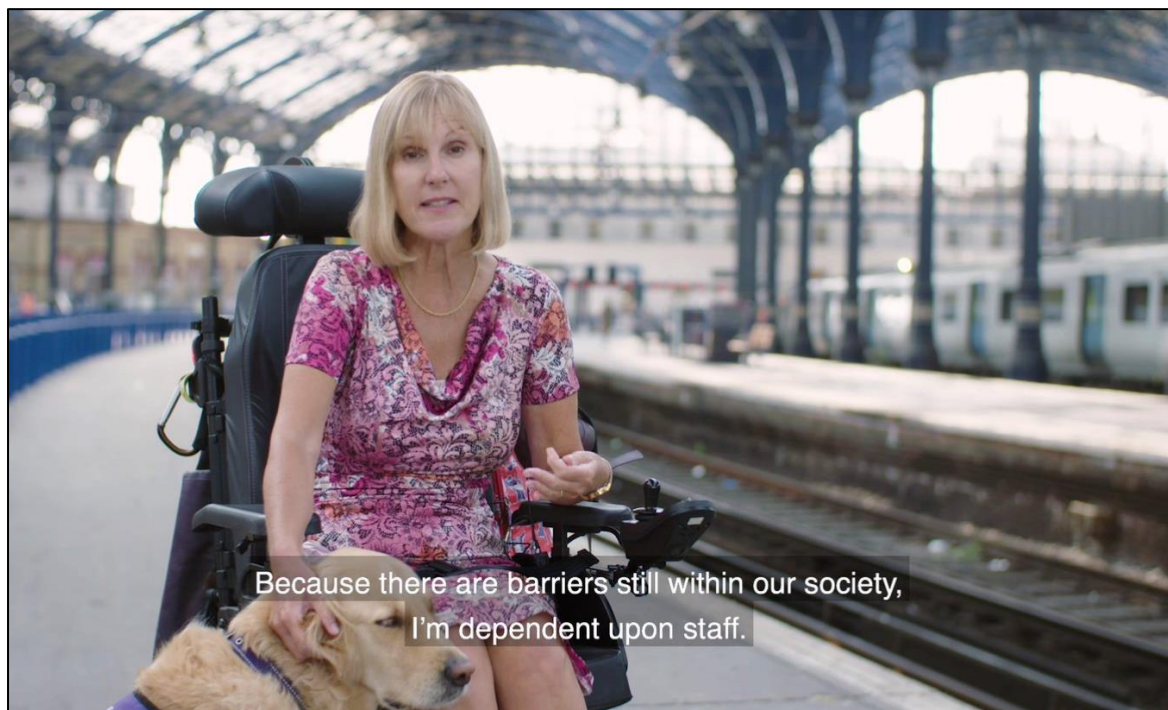


Fiona Bower, of Bexhill

Member of the GTR Access Advisory Panel for four years, she features in GTR's new staff accessibility training videos



Fiona Bower, features in a staff training video at Brighton station. Click here to [download the picture](#) and here to [download the video](#)

Fiona

Fiona Bower, 59, lives in Bexhill, East Sussex, with her husband, Graeme. She has secondary progressive Multiple Sclerosis and has been using a wheelchair full-time for 10 years.

In normal, non-Covid times, Fiona travels with Southern and Thameslink along the coast as far as Chichester, Brighton and Eastbourne for daytrips, shopping and to see friends. She also takes the train to Gatwick Airport (where she helps on another, passenger advisory group), and London.

Always at her side is Golden Retriever Mr Wiz, a registered assistance dog, who is so smart he can pick up objects as small as a dropped key or as slim as a credit card. At home he helps Fiona fold the washing and change the duvet, and out and about he'll get things off lower shop shelves and even reach the lift button.

However, at the railway station, Fiona needs more than man's best friend.

"The assistance I receive at the station is really critical because without it I simply can't travel. I am dependent on other people helping just in terms of putting down the ramp. It's why Thameslink is so great because in the centre of London you can just get off on your own, at the platform humps.

“Good assistance means you feel able to travel. If you have a bad experience it stays with you and takes away your confidence. That’s why I was so pleased to be involved in the training videos, even though I’m quite a shy person.

“This new accessible travel pledge is very important: It signifies that we are moving on and that things are going to get better. It is a pledge to improve accessibility and build inclusivity so that everyone can travel by train.

“It has been a pleasure to be able to play a small part during the consultation period of the new Accessible Travel Policy and I hope that it will empower disabled passengers and give them more confidence to travel.”

Fiona added: “The majority of my journeys are really good; people are very helpful. There are some really good people out there who are doing a really hard job standing on those freezing platforms for hours and hours and they are such a credit to the company. Anything we can do to further encourage that behaviour is a good thing.

“It is about the simple things, talking to me as if I’m a normal person, not about my disability. At London Bridge and Farringdon the staff actually meet me at the train – even though at Farringdon I can get off on my own. They greet me and it makes me feel really good.

“When I’m going home from London Bridge they always radio down and there’s always someone there to meet me. They are just great and tell you they are ringing ahead to East Croydon where I change on to a Southern train. It just makes you feel they really care you get home safely. It’s that humanity.”

ends

