



Submission to the Review of the Disability Standards for accessible Public Transport 2012.

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26 April 2013

About Guide Dogs SA.NT

Guide Dogs SA.NT (GDSA.NT) works across South Australia and Northern Territory and provides a range of services for people with vision impairment, disability and/or hearing loss. This includes: Guide Dog Services, Vision Services, Sensory Services, and Hearing Services. Guide Dogs SA.NT's purpose is to use its expertise with dogs and in sensory service provision to improve the quality of life of people living with a disability and to assist them to reach their full potential.

Introduction

Safe and effective public transport and infrastructure is essential for people who are blind or vision impaired to move about and participate fully in their community. Guide Dogs SA.NT believes that the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport can provide a mechanism for raising awareness of people who are blind or vision impaired, assist in reducing discrimination, and ensuring the legal requirements for accessible public transport and infrastructure.

Accessibility of Public Transport.

Guide Dogs SA.NT has received feedback regarding improvement in public transport since the commencement of the Transport Standards review in 2007. This includes the installation of tactile ground surface indicators (TGSIs) to enable a person who is blind or vision impaired to locate transport boarding points, automated audio announcements in trains and trams, high luminance contrast of buttons, furnishings, and poles in some bus, trains, and trams, improved lighting in train stations and interchanges, and more frequent low floor busses available on some routes. Accessibility to timetable information has improved with more functional layout of information and better contrast of written information for people who are vision impaired.

Feedback provided to Guide Dogs SA.NT regarding one of the greatest areas of need for people who are blind or vision impaired is improved disability awareness of transport operators and key customer service staff.

ISSUES PAPER Section C: For Disability Sector and Public Views.

1. As a public transport user, are there areas of the Transport Standards where you consider that a more specific requirement for compliance would improve accessibility?

For people who are vision impaired the concepts of bigger, bolder, and brighter assist with safe, effective, and independent travel. Feedback provided to Guide Dogs SA.NT includes the trend of recent transport infrastructure projects to be of low luminance contrast. This has caused issues with effective mobility and wayfinding such as inability to follow fencing to access pathways, inadvertently walking into supporting structures, and inability to locate or negotiate public furniture, as all are frequently grey in colour. A more specific requirement for high luminance contrast of fencing, supporting structures, and public furniture would improve accessibility for people who are vision impaired when using public transport infrastructure.

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

People who are blind or vision impaired require consistency to achieve safety. The 2007 Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 noted that stakeholders were critical of the lack of whole journey accessibility. Whilst accessibility has improved across whole journeys, recent upgrades to rail infrastructure in South Australia have required bus services to replace train services on several routes for extended periods of time. People who are blind or vision impaired including those with mobility issues have expressed concern about the lack of accessible busses on these routes, and a lack of information on when accessible busses may be available. Alternative transport provided during infrastructure upgrades or at any time when normal journeys are interrupted should continue to provide for whole journey accessibility as a high priority.

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

Complaints regarding public transport in South Australia are addressed by the Adelaide Metro customer service team. Individual feedback provided to Guide Dogs SA.NT regarding bus complaints includes that when a person lodges a complaint with Adelaide Metro and wishes to receive a reference number they are often directed to the individual bus operators rather than this being dealt with by the customer service team. This causes delays in lodging complaints and subsequent follow-up, and some people do not wish to deal directly with individual bus operators.

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

Guide Dogs SA.NT recognises the value of disability agencies being consulted regarding disability awareness training undertaken by transport operators. GDSA.NT also recommends that customer service staff be required to train in key competencies for communicating with people with disabilities and their needs. Whilst many transport operators provide a high level of customer service, complaints received by Guide Dogs SA.NT frequently reflect a perceived lack of understanding of the unique issues faced by people who are blind or vision impaired. This includes bus operators not stopping at a bus stop for a person who is vision impaired using a long cane, incorrect or incomplete verbal information when asking for directions, rude or impatient responses when confirming the service route or number including when the person is not using a mobility aid, forgetting to stop at the required bus stop as requested, and not allowing for enough time for the person to be seated, including those with guide dogs. There are also frequent complaints about drivers not pulling up to boarding zones before continuing on their journey, leaving people who are blind or vision impaired waiting (sometimes for lengthy periods) at the bus stops.

5. Other key issues you would like to see addressed?

Large information displays including at airports, interchanges, and train stations at eye height would assist people who are vision impaired to effectively access displayed information. Information screens are frequently suspended several metres above the ground and do not have alternative screens at a lower height available.

Talking meters in taxis to assist people who are blind or vision impaired to know the amount being charged, and prevent overcharging.