

REVIEW OF THE DISABILITY STANDARDS FOR ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT 2002

1) Has the accessibility of public transport improved since the introduction of the Transport Standards?

The answer to this question changes depending on who you ask, the type of disability they have and the type of conveyance they utilize. Many people we surveyed simply answered a definitive no.

People who use wheelchairs in the ACT are now able to access buses, albeit on a very limited amount of routes, which still makes travel by public transport very difficult for them and not an alternative to the very expensive Wheelchair Accessible Taxis. The only reliable accessible bus routes are to the interchanges and hospital routes.

Taxis are considered hopeless by visually impaired people. Call centres are difficult to use and waits of up to an hour are not uncommon. Some drivers don't speak English properly and don't know where they are going. They expect to be directed, which is impossible for someone who can't see where they are going. People with vision impairments have been dropped off at the wrong place and become lost and unaware of where they are.

There are insufficient Wheelchair Accessible Taxis to meet demand, delays are still prevalent, bookings don't always turn up and some WAT's are dirty and the drivers treat the disabled passengers badly. There is no complaints line that achieves good outcomes in the way of service improvements. If misdemeanors are reported to regulators nothing appears to happen as a result.

The taxi subsidy voucher system has limitations on voucher numbers to individuals that prevents taxis being a regular form of transport for those who want or need to access their community quite regularly.

Airline staff are always very helpful and attentive towards people with vision impairments traveling alone on both QANTAS and Virgin Blue.

But it is a different story for those with physical disabilities traveling on airlines. The airline industry still continues to create problems for people with physical disabilities, as they need to arrive earlier than able bodied travelers, for loading. No two travel arrangements ever seem to go the same way or smoothly. People with physical disabilities who use wheelchairs are still looked upon as second-class travelers. The training provided to staff for handling people with disabilities is very poor. Lifting devices are used on some occasions, but not on others. It can be difficult being the first on and last off an aircraft and people in wheelchairs have been forgotten all together by staff and left on planes. Expensive wheelchairs have been damaged through poor handling and storage in aircrafts.

➤ How has accessibility to conveyances (eg. Trains, buses, taxis, aircraft, etc) changed? Can you provide examples?

As far as some people with disabilities are concerned accessibility has not changed. The infrequency of buses is one reason why. Others have noticed a definite improvement. This is especially true for buses in the ACT. A big improvement is that the green buses have ramps and are able to 'kneel' down. Knowing that a

particular route is dedicated as a green bus route is the major change in accessibility. If a person doesn't know when the buses are coming then they are useless, but if travelers with a disability know about them, it is possible to plan to use them.

According to the Report on ACT Public Transport Accessible Infrastructure and Services that is available on the HREOC website, ACTION buses state that they have 'provided information sessions for people with a disability to practice boarding and disembarking from accessible buses'. We have received feedback from several people with disabilities who work in the disability field who have no knowledge of the availability of any such information sessions. While ACTION may say the sessions are available on request that is of no benefit to people with disabilities if they are completely unaware of the opportunity to request this assistance.

➤ **How has accessibility of information (eg maps, timetables, announcements, etc) changed? Can you provide examples?**

The people with disabilities that we surveyed do not think accessibility of information has changed at all.

➤ **How has accessibility of infrastructure (eg. Access to stations, stops, airports, interchanges, etc, as well as access to co-located facilities such as toilets, waiting rooms, and food and drink, etc) changed? Can you provide examples?**

Responses to this question varied from those who had not noticed any real changes to those who noted an increase in ramps. For wheelchair users there is still the need to get on at interchanges, unless it is not in peak times. With bus crowding there is a need to be on first and that means an interchange.

When someone does find a bus stop there is no indication of which way the bus will travel other than on the left side of the road. This can lead to much confusion.

For someone with a vision impairment the infrastructure of bus stops is still very inaccessible. Unlike in other states where a bus will automatically stop at a bus stop where a person is waiting, in the ACT the onus is on the person waiting at the bus stop to hail the bus or it will not stop. For a person with little or no sight who cannot see when the bus is approaching this presents a huge obstacle to catching a bus. Simply hailing any bus that approaches is not a solution as the bus drivers resent pulling over for someone who may not have the right bus. Also when there is more than one bus approaching it can be impossible for someone with low vision to see the buses behind the first bus. In addition when someone who has compromised vision has the sun in their eyes it reduces their vision even further.

At the airport there are no designated or specific set-down areas to provide safety for those transferring in and out of wheelchairs. This causes people in wheelchairs to transfer uphill onto the footpath or on the roadway and travel against traffic to the nearest kerb ramp.

2) **Have these changes matched your expectations of the implementation and uptake of the Transport Standards?**

While the standard of transport accessibility has improved in general for some people, there is still an expectation from wheelchair users that the whole fleet needs to become made up of green accessible buses as soon as possible to give them complete

user accessibility to the conveyance. That would be a very welcome change from the current low level of accessibility.

It appears to some that the twenty year time frame is too long and full accessibility could be obtained much earlier.

Do you consider that the changes have matched 1) the compliance requirements and 2) your expectations?

One of our members considered that regional trains have improved in terms of accessibility. For another, while they agree that compliance wise the changes have met the requirements, the changes have not met their expectations.

➤ **If the changes have fallen short of your expectations, can you provide examples?**

If anything, airlines and taxis have become more inaccessible for people with a physical disability who use wheelchairs, contrary to the expectations that the transport standards had raised.

3) Do you consider that the level of compliance required at the end of the first five year period is sufficient to have had an impact on accessibility?

Overwhelmingly the people with disabilities we surveyed answered no. This was for several reasons, including that until wheelchair users have access to an entire fleet of green buses, then it is not sufficient. A partially accessible system still has major constraints on planning public transport travel as a person with a disability. Others were adamant that airline services have gone backwards with accessibility.

4) To what extent do you consider current data on accessibility are reliable? Can you provide examples of problems with data that you are aware of?

There must be poor data because enquiries of providers doesn't give a clear indication that they even know what the improvements in the level of access are, if any.

5) How could reporting of accessibility data be improved for future stages of the implementation of the Transport Standards?

Some private operators have government contracts that could include reporting as part of the contract.

Improvements must be regularly provided to users as this keeps the pressure on providers to meet their requirements under the standards.

6) Are you aware of examples where improved accessibility of public transport has led to increased patronage?

No, because providers aren't good at keeping potential users up-to-date with changes.

We are aware of someone with a vision impairment who has cut back how often they use buses because of the continued inaccessibility

7) Has the introduction of the Transport Standards helped you better understand your rights as a public transport user? If yes, in what ways has it done this?

Most people we surveyed haven't read them and if they had it hasn't really helped them better understand their rights as a public transport user, other than to know that people with disabilities have as much right as anyone else.

8) Are the Transport Standards and the accompanying Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport Guidelines 2004 (no.3) (the Guidelines) a sufficient source of information on your rights as a user of public transport, or have you needed

to consult other sources? What other sources have you consulted? How did you find out about these sources?

As far as we have ascertained, people with disabilities as a whole aren't aware of other sources and don't know what's in the Guidelines. It seems that even knowledge of their existence is limited to those who work in the disability field. Even then it is only those few who have investigated through their own interest and found out about it through transport and government websites.

9) Are you aware of other users of public transport who appear to be unaware of their rights or obligation? How could this lack of awareness be addressed?

Most users of public transport seem to be unaware of the existence of public transport standards. Using disability groups to disseminate the information to those who most need to be informed would be one way to increase awareness. But as disability groups have limited resources already, this awareness campaign would need to be funded separately.

The lack of awareness could be also addressed by a greater spread of information to potential users of the improvements that have been made.

13) Are there areas of the Transport Standards that you consider unclear in terms of the adjustments operators and providers need to make? Please specify.

14) Have the exemptions allowed under the Transport Standards (as specified in the previous chapter), reduced the clarity of obligations under the Transport Standards?

15) To what extent do the Transport Standards allow operators and providers a choice of ways in which they can demonstrate compliance?

16) Where Australian Standards or other technical requirements are specified, are these appropriate? Please provide examples where you believe the use of Australian Standards is not appropriate.

17) Are there requirements that have proven to be impractical or difficult to implement? If so, please specify.

In hindsight the only two wheelchair spaces on public buses will be a future problem with an ageing population who has greater reliance on mobility aids and will require increased space.

18) As a public transport user, are there areas of the Transport Standards where you consider that a more specific requirement for compliance would improve accessibility?

People either said no or were unsure if a specific requirement would improve accessibility.

19) Do you consider that the requirements in the Transport Standards have been applied consistently across different modes of public transport?

20) Will any current areas of inconsistency be addressed through the future stages of implementation of the Transport Standards? (see Appendix B)

Not unless providers are made aware of the inconsistency.

21) Do you consider that the current exemptions granted are appropriate? Should these exemptions be reduced over time?

Yes, at this stage, but there is no reason that any exemptions should be retained.

22) In implementation of the Transport Standards, have the requirements led to a relatively consistent standard of compliance across all modes of public transport? If not, where are the major differences in approach?

Compliance reporting against the standard is extremely poor across all public transport.

23) To what extent do the requirements in the Transport Standards address all of the accessibility requirements for people with disability? Are there gaps in the coverage of requirements?

They fall short on informing progress made on a more accessible public transport system to users, as well as the following:

- Ticketing
- Costs for air travel
- Safety
- Staff training

24) Does the compliance timetable provide for a gradual improvement of accessibility over the 30 year implementation period? Are there aspects of this timetable that present compatibility problems? How could these requirements be improved?

The twenty year time frame is too long and this review process should look at speed of compliance at each of the reporting times with a view to shortening the overall time frame to 10-15 years.

25) Are providers meeting their obligations across all aspects of accessibility, which ensures compatibility?

No, they could report more widely and target better the phased improvements that come with the standards.

26) Do the requirements of the Transport Standards need to more explicitly recognize the potential other regulatory constraints that impede the capacity of transport providers to deliver the objects of the Transport Standards?

Yes.

27) How well are the current arrangements for making complaints about accessibility understood by the public?

The general disability population and user are unaware of the standards' requirement to report on a staged compliance.

28) Are the current processes sufficiently responsive to complaints, or requests for information or advice on the Transport Standards?

No, as currently complaints are the only process that regulates the system. If there were other regulatory systems, complaints wouldn't be needed. Complaints are a powerful tool for change as it was the myriad of complaints that were responsible for putting the Standards in place.