



“Creating a More Inclusive Transport Strategy for York”

CALL TO ACTION

Transport is not just about movement—it’s about being able to live independently, travel freely, enjoy family life, work, learn and take part in social and cultural activities. When disabled people are unable to access all parts of a city (including its public spaces, buildings and homes) on an equal basis with others, that city becomes exclusionary by design.

Disabled people in York deserve and demand a Transport Strategy that respects their human rights and the embedded principles of the Three Pillars of Unity, Accessibility and Inclusivity.

This document focuses primarily on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD). However, given the central importance also of the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998 some information about them is included in the Appendix.

DISCLAIMER – All information is correct to the best of our knowledge. It has been compiled with assistance from Adele and Paula, volunteers from York Human Rights City Network.

Pillar 1: Unity, sometimes known as Solidarity

The principle of unity (sometimes also called solidarity) encompasses collective responsibility, social inclusion, and mutual support within a community or society. In the framework of international human rights law - especially the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD)(ratified by the UK) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

(ICESCR)(ratified by the UK) - unity includes the right to social protection, accessible public services, and participation in society without discrimination.

Under the UNCRPD, unity is embedded in provisions that demand state parties to “take appropriate steps to ensure access... on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation...” (Article 9), and that disabled people have “the opportunity to live independently and be included in the community” (Article 19). These obligations are reinforced by the principles of dignity, equality, non-discrimination, and respect for difference—all of which underpin both unity and accessibility.

1.1 Disability Rights as Expressions of Unity

1.1.1. Disability rights are not only about individual entitlements—they represent society's commitment to inclusion, interdependence, and equal participation. Unity in this context means that infrastructure, planning, and service provision must account for the most marginalised, ensuring that collective progress does not leave anyone behind.

1.1.2. In York's Draft Local Transport Strategy and its 2024–2026 Implementation Plan, this principle is insufficiently realised. While the aspiration for cleaner air, reduced congestion, and better movement through the city is commendable and carries the potential to benefit disabled people, the plan's execution threatens to undermine the very notion of unity by disproportionately disadvantaging disabled people—especially those who rely on BB vehicles or who have limited mobility.

1.2. Failures to Uphold Unity-Based Rights in the Transport Strategy

1.2.1. Exclusion through Access Limitations

Unity demands that urban environments remain accessible for all, including those with complex access needs. Yet, the restriction of Blue Badge (BB) access to 150 metres from destinations (a figure that does not appear in any national guidance and is significantly more than the 50 metres limit for someone to walk unaided that the majority of BBs are awarded on), the removal of parking

in some parts of central zones, the plans to use bus stop bypasses (also known as floating bus stops), the plans for cycling lanes in streets where residents have no off-road parking at their house/flat, and limited clarity about access through or exclusion of BB vehicles through bus gates collectively create physical and social exclusion. For many disabled individuals, for example, cars are not a convenience—they are essential and the use of floating bus stops have been shown to create significant hazards for disabled people. These limitations directly contradict Article 19 of the UNCRPD, which guarantees disabled persons the right to choose their place of residence and access the community like anyone else.

1.2.2. Inequity in the ‘Active Travel’ Emphasis

The strategy’s emphasis on “walking, wheeling, and cycling” as the primary travel modes suggests a universal capacity that does not reflect reality. Many disabled people cannot engage in “active travel” as currently portrayed and enacted. By failing to acknowledge this and adequately invest in accessible alternatives or develop an inclusive approach to “active travel” for those disabled people that might be able to then engage, the strategy risks creating a two-tiered system—one designed for the non-disabled majority and one that leaves disabled people with deteriorating or unavailable transport options. This violates the principles of equality and unity, reducing disabled people’s agency in society.

1.2.3. Deterioration of Accessible Public Transport

Accessible, affordable public transport is a cornerstone of unity. Yet York Disability Rights Forum (YDRF) highlights that declining services—including loss of Dial-a-Ride, unaddressed barriers to accessing buses and associated infrastructure, inaccessible rail stations and digital-first ticketing and—have further eroded transport independence for many. Without direct investment in tailored services, including the maintenance and enhancement of existing supports, the strategy fails to meet the obligations under Article 9 of the UNCRPD to ensure equal access to transport and communication.

1.2.4. Ignoring Invisible Impairments and Diverse Needs

The strategy’s language and framing often overlook those with non-visible impairments. Phrases like “walkers, wheelers, and cyclists” not only exclude

many disabled people from recognition but signal a failure of imagination and policy design. Unity requires a full understanding of the spectrum of access needs— and policy language should reflect that diversity to avoid symbolic and practical exclusion.

1.2.5. Design Choices that Compromise Safety and Inclusion

Infrastructure changes, such as the removal of guardrails or the flattening of pavements, may align with aesthetic or minimalistic design but undermine the safety and confidence of users with visual impairments or balance challenges. Decisions made in the name of urban coherence must still prioritise those whose freedom of movement depends on predictable, safe, and supportive environments.

1.3. Reclaiming Unity through Inclusive Planning

YDRF argues that the social model of disability—where barriers are in society, including attitudes whether ‘deliberate’ or rooted in ‘unconscious bias’, not in the individual disabled person—must be embedded throughout the strategy. To uphold the rights rooted in unity, the strategy must:

- Ensure meaningful co-production/design with disabled people, not mere consultation.;
- Identify vehicles transporting Blue Badge holders as ‘essential’, ensuring their access to the vehicle is within 50 metres of both their departure and destination points.
- Invest in accessible public transport with improvements in design of vehicles and associated infrastructure, information, service frequency, enforcement of legal priority for wheelchair users, multimodal integration, and driver training to ameliorate any hostile environment incidents.
- Recognise the diversity of disabled people and their access needs in all planning documents, policies, and public communications.

- Balance environmental goals with rights-based inclusion, avoiding eco-ableist trade-offs that sacrifice the needs of disabled people in the name of sustainability.

Pillar 2: Accessibility

The principle of accessibility enshrined in both the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), is not simply a logistical consideration or a technical design feature; it is a fundamental enabler of equality/equity, dignity, and inclusion. When environments, services, and information are not accessible, disabled people are denied their right to participate fully in society.

The UNCRPD places a legal obligation on public authorities to remove barriers to accessibility across the built environment, transport, communication, and information systems (Article 9), and to ensure access to community life, services, and opportunities on an equal basis with others (Articles 19, 20, 21). Accessibility is not an optional add-on—it is a precondition for the enjoyment of all other rights.

2.1. Accessibility as a Human Right, Not a Privilege

2.1.1. The concept of accessibility must be understood not only in physical terms, but also in social, digital, economic, cultural and, importantly, attitudinal dimensions. Access is not simply about getting through a door or onto a bus—it is about being able to live independently, travel freely, enjoy family life, work, learn, socialise, and participate. When disabled people are unable to access parts of a city (including its public spaces, buildings and homes) on an equal basis with others, that city becomes exclusionary by design.

2.1.2 The City of York Council’s 2024–2026 Implementation Plan shows partial awareness of these principles, yet it fails to apply them consistently or comprehensively. There is a significant gap between what the council commits to in principle and what it delivers in practice.

2.2. Where the Plan Falls Short on Accessibility

2.2.1. Lack of Direct Access for Blue Badge Holders

One of the most glaring failures is the restriction of Blue Badge vehicle access into York's city centre. The strategy promises Blue Badge parking "within 150m of key destinations" but this fails to meet accessibility standards for the many disabled people who cannot travel that distance, particularly on foot or with mobility aids. It is also a distance seemingly plucked from the air, is not cited in any national guidance and is significantly longer than the 50 metres' eligibility condition under which many disabled people are awarded a Blue Badge. Accessibility, under human rights law, means reasonable proximity and full participation—not compromise due to planning convenience or traffic targets.

2.2.2. Active Travel Focus Ignores Non-Active Travel Needs

The plan's emphasis on "walking, wheeling, and cycling" excludes many disabled people. The potential use of e-scooters and e-bikes, for example, has at times been promoted without any meaningful alternative being provided for those who cannot access them and without regard to their significant adverse impact on many disabled people. Accessibility must be universal, not conditional.

2.2.3. Inaccessible Public Transport

Despite the language of sustainability, the plan lacks a clear and resourced strategy for accessible public transport. Dial-a-Ride services have ceased. Parts of the city's main train stations remain inaccessible and there is insufficient commitment to plans for future ones, such as that planned for Haxby, to be fully accessible. Buses and associated infrastructure lack consistent design standards for bus shelters, display boards, audio announcements, ramps, poles, wheelchair spaces, boarding support, and attention to addressing the hostile environment that can be present for some disabled people. The absence of robust investment in tailored, accessible transport options amounts to a failure to realise the right to independent mobility.

2.2.4. Insufficient Attention to Invisible Impairments and Neurodivergence

Accessibility also applies to those with non-visible impairments — such as chronic illness, autism, anxiety, or pain conditions. These individuals may require access to private vehicles or step-free environments free from overstimulation, yet the strategy makes little mention of neurodiversity or energy-limiting conditions. True accessibility is holistic—it must accommodate varied sensory, cognitive, and emotional access needs as much as physical ones.

2.2.5. Physical Design Risks Exclusion

Design decisions that eliminate tactile markers, flatten curbs, allow non-segregated use of ‘walkways’ or replace familiar signals with minimalistic features may look streamlined but can alienate users who depend on predictability and texture to navigate. Accessibility is not aesthetics—it is functionality. Without universal design principles built into every infrastructure change, York risks deepening exclusion even in spaces labelled “accessible”.

2.2.6. Planning Without Involvement

Perhaps most critically, the strategy suffers from a lack of meaningful involvement of disabled people at all stages. Accessibility cannot be achieved through assumptions or afterthoughts. Disabled people must be at the centre of transport planning—from design to implementation. Without their lived experience informing policy, well-meaning initiatives may fail or even do harm.

2.3. What Accessibility Requires in Practice

To align with the accessibility obligations of the UNCRPD and UK equality and human rights legislation, the City of York Council must move beyond token inclusion. Accessibility must be a guiding principle, not a bolt-on. This means:

- Extending and protecting Blue Badge access, recognising that vehicle access is essential for many, not a choice.
- Embedding universal design across all public spaces and transport networks, ensuring step-free access, tactile guidance, clear signage, seating, space for mobility aids and routes that segregate cyclists and

pedestrians.

- Investing in accessible public transport systems—including bus shelters, ramps, onboard assistance, visual and audio cues, and priority spaces and actively eliminating the hostile environment that can be present for some disabled people.
- Ensuring accessibility of all communications, timetables, and service announcements, whether digital or paper-based.
- Expanding disability-led training to all council departments responsible for urban planning (including transport) and infrastructure.
- Monitoring implementation with input from disabled people to guarantee that accessibility is not only promised but delivered.

Pillar 3: Inclusivity

Under frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the UK is obligated to ensure that everyone has equal access to opportunity, space, and society. This includes the right to move freely, participate equally, and live without discrimination or marginalisation.

The City of York’s 2024–2026 Transport Implementation Plan, while framed in progressive language, demonstrates key shortcomings in terms of inclusivity. It does not consistently consider who is excluded or what systemic barriers are being reinforced under the guise of sustainability or efficiency. When inclusivity is not embedded as a central value, policy risks reinforcing inequality—even unintentionally.

3.1 Inclusivity: Beyond Consultation, Towards Structural Equity

3.1.1. Inclusivity means far more than public consultation or general community engagement. It involves a deep commitment to equity, requiring planners to acknowledge, understand, and address the systemic disadvantages

faced by specific groups. For disabled people, inclusivity means not having to justify one's need to participate in society or fight for the right to access the same spaces and services that others take for granted.

3.1.2. The transport strategy must account for the intersecting barriers faced by individuals who may experience multiple forms of marginalisation—such as disabled women, elderly people with mobility needs, neurodivergent individuals, or people with low income who rely on specific types of transport to live independently.

3.2. Where the Plan Fails to Uphold Inclusivity

3.2.1. A One-Size-Fits-All Vision of Urban Mobility

The overarching strategy favours active travel and sustainable transport, such as cycling and walking. While commendable in environmental terms, this model largely reflects the needs of young, non-disabled, urban, and often male populations. It assumes physical ability, confidence in public spaces, and access to alternative forms of mobility. In doing so, it excludes those who do not or cannot conform to that ideal and renders their needs invisible within the broader urban narrative.

3.2.2. Limited Inclusion of Disabled People's Voices in Policy Formation

The process by which the strategy has been developed raises concerns around representation and involvement. Despite engaging with disability organisations at points, the plan does not reflect a deep integration of lived experience into its core logic. Inclusivity cannot be performed through consultation alone—it must be designed into the decision-making structures themselves and demonstrate through actions that their experiences are respected. Without disability awareness at every stage, inclusivity remains superficial.

3.2.3. Disproportionate Impact of Exclusionary Measures

Decisions that exempt Blue Badge vehicle access or require people to walk or cycle longer distances than prior to any changes disproportionately affect disabled people. Yet these policies are framed as necessary for “place-making” or “climate strategy,” sidelining the very real human cost of exclusion.

Inclusivity demands that policies be proportionate, balanced, and non-discriminatory—meaning they must not impose an undue burden on one group to benefit another. Disproportionate restrictions undermine the principle of inclusivity altogether.

3.2.4. Exclusion of People Who Have Non-Visible Access Needs

The strategy focuses heavily on physical infrastructure, with limited reference to sensory, cognitive, or psychological barriers. There is little acknowledgment of how noise, unpredictability, crowding, or signage can affect autistic people, those with PTSD or anxiety, or individuals with learning disabilities. Inclusivity requires that these experiences be considered from the outset—not treated as exceptional or niche.

3.2.5. Inflexibility Around Alternative Forms of Inclusion

Inclusivity is not only about physical access—it is also about choice, autonomy, and dignity. For some disabled people, inclusivity means being able to travel using a private vehicle, at their own pace, with their own equipment, on their own terms. The strategy's insistence on shifting toward communal or green transport without adequate alternatives strips many individuals of their independence under the false promise of equity.

3.3 What True Inclusivity Requires

To meet its human rights obligations under the UNCRPD and UK equality and human rights legislation, the City of York must embed inclusivity across all levels of transport and urban planning. This means:

- Collaboration during all future planning stages with disabled people and other marginalised groups — not just consulting after policies have been drafted.
- Evaluating the differential impact of all transport measures on protected groups and ensuring proportionality in how benefits and burdens are distributed. This includes always weighting responses from disabled people and further disaggregating those from for BB holders, in consultations.

- Protecting essential vehicle access for those who rely on it, including within city walls—because real inclusion means participation, not exclusion-by-design.
 - Acknowledging non-visible impairments and designing environments that are navigable, calm, and supportive for neurodivergent and chronically ill people.
 - Building inclusivity into all training, communication, signage, and public messaging, so that awareness is not limited to disability-specific teams.
 - Reframing transport access as a civil and human right, not a consumer convenience or environmental trade-off.
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Let's Make York a City for All.

Sources:

Pillar 1: Unity (sometimes referred to in human rights documents as Solidarity)

A. International Human Rights Frameworks

- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)
 - Article 3: General principles – includes respect for dignity, non-discrimination, and participation.

- Article 19: Living independently and being included in the community.
Article 20: Personal mobility.
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
 - Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
Article 29: Everyone has duties to the community.

B. UK Legal and Policy Context

- Equality Act 2010
 - Protected characteristics; duty to prevent indirect discrimination and advance equality.
- Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)
 - Requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to foster good relations between different groups.
- Human Rights Act 1998

C. City of York Council Policy Sources

- City of York Council (CYC) Local Transport Strategy 2024–2040
- CYC Implementation Plan 2024–2026

D. Advocacy-Based / Social Frameworks

- The Social Model of Disability – Focus on systemic barriers, not impairments.
York Disability Rights Forum – Representing lived experience and unity in civic policy.

Pillar 2. Accessibility

A. International Human Rights Frameworks

- UNCRPD
 - Article 9: Accessibility – ensuring access to physical environment, transportation, and information.
 - Article 21: Freedom of expression and access to information.
 - Article 5: Equality and non-discrimination.

B. UK Legal and Policy Context

- Equality Act 2010
 - Reasonable adjustments duty for disabled people.
- Department for Transport (DfT) Guidance on Inclusive Mobility (2021)
 - National design standards for accessible public transport and streets.
- Inclusive Transport Strategy (2018, DfT)
 - UK government’s roadmap to achieving equal access to transport by 2030.
- Human Rights Act 1998

C. City of York Council Policy Sources

- City of York Council Implementation Plan 2024–2026
 - Targets such as 150m Blue Badge proximity, seating every 50m, Inclusive Mobility training, and funding for dropped kerbs.
- Barrier Removal Programme and Active Travel Initiatives.

D. Advocacy-Based / Lived Experience Sources

- Evidence and feedback from York Disability Rights Forum, especially regarding Blue Badge Access Exemption (BBAE) concerns.
- Testimonies and consultations shared with local authorities and disability rights groups.

Pillar 3. Inclusivity

A. International Human Rights Frameworks

- UNCRPD
 - Article 3(c): Full and effective participation and inclusion in society.
 - Article 4: General obligations – mainstreaming disability into all policy and legislation.
 - Article 29: Participation in political and public life.
- European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)
 - Article 14: Prohibition of discrimination in enjoyment of rights.

B. UK Legal and Policy Context

- Equality Act 2010
 - Public authorities must anticipate and remove barriers.
 - Emphasis on inclusive service design and engagement.
- Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)
 - Need to advance equality of opportunity and foster inclusivity.
- Human Rights Act 1998

C. City of York Council Policy Sources

- City of York Council Local Transport Strategy & Implementation Plan
 - Focus on “movement and place”, car use reduction, and active travel.

- Lack of comprehensive inclusion planning or integrated co-production models.

D. Advocacy-Based / Social Frameworks

- Disability-led critique of universal design vs. tailored design.
 - Inclusive co-production best practices (e.g. from Disability Rights UK or Scope).
 - Commentary from York Disability Rights Forum and similar grassroots voices.
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APPENDIX

EQUALITY AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) came into force on April 5 2011 as part of the Equality Act 2010. It places a statutory obligation on public bodies (and others carrying out public functions) to actively promote equality. It requires them to have due regard to the need to achieve three specific aims in the exercise of their functions (The General Duty):

1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
2. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
3. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Public bodies must consider these aims in relation to the following nine protected characteristics:

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Age | Pregnancy and maternity |
| Disability | Religion or belief |
| Gender reassignment | Race |

| | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Marriage and civil partnership (only under the first aim: eliminating discrimination) | Sex Sexual orientation |
|---|-------------------------------|

What it Means in Practice

The PSED means that public bodies must proactively consider equality when making decisions, setting policy, designing, and delivering services, and in relation to their own employees. It moves beyond simply avoiding discrimination (a reactive approach) to actively working to promote equality (a proactive approach).

One Key difference between the Equality Act and the UNCRDP

This can perhaps best be illustrated by the differences in how disabled people are defined within each:

Equality Act says: ‘a person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to perform normal day-to-day activities’.

UNCRDP says: ‘disability is an evolving concept that results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (preamble para e). Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (Article 1.2).

HUMAN RIGHTS

Under the Human Rights Act, States have obligations to *respect, protect and fulfil*

Universal basic human rights can never be taken away, and can only be qualified if it is for a legitimate aim, is necessary and proportionate (e.g. where they may have to be balanced against rights of others or broader interests of the state).

When making the decisions as to whether qualified rights can legitimately be *interfered* with, the following questions apply:

1. What is left of the person's rights if this action is taken and what consequences will it cause for them?
2. Is there an alternative solution to the problem that would restrict the right any less?
3. Is there anything that can be done to minimise the need to restrict the right?

The **4 core values of human rights** are:

- Dignity – intrinsic value of people because they are human rather than because they are economically or otherwise 'useful'
- Autonomy – each person should be allowed and supported to make choices about their lives; a person should be placed at the centre of all decisions affecting their life
- Equality – of all, irrespective of differences
- Solidarity (what we have called Unity in our materials)– a need of society to provide appropriate [social] support to make sure everyone can enjoy their human rights

The UNCRPD includes **5 core principles**:

- Respect
- Choice and Control
- Equality
- Participation and Inclusion
- Access

The Social Model of Disability and the Human Rights Model of Disability

The **human rights model of disability** is a framework that views disability as a matter of human rights and dignity, asserting that disabled people are rights-holders and that society, particularly the state, has a duty to eliminate barriers and provide support to ensure their full and equal participation.

It builds upon the **social model of disability** and provides a concrete and legally binding foundation for action, most notably articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The human rights model is grounded in the following key tenets:

- Disability as Diversity: It recognizes that impairment is a natural part of human diversity that must be respected and supported, not a tragic flaw to be fixed.³
- Rights-Based Approach: It establishes that physical or mental impairments must never be used as an excuse to deny or restrict a person's human rights, such as the rights to education, work, health, and political participation.⁴
- Societal Responsibility: Like the social model, it locates the "problem" in society (attitudinal, environmental, and institutional barriers), but it goes further by mandating that governments have a legal responsibility to remove these barriers and provide necessary accommodations and supports.⁵
- Autonomy and Participation: It champions the principles of individual autonomy and the right of disabled people to make their own choices, live independently, and be fully and effectively included in the community.⁶ This is often encapsulated in the rallying cry of the disability rights movement: "Nothing About Us Without Us."

While the human rights model fully incorporates the core idea of the social model (that society creates the disability), it arguably has a more comprehensive scope as illustrated below:

| | Social Model of Disability | Human Rights Model of Disability |
|--------------|--|--|
| Focus | Explains the cause of disability (societal barriers). | Provides a framework for action and legal obligations (upholding rights). |
| Goal | To remove societal barriers (e.g., in buildings, attitudes). | To ensure all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights are enjoyed on an equal basis with others. |
| Scope | Primarily focuses on environmental and attitudinal barriers. | Encompasses both barrier removal <i>and</i> the provision of disability-related supports needed for equal rights (e.g., funding for personal assistance, communication supports). |

| | Social Model of Disability | Human Rights Model of Disability |
|--------------|--|--|
| Basis | Developed by disability activists and is a socio-political analysis . | Rooted in international law (CRPD) and legally binding upon ratifying states. |

FREE RESOURCES FROM YORK DISABILITY RIGHTS FORUM ABOUT THE SOCIAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS MODELS OF DISABILITY

The social and human rights models of disability provide important frameworks for campaigners, policymakers and service providers to improve the lives of disabled people as equals. **York Disability Rights Fund (YDRF)** have pulled together a wide range of resources – diagrams, videos, articles etc – into an online ‘toolkit’ with help from University of York students. It has seven sections:

- Social Model of Disability
- Applications of the social model
- Human Rights model of disability
- Applications of the human rights model
- Legal rights in the UK
- Inclusive language (including accessible communication)
- Extra Resources

The toolkit is free for anyone to use: <https://ydrf.org.uk/social-model-of-disability/> So do use these resources and spread the word!

They can be added to, so please send YDRF your suggestions for inclusion. Feedback is also welcome.

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