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# Silence Speaks: Built for the Moment of Access, Not Yet for the Moment of Failure

Heather Grizzle · October 8, 2026

*Silence Speaks' Transit Assist makes signed announcements easy to reach. Its documents say almost nothing about what happens when one is wrong.*

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7 October 2026 · Heather M. Grizzle, Novara Consulting Group · Working record, pending Silence Speaks' response

A transport product built with real care for the moment a Deaf passenger needs it, and very little for the moment it gets something wrong

**IN BRIEF**

- Silence Speaks' Transit Assist is designed around the passenger: scan a QR code, no app or account, signed language detected automatically, captions for Deaf people who do not sign, and offline use for tunnels. The company has a Deaf chief operating officer and says it hired Deaf engineers from the start.
- Coverage and the company's own news page say it is working with Transport for London across more than 250 stations. Its transport page names no network, and NCG located nothing from TfL. Whether anything is in public service is the first open question.
- The only published document governing the product is a privacy policy. It does not mention video, location, Transit Assist or model training, and it states the company collects no special category data, including biometric data. No terms of service were located.
- No accuracy figure, evaluation, reviewer, fallback or incident route was located for an avatar offered for transport announcements, healthcare, banking and exams.

## How this record was made

This record rests only on what Silence Speaks and others have published, as retrieved on 7 October 2026: the company's homepage, solutions, transport, about and news pages and its privacy policy at silencespeaks.io; the Companies House register; and press coverage from Wired, MultiLingual, Positive News and others, some of which the company republishes on its own site. It updates NCG's public-evidence Snapshot of 1 August 2026. Before publication, NCG put seven questions to the company in writing, and its answers will be published here in full. Where something is described as not located, that means not found in the places searched on that date, not that it does not exist.

## Four seconds on a platform

A Deaf woman is standing on a London platform when the board flickers and the departure she was waiting for disappears. An announcement is playing. She cannot hear





it. Beside the platform sign there is a QR code, and she scans it. A web page opens without asking her to download anything or make an account. It has already worked out which station she is in and that she signs British Sign Language. A few seconds later a digital signer on her phone tells her the train has moved to another platform.

She is not a real person. She is a composite, built from how Silence Speaks describes its Transit Assist product, and she is here because the product was clearly designed by people who thought hard about her. What this record asks is the question the product's pages do not answer: what happens to her when the signer gets it wrong.

## A front door built by people who understood the problem

Silence Speaks Ltd is a British company, incorporated in December 2021 as Kinesics Meets Ltd and renamed in February 2025[1]. Its founder and chief executive is Pavan Madduru, a former AI leader at Vodafone[11]. Its product turns text, voice and video into signed language through an avatar, in photorealistic or animated styles, and its homepage offers British, Irish, Polish, American and Indian sign languages, with more to come[2]. It markets the avatar to nine sectors under separate product names, from Transit Assist for transport to Care Connect for healthcare, Secure Sign for banking and Class Connect, which promises to turn "course materials, exams, and key information into sign language"[3].

The transport product is where the design shows most. A passenger scans a QR code "at any station or onboard; no app needed." The web app "opens instantly, auto-detecting your location and preferred sign language," and delivers platform changes, disruption alerts and wayfinding "within seconds of the original announcements." It supports up to three hours of offline use for tunnels and poor coverage[4]. The company says captioning is built in for Deaf people who prefer or rely on text[5].

The people behind it matter too. The company's about page names Robert Tiffert as its Deaf chief operating officer, fluent in six sign languages[6]. The founder told Wired he hired three full-stack engineers at the outset, all Deaf sign language users[7]. The company describes itself as "built by & for the Deaf Community"[2] and says it is "co-designing algorithms with deaf communities and linguists"[5]. It has also been candid about limits: the current system runs in the cloud and takes time to generate signing, real-time on-device translation is "at least a year away," and the team abandoned its

first goal, translating sign language into text, because it "proved trickier than expected." Those are things a company says when it is being straight about what it has built.

## Where is it running?

Everything that follows depends on one fact NCG could not establish: whether Transit Assist is in public service anywhere, and if so, where.

**What has been said about Transport for London, and by whom**

| Source | Date | What it says about Transport for London |
|---|---|---|
| Wired, republished on silencespeaks.io | 2025 | TfL "plans to roll out" the avatar; TfL is responsible for more than 250 stations |
| MultiLingual | May 2025 | A partnership with Transport for London that will bring signed announcements to over 250 stations |
| Silence Speaks, "Breaking Barriers" (company's own site) | Undated | Silence Speaks is "collaborating with Transport for London (TfL)" |
| Nimdzi Language Technology Radar | Undated | Silence Speaks works with TfL to deliver accessible public information |
| Silence Speaks transport page | Live 7 October 2026 | Early pilots with major networks; no network, operator or station named |
| Transport for London | Searched 7 October 2026 | No TfL publication about Silence Speaks or Transit Assist located |

Source: Sources as listed; all retrieved 7 October 2026

The accounts move between a plan, a partnership and a collaboration, and the company's own current transport page says only "early pilots with major networks," without

naming one. TfL is a public body with its own publications and freedom of information obligations, and NCG located nothing from it about the product. If Transit Assist is live on TfL stations, it is national public infrastructure serving people with a statutory right of access, and the questions below become urgent. If it is a plan, the record should say so plainly, and so should the company's marketing. NCG has asked.

## What the paperwork covers

The only published document governing Silence Speaks' products is its privacy policy[8]. It names Silence Speaks Ltd as data controller, gives its company number and an address at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory in Harwell, and offers a complaint route to the Information Commissioner's Office. Those are the basics, and they are there. The policy carries no date, and the mirror copy NCG recorded at a second address in August now returns an error.

What the policy does not cover is the product. It does not mention video, signing, location, Transit Assist or QR codes. Its section on what data is collected promises a list and gives none. It says the company may share personal data "in connection with the licensing of our technology" and on a change of control, may store it outside the UK, and keeps it "as long as reasonably necessary." It says nothing about whether anything a user submits trains the company's models. And it states: "We do not collect any Special Categories of Personal Data about you," a category the policy itself defines to include health and biometric data.

Set that sentence beside the transport product. A Deaf passenger who scans the code is identified as someone who needs signed language, at a known station, at a known time. Information that reveals a disability can be health data under UK data protection law. The app detects location automatically. The company's other products take video as input. The policy may be right about what the company stores; it may be describing an older website rather than the product. But as written, it does not describe Transit Assist at all, and no other document does.

No terms of service were located. NCG checked the usual routes on silencespeaks.io and all returned an error. Whatever terms govern a transport operator, a hospital or a bank buying the avatar, or a passenger using it, none are public.

## What trained it

The company describes its training data in one phrase, repeated across its own news page and the coverage it republishes: datasets covering "regional dialects, contextual language, and emotional tone"[5,7]. No corpus is named. Nothing says whether the signing was recorded by the company or drawn from elsewhere, who the signers were, what they agreed to, whether they were paid, or which regional varieties of BSL are covered. This is the same Corpus Question NCG has put to every company on its roster[9], and for an avatar that speaks for public bodies, the answer belongs in writing.

## What nobody has measured

No accuracy figure of any kind was located. The company's own news page describes "remarkable accuracy"; Wired reports that the team has "set high standards for accuracy." Neither is a measurement. No evaluation method, sample or definition of a correct rendering is published, and no evaluation by anyone other than the company was found. The company's site lists membership badges for the National Deaf Children's Society and RNID and support from three universities[2], but none of these is described as having examined the output.

## When it gets it wrong

Go back to the platform. The signer on her phone tells the passenger her train has moved to platform 4. It has moved to platform 14. Or the announcement was an instruction to leave the station, and the avatar rendered a delay.

Live rendering means no person can check that sentence before she sees it. That is a fact about the architecture, not a failing, and it is true of every live system. What matters is what stands in for the check. NCG located none: no reviewer, no sampling of live output after the fact, no stated position on whether emergency or evacuation announcements are in scope, no provision for a passenger without a smartphone, and no route for her to report that the signing was wrong or to find out who is responsible for it.

| At the point of access | At the point of failure |
|---|---|
| Scan a QR code at the station or on the train | No route to a human when the signing is wrong |
| No app, no account, no setup | No provision located for a passenger without a smartphone |
| Location and preferred sign language detected automatically | Location processing not mentioned in the privacy policy |
| Signing delivered within seconds of the announcement | Live output cannot be reviewed before a passenger sees it |
| Captioning for Deaf people who do not sign | No published route for reporting a wrong rendering |
| Up to three hours of offline use for tunnels | No stated position on emergency or evacuation content |

The transport page also tells operators that the European Accessibility Act deadline of 28 June 2025 is approaching and cites fines of up to £425,000, with no source[4]. The site's code declares WCAG 2.1 AA conformance, but no accessibility statement was located, which a UK public-sector deployment would ordinarily require.

## Who decides

Silence Speaks has more Deaf people in senior roles than most companies on NCG's roster: a Deaf chief operating officer and, by its own account, Deaf engineers from the start. That is real, and it is credited. What the public record does not show is whether any Deaf role can stop a release, change what the avatar signs, or refuse a deployment. No advisory body, charter or documented route for the wider Deaf community was located.

Its board is described in political and medical terms. Companies House lists two directors: the founder, and Chloe Smith, a former Secretary of State who led the 2022 legislation recognizing British Sign Language in UK law, appointed in June 2025 and described by Wired as chair[10,7]. Positive News reported in January 2026 that Dr John LeeAllen, an NHS doctor and technology investor, sits on the board[12]; he does not appear on the Companies House register of directors, so his role may be advisory. Leg-

islative standing is genuine credibility. It is not Deaf governance, and NCG records it under board composition rather than as evidence of Deaf authority.

## What a buyer should ask

For a transport operator, the questions are concrete. Is emergency and evacuation content in scope? What latency should passengers expect? What happens when a rendering fails, the network drops or the passenger has no phone? Who reviews live output, and how would a Deaf passenger report an error? For a hospital, a bank or an exam board, the questions are sharper still, because those are settings where a wrong sign has consequences no one can undo.

#### QUESTIONS TO PUT TO ANY VENDOR OF LIVE SIGNED ANNOUNCEMENTS

☐ Is the system in public service today, and where? Ask the operator, not only the vendor.

☐ Is emergency or evacuation content rendered, and if so, with what safeguard?

☐ What compensating control replaces pre-release review of live output?

☐ What does a passenger without a smartphone receive?

☐ What data does the app collect about where a Deaf passenger is, and who keeps it?

☐ Who trained the model on whose signing, and with what consent?

☐ Who is responsible for a wrong rendering, and how does a passenger report it in sign language?

## Questions put to Silence Speaks

NCG has put the following questions to Silence Speaks in writing, with this record attached. The company's answers, and any corrections to the record above, will be published with it.

1. Is Transit Assist in public service anywhere today? What is the status of the work with Transport for London: live, piloting, contracted or planned, and at which stations or lines? Which "major networks" ran the early pilots, and has any of them published results?

2. What data trained the avatar? Was the signing recorded by Silence Speaks or obtained elsewhere, under what licence, from which signers, with what consent and compensation, and which regional varieties of BSL does it cover?

3. Has the signed output been evaluated for accuracy by anyone other than the company, by what method and with what result? Do Deaf reviewers check output, and for live transport announcements, what control stands in for pre-release review?

4. What data does Transit Assist collect when a passenger scans a code, including location, how long is it kept, and is it linked to any identifier? How does the privacy policy's statement that the company collects no special category data apply to a service whose use reveals that the user is Deaf? Is anything a user submits used to train models, and which terms of service govern passengers and customers?

5. Are emergency, evacuation or other safety-critical announcements within the scope of Transit Assist? What is the typical latency, what happens when a rendering fails or the network is unavailable, and what does a passenger without a smartphone receive?

6. Beyond employment, can any Deaf role at Silence Speaks halt a release or deployment or change what the avatar signs? Is there a Deaf advisory body or other route for the wider community? What is Dr John LeeAllen's role, given that he does not appear on the Companies House register of directors?

7. What route does a Deaf user have, in sign language, to report a wrong rendering, and who is responsible for it, Silence Speaks or the deploying operator? Is there an accessibility statement for the Transit Assist web app?

## Silence Speaks' response

Silence Speaks' response will appear here in full when it is received.

**Disclaimer.**
This record states matters of public record as retrieved on the dates given and identifies interpretation as such. The passenger in the opening sections is a composite drawn from Silence Speaks' published product description and does not describe any real person. This record makes no allegation of misconduct and is not legal advice. Silence Speaks has been invited to correct any statement of fact before publication and to respond to the questions above.

## Sources

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**TIPS**

Know something about a sign language AI system that the public should know? Send it to tips@novaracg.com. Every tip is read by me and kept confidential. If you work in the UK, writing to us is not by itself a protected disclosure under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, so before you share employer information, check your options with Protect (protect-advice.org.uk), the free whistleblowing advice line.

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