



Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017-21 - Consultation Draft

Submission by BusNSW - 29 September 2017

BusNSW is the peak body for the NSW private bus and coach industry whose members provide essential services on a daily basis and provide a key interface with the travelling public. The BusNSW mission is to foster the efficient and sustainable growth of public transport in NSW, and to promote the benefits of bus travel.

Buses play a vital role in delivering public transport in NSW. In conjunction with other public transport modes and the point to point transport industry, bus and coach transport is an important part of an integrated mobility solution for the community.

BusNSW understands the main focus of the Transport for NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017-21 is to reduce and eliminate barriers that people with disability can face when accessing transport services and to help ensure everyone in NSW can participate fully in our community.

BusNSW supports the following strategic objectives of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan:

- deliver barrier-free end to end journeys for all customers
- build accessibility into our business processes and systems
- provide accessible planning and cutting-edge assistive technology
- ensure people with disability influence the future of transport in NSW
- become an employer of choice for people with disability.

Following are a number of specific accessibility issues as they relate to the bus and coach industry, including the use of mobility devices, their restraint, identification of compliant mobility devices by drivers and practical operational issues that impact on the ability of bus operators to meet the requirements of the accessible transport standards. These issues have been identified by BusNSW and the Bus Industry Confederation (BIC).

Mobility Devices – Identification

The bus and coach industry believes that a system is required to have mobility devices clearly identifiable as being able to be carried on relevant modes of public transport. Currently there is no satisfactory requirement or mechanism for bus and coach drivers to determine which mobility devices are suitable for use on accessible buses and coaches.

BusNSW would like to see a requirement introduced for mobility device manufacturers to ensure that all devices are appropriately identifiable as being safe and suitable to be carried on a particular public transport conveyance and that purchasers of such devices are made aware of the limitations that the standards impose, for example in the areas of size, mass and manoeuvrability.

Larger buses are expected to have useful life of 20-25 years and the need for suitably labelled devices is likely to grow. This labelling process should be supported by an education program for people with disabilities to understand the requirements of the standards for mobility devices. Bus and coach drivers need to be authorised to restrict access to devices that are appropriately labelled.

Mobility Devices – Safety

A concern for bus and coach operators in relation to mobility devices is the safety of people using them and the safety and amenity of other passengers.

The areas of concern relate to:

- Mobility devices and their impact on the safety of the user and other passengers on buses in the event of an accident, heavy braking or swerving incident if the device/passenger is not secured.
- The inconvenience caused to other public transport users and the dignity of people with disabilities, when mobility devices which are not suitable for use on a conveyance results in accessibility ramps breaking on entry or the devices not being enabled to be manoeuvred into allocated spaces due to their size and turning circle.
- The safety consequences of mobility devices of the “scooter” type that carry wet cell batteries. Wet cell batteries are a major concern due to possible leakage, as the fluid is very acidic and flammable. Wet cell batteries have also been known to explode on impact and may be a safety hazard in the event of an accident or some form of impact on the battery.
- The effective restraint of mobility devices is a major concern to the industry. The bus and coach industry is required to meet stringent seat strength and anchorage requirements under Australian Design Rules. Key issues to be considered here are seat and mobility aid strength and mobility devices that are not secure becoming projectiles.
- Australian Design Rules provide for seat strength and seat anchorage requirements that provide a level of occupant protection that cannot possibly be met by the mobility device, whether it is restrained or not. Further the wheelchair spaces on buses do not provide the compartmentalization benefits provided to other seated passengers.
- In relation to the restraint of mobility devices the accepted practice is for mobility devices to be rearward facing against what is known as an “ironing board device”.

Some passengers with disabilities tether their device to the ironing board device. The practice of facing rearward is not accepted by many people with disabilities who wish to face the front of the vehicle like most other passengers. This is considered a less safe option.

Specific Coach Issues

A number of specific concerns have been raised by coach operators who operate in the deregulated long distance, tour, charter and express sector of the Industry. Some of these matters impact on the NSW TrainLink Regional Coach services.

The areas of concern relate to:

- Some companies do not allow for people to travel on coaches without transferring to a seat belted passenger seat.
- Some users of wheelchairs and mobility devices request that they travel in their device. Coach operators are inclined to accept this request despite the fact that this is the less safe option and restraint of the device can in no way meet the requirements of the ADR's for seats, seat belts and seat anchorages. There are also concerns that drivers could injure a person in a wheelchair or themselves in attempting to restrain a wheelchair where no restraint or wheelchair strength standard exists and no crash testing simulation has been undertaken for when a wheelchair is tied down in a coach.
- People using wheelchairs and other mobility devices to travel on coaches are boarded using a wheel chair lifter. A wheel chair lifter if used requires that 4 or more seats are removed from the bus to allow access into the bus and allow manoeuvrability into a seat or wheelchair space. Due to aisle width requirements for buses and coaches it is generally not possible for people in wheelchairs or other mobility devices to have access to water fountains and toilets.
- A wheelchair lifter and the required engineering to install and operate it can add up to 600 kilograms to the Gross Vehicle Mass of the bus, this can mean, depending on the type of bus, more seats having to be removed to remain under the legal mass limits.

Workplace Injury and Practices

There is concern that requirements of the Disability Standards can at times conflict with workplace health and safety standards, as well as other legislative and regulatory requirements, that bus operators are obligated to meet.

Compliance with the Disability Standards has led to instances where passenger safety, vehicle standards, occupational health and safety, and workplace practices have been compromised. As a consequence, industrial injuries have been sustained, passengers have been subjected to additional risk, and bus operators exposed to possible legal liabilities. Driver procedures should be consistent with WHS and other safety practices.

DDA Compliant Bus Stops

BusNSW is concerned about the lack of mobility device suitable infrastructure at bus stops and the path areas to get to bus stops. It would appear that some local councils are not providing adequate infrastructure to meet the needs of people with disabilities to board and alight from buses.

This often results in bus and coach operators being unable to provide accessible trips as the surrounding infrastructure, for the “whole trip”, does not allow such a trip to occur. Where an operator does provide accessible vehicles in these circumstances it often relies on significant assistance by drivers and other passengers to assist the person with a disability. This often compromises their dignity, puts both driver and passenger at risk of possible injury.

There is a need to improve the accessibility of bus stops via the actions identified in the plan. BusNSW encourages Transport for NSW to investigate and develop a feasible program to accelerate upgrades to bus stops by councils.

On-demand and Flexible Bus Services

The NSW Government recently announced that eight pilots of On Demand Transport services in the North West, South West, West, Eastern Suburbs, Northern Beaches, Sutherland Shire and Central Coast will start from October and allow customers to book transport from or near their home to a local transport hub or other centres including local hospitals. These services are available to the public and operated under contract to Transport for NSW. It is not clear what compliance requirements under the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport apply to these services.

Conclusion

The NSW Bus and Coach Industry remains committed to finding solutions that reduce the transport disadvantage faced by people with disability. As indicated in the Disability Inclusion Action Plan, a multi-faceted approach which includes providing services for people with a disability who are unable to use mass transit public transport services is required.

There has been significant improvement to information technology which makes it easier to plan accessible journeys. BusNSW encourages Transport for NSW to continue working with app developers to create transport apps with accessibility features.

BusNSW recommends for Transport for NSW to review its consultation draft in light of the issues identified above and the second 5-year review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport. BusNSW is seeking ongoing engagement on the Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017-21, with consideration of services provided by private bus and coach operators.

If you would like to discuss these comments, please call me on (02) 8839 9500.

Regards,

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