

Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport



Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport

26 July 2007

Contents

1 Introduction	3
Background	3
Statistics	3
2 Comments on accessible public transport	3
Buses	3
Trains	3
Planes	4
Taxis.....	5
Ferries	5
Trams	5
3 Other issues.....	5
Use of International Symbol for Deafness	5
Making complaints.....	5
4 Conclusion	6
About the Deafness Forum.....	7

1 INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Access to public transport is important for the nearly four million Australians who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment. This access enables them to participate in the community in the same way as other Australians.

Deafness Forum has consulted with its members in all states of Australia to gather some feedback on accessible public transport. The feedback we have received is summarised throughout this paper.

The accessibility of public transport for people with disability is the primary purpose of the Transport Standards, and this relates as much to infrastructure as the modes of transport. The infrastructure component is where people who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment feel there is limited accessibility.

STATISTICS

Deafness Forum of Australia has long disagreed with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition of disability. It does not capture the nearly 4 million Australians who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment, even though this can adversely affect their educational, employment, emotional, and social outcomes, and can require assistive devices to participate in everyday life.

People with deafness are much more likely to be on lower incomes than people without deafness¹. Hence affordable, accessible public transport is important to people with deafness.

2 COMMENTS ON ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Probably the issue of most pressing concern for people who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment is the accessibility of timetable information, public address announcements and other signs, alarms or alerts;

BUSES

Bus terminals: Loop systems accessible by a T Switch here are few and far between at bus terminals. Announcements over PA systems are virtually impossible to hear given background noise, distortion, and other factors and the announcements that come over the loudspeaker system (often relating to delays) cannot be understood. One just has to wait and see how everybody else responds, but often one is left wondering what it was all about.

Buses themselves could also have loop systems.

Long distance buses are invariably equipped with a loudspeaker system, but never have a loop system. It would solve a number of problems if loop systems became a mandatory attachment to all amplification systems on buses.

TRAINS

“As a hearing-impaired person who uses public transport by choice (for environmental reasons), I am disadvantaged in being unable to hear voice announcements made at railway

¹ Access Economics Listen Hear! The economic cost and impact of hearing loss in Australia 2006

stations or on trains. This has often meant I have missed important information about service disruptions, etc.

One watches other passengers cocking their ears to hear the announcements, then reacting (rolling their eyes or tut-tutting or making mobile phone calls), and if one is confident of communication skills, chooses a friendly-looking passenger to ask their advice. (However, sometimes it feels risky to make known one's hearing-impaired status known to strangers.)

If there are no other passengers in the carriage or station whom I feel comfortable approaching, I can only hope the cause of the disruption is nothing life-threatening, and that the delay will not be so long as to cause me to miss a critical appointment.

Even though some major railway stations have special zones with the blue & white 'ear' symbol, I've found that quite often these are not working. (I suspect it's up to a hearing-impaired user to report if they are not working... but this isn't possible if one is rushing to catch a train).

To ensure full and fair access for all users, ALL announcements should appear in writing as well. This applies to overhead PA announcements (both pre-recorded and live), as well as to the 'push-button' update service available at stations.

"I would like to congratulate Queensland Rail for the way in which they look after the needs of the hearing impaired. Once you know what is offered, it is easy to access information at the booths that offer a loop system using a T Switch, long distance trains offer hearing augmentation through headphones (although these are not always powerful enough to pick up a good signal) and visual information is easy to see and kept up to date and time."

PLANES

Air travel and airports are a source of major concern to our constituency.

The anxiety created by not being able to easily communicate with personnel at counters, not hearing the announcements, or not understanding where a service is located, is a source of concern to travellers who are Deaf or hearing impaired. Air carriers also need to increase the accessibility of announcements and communication with passengers in airports.

Deafness Forum believes that access to TTYs and volume-controlled phones is essential for travellers who are Deaf or hearing impaired.

Deafness Forum believes that the benefits to the traveller of clearly expressing prior to travel the services that will be required, are not yet known to many travellers who are Deaf or hearing impaired.

The need for a plain language travel itinerary, available upon request in alternative formats can be a benefit to travellers who are Deaf or hearing impaired.

Air carriers are encouraged to work in concert with travel agents to facilitate these changes.

While travellers understand the need for heightened security in the light of possible terrorist activity, the information needs to be accessible. Persons who are Deaf or hearing impaired have related that they cannot hear when the security alarm beeps, and are often unsure of whether or not they can proceed to their gate.

Travellers who are deafblind will generally be accompanied on their travel. However this does not preclude the need for availability of services and information for the deafblind.

Deafness Forum recommends that where there are seating areas (for example in departure lounges) set aside for people who are deaf or hearing impaired, the equipment needs to be compatible with hearing aids, have variable amplification for those who do not use a hearing

aid, and some kind of text communication facility. This seating area must have adequate signage (for example the International Symbol for Deafness).

Technology is advancing rapidly in this area and over time many passengers will benefit from captions and audio descriptions in airport departure lounges

TAXIS

The question is whether discrimination has been removed –in fact the introduction of voice recognition systems for bookings makes it more difficult. When people who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment use the “wheelchair line” (so they can speak to a real person), they are often given a frosty reception when it is found they don’t have a wheelchair, and they are usually discouraged from using the line.

FERRIES

While we have received no specific comments relating to ferries, points about visual information at terminals and loops on board apply.

TRAMS

While we have received no specific comments relating to trams, points about visual information at terminals and loops on board apply.

3 OTHER ISSUES

USE OF INTERNATIONAL SYMBOL FOR DEAFNESS

There is limited usage of the International Symbol for Deafness. Other proprietary signage should not be used as it is confusing not just for Australians with deafness but also visitors from overseas, where the signage is well-used.

MAKING COMPLAINTS

Individuals are unlikely to make complaints. In the first instance, this is partly a combination of being in a hurry to get to a destination via the public transport, then a realization that making a complaint will be difficult given communication difficulties (not hearing what the other person is saying, or not being able to communicate via Auslan, for example). Without the support of another organization or advocate, a person with deafness is unlikely to progress a complaint. There are no deafness organisations receiving funding through the National Disability Advocacy Program although people with deafness can access other advocacy organisations. Sadly, in many cases their complaint will be lower down the queue given the prioritisation that occurs. This means that issues that affect up to 4 million Australians can be overlooked.

Any audible alarms or alerts

A number of products feature audible alerts/alarms to indicate a result. An example of this is security screening machines, found at airports.. This presumes that the nearby consumer can hear the audible alert. If that person is Deaf or hearing impaired, this may not be the case.

Example: A complainant had an experience at Perth domestic airport in Perth where the metal detector provided an auditory alert (beeps), but the passenger walked half way up the escalator before he was confronted by two very anxious security guards.

4 CONCLUSION

Currently, one in six Australians has some form of hearing impairment, and this is projected to increase to one in four by 2050². People who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment make up possibly the largest single group of people with disability. Ensuring public transport is accessible is important so that these Australians are not disadvantaged.

² Access Economics 2006 "Listen Hear: The economic impact and cost of hearing loss in Australia"

ABOUT THE DEAFNESS FORUM

Deafness Forum is the peak body for deafness in Australia. Established in early 1993 at the instigation of the Federal government, the Deafness Forum now represents all interests and viewpoints of the Deaf and hearing impaired communities of Australia (including those people who have a chronic disorder of the ear and those who are DeafBlind).

The Deafness Forum is divided into four classes of membership: Consumers, Consumer Associations, Service Providers, and Service Provider Associations.

- Consumer means an adult who is Deaf or has a hearing impairment or has a chronic ear disorder; or a parent of such a person. Chronic Ear Disorder refers to such disorders of the ear as tinnitus, Meniere's Disease, Acoustic Neuroma, hyperacusis, and otitis media. People with some such ear disorders may also have a hearing impairment. Deaf refers to people who see themselves as members of the Auslan-using Deaf community by virtue of its language (Auslan) and culture. Hearing Impairment refers to a hearing loss. People with a hearing impairment (or who are hard of hearing) may communicate orally (sometimes described as 'oral deaf') or may use a sign language or other communication methods. All Consumers are entitled to describe themselves using whatever terminologies they prefer, and are asked to do so at the time of joining and each time they renewing membership.
- Consumer Association means an incorporated organisation of, or for, consumers.
- Service Provider means an adult who provides services that promote the well-being of people who are consumers (as defined above). Examples are audiologists, audiometrists, teachers of the deaf, stenocaptioners, Auslan interpreters, and ENT specialists. Service Providers also include various other occupations that provide services to consumers who are Deaf, have a hearing impairment or have a chronic disorder of the ear.
- Service Provider Association means an incorporated organisation, which has (as its principal purpose) the provision of services that promote the wellbeing of consumers (as defined above).

The Deafness Forum exists to improve the quality of life for Australians who are Deaf, have a hearing impairment or have a chronic disorder of the ear by:

- advocating for government policy change and development
- making input into policy and legislation
- generating public awareness
- providing a forum for information sharing and
- creating better understanding between all areas of deafness.