



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

2022 Review of the Transport Standards

Summary report

November 2024

In Australia, public transport operators and providers must make sure their services are accessible for people with disability. This is managed through the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 (the Transport Standards). The Transport Standards are made under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and need to be reviewed every five years to make sure they are still fit-for-purpose.

The 2022 Review has considered the views and experiences of more than 1,000 respondents, including more than 600 people with disability, in addition to carers and family members, disability service providers and advocacy groups, government departments, public transport providers and operators and access consultants.

Public consultation for the Review was open from 22 December 2022 to 30 June 2023. The consultation process involved distributing a discussion paper, which outlined the scope of the review, what feedback was required and how to make a submission to the review. Stakeholders could respond to the discussion paper in a variety of ways, including:

- in writing via email, mail or upload to the webpage
- by video or audio recording
- by phone.

The consultation process also included an interactive webinar, two online surveys, two round tables and seven focus groups with participants representing a range of perspectives on disability. People with disability delivered or co-facilitated the consultation sessions, and live-captioning and Auslan interpretation was provided to further increase accessibility. Written materials were designed to be compatible with screen readers. Short summaries and translations into Easy English, languages other than English and Auslan were also provided.

Findings

Progress toward removing discrimination and achieving compliance with the Transport Standards

In contrast to previous reviews, public transport operators and providers provided very little quantitative data on specific levels of compliance with the Transport Standards. Therefore, the conclusions of the Review have mostly been drawn from qualitative information provided through survey responses,

submissions, webinar comments, round table discussions and focus groups. These submissions have come from a variety of perspectives, including:

- people with disability
- family, friends and carers of people with disability
- industry, including operators and providers of public transport
- local government.

What's going well?

Responses show that:

- Public transport operators and providers have made significant efforts to improve accessibility and remove barriers.
- There are many examples that show where accessibility has improved.
- There are many examples of good practice being implemented around the country.
- Newer public transport is being designed and developed to comply with the Transport Standards.

What needs work?

Responses show that:

- Improvements to transport accessibility have been incremental and patchy.
- There are still accessibility challenges in some areas of public transport.
- Accessibility issues that are outside the responsibility of public transport operators and providers, or outside the scope of the Transport Standards, mean an individual's journey may not be accessible across the whole journey.
- There are concerns about how compliance with the Transport Standards are enforced. Currently the only mechanism for enforcing compliance is through complaints made by individual public transport users.
- There are no national requirements for public transport operators and providers to report on their compliance with the Transport Standards and therefore no way of accurately knowing levels of compliance and identifying which areas need the most work.
- It is difficult for public transport operators and providers to upgrade old public transport assets to add accessibility features because of cost, disruption, and technical issues.

Many responses suggested that truly accessible public transport can only be achieved by involving people with disability across all aspects of design, procurement and implementation of public transport, including the design of the Transport Standards and supporting documents.

Awareness and understanding of public transport accessibility

It is clear from responses to the review that members of the public have a low level of awareness of the Transport Standards, its supporting Guidelines and the Whole Journey Guide. Public transport users were keen to improve public awareness, not only of the Transport Standards, but also of the needs of people with different types of disability when accessing public transport – particularly in relation to seating and getting on and off conveyances.

While public transport providers and operators are aware of the Transport Standards, they may not be consistently understood or applied, particularly by public transport staff in frontline or customer service roles. There were many calls from public transport users for more training of public transport providers and operators and their staff about their obligations under the Transport Standards, and training to support and communicate with people with accessibility needs, including those with hidden disabilities. Many responses suggested that involving people with disability in the design and delivery of this training would have better results for both public transport users and staff.

Accessibility across the whole public transport journey

A lack of accessible public transport heavily impacts the lives of people with disability. It can result in safety risks, injury, inability to access healthcare and other services, and social isolation.

What's going well?

Responses from public transport users found there have been improvements to public transport accessibility in several areas, including:

- Access to information to assist with journey planning and journey tracking
- Improvements in ticketing, seating, shelter and boarding access
- Assistance animal toilets in some airports
- More supportive and friendly public transport staff, particularly bus drivers.

What needs work?

Significant accessibility barriers still exist in relation to:

- **Journey planning** – accessibility information can be incomplete, inconsistent and/or unreliable. Information may not meet the needs of a broad range of disabilities, and public transport users need to navigate multiple sources of information to determine accessibility.
- **Stops, stations and terminals** – including lift access, seating and shelter, signage and announcements, access to toilets, crowding and sensory overwhelm.
- **Getting on and off** – including stairs, gaps between vehicles and platforms/curbs, availability of assistance and time allowed for getting on and off.
- **On board** – including difficulties accessing priority seating and spaces, inaccessible announcement of stops, unsafe driving and refusal of travel with assistance animals.
- **Journey disruptions** – including a lack of information to respond to planned disruptions or to know what to do when faced with unplanned disruptions, and lack of consideration of the needs of people with disability when providing alternative transport, often leaving them stranded or with long waits.

Barriers are often even greater for people with disability living in rural, regional and remote areas, because there is limited availability of accessible public transport and fewer alternative forms of transport when regular forms of transport are disrupted.

Issues related to the Transport Standards

Responses to the review highlighted a number of issues about the scope, wording and application of the Transport Standards, including:

- some confusion, conflict and lack of consistency between the Transport Standards and other related legislative standards
- exemptions or lack of clarity around how the Transport Standards apply to certain public transport types, including school buses, small aircraft and rideshare services
- the balance between operators and providers achieving compliance as a minimum and thinking beyond compliance to aim for best practice outcomes
- the dependence of accessibility across the whole journey upon factors that sit outside the scope of the Transport Standards, such as inaccessible footpaths.

Several newer issues were also noted, including the rise of autonomous vehicles, on-demand transport and rideshare, changes in mobility devices, increasing awareness of hidden disabilities and the impact of inaccessible public transport on NDIS funding and other subsidies.

Opportunities for action

The review identified several opportunities for action to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Transport Standards. The package of reforms to update the Transport Standards, announced on 20 March 2024, is addressing some of these opportunities in whole or in part. Others will require further consideration.

The review identified the following opportunities for action:

- 1. The Transport Standards, Guidelines and Whole Journey Guide are not widely known or understood.**

Lack of awareness of the Transport Standards and supporting documents means that people with disability may be unaware of their rights and what they should be able to expect in terms of accessibility of public transport. Transport operators and providers do not always understand the requirements and responsibilities for compliance with the Transport Standards.
- 2. A lack of mechanisms for measuring and enforcing compliance is a significant barrier to removing discrimination from public transport.**

There are currently no requirements for public transport operators and providers to report on their levels of compliance, and there is no way to enforce compliance beyond the complaints process. Many respondents said that a lack of accountability and enforcement of the Transport Standards contributes to the overall lack of progress toward removing discrimination from public transport.
- 3. The Transport Standards, Guidelines and Whole Journey Guide have not kept pace with change.**

The rapid change that can occur in a five-year period makes it difficult to ensure the Transport Standards are always kept up to date with changing technology and understanding of accessibility needs. Newer issues such as the introduction of autonomous vehicles and the rise of on-demand transport will also affect the application of the Transport Standards in the future.
- 4. The Transport Standards alone do not enable a fully accessible 'whole of journey'.**

Several of the issues raised in the review highlighted that accessibility across the whole of a journey relies upon interactions between the Transport Standards, Premise Standards, the broader Disability Discrimination Act and other relevant legislation. Exemption of some transport types from the Transport Standards, including small aircraft and school buses, also impacts the accessibility across a whole of journey approach for some people.
- 5. There are some specific aspects of public transport that pose particular accessibility challenges.**

Particular areas of concern included complaints processes, journey disruptions, travelling in rural, regional and remote areas, air travel, access to priority seating and availability of direct assistance.
- 6. Engagement of people with disability in the design and implementation of public transport leads to better accessibility outcomes.**

Many responses to the review called for greater engagement of people with disability in the design of public transport infrastructure and services, procurement and design of the Transport Standards and training programs for public transport staff. Responses gave examples where successful co-design has resulted in accessible public transport assets and effective solutions to accessibility issues.