
- making sure accessible priority seats are available for those that need them.
- alerting passengers to stops and route changes if audio announcements are not working.

It is important to acknowledge that some respondents reported positive experiences.

“I've had various road events interrupt journeys over the years, and I cannot recall an incident where the bus driver hasn't done everything he or she can to help me get alternative routes.”

**RNIB Cymru bus survey respondent**

### Other bus passengers can be both a help and a hindrance to blind and partially sighted people in bus journeys.

Public attitudes towards blind and partially sighted passengers play a crucial role in their experience on buses. Negotiating priority seating can be particularly challenging, as passengers with sight loss often face

reluctance or lack of awareness, particularly because it is often a hidden disability. One in five (22 per cent) who told us that their regular bus journeys were either fairly or very difficult highlighted the attitudes of fellow passengers as a contributing factor.

Conversely, positive public attitudes can significantly help, encouraging those who don't require priority seating to move voluntarily without being asked. General awareness of the importance of supporting individuals

with sight loss is essential. Blind and partially sighted people also report other passengers being helpful when they require assistance to pay, find a seat, or know when their stop is approaching.

Passengers should be aware that they shouldn't distract or pet guide dogs while they are working. Fellow passengers help to create an inclusive and supportive atmosphere, can greatly improve travel experiences of blind and partially sighted passengers.

## Our recommendations for how drivers and fellow passengers can help improve blind and partially sighted people's bus journeys.

### RNIB Cymru call on bus operators to:

- Give regular disability equality training to drivers so that they understand passenger accessibility needs, focusing on the specific challenges faced by people with sight loss.
- Require drivers to stop at any bus stop where people are waiting, even if they haven't indicated an intention to board the bus.
- Communicate, either verbally or through audiovisual announcements, the number and destination of the bus as passengers board.
- Communicate diversions, breakdowns, and other disruptions to all passengers.

- Tell blind or partially sighted passengers where scanners, card readers and available priority seats are.
- Encourage other passengers to offer priority seats to blind and partially sighted passengers.

RNIB Cymru offers “Swap With Me” sessions to any bus operator to give drivers and blind and partially sighted people the opportunity to experience what a bus journey is like from each other's perspective.

### RNIB Cymru call on bus passengers to:

- Offer help to blind and partially sighted passengers with things like finding a seat, advocating for them getting a priority seat or communicating important information like bus numbers and stops.



# Conclusion

**A truly accessible bus network would make a world of difference to blind and partially sighted people, expanding their opportunities, promoting their independence and enhancing their quality of life.**

Upcoming bus reform in Wales presents a timely opportunity to fundamentally re-design the national bus network and bus travel accessible by default. The Welsh Government’s stated ambition is to create a bus network that puts people first by providing one network, one timetable and one ticket across

the whole of Wales. This will only be achieved if inclusive design principles and accessibility are at the heart of these reforms.

We have an opportunity to make Wales a place that blind and partially sighted people are proud to call home, that supports their ambitions and allows them to live a full and active life.

RNIB Cymru are on hand to support you to make this vision a reality.



# Methodology

**This report presents highlights of the findings from an online survey carried out by RNIB Cymru in 2024. The survey asked blind and partially sighted people about their experiences using buses across Wales.**



79 per cent of respondents said they were formally registered and held a Certificate of Visual Impairment.

34 per cent were registered sight impaired (partially sighted) and 45 per cent as severely sight impaired (blind).

16 per cent said they had a vision impairment but were not registered and three per cent responded 'other' when asked about their vision impairment status.

Most respondents used at least one mobility aid and some used a combination. The most common including some form of cane (68 per cent), walking sticks (20 per cent), and Guide Dogs (17 per cent), with another group (19 per cent) using GPS or other mobile apps.

50 per cent of respondents live in semi-rural areas. 41 per cent live in urban areas and nine per cent live in rural areas.

13 per cent of survey respondents were between the ages of 18 and 35

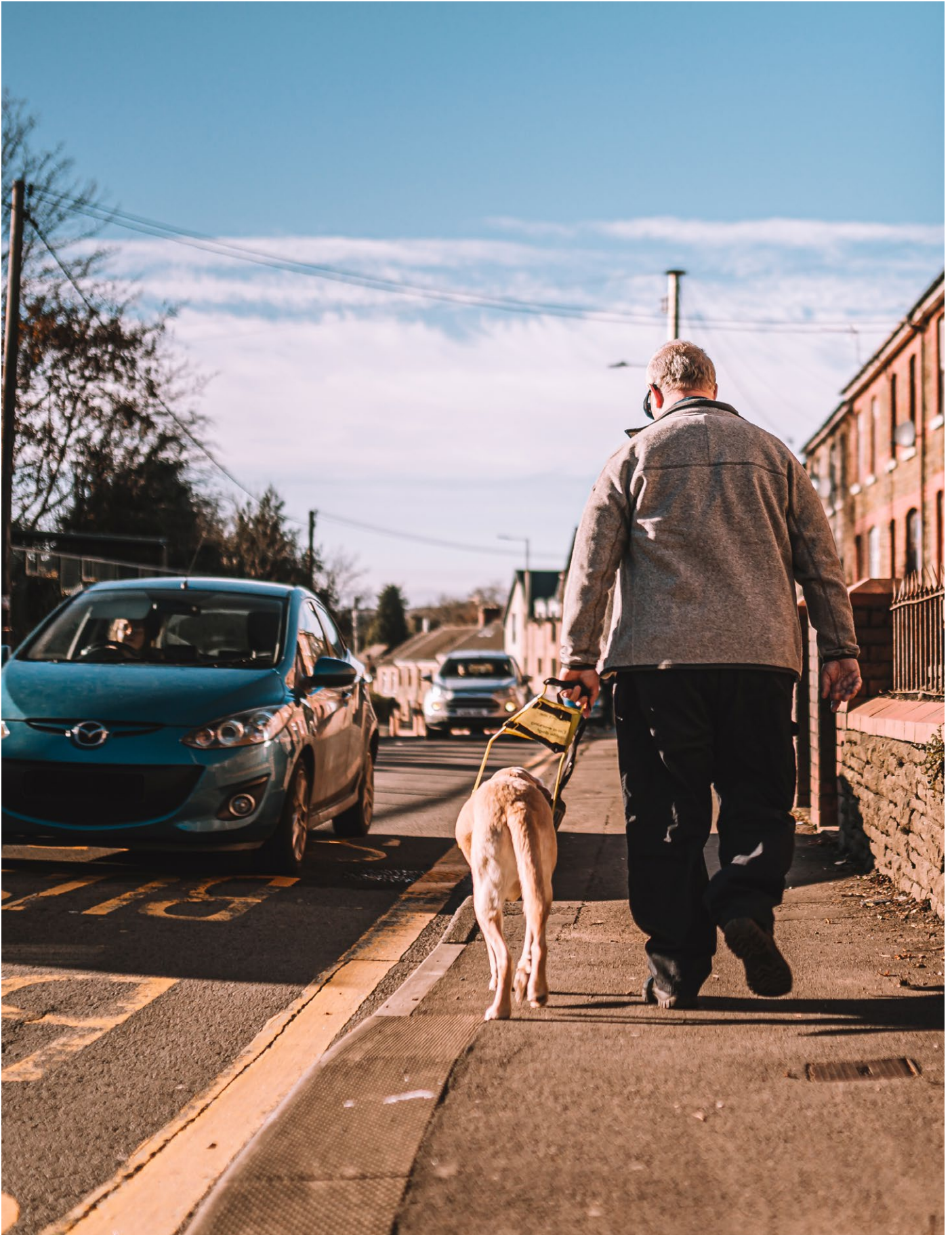
20 per cent were between the ages of 35 and 54.

26 per cent between the ages of 55 and 64.

41 per cent were over 65.

This was a self-selecting online survey advertised largely through email and social media; therefore it's likely to leave out the experience of those people with sight loss who are digitally excluded and do not use the internet.





cymru@rnib.org.uk |  @RNIBCymru |  @RNIBCymru

© RNIB registered charity in England and Wales (226227), Scotland (SCO39316), Isle of Man (1226).  
Also operating in Northern Ireland.