




Accessible Transport ▶▶

A Guide for Bus and Coach Operators



One in every five Western Australians has a disability and one in ten cares for a person with a disability. Many are seniors and together they total more than half a million people who are potential customers for bus and coach operators.

This brochure has been prepared to help you meet the needs of this sector of the community. You can meet your legal and social responsibilities as well as benefit from doing so.

Local and international experience suggests that the benefits of accessible public transport flow onto a wide variety of sectors of the community, such as parents with strollers and prams, who are big users of accessible transport. Also, Australia has a rapidly ageing population and the level of disability increases significantly as people get older.

People with heavy shopping and luggage benefit from accessible public transport, as do people with temporary disabilities or injuries, such as a leg in plaster requiring the use of crutches.

The market for more accessible transport is expanding and bus and coach operators have the opportunity to benefit from it.

Disability Discrimination Act

The Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act* was introduced in 1992 to eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination against people in a range of areas on the grounds of disability.

Because the Act covers (among other things) transport and travel services, it is against the law not to provide people with a disability with reasonable access to these services.

However, this does not mean that access must be provided at any cost.

The *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002* have been developed to help clarify the rights of people with disabilities and those of service providers.

Standards on Accessible Public Transport

The *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002* came into effect on 23 October 2002 and apply to all operators whose vehicles provide public transport services.

The standards specify how public transport is to be made accessible.

Guidelines have also been developed to assist in the understanding and interpreting of the standards. Unlike the standards, the guidelines are not legally binding, they are for assistance only.

The standards cover a range of areas, including access paths and manoeuvring areas, symbols, signs, lighting, handrails, street furniture and information services.

Each section states whether the standard applies to vehicles, premises or infrastructure.

The standards provide for compliance based on 'equivalent access'. This allows a transport provider to achieve the required level of access by different means, such as ramps that can be put in place manually at railway stations or on buses.

They also require that all relevant circumstances be considered when assessing a claim that meeting certain requirements would impose 'unjustifiable hardship' on a person or organisation. The standards list a range of circumstances that would be considered relevant.



Dedicated school bus exemption

There are some exemptions to the application of the standards. One of these is the exclusion of dedicated school bus services from the physical access requirements.

A dedicated school bus service is a service that operates to transport primary and secondary students to or from school or for other school purposes. If the bus is used for other work in addition to school runs, for example charters or tours, then it is not classified as a dedicated school bus.

School bus services will need to comply with the standards if they transport the general public with students.

Several technical issues regarding accessibility require further investigation before appropriate standards can be developed for school buses. These include access for passengers in wheelchairs, boarding ramps, use of boarding devices and handrails on steps.

Transporting service animals

A service animal is an animal trained by a recognised individual or agency.

If a passenger is travelling with a service animal (eg guide dog), the animal is not subject to a fare. On booked services, the service animal must be able to accompany the passenger at all times and to travel without encroaching onto an access path.

Compliance timetable

Not all services have to be made accessible right away. All new transport systems must comply with the standards (with the exception of those supplied under pre-existing contracts), however there is a 20-year timetable for existing public transport to become accessible (or 30-year timetable for trains and trams).

Target dates of every five (5) years set out the required degree of compliance for each standard.

For example, compliance with the relevant standards in relation to boarding by 25 per cent has been targeted for 31 December 2007. Compliance is to be increased to 55 per cent by 31 December 2012, 80 per cent by 31 December 2017 for buses and 90 per cent by 31 December 2017 for other vehicles.

All public transport services are to fully comply with the relevant standards by 31 December 2022 (with the exception of trains and trams).

It is expected that public transport will become accessible by replacement or upgrading of vehicles, premises and infrastructure at the end of their service life. All new items must comply with the standards. However it is the particular upgrading, reconstruction or refurbishment that must comply with the standards and not the infrastructure as a whole.


Vehicles that are second-hand can follow the 20-year compliance schedule, unless they are imported second-hand vehicles. If these vehicles are imported for use as public transport in Australia they are considered to be new and must comply with the standards.

The cost of compliance

The standards do not require you to provide accessible public transport at any cost. Like the Act itself, the standards recognise there must be a fair balance between benefits and cost.

This means you won't be in breach of the Act for failing to comply with the standards if it would impose 'unjustifiable hardship'.





Assessment of an exemption sought on the grounds of unjustifiable hardship would include:

- ▶ additional capital, operating or other costs (or loss of revenue) likely to result from compliance;
- ▶ how much the service must operate on a cost-recovery basis; and
- ▶ any effect that compliance might have on the financial viability of the operator.

The effect of the standards on your business operations

Compliance with the standards will not be required if it would cause a service to be withdrawn.

The principle of 'unjustifiable hardship' would be a consideration and would include the effect of compliance on providing a service or a feature of a service, including effects on financial, staffing, technical, information or other resources.

Helpful Advice

Common sense, sensitivity and careful listening will aid in the dignified carriage of people with disabilities on your bus or coach.

Always ask a person with a disability if they need assistance. They are the expert on their particular disability and will tell you what assistance they need.

Staff development

Your staff should be trained in disability awareness, and information about accessible services needs to be readily available, particularly for your reservation and booking staff. This will ensure that your staff are equipped with the skills to effectively service people with a disability.

Promoting your business

In providing information on the accessibility of your services to people with disabilities and their carers, the following guidelines may be helpful.

Printed information should be set in at least 12-point font size in a sans serif font style such as Arial or Helvetica. Publications should also be offered in alternative formats such as Braille, large print (18-point font size in a sans serif font), computer disk or CD-ROM.

Promotional materials should be printed with a high contrast between the text and the background for easy reading, eg dark text on a light background. The paper used should be matt or non-reflective as light reflecting off paper can make reading very difficult.

All companies should have a telephone typewriter (TTY) or use the National Relay System to enable people with hearing disabilities to place their bookings and make general enquiries.


An Internet site will help people with disabilities, as well as all your customers, to access information.

Customer service

People with disabilities should receive the same level of service as any other passenger, so they should not have to notify you ahead of time that they are travelling.

However, if you do not yet have accessible vehicles, you will need to work out some way to communicate this to customers so that those with disabilities can contact you in advance and you can meet their needs.





People who can transfer out of their wheelchair or scooter should be able to store their mobility device in the luggage hold of your bus or coach and there are ways you can assist them to board, such as a fold-up ramp.

Accessible rest stops must be used.

Parents with prams, seniors and people with temporary injuries will also welcome this.

Further Information

There is a wealth of useful information on the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC) web site.

Information about the rights of people with disabilities in relation to transport accessibility:

- ▶ http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/transport/transport.html

Information on the standards and guidelines for accessible public transport:

- ▶ <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disabilityrights/standards/standards.html>

A guide to the *Disability Discrimination Act*:

- ▶ http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/dda_guide/dda_guide.htm

Information about complaints under anti-discrimination legislation:

- ▶ http://www.hreoc.gov.au/complaints_information/index.html

You can also contact the Department's Access and Mobility Unit on (08) 9216 8584.

For operational matters relating to service delivery or omnibus licensing contact the Department's Omnibus Licensing Section on (08) 9216 8756.



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