

# **Submission to the DDA Transport Standards – 5 year review**

## **Wellington Access and Inclusion Advisory Group**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission into the Third Review of DDA Transport Standards.

This submission has been prepared on behalf of members of the Wellington Access and Inclusion Advisory Group. The Wellington Access and Inclusion Advisory Group consists of people with disabilities, carers and disability service providers.

In addition to people with disabilities a high percentage of older people in the Wellington community also have limited mobility and transport access issues.

Transport is inevitably one of the top issues identified causing disadvantage and isolation for people living in rural communities.

### **Focus of submission**

The focus of this submission is largely on the impact of the standards from a rural perspective where there has been NO net improvement to services or DDA standards for over 10 years.

- The last public transport review for Wellington Shire transit services was conducted in 2008
- Less than half of the existing bus services are 'universally or wheelchair accessible'
- Apart from Vline services there are no town services or inter-town services available on weekends or public holidays
- Rural areas such as ours still rely solely on school buses to deliver local public bus services resulting in equitable access to transport services

### **Impact of the Standards in rural areas:**

#### **Inequitable Public Transport compliance – school bus exemptions**

It is important to note that rural areas such as Sale and surrounds are still solely reliant on school buses to deliver local bus services. These are the services that connect our communities with key destinations

such as health, shopping, education and access to recreational activities.

School buses are a valuable transport resource for rural communities and should be fully utilised to meet transport needs.

It is currently understood that school buses are still exempt from DDA standards with PTV continuing to request exemptions based on threats they will withdraw services if made to comply due to costs.

For as long as these exemptions continue, rural areas will never see any improvements in universal accessibility.

Unfortunately, the way DDA compliance is reported also contributes to a gap in understanding how some areas are missing out altogether on improvements to accessible transport services.

A review of the exemption for DDA compliant school buses that also provide additional public transport services could make a significant improvement for all.

### **Wheelchair Hoist buses vs low floor buses**

This has been rather a contentious issue since 2015 when the Traralgon-Maffra-Sale Vline service low floor bus was unexpectedly replaced with a wheelchair hoist bus without any community consultation.

PTV's decision had a detrimental affect on so many people in the Maffra community as they can no longer get up the steps of the replacement bus, excluding them from using the service altogether. It also reflected poorly on PVT considering the needs of older people and soon led to a community petition signed by over 200 people. Despite receiving numerous complaints PTV refused to reverse their decision saying that it was final and that the replacement service did comply with the DDA standards. PTV also said that if people could no longer get on the bus between Traralgon, Maffra or Sale then they would provide a taxi service.

This clearly contradicted the PTV Accessibility Implementation Plan at the time which stated that :

- New services must demonstrate a net access 'improvement' for **all users** of the PT network
- Alterations to existing PT routes and services must demonstrate a net access 'improvement' for **all users** of the PT network
- Equivalent access does not include a segregated or parallel service

Even an escalation of the complaint to the PTV Customer Advocacy Officer on the basis of the above did not result in a satisfactory outcome, mainly because PTV remained adamant that the service met the current standards for DDA compliance and there was nothing further the community could do about it.

There is a huge need for a commitment to ‘universal access’ as a minimum standard for all transport services. We should no longer be accepting of ‘boarding devices’ to meet DDA compliance – (such as additional ramps, lifts, hoists etc). The disability sector have argued for a very long time that the answer to this should lie within the construction and standard of the infrastructure yet the government has failed to introduce minimum standards which reflect this. This applies right across the board from community transport, taxis, school buses, tour buses, trams, trains etc.

A timeframe for setting a minimum level of DDA compliance needs to be introduced for rural areas.

## **Vline issues**

Many of the issues highlighted in the attached case studies highlight the lack of suitable accessible bus infrastructure available for bus replacement services which has been a common occurrence on the Bairnsdale rail line for many years. So much for journey planning when websites say one thing and reality delivers another. Segregated taxi services should not be allowed to become the norm for people in rural areas. Not only is it not satisfactory, its expensive and it takes valuable ‘accessible’ taxis out of our towns for whole days at a time.

## **Complaints Process**

Unfortunately, many people with disabilities are not aware of how to effectively make a complaint when something goes wrong, ie left stranded on stations when the train has no ramp to provide a wheelchair passenger or WAT taxis refusing a fare because it is seen as not economical.

Making a complaint is often seen as ‘making a fuss’ hence it rarely gets reported. It is also unreasonable to expect people with disabilities to identify non-compliance and seek a resolution in what is a complicated and discouraging process.

People are not often referred to the ‘official’ complaints registers for different transport modes. Information and advice about traveling with a disability varies considerably from operator to operator and call centre to call centre.

Introduction of a multi-modal universal complaints process for all public transport providers would lessen the onus on an individual making a complaint and be seen as more transparent and non-threatening for users.

## **Information and Timetables**

Many people still find transport information either absent, inaccessible, incorrect or difficult to use. Whilst there have been significant improvements on-line with apps and the like, this still precludes many people who do not have access to, or the capacity to use, a computer or a smart phone.

All transport operators should be required, under contract, to promote their services in local communities, provide up to date information, easy to read maps and timetable information in a full range of formats.

## **Wheelchair Accessible Taxis**

There has been no increase in the number of WATs servicing the Shire (population 14000+) going back 10 years. Current service levels remain inadequate at: 2 x maxi taxis and 1 x station wagon

These services are in high demand at peak times in the mornings and afternoons to get people with special needs to health appointments, planned activities and education. When these services are taken out of the community due to a lack of other accessible infrastructure this leaves the community frustrated and short-changed.

Centralised taxi booking services such as 13CABS is also proving to be difficult for some to navigate– refer case studies attached for details.

## **Additional comments:**

The Wellington Access and Inclusion Advisory group would be pleased to provide you with further information relating to any of the issues raised in this submission and the attached case studies. For more information please contact James Griffiths as listed below.

Signed on behalf of the

Wellington Access and Inclusion Advisory Group by :



James Griffiths

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