

## Transport Issues in Western Australia .

I would like to submit the following information as I have concerns about how difficult it is and will be to roll out the DDA re Transport issues in country areas.

I am an amputee who uses a manual fold-up wheelchair for mobility.

I live in Exmouth, a small country town which is 1300 km from Perth and has a resident population of 2500 people. During tourist season (April to November) the population swells to approx. 8 -10,000 people.

Many of our visitors are elderly pensioners (some with mobility issues) who come to Exmouth for 6 months residency.

I am on the Exmouth Shire Townscape and Disability Committees and am passionate about improving access for all in my community.

Only Skywest Airlines services Exmouth and we have only one taxi service in town, that does not have an accessible taxi. The Exmouth Airport Bus Service is not accessible to PWD 's .

### 1. Exmouth Airport Bus Charter.

The Exmouth Shire Council contracts out the public transport of passengers from the Learmonth Airport to and from the town of Exmouth, which is located 36km from the airport. Despite having the issue of this bus service NOT being accessible for people with disabilities raised for the past 3 years through the Exmouth Shire Disability Committee, none of the 3 buses used to provide transport are accessible. For me to be able to use the service, I transfer from my wheelchair onto the stairs of the bus and then onto the floor of the bus before lifting myself into the seat. This process is repeated at the other end. (I need to consider what I am wearing to the airport in terms of what will show the dirt and will keep me covered as I do this maneuver.)

In 2006 I raised the possibility of me bringing a HEROC claim against the Exmouth Shire because of their lack of accessible transport to/from the airport and the Exmouth Shire sought legal advice. Because the bus's were old, and the recently purchased bus was second hand, they believe that they DO NOT have to create 25% compliance by December 31st, 2007 for bus access.

In my view both the Exmouth Bus Charter and the Exmouth Shire believe that they would be exempt from any future requirement to create access.

I am well aware of the difficulties which arise when people with mobility issues need to get out to and from the airport. There is no accessible taxi service in Exmouth and so people with disabilities are unable to use any public transport service to get to and from the airport into Exmouth or around town and it's surrounds. If they are not a HACC client then they need to arrange transport privately because there is no other accessible transport choice available in Exmouth. ( The Home And Community Care bus is wheelchair accessible but is only able to be used by eligible HACC clients and this service is only available Monday to Friday, 9am to 3pm. ) Many flights are outside of these times.

While I am able to transfer out of my wheelchair and lift myself from the floor and stairs into a seat, what about the people who are unable to negotiate stairs safely or who are in electric wheelchair etc? I resent the fact that despite the Shire being very aware of the need to improve access to transport in Exmouth it has not yet happened.

I live in hope that the DDA compliance requirements will change this!

## 2. Skywest Flights.

I fly Skywest in WA all of the time (at least once a month, sometimes more frequently), and find them to be usually very helpful and accommodating. However, they do seem to have a high turn over of staff, especially ground staff (who are a different company contracted to perform these tasks by Skywest) and check in staff who perform the Passenger Assist service I require to get on and off the planes . I can't use the stairs due to the fact that I am an above knee amputee and use a lightweight, fold-up wheelchair. I do not require any assistance with transferring onto my seat or during the flight. I have heard that heavier electric wheelchairs can pose all kinds of problems re: airport staff handling and flight storage issues.

On 3 occasions in 2006 I have encountered stressed/rushed staff who are new to the process of assisting me on to a plane at Perth Domestic Airport. Usually we get thru the process, but the following experience led me to ring Skywest management in Perth to ask them to follow up and perhaps to provide some more staff training around assisting people with disabilities. In 2006 an obviously inexperienced member of ground staff who was required to perform a passenger assist service led myself and another passenger (on crutches) to the plane to board. The other passenger used the stairs and I was led onto the lift/hoist compartment on to the plane. After some manoeuvring I was moved into the plane at row 1. My allocated seat was in row 7. The staff member then asked me " Can you hop to your seat?". I refused for safety reasons and was pushed to my seat. The air hostess later said that she found the hop comment to be offensive, and that she was going to make a complaint to management. When I followed up a few days later, Skywest management said that they were in the process of investigating the written complaint they had received from the hostess and that they acknowledged that a high staff turn over had caused some issues of concern.

## 3. Broome.

I went to Broome in July 2007 to attend a meeting and spend some time on holiday with friends. I used my taxi vouchers through the Taxi User's Subsidy Scheme and as I am able to transfer into any car or van and my wheelchair folds up I did not have any problems accessing taxi's. However, I did ask about Multi Purpose Taxi's in Broome and was told that they only had one accessible taxi and it was an "old clanger and was off the road more than it was on the road". Broome has many clients who would require and use an accessible taxi and the lack of a working taxi would limit the ability of PWD's .

## 4. Perth Taxi's Buses and Ferry Services.

### Perth Taxi's.

I am in Perth once a month and have a million taxi stories to tell and not all of them are positive.

Sometimes I do not tell the taxi company that I am in a fold up wheelchair and still ONLY require a normal four seater car, as I feel that the wheelchair

discriminates me because many taxi drivers literally do not want to get out of their cars to lift a 11 kg wheelchair (most suitcases weigh more) into their car. I have often waited up to one hour for a booked taxi, even though empty taxi's have been driving past me on the street and have not stopped. And yet I feel lucky that I do not have to use a MPT as I have heard horrific stories of people having to wait even longer.

I have had taxi driver's tell me that they are unwilling to pick up wheelchair passengers for short trips because it is not worth the effort of lifting the chair in and out of the car.

Many taxi driver's do not know the intricacies of the taxi user's subsidy scheme and this has lead to me being over charged because the driver will not accept my version of the truth. (I now carry a letter from the Dept. Of Infrastructure and Planning explaining the program and my subsidy to try and avoid any misunderstandings. I used this letter and subsequent conversations with a taxi service in Bunbury to educate them about charging appropriately which they had not been doing).

Again taxi staff training about the taxi user's subsidy scheme and what people with disabilities have a right to receive would help with improved service provision for all.

Perth Buses.

I really like being able to travel on the accessible buses in Perth. I love how the ramp drops down and there is space for a wheelchair. Accessible buses in the country would be a very welcome bonus.

WESTRAIL (Government) County Bus Service

I have traveled on a South - West Westrail Country bus that was accessible, but this service currently only extends to Kalbarri and I live much further north. That precludes me from bus travel from my town as there is no accessible bus service (government or privately run ) from/to Exmouth.

Ferry To Rottnest Island (off Perth)

I have only traveled on the ferry to Rottnest once in a wheelchair and the trip was great apart from the terrifying angle of the ramp to get off the ferry. It was so steep I had to be held into my chair so that I would not tumble out!!