

Bus station app for visually impaired a first in Surrey

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Surrey County Council is now the first UK local authority to provide a new app to help guide blind and partially sighted passengers around bus stations across the county.

The Aira Explorer app allows customers to place a video call with a trained visual interpreter on speakerphone, who looks through the person's smartphone camera to guide them around the bus station.

The service is now operating at bus stations in Guildford, Redhill, Staines and Woking.

All app usage at these locations will be free of charge, provided by Surrey County Council using some of its allocation from the Government's Bus Service Improvement Fund.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth at Surrey County Council, said:

"We're very aware that using buses and navigating bus stations can sometimes be difficult for people with visual impairments. We're keen to make bus travel accessible for everyone and hope this will support people with sight loss to travel confidently and independently.

As well as helping blind and partially sighted bus users to locate their bus, interpreters can also direct them to a member of staff for assistance, read the timetable for them or explain the way into town.

This initiative is part of our wider investment in buses which also includes £6.3m to provide more ultra-low and zero emission community transport minibuses, £9m in bus priority measures to ensure Surrey buses turn up on time, and £1.4m in improving information for passengers at bus stops. Our Surrey LINK card gives young people half-price bus travel and we've expanded our on-demand Surrey Connect bus services to cover areas where there are limited fixed bus routes, giving more options to travel by bus for all residents right across Surrey.

We've worked with Govia Thameslink Railway, Sight for Surrey, the Sussex Sight Loss Council and the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People to get this trial underway, which we hope to extend if it proves popular."

The app is being launched as part of **Better Transport Week**, the annual celebration of how better transport can help connect communities and bring people together. This year, the week takes place from 16 to 22 June and is funded by the UK Government.

Ben Curtis from Campaign for Better Transport, which organises Better Transport Week, said:

"Good public transport networks help connect us to the people we love, the things we need and the places that matter. That's why I'm really pleased to see first-hand how Surrey County Council is working to improve the local bus network. Buses are key to keeping us connected, and the new Aira app will help ensure that everyone can access and use the county's buses, building a fairer future for everyone."

This initiative follows a successful roll out by Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), who have also partnered with Aira.io to support visually impaired passengers get around their rail network more confidently.

More information is available on the Surrey County Council website.