

Association for the Blind of WA (Inc.)

Submission to the – Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002

1.0 Organisational Background

The Association for the Blind of WA is the principal provider of services to people with vision impairment in Western Australia. The Association offers to its clients, a broad range of services aimed at maximising their independence in the community. It is estimated that there are 24,900 people in Western Australia who, due to a loss of sight and inability to see normally when wearing glasses or contact lenses, are blind or vision impaired. This is approximately 1.36% of the Western Australian population.

The majority of the Association's clients are older adults aged 65 or over (67%), with just over half of these clients being 85 years plus. It is estimated that between 1998 and 2016 the number of blind and vision impaired people in Western Australia will increase by 57%. With an aging population the biggest growth in the blind and vision impaired population is expected to be among people 65 years old and over (77%).

For over 90 years the Association has been providing a wide range of services aimed at maximising the quality of life for people who are blind or vision impaired. Independence is a significant issue for most people with a vision impairment. It is important to be able to do the things you want to do, in your own time, without being dependent upon the help or support of others. The availability of accessible public transport is a significant contributing factor to the independent living of Association clients.

2.0 Context

The Association sought comments for this submission from its Orientation and Mobility Instructors and from its clients. A request for feedback was broadcast to its client feedback email consultancy group. Clients attending the Association's Leisure Centre were also provided with the opportunity to make comment. The results are presented below; general opinion is summarised and specific comments provided.

3.0 Responses

3.1 General

Overall sentiments expressed, convey a very positive and appreciative attitude towards the availability and accessibility of public transport. It is clearly used by many clients of the Association and plays an extremely important role their lives, enabling their independence and pursuit of commonplace daily activities that include: working, studying, shopping, attending medical appointments, enjoying leisure activities and meeting with friends and family.

Particular note was made of the public transport workers whose friendly assistance contributes greatly to the confident and efficient travel of our clients. This enables their use of transport services that are available to the broader community, thereby enhancing their sense of wellbeing and ultimately, their quality of life.

3.2 Purpose for which public transport is used

Public transport is used for a variety of purposes, which include going – to workplace or volunteering venues, on social trips, to the Association for the Blind’s facility, to medical appointments, for shopping and to get to the city.

One respondent qualified that her use is contingent on the train or bus being easy to access (i.e. not involving the crossing of any major roads).

3.3 Overcoming existing problems

- Better signage and audible announcements would help overcome difficulties identifying the correct train with the annoying and frustrating consequences of catching an incorrect one.
- The provision of a bus service in the local area.
- Platforms to be at the same level as the trains.
- Website needs to be much more accessible (even sighted relatives have problems).
- The provision of timetables in large print.
- Schedules to allow sufficient time for passengers arriving on one train to get to the connecting bus.
- Bus ramp to be lowered.
- Transperth Officers to identify themselves when speaking to a person with a vision impairment.
- Provision of Transperth Officers for longer hours to assist travellers who work business hours.
- As the bus doors open, before passengers who are vision impaired board the bus, driver to verbally announce the bus number. This sometimes happens, but is not widespread.
- Bus number visibility is difficult; it’s stressful flagging a bus, without being able to see its number and then realising, once stopped, that its not the bus required. Displaying the bus number in a good contrasting colour and in a bigger, bolder, brighter format, at an additional location on the bus – possibly at the bottom of the window, would be helpful
- The provision of staff to assist passengers with a vision impairment to move from one bus to the other (as is the case with trains).
- Driver to verbally advise passengers who are vision impaired if the bus is parking in a bus station bay that is different to the norm.
- Ensuring the frequency and reliability of buses.
- The audible information provided by the Central Area Transit (CAT) bus stands and onboard information about forthcoming CAT stops is great – and should *a/ways* be used by the drivers
- It is difficult to use public transport with a pram or stroller. Even when the bus is accessible with a low floor eg: the Perth CAT buses, the experience is that drivers rarely use it - or offer to lower

the floor for a passenger with a pram / stroller. Bus drivers need to be made more aware of this and change their behaviour.

- The grey CAT buses are difficult to see; a brighter colour would provide better visibility.
- Audible announcements on trains are sometimes incorrectly activated after the train has left the station; they should be activated when the train is still stationary.
- The provision of continuing taxi driver awareness and the consideration of increased fines for taxi drivers who refuse to accept passengers with guide dogs.
- During times of maintenance or new construction, if services are affected, it's not always made clear to passengers with a vision impairment. Examples of inconvenience that have been experienced by a respondent include – physical barrier to the normal platform, or a change to a bus' normal departure point (discovered after standing on the usual platform for one hour). Staff attending these areas during such situations and assisting people who are vision impaired would be extremely helpful.
- Recent changes to the train line that delivers passengers to the Association for the Blind of WA need to be addressed. The changes have resulted in: a less frequent service; and a different platform at the Central Station, which is poorly lit and narrow.
- Help line operators do not always have enough particular and specific information to be of help to people with a vision impairment (for instance, knowledge of physical landmarks, crossroads etc.). Better operator awareness of the needs of people who are blind or vision impaired would be good.
- During wet weather, the tiled platforms become extremely slippery at the Perth Central Station. A non-slip surface on the platforms would address this concern.
- Trains to be stationed for longer periods at Victoria Park. Thus allowing senior passengers sufficient time move from priority seating and alight the train to visit the premises of the Association for the Blind.
- Staff working at the information counter at Perth Central Train Station, need to be constantly updated with changes to schedules and services so they can impart helpful information as well as hand out timetables.

3.4 Improvements to public transport over the past five years

There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the question of improvements to public transport over the last five years; everyone who responded indicated such.

Specific comments included –

- Bus design has improved to include allocated seating for seniors and people with a disability.
- The CAT bus service is very good.
- The provision of a bus stop close to home.
- Good wheelchair access.
- Provision of extra staff to assist people with a disability.
- Newer buses.

- Additional buses, bus routes and a train station.
- The low floor buses and CAT buses are great - when the driver uses all the features; they have good internal colour contrasting and efforts to enlarge the numbers on the front of the bus is a positive move.
- Audible announcements on trains.
- Awareness of bus drivers who tell passengers with a vision impairment the number of the bus as they enter to ensure that it's the correct one.
- All transport authority staff to recognize Travel Passes
- Staff at train stations to have a positive attitude towards Orientation and Mobility Instructors and their clients who are undergoing training.
- Prompt responses to formal requests for the installation of Tactile Ground Service Indicators.

3.5 Accessing travel information

Every response showed that people access travel information, from bus stands, train stations and phone lines. One respondent suggested that the availability of audio timetable information at bus stops and train stations would be very helpful. Another person indicated that obtaining travel information is generally difficult. Two others commented that the website is confusing and very difficult to use.

3.6 Help provided by transport operators

Two people indicated that they were unaware of the help they can request from transport operators. All other respondents indicated an awareness of the type of help they can request. One respondent said that she has often requested assistance from telephone operators to design a travel route and to obtain timetable information from the phone operators, with most being very helpful.

4.0 Conclusion

The Association appreciates the opportunity to comment on the review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.

The feedback from its clients strongly indicate that they:

- value public transport services; and
- make good use of them; and
- generally have a good opinion of the services; and
- believe the services have improved; but
- can identify the need for further improvement; and
- suggest such improvements.

Staff contact

Carol Solosy

Director: Training, Employment and Information Services

Association for the Blind of WA (Inc.)

PO Box 101

VICTORIA PARK WA 6979

carols@guidedogswa.com.au

Tel: 08 9311 8202

Fax: 08 9361 8696