



Thursday 17th January 2013

Submission to the 2012 Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 (Transport Standards) Issues Paper

Deaf Victoria is the peak representative body for all Deaf and hard of hearing people in Victoria. We provide information services and advocacy on behalf of and for the Deaf and hard of hearing community. With all Deaf and hard of hearing management and board of directors we are the “voice of victoria’s deaf community”.

1. *Has your accessibility to public transport improved since the commencement of the first Transport Standards review in 2007?*

As a representative of the Deaf and hard of hearing community in Victoria, and a Deaf public transport user myself, it has improved slightly, particularly in the Melbourne city loop and some major train stations, but there is still more work to be done.

- *How has your accessibility to conveyances (e.g. trains, buses and coaches, trams, ferries, wheelchair accessible taxis and aircraft) changed? Can you provide examples?*

Physical accessibility to conveyances have not been an issue for Deaf and hard of hearing people, however the accessibility of information relating to announcements made in transit on loudspeakers are not accessible. There are no hearing loops in the vehicles and there are rarely any captioned announcements.

Example: in some of the newer trains, there are captioned announcements saying, “next stop xxx” however this is not the case for all trains or other transport.

Example: if a train or other vehicle stops suddenly due to an emergency, and people need to get off the train/vehicle, this information is not on screen in captions, and is announced via loudspeakers. Deaf and hard of hearing people tend to follow what the other passengers do.

- *How has your accessibility to information (e.g. maps, timetables, announcements, etc.) changed? Can you provide examples?*

Unfortunately there has been no change. Access to information that is announced over the loudspeakers is still not translated on screen in captions therefore inaccessible.

Example: when a cancellation or service disruption happens, on screen the displays show “listen for announcement” rather than elaborating on what has happened or what will happen next. This is a major issue for Deaf and hard of hearing passengers.

The same situation applies in any emergency procedure, where Deaf and hard of Hearing passengers will have to rely of what other passengers are doing.

- How has your accessibility to infrastructure immediate to boarding a conveyance changed? (e.g. any structure or facility that is used by passengers in conjunction with travelling on a public transport service). Can you provide examples?

In airports, there are metal screening detectors that emit an audible beep if the passenger has metal on their bodies. However there have been cases where Deaf and hard of hearing people have not been able to hear these alerts and have kept walking, much to the anxiousness of the security officers. Visual alerts need to be installed.

- What do you currently see as the greatest areas of need with regard to accessibility of public transport for people with disability? Can you provide specific examples?

The biggest priority for access for Deaf and hard of hearing people would be ensuring that all train stations, airports and major tram and bus stops have electronic screens highlighting the details of the next arrival, and advising of upcoming arrivals, of trains/trams/buses is paramount, not just for Deaf and hard of hearing people but for the wider community too.

These screens have currently been installed in the city loop train stations and are working, and accessible for the Deaf and hard of hearing community. However, there is a major drawback: the "Listen to Announcement" sign that comes up when a train has been cancelled or there has been a service disruption. Public Transport Victoria needs to ensure that the "Listen to Announcement" sign is replaced with something that will give more information as to what is happening next. This could be " 'South Morang train at 3.35pm is cancelled", "Lilydale line has been moved to platform two". This specific information would be widely helpful. This could take the form of a scrolling text on the top or bottom of the screen with live updates.

Feedback from the community states that often the hearing loop is not switched on, and for many of the community, the hearing loop is useless due to not having sufficient enough hearing to be able to utilize it. There is a large section of the community who do, however, find the hearing loop useful however it needs to be switched on to work effectively.

There also needs to be plans in place for emergencies- able hearing people have access to the red emergency button in trains. What will happen in the situation that a deaf person finds himself or herself in an emergency situation?

2. 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?

In the Transport standards it states, under hearing augmentation- listening systems

26.2 (a) people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment must be able to receive a message equivalent to the message received by people without a hearing impairment.

It is vital to note that not all deaf and hard of hearing passengers can use the hearing loop effectively. It is only a percentage of them that are able to hear adequately enough to pick up the message on the hearing loop. It is vital that the message appears in captions on screen, which is accessible for all deaf and hard of hearing passengers.

3. To what extent do you feel that the requirements in the Transport Standards address all of the accessibility requirements for people with a disability? Are there gaps in the coverage of requirements?

The transport standards are quite vague when it comes to accessibility for the deaf and hard of hearing passengers. The only information I could find within the document relating to deaf and hard of hearing people is the need for visual alerts for emergencies, hearing loops and the use of the international symbol of deafness.

It is important that the need for captioning on screen at the same time that announcements are made is incorporated as a standard practice as this is accessible to all and will fulfil the requirement noted in 27.1:

27.1 General information about transport services must be accessible to all passengers

4. Do you find that the current processes with regard to making a complaint or seeking information are sufficient or sufficiently responsive?

While, as an employed advocate for the Deaf and hard of hearing community, I am aware of the complaint process via the feedback mechanism on the website and the Public Transport Ombudsman, the general Deaf and hard of hearing community are not clearly aware of how to make a complaint. There needs to be more work done in this area to encourage passengers to submit feedback and complaints.

5. As a body representing the views of people with a disability, do you have any specific responses or perspectives with regard to the issues raised in the questions above?

Deaf and hard of hearing people often use public transport as their main source of travel, and it is of very overdue and vital importance that all announcements are placed as captions on screen to be accessible to all of them, whatever varying degree of hearing loss they have.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this review. If there are further queries, do not hesitate to contact me on melissa.lowrie@deafvictoria.org.au.

Regards

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