

**ACT Government Submission to the
2012 Review of the *Disability Standards for
Accessible Public Transport 2002***

May 2013

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BACKGROUND

The ACT Government is committed to an efficient, affordable and accessible public transport service that meets the needs of all members of the ACT community. The ACT Government welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the 2012 review of the *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002* (DSAPT).

The Action Plan for Accessible Public Transport in the ACT was first released in May 2000 and is periodically updated to monitor and ensure compliance with the DSAPT target dates. The 2009–2012 Action Plan is currently being reviewed and updated.

Public transport services in the ACT are regulated under the *Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Act 2001* which provides for the accreditation and regulation of bus, hire car and taxi services.

There are three accredited regular route bus services in the ACT, with the main regular route public bus service (ACTION) being operated by the ACT Government. Most public transport infrastructure is built and maintained by the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate¹ with some facilities owned and managed by private commercial entities. Non-government transport providers, ie tour and charter and long haul bus/coach operators are also accredited by Public Transport Regulation. For the purpose of reporting, public transport service operators whose businesses are operated from another jurisdiction are outside the scope of this submission, as compliance and reporting requirements for the DSAPT would be covered by the jurisdiction of origin. This ensures the ACT Government does not unduly burden service providers with double reporting requirements and information on DSAPT compliance is not incidentally duplicated between jurisdictions.

1. SPECIFIC INFORMATION ADDRESSING THE ISSUES PAPER:

1.1 *Has accessibility of public transport within your jurisdiction improved since 2007?*

1.1.1 *How has accessibility to conveyances (eg trains, buses and coaches, trams, ferries, wheelchair accessible taxis and aircraft) changed? Have compliance targets been met? Can you provide examples? If compliance targets have not been met, can you elaborate on the reasons for not being able to meet these targets?*

Buses

With the commencement of the DSAPT in 2002, ACTION implemented a fleet replacement strategy to ensure it was able to meet compliance targets. In 2007, ACTION met the compliance target of 25% of buses being accessible, and has exceeded the 2012 target of 55%. In the 2012-13 Budget, the ACT Government committed a funding over a five year period to ensure that ACTION will meet the 31 December 2017 target of 80% of the fleet being accessible. ACTION will also continue to work towards all public bus routes to be serviced with accessible buses by 2022.

With the implementation of Network 12 in May 2012, ACTION has significantly increased the number and frequency of accessible bus routes. The Blue and Red Rapid services which service major town centres are all scheduled with accessible buses as well as the majority of buses servicing the Canberra Hospital and Village Creek Rehabilitation Centre. The next

¹ Westfield Belconnen, the Jolimont terminus and Kingston Railway Station are infrastructure assets not owned/controlled by the ACT Government.

bus network is currently under development and it is expected to continue this trend of scheduling accessible buses on routes where demand is greatest.

In 2011 ACTION introduced the MyWay Ticketing System, lowering the position of ticket scanners to accommodate passengers who use mobility devices.

Hearing Augmentation of PA systems at bus stations have not been upgraded to meet the DSAPT. ACTION will investigate the upgrading of these systems in the future to ensure that they meet the Standards.

In 2012 free travel on ACTION buses was extended to include Gold Card holders (over 75 years) in addition to vision impaired and blind passengers and holders of a Companion Card.

Taxi Networks and Wheelchair Accessible Taxis

As at 10 April 2013, there are 335 taxis operating in the ACT, affiliated with three taxi networks, of which 18 are Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WATs). The ACT Government currently holds 8 surrendered WAT licences for possible release in the future, pending the outcome of the annual review of the taxi licence allocation model before releasing any further taxi licences.

Throughout the reporting period, Public Transport Regulation has continued to work with taxi networks to monitor compliance with the DSAPT, specifically relating to networks meeting the requirement for equivalent response times for WATs to that of standard taxis.

While response times for WATs have improved, on average taxi networks did not meet the 2007 through to 2011 compliance target for equivalent response times for WATs. Data reported by networks indicate that equivalent response times for WATs were met in 2012. Public Transport Regulation identified some inconsistencies in the way networks collected data due to some limitations with the networks booking/MT data systems.

Following recommendations arising from the 2010 Taxi Industry Review, the ACT Government implemented a Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Centralised Booking Service (WCBS) in mid December 2012. The WCBS is under contract, to provide a dedicated booking service for all WATs regardless of the taxi operator's network affiliation. The WCBS was implemented to provide a more efficient and reliable taxi service to people with disabilities. In addition to micromanaging all WAT bookings, the WCBS is responsible for:

- communicating directly with customers to provide up to date information on status of bookings;
- administering the new on-time and after hours on-call bonus payments to operators and drivers to encourage equivalent response times and broader availability of WATs after hours and on weekends;
- centralised complaints handling for WAT services; and
- independent reporting of key performance indicators to Public Transport Regulation including accurate and transparent response time reporting.

Preliminary feedback from WAT passengers has been positive, with a number of passengers indicating an improved confidence in WAT services as a result of the WCBS.

Five surrendered WAT licences were released by ballot in 2012, bringing the total number of WAT to 5% of the taxi fleet in the ACT. Public Transport Regulation continues to closely monitor WAT services managed through the WCBS and will review the number of WATs required to meet demand and sustain viability for WAT operators. Public Transport Regulation is also currently investigating options to simplify the current WAT licence allocation process.

In July 2011, Public Transport Regulation adopted the policy that all new WATs have a minimum passenger head height requirement of 1500mm and have the capacity to carry two wheelchairs. While the Standard requiring the increase in head clearance applied from 1 January 2013, the Australian Vehicle Standards Rules for motor vehicles (Cwth) are yet to be amended to reflect the changes in the DSAPT for a WAT.

As a result of the 2007 Review of the Transport Standards, it was recommended that “The taxi modal sub-committee be tasked with developing a staged implementation timeframe similar to that for other modes of transport and an appropriate performance measure, to replace the 2007 milestone for WAT waiting times to be equal to conventional taxi waiting times”.

The ACT has been participating in ongoing discussions with other transport regulators as part of the National Transport Regulators Group (NTRG) to progress this recommendation.

There is significant difficulty in reaching a consistent, national position to deliver the recommendation. The complexity is, in part, due to the absence of a national approach to the regulation of taxi services generally.

While there are some similarities, each jurisdiction adopts a different approach and methodology to the measurement of waiting times for conventional and wheelchair accessible taxi services.

The NTRG, following consultation with the industry peak body may seek support to reconsider the recommendation and to adopt a new, more achievable form of standard.

1.1.2 How has accessibility of information (eg, maps, timetables, announcements, etc) changed? Can you provide examples?

ACTION commenced the development of a real time passenger information system, with the launch of a limited trial of “NXTBUS” expected in June/July 2013. NXTBUS will include Braille display units at selected locations and real time audio announcements of information. ACTION has continued to improve accessibility of information to passengers and the redevelopment of web resources at the beginning of 2013.

The MyWay Shopfronts provide a face to face channel for information and assistance to customers with bus information. These shopfronts are located at the Westfield Bus Station in Belconnen and behind platform 4 in the City Bus Station. Additionally ACTION also provides passenger information and service updates via Twitter which is monitored between 7:30am and 5:30pm weekdays. ACTION can also be contacted by telephone by ringing ACTION Information on 13 17 10 or if you are outside the ACT, (02) 6207 7611 and online via the feedback form on the ACTION website. There are also Transport Officers available on the platforms at all major bus stations to assist with passenger information.

Due to limitations in space, timetable information is not provided in large format at bus stops. To ensure access for all passengers, the phone number for ACTION information is displayed at bus stops to provide direct assistance. In addition, large format timetables for customers can be produced by ACTION on request.

As part of the real-time passenger information system, the signage will be updated to include a unique bus stop number that can be used to access timetable information. Passengers will be able to use this unique number to access information via web, SMS and direct assistance through the ACTION information line 13 17 10. A trial of 100 bus stops with raised numbering and Braille is also being trialled as part of the system.

Timetables are available to customers in alternative formats on request. In early 2013 ACTION completed an upgrade of its website, and is currently investigating options for providing audio descriptions for bus route maps on the website.

In 2010 ACTION commenced a limited trial of an audio en-route announcement system as part of the Redex rapid bus service trial. Passenger information screens and speakers were fitted in some buses. The Redex trial was successful and became what is now known as the Red Rapid service. However, use of the audio en-route announcement system was not expanded to include other services. The RTPIS NXTBUS project will address this issue in all buses once it becomes fully operational.

ACTION continues to provide information sessions for people with disabilities to practice using accessible buses, and is investigating options for public education campaign on passenger etiquette, including the appropriate use of priority seating.

The ACT Government has continued to promote its public transport “compliments and complaints” mechanism and other important information to disability groups and service organisations in addition to members of the Taxi Subsidy Scheme. Additionally, the Authority has assisted in disseminating information regarding access arrangements at the Canberra Airport to disability and community organisations.

Roads ACT in conjunction with Guide Dogs ACT/NSW is currently trialling email alerts via an opt-in user group system advising blind and vision impaired clients of road closures and construction work which may impact upon their regular travel movements.

1.1.3 How has accessibility of infrastructure (eg, any structure or facility that is used by passengers in conjunction with travelling on a public transport service) changed? Can you provide examples?

Bus Stops

In the period to December 2012, Roads ACT report that a further 26% of bus stops received upgrades to meet the DSAPT, totalling 54% of bus stops being either partially or fully compliance with the Standards.

Roads ACT will continue to work closely with ACTION during the ongoing development of Network 12/13 to prioritise bus stop upgrades.

Bus Stations and Interchanges

The ACT Government, through Roads ACT, own and maintain four bus interchanges within the Territory, those being Belconnen, City, Woden and Tuggeranong. The interchanges were constructed at various stages of Canberra’s development over the past 40 years. More recently they are being redeveloped, including the Belconnen Town Centre Upgrade project completed in 2010, and the planned redevelopment of the Woden Bus Interchange in the coming years. The City Bus Interchange has taken shape over decades to currently include sections of East Row, Mort Street and Alinga Street. The city precinct also includes a number of major bus stops to cater for the public transport patrons on its fringes, which are located on London Circuit, Alinga Street, Marcus Clarke Street and Rimmer Street.

During the 2009/10 redevelopment of the Belconnen Town Centre, the existing bus interchange was demolished and replaced by two new bus stations. The Belconnen Community bus station was developed on the existing interchange site, and the Westfield bus station was developed by Westfield, as part of their major upgrade to the Belconnen Westfield Shopping Centre. During the redevelopment a range of improvements were made to the public realm including the facilities at the bus stations (interchanges). The improvements included ensuring compliance with the access and mobility standards for all features included in the scope of works. The Westfield Bus Station is privately owned and

managed by Westfield. An agreement with the ACT Government allows ACTION buses to utilise the facilities as part of their service.

The City Action plan included the upgrade of a section of the City Bus Interchange as well as the major stops on Alinga Street. These improvements included upgrades to meet the compliance levels of the existing verge paving including tactile ground surface indicators, signage, street lighting and public toilet facilities. These works have improved the partial compliance of the city interchange for those areas included in the scope of works. A detailed investigation would be required to determine what elements require upgrade to achieve full compliance of this facility.

The Woden Bus Interchange was audited for access and mobility improvements in 2009/10. A list of recommendations were implemented including upgrading the ground surface tactile indicators, signage, some lighting and improvements to the existing public toilet facilities. Further works have been put on hold given the likelihood of a major redevelopment at this site in the coming years. This interchange would be considered partially compliant. A detailed investigation would be required to determine what elements require upgrade to achieve full compliance of this facility.

The Tuggeranong Bus Interchange was also audited during 2009/10. A list of minor improvements is currently being implemented within the town centre including the Bus Interchange. These works are limited to ground surface tactile indicators, pram ramps, footpath surfaces and signage. When complete, this interchange would be considered partially compliant. A detailed investigation would be required to determine what elements require upgrade to achieve full compliance of this facility.

The ACT Government has committed funding in the 2013/14 budget to undertake a detailed investigation of the bus interchange facilities to identify and detail any outstanding DSAPT compliance issues. These outstanding issues will be prioritised and programmed for upgrade in the following financial years. Given that significant development is planned for the Woden Bus Interchange in the next 3-5 years, addressing some of the issues related to physical constraints of this interchange might be delayed.

With regard to the compliance targets and requirements for public transport facilities, the ACT Government has found that achieving 100% compliance for a range of the requirements is very difficult, and in some cases almost impossible. In particular, the compliance of verge and path grades approaching bus stops has proven challenging on existing streets with grades that significantly exceed the standards. Another example would be the lighting levels required within bus stops. Achieving the lux levels identified in the standards whilst also attempting to utilise modern technology and alternative energy sources has also proven challenging. Advice from lighting experts suggests the levels could be reconsidered in the standard.

1.1.4 Have you been able to improve the collection and reporting of reliable, current data on public transport accessibility within your jurisdiction?

Public Transport Regulation continues to work with transport service providers to educate them on their responsibilities under the DSAPT and to improve reporting mechanisms to collect data on public transport accessibility in the ACT.

Operational requirements across a number of different government Directorates and project areas means that information may not be recorded in a manner which readily enables the ACT Government to provide a collective response against compliance targets broken down under the DSAPT.

Partial Compliance

While a definitive response can be given for things such as the number of accessible buses in the ACTION fleet, because of the location of bus stops (geographic slope etc), not all bus

stops will be able to be upgraded to meet full compliance targets due to extraordinary technical or geographical factors as set out under 33.7 (g) of the DSAPT.² The longitudinal gradient of 2.5% for bus stop pads is not possible to achieve when the slope of the road exceeds this gradient. This will present a challenge for the ACT to reach the 2017 compliance target and full compliance in 2022 with audits conducted estimating that the longitudinal requirement for accessible bus stop pads could not be achieved in one out of three bus stops.

As mentioned previously, it is not clear to what extent data received from taxi networks reporting the response times of WATs can be relied upon for the past reporting period, particularly when paired with feedback to Public Transport Regulation from WAT customers. With the introduction of the WCBS, Public Transport Regulation anticipates receiving consistent and reliable data on performance of WATs from December 2012 onwards.

Method of reporting

Schedule 1 of the DSAPT sets out compliance broad targets for individual components as contained within the Standards (doorways, ramps, tactile ground indicators etc). Generally, project areas have found recording data universally in this format impractical and largely irrelevant as it relates to the day to day operations of projects across the ACT Government.

Investigating avenues to further streamline reporting of accessibility data will be addressed in the Review of the ACT Accessible Public Transport Action Plan.

The Non-Government Sector

With DSAPT reporting for bus, coach and tourist and charter services being voluntary for non-government (commercially operated) public transport providers, there is insufficient data available to measure overall improvements in accessibility compliance across the jurisdiction as a whole. In 2011, the ACT Government provided private public transport service providers with information on the DSAPT and a self audit and Action Plan template for their company use, completion and return. Response from those accredited operators was poor with only three audits completed. Thought may be given in the future to include regular reporting on DSAPT compliance under the accreditation process.

During the review process for the current ACT Accessible Public Transport Action Plan, it was identified that further guidance from the Commonwealth to Territory and State governments and transport providers is required on the extent to which tourist and charter services (including long haul ticketed coach services) are included within the scope of the DSAPT. For the purposes of regulation, a tourist and charter services is required to be accredited under the *Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Act 2000 (ACT)*, however not all tourist and charter service fall into the description under exemption from the DSAPT. On seeking further clarification from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission in February 2013, the Commission indicated that the scope of the Standards is not clear and provided the following response:

"It is unclear whether charter services are covered by the Transport Standards.

On one view a charter service is not a public transport service because it is not available to any member of the public. For example, if a group has chartered a bus or coach for a particular purpose, a member of the public not in the group cannot access that service.

On the other hand, the Transport Standards apply to 'public transport services'. A public transport service is defined as 'an enterprise that conveys members of the public by land,

² Exceptional Circumstances – Unjustifiable hardship on the basis of exceptional operational, technical or geographical factors.

water or air' (s1.23). This is a broad definition and it arguable that charter bus services fall with this definition.

Section 1.23(3) of the Transport Standards excludes certain forms of transport from the definition of a public transport service. Charter bus services are not expressly excluded from the definition of a public transport service. Further section 33.5(2) of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport Guidelines 2004 (No.3) refers to a charter service as a type of service."

2. Are there any other initiatives and actions in relation to removing discrimination from public transport services, that do not come under the above, for which you can provide details?

In 2011, the Taxi Subsidy Scheme (TSS) was reviewed, with the subsidy being increased in line with past increases in taxi fare rates.

A scoping study was undertaken to streamline the TSS by converting the paper voucher system to an electronic smartcard format, similar to other States and Territories. The TSS Smartcard system is expected to be implemented in 2013.

A review of community transport services in the ACT commenced in 2013. Community transport provides individual and group travel, often door to door, to people who do not have ready access to a private motor vehicle and who have difficulty using public transport or standard taxi services. In the 2009-2010 financial year, primary community transport service providers in the ACT completed approximately 238,000 passenger trips. While exempt from provisions under the DSAPT, community transport provides an important role in alternative transport options to people with disabilities.

In deciding to introduce a lift fee in 2003, the ACT Government agreed that the level of the lift fee would be calculated as 25% of the 'waiting time' component of the taxi fare determination. The amount is usually adjusted annually. In 2012, the lift fee was increased to \$12.50. In addition, the ACT Government also continues to offer incentive payments to WAT operators to have their WAT on the road and available for hirings on ten "special" days per year including Christmas, New Year and other significant public holidays. The lift fee is also increased to \$25 on those special days.

The ACT Government, through the ACTION Disability Consumer Advisory Committee, has continued to investigate options for implementing appropriate wheelchair restraint devices on ACTION buses. While no definitive solution has been reached, the Government acknowledges that the provision of adequate restraint devices on buses remains a significant concern for passengers with disabilities and submits that standardised wheelchair restraint devices should be incorporated on accessible conveyances as part of the Australian Vehicle Standards.