

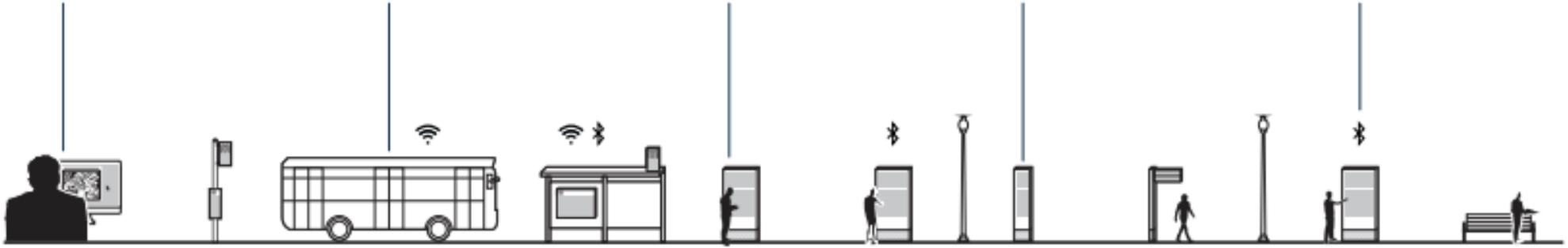
## Pre-journey

## In transit

## Welcome

## En-route

## Destination



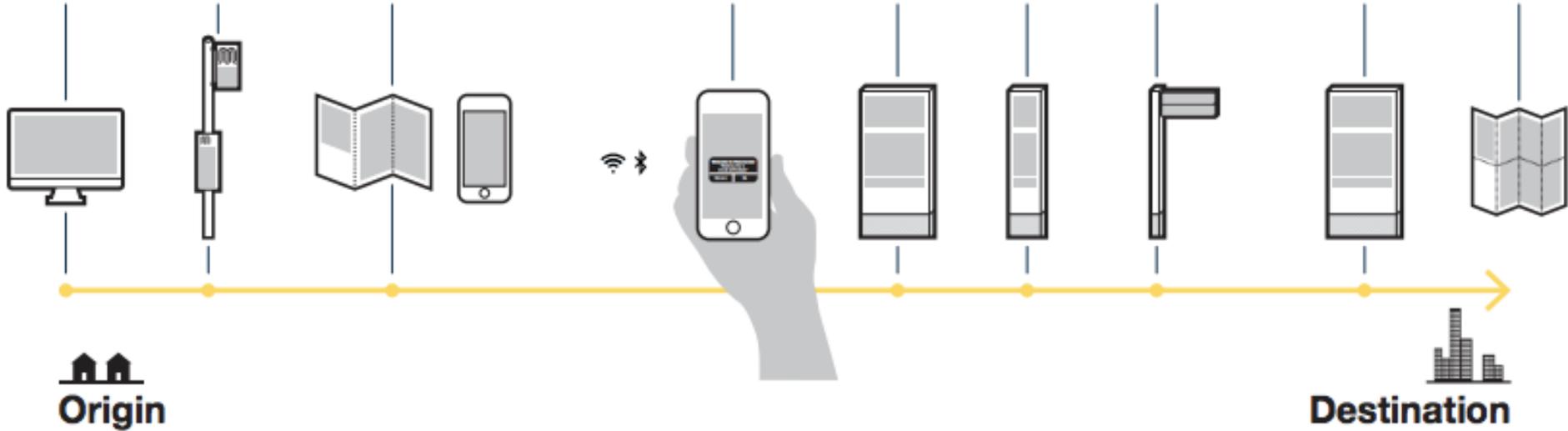
How would you plan your trip to the destination?  
 What are the key things you must consider?  
 What kind of concerns or worries may you have?  
 How long would it take to plan such a journey?  
**What would help you at this stage in the journey?**

How would you prepare on the day of travelling?  
 What factors influence your choice of travel mode?  
 What preparation goes into each stage of the trip?  
 How do you feel travelling to your destination?  
**What would help you at this stage in the journey?**

What are your thoughts upon arriving at a place?  
 How do you react in new and unfamiliar settings?  
 What things are you conscious of when alighting?  
 What processes do you go through at this point?  
**What would help you at this stage in the journey?**

What steps do you take from arriving at a place?  
 How would you navigate to a chosen destination?  
 What features would you hope for / try and avoid?  
 How does past experience influence your feelings?  
**What would help you at this stage in the journey?**

What are your immediate thoughts upon arrival?  
 Which provision do you find lacking in most cases?  
 Do you find yourself needing much assistance?  
 What are the prerequisites for accessing the site?  
**What would help you at this stage in the journey?**



**Origin**

**Destination**

### Pre Journey (Past Experiences - Office Based):

Memories play a hugely significant factor in decision making; this may effect whether or not you embark on a journey to a set destination, the type of mode used and the process of undertaking the planning of a journey.

Recollections of past experiences and knowledge of some of the obstacles and issues faced historically, influenced Beth's overall approach at this very early stage, pre journey. Here are some of the key themes noted:

- Beth's experience of travelling by rail has not been particularly positive as she finds them quite intimidating; the noise emitted from the engines affects her mood and this immediately puts her off train travel.
- This scenario is particularly acute at certain enclosed station settings where there is an echo and the announcements over the tannoy system are noticeable loud. This is something that was immediately identified.
- Beth's confidence using rail may also be attributed to limited recent experience. Historically she travelled once a month to Birmingham New Street from Selly Oak but last travelled two years ago on a short trip.
- Beth's is aware that planning a trip by rail will involve entering and egressing the carriages by ramp. Although she makes people aware in advance using the helpline number, this is a cause of anxiety.
- This is due to her experiences of staff members locating a ramp in the last minute before boarding without any prior reassurance of their presence. This consequently 'plays on the back of your mind'.
- Beth noted that a key consideration, during the planning stages, is the availability and location of disabled parking. This is based on experience with spaces having being abused, fully occupied or poorly proportioned.
- After being informed about meeting at Stroud Railway Station, one of the first actions Beth undertook was to 'Google' Stroud Station and look at the availability of disabled parking spaces and facilities.

- Access to disabled toilet facilities were only a secondary consideration and not necessarily contemplated during this stage. Beth did also state that she could use standard provision (but as apart of a 'coping strategy')
- There were only a few key pre journey considerations, including working out the route and duration from the station and factoring this into the preparation timeframe. This would occur a day or two beforehand.
- Beth was well equipped and conscious of carrying around equipment to assist with her journey with this being dependant on the destination and activity. This is typically pre-prepared and 'oven ready'.
- This includes a communicator, waterproof clothing, medication, a drink and some money. There may be a question around whether places can provide additional 'add on' features to reduce the burden.

Due to unfortunate incidences where Beth has been unable to access a destination due to limited wheelchair access provision, both herself and Mike are understandably keen to plan ahead. This not only includes researching travel and transport options, but the facilities available at the destination.

However sourcing this information is also quite challenging and another part of the planning regime that results in Beth using 'Street View' on Google Maps to assess the external environment and make assumptions as to the ease of getting to her destination.

This may include searching for the organisations website to see whether they have a ramped access point, wide automatic doors, sufficient room for manoeuvring internally and that they are not crowded and noisy during particular times of the day. Accessible toilets on a ground floor are pivotal.

Interestingly Beth had a positive outlook on using trams having also used them previously in France and on the Paris Metro. She was initially very nervous but thoroughly enjoyed the trip. She identified step free access and spacious interiors that enabled her to drive on and park to be key, positive factors.

### **In Transit (Driving to Station):**

Beth arrived by car to Stroud Railway Station as opposed to by rail. There are numerous factors that she considers before embarking on a journey. There is a tendency and need to visualise the whole journey experience to ensure that she is well prepared to get to and from her destination. Some of the key elements that she is thinking about whilst in transit include:

- How accessible are the roads; is there suitable inclusive provision in place such as dropped kerbs, wide pavement dimensions, absence of potholes, clear crossing points, distinguish road names.

Indeed many of the considerations that instinctively came to her mind, were related to the physical environment, not necessarily the softer measures such as information provision; although this was considered for accessing the destination and sourcing an available car parking space.

During the pre journey phase, Beth requested a phone number to ensure that she could check whether they were at the right location. This advice and knowledge of being able to contact somebody at the location seemed to be very reassuring and may help overcome any anxieties. A number of other factors spring to mind during the journey and particularly in relation to a railway station, including:

- The availability and reliability of lift equipment and disabled access arrangements having had an experience where a bridge had not been equipped with a lift capsule on each side of the station.
- In Beth's particular case, she was escorted to Stroud Station in a large minibus that far exceeded the dimensions of the forecourt site. There was limited access to suitable information to help with decision making.
- The driver was unfamiliar with Stroud Station and actually visiting Stonehouse station accidentally. As an infrequent visitor there is limited guidance pre-journey via National Rail Enquiries or GWR.
- Beth could not manage to use Google Street View before arriving which she normally relies upon to check the environment. This meant she was a little apprehensive as to what she was going to encounter.

### **Welcome (in Stroud):**

Beth had spoken about how enjoyable an experience it had been to have been given support after visiting a dedicated help desk at Birmingham New Street Station where she could obtain all the information she require to make her onward trip. This made her feel like 'she doesn't feel forgotten'.

When arriving in a place, Beth is conscious of how crowded the area is especially when considering that she witnesses the scene from a lower perspective in a wheelchair. This could happen anywhere and Beth feels self conscious in these situations and slightly overwhelmed.

One of the pre-journey concerns was the availability of disabled parking spaces upon arrival at the station. The two spaces available were illegally occupied by vehicles, albeit temporarily, without a disabled permit which consequently led to the minibus travelling to the Goods Shed and turning around.

The small disabled bay proportions and limited space for manoeuvring into place, resulted in the minibus parking adjacent to the station; impeding visibility and causing visual pollution whilst Beth was escorted from the vehicle. When finally parked, the vehicle massively over hanged the bay dimensions.

Upon arrival at Stroud Station, only one access point from the platform is wide enough for wheelchair users which doesn't enable access to the booking office area and travel information desk as well as tourism brochures. Beth commented on how the station appeared smaller in reality than on a map.

Beth spoke about how useful she found the National Rail Enquiries Page for looking up station facilities; particularly the station map whereby she could hover over elements and see an image and a description. She simply typed 'Stroud Station' in Google. This made her feel far more confident arriving.

Beth was equipped with a iPad and had taken screenshots of her route from the station to the selected destination. She had also made some notes but all the content was static; that is she relied on these being correct to navigate her way to the destination. She had no Wi-Fi to be able to respond spontaneously.

Beth was also using Google Maps screenshot that was based on car access although even the walking version provided little consolation for people with visual or physical impairments. Training is needed to use the tool effectively.

### En-Route (via Station Forecourt)

Beth, who has never visited Stroud, was automatically confronted by parked vehicles and obstructed sightlines meaning that she had little forward vision for making her way on the most convenient route alignment and desire line.

Beth also commented on the lack of information at the station (with signs obscured by parked vehicles and inaccessible) and explained that she would usually consult a travel helpline desk to source her information. Without any obvious signage to wayfinding markers, she chose an inappropriate route.

Beth described the feeling of moving through the forecourt as being exposed with a concern for clashing with vehicles navigating the same space. Mike, Beth's helper had to alert her of the perceived dangers; suggesting that this was no a place to spend time and enjoy moving through.

Beth found the pavement dimensions slightly challenging especially as it also prevented side by side conversing and socialising when travelling between the forecourt area and the town centre. The crossings themselves were generally in good condition along Russell Street.

Beth was not too concerned with the crossing points whilst motorists were generous in giving way although due to the timing of the audit, there were fewer vehicles on the road in contrast to peak morning and evening periods. Signage however was non existent and Beth regular consulted her map.

Beth was critical of all crossing points from the forecourt area onwards as they were configured in a way that did not follow desire lines. The tactile paving and dropped kerbs sections were also often narrow and, at times, poorly laid. In this case, a 'lip' had been created which was difficult to overcome.

The absence of a dropped kerb in the forecourt area was a major barrier and the ability to traverse a grade level surface had an influence on Beth;s decision to abandon her map, consult the signage (at the junction of Kings Street and George Street) and take the pedestrianised route.

Beth emphasised that she would always take the most direct route whenever possible (a natural tendency) and part of Kings Road and the High Street was 'enabling' her to travel independently across the space.

### En-Route (via Station Forecourt)

One of the main barriers encountered was the crossing point across Kings Street whereby a combination of the poor inclusive mobility provision (quality and location), high vehicular turning speeds and a lack of clear sightlines and visibility, led to Beth coming into conflict with a motorist.

Beth described how she was reluctant to cross the road whilst Mike, who assists her on day out of the college, was making efforts to escort her across the road; knowing or having perceived there to be a danger. This cautious behaviour was reflected quite prominently around the part of Stroud.

An issue faced on the transition from the station through to the forecourt and on towards the destination (a cafe by the name of Social Light), was the height and overall visibility of directional signage. Beth mistook them initially as lampposts as they blended in (effectively) with surrounding street furniture.

The problem was the height of the signs; they were not within the horizontal plane of vision for Beth and others interesting the environment from a lower perspective. This is an issue Beth has encountered in Gloucester. However, the signage was perfectly located at a key decision making, nodal point.

Beth seamlessly navigated the last section of the trip to the cafe with her description of the trip distinctly segregated into three stages; navigating the forecourt, the stretch between Station Road and Kings Street and then the pedestrianised area between Kings Street and the High Street.

Beth described the latter, being pedestrianised and party renovated, as being easy to move along with the grade level surface reducing her need to be conscious of dropped kerbs and mounting / dismounting pavements. Beth was not aware of the areas that were pedestrianised from maps / onward signage.

Beth was generally satisfied with her experience with the exception of key issues around signage and inclusive mobility provision. She had the confidence to let the environment guide her along the pedestrianised areas but the first part of the station area was fragmented and piecemeal (visually / quality). This observation may be actually deterring people from accessing the area initially and coming into contact with the forecourt area.

### **Destination (Social Light Cafe)**

As the destination, a cafe, was located on the High Street, a pedestrianised area, there would have been no chance to view the wheelchair assessable facilities via the Google Street View function. Consequently upon arriving Beth made the instant observation that there was no ramped entrance point.

This is a prerequisite for accessing a premises and whilst Beth had a map and had sourced out the station facilities beforehand, she had not researched the facilities at the cafe and investigated the ease of access for wheelchair users. Beth stated that without Google Maps she wouldn't know where to look.

The door dimensions were also quite constrained; meaning access with an oversized wheelchair would have proven challenge even with the presence of a ramped entry / egress point. Having visibility of sites with accessible and wheelchair facilities was suggested by Beth after this disappointment.

### **Reflection**

On reflection, Beth commented on how the distance between the station and the immediate area on a map was vastly different to the experience she had within reality. Pre-planning issues and limited training / internet on IT devices meant that she was not responsive to changing circumstances / scenarios.

When Beth was asked to comment on her experience in Stroud, it was generally positive; but in relation to the pedestrianised areas. She was no complementary about the forecourt (5 out of 10) due to its sense of enclosure, vehicular movements and lack of inclusive mobility provision.

The lack, or abuse, of disabled parking spaces was a key issue to address to reduce the time wasted circulating an area and the challenges posted by egressing and accessing the vehicle; especially when the dimensions of the spaces were also quite constrained. Beth was conscious of this happening.

Viewing the 'travel timeline' from Beth's perspective was incredibly insightful for understanding the importance of planning journeys and methods used to help translate and interpret an environment before actually entering it in reality. This stage of the journey is perhaps the most important in this context.

### **On Reflection**

The actual journey within Stroud, from the forecourt to the cafe (destination) could be split up into three defined stages; the forecourt area, the transition to Russell Street / Kings Street and the move from Kings Street to the High Street. These all have strikingly different characteristics.

Whilst the emphasis was on evaluating the forecourt area, it was important to understand how it linked to surrounding streets as part of a journey from and to the station. The ability to split the journey into three stages perhaps indicates that this transition was not seamless but instead quite piecemeal.

As the station forecourt occupies a prominence position within a central location, there is real potential to better inform and facilitate movements across the space through physical (signage, pathways etc), behavioural (travel maps, wayfinding etc) and operational (restricted access times) measures.

One observation was that the forecourt area was seen and felt to be purely a place that you traversed through and to get to and from quickly. This is opposed to being at ease with the environment and being encouraged to take time and compose thoughts onto the next course of action.

This is reflected in the design (no waiting areas / open exposed area) whilst the recorded experience of travelling with Beth illustrated the haste at moving on to the destination without consulting the setting into the depth required to overcome obstacles (i.e dropped kerbs).

The poor surface quality and installation of incisive mobility provision, whilst invisible to the able bodied person, not only posed an issue at times for Beth but would have contributed towards her experience of place. This was the case along Russell / Kings Street where the wheelchair is constantly jarring.

The smooth and effortless transition between Kings Street and the High Street exemplified how a combination of grade level surfaces, 'clean' environments and the absence of vehicular flows, liberated Beth and other mobility impaired users from the poorly constructed and regimented pathways. The use of different surface colours and materials assisted the transition and enabled Beth to travel independently without being conscious of other street furniture.