

Getting around

As with most big cities, getting around is often the biggest challenge for a visitor with a disability, unless you bring your own transport - and even then there can be hassles with stopping and parking. One of the ways to reduce the need to move around too much is to choose a centrally located hotel, or even to use two hotels in different parts of the city, spending a few days at one, and then transferring to another. In Paris that could well mean one hotel around (say) les Halles or the Louvre, and another near the Eiffel Tower.

This chapter discusses, in order:

- **driving and parking**
- **taxis, and the use of adapted vehicles**
- **public transport**
- **buses**
 - **the Métro**
 - **RER**
 - **SNCF main line railways**
- **boat trips on the Seine and on the canal**

Driving and parking

Driving in Paris is undoubtedly a bit hairy, and not recommended if you are of a nervous disposition or if you have no experience of big city driving. However, all you need is a little confidence and commonsense, and it's not that difficult! Some of our survey teams drove themselves around both in conventional cars, one team had an adapted accessible minibus.

If you can cope with the driving, then having your own transport makes you much more mobile and flexible.

Having good maps, and a competent navigator is a great help. The use of an up-to-date SatNav system could also make the navigating much easier (although SatNav is not perfect, and there are security problems if you leave a portable one in sight).

Bus and taxi lanes are generally well marked and it means that taxis in

particular can get around quickly, though their existence means that it can be virtually impossible to pull over to study a map! Something that can be slightly disconcerting is that sometimes the bus lane is the nearside right-hand lane, and then it can suddenly switch to being in the middle of the road without much apparent warning.

The signs giving directions are (in our view) pretty dire and are especially challenging at night because signs do not normally appear until you reach the road junction or roundabout, at which stage, you may be in the wrong lane!

Using the routes along the river on the *rive Gauche* and *rive Droite* can simplify some navigating problems, so long as you know where to turn off. Also note that the signs for the Périphérique (the inner ring motorway) indicate a choice between 'Intérieur' and 'Extérieur'. It depends whether you want to go clockwise, in which case you want the *Intérieur*, or to go anti-clockwise, you need the *Extérieur*. It's all to do with driving on the right, since the clockwise direction is always on the inside of the circle, and vice versa.

We have to say that it was a little while before we understood the distinction.

Traffic lights generally only exist at either end of the stop line on the road. There are no duplicate lights in front of you on the far side of the junction, as is normally the case in the UK. The traffic lights in Paris are at two different heights, with lower level repeater lights which can usually be seen easily from the drivers seat in a car.

When you are turning right or left at traffic lights, pedestrians have priority over vehicles, which is a different convention from the UK. Your green light only gives you priority for going straight ahead.

Parking

Parking in Paris has become much more widely regulated and controlled since the last edition of the guide. Practically the whole area inside the Périphérique is a parking meter zone, with controls during the day. However, there are a good number of big CPs, mainly underground. For example, there are more than ten UGCPs on or very near the Champs-Élysées. Some have lift access back up to the street.

There is also quite a lot of meter parking at the roadside in controlled areas, although the provision is variable in different arrondissements.

To pay for parking at a meter, you need to get a pre-paid card from a *Tabac*, and when you use it, appropriate amounts of money are deducted each time you park. You cannot put cash into the machines which can cause a hassle when you first park. The machines only have instructions in French, whereas the UGCP machines usually have the option of language choice. UGCPs are increasingly only allowing access to people with valid CP tickets by using a swipe card reader to open doors or allow you to use the lift, or you have to key in a six-digit number which is printed on your ticket.

The Blue Badge (BB) parking scheme for disabled people is Europe-wide, but the local application of the rules is difficult to assess properly. Most BB spaces consist of just one space, and if that one is full it may be some distance before you find another one.

Parkings de Paris

Com 3000, 21 rue Lamartine, 75009

Tel: 01 45 26 59 74 Fax: 01 45 26 59 75

website: www.parkingsdeparis.com

e-mail: contact@parkingsdeparis.com

This book is an excellent publication which lists all the underground and overground car parks throughout the city, with good maps showing their exact location, and detailing the charges. They also say whether there are spaces specifically reserved for BB holders (ie for disabled people). The description in *Parkings de Paris* also says whether or not there is lift access up to the surface.

Note that most CPs have a height limitation of around 1.9m which makes it difficult for those driving higher vehicles, such as minibuses or cars with a wheelchair stowage pod on the roof.

We visited many of the CPs listed near the main sights which have a lift up to the surface, and details have been integrated into the appropriate area write-ups. There's a separate write-up about hotel CPs in the Accommodation chapter with appropriate warnings about the difficulties of using CPs with steep, narrow and curved approaches.

Taxis and the use of adapted vehicles

Paris has nearly 15,000 taxis. These are conventional cars, like those in New York, and they are completely unlike the black cabs in London. In Paris, **a wheelchair user would have to transfer into a car seat while their chair is folded and put in the boot/trunk.** London's black cabs are unusual, in that most are wheelchair accessible. Note that many cab drivers will not carry a passenger on the front seat, and the back seats in a car are not so easy to get in and out of for some people.

Taxis can be hailed on the street. There are also a large number of cab ranks at major junctions, near tourist sites, and near many big RER and Métro stations. For two or three passengers travelling together, they can provide a not-too-expensive and efficient method of getting around, depending on the time of day. If you have come for a brief holiday or break, the time you save by using a taxi probably means that it is money well spent. As in every country, it is worth having a map in your hand, and knowing where you are going, as you are less likely to be ripped off. As in other big cities, taxis are far more difficult to find when it is raining, and during the commuter rush hours. However, the cab rank system does mean that you can join a queue of those seeking a taxi, and then you just have to be patient.

The only Taxi service we know of with adapted vehicles for chair users and available 'on call' is

Taxis G7 Horizon

22-28 rue Henri Barbusse, 92110 Clichy, Hauts-de-Seine

Tel: 01 47 39 00 91 (the dedicated line for adapted taxis, staffed 24/7)

Tel: 01 47 39 47 39 (the main call centre number also staffed 24/7)

Tel: 01 41 27 66 99 is a phone line where English is spoken and using this should enable you to get an adapted vehicle.

website: www.taxis-g7.com e-mail: service.clients@taxis-g7.com

Their office is just outside the Périphérique to the northwest.

G7 operates some 4500 of the conventional Paris taxis and provides a call centre for ordering a Radio Taxi.

G7 Horizon operating in parallel to the basic services have a number of taxi drivers who are used to carrying customers with a manual wheelchair which can be folded up and put in the boot. They also have a fleet of

twelve ramped taxis where a customer can get in the cab in their electric wheelchair.

The information for disabled people on their website is slightly difficult to find, but you can do it via the site map. G7 Horizon say that you can call and order a taxi with ramped access and that you should only have to wait about 15-30 minutes.

We used the G7 Horizon service, and phoned the ‘English-speaking’ number to make our booking. We asked them to ring back on our mobile number when they knew how long we would have to wait. The taxi that came was a people carrier which had an extending ramp and in which the seats could be folded back making space in the back. It was only possible to take a chair user and two companions, and the wheelchair space was quite cramped. There was only 100cm between the two rows of seats, and someone in a larger chair would have had to sit sideways on, possibly without restraints. The vehicle took about 45 minutes to get to us outside the Musée d’Orsay, and arrived with €35 on the clock, so that the whole journey back to our hotel in the 20th cost €55. This compares with the fare in a conventional taxi of about €20. We heard recently from a guide user who was charged €100 for a journey inside the city from Notre Dame to Montmartre, which he (correctly) regarded as unreasonably expensive. In a normal taxi, the fare would have been more like €10-12.

Wheelchair accessible vehicles

In our research, we found a number of companies and organisations which can offer adapted and wheelchair accessible cars/taxis and minibuses. One can offer self-drive hire of adapted vehicles. For British companies offering adapted vehicles, see under car hire in the *General information* chapter.

In view of the limitations of public transport, these services may give some disabled people the chance of having easy and independent transport to get to the places that they want to visit. Using such companies is not cheap, but choosing your accommodation to minimise the amount of travelling around you need to do and then selecting two of three ‘outings’ you might want to make should enable you to contain the expense. The cost for an individual journey in an adapted minibus is likely to be somewhere in the €50-100 region while to hire a vehicle for an 8-hour day is likely to cost something like €300-400.

We haven't checked out all the companies by using their services, but we got them all to quote us for a vehicle to take a chair user and two friends on three journeys:

- 1 from Charles de Gaulle airport to a central hotel;
- 2 for a whole day outing to Fontainebleau; and
- 3 for the journey from the central hotel to Orly airport.

We have been to visit several of the companies to confirm the information provided.

We would have to say that our experience with trying to get quotes was quite mixed. The names we followed-up had been acquired from a number of sources, and in some cases had clearly been listed by people who had not properly checked what services the company could offer to a visitor.

We made our enquiries initially by e-mail in English, and received only one reply! We then tried by e-mail in French, which improved the response rate a little. We then rang up, first of all using English, and then using French. It took a lot of work to get a reasonable picture of what is on offer. One lesson from this (as we have said elsewhere) is NOT to rely on initial enquiries by e-mail, unless you get a quick response. Letters, faxes and/or a phone call are almost certainly a better way to communicate AND you may need to be persistent.

Some of the organisations who offer adapted transport exist primarily to provide for Parisians in terms of taking disabled children to school and elderly people to day centres. This means that their 'spare' capacity for dealing with the needs of visitors is limited. Some of these are listed at the end of this section. You may well have more luck with these groups during the school holidays when many of their regular clients are not needing transport.

Most of the companies or organisations listed here offer a variety of vehicles. These are:

- adapted cars which will take one chair user in their chair and two or three friends;
- minibuses with ramped or lift access which will accommodate two or three wheelchair users, with other passengers as well;
- larger buses with lift access for groups.

The various organisations virtually **all request that vehicles are booked in advance**, and availability will depend on the time of year, and how much demand there is. **Bookings can generally only be made during normal office hours.**

Some will enable you to hire the vehicle for the day, with a driver/guide, and this may enable you to go to Versailles or Fontainebleau, or other places that are less easy to get to.

A few companies offer the possibility of self-drive hire of the adapted vehicles, but this will not (generally) include hand controls.

The companies from whom we had the most positive replies are

AETAS Services

141 blvd Mac Donald, 75019

Tel: 01 30 53 69 97 Fax: 01 34 80 94 58

website: www.aetas.fr e-mail: aetas-france@wanadoo.fr

Has adapted people carriers and minibuses with one to eight seats/spaces, including accommodation for up to four chair users. Taxi services and tailor-made sightseeing tours. Their quote for single journeys (for example to and from the airports) was competitive.

Aetas responded to our quotation request at the second attempt, and were very apologetic for having missed the first one. Their reply was in English. Later we booked a journey with them in an accessible minibus from the Gare du Nord to our hotel, using e-mail and English, and they provided an excellent service.

Les Coccinelles

8 allée du Parc de Garlande, 92220 Bagneux, Hauts-de-Seine

Tel: 01 57 63 92 60 Fax: 01 57 63 92 96

e-mail: christine.gestamb@wanadoo.fr

Bagneux is some 3km south of the porte de Chatillon on the Périphérique. In 2007 they did not have a website, but we were told that one is under construction. They have about 35 adapted taxis including seven that will take an electric wheelchair. They have adapted minibuses which can take between one and five passengers in wheelchairs. Prices from €42/h TTC (all taxes included), but the overall cost depends on where and when you want to travel. In order to get a quote from this company, we needed to phone in French, and the quotation was sent in French, but we were told that queries in English would now be answered in English.

Navette Service

4 rue François Mitterrand, Bouffemont 95570

Tel: 01 39 35 09 31 *Fax:* 01 39 35 98 24

website: www.navette-service.com *e-mail:* info@navette-service.com

The office is some 20km north of Paris just off the N1 autoroute north of Sarcelles.

They have five vehicles which can take between one and four wheelchairs, and three other passengers. They confusingly have an old website 'navetteservice' where the English side does not work, and a new site where it does! They provide services seven days a week.

The price from CDG Airport-Paris is about €90.

Ptitcar

27-29 rue Raffet, 75016

Tel: 01 42 24 70 73 *Fax:* 08 25 18 77 56

website: www.ptitcar.com *e-mail:* contact@ptitcar.com

Offers top-of-the-range adapted vehicles for a chair user and up to four other passengers. Can provide a simple taxi service, or chauffeur-driven hire for shopping or excursions.

Ptitcar were the ones who replied to our initial e-mail, with a quotation for the journeys requested. They publish their tariff on their website, although using our browser we were unable to access to English 'button' on the home page.

Ptitcar can offer the hire of a self-drive adapted vehicle (though only for a disabled passenger, and it is not a vehicle with hand controls).

Taxi Ulysse

116 rue de Charenton, 75012

Tel: 01 44 67 80 69 *Fax:* 01 44 67 81 77

website: www.ulyссе-transport.fr *e-mail:* paris@ulyссе-transport.fr

English speaking information and drivers, and there is an English version of the website.

They have five taxis (Renault Kangoo) which can take one electric wheelchair, and about five minibuses for up to nine passengers and/or four electric wheelchair users. Each uses a ramp.

Taxi Ulysse offers taxi services like this all over France and its main office is in Nice. Operations in other areas are under separate franchises.

It was founded in 1996 by Franck Vialle who had been involved in a serious accident and was left tetraplegic. Their quotation for the three specified journeys was slightly more expensive than the others.

Services which seem to be primarily for Paris residents, based around social service requirements and bussing children to and from school are listed below. They may be able to provide transport, quite possibly at reasonable cost, but will not always be available. We had quite some difficulty in getting replies to our request for a quotation. Some only operate on weekdays from 09.00 to 17.00.

AIHROP

3 ave Paul Doumer, 92508 Rueil Malmaison

Tel: 01 41 29 01 29 *Fax:* 01 41 29 01 27

Has about 20 accessible vehicles. When we requested a quotation for the three journeys they were unable to provide it, however we know of other people who have successfully used AIHROP services.

ASAH

4 rue Charcot, 75013

Tel: 01 42 03 61 67 *Fax:* 01 42 02 37 91

website: www.asah75.org *e-mail:* asah@asah75.org

Has a number of different vehicles for one to four wheelchair users and three to eight seats. Again, we were unable to get a quotation.

GIHP Ile de France (Groupement Insertion Personnes Handicapées Physiques)

32 rue de Paradis, 75010

Tel: 01 60 77 20 20 *Fax:* 01 60 77 07 12

Has about 30 adapted taxis (all different kinds) including minibuses for eight passengers or up to five wheelchair users and three other passengers. We tried to make a reservation, but we were told that they don't work on Saturdays. Their website says that they offer a service to and from the airports on a 7 day-a-week basis between 07.00 and 23.00. It also says that some services can be provided for visitors. During the week an airport shuttle costs approximately €60. We used GIHP some years ago, and the service they provided then was good.

There are two organisations who are listed in various places as being able to provide adapted/accessible transport with whom we failed to make contact, in spite of sending and resending e-mails, and leaving messages on voicemail. These were:

- **Handi Transports**, 118/130 ave Jean Jaurès, 75019,
Tel: 01 40 40 97 72 *Fax:* 01 40 40 97 72;

website: www.geocities.com/handitransport

- **PMR Transport**, 20 rue Gambetta, 92500 Rueil-Malmaison, Hauts-de-Seine *Tel:* 01 34 46 27 47

and we think that this is primarily because their main purpose, as mentioned above, is to provide services for Paris residents.

When we made contact with Lynx Transports who are listed in ParisInfo, they clearly didn't want to know (about our request, anyway), so we have not included their details.

Public transport

We used the public transport system extensively, and found that it can be really useful, although you always need to be prepared for the odd glitch or delay, and to have a plan B in your head if something goes wrong.

There are three authorities operating under the general umbrella of Syndicat de Transport for the Ile-de-France (STIF). These are:

- the **RATP** which covers the buses, Métro and a part of the RER;
- the **SNCF** which covers the trains, the rest of the RER, and a few of the buses; and,
- **OPTILE** which is a network of private bus companies located in the greater Paris region.

The Parisian underground system is renowned for being both extensive and efficient. You are rarely any great distance from a Métro station, but **most of the stations are not in any way 'accessible'**. Fourteen lines operate in the city together with five RER lines which provide connections to both the suburbs and further afield.

The facilities on public transport have improved considerably since the guide was last published, but there are still some major gaps and glitches, detailed below. In particular, the lifts (where provided on the RER and Line 14) are somewhat unreliable, the special ticket barriers designed for easy access by disabled travellers get broken too easily. The accessible buses are sometimes hindered by the inappropriate kerb height or by inconsiderate parking. A major improvement is the service available on RER lines A and B for the provision of a ramp (on request) to facilitate wheelchair transfer on and off the trains. When we checked in 2007 there

seemed to be ramps on all the line A platforms in the city centre, and many outside, including (curiously) stations that were not ‘accessible’. We haven’t checked line B so thoroughly, but it was intended to provide ramps here as well. If that’s important to you, check with Infomobi.

There is an extensive network of bus routes and an increasing number of the buses have a ramp and a wheelchair space.

Information sources

Infomobi

website: www.infomobi.com

Infomobi is an information agency who publish an extremely useful map of the accessible bits of the public transport system, *Plan du réseau accessible aux personnes en fauteuil roulant dans Paris - bus, Métro, RER et Transilien*. The map is good at identifying where the accessible buses go, and also which RER stations are accessible. They only seem to publish a new version about once every three years and the most recent edition is dated June 2006. The map is probably rather optimistic as it includes stations on line C where there are two big steps to get up into the train/s. On RER lines A and B there is also a substantial step or gap between the platform and the train carriage, but that is potentially surmountable by a chair user with big back wheels and a strongish friend. The RER lines aren’t generally suitable for an electric wheelchair user, although with the ramps now available, some journeys should be possible.

Infomobi run a daily check on which lifts are/aren’t working at all the RER and Line 14 stations, and have a phone number so that you can ring and check *Tel: 08 10 64 64 64*. Most of those answering will only be able to speak French, although, if you’re lucky, they may be able to find an English speaker.

Last time we tried their e-mail link on the website, which is *contact@infomobi.com*, it didn’t work. The message did get through, however, by sending it independently of the website (and this was probably a temporary glitch).

The website which is regularly updated, has an excellent listing of the ‘accessible’ bus routes and of ‘accessible’ RER stations, which we have used as the basis for some of the information here. It is particularly useful

in highlighting a few stations where there are long-term problems with the lifts. The information given about the accessibility of line C is (in our view) slightly optimistic.

Another source of information is on the RATP website which can be found from www.parisinfo.com (the home page of the Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau) and going via 'Maps & Transport'; 'Info/Disabled access' which leads to www.ratp.fr and from there, go to 'Facilités d'accès' and you can choose bus; tramway; or Métro/RER - and that leads you to a list of bus routes, RER stations etc.

From a printed list it is generally quite difficult to work out what you can do unless you are familiar with the routes and where they go, so the Infomobi map is (in our view) much more user-friendly and helpful. What you can do, however, is to see if there are new bus routes or RER stations that have been made accessible more recently.

Tickets

A variety of tickets are available, all of which are valid for the Métro, buses and the RER. You can buy a single journey ticket or a carnet (packet) of ten tickets which you can get at a discount.

There are weekly and monthly passes for which you need two passport size photos and which you can only get at major stations. There are also Paris Visite passes valid for three or five days giving unlimited travel.

The whole system is 'zoned', so the larger the area you want your pass or tickets to include, the more they will cost. For travel on just one day, you can buy a Formule 1 ticket, which is rather like a Travelcard in London. Its price depends on the number of zones you wish to visit.

Travelling by bus

Paris has a good network of bus routes, and many of their buses are now wheelchair accessible. This means they are equipped with an extending ramp from the middle doors, leading to a space inside which can accommodate a chair. The Infomobi map shows the routes with the accessible buses.

Most solo chair users would find both buses and trains quite difficult (though certainly not impossible) to use, but with a companion, things become easier. We measured the height of the step up into the bus as 37cm, so if that is a problem you can ask for the ramp to be extended.

The space provided in the bus requires that the wheelchair user to face backwards, resting against a tall padded support so that you don't slide around if the bus brakes sharply. This space must be reversed into, and should be big enough to cope with most electric chairs.

There is a button on the outside of the bus, and another one inside by the wheelchair space. Press these to let the driver know that you want to use the ramp. AFTER you've pressed the button, the driver needs to close the doors before extending the ramp - so don't be alarmed, and feel that the bus is going to drive off without you! For getting off, press the button well before your stop if you can. In some cases, the buttons were broken and we had to ask the driver to extend the ramp. This can be difficult if the bus is crowded - but we found that most drivers and passengers were helpful, and messages were relayed to the driver.

If the kerb is too high, as we found in some places, the ramp will go back in before it is fully deployed, and thus the doors do not open. Sometimes, the driver can reposition the bus in order to open them, but again it may be difficult to contact her/him if the bus is crowded. In extreme cases, the ramp cannot be used if other vehicles are badly parked, and you may have to wait for the next bus, or (if you're on the bus) go on to the next stop.

During our summer visits in 2005/6 we tried out a good number of the buses, on several different routes. On the whole, we found the drivers to be helpful in terms of trying to find a bit of pavement where they could put out the retractable ramp. Out of twenty-five random journeys, we had about an 80% success rate in terms of an accompanied chair user getting on and off the bus OK, which is a much better result that we have had when carrying out a similar exercise in London. If it's not possible, for some reason, to get on, then you just have to be patient, and wait for the next bus!

Using buses in a strange city is much more difficult than using trains because bus routes are considerably more complex than those followed by the trains. The Infomobi map mentioned earlier is particularly helpful. In Paris there is a route map inside the bus, and all the stops are prominently named; some buses even have illuminated indicators to show where you are. However, the indicators can be difficult to see from wheelchair users eyeline, especially if the bus is crowded.

The motion on a bus can be more uncertain than it is on a train, and there can be sudden acceleration and/or braking, as well as sharp changes in direction. This can be a hassle for many disabled walkers as well as for

some chair users. Not all drivers wait until you have found a seat before accelerating away from the bus stop, although we found that the Paris drivers were generally more considerate than those we have come across in London.

Note that Paris, in common with many other cities, has a pre-pay system for travelling on buses. You need to get some Métro/bus tickets in advance and these should be available from a *Tabac* as well as from Métro stations.

If you are hard of hearing, you might be wise to write down your destination to show the conductor since then you can be sure she/he knows. If you are partially sighted and need to be told when to get off, again it might be worth having it in writing in French if your local language skills are limited.

The currently accessible bus routes in central Paris are listed in the Table. What is obvious is that there is a whole network of buses going from Gare St-Lazare, which is also at the end of Line 14. There are also three useful routes going around just inside the Périphérique (routes PC1/2/3). Montparnasse is also a useful hub, but it does not link with other accessible transport routes. The number of routes which are wheelchair accessible is continually being increased. If there's something you particularly need to know, have a look at the Infomobi site www.infomobi.com before coming.

The Métro

The Métro remains, basically, a 'no go' area for people with disabilities.

Our view is that if you can cope with the stairs, long distances and difficult entrance and exit barriers, you don't really need the help of an 'access' guide. There is, however one new line which IS accessible, with step free access from pavement to platform on these stations, and only a small step/gap to get into the train. It is Line 14, and goes from Bibliothèque François Mitterrand via Cour St Emilion, Bercy, Gare de Lyon, Châtelet, Pyramides, Madeleine to St-Lazare.

Bus routes with wheelchair accessible buses (June 2007)

<i>Line</i>	<i>Route</i>
20	Gare St-Lazare/Gare de Lyon
21	Gare St-Lazare/Stade Charléty
24	Gare St-Lazare/Maisons-Alfort
26	Gare St-Lazare/Cours de Vincennes
27	Gare St-Lazare/Porte d'Ivry
29	Gare St Lazare/Porte de Montempoivre
30	Trocadéro/Gare de l'Est
31	Étoile/Gare de l'Est
38	Porte d'Orléans/Gare du Nord
39	Issy, Val de Seine/Gare de l'Est
43	Neuilly/Gare du Nord
53	Pont de Levallois/Opéra
54	Gennevilliers/Porte d'Aubervilliers
60	Porte de Montmartre/Gambetta
62	Porte de Saint Cloud/Vincennes
63	Porte de la Muette/Gare de Lyon
64	Gambetta/Place d'Italie
80	Porte de Versailles/Mairie de 18e
81	Porte de St-Ouen/Châtelet
88	Hôpital Européen Pompidou/Montsouris - Tombe Isoire
91	Montparnasse/Bastille
92	Montparnasse/Porte de Champerret
94	Montparnasse/Levallois
95	Porte de Vanves/Porte de Montmartre
96	Montparnasse/Porte des Lilas
PC1	Porte de Champerret/Pont du Garigliano
PC2	Porte d'Ivry/Porte de la Villette
PC3	Porte Maillot/Porte des Lilas

Our 2005 survey found that many of the lifts did not work. One third (33%) of the platforms could not be reached step-free because of broken lifts, and if that level of breakdowns continues, it makes use of Line 14 quite problematic.

When we revisited in 2006, it was 20% of platforms that could not be reached, so more of the lifts were working. We also encountered problems with the wheelchair accessible ticket barriers at several stations, which had been broken by Parisien fare-dodgers. The difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that many stations are virtually unstaffed, so when there is a problem, you have to use an intercom to talk to someone in a remote control room

'Accessible' stations

Line 1

Esplanade de la Défense

This station is underneath the esplanade at the 'city' end, (the end nearest the Arc de Triomphe). Step-free entry is via a lift housed in a large concrete circle or tube on the left at the end of the esplanade, at the point furthest from the Grande Arche de la Défense (the lift was *hors service*, ie out of service, on our visit). Turning right out of the lift, the ticket office is 50m away on the right. 5m from the ticket barriers, the lift to the platform is in the centre on the far side of the central pillar. Assistance must be requested to use this lift.

The **La Defense** Métro station is also wheelchair accessible, but there are no other stations on Line 1 where a chair user could get on or off.

Line 14

Bercy (access to the platforms via either 2 or 3 lifts)

Step-free access to the ticket-office level is via a lift (D75 W110 L130) outside the Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy, facing blvd de Bercy. A second lift, 60m from the first, leads directly to the northbound platform or to a level from which the southbound platform can be accessed via a third lift, 30m away.

Bibliothèque François Mitterrand (access to platform via 2 lifts)

This is the southern terminus for Métro line 14. There are two entrances to the station, one on rue Neuve Tolbiac, an elevated road, and the other

on the lower road, rue du Chevaleret. Both are step-free and provide access to the lift (D80 W105 L145) down to the ticket hall. From the ticket office, the lift (D80 W115 L135) to the platforms is over a bridge. The distance between the lifts is about 200m.

Châtelet (access to the platform via 2 lifts)

Step free entry from street level is via a lift (D80 W135 L130) right by the Novotel les Halles. The lift is also accessible from Châtelet-les-Halles exit 10 (rue de la Ferronniere). The lift down to the platforms was D80 W100 L135. Distances underground were huge (up to 500m) and even the route to line 14 is quite long (200m+).

Cour St-Émilien (access to the platform via 2 lifts)

Step-free entry to the ticket-hall is via a lift on rue de l'Ambroisie. It is 30m from rue François Truffant and Bercy Village, a pedestrian shopping and eating area where there is a reasonably well signed **wheelchair toilet (D85 ST80 SH48)**. Lifts to the platforms (D80 W110 L130) are through the barriers on both sides. These come down in the centre of the platforms.

Gare de Lyon (access to the platforms via at least 2 lifts)

There are two ways down to the line 14 ticket office level. Either follow the signs for platforms 5-23, and the lift is located some 50m from the end of platforms 9 and 11 OR follow the signs for platforms A-N, and there's another lift near the end of platform N.

It is not entirely clear from our write-ups whether there is just one or two further lifts to get to the line 14 platforms, but provided the lifts are working, it is step-free.

Madeleine (access to the platforms via 3 lifts)

The lift (D75 W110 L130) to the ticket-hall is in the middle of the pavement, directly in front of 22 place de la Madeleine. Access to the platforms from here is via a lift to level minus two (broken at time of visit), from where there is a lift (D75 W120 L135) to the northern end of either platform.

Pyramides (access to the platforms via 2 lifts)

The step-free access is via lifts (D75 W130 L170) on the opposite side of the road from the junction between ave de l'Opera and rue Saint-Anne. Two more lifts (D75 W115 L170) take you down to the platforms.

St-Lazare (access to platform via 3 lifts)

A large station spreading over five floors. St-Lazare is the northern terminus station for line 14 and a major interchange for other Métro lines, SNCF lines and RER line E. Step-free entry is via a lift (D80 W100 L150) in a half-dome on the pavement in front of the station facing place du Havre. The ticket hall is on level 0. From here, access to the platform is via a lift to level minus four (D80 W115 L145), then another 15m straight ahead, down to the middle of the platforms.

RER

There are five lines with standard colour markings on the RATP maps:

- **A** (red) runs west-east from St-Germain-en-Laye to Chessy-Marne-la-Vallée (for EuroDisney) via Gare de Lyon and Vincennes. Branches of this line also go north to Poissy and Cergy-le Haut and south to Boissy-St-Léger
- **B** (blue) runs northeast-southwest from Roissy-Aéroport Charles-de-Gaulle-2 and Mitry-Claye to St-Rémy-lès-Chevreuse and Robinson;
- **C** (yellow) runs from Pontoise and Argenteuil in the north to Massy-Palaiseau, Domain-la-Forêt and St-Martin-d'Étampes in the southeast and to Versailles and St-Quentin-en-Yvelines in the east. It also serves Orly airport;
- **D** (green) runs from Orry-la-Ville in the north to Malesherbes and Melun in the south, and,
- **E** (mauve) runs eastwards from Haussmann-St-Lazarre in the centre to Chelles-Gournay and Tournan.

The RER has far fewer stations in the centre of Paris than the Métro, but stretches well outside the suburbs and into neighbouring regions. It is useful for the visitor because it serves Charles de Gaulle and Orly airports, St Germain, Vincennes and Disneyland Paris, as well as several of the main central rail stations. It is also useful for disabled visitors as all the stations on lines A and B inside the Périphérique are accessible from pavement to platform.

This is providing the lifts are working!

There are also some difficulties in terms of actually getting on and off the trains, and there are long distances at most stations. Nonetheless it's a great deal more wheelchair-friendly and disabled-person-friendly than the Métro.

Lines C and D on the RER are of old/obsolete design and they are difficult to modernise to make them ‘accessible’. The trains on these lines are double decker. On Line C there are two steps up into the carriage and

In contrast to the Métro, major parts of RER lines A and B are usable by many people with disabilities, though there are some challenges, including quite long distances to walk/wheel, unreliable lifts, and the fact that there are more double deck trains being used.

The map shows the ‘accessible’ stations.

then either +2, +5 or –4 steps to different parts of the coach to reach a seat. On Line D there’s a large horizontal gap of more than 30cm to get over.

For disabled visitors with a sense of adventure, and for chair users with a strong friend (or two) to help get over the step or gap into the train carriage, the RER lines A and B (the more accessible ones) provide a fast and, on the whole, reliable method of transport.

There are now manually applied ramps (L122 W82) to assist with bypassing the gaps between the train and the platform on lines A and B. When we surveyed, not all stations had ramps. Those that did all kept them by the front carriage, so that getting on and off can be coordinated with the driver at the front of the train.

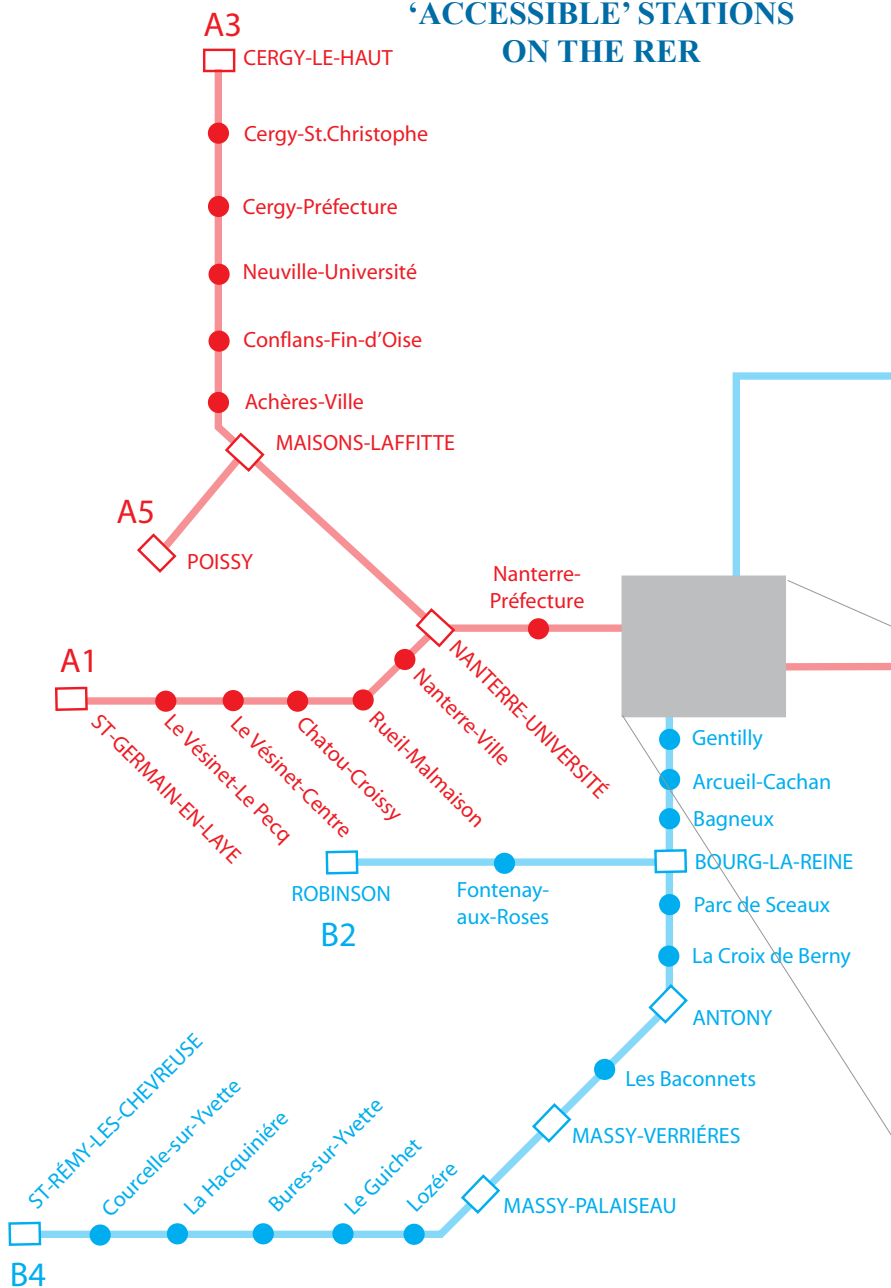
To activate the system, you need to ask for the use of the ramps at the ticket office. Staff will then be alerted to meet you on the platform to put the ramps down, and to ring ahead to inform somebody at your destination to put down the ramp to help you get off.

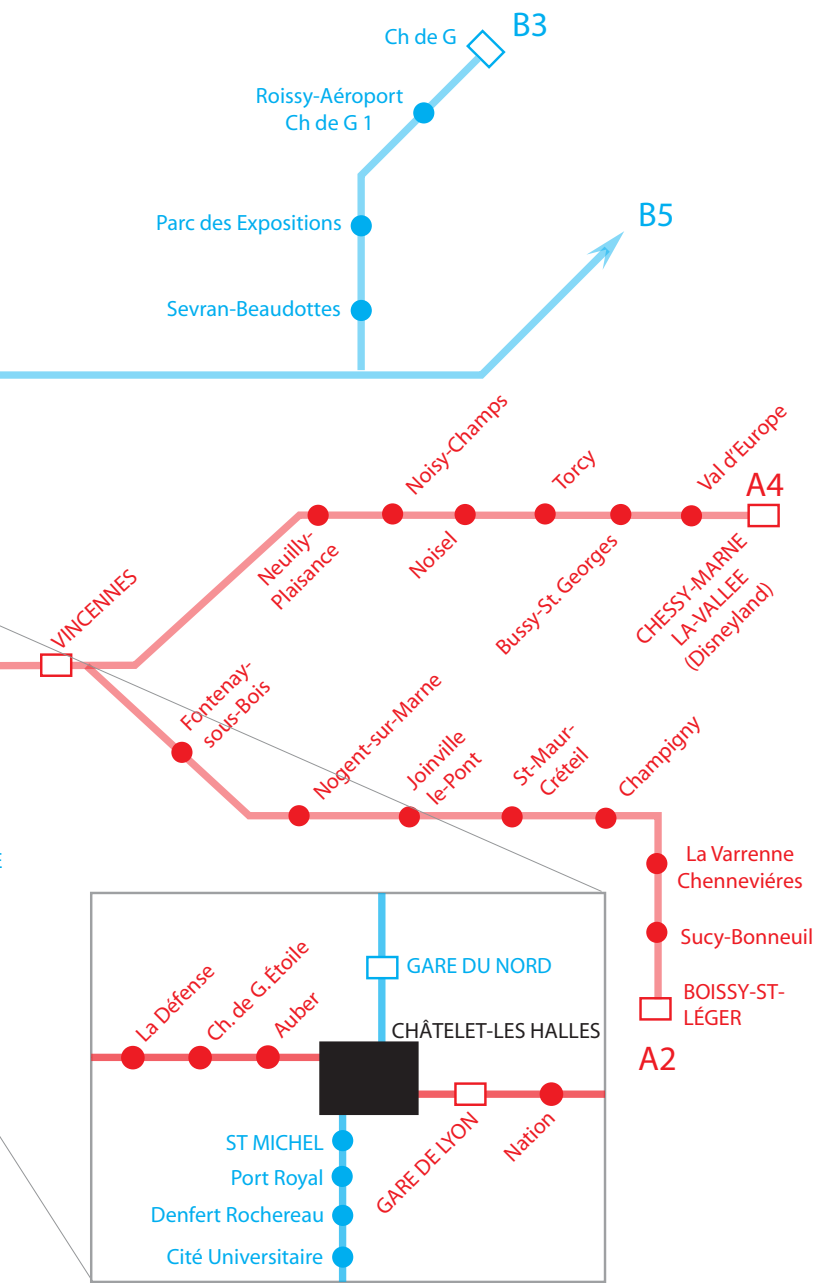
There is discussion about extending this facility to line C where there are ± 2 steps when getting on or off the trains, but the benefits are more arguable as all the trains are also double-deckers.

To take a lift, press the intercom button to call the station control room and explain clearly where you are (ground floor, platform level etc) and where you would like to go. Most staff are helpful and may come to meet you. In other cases, the lift will simply be switched on and be made available for use. Many of the lifts are not for use by everyone.

Occasionally, when our surveying teams came across broken lifts or blocked gates which made wheelchair access to and from those stations difficult or impossible, there seemed to be little impetus to correct the

'ACCESSIBLE' STATIONS ON THE RER





situation. At Nation, for example, the lift was out of order when we visited. The member of staff we spoke to did not know when it would be fixed, only that it had been broken for several months. The current Infomobi list suggests that it is now working OK. From our own observation/experience lifts at the Gare du Nord and at St Michel-Notre Dame have been out of action for more than a year. When last visited, the Gare du Nord lift/s had been repaired, but one at St Michel hadn't.

We have included a map of the main 'accessible' stations on the RER, many of which are described further in the text.

The comments in the paragraphs above provide an appropriate 'health warning' since using the system is NOT entirely straightforward.

RER line A

Central stations (inside the box on map)

Auber (line A)

There are entrances to the station on rue Auber and rue des Mathurins near the junction of the two roads. The entrance on rue des Mathurins is step-free, whereas at rue Auber an open lift (L145 W90) bypasses -9 steps. Both lead to the four lifts (D150 W230 L250) to the ticket hall, from where a one-way open lift leads to a very long corridor (approx 200m long). Lifts to the platforms (D75 W90 L130) are at the end of this. Coming from the trains, lifts at the end of the platforms lead to the long corridor, at the other end of which there are four lifts to the surface. As the trains can be about 200m long, you could finish up covering 400-500m to get out. All the wide barriers have buttons so that disabled passengers can call a staff member to open them.

Charles-de-Gaulle-Étoile (line A)

The lift entrance is located outside the Hôtel Splendid Étoile on ave Carnot, just downhill from the traffic lights on the rue de Tilsett. There is a taxi rank alongside. The lift (D90 W110 L200) takes you down to the ticket hall. After the barriers, there is a funicular-style lift (D90 W120 L140) to a lower level, from where the eastbound platform is accessed by a lift (D108 W125 L200+) forwards and to the right, taking you to the back of the platform. The westbound platform is reached via another lift (D110 W115 L200) down the corridor to the left, which takes you

two thirds of the way towards the front of the platform. When exiting the station, the step-free route via the lifts is signed ‘ave Carnot’.

Châtelet-Les-Halles (lines A, B and D, Métro line 14)

A very large station, with many interchanges. Distances within station may be up to 500m, especially if using both RER and Métro, which are at least 200m apart, in separate sections of the station.

Enter via Forum Les Halles. The simplest way of getting to the platforms for Lines A and B is to use the public lifts from the surface down to level minus 3. There are lifts from surface on rue Rambuteau, allée André Breton and from rue Berger, see Forum Les Halles write up. Go and find one of the two information desks on level minus three (marked on the plans) and someone there will call a staff member to take you down to the station in the service lift (D300 W300 L300). The ticket hall is on level minus four, and the platforms on minus five.

Alternatively, there’s a lift (D80 W135 L130) next to the Novotel Les Halles on rue de la Ferronnerie. This lift comes down between the Métro and RER stations, about 20m from RER ticket barriers, so still a long walk to the Métro. There is a **wheelchair toilet** by the RER entrance here (on the left as you face the ticket barriers) but it has been *hors service* every time we’ve gone past.

All the ticket barriers had wider wheelchair entrances with a call button to ask someone to open the gate for you. There is a very large central area behind the barriers.

Lifts (D80 W100 L140) to the platforms are signed. These come down to the end of the platforms.

The station is quite confusing (and big) and the first few times when you use it you would do well to request staff help, at level minus three (as described) to get down to the platforms and by using the help button on the platform to get off and up to the publi areas.

For Métro Line 14, see Métro section.

Gare de Lyon (lines A and D, Métro line 14)

The Gare de Lyon is huge and confusing. It IS possible to get both from the street and the various platforms down on to the RER and to the Line 14 platforms step-free, but it’s not easy to describe precisely how!

The main station is described in the section on the SNCF stations. Our

advice for finding the RER platforms and those for line 14 is to follow the signs and to ask en route if you need to.

La Défense (line A)

Step free access to the street is via a lift from the platforms which takes you to the ticket office level.

Then use Exit A where there's a lift up to the Parvis (see the more detailed write up in the chapter on *Sights outside the Périphérique*).

Nation (line A)

Step free access from the street would be provided by a lift into the station, where there are further lifts to the platforms. At the time of surveying, the lifts were out of order, rendering the whole station inaccessible to wheelchair users for more than a year. The Infomobi website now implies that they are now in use again, presumably after repair.

Stations outside the Périphérique

Chatou-Croissy (line A1)

The entrance to this station is step-free from place de la Gare, just off rue Paul Flament. Access to the platform is via a service lift (a *monte-charge*; not seen, but we were assured that it was easily large enough for a wheelchair). The lift is staff controlled and only used by the public when needed. On the platform there is a call button on the side of the door.

Chessy-Marne-La-Vallée (line A4)

A large station on three different levels next to Parc Disney. RER and SNCF trains are on level minus one, while the Eurostar trains are on level one. There are four step-free entrances to level 0 for the RER and the ticket hall: exits 1 and 2 lead to Disneyland and towards the Studios.

The RER train is reached by a lift (D75 W135 L135) through the ticket barriers opposite exit 1, while the Eurostar and SNCF lifts are at the back of the ticket hall. There are wheelchair ramps on the SNCF platforms to bridge a 19cm gap. Ask at the ticket hall to use these.

There is a **wheelchair toilet (D90 ST140 SH50)** on level one. It costs 40 cents. Station facilities include an information centre and café in the level 0 ticket area, as well as baggage lockers.

Le Vésinet-Centre (line A1)

There is step-free entry to the station from its CP (with 2 BB spaces) off rue du Général Clavery. From the ticket hall, access to the eastbound platform is direct and step-free. Step-free access to the westbound platform is via a very large goods lift (a *monte-charge*) which goes down from just beside the ticket office. Then another lift takes you up to the centre of the platform. Staff assistance is needed, and there's an intercom button on the platform to alert someone when you want to exit.

Le Vésinet-Le Pecq (line A1)

There is a step-free entrance to the ticket office off rue Alexandre Dumas, behind the station CP which has 2 BB spaces. The lift down to the ticket barriers (D99 W140 L135) is on the left of the ticket office. From there the lifts to the platforms (same dimensions) are on either side of the ticket machines. These open up in the middle of the platforms.

Rueil-Malmaison (line A1)

Step-free entry from rue des Deux Gares and ave de Colmar. It is 25m to the ticket office and there is a wide gate to bypass the ticket barriers. Then there is a lift (D130 W129 L137) to the beginning of the platform. It was blocked off at the time of our visit (in 2005) due to building work.

St-Germain-en-Laye (the western terminus of line A1)

Located opposite the Château de St-Germain, the way in to the lift is located just downhill from the main entrance, behind the bicycle racks. This lift (D100 W150 L120), which was in poor condition, with an uneven, broken stone-tiled floor, leads down to the ticket hall. The lift to platform 1 (D110 W130 L210) is on the left immediately after the ticket barriers, while the lift to platforms 2 and 4 (D110 W120 L200) is at the far right of the 50m long hall and opens up halfway along the platforms.

Nanterre-Préfecture (line A)

The main entrance to the station, on Esplanade Charles de Gaule, off rue des Trois Fontanot, has escalators or -32 steps. The lift providing step-free access to the station appears to have been made as hidden and obscure as it possibly could be. At the main entrance to the station, look across rue des Trois Fontanot to your left, where you will see a rather non-descript beige cylindrical building. Believe it or not, this contains the *monte-charge* (large service lift) down to the station. To reach it,

cross over rue des Trois Fontanot, then take the 30m tarmac path slightly to your right across what (at the time of writing) was a building site. At the road, turn left, then after about 50m there is a small path on the left leading to the *monte-charge*. This is not generally accessible to the public, so you will have to press the call button on the door to alert staff to your presence. They will then come and escort you down into the station. Inside (which also contains a snack shop, clothes shop and entertainment store), once you have bought your ticket, staff will accompany you to the platform via the service lift/*monte-charge* (D125 W165 L230). This surfaces in the centre of the platforms and bypasses escalators or -35 steps. When arriving at the station on a train, alert the staff by pressing the call button on the side of the *monte-charge*.

Nanterre-Université (line A1)

On the university side of the station, there is a ramp providing step-free access from the end of rue de la Folie, by the university CP, to the ticket office. Access from blvd des Provinces Françaises on the other side is via +6 large, shallow sloping steps (each 205cm long and 6cm high), which a pushed manual wheelchair would probably not find too difficult to negotiate. From the ticket office, step-free access to the platforms is provided by lifts. The lift at the bottom of the ramp leading down to the rue de la Folie (D85 W155 L125) takes you to the ticket barriers, from which lifts to the SNCF and RER platforms are signposted. These are (D85 W155 L125) and (D105 W100 L215) respectively and located fairly centrally on the platforms. There is parking available in the CP off rue de la Folie.

Nanterre-Ville (line A1)

The main entrance to the station is on the junction of rue Beranger, blvd de la Seine and ave du Général Gallieni. It is step-free via a ramp on the right of the main doors. The lift to the platforms (D125 W155 L210) is on the right after the ticket barriers. Take this lift up to reach the eastbound platform. For westbound trains, take the lift down to the lowest level (from where there is also direct ramped access to blvd du Couchant), then take the other lift up to the centre of the platform. There is a CP just off ave du Général Gallieni.

Noisiel (line A4)

Step-free entry to the station is via a ramp bypassing about +8 steps either side, opposite the Église Catholique Centre St Paul. On entering, the

ticket booth is on the right. Lifts to the platforms are beyond the ticket barriers, behind the protruding walls on either side of the hall. The lift on the right leads to the eastbound platform and the one on the left to the westbound platform.

Noisy-Champs (line A4)

This small station has three exits/entrances. Exit 2 on blvd Archimède and exit 3 on blvd Newton both provide step-free entry to the ticket hall area but exit 1 does not. Through the ticket barriers, the lift on the right (D90 W95 L145) goes down to the westbound platform and the equally sized lift on the left to the eastbound platform. To go through the ticket barriers in a chair, press the red button by the wide gate in the middle to alert staff to your presence. Near exit 3 there is a taxi drop-off point and a CP with sloped access and five BB spaces at the far end.

Vincennes (line A)

Vincennes station has three exits/entrances. The ticket hall is in the main building at exit 1 on ave Aubert. Access to the ticket hall is step-free, but access to the platform from here is by escalator only. For lift access to the platforms you must walk/wheel around 150m to exit 2 on ave Aubert, or around 200m to exit 3 on rue du Docteur Lebel. The ticket barriers are on platform level.

RER line B

The ticket offices at line B stations all have high, unadapted desks. The trains themselves have +1 step onto them (12 or 30 cm, depending on the length of the train), but ramps (W82 L122) are available to bypass these and also avoid having to negotiate large gaps between the platform and the train. When asking for the ramps at the ticket office, tell them your destination station and they will telephone through so that a conductor is waiting there. Wheelchair users are advised to use the front carriage, where the ramps can be used and there is more space.

Central stations (inside the box on the map)

Cité Université (line B)

Entry to the ticket hall is step-free from the street. After the ticket barriers, lifts (D105 W125 L205, handrail H92) bypass the +13+15+20 steps to the

platforms; the lift on the left is for the northbound platform and the right lift for southbound.

Denfert Rochereau (line B)

Step-free entry to the station, with a wide gate by the ticket barriers (W110) for chair users. Follow the concourse to the right to reach the lift to the southbound platform on the right, and the lift to the northbound platform on the far left (both D100 W105 L215).

Gare du Nord (line B)

There's a lift from the main station concourse leading down to the RER ticket office level. It is past platform 19 and by the ticket barriers leading to platforms 33-36 (see the description of the station under the *SNCF main line railways*). The RER Line B platforms can also be accessed from street level on rue Faubourg St Denis, near the junction with rue Demarquay. The entrance is signposted for station "Magenta" and the lift (D110 W155 L180) stops at level one (street level "sortie rue") and level 0 (Métro, RER). On level 0 there is a ticket office for both SNCF and Ile de France tickets, and a wide access ticket barrier.

To reach the RER itself, there are further lifts that take you down to the platforms: there are two (both D80 L130 W120) near the rue de Dunkerque exit, serving line B on level -3. However, both of these were out of order when our surveyors visited. Another (D90 W125 L120) links the line B platforms to the ticket office level, near the cafés and shops. There are **wheelchair toilets (D85 ST120)** in a new toilet block on the ticket office level.

It is worth noting the rue de Maubeuge/rue Ambroise Paré/Hôpital Lariboisière exit from the station do not provide a step-free route.

Port Royal (line B)

Step-free entrance from street level. The lift (D100 W105 L140) on the right immediately after entering takes you down to the ticket barriers, after which lifts (D90 W110 L150) go down to the two platforms.

St-Michel Notre-Dame (line B)

The station has a single central platform with access right up to street level. The lift is located in rue Xavier-Privas on the corner with quai St-Michel. It is not very obvious, but has an intercom to contact station staff. When we used the lift's *appel* intercom button, we were told it had been broken for a long time and were advised to try Luxembourg instead. All

the station entrances involve more than 20 steps and appear to go via line C platforms. It would appear from the Infomobi list in December 2007 that the lift is still broken as it is described as *En cours de rénovation* ie under repair.

It has been out of action to our knowledge for about two years.

Outside stations

Gentilly (line B)

Entry to the ticket hall is step-free from the street. After the ticket barriers, lifts (D106 W125 L205, handrail H92) take you to the platforms; the right lift for the northbound platform and the left lift for the southbound platform.

Parc des Expositions (line B)

In order to use the lifts at this station, it is necessary to call ahead from your departure station. The station staff will do this for you if you ask at the ticket office in the station where you start. Otherwise (we were told), you will not be able to use the lift and, from the southbound platform, the only alternative exit route involves $-22-11+6+1+2+8+9$ steps, or an escalator. Calling ahead should also mean that you are greeted with a ramp to help you get off, which can otherwise be difficult due to the 60cm step involved. There is one lift (D80 W110 L160) centrally situated on both the north and southbound platforms.

RER line C

The trains are all double deckers with steps inside the carriages, although there's a 'parking place' and a small area where people could stand, just inside the doors. Entry to the trains from the platform is via +2 steps (alternatively 10cm + 24cm, or 15cm + 15cm). Some of the doors on the trains have 2 vertical hand rails with quite a narrow gap between them, but others have just one, providing easier access. There are no ramps available on this line, but we were told that if ramp-access system proves successful on Lines A and B, it might be introduced to line C trains.

Although quite a number of the stations feature on the Infomobi map as being 'accessible', our view is that for most chair users, using line C trains presents considerable challenges. While we hope that in the future

we will be proved wrong, we're a bit sceptical about using this line if you have problems.

RER line D

Line D has double-decker trains with +2 steps into the train then +7 or -3 steps with handrails to the upper and lower decks respectively. One door on each train is marked with the wheelchair symbol, but is identical to the others. We did not look at this line in any detail.

SNCF main line railways

There is an extensive network of surface railways in and around Paris. The SNCF (Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français) are responsible for the long distance trains. One disadvantage of French rail travel is that getting on board usually involves bigger and more awkward steps than people are used to in Britain.

The main central stations in Paris are all 'accessible' because they are railway terminals and there are no railway lines/tracks to cross. Chair users may need one of the portable hydraulic lifts which are available at the big stations in order to get on and off the train itself, and some disabled walkers may need to use this facility as well. There are often 2 or 3 biggish steps to get on and off the trains in France, which is more than in British trains.

Information (in French) about the the provisions of individual stations around the country can be obtained from SNCF's website www.voyages-sncf.com. SNCF have been trying to improve their services to disabled travellers, and there is now an accessibility website www.accessibilite.sncf.com with informaton about the Accès Plus service which can facilitate and assist with some SNCF journeys. This is in principle for people who have an assessment of disability of greater than 80% (see the comments about the orange card under *Price concessions* in the *General information* chapter).

Gare d'Austerlitz

This station serves south-western France and Spain. Also passing through are RER line C and Métro line 10. There are three CPs all with step-free access to the station. The CP off *blvd de l'Hôpital* has four BB spaces 30m from *Porte 24B*, one of the main entrances. There's a taxi drop-off point 5m from this entrance. On the other side of the station, off *Quai*

d'Austerlitz, there is a CP with two BB spaces, and a covered CP with four BB spaces. Inside the station itself there is step-free access to all the SNCF platforms and into the cafés and shops.

If you want assistance to get onto a train, go to the information desk inside the office opposite platform 16. There are two wheelchairs available for use. We were told that there is a hydraulic lift, which can lift wheelchair users up to the train in their chair so that they can get on step-free. This should be requested in advance when making a booking to ensure availability, and could, presumably, be used by a disabled walker if the steps would be difficult. We were also told that there is at least one door on every train wide enough to get a wheelchair through (not seen). There is a unisex **wheelchair toilet (D85 ST90 SH49)** by platform 21, which costs 50 cents.

The RER station can be accessed via a lift (D90 W96 L150) located behind the information office opposite platform 16. 75m from this lift, beyond the ticket barriers, are two more lifts of the same dimensions to platforms A and B. There is a 12cm gap between the trains and the platforms.

Gare de Lyon

Serving the south, east and international routes to Italy and Switzerland, this complex station is on a number of different levels with interconnecting lifts. There is step-free access from Cour Diderot, Cour de Chalon, and via an elevated walkway from the shopping centre on the other side of the rue de Bercy to the main SNCF concourse. The platforms are grouped into two: A to M and 5 to 23. Access between the two is along platform A or through the ticket office. There is an information desk in the office opposite platform M.

A unisex **wheelchair toilet (D80 ST70 H50)** is located in the 'Relais Toilette' between platforms 5-23 and the ticket office. It costs 50 cents.

Gare Montparnasse

place Raoul Dautry, 75015

The gare consists of three separate stations, Maine, Pasteur and Vaugirard, as well as its internal underground city links. It provides the rail link to the Atlantic coast, and hence the title "Porte Océane".

The station has five levels – Métro, UGCP, A, B and C, in ascending order. Trains leave from levels A and C. One lift (D80 W115 L115) serves all levels except the Métro and another lift (D90 W100 L140) serves levels A, B and C. From place Beinvenue there is flat access to

level A and ramped access goes from rue du Cdt-René-Mouchotte. A unisex **wheelchair toilet (D70+ ST70)** is situated on level B, within the main toilets, and similarly on level C, closest to the rue du Cdt-René-Mouchotte entrance.

Gare du Nord

rue de Dunkerque, 75010

This is the station where you arrive if you're coming from London.

Eurostar arrivals come in on platforms 3/4/5/6 and the trains are described more fully in the chapter on *Travelling*. Like many large central stations it has a section for long-distance trains, and another for more local services. The station concourse is some 200m long, with main line platforms, and a suburban section. There are lifts to get down to RER line B, but these are not entirely reliable. When we visited in August 2007 one of the three necessary lifts was *hors service* until the end of the month.

There's a good plan/map of the immediate area on the Eurostar website www.eurostar.com which shows where the taxis go from and roughly where the RER access is, and there's a good range of restaurants just outside the main entrance.

The Eurostar trains themselves are, of course, about a quarter of a mile (400m) long, so there's a long way to go to get on or off. To get off the train at the Gare du Nord there are -3 steps [H25,20,20cm], with no handrail, which can be quite tricky if you also have luggage. If this is likely to be a problem for you then ask for some help in advance. Other passengers may be helpful, but it's difficult to guarantee this!

When you arrive, the taxi rank is about 150m away to your right, and the distance includes the queueing rails/barriers. Beware of taxi touts who will offer you an immediate taxi, avoiding the queue, but with a charge which will be two to three times the regular price.

To find the car hire desks, which are also to the right from the Eurostar arrival platforms, you have to go to level -1, and while the main route is to use the escalators you can take the lift (D75 W100 L130) for the Parking Gare du Nord. At level -1 go past the luggage storage area, and the desks are on your right.

The hire companies use a different CP for their cars, Euronord Laribosière (*Parking guide* page 164) which is right by the Laribosière hospital in rue Ambroise-Paré. It is about 250m from the station and has lift (D75 W100 L130) access to level -5 where the rental cars are located.

Eurostar departures are administered on an upper level, and there are large lifts located opposite the end of blvd de Denain near the middle of the station concourse. Before catching the train passengers have to go through a security check and passport control.

To find the lift/s down to the RER, and the toilets, you need to go to the end of the main concourse past platform 19 and the adjacent ticket office. Then turn half-left over a sort of bridge. The toilets are then straight in front and there are **wheelchair cubicles (D80 ST75 SH52)** in both the mens and womens. To get in you have to pay 50c at the window, and a side door will be opened for you so as you can bypass the turnstiles. The RER lift is by the ticket barriers leading to platforms 33-36. As we have said elsewhere, whether or not the RER lifts are working is a bit of a lottery, although some seem to be more reliable than others.

Gare de l'Est

place de 11 Nov 1918, 75010

Tel: 01 40 18 88 72 or 01 46 07 17 73

This station serves Strasbourg, Champagne and Southern Germany. The UGCP has its entrance on rue Faubourg St Martin and has five levels, each providing two BB spaces. The lift (D80 L140 W100), sign posted "Gare", provides step-free access to the station's platforms and ticket desks (both SNCF and Ile-de-France) on Level 0. Level minus one, however, involves +5 steps to the platforms. The **wheelchair toilet (D90 ST180 SH46)** is situated opposite the "Accueil" desk at Platform 2 on the rue d'Alsace side of the station. From this information desk, wheelchairs are available for use. The step-free alternative to the +6 steps at the rue Faubourg St Martin entrance is to the right. There is also a taxi drop-off point there. There are ramps available upon request from any of the information points, or by calling in advance. To get through the SNCF ticket barriers between platforms 12 and 22 by using the wide gates, ask at the SNCF information desk at platform 19. In the main concourse area of the station, there are many cafes, some of which have moveable tables and chairs.

Gare St Lazare

A major SNCF station which is at the end of the 'accessible' line 14. The SNCF trains appeared to be mainly double-deckers.

Access to the platforms is step-free, and there's an Accueil/enquiries counter in line with the end of platform 15.

There's a **wheelchair toilet (D70 ST80 SH48)** just inside the outer door to the womens toilets which are in line with the end of platform 19. It is effectively unisex, although our male surveyor got a rather rough reception when wanting to measure it!

Boat trips on the Seine and the canals

As a laid back way to see the sights, the riverboats offer an excellent guided tour usually lasting about an hour, and leaving at regular intervals. It's a "don't miss" activity, even if you're only making a short visit. Many of Paris' grandest buildings are located alongside the river, and in the evenings, the floodlighting is spectacular.

The two companies running boats with the easiest access, the **Bateaux Mouches** and **Bateaux Parisienes**, are described below. The facilities are just about OK in our view, and in both cases, if you need to get off by the same route by which you got on board, you have to wait for 15-30 minutes until the boat can pull up and moor at its departure point. Otherwise there are steps where the passengers disembark, though the staff are very helpful in lifting chair users if needed. There's also rather limited space for a chair user to 'park' on the deck, and this hasn't been thought through at all.

There are other operators, but the access challenges/barriers on their boats are considerably greater.

Bateaux Mouches

Pont de l'Alma, Rive Droite 75018

Tel: (for special hire) 01 42 25 96 10 *Information:* 01 40 76 99 99

website: www.bateaux-mouches.fr

The Bateaux Mouches leave from the Rive Droite on the north side of the river, by the pont de l'Alma. There was a clearly marked CP with three BB spaces by the ticket office, and a taxi drop off point.

There are twelve different boats, five of which include restaurants. We went on a non-restaurant boat. Access onto the boat was step-free, with a handrail. A previous group had had to get on board via another boat across some lips [about 7cm], and large rickety ramps, as their boat was not parked alongside the quay.

On board the boat, 40% (the upper deck) was reached via +13 steps, with handrails both sides. The rest of the boat (including the covered area) was step free, with some handrails around. One wheelchair space was available, but there was a large central gangway with enough space to

park a chair at virtually any spot next to several rows of fold-down seats. On leaving the boat, we were offered the choice of a 15 minute wait for step-free exit, or of going via some steps, -1+1 then -1+6. There were staff on hand who were happy to help with lifting a chair (and its occupant!). There was then an 80m walk back to the BB spaces.

There's a **wheelchair toilet (D80 ST80 SH50)** in a portaloos cabin on the riverbank about 40m left of entrance to the reception desk, with ramped access. Although this smelt fairly appalling when we surveyed it, you need to note that there are no adapted or accessible toilets on the boats themselves.

Our surveyors commented that the website is a contender for the slowest and least useful website in the world! After waiting an age, all it seemed to contain was a pretty picture and a video. Its main use is probably for booking dinner cruises etc.

Bateaux Parisiens

Port de La Bourdonnais, 75007

Tel: 01 46 99 43 13

website: www.bateauxparisiens.com

The pier for getting on board is located about 400m from the Eiffel Tower. There is parking for both cars and coaches on the riverside, accessed off the quai Branly. It's not easy to spot the turn, as it is not labelled Bateaux Parisiens until after the junction. You can approach and turn from either direction, and the sign says '*Navettes Fluviales les Bourdonnais*'. Parking for up to two hours is free if you're taking a cruise, and after that it is €7/hour. There is no height restriction, and you can park a minibus.

At the end of the CP there's an open air café with ramped access. The pavement giving access from the parking area has a long stretch with +2 steps, but there's a ramp at either end.

Getting on board involves using three different ramps, and a chair user (or disabled walker) can access the boat via a side, gated, entrance, and to get on board there's a steepish ramp and a 3cm lip.

No provision has been made for chair users and apart from the gangways/corridors, the whole area is covered with fixed seating. A chair user is therefore obliged to park somewhere where there is either a slightly restricted view, or to cause a major blockage. It is also virtually impossible for a chair user to get to one of the audio sets providing a multilingual commentary, as they are firmly attached to the fixed seating. The main boat deck is flat with metal decking. Part of it is open and part

is covered with a see-through roof (useful if it happens to rain!). The café and on-board toilets are -14 (with a HR on both sides). There are almost no handrails on the boat deck itself.

The riverside sights are spectacular, and this is a trip not to be missed. If you're lucky (?) you may get the bonus of seeing a naked man playing football on the river bank, enjoying the freedom of the *Paris Plage!*

To get off the boat, the normal route is via a ramp and then +6. The staff were very helpful in connection with negotiating the stairs, and were on hand to provide the necessary muscle power. If you wanted to bypass the steps you would have to stay on the boat for another half-an-hour or so until it moved forward to load the next lot of passengers. You can then leave by the same route that you used to get on board. There are no adapted or accessible toilets on the pontoon, and the nearest one is in the Musée Branly.

Paris Canal

19-21 Quai de la Loire, 75019

Tel: 01 42 40 96 97 Fax: 01 42 40 77 30

website: www.pariscanal.com e-mail: resa@pariscanal.com

We asked for information about these boats by e-mail, and the company came back with the following reply:

“Our boats are moored alongside the Musée d’Orsay CP and pedestrian access is via a circular staircase. You can get round this by taking a taxi which could drop you off right next to the boat. The next barrier is that there are 3 steps to get on the boat and another 2 to get inside. There is only a single step to disembark at the Vilette park, but it is a 7/8 minutes walk to a taxi rank. The toilets are unadapted.”

At least this is sufficiently descriptive to enable people to make up their own mind about the practicality of using the boats.

To illustrate the difficulties of getting on some of the other boats:

- for the **Vedettes Pont Neuf** there is signed access from the west side of the bridge and the route down is via +2 very worn and uneven steps, and then -39-6-11 down to a cobbled area at river level, where the boats dock. There is a ramp down off the Quai des Orfevres (past a no entry except for access sign). This leads to a cobbled road that runs 400m west alongside the river. Enough said!;
- we also contacted another company, **Vedettes de Paris**, and they told us that there are unfortunately 4 steps to get on board

all their boats, so they regard them as being inaccessible to chair users.

Batobus

The Batobus is a river ferry service that stops at eight places, which are on both sides of the river. It provides a round trip on the river Seine. Boats run at intervals of 15-30 minutes and tickets operate on a ‘hop-on, hop-off’ basis. The boats are all the same, with the entrance at the bows and flat access to the stern, where there are some good, solid handrails. 60% of the boat is –1 step from the middle walkway.

The service is probably of most use to disabled walkers, and we have had one report back saying that the Batobus had provided an easy-to-use link to most of the most interesting places in central Paris. This was from someone who could walk a little, travelling with an able and strong companion.

The riverside is generally on a lower level towpath/roadway, and to get there one frequently needs to contend with cobblestones and long distances. In a few places in order to bypass steps one does have to go a very long way around. There is a variable number of steps involved in actually getting into the boat, and details are given below. Some stops are more accessible than others!

The **Tour Eiffel** provides perhaps the easiest access to the Batobus, with ramped access from the Champ de Mars and then just –1–1 steps to the boat.

The **Musée d’Orsay** stop is right next to a road ramp from Quai Anatole France and there is parking available 30m over cobbles from the ferry stop. Access to the boat is via !4!1 steps.

The towpath at **St Germain des Pres** is cobbled and one can reach the Quai Malaquais by a ramp which is 400m away from the stop. Access to the boat is either –1–1–1–1–1+1 steps, or down a ramp and then +1+1.

Access is probably the most difficult at **Notre Dame**. There are 31 steps from the Quai Malaquais down to the towpath and then –4–4–4–1 to the

boat. The 31 steps can be bypassed by a ramp 600m away from the boat stop.

Jardin des Plantes has the advantage of not having cobblestones, but there are –5–4–4 steps down to the boat.

Hôtel de Ville is the stop for Paris Plage in the Summer, and there is a **wheelchair toilet (D95 ST80 SH52)** in an unmarked Portaloo right next to the boat stop. There are no cobblestones, but one needs to negotiate –5–5–3–1 steps to get to the boat.

At the **Louvre** stop, the boat is reached down a ramp and a –1[23cm] step from the cobbled towpath, but unfortunately there is no step-free access to the towpath nearby.

At the **Champs Élysées** stop, access the boat is via –8 steps from smooth tarmac, and access to street level can be reached via a cobbled ramp 400m away.

