

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing my concerns of the *Disability Standards For Accessible Public Transport 2002* and how people with disabilities such as autism are impacted.

Several features have been included as part of this legislation such as door controls and on-board information screens. These parts are useful for people with certain disabilities, however features such as these can cause problems for people with autism.

“What are the common examples of autistic sensory sensitivities?
Many people with autism have reported hurtful responses to the following (not all-inclusive) list of sensory sensitivities:
Hearing: Babies crying, dogs barking, cars backfiring, vacuum cleaners, school bells, fire alarms, police and ambulance sirens, certain high-pitched voices, food chewing, pencil tapping, fans and ventilation systems, music other than their own, the pronunciation of select words.
Visions: Too many colors or a certain color that is painful to look at, sunlight that is too bright, harsh overhead lighting such as halogen or fluorescent lights, alternating light and shadow (especially while driving) that creates a strobe light effect, attempting to transition from one environment to a different environment (e.g., moving from hardwood flooring to patterned carpet).”

Source: Stillman, W 2007, The Autism Answer Book – More than 300 of the top questions parents ask pp. 66-67, Sourcebooks, Naperville, Ill.

As part of the proposed DSM-V says the following as part of the Autism criteria:

“Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment; (such as apparent indifference to pain/heat/cold, adverse response to specific sounds or textures, excessive smelling or touching of objects, fascination with lights or spinning objects).”

<
<http://www.dsm5.org/proposedrevision/pages/proposedrevision.aspx?rid=94#>>
(Website no longer accessible)

I personally have autism and I have problems with the following features associated with the *Disability Standards For Accessible Public Transport 2002* and I also mention what things are suitable:

Buses	
Problems	Suggestions
Bright orange destination signs	Replace with green destinations like those still used on some buses. Otherwise use old-fashioned winding destination signs.

Trains	
Problems	Suggestions
Bright orange destinations on trains	Use green destinations like what use to be used on most trains. Otherwise use old-fashioned winding destination signs.
On-board passenger information screens.	Provide carriages or allocate special trains without on-board passenger information screens.
Audible push button doors	Provide carriages or allocate special trains without audible push button doors.
Loud autovoice system used to announce stations	The old EMU autovoice which was used prior to the new system was suitable. Otherwise provide carriages or allocate special trains without a loud autovoice system.

I am going to briefly clarify some of the solutions in regards to the trains. The options that I listed were either reserving special fleet or have a special carriage in each service.

In Queensland Rail there is the ICE fleet that do not have any of the troublesome features listed in the table above. This could form part of the solution if the option of reserving special fleet is needed. However ICE fleet is not plentiful with 8 power packs.

Otherwise if having a special carriage in each train is to be considered I will briefly explain why it should be a carriage and not a small area in every set. Using this method will ensure that people like myself can travel on any train sets. Doors connecting between carriages should be darkened to minimise the effect of the on-board passenger information screens. However there would need to be considerable work on the newer Interurban Multiple Units (IMU) 160 or Suburban Multiple Units (SMU) 260 fleet due to no dividing doors between carriages. I have confined myself to small parts of the train and I can experience any of the following problems:

Flickering overhead lights: if a whole carriage is able to be used then I can just move away from the flickering overhead lights.

Bad odours: if a whole carriage is able to be used then I can just move away from the bad odours

No available seating in the reserved area: I can stand or sit else where if a whole carriage were to be reserved.

Taking trains have become increasingly difficult with the instalment of these things that make trains comply with Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002. On the Queensland Rail Citytrain fleet, eventually the only fleet that I am able to take without problems are the ICE units. There are only a few EMU trains without the instalment of any problematic items listed in the table above. Nearly all the EMU fleet has at least one of the problematic

items. I have also tried to avoid taking trains whenever possible and reserve my trains around when the ICE fleet are running the service.

Earplugs have been suggested to help alleviate problems that I experience on trains. I have never needed earplugs before on services and I do not see why this should change just because the sensory needs for people with autism are overlooked. When I travel on an ICE train I do not need earplugs – why should this be different on other sets?

How many people on the trains have earplugs?

I don't see anyone on the train wearing earplugs. How can wearing earplugs when they were not needed before an improvement in the quality of life for people with autism?

I have tried a musical device on a service but the music needed to be at an uncomfortable level to relieve from the sounds that I experience on trains now. So this isn't really a solution – replacing one loud noise with another loud noise.

I am aware that some people with autism may benefit from using polarised sunglasses or Irlen lenses to minimise effect of bright lights. I have tried polarised sunglasses with other bright lights and they do not work for me. Irlen lenses are expensive and there is no guarantee that they would work for me. Why should I wear these as a result of the Disability Standards For Accessible Public Transport 2002?

I am looking forward to when the sensory needs for people with disabilities such as autism can be catered for.

Yours faithfully,

Jason Stehn.