



Blue  
badge  
holders  
only

**The Politics of Parking:  
Final Summary Report**

**Disabled People's Encounters with Strangers in  
Accessible Parking Spaces**

**Vera Isabella Kubenz, December 2025**

**[www.politicsofparking.com](http://www.politicsofparking.com)**

# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Types of Encounters</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 'Faking' Accusations	4
1.2 Confronting Others	5
1.3 Hate	6
1.4 Positive Encounters	6
1.4 What Happens During an Encounter?	7
<b>2. Encounters in Context</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1. When and Where	8
2.2. Welfare Cuts and 'Scrounger' Rhetoric	9
2.3 Location and Facilities	9
2.4 Stereotypes and Expectations	10
<b>2. Navigating Encounters</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1. Strategies for Managing Encounters	11
3.2. Reporting	12
3.3 Emotional Impact	12
3.4 Experiences of Access	13
<b>Key Takeaways</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Further Information</b>	<b>17</b>



To cite this report: Kubenz, V. I. (2025) *The Politics of Parking Final Summary Report: Disabled People's Encounters with Strangers in Accessible Parking Spaces*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham. DOI: 10.25500/epapers.bham.00004418

Copyright license: [CC BY 4.0](#)

Direct link: <https://epapers.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/4418/>

# INTRODUCTION

---

This report presents a summary of the findings from the “Politics of Parking” PhD research project on disabled people’s encounters with strangers in Blue Badge parking spaces. The report highlights in detail how these encounters can make ‘accessible’ spaces anything but accessible. Encounters can be highly stressful, need a lot of work to navigate, and have an emotional impact that lasts long beyond the parking space. This report is based on PhD research which took place from 2021 to 2025, and the findings presented here come from a survey of 304 Blue Badge holders and 20 follow-up interviews with survey participants. More about the methodology can be found at the end of this document.

This report

- maps out different types of encounter that can take place and the interactions that can occur as part of them
- focuses on the broader contexts which can shape an individual encounter
- explores the experiences of navigating encounters and the impact this has on disabled people’s wellbeing and experiences of accessibility.

The key takeaways from the report are that

- encounters can never exist outside the wider hostility that exists towards disabled people as a result of austerity politics and ‘scrounger’ rhetoric
- disabled people are always under scrutiny, due to harmful assumptions that disability should equal complete incompetence, poverty and suffering
- most disabled people can be seen as potentially not ‘deserving’ and can experience confrontation as a result.

This research highlights the impact of encounters on disabled people’s lives; they can be extremely draining, and can sometimes exclude people from public spaces because they cannot face going out. Currently, the Blue Badge scheme does not facilitate equal access, but instead puts disabled people in a position where they are often on edge about a potential encounter and feel like second-class citizens because there is often no way to effectively report an encounter. However, positive encounters can also be impactful with solidarity between disabled people (and sometimes even bystanders) as well as support from friends and family motivating disabled people to keep going despite all the negativity.

While encounters are a complex problem that cannot be easily solved through awareness campaigns or different rules, I include in this report some recommendations for practical changes that could begin to address some of the structural and policy issues which can influence encounters. I also include links to further readings and resources. Thank you to the participants who shared their stories with me, and thank you to my advisory group who have ensured this research is shaped by the concerns of a diverse group of disabled people. I hope this report will be useful for disabled people make sense of their experiences, resist harmful stereotypes about disability, and campaign for effective change for a better, more accessible future.

# 1. TYPES OF ENCOUNTERS

## 1.1 'Faking' Accusations

Being accused of 'faking' their impairment or not really needing a Blue Badge was one of the most common types of encounters. In the survey, **74% of people said they had been accused of 'faking'** by others.

These types of encounters were especially common for **younger disabled people**, with some being told they were 'too young' to be disabled:

A member of the public stopped me as I was parking in a Blue Badge space. He knocked on my window, I wound it down and he told me I shouldn't be parking there, and I had no right to be there. I explained I was disabled. He said I was too young and there was nothing wrong with me. I proceeded to get into my wheelchair and get out of the car, in fairness, he did look quite embarrassed when I got out of the car.

Lauren, 40-49, London

As this story shows, even wheelchair users can be accused. Ultimately, **whether an impairment was visible mattered less than the type of impairment**— people with chronic illness, neurodivergence, or mental health conditions were more likely to be confronted.

'Faking' accusations could range from **subtle interactions** such as staring, tutting, or hushed comments, to **outright accusations** of using someone else's badge, demands to inspect the badge, and even physical violence.

Sometimes, disabled people were told they were **not disabled enough** and that others deserved the space more. This could come both from random passersby and other Blue Badge holders. This shows the hierarchies in who is seen as more 'legitimate' and deserving of access.

'Faking' encounters and intrusive questions had a big impact on those who experienced them. For many, **being under constant suspicion meant they always felt on edge** and worried that an encounter could happen at any moment:

It's still that original reaction, that kind of stays with you. And it does to some degree kind of make you feel a bit dirty. Um... and then you do have that every time you go out, it's like "Is it going to happen again?" Erm...and it could be nine times out of ten it doesn't happen. But you're still kind of building yourself up and anxious, waiting for that one time out of ten, when you've got to realize: "What am I going to do in this situation to protect myself?"

Katie, 18 –29, South of England

## 1.2 Confronting Others

Of those disabled people who took the survey, **most (74%) had confronted other people** in Blue Badge bays, for example those misusing a bay without a badge. Age was an important factor for this type of encounter, **with older people over 60 more likely to confront** others.

Some people only challenged others when they needed a bay themselves, but others, especially older people, talked about **confronting others out of principle** to defend Blue Badge bays from misuse. However, confronting others can be risky and lead to the misuser reacting poorly and even getting violent. This meant that many people deliberately chose a careful and polite approach, for example by **asking the other person if they had forgotten to display their Blue Badge**:

You have to be very careful. And that's why I don't challenge anymore. I try and take the tact of, "Oh, I think you've forgotten your badge" and if you say it sort of softly, it doesn't seem to rile so much.

Elizabeth, 70+, South of England

Blue Badge bays being misused by non-badge holders was a very common and frustrating experience. In particular, **many non-disabled people felt entitled to park in accessible bays and simply did not care** about the impact this had on disabled people who needed them.



Image: A tractor parked sideways across multiple Blue Badge bays, ©Vera Kubenz

Many disabled people were sick of hearing the same excuses over and over, like "**I'll only be 5 minutes**" or other parking spaces being too small for their large car. Some felt this had got worse in recent years and was a symptom of an increasingly selfish society.

Many people felt very angry at the constant misuse of Blue Badge bays, and sometimes struggled to keep their temper during confrontations. Some also talked about things they would like to do to **take revenge on misusers**:

Well, I'd like to spread a whole load of nails under the tires, so that when they move out they'd learn what it's like to be without transport. I would also like to put a big sticker on their window saying "This is a Blue Badge bay. You should not be parked here." And it'll take them the rest of the day to scrape it off the windscreens. And it'll still be there for weeks and months afterwards to remind them not to do it again. Well, yeah, none of those are lawful, of course.

Richard, 70+, North of England

## 1.3 Hate

**Two thirds (67%) of disabled people taking part in the survey had experienced hate and harassment** in accessible parking spaces. People with chronic illness were particularly likely to report this type of encounter.

Some who had experienced hate felt that they **were targeted because they were in a Blue Badge bay** and therefore visible as disabled people. One participant, Julie, was assaulted by teenagers in a parking space and while the perpetrators were ultimately prosecuted, the police initially tried to persuade her not to pursue criminal charges:

Yeah, they threw things at me, called me names, and... it just wasn't very pleasant. I reported it to the police. They were very good. They were caught. And [...] the policeman actually [suggested] restorative justice. You know, when you go and talk to them instead of taking the legal route. He said because apparently they are usually well-behaved children. "Well... you know, teenagers. And they're about to sit their exams." I said, "Well, that's why they should know better."

Julie, 50-59, North of England

Other encounters could also turn into aggression and physical violence, meaning that disabled people were concerned about how **managing their reactions to avoid escalation**. Some were worried that they would be physically assaulted or have their car damaged if they reacted to forcefully.

## 1.4 Positive Encounters

Alongside all the negativity, **most people (69%) had also had at least one positive encounter**. Over half of survey participants (53%) had had a positive chat with another Blue Badge holder. Positive interactions with random passersby (37%) or receiving wanted help (33%) were less common.

Other disabled people are always.... they always look out, it feels like they look out for each other, disabled people in the disabled bays, more than the non-disabled people would.

Isabella, 30-39, London

**People with a mobility impairment and/or a visible impairment were more likely** to have had a positive encounter, particularly with non-badge holders. This shows how people close to a stereotypical expectations of what a Blue Badge holder sometimes received better treatment.

## 1.5 What Happens During an Encounter?

Different interactions between the disabled person and another party could take place during an encounter. The most common interactions were intrusive ones, with **staring being the overall most common—80% of survey participants said they had been stared at**. Disabled people under 50 were more likely to have been stared at. Almost two thirds (63%) of participants said they had been asked **intrusive questions such as “What’s wrong with you?”** or intimate details about their impairment. This shows how disabled people’s bodies are often considered public property.

When disabled people called out the rudeness of the other person’s behaviour, they were often met with further hostility, being told it was *they* who were being rude for talking back:

A supermarket with 50% of Blue Badge spaces in use. I had just parked and a car stopped in the access and tooted. Elderly driver pointed and gestured at me, then wound window to tell me I'd parked in a bay reserved for cars with a badge. Politely acknowledged "yes I have". "Well I can't see a badge!" "It's on the dashboard clearly displayed" "Well is it actually your badge, you don't look disabled!" (5 Cars now queuing behind them unable to pass around to park). "I'm not aware of it being a game of disability 'Top Trumps', but perhaps looking up Motor Neurone Disease may explain the lower leg orthotics I wear and the medically restricted driving licence I have!" I was told I was "very rude" to reply how I did. The couple later mumbled something when in the same aisle in the supermarket.

Darren, 50-59, North of England

Another common interaction involved **other people expressing envy at the Blue Badge**, which was experienced by over half of people in the survey. This involved the underlying assumption that the Blue Badge was a 'perk' or equated to better treatment, rather than enabling disabled people to access otherwise inaccessible public spaces.

Disabled people in public can often receive **condescending treatment** and this also happened in Blue Badge bays. Just under half said they have been patronised (47%) or had unwanted help forced upon them (47%), and 39% had received 'non-person treatment', where the other person talked to their companion instead of to them directly.

As part of being policed by others in Blue Badge bays, **just over a quarter (28%) of people in the survey said they had been reported**. A smaller number had been photographed or films (17%) or followed around by strangers (14%).

Negative encounters could involve anything from **passive-aggressive interactions** such as staring, tutting, or hushed comments, to overt aggression. **Almost half (46%) of people had been insulted by others and around a third (32%) had been threatened**. Physical violence was much rarer (6%), but nevertheless several participants reported experiencing violence and hate crimes in Blue Badge bays (as illustrated in Julie’s story on page 6).

## 2. ENCOUNTERS IN CONTEXT

### 2.1 When and Where?

The most common location for encounters were supermarkets – **87% of survey participants had had an encounter in a supermarket car park**. Other common locations included near shops (70%) and at hospitals or doctor's surgeries (58%). This highlights how encounters often taking place during essential everyday errands and activities, and how difficult it can be to avoid them. It also meant that sometimes disabled people would avoid non-essential trips if they could not face the hassle of an encounter.

So, I think this is part of the fact that sometimes it's easier not to go out than it is to go out. It's often not worth the hassle. I'd love to go to town and buy a hat for example. I want to buy it. I lost my hat, so I want to replace it. But it's so much trouble trying to get to the... to park outside the shop that... what is it, since October last year I've been planning to go but I won't go because it's too much hassle. So.... yeah, I would say it's more of a 'I avoid getting into that' situation.

George, 50-59, Midlands

Most often, the other person involved an encounter was **either a non-Blue Badge holder misusing a bay (70%)**, particularly for older disabled people, **or a random bystander (59%)**. These encounters with random strangers were particularly common for women and non-binary participants.

Most people in the survey had had a Blue Badge for over a decade, and this was reflected in the number of encounters they reported. Almost half (42%) of participants said they had had **over 20 encounters**.

For most people (70%), encounters happened between a few times a year and a few times a month. However, **they did not need to happen often to have an impact**. Even two or three particularly intense encounters could be enough to discourage someone from going out.



Image: A cracked wheelchair symbol in an accessible parking bay

It hasn't happened that often, but is very upsetting when it does.

Tina, 70+, North of England

## 2.2 Welfare Cuts and 'Scrounger' Rhetoric

Disability benefits have been targeted by repeated drastic cuts in the last 15 years, and this was accompanied by government and media painting most disabled as 'scroungers' taking advantage of benefits they do not really deserve. While the Blue Badge scheme was exempt from cuts and was in fact expanded to a wider range of conditions, **many disabled people reported being called 'scroungers' and 'fakers' when using accessible parking.**

After parking in a disabled bay at Waitrose, a man shouted "Why are you parking there, you're not disabled. There's nothing wrong with you. You're a scrounger!" He stood in front of me shouting. No one helped. I walked to the store and asked for help and he followed me repeating similar phrases. Even when the manager asked him to calm down as he appeared to be in a rage - he refused shouting in front of everyone I was a fake, 'scrounger' and didn't need a Blue Badge. I'm normally independent and resilient but this reduced me to tears and I couldn't stop shaking.

Helen, 60-69, South of England

The assumption that someone's Blue Badge was not 'legitimate' was often the reason for intrusive questions and even **demands from strangers to check someone's Blue Badge**. There were many stories of both non-disabled people and other disabled people feeling entitled to 'police' parking bay. This entitlement was rooted in **the perception that Blue Badge parking equalled 'better' treatment**, and that Blue Badges were easy to get. Because the Blue Badge is perceived as a 'perk', **envy was a strong motivation** to challenge those seen as not 'deserving'.

## 2.3. Location and Facilities

Both the location of Blue Badge bays and their larger width arguably added to their perception as a 'perk'. However, in practice many disabled people said that **Blue Badge bays were often not adequate**. They criticised the one-size-fits-all approach, with some wheelchair users preferring to have bays that were further away from the entrance. Some bays were not large or close enough, and many felt that there were **simply not enough bays**. Some argued that not having enough bays **increased** competition for the spaces available and this further encouraged policing others. The '**bare minimum' approach to access** left many feeling like they were **second-class citizens**, for example when bays were replaced with (inaccessible) electric vehicle charging bays, or their hours restricted:

I kind of think as well, some of the Blue Badge bays I've noticed, are suspended after 6 o'clock in where I live in [local city], and you kind of think, "We're disabled, we're not werewolves!", you know. [laughs] [...] But yeah, I think there should be more Blue Badge bays. I think there should be more accessible parking full stop.

Emma, 50-59, Midlands

## 2.4 Stereotypes and Expectations

Being seen as not 'deserving' or 'legitimate' was central to many encounters. In practice, this usually involved stereotypical **assumptions about what disability should 'look' like**. As discussed previously, age was an important factor for people getting challenged, as was having a mobility impairment. However, **even wheelchair users were sometimes challenged**, usually when they had not yet got their wheelchair out of the car.

Chris: Em... I know there's a lot of challenges going around because you see some people that have got Blue Badges and people question why. I mean I've noticed a few times when I pulled up. And to see somebody pulling up and... I sit there for a few minutes, but they don't realise I'm actually lowering my seat down so I can open my door, lean back, and carry my wheelchair out. And I'll open the door and they sit and watch and then... they sort of give you that look where they raise and roll their eyes and then look the other way. You know, as if they say, "Okay, we'll let you off this time." And I'm thinking, "Right, okay." You know.

Chris, 60-69 Midlands

**'Looking' disabled is thus not a fixed state.** In fact, in the survey 44% of people had a visible impairment and 67% said they felt 'not looking disabled' was a factor in their encounters, meaning there was considerable overlap between the two.

When asked what the public expect disability to look like, participants **described a stereotype of severe impairment and people being able to do anything for themselves**.

What do I think a Blue Badge holder should look like? The most caricature stereotype-y looking disabled person ever [...] either obviously blind and needs glasses and a cane or clearly has... no control of their body whatsoever hence no neck control, lolling tongue, no ability to speak, blah, blah, right? I mean, these are the... like if you imagine severe disability. That's what I think people think of.

Amir, 18-29, Midlands

Equating disability with being completely incompetent meant there were expectations of how disabled people should be in accessible parking spaces, for example that they should not be able to drive themselves or travel alone, but with a carer. **Some disabled people were also hassled for having new or expensive cars, nice clothes, and for travelling with children**, with the unspoken assumption that disabled people should not be able to have all of these. What underlies this attitude is **prejudice that disabled people are inferior to non-disabled people, and should know their place**. This was reflected in the expectation that disabled people should be polite and deferential, even when the other person was not. Tellingly, 54% of disabled people in the survey said they were confronted because they were not behaving in the right way. My participants felt that a **lack of media representation of 'normal' disabled people** was a big part in why the public had such limited expectations of what disabled people should be like.

# 3. NAVIGATING ENCOUNTERS

## 3.1 Strategies for Managing Encounters

While how disabled people handle an encounter often depended on both the person and the situation, overall **the most common strategies used were those designed to avoid engaging in an encounter— 46% ignored the other person and 45% stayed in their car** rather than getting out. These strategies were particularly common in encounters involving harassment or being accused of using a 'fake' Badge. Some also parked elsewhere to avoid an encounter, although this could often come at a cost:

When I could walk I have had people say (out loud) to their friend, "she doesn't need a Blue Badge". I have on occasion not used a Blue Badge space because I have been worried that people would stare at me. The extra effort then put me in bed for two days.

Sarah, 60-69, South of England

**Another 46% said they prepared answers** in advance for potential intrusive questions, and this strategy was particularly used by younger people. Some disabled people, especially those with not always visible impairments, used mobility aids (28%) they did not strictly need, or exaggerated their impairment (24%), e.g. by emphasizing a limp, **in order to 'look' disabled** and protect themselves from a potential encounter.

Where disabled people chose to engage the other person, **choosing to educate the other person (41%) was used slightly more often than taking a confrontational approach (38%)**. For some people, a lot of effort encounters went into keeping their temper, particularly when they were frustrated by the constant hassle they were facing. This could lead to feelings **of guilt when they did lose their temper**, such as one poorly participant who yelled "Who the f\*\*\* are you, the Blue Badge police?" at an older woman who was hassling her at her GP surgery:

I do regret shouting at that woman and swearing because that was rude. My mum raised me better, you know, I shouldn't have done that.

Ivy, 18-29, North of England

A final strategy employed by some disabled people was **using sarcasm and humour** to embarrass to defuse situations, and embarrass people by calling them out about their assumptions, for example by theatrically getting their wheelchair out of the car. The participants using these strategies in the hope that it would **make the other person question their assumptions** and think again before harassing other disabled people in the future.

## 3.2 Reporting

Only 32% of disabled people said they had reported an encounter, with older people more likely to report. Of those who had reported, 40% said no action was taken and 34% did not hear back from their report. This highlights how little recourse disabled people have in addressing the injustices they face in Blue Badge bays. Enforcement was often a postcode lottery. While some said their councils took action to enforce Blue Badge rules and fine people parking in bays with no badge, many others said their council took no action.

Many who took part in the research wanted to see more enforcement and harsher penalties such as fines or points on the license of people misusing Blue Badges and bays. A few people compared misuse of bays to breaking the law. However, a few people had even had negative encounters with traffic wardens who doubted their legitimacy. Some disabled people felt that the lack of formal enforcement encouraged the public to police Blue Badge bays:

I wish that Blue Badge parking was properly policed because what we have now is the worst of both worlds, people making assumptions and not looking at the badge and trying to police it for the benefit of those who do, but in doing so make lots of assumptions.

Mel, 40-49, London

## 3.3. Emotional Impact

Encounters can be extremely draining, because of the frustration that they happen over and over again and disabled people can do little to stop them. 91% of people said they worried about encounters, with 40% worrying always and 35% worrying a lot. Young people and those with non-mobility impairment were particularly likely to worry. This worry was made worse by the fact that encounters could happen at any time, meaning many disabled people were always on edge. For even the most assertive disabled people, the impact could sometimes get too much:

If somebody gives me grief I'm going to give it right back to them. I do occasionally have the "It's not worth doing the thing, I don't want to get into a fight with anybody" and will have a couple of weeks of maybe not wanting to use my Blue Badge or other ones and then I notice that my world has gotten smaller again.

Charlie, 30-39, South of England

Over two thirds (68%) said they sometimes did not go out because of the worry. Encounters did not need to involve outright aggression or hate to cause anxiety. In fact, staring was the interaction most strongly associated with worrying. Small encounters could thus build up to become just as impactful as outright aggression and hate.

## 3.4 Experiences of Access

The Blue Badge was essential for disabled people taking part in the research to be able to participate in public life. But while the scheme was great in theory, it often did not improve access in practice, instead creating new problems. Encounters could significantly disrupt disabled people's ability to go about their day:

A man in his 50s came over trying to take our car keys out of the car (luckily it was a keyless ignition Motability vehicle). When he realised he couldn't get the key he came round to my side trying to grab my Blue Badge. We was [sic] called every name under the sun. The c word, the n word, lots of f yours. All because we had parked in the disabled bay. [...] I was that upset with the whole incident I wanted to just leave and not have my operation.

Mark, 40–49, South of England

While age, type of impairment, and other demographics could shape encounters, any disabled person could potentially be impacted by an encounter. Even some people who had not experienced negative encounters were affected by stories from others, leading to worry that they may also be targeted:

So I'm kind of sat waiting and wondering when is that going to happen to us, especially if my husband has to help me get out of the car and there's a delay for me exiting the car with my walking aid. You really do wonder what's gonna happen next... it just puts you off going out.

Anna, 40-49, South of England

Both the poor facilities and the lack of being able to report encounters left many disabled people feeling like second-class citizens, whose access did not matter because nobody really cared. Some also talked about feeling vulnerable in accessible parking spaces because of the real potential for encounters to escalate into aggression and violence. Encounters could make both physical and mental impairments worse, with pain, fatigue, anxiety, and depression flaring up due to the stress.

Despite this, many disabled people continued to resist ideas of the Blue Badge as a 'perk', and asserted their rights to these spaces. Some older disabled people in particular challenged others out of principle to defend bays from misuse. Some people also talked about intervening when they saw others being challenged by vigilante enforcers, and standing up for each other.

Many shared stories about encounters with disabled friends, and were engaged in their local disabled people's organisation, on social media, or on disability forums to build a sense of community and solidarity. Support from friends, family, and carers was also crucial for many in knowing they were not alone in navigating encounters, and continuing to brave public spaces day after day despite the potential for yet another encounter.

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

## Encounters reflect wider negative attitudes

The impact of political messages about disabled people as 'scroungers' can be strongly felt in this research. This kind of **scapegoating** harms all disabled people, making them the problem instead of the lack of proper enforcement. It also pits people against each other and reinforces prejudice about the Blue Badge being a 'perk', which leads to **envy and resentment about disabled people getting 'better treatment'** rather than equal access.

## All disabled people can have encounters

This research has shown that it is **not just people with 'invisible' impairments** who face hassle in Blue Badge bays. Firstly, **age is the strongest factor** shaping encounters, but many other aspects of a person's identity (gender, race, having children) can also play a part. Secondly, some disabled people with visible impairments faced confrontation before getting out of the car. Ultimately, **all disabled people risk confrontation** because nobody can live up to the impossible stereotype required for being truly 'deserving'.

## Encounters can actively exclude disabled people

The everyday impact of **even small encounters can be so draining that many disabled people stopped going out** at least temporarily because of them. Feelings of worry, frustration, and anger were strong among participants, alongside the frustration that the scheme was only half-heartedly implemented and **nobody seems to care** about whether it actually works. The lack of adequate facilities plus the poor enforcement in most of the country meant that **disabled people are made to feel like second-class citizens** on a regular basis.

## Blue Badge can never create 'full' access

Encounters can turn supposedly accessible space into a space that in practice often requires **a lot of physical and emotional energy to navigate**. This shows that access is not just about having the spaces, but about the people within these spaces and the attitudes they bring with them. While **wider prejudice, hostility, and suspicion against disabled people exist**, there can be no such thing as a truly accessible space, and disabled people.

## Solidarity is important to keep going

Despite all the negativity, there were also **positive moments of solidarity** between disabled people, support from bystanders, and shared experiences with friends, family members, and carers, which enabled disabled people to feel they were not alone in persisting. They also connected **with other disabled people** through social media and real life groups. Many participants resisted the reductive 'scrounger' stereotype and fought for **access to Blue Badge parking as their right**.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. Strengthen enforcement and reporting mechanisms

:There should be **increased penalties** for both Blue Badge abuse and misuse of accessible parking bays (e.g. increasing fines or driving license points), alongside **dedicated reporting services** (phone or online messaging) and use of automatic number plate recognition to tackle abuse and misuse.

## 2. Involve disabled people in policy-making and decisions

National and local policy around Blue Badges should be **co-produced with disabled people**, with regular engagement through focus and advisory groups, taking **a social-model informed approach** in shaping both policy and public communications.

## 3. Resume Blue Badge data collection

Collection of scheme data has been partially discontinued by the national government. Local authorities should be enabled to **resume and expand collection of data on the scheme**, including demographic information, data on Blue Badge prosecutions, and the actions taken by local authorities to enforce the scheme.

## 4. Increase minimum requirements for bays

Stricter standards for both public and private parking spaces regarding the size, number, and location of bays should be made **mandatory rather than advisory** to ensure bay provision goes **beyond the bare minimum**.

## 5. Provide adequate resourcing for local authorities

Local authorities should be supported to develop **robust and best practice-informed policies** for data collection and developing policies, moving towards **a standardised approach** to Blue Badge implementation to avoid variation between different areas.



Image: A small white sign with the International Symbol of Access (wheelchair symbol)

# METHODOLOGY

The findings presented in this report are drawn from a survey of 304 Blue Badge holders plus 20 follow-up interviews. All names given in this report are pseudonyms.

## Survey

The survey ran from 1 January to 30 June 2023 and was open to Blue Badge holders (not friends or family) who had had at least one encounter, were over 18, and lived in England. The survey covered the types of encounters experienced, other people involved, the frequency and location of encounters, the factors that participants felt had influenced encounters, and the strategies used to manage encounters. I also collected some demographic and impairment information on participants. The survey was shared on social media (Twitter/X and LinkedIn) and sent to 178 Disabled People's Organisations, of which at least 34 sent it to their members. The survey received a total of 304 valid responses, with women overrepresented (67% in the survey versus 58% in the representative National Travel Survey). Younger people were also more likely to take the survey, with ages 59 and under overrepresented, and almost half of participants (48%) aged between 40-59. Results were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. This included exploring associations between the answers given and demographic variables to show how diverse groups of disabled people can experience encounters in different ways. The survey also included many stories shared by participants and some of them are represented in this report to illustrate the findings.

## Follow-up interviews

Between November 2023 and April 2024, I invited 20 survey participants for follow-up interviews. These were chosen for maximum diversity in terms of location, age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, impairment type, and impairment visibility. This included 10 men, 9 women, and 1 non-binary participants. Unfortunately, I was only able to interview 2 participants who identified as an ethnic minority, meaning there is a gap in how this report reflects the experiences of people from racially minoritised backgrounds. There was also a roughly equal spread across all age groups. Interviews were conducted remotely via online video conference, phone, or email, depending on each participant's preference. I used semi-structured interviews, meaning there were some set questions I asked all participants, covering their Blue Badge, one or more specific encounters they had experienced, the factors that influenced the encounter, the way they had managed the encounter, and the impact of encounters on the person's life. Interviews were analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis approach, meaning I generated four themes (with 10 subthemes) to tell a coherent story about Blue Badge encounters: "Second-class citizens", "Whose space is it anyway?", "Disabling Emotions", and "Spaces of Resistance".

For more details about the research, please see the Further Resources on the next page.

# FURTHER RESOURCES

## More Politics of Parking

- ◆ Project website: <https://www.politicsofparking.com>
- ◆ Full PhD thesis: LINK COMING SOON
- ◆ Article on emotion management in accessible parking spaces in Frontiers of Sociology journal: <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sociology/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2025.1401620/full>
- ◆ Article on 'faking' encounters and experiences of accessibility in Urban Studies journal: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00420980251342964>
- ◆ Disability News Service article based on survey findings: <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disabled-people-with-blue-badges-threatened-insulted-and-attacked-survey-shows/>
- ◆ Presentation at the British Hate Crime Network PGR/ECR Discussion Group: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSimQ8A3QRw>
- ◆ Social Policy Matters blog post: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/2023/does-the-blue-badge-parking-scheme-really-make-life-easier-for-disabled-people>
- ◆ LAbled disability podcast episode on the Politics of Parking: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/1Gi2MVKHRCiyzRHfHXHgku?si=aed0b54787404549>

## Blue Badge information and guidance

- ◆ Disabled Motoring's UK Baywatch campaign: <https://www.disabledmotoring.org/baywatch/about-baywatch>
- ◆ Disabled Motoring UK on Responsibilities and Use of a Blue Badge: <https://www.disabledmotoring.org/blue-badge/blue-badge-reforms>
- ◆ Citizen's Advice on Using Your Blue Badge: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/benefits/sick-or-disabled-people-and-carers/help-for-disabled-travellers1/blue-badge-scheme/using-your-blue-badge/>

## Hate and harassment

- ◆ Disability Hate Crime toolkit: <https://disabilityhatecrimetoolkit.wordpress.com/>
- ◆ Disability Rights UK on reporting disability hate crime: <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/independent-living/stop-disability-hate-crime>