

SOUTHWEST ADVOCACY ASSOCIATION

SUBMISSION TO REVIEW OF THE DISABILITY STANDARDS FOR ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

August 2007

Southwest Advocacy Association (“SWAA”) is an independent, not-for-profit, community organisation that has been funded by the Commonwealth Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to provide advocacy and information to people with all types of disabilities throughout south west Victoria since 1993.

Unfortunately, due to the limited resources that SWAA has at its disposal, SWAA is not able to make a detailed submission to the Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (the Standards). SWAA would however, like to support and endorse the submission of the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) and, on the basis of its’ experience as an advocacy organisation for people with disabilities, SWAA would like to submit some general points for the consideration of the Review team.

1. It is SWAA’s view that, despite the introduction of the Standards, in general, transport services and supporting infrastructure continue to be far less accessible to people with disabilities than to other citizens in our society.
2. SWAA does not believe that sufficient progress is being made toward meeting the Standards by many public and private transport providers.
3. Compliance with the Standards must be monitored and enforced by Government. A dedicated body with responsibility in this area should be established without delay.
4. In SWAA’s experience people with disabilities commonly put up with breaches or infringements of their rights under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) because they are not aware of their rights or because they find the existing system that they are required to use to enforce their rights far too time consuming, exhausting, and potentially costly, due to the prolonged and legalistic nature of the complaint resolution process.
5. The DDA should be reformed to make complaint resolution processes, quicker, simpler and less legalistic. The potential for costs to be awarded against complainants in the Federal Magistrates Court should also be removed.
6. There needs to a community education campaign funded by Government to make people with disabilities aware of their rights under the DDA and the Transport Standards.

7. Levels of disability issues awareness amongst the staff of transport providers are generally very poor. An appropriate disability awareness training package for the staff of transport providers should be designed in consultation with relevant training providers and people with disabilities and this training should be mandatory for the staff of transport providers under the Standards.
8. Transport service providers should be required to consult and negotiate with people with disabilities and independent advocacy organisations that represent people with disabilities prior to seeking an exemption from the Standards.
9. Transport service providers should be required to establish disability consultative committees, that include people with disabilities and independent advocacy organisations that represent people with disabilities. It would be important to ensure that people with disabilities on such committees were adequately supported and resourced to enable them to participate in a meaningful way.
10. Further research needs to be done by Government on the barriers to access to transport that people with disabilities experience with a view to eliminating these barriers.