London's River Transport.
A Tale of Signs and Sounds.

London is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world: the multitude of people who live and experience it every day becomes an integral part of it, leaving an indelible mark of their passage. The paper presented here reports the experience carried out in the context of a workshop entitled The Voices of London on the occasion of the London Festival of Architecture: particular attention was given to the comfort of users on board the river buses and to the communication of this particular type of public transport. The study examines the language of the social networks of river transport and the methods used to promote the service. The aim of this research is to evaluate the following aspects: first of all the specific one linked to the theme of the workshop, that is, the sound identity (stimuli, noises, aids...) of the river transport system, and at the same time its lack or effective integration with urban transport systems, the communicative register with which it relates to users, the level of effective accessibility for disabled people (motor or cognitive).

Keywords: *urban mobility; visual communication; river transport; accessibility design; cognitive and sensory inclusion*

Literature Review

Research no longer focuses solely on the structural aspect of transportation, but has begun to address the topic of visual communication and how it contributes to creating a more enjoyable experience of the service. Historical and socioeconomic literature have highlighted how transportation development is closely linked to the symbolic and cultural transformation of each city, thus contributing to the development of everyday practices and the urban imaginary itself (Bogart 2013).

A consolidated line of research focuses on visual communication and wayfinding systems in public transportation environments. Particularly when it comes to the design of signage, maps, and information devices, they are recognized as important components for orientation, spatial readability, and perceived comfort for users, having a direct impact on accessibility and service effectiveness (Hu & Xu, 2022).

At the same time, recent studies have analyzed the role of social media in public transport services, highlighting how digital platforms are increasingly being used to construct narratives of service quality and experience, shaping the perception of the value and safety of urban mobility (Das et al., 2022). However, the available scientific literature still highlights an imbalance between the narrative and aesthetic dimension and the informational function, with a tendency to marginalize operational aspects such as timetables, intermodality, and accessibility (Nikolaidou & Papaioannou, 2018).

Despite these contributions, urban river transport remains under-researched, particularly with respect to the integration of visual communication, digital

storytelling, spatial design, and accessibility. In this context, the dimensions of cognitive and sensorial accessibility appear largely marginal in the existing literature. This paper addresses this gap, offering an analysis of river transport as a designed mobility system, in which graphics, space, and communication contribute to the construction of the urban experience.

Methodology

This paper is based on a qualitative, practice-based research approach developed within the workshop The Voices of London, held during the London Festival of Architecture. The study combines direct field observation and experiential analysis aboard the River Bus service operated by Uber Boat by Thames Clippers (June 2025) with a systematic visual and spatial reading of vessels, piers, signage systems, and onboard graphic artefacts. Particular attention was given to graphic consistency, wayfinding strategies, sound and sensory cues, and the relationship between naval design, user comfort, and communicative clarity. The methodology also includes a qualitative analysis of the service's digital communication ecosystem—website, mobile application, and official social media channels—examined in terms of visual language, narrative positioning, and informational hierarchy. Accessibility was assessed through the observation of boarding interfaces, interior layouts, and sensory environments, complemented by the review of institutional documentation and independent user-generated sources. This integrated approach allows for a critical evaluation of river transport as a designed system in which naval architecture, graphic communication, and user experience are structurally interconnected.

Results

An analysis of London's river transport system highlights the River Bus's strong spatial and visual integration within one of the world's largest urban public transport networks. The graphic language adopted—including signage, maps, pictograms, and spatial organization—appears consistent with that of the Tube (underground), helping to convey a sense of continuity and familiarity to users. Orientation along the piers and access to the service are supported by a clear hierarchy of information and multiple integrated ticketing options.

The onboard experience is characterised by a high level of environmental comfort: generous spatial layouts, low noise levels, ergonomic seating, and extensive glazed surfaces support a calm and orderly travel experience. Internal communication is primarily focused on safety information and service layout, while information related to accessibility, assistance procedures, and intermodal connections is less prominent.

The analysis of digital communication reveals strong aesthetic and narrative coherence across the service's official channels, which frame the River Bus as a distinctive and pleasant urban experience. However, content prioritises

experiential and visual dimensions over functional information: timetables, assisted access procedures, differences between vessel types, and accessibility-related details are marginal or largely confined to the dedicated mobile application. Engagement data further indicate limited interaction between the service and its audience.

With regard to physical accessibility, boarding is generally step-free and supported by staff, but ramp gradients vary significantly according to tidal conditions, in some cases exceeding recommended thresholds. The availability of accessible spaces and facilities is not consistent across different vessel classes, resulting in discontinuities in the user experience for some passengers. From a cognitive and sensory perspective, the onboard environment presents a low sensory load and predictable spatial cues; however, these characteristics are not accompanied by dedicated or easily retrievable informational tools.

London's River Transport: An Analysis of the River Boat

Experiencing London inevitably means encountering a double-decker bus—now as emblematic of the city as Big Ben, the iconic red telephone booths, the black-and-yellow taxis, and the "Tube," the primary backbone of London's transport system.

Public transport in England plays a central role not only economically, but also historically and culturally. In the contemporary era, technological progress has gone hand in hand with the evolution of communication strategies surrounding these systems (Bogart, 2013).

Over the decades, the transformation of transport modes has not been limited to design or engineering—such as improving sustainability, accessibility, and functionality—but has also involved social and communicative dimensions. These include the redesign of stop maps, visual signage to identify stations, on-board instructions, and enhanced interaction with service personnel (Hu & Xu, 2022).

In a city like London, whose identity is deeply intertwined with its river—the Thames—fluvial transport, though often overlooked, represents one of the oldest and still most efficient ways to cross the city.

This is evidenced by the daily activity of numerous river boats navigating at relatively high speeds (see Figure 1) unlike cities such as Paris, where the Seine is used almost exclusively for tourist cruises. On the Thames, one can find both sightseeing boats (river cruises) (see Figure 2) offering uninterrupted journeys accompanied by live commentary, and commuter boats (river boats) operating as a regular form of urban transit with multiple stops.

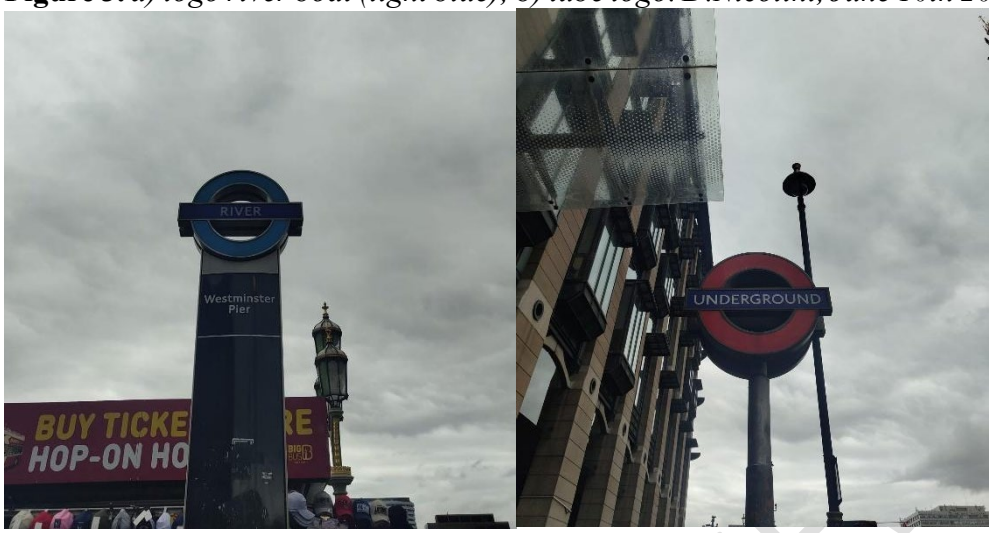
Figure 1. *River Boat. D.Nicolini, June 10th 2025*

Figure 2. *River Cruise. D.Nicolini, June 10th 2025*

On board the river boats—modern catamarans painted in light blue and white—one finds a diverse cross-section of London's population: entrepreneurs, office workers, retirees, families, young people, and tourists alike. These groups choose the river as a preferred means of transport, opting for water over congested roads or the underground.

A key indicator of how embedded river transport is in the everyday life of Londoners lies in its visual identity. The logo representing the service mirrors the iconic symbol of the London Underground (see Figure 3), differing only in colour—blue instead of red—signalling its integration within the broader transport system while affirming a distinct identity.

Figure 3. *a) logo river boat (light blue); b) tube logo. D.Nicolini, June 10th 2025*



This strong visual continuity serves as a starting point for understanding the equivalence between the two systems. While the Underground is often perceived as the ultimate symbol of London's transport network, in reality, the river service functions as both a complementary and, at times, an alternative mode of transit. Interviews with residents and frequent city users reveal that river transport is often preferred for its speed, convenience, and overall superior user experience.

This contextual information sheds light on the coherence of the entire visual and communicative system: every icon, auditory cue, or visual sign is designed to be remarkably simple, graphically refined, essential, and functional.

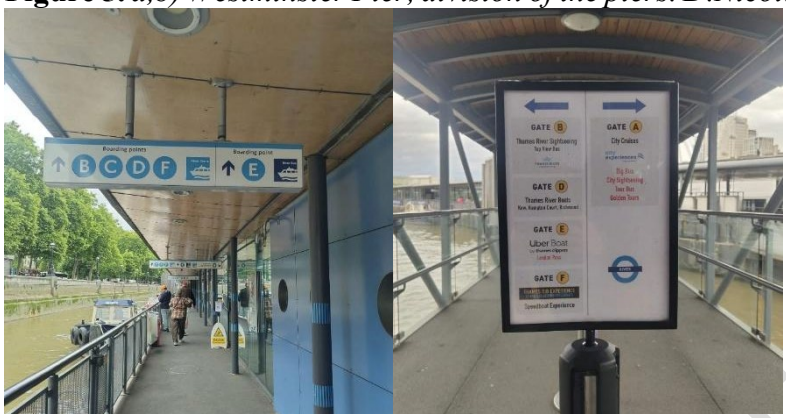
The River Bus logo is accompanied by the silhouette of a boat—also in blue—with the bow pointing to the left, in contrast to common graphic conventions in Italy, where such icons typically face right. Users are informed of the presence of a pier through extensive signage (see Figure 4), much like what is seen in the Underground network.

Figure 4. *Westminster Pier, D.Nicolini, June 10th 2025*

The platforms are very spacious, completely covered (see Figure 5), with seats and are generally made up of several mooring piers (identified by letters)

for the same number of destinations: the sensation is that of being in a normal railway station with numerous platforms.

Figure 5. *a,b) Westminster Pier, division of the piers. D.Nicolini, June 10th 2025*



The access ticket can be purchased in several ways: by scanning the QR code found on posters placed on the benches, through the app, from staff members welcoming passengers before boarding, or—most commonly—by using a contactless card and tapping it on the turnstile (a method very similar to that of the Underground).

The graphic design supports users along the entire journey (see Figure 6) from the road or pedestrian path to the boat in a highly intuitive way: even those who have never used this means of transport can easily understand how it works, thanks to the many maps displayed throughout the pier, which clearly indicate which dock to choose and how to purchase a ticket.

Figure 6. *Uber Boat, route map and informational signage, Westminster Pier. D. Nicolini, June 10th 2025*

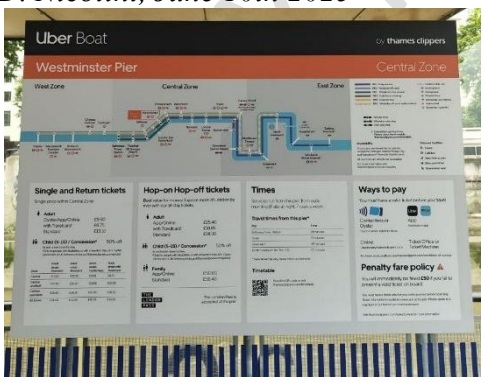
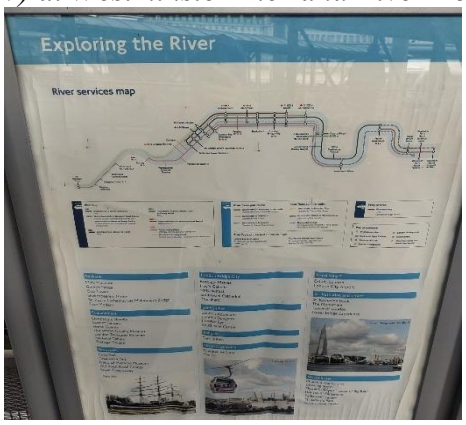


Figure 7. *Graphic information regarding Thames-related services (see Figure 7) at Westminster Pier and River Boat stops. D. Nicolini, June 10th 2025*



The electronic display positioned above the access turnstile indicates the expected arrival time of the vessel.

Communication, therefore, is consistent not only in terms of the logo, but in every aspect, with that of the Underground: from a graphic and spatial organisation perspective, it feels like being in a Tube station—only outdoors, along the river.

Once on board, the two crew members count the number of passengers boarding (river boats generally have a capacity of 220 passengers plus 4 crew members) and, in a surprisingly quiet manner, begin the assigned route.

The passenger count ensures that overcrowding—common in other modes of transport—never occurs, making the journey feel calm and relaxing.

The interior space is wide and features ergonomic faux-leather seats (see Figure 8), with some rows equipped with tables. All seats are covered, but the large windows on the sides and partially above the main deck provide an almost panoramic view of the outside.

Each row includes a dedicated area for charging smartphones or other devices, while life jackets according to the instructions displayed on the partition graphics are located under the seats and along the side compartments.

Figure 8. *a) Uber Boat, Interior detail of the main deck seating with large side windows. D. Nicolini, June 10th 2025. b) Uber Boat, Faux-leather seats: ergonomic detail. D. Nicolini, June 10th 2025*

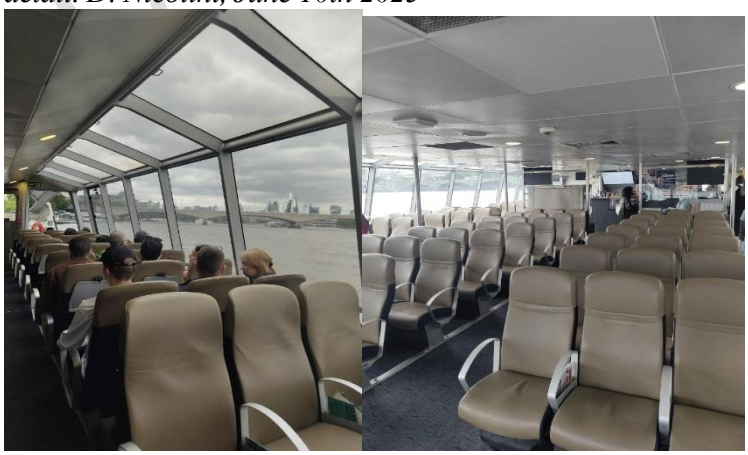
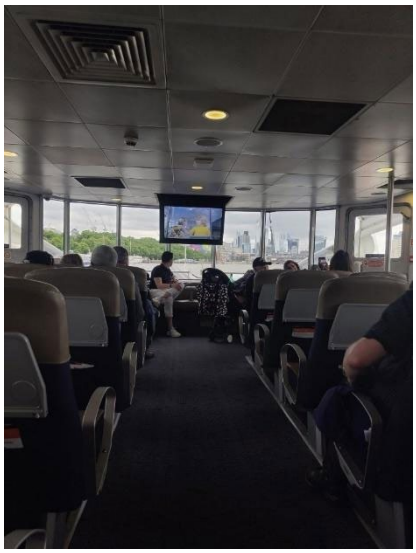


Figure 9. *Uber Boat, Main deck with interior view towards the bow. D. Nicolini, June 10th 2025*



Safety information is clearly displayed and available throughout the deck (see Figure 10), while restroom facilities are indicated both on the general layout plans and on the catamaran's bulkheads.

Figure 10. *a,b) Uber Boat, general layout plans posted on the interior bulkheads of the main deck. D. Nicolini, June 10th 2025*

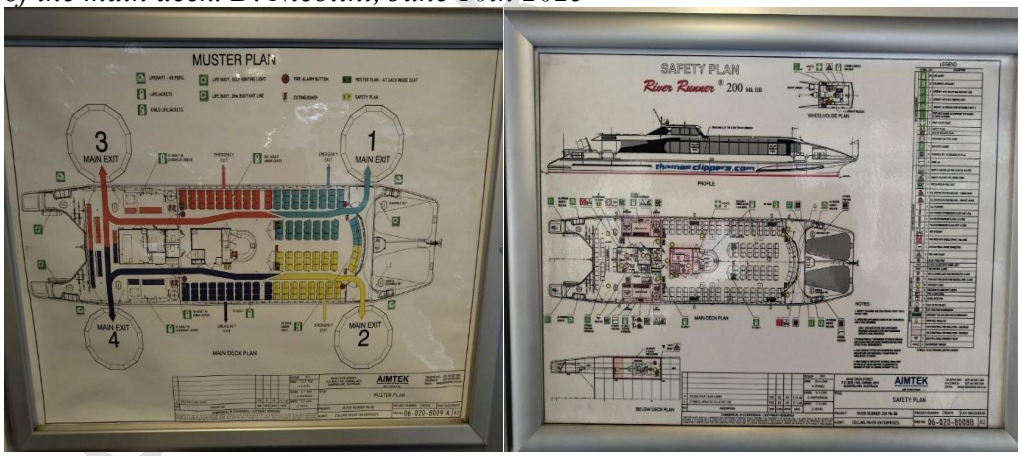


Figure 11. *Uber Boat, infographic on the main deck interior. D. Nicolini, June 10th 2025*

A crew member announces each stop via microphone.

On board, there is a bar that offers both hot and cold beverages, as well as food options. Within the bar area, there is also a dedicated merchandising section where the River Bus logo appears on water bottles, t-shirts, and caps. A LEGO miniature of the boat is also available for purchase.

The intention is clear: to establish river transport as a globally recognized icon, on par with the city's famous taxis, Underground, and most well-known landmarks.

Narrative and Positioning of the River Bus within the Digital Urban Landscape

In the stratified landscape of London's transport systems, the River Bus—operated by Uber Boat by Thames Clippers—presents itself not merely as a means of connection, but as an urban experience that blends comfort, landscape, and visual storytelling. In a city where the Underground forms the backbone of everyday mobility, the communication strategy behind this fluvial service plays a strategic role in positioning it as a desirable, functional, and aesthetically engaging alternative.

The target audience is clearly defined: professionals in the financial and creative sectors, often reimbursed by their companies and commuting to the City or Canary Wharf; tourists in search of a different yet efficient urban experience; students and residents of neighbourhoods such as Greenwich, Battersea, and Woolwich, drawn to a slower and more sustainable form of mobility.

The digital communication reflects these segments with consistency. On its official channels—Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok—the River Bus is portrayed as a calm, orderly, and quiet environment from which to view London from a lateral perspective: clean and bright interiors, glimpses of the river, passengers with laptops on their laps or coffee in hand. This narrative construction aligns with what is observed in academic literature, which suggests that social media, in the context of public transport, are increasingly used as tools to generate perceived quality and experiential value of the service (Das et al., 2022). The content is carefully curated, visually consistent, and designed to reinforce the image of urban mobility as not only useful, but also pleasant and compatible with the pace of contemporary city life.

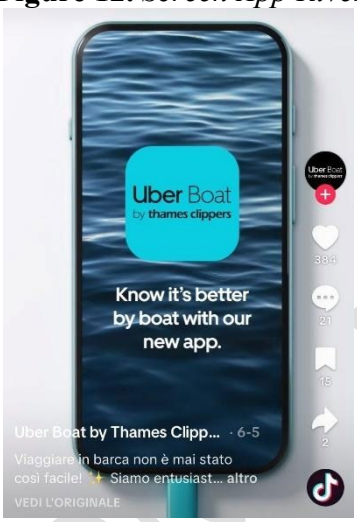
Although it is part of the licensed network of London River Services, the River Bus service operated by Uber Boat by Thames Clippers does not adopt the Transport for London (TfL) logo, nor other core visual identifiers of the network, such as the Johnston typeface or the official signage colour codes. This is due to its nature as a private operator working under concession: regulated by TfL, but neither owned nor directly managed by it. The distinction becomes clear when compared to services like the Woolwich Ferry, which is fully operated by TfL and prominently features the institutional logo.

According to TfL's official website, Thames Clippers "operates under licence from TfL's London River Services," with partial fare integration but an

autonomous visual identity. The presence or absence of official branding thus reflects (see Figure 12) the structural differences between internally run and concession-based services within the same fluvial network. The case study by Definition Agency (2019), which specifically analyses the visual guidelines applied to the River Bus, shows that the strength of this communication lies in its ability to harmonise urban branding with a distinct identity. The service positions itself as part of a coherent ecosystem, yet with its own voice, centred on values such as relaxation, order, and an alternative view of the city.

However, this emphasis on visual aesthetics is accompanied by a number of functional limitations. The communication, while evocative, tends to marginalise practical information: timetables, ticketing methods, accessibility, and intermodal connections are often secondary to the narrative dimension. These details are available through the Uber Boat app but not on the service's social media channels. This imbalance, already documented in academic literature (Nikolaidou & Papaioannou, 2018), can reduce both informational effectiveness and communicative inclusivity, especially for users outside the privileged target demographic.

Figure 12. *Screen App River Boat*



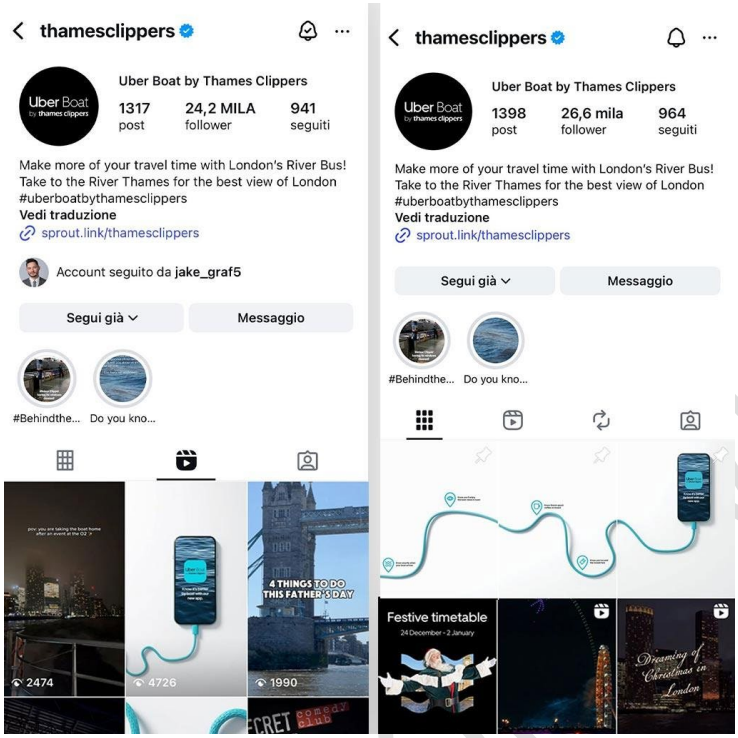
With 24,200 followers on Instagram (see Figure 13) and approximately 17,900 on TikTok (data as of June 15, 2025), Uber Boat by Thames Clippers maintains a moderate presence on social media in terms of audience size. However, the engagement rate on Instagram remains consistently low, staying below 0.5% throughout the week of June 9–15.

Similarly, performance on TikTok appears to fall short of expectations: the average number of views for the five most recent videos is around 7,070, despite a follower base exceeding 17,000. A comparable trend is observed on Instagram, where video content—often nearly identical to that published on TikTok—has averaged 2,526 views across the last five video posts (as of June 15, 2025).

A later observation records an increase in follower numbers, reaching approximately 26,600 followers on Instagram and 20,209 on TikTok. These data

indicate a growth in audience size over time, which can be documented through platform metrics (data as of December 23, 2025).

Figure 13. *a,b) Screen Instagram page thamesclippers June 2025 and December 2025*



This approach suggests a lack of cross-platform strategy and a weak differentiation of content based on specific target audiences and the communicative characteristics of each social platform. The posts that generate the most interest are generally linked to events or special initiatives, such as those produced for New Year's celebrations or in collaboration with exhibitions and cultural institutions.

There is a clear attention to visual quality, particularly in the aesthetic presentation of the boat's interior and in the use of emotionally evocative footage. However, the overall content offering lacks variety: engaging formats such as interviews or experiential storytelling are absent; calls to action are rare; comments do not foster genuine interaction; and there are no structured tools for listening to or involving the audience.

The polished tone of Uber Boat by Thames Clippers' social media communication is present but remains secondary and carefully controlled. The quality of the images, music, and stylistic choices signals a medium-to-high target audience, without resorting to overtly luxury codes or an exclusive representation of the service. Polishing therefore functions as a background element rather than as the core of the narrative.

The experiential tone, by contrast, represents the main axis of communication. Video content frames the journey as a sensory and immersive experience, through urban views, reflections on the water, light effects, and

slow-paced shots that foster direct viewer engagement. This dimension is further reinforced by pinned posts that combine iconography and short messages to integrate experiential value with practical benefits: the quality of the view, the availability of onboard services, and the use of the app as a tool to optimise travel time and costs.

Alongside this, an intimate tone emerges, oriented toward building an empathetic relationship with users. Musical choices contribute to creating a sense of proximity, while highlighted stories dedicated to behind-the-scenes content and interactive features introduce a relational and participatory dimension. This approach humanises the service and strengthens a sense of familiarity, making the experience feel personal and accessible, even in the absence of high levels of quantitative engagement.

With regard to values, the communication clearly foregrounds quality of urban experience, comfort, and calm as alternatives to the frenetic pace of metropolitan transport. The fluvial journey is constructed as an orderly, predictable, and pleasant space, in which technological efficiency—conveyed through the use of the app, punctuality, and fare transparency—integrates with a sensory and visual appreciation of the urban landscape. The content also conveys values of reliability and care, reinforced by an empathetic and non-aggressive tone that privileges proximity and familiarity over intrusive promotional strategies. Overall, the social media presence outlines a coherent value system, addressed to an urban, digitally competent audience that is receptive to an idea of mobility that is both efficient and experiential.

The analysis of content published on Uber Boat by Thames Clippers' social media channels reveals a clearly defined desired target articulated through communication itself. The Instagram page constructs and appeals to an urban audience that is digitally competent and sensitive to experiential quality rather than to transport functionality alone. The service implicitly addresses users who possess time, economic resources, and familiarity with digital tools, and who recognise value in a form of mobility perceived as orderly, efficient, and pleasant.

The desired target primarily consists of professionals, students, and tourists who inhabit or traverse the city through an experiential lens, for whom travel time is not merely residual but a moment to be inhabited. Through curated imagery, calm atmospheres, and a narrative centred on comfort, views, and well-being, the communication aims to attract users who consciously choose the River Bus not only for convenience, but for value alignment.

The social media channels also suggest an aspiration to build a loyal audience that regularly uses both the service and the dedicated app, perceiving it as reliable, cost-effective, and technologically advanced. The objective does not appear to be maximising the overall user base, but rather selecting a specific target capable of recognising itself in the communicated values and reinforcing the image of the River Bus as a qualified urban alternative to the Underground.

In conclusion, the digital communication of the River Bus operated by Uber Boat by Thames Clippers positions the service as an experiential and carefully curated alternative within London's transport system. Visual consistency,

experiential storytelling, and an intimate tone contribute to constructing the journey as a calm, ordered, and pleasurable urban experience rather than a purely functional mode of transport.

However, this narrative emphasis comes at the expense of functional clarity. Practical information related to accessibility, intermodality, and service conditions remains marginal in social media content, reinforcing a selective positioning addressed to a digitally competent, medium-to-high socio-economic audience. While follower growth suggests increasing visibility, low engagement levels indicate limited participatory interaction.

Overall, the River Bus exemplifies how digital storytelling can enhance the perceived value of urban mobility, while also highlighting the need to better balance experiential communication with inclusivity and informational accessibility if the service is to function fully as part of public transport infrastructure.

Motivating factors, enablers, and obstacles for people with cognitive or motor impairments

Accessible mobility—meaning mobility that is usable by all citizens of the country regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities, economic status, age, gender, or other conditions, and regardless of their place of residence—is a fundamental component of future urban development. At the same time, it constitutes both a human right, as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006), and a legal obligation under the UK Equality Act (2010).

Although Transport for London (TfL) reports that 95% of Londoners live within 400 metres of an accessible bus or Underground stop (TfL, 2024a), only 24 of the 31 publicly used piers on the Thames guarantee step-free boarding under all tidal conditions (Port of London Authority [PLA], 2023). However, Cadogan, London Bridge City, and Wandsworth Riverside Quarter are not accessible to wheelchair users. Depending on the tide, access ramps at these locations may become too steep, posing a safety risk for those using wheelchairs.

Customer service assistants are available to all passengers at the London Eye, Westminster, Embankment, Bankside, London Bridge, Tower, Canary Wharf, Greenwich, and North Greenwich piers between 10:00 and 18:00.

In the broader context of transitioning toward more inclusive public transport, the fluvial service operated by Uber Boat by Thames Clippers stands out as a significant case study for the city of London. Historically a physical barrier, the Thames has become a mobility corridor over the past two decades. Nonetheless, the academic literature on accessibility within river transport services remains sparse.

The writing of this contribution is based on my direct experience aboard the Uber Boat, a review of the documentation available on the operator's official website, and an analysis of independent sources such as TripAdvisor, Euan's Guide, and Simply Emma.

Boarding routes are generally step-free; however, tidal variation causes the gradient of access ramps to fluctuate between 4.8% (at high tide) and 9.7% (at low tide), exceeding the recommended maximum slope set by the Equality Act (8%). Onboard, the 320-class vessels offer four wheelchair spaces at the stern and accessible toilets; in contrast, lighter vessels such as the Star, Storm, and Sky Clipper are not equipped with such facilities, forcing some passengers to choose specific sailings. Beyond physical infrastructure, an often underestimated enabling factor is the cognitive legibility of the transport environment. For users with cognitive disabilities, neurodivergent conditions, or age-related cognitive decline, the predictability of spatial sequences, the coherence of signage, and the reduction of environmental uncertainty play a decisive role in determining whether a service is perceived as accessible or exclusionary. In the observed river transport system, the overall spatial calm and the consistency of visual language contribute positively to this perception. However, the absence of dedicated cognitive support tools—such as simplified journey maps, pre-boarding visual guides, or step-by-step travel narratives—represents a missed opportunity to transform general comfort into true cognitive accessibility.

Obstacles do not derive solely from physical barriers, but from moments of ambiguity: unclear boarding procedures, inconsistent information between platforms, and the lack of anticipatory communication regarding sensory conditions (crowding levels, noise, light exposure). For many users, especially those on the autism spectrum or with anxiety-related disorders, such uncertainties can significantly discourage independent travel. Conversely, the introduction of anticipatory information systems, sensory descriptors of the journey, and optional “quiet zones” onboard would not only support vulnerable users, but enhance the experience for the broader passenger population.

Inclusive mobility therefore emerges not as a specialized service for a minority, but as a systemic design approach capable of improving the overall quality, usability, and social value of public transport.

Figure 14. *Pier access for individuals with mobility impairments, M. Di Lecce, June 10th 2025*

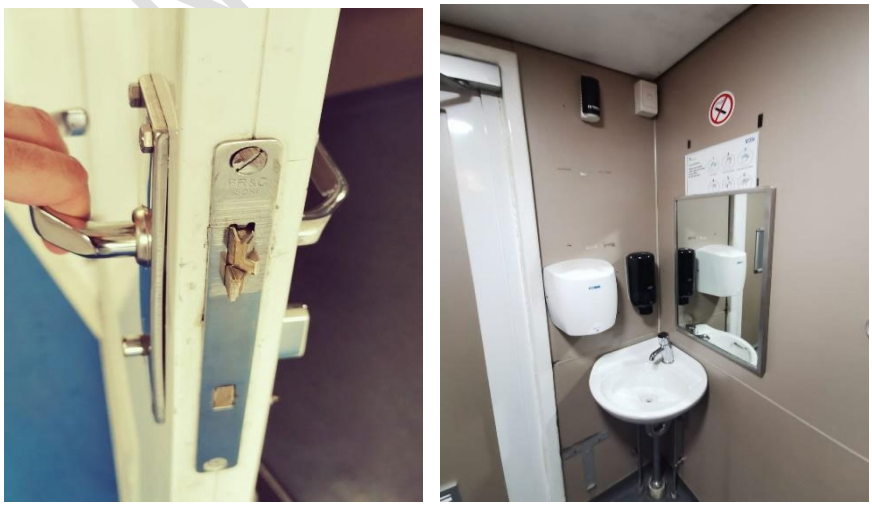
The data confirm that the onboard experience is generally perceived (see Figure 14) by disabled users as positive, though not consistent for everyone. The low gradient of ramps during high tide, the presence of trained staff, and the availability of free tickets for accompanying persons are all highly appreciated features.

On the main deck—as well as in the restroom (see Figure 15) located externally on the aft outdoor deck—spaces are designed to ensure full manoeuvrability: wide 360° turning areas guarantee complete autonomy, while controlled-slope gangways enable safe boarding and disembarkation for individuals with mobility impairments.

Figure 15. *a,b) The ramp provides safe access for individuals with disabilities., M. Di Lecce, June 10th 2025*

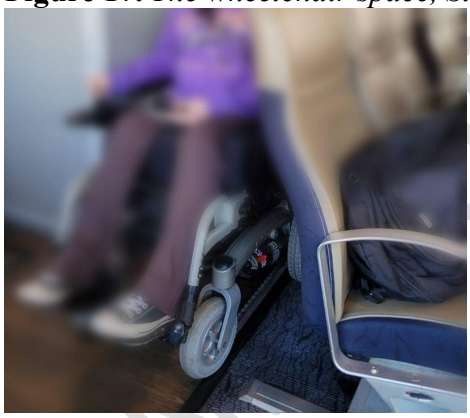
As for the restroom door, it opens outward (see Figure 16) and features a thumb-turn lock, meaning it can be closed from the inside by rotating a knob (no key is required). However, a recessed sliding door would be preferable, as it would avoid obstructing the passage of a wheelchair. The accessible sink is wall-mounted but placed in a rather cramped corner.

Figure 16. *a,b,c) The accessible restroom door, sink, and toilet, M. Di Lecce, June 10th 2025*



The wheelchair space is located toward the stern (see Figure 17), next to the door leading to the external deck. However, for safety reasons, wheelchair users are not permitted on the deck.

Figure 17. *The wheelchair space, Simply Emma, 2023*



Disabled passengers are entitled to a 50% discount on the ticket fare and, if they require the assistance of a companion, may obtain a complimentary ticket.

Anyone holding a Freedom Pass or a 60+ Oyster card will receive a 50% discount. The discount applies to single, hop-on hop-off, and season tickets. It does not apply to return tickets purchased at the pier or to ticket bundles.

If assistance from a companion is required, a complimentary ticket is available at any staffed ticket office. If more than one person is needed for support, customers are asked to contact the Customer Service team at least three working days before travel. Regarding cognitive disabilities, the River Bus operated by Uber Boat by Thames Clippers is part of and supports the Sunflower Lanyard programme. The Sunflower initiative for Hidden Disabilities is an internationally recognised scheme adopted by a growing number of airports, tourist attractions, and accommodation providers.

If a person with a non-visible disability is travelling on the Uber Boat, they may choose to wear a sunflower lanyard, pin, or bracelet to discreetly indicate to the crew that they might need understanding, time, or support. All staff are trained to assist and provide support during the journey. The lanyards—bright green and decorated with a recognisable sunflower design—are entirely optional and signal to staff that a passenger may:

- Need more time to process information or prepare for check-in, boarding, or disembarkation;
- Require clearer verbal instructions, as they may find it difficult to understand facial expressions and/or body language;
- Need assistance reading departure boards or signs;
- Prefer to stay close to family or friends;
- Benefit from more detailed information about what to expect before, during, and after the journey.

Sensory stimuli are carefully calibrated (see Figure 18): neutral colours—such as white, beige, and warm shades of brown and green—create a calming environment, reducing sensory overload. Ergonomic and comfortable seating, the absence of reflective surfaces, minimal noise during navigation, and indirect lighting contribute to a welcoming space for those with heightened sensory sensitivity.

The environment remains predictable, thanks to clear and intuitive pictograms that guide movement both inside and outside the catamaran.

Figure 18. *A detail of the seating, M. Di Lecce, June 10th 2025*

Conclusions

The observations and data collected on river transport in London reveal an effective management of graphic communication directed at users. Information is conveyed in a clear, direct, and functional manner, reflecting an explicit intention to align the communicative dimension of the river service with that of the metropolitan transport system. The graphic design adopted for the Underground and the river boats appears remarkably homogeneous: despite different colour schemes, the two systems are substantially aligned in terms of

structure and visual logic. This coherence contributes to the construction of a unified perception of the overall public transport network. The onboard experience of the river boats is characterised by a high level of comfort: the environment is quiet, noise levels are limited, and seating is spacious and comfortable. Onboard information, although selective, adequately covers safety issues and the organisation of services.

With regard to social media communication, Uber Boat by Thames Clippers constructs a refined, relaxing, and aesthetically coherent image, primarily addressed to a selected urban audience with a high level of digital familiarity. However, this narrative approach privileges visual identity over informational function, leaving essential aspects such as accessibility, clear timetables, and intermodal connections in the background. The resulting strategy appears more oriented toward branding than toward public service, capable of attracting interest but not necessarily fostering inclusion. Although Uber Boat operates under a Transport for London (TfL) licence and is listed on the official website among river services, this institutional integration is not fully reflected in its social media communication. River Bus channels remain separate from official TfL platforms, and key elements of TfL's visual identity—such as logo, typography, and colour codes—are absent. In contrast, services directly managed by TfL, such as the Woolwich Ferry, clearly emphasise their belonging to the public network. In order for the digital storytelling of the River Bus to function effectively as part of the urban transport infrastructure, it is therefore necessary to move beyond aesthetic appeal and promote more accessible, transparent, and dialogic communication capable of addressing the real needs of diverse users.

Despite the progress achieved in terms of physical accessibility, the Uber Boat by Thames Clippers service continues to exhibit significant critical issues, particularly when compared with other public transport systems such as the London Underground or Scandinavian passenger ferries. One of the main problems concerns boarding ramps, whose inclination varies considerably with tidal levels and may become excessively steep at certain times, as reported by users at Westminster and Greenwich piers, thereby compromising the autonomy of people with motor impairments. This difficulty is compounded by the instability of surfaces near moorings, which are often irregular and require considerable physical effort and attention. A further problematic area concerns the organisation of onboard spaces. Areas reserved for wheelchair users are frequently located in peripheral or high-traffic zones, such as central corridors or spaces adjacent to baggage areas, generating discomfort and a sense of marginalisation while interfering with passenger flows involving strollers or luggage. Communication regarding assistance services also remains fragmented and insufficiently transparent, particularly in relation to booking procedures and operational protocols. Comparison with the TfL Turn-Up-and-Go service highlights a more effective model based on coherent communication and stronger integration between infrastructure and human support. Similarly, Norwegian UU-Ferger passenger ferries offer valuable examples of inclusive design through low-sensory environments and the systematic inclusion of users

with both physical and cognitive disabilities. Further comparison with the London Underground and, in particular, with the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) reveals a higher level of consistency between accessible design, signage, staff training, and user assistance.

In light of these findings, it would be desirable for Uber Boat to introduce additional sensory support tools, such as sensory route maps accessible via mobile applications or simplified printed materials, as well as dedicated onboard areas such as quiet zones to provide a more comfortable experience for users with specific sensory profiles, including individuals on the autism spectrum. From this perspective, accessibility should no longer be interpreted solely as regulatory compliance or technical accommodation, but rather as a strategic dimension of urban mobility design. The analysis of motivating factors, enabling conditions, and persistent obstacles experienced by users with cognitive and motor impairments demonstrates that inclusive solutions generate systemic benefits, including greater clarity, higher perceived comfort, improved safety, and stronger trust in public transport services. Given its spatial characteristics and sensory qualities, river transport is particularly well suited to function as a testing ground for advanced models of cognitive and sensory inclusion capable of influencing future standards in urban mobility design. The adoption of good practices already implemented by TfL and in inclusive navigation systems in Northern Europe could ultimately transform Uber Boat into a model of integrated and personalised accessibility.

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