Bus user Angus Huntley and his guide dog Kira with Kevin Carr from Go North East and RNIB's Fran Di Giorgio

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Go North East signs RNIB's accessibility charter

The region's largest bus company, Go North East, has signed RNIB's (Royal National Institute of Blind People) Accessibility Charter. Its drivers are undertaking special training so they can better understand the challenges blind and partially sighted passengers face when using the bus in some 'Swap with Me' events. The first event was held in Gateshead's Go North Riverside Depot on 30 June 2016.

Go North East drivers and blind or partially sighted people swapped places to learn from each other's experiences. The drivers, with guidance from a

visually impaired person, attempted to board the bus wearing sim specs which simulate different eye conditions. In turn, the blind or partially sighted people sat in the bus driving seat and experienced communicating with passengers from the drivers' cabin.

This is part of RNIB's 'Stop for Me Speak to Me' bus campaign. The Accessibility Charter is a list of commitments that blind and partially sighted people want bus operators to make in order to improve the services for those with sight loss.

Francesca Di Giorgio, RNIB's regional campaigns officer for the North East, said: "Bus travel is a life line to blind and partially sighted people who rely on buses to take them to work, the shops or just to get out and about with friends. We are really impressed with Go North East's willingness to make improvements for their blind and partially sighted passengers. Go North East has clearly been doing a lot already. Now that we are working together and with its commitment to our charter, we are sure things can only go from strength to strength."

Over a third of Go North East's fleet has onboard audio-visual announcements which transform bus travel for the visually impaired. Having audio that announces current stops, bus routes, destinations and next stops is a significant help to passengers with sight loss.

Go North East has a 100% easy access fleet and carries out enhanced driver training for supporting passengers with disabilities. It also has a talking website.

Managing director at Go North East Kevin Carr said: "We invest heavily in ensuring people with disabilities, including visual impairments, are supported when using our buses. We receive a lot of praise from passengers about our drivers for their skills in supporting those with disabilities."

Find out more about the Charter and the campaign. If you think blind or partially sighted people shouldn't be left behind at bus stops visit www.rnib.org.uk/bus or call RNIB's campaigns hotline on 020 7391 2123.

Go North East website