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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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THE ALLEN CONSULTING GROUP

REVIEW OF THE DISABILITY STANDARDS FOR ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

HEARING CONDUCTED AT:

**HOTEL JASPER
489 ELIZABETH STREET
MELBOURNE**

DATE:

8 AUGUST 2007

MS SKILBECK: Okay. Good morning everyone. Welcome to the second day of hearings in Melbourne for our review of disability transport standards implementation. I will just make a few introductory comments before we start proceedings. I'm Melissa Skilbeck and my colleagues James Green is in the room.
5 We're from the Allen Consulting Group. We've been appointed by the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Commonwealth Minister, that is, to conduct a review of the standards since they were implemented in 2002. This is the first five-yearly review that is planned. Our role is essentially to assess the progress against the requirements in the standards and being mindful, of course, of the staggered
10 implementation timetable that exists.

It goes all the way from 2002 to 2032. There are compliance milestones every five years and the first one is 31 December 2007. We are therefore not assessing whether there ought to be standards but we're assessing the extent to which the standards
15 have thus far been effective in approving accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities. The review has a dedicated website, www.dda.transportreview.com.au. On that we have our issues paper which sets out the questions, our early questions for stakeholders to respond to. We will have the transcripts of this hearing and all previous hearings on that website. They are
20 appearing within about five days from each hearing date. Written submissions also appear on that website.

We are open for and welcome any written submissions until 24 August. When we produce our public draft report, we will also have it on that website and submissions to that will appear there. This is one hearing among 15 that we have conducted.
25 This is the last day of hearings for the review. We've conducted hearings in each capital city and a regional centre in each state and territory, in fact. The role of the hearings is to provide interested people and organisations with an opportunity to speak, an opportunity for us to hear issues and perspective on the implementation of the standards. We do intend the hearings to be relatively informal but there's a fair
30 bit of formality attached to needing to speak into a microphone for the purposes of a transcript.

So I would ask anyone who would like to make a comment throughout the day to ensure they make themselves known to myself or James and so a microphone can be
35 within cooe of their voice when they speak and that you identify yourself before you speak. For those here to observe, please try not to interrupt a person speaking for the same reason but please feel free to make comments after organising with James and myself. We have some copies of the issues paper here if you would like
40 one.

Just a bit of housekeeping too before we start. We have tea and coffee outside the hearing room to the left of the door through which people have come. The toilets, which both have wheelchair accessible accepts, is as we face the front door of this
45 room on the right past the tea and coffee.

The plan for today is for three speakers formally. We have Leah Hobson with us from Blind Citizens Australia. We're expecting Jeanette Lee from Yooralla and Kate

Colvin from VCOSS. We expect to be able to hear all three speakers before we break but we will be flexible if we have some difficulty with people arriving. So with that, are there any questions about the arrangements for the hearing this morning? No? Well, with that Leah, would you like to make some comments?

5 Thank you.

MS HOBSON: Okay. Thank you for having me here as a speaker today. My name is Leah Hobson, as Melissa said, and I am the national policy officer for Blind Citizens Australia. Blind Citizens Australia is the national peak advocacy body of
10 and for people who are blind or vision impaired. We have about 3000 members nationwide. We have branches all over the country and we have about 13 affiliate organisations around the country as well and our mission is to improve the lives of people who are blind or vision impaired in quality, improving positive community attitudes, empowering ourselves and through demanding and advocating for high
15 quality accessible services.

So for BCA, our experience with the implementation of a disability standard so far has been that it has brought some positive outcomes for people who are blind or vision impaired. For example you can now go to a train station, if your train station
20 has been upgraded and it has tactile ground surface indicators which help you navigate your way successfully around the train station and that's a big improvement for people who want to be able to travel independently and safely, but of course the standards are being implemented in a staggered way, as Melissa just said and over a 20 year period, so there are some things that aren't quite in place yet. It's not a
25 whole of journey experience in terms of accessibility yet and we recognise that that's just a part of the long term implementation of the standards.

So for example if, as I mentioned, you know, you can get into your station and you can find the platform and you can find where the door to the train is by using tactile
30 ground surface indicators. You might actually get on to a train and then find that there are no audible announcements telling you which stops are where and if you're vision impaired, you might find that the signage on the train platforms that you're passing as the train stops aren't going to be very clear or easily readable. So obviously, you know, there are improvements happening but it is happening slowly
35 and we recognise that. We also recognise as an issue that there are going to be sometimes concerns about meeting the needs of different groups of people with disabilities at once.

So for example, the tactile ground surface indicators, as I mentioned, are sometimes
40 an issue for people in wheelchairs if they're placed in certain spots and obviously there needs to be ongoing negotiation and clear consultation between grounds so that people with disabilities can all have their needs met in the best way possible. So one of the things that we think the standard has really done is increase awareness of the needs of people with disabilities. It's done that by providing a lot of specific legal
45 requirements and guidelines for people to access if their transport providers or local government, those sorts of things, but it's also important to note that the standards should be accessible to people with disabilities themselves because this is also about educating them about their rights to use public transport.

So one of the comments that we would like to make is that there hasn't really been a lot of consumer education around the standards and you know, you could argue that of course this is a legal document and should be the bastion of lawyers and people who are highly educated but really when you're talking about the impact it has on people with disabilities, they should really be aware in a plain English sense what the standards mean for them. For BCA, we found that one of the big issues when we came to look at how the standards are going is consistency. This is important for people who are blind or vision impaired because you can get orientation and mobility from an instructor at our guide dog school or our vision impairment service provider and learn your way around a route but once you've learned your way around that route, you rely on your memory of how things are to continue to navigate that route successfully when you're going there independently.

So for somebody who is vision impaired to find themselves maybe using the same mode of transport but with a different model of bus or train or tram can be difficult and can also be difficult in terms of interstate travel as well, so that people who are blind or vision impaired going from Sydney or Melbourne don't just face the fact that oh, in Sydney they have monorails and in Melbourne they have trams. It's also a difference in the level of implementation and the way in which states and territories are going about implementation. So part of the issue here is to do with the standards themselves and in terms of the clarity they provide in how implementation should be done.

So one of the things that we noticed is that the disability standards on accessible public transport cite sometimes very old Australian standards. So you could be talking about standards from 1989 or 1992 which at the time the standards were implemented would be 10, 13 years old and which are going to get more and more out of date as time goes on and newer standards have actually come in in certain cases and you know, because meeting those newer standards is voluntary some places are doing it and some places aren't and there really needs to be some discussion around what happens when a newer set of standards comes in.

MS SKILBECK: Leah, may I ask a question? Are there some, I guess, more important or more significant differences between states in the implementation of standards that has a particular impact on the members that you represent?

MS HOBSON: Well, I think just in terms of quality and level of implementation, so for example, if you go to Perth you get on a train that has wheelchair accessible slots, it has audio loops for announcements, it has – it might have a little electronic display above the entrance area telling you what the next stop is, but if you go to Sydney you might be on a

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS HOBSON: So, you know, there's that real disparity in terms of how quickly and how effectively the states are picking up.

MS SKILBECK: Where the standards have been implemented, for example, the tactile surface indicators, are they being done in a consistent way when they are done?

5 MS HOBSON: Well, that's an issue I was going to bring up later actually.

MS SKILBECK: Sorry.

10 MS HOBSON: But I will certainly discuss that further down the line.

MS SKILBECK: Okay. please.

15 MS HOBSON: Okay. So as I was saying, you know, there's a difference in the Australian Standards which are cited in the Disability Standards on Accessible Public Transport and ones which are current, and so some places are voluntarily implementing the current standards, and some places aren't. There really needs to be that discussion around what happens does – do the Disability Standards on Accessible Public Transport need to be upgraded to be in line with the Australian Standards, do we talk in the guidelines about what it might mean to use the newer standards as opposed to the older ones, those sorts of issues need to be addressed and of course, if we're talking about, you know, do we introduce newer standards, we also have to look at issues around retrofitting and refurbishing and upgrading.

25 So for example, if we were introducing a newer version of an Australian Standard, and somebody has just upgraded their station to be compliant, we need to have some discussions around whether or not that person then has to immediately go and upgrade to a whole new set of standards or whether we have some timeframes and periods of leeway for people. It's also important to be a little bit flexible in terms of emerging issues, so for example, website information isn't really covered under the standards, and I imagine in 2002, it wasn't quite so common to be able to go to a company website and find your timetable, find a route map, find all of the information that you can now get off the Internet.

35 So obviously, there needs to be some flexibility in those sorts of issues, and particularly when it comes to issues that are urgent safety concerns. So at the moment, there's growing concern in the blind community about the rise in the number of hybrid cars on the roads, because although they're wonderful in terms of their effect on the environment, they're very, very quiet and it's very hard to hear a hybrid car coming towards you on a road, and so the issues around safe street crossings are becoming much more important to people who are blind or vision impaired as a result of that. Also in terms of the way the standards – the disability standards, that is, promote consistency.

45 Sometimes there isn't an Australian Standard cited because there may not be one, such as in the case of the raised tactile taxi numbers on the doors of taxis, and that's an issue in terms of consistency because although the disability standards talk about where these raised numbers should be placed and how they should be – how high they should be off the door, they don't really talk about say, font size or the kind of –

the way the numbers should look and feel to a person who is blind or vision impaired, and that can be an issue, so in the cases where there aren't Australian Standards, we do perhaps need to be a little bit more specific about what we're requiring of people. It's also important to note that in some cases it seems that the disability standards may not cite an Australian Standard even when there's one in existence, and there's no explicit undertaking in the disability standards which tells you whether or not that Australian Standard should then be ignored or should be taken on board, and that needs to be clarified.

10 MS SKILBECK: Do you have an example of that?

MS HOBSON: Not off the top of my head, sorry, I've gone blank.

MS SKILBECK: That's all right, thanks.

15

MS HOBSON: But I will include one in the written submissions.

MS SKILBECK: Thank you, that would be great.

20 MS HOBSON: Okay. So there's those sorts of issues around consistency, there's also issues across states and territories, there isn't a consistent means of reporting levels of compliance, so the reports have to be done, but there isn't any way of lining up and going, okay, the people in the ACT are doing much better at buses than the people in Sydney, and the people in Brisbane. So it's very difficult to gage on a national level how this is going. I guess there's also the issue of consistency across service providers, and again this is, you know, we recognise that both states and territories and service providers have their own budgetary constraints, they have their own – a whole draft of other regulations of laws to deal with, and so this is sometimes very tricky, and I'm not meaning to be combative about this at all, certainly among service providers there's often an inconsistency in the sort of equipment that's available.

35 So for example, if you get on a tram in Melbourne, you may get a tram that has steps, that doesn't have very good contrasting between the poles and their background, doesn't have very good contrasting for the buttons and the ticketing machines, or you may get one that's, you know, low rise and has all this great contrasting available to you, and again, that's, I guess, an issue that goes back to the fact that this is being implemented over a staggered period. So there's all that, there's also the issue of inconsistent levels of maintenance as well. So service providers aren't necessarily always considering say, you know, that if they leave a sign out in the sun for 10 years, it's going to get a bit faded and you're not necessarily going to have the same level of consistent contrast that you did 10 years ago if you go back and look at it.

45 There's also the issue of consistent staff training here, so that staff training is really not looked at in the guidelines with any sort of clarity in terms of the outcomes that it should have and the regularity that it should happen at, so, you know, you find that staff may not necessarily be aware of things, and as a result, some of the standards aren't actually met. So if you go into a train station and you're listening out for the

audible announcement, and you get someone who comes on with a really thick accent and they're talking really fast, that audible announcement has been provided, but because the person isn't aware they need to speak more slowly and clearly for people to be able to understand them properly, the standard isn't met, you know, it's not accessible to people.

So that becomes another issue. I guess in terms of consistency, that's about it, but there's also issues that are specific to people who are blind or vision impaired within the DSAPT, so there are – we can start with access path which, at the moment, there are some issues, and I believe you would have heard about these in Sydney, regarding train stations, because you might have a clear access path in the middle of a platform on a train station that meets all the requirements of DSAPT, but if you are a person who's blind or vision impaired, you're going to want to be shore lining, which is a traditional orientation and mobility method which means that you just go along the edge of a wall or a building or a fence to make sure that you're going where you want to be going, and of course, on a lot of train platforms, the buildings that are there have, you know, vending machines, telephone booths, seats, it makes it very difficult for someone to use that shore lining technique, and so a lot of people who are blind or vision impaired aren't actually able to use the access paths in the middle of the platform, so they go to the tactile ground surface indicators which are along the edge of the platform.

Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean they're going to get a clear right of right, because there might be poles that are supporting the structures within the station along by those tactile ground surface indicators. It's a really important issue, because obviously if you're walking along and one side of you is an open set of train tracks, it's more ideal if you don't run into something and fall off. So there's that issue with access paths.

There's also the issue that while we talk about unhindered access in the standards, we don't necessarily talk about creating a straight and even navigable path, so you might have a clear path between one set of chairs in a café and another set of chairs that are a little bit closer to the counter, but it might be a bit zigzaggy, it might be a bit difficult to find your way through. If you're talking about, say, an airport terminus, that becomes difficult for somebody who's blind or vision impaired, whereas someone in a wheelchair is going to see that, "Yes, this is a bit funny. I need to watch out here." So that's an issue with access paths as well.

Getting back to tactile ground surface indicators, there is a lot of inconsistency, as you asked earlier, in terms of implementation, and that's because the standards are fairly vague about how they should be implemented. We talk about colour contrast, for example, instead of luminance contrast in the standards, so we're talking about maybe black on white, which isn't really sort of any kind of technical standard, whereas luminance contrast is a term that relates to something that the CSIRO has developed in terms of making sure that something – no matter how different the colours are – can be seen at a reasonable distance by most people in most conditions so that it has been designed specifically so that somebody who's blind or vision

impaired can utilise that. Because of the language in the standards we don't necessarily always see transport providers picking up on that.

5 Again, in terms of differentiating between different kinds of tactile ground surface indicators – because there are two kinds. You have directional tactile ground surface indicators, which are long lines and funnily enough they point you in the direction you need to go, and then you have hazard tactile ground surface indicators, which are the little round ones that you see on the edges of train platforms. They indicate not just a hazard, like the edge of a train platform or the top of set a stairs, but they also
10 indicate where you should stop, so like in front of a lift or in front of a ticket barrier, something like that. There's no real distinction between the two, so there can be some inappropriate use of tactile ground surface indicators because of that.

15 Because the standard talks about change of direction but doesn't really specify what a change of direction might be or where you might want to be directing people to, there can be some confusion around that. You could be talking about a change of direction to indicate where toilets are, where a customer service desk is, where an emergency exit is, any or all of those things, and the standards don't really tell people what sort of things they should be considering when they're looking at installing
20 tactile ground surface indicators. It also doesn't really talk about issues around bad design, so encouraging people not to use tactile ground surface indicators, for example, to cover up something that could be dealt with in another way.

25 Again, I think Barry in Sydney, who's one of our members, would have spoken about the fact that in some cases you see hazard indicators to the underside of a set of stairs. Really, that underside of a set of stairs should be fenced off rather than having someone stop there and try and figure out whether they've got to go forward, maybe hitting their head. So that's an issue, and also in terms of making sure that tactile ground surface indicators are not overused either, because sometimes you can see a
30 real mess of tactile ground surface indicators. People will need to go, "Here," and "Here," and, "Here," all at the same time. It gets very confusing, and, as I said earlier, it can be difficult for people in wheelchairs to navigate. So there were some real concerns around how well the standards allow people to implement tactile ground surface indicators effectively.

35 I guess another big issue – and I believe this has been a bit of a chestnut throughout the public hearings – is access to information. As I mentioned earlier, access to Web site information is something that we believe should be included in the standards. We think that, you know, the standard should be sighting the W3C Web
40 Accessibility Initiative user access guidelines which talk about the need to have a replacement, and an appropriate replacement, for any visual or audio content you have on a Web site.

45 That might be a PDF, it might be an image, it might be something like that where you have maybe an HTML copy of a PDF document or you have a written description of a route if you've got a route map or you're offering people Braille copies of information if you can't put up some alternative to a PDF for some reason because it's an official document. You know, that's an issue that really needs to be

considered because, as I said, you know, in the past five years Web site accessibility has become much more important. People are using the Web a lot more.

5 We also think that audible announcements are a really important feature of access for people who are blind or vision impaired. They need to be made not just clearly, as I said earlier, but they need to be made accurately. When we're talking about things like route numbers or the next stop or what the next train or tram or bus is going to be, that sort of information needs to be accurate, because I can tell you I've had the experience of getting on the wrong train and it's not a lot of fun if you can't see
10 where you're going. It's also not very safe if you can't see where you're going because then you've got to navigate a whole new environment to get back to where you were. Maybe that increases your stress and anxiety levels at the same time.

15 In terms of bus travel, when I was looking at the issue of audible announcements, I sort of thought, "Well, what happens if you're deaf blind?" There's an initiative within the Seattle area in the US which looks at bus travel for people who are deaf blind, because obviously you can't see the route number, you can't even tell the bus is coming, you won't be able to hear the bus driver, you won't be able to
20 communicate with them. What they do in Seattle is they have a card system. That card system means that if you're deaf blind and you want to travel on a bus, you go to the bus stop and you have the route number on a card. You hold that up. The bus driver recognises that you're deaf blind because you're holding this card, stops for you, assists you onto the bus, and then you give him another card which tells him exactly where on the route you want to be let off.

25 The bus driver assists you to your seat, takes you to that stop, takes you out of your seat and helps you out and gives you back the card. It's a really simple, low cost, effective system that means that people in our population who are deaf blind are able to travel independently by bus. It's something that we think DSAPT should really be
30 looking at including.

MS SKILBECK: Leah, is there any experience with that in Australia that you're aware of?

35 MS HOBSON: I don't think it's been implemented anywhere in Australia. I'm pretty sure it hasn't.

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

40 MS HOBSON: Let me just find my place again. Sorry. Alternative information on signage should be compulsory, we think. We believe that it's not just enough to ask people to do it. It's really important because you get a lot of information from signs. You might know where the emergency exits are, for example, because you're able to read a sign. You might know, you know, where the toilets are, you might know what
45 direction you've got to go in to get out. A lot of that information is missed by people who are blind or vision impaired because the signs are not clear. They're not properly signposted for somebody who can't see very well and so you end up having to, as I said before, either memorise that information or get it in advance off a Web

site or through a service line number. That's not particularly ideal, especially when somebody else can just pop into the train station or the bus stop and find out for themselves what's going on.

5 We also think that the tactile signage on taxis should be on the inside door as well as the outside. We think that because sometimes you have situations where you need to identify a taxi at the outset of the journey. That would be maybe if you get a cabbie who says to you, "Oh, well, I'm allergic to guide dogs. I can't take you." So, you want be able to go and obviously put in a complaint that that has happened.
10 Sometimes you get into a cab and maybe bad service doesn't start until you are already on the journey. So, somebody who is sighted will be able to see the taxi driver's number and we need to be able to identify that as well. You are not necessarily going to want to carefully feel the door on your way out to be able to access that information.

15 So, in terms of access to taxis as well, there should also be a way for people who are blind or vision impaired to independently verify their taxi fare. There is often a lot of concern among who are blind or vision impaired that they might be being ripped off by a taxi driver. It is not necessarily happening very frequently but nobody knows
20 because there is no way to tell necessarily that that has happened. So, something like talking metres would be useful for people who are blind or vision impaired to be able to independently verify that information.

In terms of what is already in DSAPT, I think, that is about it but there are some
25 things that we are remiss in not being included. Particularly communication would be one of the important ones. So that staff aren't necessarily encouraged to communicate effectively with people with disabilities who come into their contact if they are customer facing. So that is important for people who are deafblind, for
30 people who are blind, and may be from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, people who might be blind and have another disability like an intellectual impairment or a cognitive disability because all of those people have trouble accessing information in other ways. So a member of staff is going to be their first and best point of contact.

35 A good example I can give here is that I heard a story about a deafblind woman going to an event and she had to catch two trains. She got the first one successfully, was waiting on the platform for her second one. Someone came up and grabbed her. She didn't know who they were. They took her to a car. They put her in the car. She didn't know until the end of her journey that she was actually where she was
40 supposed to be. She didn't know what was going on. Nobody could communicate with her through sign language.

So what had actually happened was that the train she was supposed to be catching was being replaced with buses that day. The staff had a little bit of a discussion and
45 found her identification and found some information saying where she was going and called up the people she was meant to be meeting, got the address and told them she was coming by taxi. They didn't tell her. So it was a very harrowing journey for her. It is the sort of thing that really could have been solved if people were a little bit

more aware of good communication techniques just generally. We also feel that – hang on. I am just going to have to find my place. Sorry about this.

MS SKILBECK: No worries.

5

MS HOBSON: We also feel that in terms of deafblind people, there needs to be an investigation of what can be done at level crossings to ensure additional safety because if you are talking about crossing somewhere and maybe you don't hear the loud clanging noise that most people can apparently hear from two blocks away and you can't see the big flashing lights, it is not necessarily going to encourage you to get across that level crossing as quickly as you might need to. So it is an important issue for people who are deafblind. We don't have necessarily an answer to that but we think the issue should be investigated and looked at because it is such a big safety concern for people who are deafblind.

10

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MS SKILBECK: Are you aware of any investigations going on in other countries who - - -

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MS HOBSON: Not that I have been able to find but, again, I will be doing a little bit more research before my submission goes in.

MS SKILBECK: Great. Thank you.

25

MS HOBSON: Just to confirm that finally.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

30

MS HOBSON: We have also noticed that patrons aren't always clearly consulted or communicated with in terms of changes to public transport routes or stops. So, sometimes you might have a blind or vision impaired person who has learnt their way to a bus stop but near accessible crossings and it is in a really good location for them, and then it gets moved, and then get conflicting information from an information line about whether or not that change has happened and where it has gone. When they actually get there, they find that it has been moved to a much less accessible spot. So, that the road crossings are not as easy for them to navigate. It is a bit issue obviously if that is your only means of transport outside of taxis and taxis are much more expensive and you are at a financial disadvantage. So, consultation and clear communication about changes really needs to be looked at as well. Just general, on the ground communication from staff.

35

40

We would like to see some awareness around the need to have a ticket barrier that is open for guide dogs to go through on unattended platforms because in some cases, you know, you get to the platform and there is nobody there and you have got a special travel pass so you can't use the ticket barrier to enter the station. You have got an option of doing some very awkward wriggling or getting your guide dog to show jump. Neither of those are a particularly good option. We really think that there needs to be some more awareness around that as well.

45

Those are, I guess, all the issues that we have come up with in terms of things that aren't in the standards. I guess I would just like to close by saying that we think that accessibility on public transport is not just about addressing disability specific issues. That accessibility has to be a part of a broader push for good quality and readily
5 available public transport for people. So, that if you on a rural and remote area you do have access to public transport when and as appropriate. Really, if you are in a city area, as we are here, you are not faced with over-crowding because petrol prices have gone up and that seems to really surprise everybody. Aside from that, I think that is about all I wanted to say.

10 MS SKILBECK: Thank you very much, Leah.

MS HOBSON: Thank you.

15 MS SKILBECK: Can I ask for some additional observations to the extent you can getting a blind assistance Australia coverage across the country. Whether you have any observations on the relative performance between states, how well implemented some of the standards particularly relevant to blind citizens, whether any particular states are doing well or worse than others in particular modes perhaps.

20 MS HOBSON: I think – we don't really get a lot of clear information because of course this is – we are a consumer organisation and a lot of what comes through to us is about personal experience.

25 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS HOBSON: So, we don't get a clear systemic – at this point we don't get a clear systemic idea of how things are going across the board in any given state - - -

30 MS SKILBECK: Right, okay.

MS HOBSON: - - - unfortunately.

35 MS SKILBECK: So, the consumer complaints that you are receiving aren't systemic. You don't have a full pattern appearing?

MS HOBSON: Sorry, can you - - -

40 MS SKILBECK: There is not a pattern of the complaints that you receive?

MS HOBSON: Aly, do you have any particular comments because you are the one who deals – Aly is – I am a policy person. Aly deals with the advocacy.

45 MS SKILBECK: Okay. Excellent. Okay. Please.

MS MOHUMMADALLY: Yes, I am Alyena Mohammadally and the solicitor and communal legal education advocate at Blind Citizens Australia. Just in relation to that question, I think there is a definite lack of transparency amongst the service

providers. It is very difficult to get information out of them because they do believe they are being challenged or on the back foot. So, the only way we are able to find any information is when we lodge a complaint through the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. So, that is already an adversarial process. It is a long,
5 drawn out process to get statistics or figures or policies or anything that is happening behind the scenes because they – well, they just don't want to give it.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

10 MS MOHUMMADALLY: I think I just wanted to comment on something that Leah was saying and it has just triggered something off in my head.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

15 MS MOHUMMADALLY: In terms of the message of consistency, I can't reiterate how important that is, purely because as a sighted person I, like many people, take it for granted that I can move freely between the states and you can't if you have a disability. I mean, that is a massive generalisation but it is very, very difficult for our
20 members to move from one state to another because of the inconsistency in service provider implementation in transport. I recently had a conciliation that had run for two years or an attempted conciliation, and it failed because – it was as TGSi issue and one of the reasons why it wasn't going anywhere is the transport providers kept on insisting that, well, look, not so many blind people are in this suburb, (a), which is an absolutely comment but (b) we have put lifts there, so what is your problem in
25 that you can get from the ground floor to the first floor so why do you need to use the steps anyway? I remember our member saying to me most blind people – again, a bit of generalisation. Many, many blind people or vision impaired people won't use lifts because just how difficult or how different lifts are.

30 I mean, you walk into a lift, and you don't know what side the buttons are going to be on, not all lifts have Braille, and just being able to access that lift can be difficult again for sighted people, so how is it accessible to people who are blind or vision impaired, it's not. So putting a lift in might say that you're complying with the
35 standard and you're allowing people, but you're actually not practically allowing people to access it.

MS SKILBECK: Okay. Your point about consistency across jurisdictions raises another issue on – if you have observations on airline travel, travel between states in particular?

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MS MOHUMMADALLY: That's a really good one, BCA is involved in a national consortium or network of different disability organisations to work with the airlines, because right now, we find that, yes, they all do operate differently, that there is a certain almost goodwill that pushes some airlines to do, let's say, more and above in
45 their minds, but what we see as practical. So there is confusion. I mean, I can give the example of guide dogs.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS MOHUMMADALLY: Without mentioning which airline, certain airlines will have restrictions on how many guide dogs can be on a plane.

MS SKILBECK: In total?

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MS MOHUMMADALLY: In total, and there is no actual statistical or evidence as such to say that you should not be able to have more than one guide dog on a plane or dog guide or seeing eye dog, but this airline believes that because of their configuration of their plane – and we've actually got advice from engineers as well, that they can't have more than one dog on a plane.

10

MS SKILBECK: Okay. Could you elaborate a little bit more, is there a particular characteristic of the aircraft that limits dog access?

MS MOHUMMADALLY: Well, the main reason that they believed, and this again was a conciliation, was that they felt that it would be difficult to, in an emergency, to look out for more than one person with a dog, (a), and (b), how would they get the dog off the plane. So, of course, I said I think the dog would probably run faster than you do. Again, a lot of this area stems from ignorance or just the cost benefit analysis, the belief that it's going to cost too much, and because most of this is reactive. What we really, really want is to get a process into place in which there is consultation before things are put into ground or put into place, because then it becomes too late.

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MS SKILBECK: In terms of the conciliation to which you refer, is that a process that Blind Citizens Australia commenced an informal conciliation, or is it a part of a more formal, broader complaints handling process?

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MS MOHUMMADALLY: I run formal complaints as well as - - -

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MS SKILBECK: So HREOC complaints?

MS MOHUMMADALLY: HREOC complaints, as well as informal. I mean, personally, as an advocate, I would much rather resolve things informally in 99.9 per cent of the situations, but if it doesn't work there, then, yes, I do have to lodge a complaint. Unfortunately, most service providers are aware of the fact that if the complaint process fails, you've got to take it to the Federal Magistrate Service, or Federal Court, and that's costs, and many of our members just don't want to go through another six to nine months to a year of costs and just time spent.

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MS SKILBECK: Okay. Thank you very much. We haven't got our next speaker here at the moment, so we might pause the proceedings for a short while until Jeanette Lee arrives. Thank you very much, Leah and yourself, and we'll resume hopefully within 10, 15 minutes.

45

ADJOURNED

[12.10pm]

5 MS SKILBECK: Hello. Welcome back, everyone. We have our next speaker for this morning – this afternoon, in fact, now. From Yoorally, Jeanette Lee and Mary on a special phone. Please, Jeanette, proceed any way you like.

10 MS LEE: Okay. Thanks. Hello, everyone. Thanks for having us here. Yes. We just wanted to give some feedback about the issues around public transport from our clients' perspective and the workers' perspective from Yoorally. I am the advocacy and personal development worker at Yoorally's Community Learning and Living Service and I deal a lot with people's or our clients' issues that they're not – you know, things they're not happy about that they want to change. Public transport is one of the areas where we, you know, there's quite a few obstacles that people face.
15 So I try and help advocate for them and we work on also at a broader level, you know, to try and get some change within government and stuff like that, that involve with, like governments – like committees too on public transport.

20 MS SKILBECK: The characteristics of your clients, what range of disabilities do people face?

MS LEE: We deal with clients with quite severe physical disabilities, also ABI, you know, Acquired Brain Injuries, intellectual disabilities, cognitive disabilities. Yes, so quite a range. We specialise like in the things we call disabilities, like cerebral palsy and – yes, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, those sort of conditions from birth. I'll let Mary introduce herself.
25

MS VELLA: I'm Mary Vella. I work for Yoorally as well. I do mobility and public transport training. So I've been doing that for the last 10 years, I suppose. So, yes.
30 We do meet with some issues that we think that could be improved to make train stations, buses, trams, more accessible for these people, especially people in wheelchairs.

35 MS SKILBECK: So, Mary, does that mean in your role that you take people through the public transport system that they need to use and - - -

MS VELLA: That's right. I train them how to be safe and how to access public transport. Yes.

40 MS SKILBECK: Yes, thank you.

MS LEE: So she comes across a lot of, you know, the difficulties people face.

45 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS LEE: Then we can talk about some examples.

MS VELLA: We might sort of follow some of those headings that you've sent out. Probably not every question, but you know, just a rural area.

5 MS LEE: Yes. In regards to achievement of accessibility, since 2002 I think there have been some developments, positive developments. You know, there's more accessible buses, the trams are starting to – the new ones are more accessible and the tram platforms. You know, some better signage and stuff like that. I could probably talk about more – there's still a lot of problems but I'll just let Mary say what she's seen as improvements.

10 MS VELLA: When it comes to, I think when it comes to trains, I'm talking about trains at the moment, there is some improvement as well. Especially in the outer train stations they are sort of upgrading them a bit and having a lot more signage and things like that. But I find that the train stations in the city, Flinders Street and the city loop there's a lot of things that need to happen even though there's been changes everywhere as everybody knows. But for people with disabilities, with certain disabilities they are still finding that it's not enough for them and here I'm not just talking about physical but I'm even talking about sensory, about visually impaired people or hearing impaired. So there's still a lot, I think there's still a lot to happen in that area.

20 MS LEE: Yes. The problems with the trams is that you may have an accessible platform but then you're not necessarily going to get an accessible tram coming and it's hard to know, you know, if there will be one. I mean, there's only one tramline that is, you know that they will be accessible trams but then all the stops aren't accessible. So, you know, there's quite a bit gap where there's no stops. In regards to things like announcements they're starting to do them but they're quite inconsistent too, they're not always happening. Yes. Sometimes like the announcements of stops and things they're wrong or, you know, they're saying the wrong station.

30 I mean, in bus stops I guess there has been improvements with some of the things like the infrastructure. There's been more concrete sort of landings for the ramps to come out on. I guess, looking at whether the changes have matched our expectations I would say no, not really. I would have liked things to have improved more in the five years. I know that in regards to taxis they're supposed to be now responding the same time as – you know, the wheelchair accessible taxis, they're supposed to be responding the same time as other taxis and that's, you know, far from what's happening. Yes. We get a lot of clients who are complaining. You know, they're waiting for an hour, an hour and a half. Sometimes they don't turn up. Yes. So there are big issues with taxis still.

45 MS SKILBECK: Things like, you know, most of your clients, are they within metropolitan Melbourne?

MS VELLA: We have even – yes, we go even further than that.

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

MS VELLA: Sunbury, Bacchus Marsh.

MS SKILBECK: Oh, okay. Outer suburban Melbourne.

5 MS LEE: At certain times of the day it's very hard to get a taxi especially when
school runs are done in taxis and certain areas, suburbs where the taxis don't want to
hang out because they don't think there's enough work there so they don't go in that
area or they hang around the airports where they can get sort of more clients. Yes.
10 So other infrastructure like piers and ferries, you know, for the ferries and that? I can
give you an example of – yes. I was wanting to catch a ferry to I think it's called
French Island. Yes, across from Stony Point. The ferry looked like it was sort of
could be – sorry, I'll turn this off.

MS VELLA: Sorry about that.

15

MS LEE: Yes. The ferry looked like it could be accessible, you know, by maybe
just a portable ramp but where they actually came to the pier you had to actually go
down steps, you know, quite a few steps like 10 steps.

20 MS SKILBECK: Right.

MS LEE: Yes. You know, that nothing really has been done much in those areas.
I've heard other people, you know, having problems with getting on to different
boats and things. Yes.

25

MS SKILBECK: These are boats that provide a public transport service to French
Island and - - -

MS LEE: Well, yes. That's the only way you can get there. I think it's a private
30 company, but yes. So that was one example.

MS VELLA: But even the school buses that are exempt, you know, sometimes you
might have somebody in a wheelchair who accesses a mainstream school but they
can't actually go on the bus so they depend on either the family or taxis to take them
35 there.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS VELLA: So there is still a fair bit that needs to happen there. Yes.
40

MS LEE: Yes. Okay, in regards to is there current data available or reliable and
how is reporting done, yes, I think that's an area really that needs to be looked at,
because it's really hard to know, you know, what has been done and yes, for just the
normal everyday person, I don't think they even know about the standards, so – and
45 just having some data, you know, that if there was a website or something you could
go to and see, I guess, what has been done and what changes and all that kind of
thing, you know, within the whole of Victoria, you know, that would be a lot better,

yes. Yes, so, you know, where there was more reporting of, yes, what access has been achieved in certain areas and how they have achieved – met the standards.

5 MS SKILBECK: More broadly, Jeanette, if – for Yooralla clients, what sorts of information do they access in order to establish what parts of the public transport system they can access, they can use? Mary’s smiling there.

10 MS VELLA: The clients that we get, we usually go through a process with them and sort of identify what their goal is and where they need to travel to, and we sort of sort out which is the best mode of travel for them, and then we go through teaching them how to do that. But even in doing that, some of the problems that we meet are, for example, some of the platforms that are very narrow at one end, and with their wheelchairs and scooters, sometimes, there is not enough room, by the time the ramp is down, there is not enough room for them to make a circle to get in. So they sort of
15 get discouraged and say, no, no, I’m not – it’s too scary, I can’t access that. So again, a lot of things – I have noticed that some of the train stations actually have improved on that and widened that part, but there are still heaps of them that need
- - -

20 MS SKILBECK: Do you access any general available information to know whether certain train stations are accessible or not or do you physically go there?

MS VELLA: I usually go on the Internet and check it, or physically go and check.

25 MS LEE: You have to go there to check, yes. Because I know - - -

MS VELLA: Before I actually start the program I go and check to see.

30 MS LEE: Yes, I’m not sure if they actually do say, you know, about the platforms and their width and, you know, on the website. Like, with some train stations, the gradient is really hard to get into the train with the ramp, I know with my station, and it’s not really following the standards. So, yes, the information is not readily available to people. Did you want to talk about if it’s led to increased patronage? You think there’s more people travelling?

35 MS VELLA: Yes, I think nowadays with the improved technology on wheelchairs and scooters and with the lack of response these people get from taxis, there are many, many more people accessing public transport, people with disabilities, and they’re finding that they’re still very limited in what they can access, because as you
40 said, not all trains are accessible. Not all buses are accessible, and clients that depend on needing to catch a bus to get them to the train station, that’s becoming very, very difficult for them to actually move on with their life and become more independent. So, yes, we’re trying to get these things organised them, but the level of people travelling, I mean, even in the city itself, you see them everywhere
45 nowadays, because they’re really out and about and they’re taking the challenge of becoming more independent.

MS SKILBECK: Do you find for your clients that have always used public transport, that their experience has changed in the last five years, the quality of their experience?

5 MS VELLA: Well, some of them say yes. It's easier for them, but some of them, they're finding that with the new technology on trains and things like that, it's actually more confusing for them. Like, when the announcement on the train is saying that we are now approaching Flinders Street, and you're still in Parliament, so it's becoming more confusing for them to actually rely on what's being offered,
10 because they can't trust these things.

MS SKILBECK: Is it particular to any particular set of disabilities, the sorts of difficulties that are experienced?

15 MS VELLA: I think the one who has got a little bit more of cognitive issues, you know, and are those that actually rely, have hearing impairment, so they rely on the visual, and the visual is not really telling them exactly where they are. Even clients with acquired brain injury, sometimes they don't really have that in them to look to see where the actual train station – where the train is, at which train station, so they
20 really rely on what's around them and what they're seeing in the train, but they can't rely completely on that.

MS LEE: Yes, so if things worked properly, it would be good. Or if it was consistent, there were announcements or things like that, but it's – yes, it's more the
25 implementation of it, I think, that seems to be the problem. Just in the next area of clarification of rights and obligation, since the introduction of the standards, yes, I don't know – I don't think there is a better awareness of their rights, just the normal people, clientele.

30 I mean, for people that work in the field, yes, you know, I know more about the standards, but it's actually not – the documents are not that easy to understand, because you need to have access to all the Australian Standards, and New Zealand Standards and all this kind of thing, and a lot of people just don't have access to them, and they actually cost money, you know, 300 or something for a package of
35 standards. So a lot of people don't really bother to look at it properly and refer to, you know, what standard it's about, and this and that, and, you know, actually know about what measurements and - - -

40 MS SKILBECK: Do you think information would be useful?

MS LEE: Yes, I think it would be good if you had an appendix where you actually state all the standards that you're using and what it actually says in the standards. That would make it a lot easier. Yes, just making things more – information more available, say, TV, brochures and, you know, that kind of thing, newspapers, just
45 about that we have got these standards and what you can do, you know, if you're not happy, you know, or you think that they're not being followed. I guess an example of also the standards being interpreted in different ways, or they're a bit unclear, there's an issue at the moment that we're working with, with the Department of

Infrastructure, about the issue around the new machines that are coming through, the ticketing feed.

MS SKILBECK: The new ticketing machines, yes.

5

MS LEE: From me reading the standards, it's quite clear that they're saying that the heights of ticket and coin sort of feed machines should be at some height, you know, I actually took the effort of finding the standards and looked it up and everything, to be, you know, 800 to 900mm.

10

MS SKILBECK: From the ground?

MS LEE: Yes, yes. But the contention is there saying that – the people that have brought in new machines, are saying that we don't have to follow that standard because it's not a ticket feed, it's a ticket scan. For me, it's pretty much the same thing, because I can't lift my hands up, you know, over my head, you know, up to my head level, you know. So the centimetres, and you know, reaching is the thing, you know, you may or you may not have fine motor control, but that's a different issue too, and, you know, but the actual height of reaching something, so they've gone with a standard which is not referred to in the DDA Transport Standards, corporate zone of common reach, which is in the Australian Standards. I can't understand why they took that standard, because they wanted to make it higher because the machines were higher, so it's a way of getting away with having a higher machine, so they're having 1100 millimetres, I guess that's at the moment where I'm pushing – working with them on that issue.

20
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MS SKILBECK: Do you know if the Australian Standard for the zone of common reach is that used more generally for shops and so forth?

MS LEE: Yes, it's supposed to be some kind of just general standard which maybe if there's not a specific one for different things.

30

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

MS LEE: But, you know, for that there needs to be a more specific one. I mean it still is in a zone of common reach, because a zone of common reach is from 700 to 1200, but I guess specifically to gateways and barriers, which is referred in the DDA transport standards, they're saying – and I guess what we're saying it's a gateway, it's about – you know, you're going through with your ticket so I guess that's an issue where, you know, people are saying different things. Maybe they need to say, you know, ticket height, you know, where you have to life – maybe the word “feed”, or “insertion” or “scan”, or you could be, you know, all those things, yes, interpreted in different ways.

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MS SKILBECK: Do you have anything to say in that area?

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MS VELLA: When it comes to the we still have some issues. I've got issues with clients who travel, driving their wheelchair where they have a pointer they have

no use of their upper limbs at all, or drive their chair with their foot, so, yes, it's going to be a big issue for them to actually access and go through.

5 MS SKILBECK: To what extent is that different from their current arrangement though? They would have difficulty currently wouldn't they?

MS VELLA: Well, at the moment if it's manned – manned then they will open the gates for them, but if not - - -

10 MS LEE: Yes, but the present system doesn't fit the standards and we have been told that. The new system, you know, they're spending lots of money on it is going to be fitting the DDA standards and everything. So I guess people have waited for this. At the moment people pretty much will travel for free because they can't buy
15 the ticket, they can't validate it, you know, a lot of them, so I mean I guess we're saying that we want to have the right to, you know, use the transport like everyone else and pay and stuff and you know it's not a good enough – as having someone assist you, you know, there's more dignity in being able to do it yourself, basically.

20 MS SKILBECK: Yes, understood.

MS LEE: You know, if you can – I mean, there are going to be people that need assistance and it's good that there is someone that can assist, but, you know, if you can get through it yourself if it was just lowered down a bit then, you know, that should be – yes, the process. Yes, I guess that goes on to flexibility of approach. I
25 think you do need some flexibility, but you need to make sure it doesn't compromise the actual standard of equal access as much as possible.

As I was saying, the standards say something about you can have alternative ways, or assistance, or whatever, and I think that could be a way of people not actually, you
30 know, making changes that make it accessible. Because I think, you know, having – the optimum is having independent access for someone that doesn't have to depend on someone else to help them. I guess with our train system, you know, we have to depend on the drivers taking out the ramps and we have to put up with a lot of, you know, really grumpy drivers and they can be abusive sometimes. Sometimes they
35 won't take them out, they try and ignore you or if they see you, they quickly go and stuff like that. So it's not the best way and you know they slam the ramp down and they look like they're pretty unhappy with doing it. You know, you could probably talk about - - -

40 MS VELLA: Yes, and that creates a lot of issues with the clients, especially clients who suffer from reflex. As soon as they drop the platform down they jump, so their hand is off the joy stick and by the time the muscle has relaxed to get back to the joy stick to drive up people are waiting, the train driver is saying, "Come on, come on, come on, we're running late and there is a lot of repercussions that are happening,"
45 and we sometimes wonder about the train drivers, what disability awareness they have.

We wonder whether they're actually – there is something in their course that is actually giving them a bit of awareness about disabilities and how to communicate with clients who don't actually – who are non-verbal but have actually devices, because sometimes they don't even know that this guy is writing down which train station he wants to go to. They don't even know what to look at and what to look for. So there are a lot of issues in that regard.

MS LEE: Yes, I mean I think in other countries, like I've been to America, you know, with the trains and that and was able to just go straight in and automatic doors and you can go straight in without having to depend on someone else to take out ramps and stuff like that. It's looking at the issue of are Australian Standards technical requirements appropriate? Yes, I think there needs to be some technical requirements, you know, like standards, especially in regards to things like heights and width and length and amount of space, things like manoeuvring wheelchairs and pathways. Yes specifically things like, you know, validating, coin vending machines, that kind of thing. I think it's using – are technical requirements appropriate.

I mean, the Australian Standards may not always be good enough, because they're sort of often minimum standards and they don't always meet everyone's needs because I think they were judged from a certain percentage of people with disabilities and there seems to be more people that can lift their arms over their head, kind of thing. So, yes, maybe improving on the Australian Standards, or you know improving the transport standards might be a good idea, because transport operators tend to take the – like there might be a range and they will tend to take maybe the highest point, you know, instead of going somewhere in the middle, or - - -

MS SKILBECK:

MS LEE: Yes, that's right, or below and you know for someone in a wheelchair, yes, centimetres do matter, yes. Like, you know, being able to reach something, you know, that might be if you made it a bit lower, 10 centimetres lower, or something like that, you know, it makes a big difference. So I think things like, you know, being specific with measurements it does matter.

MS VELLA: The other thing I find a bit confusing and I don't think there's any standards about, is the actual tactile that we find on platforms; the colour of the tactile. We've got a few – not a few – a fair bit of clients with ID or AVIs that really depend on no changes at all, so if you teach them and you say, look, if you follow the grey line, you're going to get there, they go to another train station and they might find it orange, or they might find it blue and that's very confusing for them. So I don't think – there should be a standard colour, a really good colour that is well visible, or any background colour and I think that should be something that needs to be looked at as well.

MS LEE: Yes. They shouldn't depend on people complaining to get them to, you know, meet the standards, because I think there are a lot of areas where the standards

aren't being followed, but then knowing the timelines, it's hard to know where you're up to in five, 10 years, 15 years or how much percentage and whether your station is under that percentage or not, you know, so it's too complex for just a general everyday person. You know, there are so many access issues that people just haven't got the energy to have to complain about things, so there needs to be someone that, you know, is actually checking and enforcing it, you know, checking that's been done, you know, and then if people think that would still not fit in the standards then they can make a complaint, but not having to depend on, you know, individuals to have to check everything themselves. I guess the whole process of having to complain about everything is pretty tiring for a lot of people. It takes a lot of effort. I know I've done it. It took, like, three years to get something resolved. I think that's all. Was there anything else, Mary?

MS VELLA: Can I just go back a bit, because we're finding nowadays that people are getting bigger, everybody is talking about geriatrics, and wheelchairs are getting bigger and heavier, and just so that the ambulances have actually some geriatric ambulances. With the standards, this should be taken in consideration, that people are getting bigger and, like, ramps are going to be heavier. You know, they need to be able to accommodate heavier and wider chairs. So in a few years' time we're going to get to a situation where certain people are not going to be – for example, we've got that the sector ramps can only take 200 kilograms. Nowadays we're finding the chair on its own it's already over 100, and a big person sitting on it could be another 120, you know, so by the time they put their little bags and things around, they're getting heavier and wider and bigger, so I think this should be taken in consideration as well to really make sure that when the time happens – yes.

MS LEE: I think the width of the ramps is 800. We were thinking that, say, one metre would be better, because it's quite hard to go up straight with the coordination of their wheelchairs and stuff like that. There have been some people that, you know, have gone off the edge and stuff like that, so if, you know, they could be wider. Things like the access paths as well and passing areas. They could be wider as well.

MS SKILBECK: Do similar observations apply to taxi access?

MS LEE: Yes, with some of the taxis the ramps are pretty narrow. They seem to differ a bit, different taxis, yes, to be able to get in. Sort of the big vans where you come from the back seem to be okay, I think. Sometimes coming in from the side it's difficult to turn your chair and to, you know, face the front kind of thing.

MS VELLA: But even, like, the ramps that are on the trains – I mean, we come up with wanting everything perfect, but even with the design of the ramp, why is it straight? Why isn't it tapered wider so that there's a little bit more room for them to manoeuvre the chairs? You know?

MS SKILBECK: Manoeuvre on the ramp itself.

MS VELLA: Yes, yes. If the ramp wasn't so straight but it tapers a bit wider at the end it's easier. It's given them another six inches where they can actually manoeuvre the chair. Simple things like that. We want everything to be perfect but we know that it's very difficult to have everything perfect, but anyway.

5

MS LEE: Yes, I think overall, you know, the standards have improved things slowly, but there's still a lot to be done. You know, if certain things could be looked at and changes made it would be good.

10 MS SKILBECK: Thank you very much, Jeannette and Mary.

MS LEE: Thank you.

MS VELLA: Thank you.

15

MS SKILBECK: Thank you.

MS LEE: Thanks a lot.

20 MS SKILBECK: We will take a short pause while we await our last speaker from the Victorian Council of Social Services. Thank you.

ADJOURNED

[1.14 pm]

25

RESUMED

[1.27pm]

30 MS SKILBECK: Welcome back everyone. We're recommencing our hearing with some words from VCOSS, the Victorian Council of Social Services. Kate Colvin and Maree Kelly are here and I will pass it on to you.

35 MS COLVIN: Thank you. Firstly just to introduce ourselves, so as Melissa said, Kate Colvin from Victorian Council of Social Services and the Policy and Public Affairs Manager at VCOSS and Maree Kelly, who's working on the accessible Transport Watch project, which is actually a project of VCOSS, the Disability Resources Centre and the Disability Advocate Information Service in Albury Wodonga. So what I thought I'd do is just give a brief outline of VCOSS and the project's involvement on accessibility and then talk through a couple of the questions and then hand over to Maree to talk some more about some of the issues that have arisen around public transport. So firstly thank you for having us and it's great to have an opportunity to discuss the issues around public transport.

45 It's great that the government is doing a review. So I said I'd talk about the issues, VCOSS involvement. So certainly public transport has been a very important and difficult issue for people with disabilities and this is brought to the attention of VCOSS a number of years ago after the standards had been brought into place. So I

think VCOSS may have been involved in advocacy around the time of the development of the standards but it was before my time and I've been involved more since the advent of the standards. So I guess one of the things that we'd say in commencing is that the standards have made a huge difference in advocacy on public transport and have made it immensely easier to raise issues with government because the obligations of government are far more clear than I think they were before the standards came into place.

So it's a document that we regard as very important and that we're, you know, very pleased that standards do exist. That said, I guess there are some issues with the standards and I'm sure others have mentioned them and we will get to those as wells. So the Accessible Transport Watch project arose out of an ongoing process of advocacy that VCOSS had been doing and it arose partly as a consequence of what could be interpreted as some of the issues with the standards.

The government had started to invest in more infrastructure and while that was positive, the experiences of people with disabilities in relation to new and improved infrastructure, built specifically to specifications in the standards, were mixed. We were finding people were reporting that often very new pieces of infrastructure were not always more accessible than previous or were creating some unexpected surprises.

An example of that was the people using white canes reported that it's very difficult to distinguish on some of the new trains between the gap between trains and the space for the door. So I think on a number of instances people have – and obviously this is incredibly dangerous – stepped between the train carriages on to the tracks when they thought that they were stepping into a door.

MS SKILBECK: This is when standing on the platform?

MS COLVIN: Yes. So that's just an example of a new piece of infrastructure that creates an unexpected issue. So one of the things that we wanted to do was have a large, have a number of people with disabilities go on to the public transport system and experience both old and new pieces of infrastructure and report on how they found that, how usable they found it. So not to report on whether, in a technical way on whether it did or didn't meet the standards but to, from their own experience, identify was I able to easily board this vehicle, easily find a seat, easily able to disembark the vehicle? Was I aware of when the vehicle was going to stop at my station and you know, so was it easy for me to know that kind of information?

So basically was the public transport usable from the perspective of people with a range of different disabilities? So that project is, I guess, under way and it hasn't been underway for a very long time so we've only got some aspects of that to report back at this point but Maree is going to talk some more about some of the outcomes that we have identified from that project. So before I get to that, I will maybe just run through a couple of the introductory questions in the information paper. The first one about whether or not the accessibility of public transport has improved.

As I mentioned before, I think it has unquestionably improved since the introduction of the standards and in my experience of advocacy in Victoria, if we didn't have standards to refer to, didn't have those obligations clear on government, I think we would have Buckley's of getting government to spend money on what is often
5 expensive infrastructure and yet obviously the expenditure on that infrastructure is incredibly important for universal access to the public transport system.

So just to reiterate that point, that the standards have been very positive. Some examples of that, how accessibility has improved. I think in Victoria more than 50
10 per cent of metropolitan buses are now accessible. Obviously that is translated into more people being able to use the bus network and as the bus network is the most comprehensive of Melbourne's public transport services, that's delivered a benefit to a very large number of people. A small proportion of trams have been upgraded. We would have wished that a lot more trams had been upgraded but certainly the
15 trams that are in use are providing a much better service than the previous trams, which were possibly the least accessible form of public transport that we had, so the new trams are a great improvement and the train system is, despite some hiccups that we will get into later, in large part accessible for many users. I think that the very large part of those gains have been as a result of the standards.

20

MS SKILBECK: Kate, can I ask a question of the scope of your review? Do you also include taxis?

MS COLVIN: We're not investigating taxis because the Equal Opportunity
25 Commission very recently did a very comprehensive survey of users. So I'm assuming that that information has been contributed to the review as well so yes, for that reason we didn't.

MS SKILBECK: Okay. No worries.

30

MS COLVIN: Yes. One of the other things that has come up, not so much through the accessible transport watch project but through other work that VCOSS does on transport disadvantage with other groups who have issues with public transport, is it has become clear that accessibility, improved accessibility of the public transport
35 system has delivered benefits to other groups in the community. So some research that we're doing with young parents of small children showed that it's actually one of the things that's made travel on public transport possible if you're using a pram or if you've got small children or a lot of shopping. So one of the things that came up in that research was that the number one thing that young mums would like to see in
40 the public transport system is more low floor trams and buses. I think that just gives an indication of how valuable those improved services have been to that group of transport users.

Another issue that's come up is that the low floor vehicles are much quicker to board
45 and dismount for all users and that improves the efficiency across the whole public transport system. So that's probably, you know, another area where the standards have delivered a much broader benefit than might be apparent just by a very narrow perspective on how many extra passengers with disabilities have travelled.

So that's, I think, some of the very positive aspects and I think Maree was going to talk about some of the issues where the experience has been more mixed, either because the infrastructure or information provision has not either met the standards or been useful or where sometimes a key issue is that the infrastructure has – there is
5 a new piece of infrastructure or the capacity of the equipment is there to deliver accessibility but the transport operators or staff using the system at the time don't use it to that capacity and as a consequence the accessibility is compromised. So I will hand over to Maree.

10 MS KELLY: Thanks. Hi everyone. As Kate said, the survey is just underway, so we've only got limited anecdotal information at this stage, however, the surveys are certainly coming in over the next month or so, and a lot of the information we have today is gained from going out and talking to individuals and groups in relation to the surveys and the context of it, and why we're actually undertaking that. One of the
15 issues that we picked up in terms of the low floor trams and buses, is that whilst that has increased access for people, particularly mums with prams etcetera, it's also enabled particularly teenagers with bicycles etcetera to access public transport as well.

20 But unfortunately, that has had an impact on people with disabilities, particularly people in wheelchairs. Often the space that has been set aside and available for people with disabilities is now taken up with prams and bicycles, in particular the overcrowding issue with peak hour, it becomes, one, very difficult when there is a low tram or bus available that it's often overcrowded with bicycles and prams at that
25 particular time, and that's not necessarily even in peak hour. Traffic as well, you know, at peak hour times. You know, that's a dilemma about how can we best meet the needs of, you know, all of those groups.

In relation to the buses and the low floors, what people are finding is that often it's
30 advertised that there is a low bus going to be available on the timetable, but when people turn up to the bus stop, for example, they find that it's not a low floor. So communication and advertising continues to be a major issue around the information, and we've got some fairly concrete examples around that. Again, whilst we're finding that there is access to the infrastructure such as the voice overs and
35 advertising, it's often – they're not up to date and accurate, and that some of the pre, you know, the visual signs are often saying that, for example, the train may be leaving on platform 2, but in actual fact, it actually arrives in and leaves on platform 3.

40 That has implications, particularly for vision impaired or hearing impaired people. We had some fairly horrendous stories from vision impaired people where they've found out that the train has now arrived at the third platform and they've stepped off into never never without being aware, and there's been a whole lot of discussions around doors and access of doors, for example, even though some trains the doors
45 will not open if it's on the left hand side of the train as opposed to the right hand side where the platform, what they're saying is even with enough strength, for example, the doors do actually open, and people's anxiety, for example, gets really raised in situations like that.

Also often the voice overs are difficult for some people to hear as well. Whilst we're not quite sure how to best address those issues, they are clearly presenting issues on an ongoing basis, and people are finding that often the voice overs actually on the train, once the train has commenced starting, are easier to hear than what perhaps the
5 voice overs are on the platforms. However, the voice overs on the train, once the train first commences, are more difficult to hear than what perhaps it is after five minutes, once the initial noise barrier of the train commencing has diminished, for example.

10 Some other additional issues are around information and communication about luggage, and this is particularly for needs with people with disability travelling on the V/line system, and often where they have to transfer from the buses to the trains. I had an interesting example in the store last week where there was interesting
15 discussion around – one person thought that her luggage could not be booked in and transferred straight through, that she actually had to pick them up at the end of the bus link, and then carry it herself to the train link. Some people informed her that, no, that was not the case, that she did not have to carry that, she could have booked her luggage right through.

20 Then the dialogue around, that on some stations that is available, and other stations that's not available depending upon what the linkages are and what the transport operators have worked out between themselves, so I don't know the accuracy of that information, but it's certainly an example of where, you know, a
25 group of 20 people were unaware of how that particular system worked in that particular area. In addition to that, the linkages between the transport modes was the difficulty around the lateness of vehicles, for example, if a V/line bus was arriving late into an area, often the timetable would show that it could be up to 11 minutes late, for example, and it would still be showing as being on time, however, if there was a connecting train, that train may leave within, you know, a certain timeframe,
30 say within seven or eight minutes after the due time, and that they would miss that.

That had some significant implications for particularly country people, that meant they may well have either had to have a lengthy wait of one or two hours between connections if there were connections at all, if not that meant having to find
35 accommodation overnight. The implications of finding accessible accommodation raises a whole lot of other issues for people, particularly in area, so that had some info. The issues around timetables, and displaying of timetables. I think we can talk quite a lot in length of timetables, particularly the bus timetables at bus stops. Often they're in small print and very difficult to read, they're often in Perspex kind of glass
40 that's difficult – as that becomes aged it's even difficult to see through let alone to be able to read the timetable, and often the timetables are actually out of date by the time they get printed and displayed in many cases.

45 However, many people were saying that they did rely on those timetables, and I was quite surprised just with the amount of people who have said that they do rely on the timetables displayed at the tram and the bus stops, not for example, all people are kind of computer savvy and linked into the websites, etcetera. Other issues, are you know, I talked about the platform ones. The tactile paving, again, you know, I've

had quite a few examples of where tactile paving is very beneficial to people, particularly vision impaired. However, we've got examples of perhaps where trams have not been stopping at the correct point on the platforms, and again people are trying to access doorways and they can't – they don't quite know where the door is because the tram hasn't stopped at the correct point on the stop.

Other examples are that some people would like more information to the general public about the use of tactile paving and why it is necessary. Again, during peak hour traffic in particular, many people do actually stand on the tactile paving as they're waiting for trains and trams etcetera, yet it's very necessary for people who are vision impaired to use that tactile paving as a way of directing them through various points of location, and one woman has given me some fairly horror stories of how – not only just herself, but of several others, of how they've been collecting people's heels and shins for example and have been quite – others have been quite abusive towards them, and yet, you know, they were saying if there was a sign for people, the general public, to say please do not stand on the tactile paving, it would certainly assist them in being able to better access that.

Also, with tactile paving it can become very slippery for non-vision impaired users. For example, like myself using a crutch. That when they are wet, they become very slippery. Not so much when you are walking on it with your feet but also, like, using crutches, etcetera, walking sticks, the tactile paving is very slippery in that situation. Others have mentioned they have difficulty walking on it that having uneven surfaces that it is very difficult as well. I guess there is no easy way around some of those issues but it just presents the difficulty of the varying needs of people with disabilities, a range of disabilities.

In terms of some of the infrastructure, we found that the standards have been very good in terms of being able to be – you know, transport operators, etcetera, being compliant to meeting the transport standards but often through that compliance it dismisses people's individual needs that often it says – we had a good example and I think you would have heard in Bendigo last week around the person who was pre-ambulant and had had a stroke and she was unable to use a ramp on the train and the platform.

We have had some correspondence with the transport operators, how the ramps are only wheelchair accessible and that the way the ramps are designed in terms of their folding that they do close in the centre if weight was distributed in the centre of the ramp. The difficulty is often that with the gaps, particularly in rural areas, is that you have to step up and step down between the gaps on the trains. That is very difficult for people with - you know, non-wheelchair people. It becomes – and, you know, the Bendigo example was where she had to sit down on the floor and actually scuffle across the floor to get on and off the train.

For example, myself, I often find it difficult on the Shepparton train line to get access up and onto the train. There is quite a wide gap. That transport operators at times may or may not assist you. Sorry, the transport staff may or may not be available to

assist you on getting on that. Often there is a whole lot of safety issues around that assistance and whether it is appropriate assistance or not.

5 Getting back to the compliance, that we have had some standards – sorry, some
correspondence that states that the standards are actually being met so, therefore, you
know, the issue doesn't need to be resolved. However, it is an issue, particularly for
elderly people and people on walking sticks and crutches, etcetera. I think that that is
a fairly significant one that does need to be addressed in some way through perhaps
10 the use of another ramp that could be available for people who do need to walk up
onto the ramp.

Also we are finding that again the staff – the infrastructure does exist but it is about
whether staff actually implement the use of that infrastructure such as the voice
overs, such as deploying ramps. It is also based on – and rural people in particular
15 and even metro people have found that it is also about building relationships with
individual staff. That, you know, we have got many stories of how individual staff
have been incredibly helpful and others have not been so helpful and how people will
tend to avoid particular times of travel due to whoever may be the individual staff
person involved, due to the support or lack of support that they may get in terms of
20 accessing the transport mode.

The other issues could be around purchasing of tickets and the availability of tickets,
in terms of purchasing those. The other issues around that we are looking at, in
terms of accessibility. For example, accessible toilets on trains for example. That
25 what we are finding is, yes, there may be an accessible toilet but it may not
necessarily be accessible to all people. We are actually looking at the issues as to
why they may not be accessible to particular individuals. So, that we are finding that
it is still limited to people with varying degrees of disabilities. Also that we find that
is it also - - -
30

MS SKILBECK: Sorry, Maree. Sorry, Maree, sorry. Is that related specifically to
any particular type of train on the V/Line service? I am assuming it is a V/Line
service. Are there differences between the different – the newer trains versus the
older trains for example?
35

MS KELLY: In part, yes, it can be. For others like myself, for example, once a
train is moving I cannot actually walk along the train. It is not safe for me to do so.
So, yes, I would not be able to access something like that whilst the train was
moving. Like, it would be suitable at a stop for example but certainly not during the
40 movement. For example, like, often – like this morning, travelling down to
Melbourne, I had to purchase a ticket at the kiosk as opposed to the conductor
coming down the train.

However, you know, I had to stress to him that I had to be seated once the train was
45 commencing travelling and that it was not suitable for me to wait at the kiosk to
purchase a ticket. I found that on a number of occasions on that particular train, that
that is an issue. That not all people can queue up at the kiosk which makes it easier

for the conductor to – for people to purchase the ticket and then be seated. That some of us have to be seated to then purchase a ticket.

5 Yes, so it depends on what the issues are. Like, it doesn't matter whether – like, for example, some of the older trains aren't wheelchair accessible with their toilets where that is not such an issue with the newer trains. So, again, it depends on what are the issues and the type of disability involved, yes.

10 Okay. What else was there? Also I guess that gets back to the individual staffing and their attitudes around some of those things as well. With the buses, for example, many people who – again, with walking sticks and crutches, for example, were finding that buses were often deployed prior to their being seated and that became a real safety issue for them as well. So, that often they could no longer have access to the bus driver to say can you please wait until I am seated before you travel because
15 of safety screens, etcetera, that are being put on – in place now.

Also we are finding that also with toilets on trains for example that often the disabled seating is often located opposite the toilets and that, you know, has limits to I guess a certain level of comfort, enjoyment that impacts other passenger who might enjoy –
20 for example, on long train distances, sitting opposite a toilet can have a whole range of issues. They don't have – you know, smell can become a significant issue and also limited access to looking at views outside the windows, for example.

25 There also still continues to be people travelling in the luggage departments on trains, even if they have booked a disabled seating and, yes, that is a major concern because often in the luggage department packages and bicycles, etcetera, aren't kind of tied down and it can become an occupational health and safety issue. Also for carers, that often carers have to be seated independently of the person in a wheelchair. Often they could be two or three carriages away from where the luggage
30 department is. We found that that was a particular area for the Albury line. We will certainly - through our surveys, we will have more information, detailed information, on particular transport routes, etcetera.

35 We are finding that the shelters for example, that there was great improvement to the shelters but they weren't necessarily accessible for people in wheelchairs. You know, certainly, you know, the benefits of being out of the rain and the cold wind is also a need for them as well.

40 Opening the doors on various modes of trains and trams. For example, some of the doors have push button doors, some of them have pull doors, handles. Others have automatic doors. Clearly I think from what we are finding is that the automatic doors are the preferred option from what people are saying. That, for example, with the push button doors, that you often have to walk or move your wheelchair three or four kind of metres before you then can access the door. Yes, so that is – yes, it was
45 amazing the length of dialogue and discussion we have had around particular door types.

Also we have had some experiences, I think, on the newer trains and buses. That the gap – the width of the doorway for wheelchairs getting in is not wide enough. Perhaps, Kate, you can talk a bit more about that example.

5 MS COLVIN: This is an example where passengers with wheelchairs going on to, I think it's the newer trains, the sort of turning circle to get into the space that's allocated for those passengers is too sharp, so for someone on a larger scooter, it may not be possible to turn and so then they have to remain between the doors which then, if there's another passenger with a wheelchair who needed to get out the person
10 with the scooter would have to dismount the train and then the other passenger and then the person with the scooter could kind of go back in and obviously on a crowded train, sitting between the two doors or so, you know, creates a blockage and will be uncomfortable with people jostling and what have you.

15 MS SKILBECK: Kate, this is the new suburban trains?

MS COLVIN: Yes and the other aspect of that and this is particularly a problem on crowded trains, is because that turn is so sharp into the place where wheelchairs sit, it can't be executed in a single turn and so, you know, the wheelchair has to kind of go
20 backwards and forwards and obviously if there's people standing around in that space that's going to be very difficult to achieve, if not impossible in many situations. So that's another example. A couple more that I'd add, is around the timetabling of buses. So Maree mentioned the situation where sometimes the bus timetables do indicate, or maybe the Internet indicates, when an accessible service is
25 going to arrive and the accessible service doesn't always turn up, which is a problem.

Another problem that we've had is that in many cases the bus timetables don't indicate when an accessible service is going to turn up, leaving people to just kind of wait past three or four vehicles turning up that they can't get on to for an accessible
30 service to arrive and that's one where the standards don't, I think, clearly indicate that the accessible services need to be indicated on the timetables. So that's probably one that we'd suggest as a recommendation that that be mandated. Another one was – and I think Maree did mention this, but I'll maybe just reiterate it, is about the infrastructure for making announcements of when the tram is going to stop next, it's
35 all built into the new trams, but it's very rarely used.

It is sometimes used at the city stops. There's the issue that Maree mentioned about it's not always clear to understand what the driver has said about the stop that's
40 upcoming, but that's a service that is particularly useful for people with a vision impairment. It's also very useful for tourists, or anyone who is not quite, you know, very familiar with the tram route that they're travelling on, to have those announcements of each upcoming stop. So that's an issue where it would be great to see the transport operators using the infrastructure that has been put in for
45 accessibility.

MS KELLY: Can I just add to that?

MS COLVIN: Yes.

MS KELLY: Just on that I find that there's been comments that that is least often used during peak hour and often there's a need to use it more so in peak hour because people, for example, can't see, you know, what stop, for example, the difference between Swanston Street and Elizabeth Street in the city as to what stop they're arriving at and if those announcements were used, particularly in those peak hour times, it would be more beneficial.

Okay, just a couple of other kind of, I guess, fairly concrete examples that we've had to date, that continue to be the issues, is that with the infrastructure development that's been occurring around the state that particularly in rural areas, the removal of the ramps, particularly walking up to, and in particular platforms, has been really beneficial to people. It's certainly made that access much easier.

However, there continues to be a number of footbridges and ramps that even though the upgrading has occurred where tactile paving, for example, and re-paving of the area has occurred at particular stations, the ramps and the footbridges have remained and people have actually questioned whether they will have further work done on them, because it does limit their access.

Geelong has been a good example of where one of the platforms you do need to go over a footbridge. There are also some metro ones that have been included. In the rural areas where some work has been done there has been work done on and around the station, but in terms of improvements to parking in the area and lighting to the area, street lighting, or lighting on the platform, particularly in the rural platforms, that continues to be an issue, or lack of and also disabled parking, that often people have to drive to transport, even bus stops, for example, to catch public transport and that there is limited access to disabled parking, whether it's about being dropped off and picked up from – or even having access to day long parking, you know, they continue to be – you know, the lighting and parking are the other key issues I wanted to highlight. As I mentioned the surveys are only just starting to filter in and certainly over the next month we'll have a lot more kind of concrete examples.

MS SKILBECK: Could you just briefly, Maree, just for context for the survey responses that you've used, just describe the method that they're using to survey people and the proportion of your total sample that you've got already.

MS KELLY: Okay, our aim was to sample 70 recruits - we call them recruits - from both within metro and rural Melbourne – sorry, metro Melbourne and rural Victoria, across Victoria. We have through our information sessions and individual discussions with people and surveys returned, we've probably had about 35 responses from that. Our recruit target from about 70 has actually blown out, there are over 150 people who have shown a lot of interest in this project and, you know, VCOS is currently having discussions about how - you know, the value of maintaining the momentum and continuing to get the surveys out and tap into the needs of the community to ensure, you know, what is the original aim of the project and the standards – our response to the standards is part of that, but certainly not all of the project and that unfortunately, you know, the timing of it is not quite right. But we will certainly be able to contribute some of this information to the standards

review, but we're certainly, you know, looking forward to the outcomes of the survey much more.

5 MS SKILBECK: Yes and I appreciate the input too. Just one final question on methodology. Do you have a standard survey instrument that you're using, so that everyone is given the same range of questions to cover, so everyone has an opportunity to comment on information to infrastructure and so forth?

10 MS KELLY: Absolutely. We have five standard survey forms. We had, for example, for metro we had a standard form for the trains, trams and buses and then for rural Victoria we had V-line train and V-line buses, as well as local bus services. So we had those five forms. The metro bus is also used for local bus services across rural Victoria and they had a list of set questions and the methodologies basically and
15 whilst it's quantitative data, it's also qualitative data in terms of people's individual views.

MS SKILBECK: Do you have any particular early observations on the accessibility of local buses in regional towns?

20 MS KELLY: Very varied and again it gets back to individual operators and some people speak quite highly of particular bus operators and their responses to meeting needs for disabilities in some areas, versus needs of others. There has been a lot of concern around the school buses and how they're exempt from this standard review and, yes, there's a particular need for some response to the school buses and how
25 school buses, particularly, have been -through the flexibility of transport operators been picking up on the needs of adolescents with disabilities, perhaps outside the scope of what their brief is. Again, it's about again individual operators being more flexible than others in terms of how they provide services.

30 MS SKILBECK: Right.

MS KELLY: Yes, but it's still too early days - too early to really comment on too much of that data. I've got limited data but not enough to really comment on it.

35 MS SKILBECK: I appreciate that. Thank you.

MS KELLY: Yes, no worries.

40 MS COLVIN: That brings us to a couple of things that we wanted to mention about things that are not included in the standards which have created some problems. One of those which has been I think raised a lot of discussion quite recently is the issue about scanning devices. So that's something that's not mentioned in the standards but it's certainly a feature of the public transport system in Victoria now. It's been, you know, certainly it's been disappointing for advocates in Victoria that the
45 government has chosen to sort of select a reading of the standards that puts the scanning devices at a height that's not accessible for many users. So our recommendation would be that the standards address that issue and obviously

recommend that the scanning devices be put at a height that people with disabilities can use.

5 Another one that's not mentioned in the standards is the handrails inside the doors of
vehicles and this has been an issue in some of the new trains where the handrail is
now set further back. So if someone is trying to step up or step down onto a train
from the platform and is reaching into the vehicle to try and secure themselves so
that they can make that step safely, because those handrails have now been set
10 further back people risk sort of toppling over as they're trying to board the train. So
obviously that's unsafe and that would be another issue that it would be good to
cover in the standards. Those were the main ones.

15 The issue with the scanning devices raises a broader issue about the process of the
consultation with people with disabilities and I know this isn't specifically covered in
the standards. But certainly over a long period of time there's been a lot of
frustration about people with disabilities in consultative committees being asked for
input often at a point in an infrastructure decision-making process where it is no
longer feasible or the argument is made that it's no longer feasible to make changes
which then begs the question, why the information was sought about, you know, I
20 mean obviously if consultation is going to be meaningful it has to engage with
people that are being consulted at a point in the decision-making process where
changes can still be made.

25 So, you know, conversations continue about these scanning devices meanwhile a
number of them have been purchased and are being implemented so even though
they don't meet people's needs. So it would be useful perhaps if some points about
consultation and appropriate consultation are included in the standards. Just some
other sort of general recommendations is that we would hope that the review would
30 propose a stronger compliance regime. One of the issues that we've faced in
Victoria is lack of action by the government on trams. In some areas like as I
mentioned, bus vehicles I think is up to over 50 per cent of accessible bus vehicles
now. Trams is far below and tram stops is at I think three per cent when it's
supposed to be 25 per cent.

35 That's really because the government didn't get going on making tram stops
compliant until the process started possibly around 2004. But really a significant
number of tram stops haven't been built until this year and we're looking at a
December timeframe for 25 per cent. So I think that that inertia has been, you know,
very significantly contributed to by the lack of a strong compliance regime in the
40 standard. There's not really clearly anything that the government needs to fear from
not meeting their obligations other than, you know, embarrassment and so we would
prefer that there been some tougher regulations, maybe fines or you know, there
could be a range of mechanisms to ensure greater compliance.

45 So other recommendations, just another general one is the broader issue which I
think was raised and it was controversial around the time of the standards coming in
about the timeframe. Certainly we consider 30 years, it's now 25 years now to be
too long for full accessibility of the public transport system to be delivered and think

that that should be brought back to 20 years at the longest, I mean, 15 years at the longest because we've already had five years go past. Did you want to add - - -

5 MS KELLY: Yes. Just one other thing. I think that there is a lot of myths and assumptions still out there for people with disabilities using public transport during peak hour times. I think that particularly for wheelchair users that they actually find that often their needs are dismissed in terms of having access to transport and that they should travel outside of those times. However they need to be able to access transport to participate in the workforce or social activities, etcetera, is fairly crucial and important and I think that their needs should not be dismissed in issues of 10 overcrowding. So I think that there needs to be a lot of work done around those particular issues as well as what is another area that's been highlighted. I just wanted to mention this one.

15 MS COLVIN: Just a couple more. I noticed that the review asked a question about the current data of accessibility and whether or not that's reliable. I guess what we would say in relation to that is we've got no evidence that it isn't reliable and yet because of the way in the data is provided we've also got no way of assessing whether or not it's reliable. So our proposal would be that the government provides 20 such specific information so that then we can see that if they say that Spencer Street Station or Inner Southern Cross Station is accessible then we can assess whether or not it actually is accessible rather than just reporting that, you know, 20 per cent of all train stations have been made accessible which it's now as I mentioned possible to audit that without an incredibly expensive and time consuming process.

25 So that's another recommendation for your information. Possibly lastly, I just comment on the exemption for school buses. I think that it's difficult to understand why school buses have got an exemption when local bus services in rural areas don't have an exemption and they'll be travelling through a lot of similar terrain and 30 certainly the lack of accessibility of school buses seriously comprises the inclusion of young people attending school. They're not able to travel on the same vehicle as their classmates and siblings and when the school bus is then used for excursions or other activities and often in a rural community the school bus may be one of the main vehicles that is available for charter or for any other kind of transport of large groups 35 of people, then again that young person is excluded from those activities and obviously, you know, we think that that's not appropriate.

So our recommendation would be that that exemption be removed and that school buses fit within the same timetable as the other services. So that sort of probably 40 concludes pretty much everything. I'll just say one thing or a couple of things about taxis. Even though we haven't looked at it in the accessible transport watch project it is something that VCOSS has worked on over a number of years. I notice that the taxi vehicles' response times for accessible taxi vehicles is supposed to be by December is supposed to be 100 per cent compliance. So response times are 45 supposed to be the same as those for ordinary vehicles and certainly that is not the case.

In Victoria we have consistent complaints that accessible vehicles, the response times are certainly more unreliable and are often far, far longer than non-accessible vehicles and again this possibly comes back to the compliance regime is that it's not clear what the implications of having not achieved much in that area are for the government. So where there some stronger compliance mechanisms that might have elicited some more compliance. I think probably that's it. So thanks again for having us and good luck with your review.

MS SKILBECK: Thank you, Kate and Maree, that's excellent. Thanks for your contribution. Could I ask now if there's anyone in the audience who would like an opportunity to speak or speak again? No? Okay. I think then with that we might close the day and thank you very much for your attendance and your participation for those who spoke. Thank you.

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MATTER ADJOURNED at 2.26 pm ACCORDINGLY