



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

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The scope of the review of accessible public transport encompasses the provision of vehicles and supporting infrastructure such as access paths, ramps, bus stops waiting areas etc. As Local Government in Queensland is primarily involved in the provision/maintenance of public transport infrastructure this submission will address only this aspect.

Provision of Public Transport Infrastructure

In Queensland, Queensland Transport is responsible for the provision of public transport (PT) services with the exception of Brisbane which operates a major bus fleet and a ferry fleet. Both the Brisbane City Council and Gold Coast City Council also operate Council Cab services which assist older people and those with disability with travel to their local centres.

Local Governments and Queensland Transport share responsibility for the provision of public transport infrastructure in Queensland on a 50/50 funding basis, with Local Government assuming ownership and responsibility for the ongoing costs of maintaining the infrastructure.

Meeting the 25% compliance target

Councils are working with Queensland Transport in response to the requirement to comply with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* 25% compliance target for bus stops is reached by 30 December 2007

South East Queensland

In the South East, major councils such as Brisbane City Council and Gold Coast City Council have implemented their own ongoing programs to meet the 25% compliance target. TransLink has advised that they have around 12 000 bus stops in the region and have allocated funding for DDA compliance work through the broader Station & Stop Infrastructure Grant program which has a budget of \$3m per year. This funding is available to councils on a 50/50 basis.

Regional Queensland

Local Governments in regional Queensland are working with Queensland Transport and their communities to ensure that the compliance target is met. Queensland Transport developed a comprehensive strategy for regional Queensland to audit existing stops and prioritise those stops which requiring upgrading. QT is developing a database which will record details of all bus stops in regional Queensland. This will be used to track the progress of compliance with the Transport Standards. Councils are assisting QT with the gathering of information in relation to individual bus stops.

In order to identify the priority stops based on user requirements, QT set up the Regional Queensland Bus Stop Project, which is a consortium of four key agencies: Disability Council of Qld and Regional Disability Councils; Guide Dogs Qld; Queenslanders with Disability Network; and Spinal Injuries Association. This group held public consultations throughout the region with councils and community groups to identify key strategic bus stops and prioritise the upgrades. Councils and Queensland Transport are also addressing these issues through their local Public Transport Committees.

There are approximately 3,000 bus stops in regional Queensland. QT has \$7.62M this financial year to assist councils with meeting their targets. This funding will be in the form of capital grants for the procurement and installation of Transport Standard compliant bus stops.

Compliance Issues

The process established by Queensland Transport is assisting councils to meet the DDA requirement but there are however a number of issues of concern for local government in meeting the requirements.

The cost of upgrading infrastructure to meet the Standards could be excessive

Many of the non-compliant bus stops will require significant upgrading as will the surrounding lead up areas around those stops. For example, additional signage, treads or kerb modifications may be required even if the shelter structure itself is compliant. There will be instances where a strategic bus stop is unable to be made compliant due a difficult terrain arising in excessive cost leaving Council exposed.

There is the potential for very significant costs to upgrade and even with Queensland Transport sharing 50% of the costs the funding implications for councils is still going to be very significant and immediate leaving a significant funding shortfall.

There is a lack of guidance in the Standards on how to address bus stops in regional and peri urban environments

There is some confusion on how bus stops which are simply a pole in the ground particularly common in regional or peri urban areas are to be treated. These stops simply utilise the grass verge of the roadway for passengers to wait and in most instances the roadway does not have a constructed kerb. One interpretation considers that these stops are compliant if the ground is firm and level on the basis that there is not a 'premises' and the pole is not classified as being 'infrastructure'. Whereas another view classifies these bus stops as non-compliant for there is not an access path or turning area provided.

Meeting the standard may have unintended consequences for other transport users.

Another concerns expressed by councils regards the potential for modification of bus shelters to disadvantage other vulnerable users. For example if two spaces are removed from a standard bus shelter that leaves very little seating room for other users who may be aged and frail or parents with young children who need to be able to sit and hold their children.

Councils may be forced to rationalise bus stops due to the costs of making them compliant. This is likely to become more of an issue as the compliance rate increases potentially leading to disadvantage to the broader community who may rely on that stop.

Conclusion

While local government is very aware of the need to assist those with disabilities by providing suitable infrastructure and services and does not resile from its responsibilities, there are however concerns that the cost of providing compliant infrastructure can not be met within their own budgets even with the assistance of State Government funding. The failure by the Australian Government to provide additional funding to Local Government to assist them to meet this requirement is in essence another example of cost shifting from the Commonwealth to Local Government.