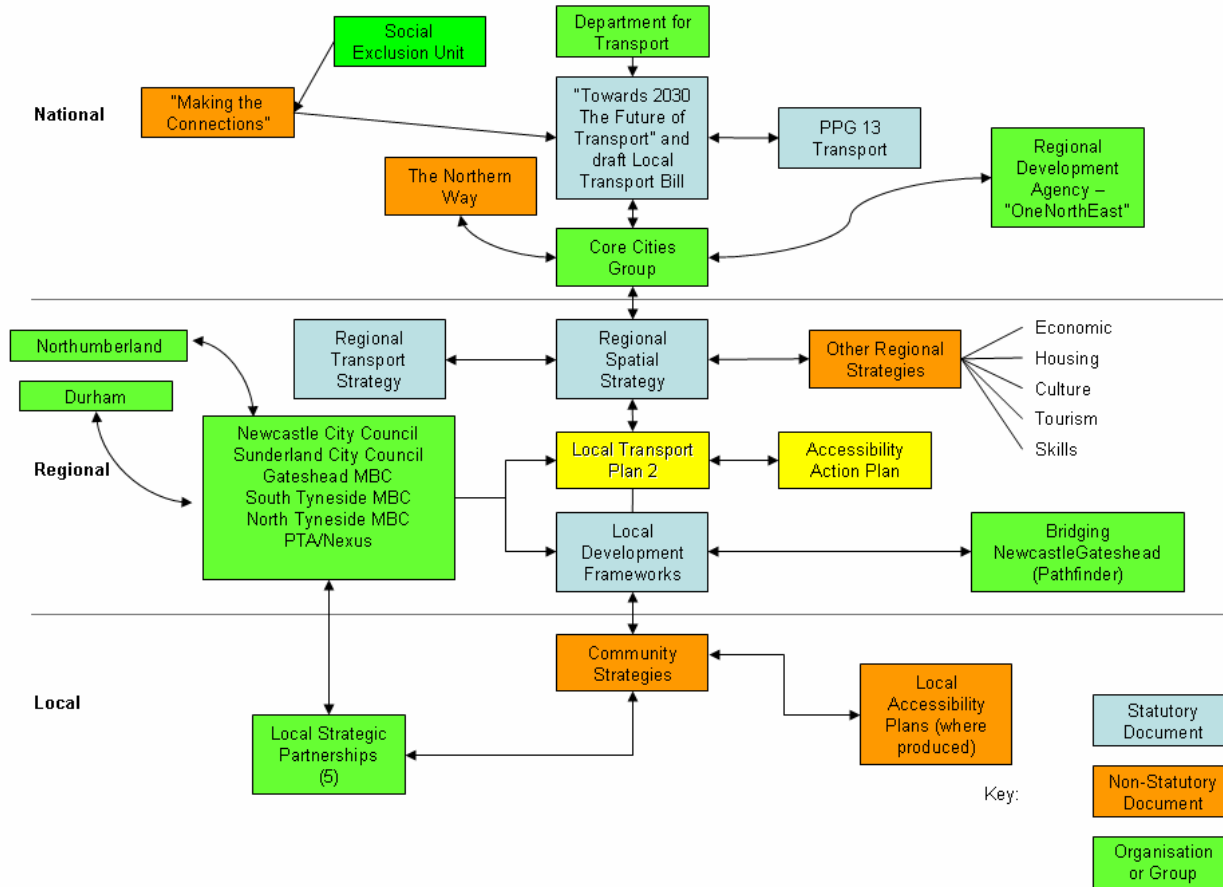


**Figure 1: Policy Framework for the Accessibility Action Plan**





# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Defining accessibility

Accessibility means different things to different people. Finding a common agreed definition is the first step towards implementing meaningful targets for improving accessibility.

At its broadest, accessibility is a general term used to describe the degree to which a system is usable by as many people as possible. In other words, it is the degree of ease with which it is possible to reach a certain location (or service) from other locations.

Accessibility is about giving equal access to everyone. While it is often used to describe facilities or amenities to assist people with disabilities, as in "wheelchair accessible", the term can extend to signage, information provision, audio signals at pedestrian crossings, cost of travel, walkway contours, footway obstructions and fears about personal safety. Poor accessibility to key services and information may result in social exclusion.

Although accessibility is often considered in terms of physical movement, sometimes it may mean the service coming to meet the user, rather than the other way round. In an ageing society, where it may be difficult or sometimes impossible for infirm users to leave their homes, it is likely to become increasingly important for **services** (not just service users) to be mobile.

In transport, accessibility refers to the ease of reaching destinations. People who are in places that are highly accessible can reach many other activities or destinations quickly; people in inaccessible places can reach much fewer destinations in the same amount of time. Accessibility is a combination of the following five factors:

1. Accessibility: the ease with which one can physically access or use a particular transport mode;
2. Availability: the hours at which transport or services operate;
3. Affordability: financial constraints on a citizen's opportunities to undertake activities;
4. Acceptability: public attitudes towards what constitutes acceptable service of transport provision, as well as factors such as perceptions of safety;
5. Awareness: the degree to which a citizen is aware of the real status of a service in terms of the preceding considerations of accessibility, affordability, availability and acceptability.

It must be stressed that transport is only one element of accessibility. Today's spatial planning policies seek to build accessibility into the planning stage of a new development, rather than later requiring high levels of spending on improved transport or road links to improve accessibility.

## **1.2 Barriers to accessibility**

Good accessibility is often not noticed. What we do observe are the barriers to accessibility.

Using the example of getting a bus to a shop and reviewing the five main components to accessibility referred to above, the following barriers may be encountered:

- Accessibility: Closeness to boarding and alighting point at origin / destination, steep gradients, poorly-maintained or indirect walking routes, access obstructions (e.g. cars parked on pavements), lack of safe crossing points, severance by busy roads, buses that do not accept prams or wheelchairs
- Affordability: Expensive or inflexible ticketing, need to buy more than one ticket for a journey involving interchange
- Availability: Unattractive or infrequent timetable, no service provided at chosen time of travel, lack of evening or Sunday services
- Acceptability: Rundown facilities, absence of a bus shelter, untidy vehicle interiors, no staff to assist passengers, no toilets at interchange, fears about personal safety including low-level nuisance caused by behaviour of other passengers
- Awareness: Poor information provision, lack of timetables or route maps, hard-to-read timetables, irregular service that is hard to memorise

Pages 19 to 27 explore these barriers in more detail and outline some of the measures being taken to overcome them.