

# Essential services: getting extra help

Services such as gas, electricity, water, phones and public transport are not luxuries. We need them every day to look after ourselves, and if you're older, ill or have a disability, or you've suddenly found yourself in vulnerable circumstances, you may have particular needs. This leaflet tells you about free services that can give you extra help.



## Your phone

- **Free directory enquiries.** If you struggle to look up a phone number because you're visually impaired or have another disability, tell your phone company. They can make Directory Enquiries free for you.
- **Making calls clearer.** If you are deaf or have difficulty speaking, there's a service that can translate phone calls into text on a smartphone, tablet or computer. It's called Next Generation Text. Visit [www.ngts.org.uk](http://www.ngts.org.uk)
- **Calling 999 by text message.** If you're deaf or speech-impaired, you can call the emergency services by sending a text message. You need to register your mobile phone before you can use the service. Visit [www.emergencysms.org.uk](http://www.emergencysms.org.uk)
- **Running your phone account.** If you need help managing your account, for example to make sure bills are paid on time, you can nominate a friend or family member. Ask your phone company about 'Third Party Bill Management'.
- **Faster fault fixing.** You may depend on your home phone because of ill-health or a disability. If so, your phone company can give you priority if there's a problem with your line. Ask them to put you on their 'Priority Fault Repair' list.
- **Easier to follow bills and contracts.** You can ask for accessible formats such as large print or braille.



## Post

- **Free post for blind and visually impaired people.** You can send books and letters in braille, large print or audio, and mobility aids such as white canes, first class and free of charge. Packages must be unsealed, marked 'Articles for the Blind', and show a return address. Visit [www.royalmail.com/personal/uk-delivery/articles-for-the-blind](http://www.royalmail.com/personal/uk-delivery/articles-for-the-blind)



# Water



- **Special assistance.** If you have an impairment, disability or a relevant medical need, you can ask your water company to include you on their Special Assistance Register. This offers a range of services to meet particular needs.
- **Bills and other literature in accessible formats.** You can ask for large print, disc or braille communications, and have your bill read out to you over the phone before they send it.
- **More warning of supply interruptions.** Sometimes water companies need to turn off the water supply to do work in your area. Tell them now if you have special medical needs - for example, kidney dialysis at home - and they will give you early warning of their plans.
- **Create a password.** You can set a password that any water company employee will use if they knock on your door.
- **Moving your meter.** If you have a meter and it's difficult to reach and read, your water company may agree to move it for you. Alternatively, your company may offer help with meter reading so that you can monitor your water consumption.
- **Capping your costs.** If you need to use additional water for medical reasons, are receiving certain benefits and have a meter, there is a capped tariff called WaterSure.

# Gas and electricity



- **Easy reach pre-payment meters.** If you have a problem reaching your meter, your provider may agree to move it.
- **Meter reading.** If you struggle to read your meter, you may be able to ask your supplier to do it for you
- **Become a priority customer.** Customers with certain needs can ask for advanced notice if a supply is going to be interrupted, and to be put at the front of the queue to be reconnected.
- **Request back-up facilities.** You may be able to ask for alternative cooking and heating facilities if your energy supply is interrupted.
- **Get a doorstep password.** If anyone needs to call at your home, ask them to quote a password so you know they are genuine.
- **Stay safe.** Customers who receive certain benefits can ask for free safety checks of their gas appliances.
- **Clear bills.** You can ask for large print and braille communications.
- **Copy a friend.** You can ask for a copy of your bills to be sent to a trusted friend or family member for checking.

## Travel by bus

Buses are an essential service for many people, but are not regulated in the same way as the other services in this leaflet. Thanks to Bus Users UK (which campaigns for the rights of bus users) and the Department for Transport for providing the information below.



- **Do you have a wheelchair?** Most buses built since 2000 are wheelchair accessible. By law, single deck buses must have a ramp and a suitable wheelchair space by 2016, and larger local buses must have the same by 2017.
- **What about mobility scooters?** There is no law requiring buses to carry mobility scooters; it's at the discretion of the bus company. Many bus companies will assess your scooter and, if it meets their requirements, they'll issue you with a permit allowing you to take your scooter on the bus. The requirement is usually that it's a 'Class 2' scooter (not a 'Class 3' that can do 6-8mph) and that it's no more than 600mm wide and 1,000mm long.
- **Free bus travel.** Eligible older and disabled people can apply for a bus pass which will enable them to travel for free on off-peak local bus services throughout England.
- **Eligible older people** must live in England and have reached either their state pension age (women) or the state pension age of a woman born on the same day (men). You can find out more at [www.gov.uk/apply-for-elderly-person-bus-pass](http://www.gov.uk/apply-for-elderly-person-bus-pass) or by contacting your council.
- **Eligible disabled people** must live in England and have a disability which meets at least one of seven published criteria. You can find out more at [www.gov.uk/apply-for-disabled-bus-pass](http://www.gov.uk/apply-for-disabled-bus-pass) or by contacting your council.
- **Additional concessions are available in some areas.** These might allow people with an eligible disability to be accompanied by a companion free of charge, for older people to access free travel before they reach state retirement age or for pass holders to travel during peak hours or on other modes of transport. Contact your council for full details of what is available in your area.
- **Concessionary travel outside England** is the responsibility of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Governments.

## Travel by rail



- **Help on your journey.** Certain customers can book assistance to help them travel by train. Rail staff can help passengers plan journeys, book tickets and make reservations. They can also help you at stations and on board trains.
- **Information about this help.** To see the help available, ask at your station for the leaflet called 'Making Rail Accessible: Helping older and disabled people'. You will also find it on the train operators' websites. Or you can call 08457 484950 or visit the National Rail Enquiries website. It tells you how to get the help you need, and also provides links to the train operators' own sites.
- **Stations Made Easy.** This internet tool helps you to find your way around stations. So, for example, you can plan a route that avoids stairs. It includes photographs and maps, as well as information about facilities such as accessible WCs. Visit [http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/stations\\_destinations](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/stations_destinations) and enter the station you want to see.
- **The Disabled Person's Railcard.** This gives discounts on fares for disabled people and their travelling companions. To find out more visit <http://www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk>
- **Help with luggage.** You can ask for assistance with your bags, but this does need to be arranged in advance.

- **Do you need a ramp?** Your train operator can provide one at stations and on trains.
- **Ask about free station parking.** Some stations offer free bays in their car parks for Blue Badge holders.

## Travel by air

- **Free assistance.** For most flights to and from a European Union airport, passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility can request free assistance to help complete a journey. This can cover travelling through airports, getting on and off planes, transferring between flights at an airport and help during the flight itself.
- **Taking your wheelchair?** Airlines must carry two pieces of mobility equipment free of charge, so long as the equipment fits through the aircraft doors.
- **Book in advance.** Assistance needs to be booked 48 hours in advance. You can book where you bought your ticket, e.g. airline, travel agent. Airlines can only refuse a booking, or ask a passenger to travel accompanied, on aircraft safety grounds.
- **Travelling outside the EU?** Similar legislation applies in other countries including the United States. However, there are many parts of the world where assistance may require a fee or may not be available at all.



## What to do next

For help with **gas, electricity, water or your phone service**, simply call the enquiries number shown on your bill, or contact them via their website.

For **rail travel**, use the links and contact details shown above. If you can't find the information you need, contact the train operator or visit Transport Focus <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/>.

For **air travel**, there is a directory of links to relevant pages from major airlines and UK airport websites at [www.caa.co.uk/specialassistance](http://www.caa.co.uk/specialassistance).

For **bus travel**, the rules vary according to where you live. Visit [www.bususers.org](http://www.bususers.org) for more information.

Please note that the services above are designed for people with particular needs due to age, impairment, disability or long-term condition. You may be asked to prove that you need extra help, for example by getting a health professional's signature.



## About this leaflet

The information in this leaflet has been prepared by the UK Regulators' Network ([www.ukrn.org.uk](http://www.ukrn.org.uk)). This group is formed of the official bodies that regulate the UK's essential services.

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[Note: the provision of gas and electricity services is currently being reviewed and is subject to change in 2016]