



## 2022 REVIEW OF THE DISABILITY STANDARDS FOR ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT 2002

# Focus group summary: Deafblind Victoria

### Focus group details

<b><u>Date:</u></b>	17 May 2023, 1:00pm – 3:30pm (AEST)
<b><u>Location:</u></b>	██
<b><u>Type of event:</u></b>	Focus group hosted by Deafblind Victoria and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.
<b><u>Purpose of event:</u></b>	<p>In Australia, public transport operators and providers must make sure that public transport is accessible. This is managed through the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 (Transport Standards). These Standards sit under the <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i> (DDA). The Transport Standards must be reviewed every five years.</p> <p>This focus group focused on gaining the insights and experiences of Deafblind people to inform the 2022 statutory review of the Transport Standards, and covered the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• their experiences when using public transport; and</li><li>• their ideas for improving accessibility of public transport and the Transport Standards.</li></ul>
<b><u>Participants</u></b>	15 people who are Deafblind participated in the focus group.

## Feedback

- The department provided an overview of the purpose of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 and the scope of the 2022 statutory review.
- The department requested participants share their experiences of using public transport, including what works well, what does not work well and what improvements could be made.

### Heather

- Heather was unable to attend the focus group in-person. Instead, she prepared a video outlining her experiences using public transport.
- Heather has caught trains for 35 years. She noted that Orientation and Mobility training was previously mandatory for public transport staff, which was useful to support people with low vision or blindness to know where they are, so they can get where they want to go safely. She noted that it is important staff can communicate effectively with people with disability and are available to provide assistance. Heather noted this is an area that requires improvement.
- Heather noted there are issues with taxi availability. She also noted it is difficult to identify rideshare services, as they rely on users using their vision to identify the correct vehicle.
- Heather stated that Deafblind people are able to be more independent in the USA, and their practices should be considered the standard.

### Gina

- Gina uses buses, trains and trams.
- Gina noted trams are not comfortable and can be dangerous to use. Gina also noted there are safety risks when crossing the road to reach a tram stop due to the boarding point location.
- Gina noted she has missed her bus services in the past, as she cannot identify when the bus is arriving, and the bus driver does not always realise she is trying to hail the service.
  - Sometimes, this is because there are either insufficient or damaged tactile ground surface indicators. This makes the bus stop confusing to navigate.
- Gina said she sometimes struggles to locate the myki 'touch-on' gates. Similarly, she sometimes finds it difficult to locate staff. If no staff are available, this makes the journey more difficult to complete.
- Overall, Gina wants to see greater consistency across services. Sometimes, these situations are too dangerous, and she consequently opts to not travel using public transport. This impacts her independence.
- Gina said she used to travel more frequently, when her father could assist her.
- Gina noted that the proliferation of touch screens has meant she can no longer travel independently. This makes it harder to access the community and services – for example, self-service check-in booths.
- Gina also noted that communication barriers have resulted in her not being able to travel independently.
- Gina said it is hard to travel. She relies on a CommGuide and is not independent.
- Gina said in the USA, their system is so good it is like it is in the space age. She said this should be the standard.

- Gina shared an experience catching the train at Southern Cross Station. She said it was too dark to see properly, and she could not see the driver of the train properly to indicated she needed support boarding. This makes it confusing.
- Gina agreed that the state-based taxi subsidy scheme is an issue and it should be unified.

### **Trudy**

- Trudy noted there are issues with the connecting infrastructure to public transport sites, such as street crossings.
- Trudy said that there are ongoing issues with taxis. Sometimes there are issues with the booking system, which makes it hard.
- Trudy suggested the current state-by-state concession system should be expanded to a national program, to ensure all taxi drivers accept the concession fares.
- Trudy suggested regional taxi services should be subsidised to support people to travel to the city. Without travel options, people may become isolated.
- Trudy queried where the funding for these changes is going to come from, noting upgrades are expensive. She is worried about whether these changes can actually be implemented.

### **Joe**

- Joe shared an experience where he was assaulted on a train while travelling with a CommGuide. Joe required the support of the Police, but did not receive an adequate response.
- Joe shared an experience where he caught a taxi with his family. He wrote instructions for the driver, but the taxi drove to the wrong destination. There were also communication barriers with the driver.
  - Joe said he has been advocating for improvements to taxi accessibility for 20 years, but nothing has improved – the Government hasn't done anything to address these issues. This makes him very frustrated.
- Joe said he wants feedback to be validated by Government. He said there is a lack of education in public transport agencies about accessibility issues, so he does not have faith change can be achieved.
- Joe shared that he worked for Government for 32 years, but was fired because of his disability.

### **Michelle**

- Michelle has been catching V/Line trains for 40 years. Due to her mobility issues, she experiences issues catching trains.
- The biggest issue is that conductors don't guide her wheelchair up the boarding ramp due to occupation health and safety risks. This means Michelle requires the support of a CommGuide to catch the train. Michelle noted she experiences additional barriers to sighted people, as she requires support to use the ramp. This is discriminatory.
- Michelle noted in Western Australia this is not an issue, as the train is level to the platform. The current design of ramps used in Victoria is too steep and narrow, and is a barrier for vision impaired people.
- Michelle noted the current state-based taxi subsidy scheme should be nationalised. This would benefit government, users and the taxi industry.

- Michelle would like to see airline and airport staff complete more training to assist passengers with disability. Michelle suggested all airline staff should understand some basic signs to communicate with hearing impaired passengers.
- Michelle supported the notion that taxi companies should become registered NDIS providers in Victoria, like in Western Australia.
- Michelle asked what the department is doing with this information and how will it be acted upon.
- The department explained that the review of the Transport Standards is seeking to understand whether discrimination is being removed from public transport services, and whether changes are needed to meet the needs of people with disability. This information will be analysed along with feedback provided by other people with disability, the public transport industry and government to write a report, which will contain recommendations.
- Michelle noted that communication barriers are the biggest issue for Deafblind people. Michelle noted Deafblind Victoria provide training to people in a wide range of fields, including public transport providers to help them understand the needs of Deafblind people. Michelle noted this needs to continue.

### **Kathy**

- Kathy shared she travels from Mitcham Station using both trains and taxis. Kathy uses these services to go places she likes to visit.

### **Alex**

- Alex said that it should be mandatory for electric vehicles to make noise, as if they are too quiet, it is dangerous for Deafblind people.
- Alex said he catches the train to work. He said the announcements that come from the speakers are muffled and too quiet. He relies on a CommGuide to understand what the announcement says. This is an issue for announcements from both the control centre and from the driver. Alex suggested announcements in the train should also say what side of the train the doors will open to disembark from. Alex said this will improve independence.
- Alex said that the information button available on platforms is often misconfigured, or has speakers that have similar issues.
- Alex said it would be helpful if the Myki machine was accessible. Alex said it was frustrating that station staff often had to be called over to open the accessible gate. He said it would save time and make it easier for everyone if the accessible gate was left unlocked.
- Alex said trams in the city are often not accessible. They have steep stairs – these should be replaced with ramps. He also said that sometimes tram drivers are impatient, and do not wait long enough for you to sit down safely.

### **Alison**

- Alison catches the train to Geelong. She said there are issues when a service is cancelled.
- She shared an experience where everyone got off the train, but she was unaware of what the alternative arrangements / plan was – for example, where is the correct replacement bus. She also said she had issues receiving information about where the replacement bus was stopping. On this occasion, the replacement stopped at a different location to what the driver initially told her due to an unplanned change of driver. This was not communicated to Alison, and was incredibly frustrating.

- Alison shared another experience where the next stop information sign on the train was showing the incorrect information. As it was dark outside, Alison relies on this caption to understand where she is on her journey. Consequently, she needs to be very careful to keep track of her location. This makes travelling challenging.

### **Karen (Deafblind Consultant)**

- Karen shared some perspectives on behalf of Deafblind peoples' experiences using public transport in Western Australia.
- Karen reiterated the need for electric vehicles to consider accessibility needs, including for assistance animals.
- Karen noted that while there is a reasonable amount of tactile signage in Western Australia, issues arise when there is damage to the sign. This can present as a barrier to travel, and in her experience, can take a long time to get fixed. The requests for repairs get stuck in a loop with the public transport agency – in one instance taking twelve months. This is a significant issue.
- Karen reiterated issues related to taxi subsidies. She noted in WA, taxi companies are registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) providers. This allows the taxi fare to be paid through the NDIS where no other suitable travel is available. This is good, and also allows users to build trusted relationships with regular drivers. The booking system also ensures the driver is aware of any accessibility needs prior to picking up the passenger.
- Karen noted in Western Australia you can book someone to meet you at a taxi rank, support you to board the train, and then meet you at the destination to support you to disembark. You can pre-book this service through the public transport operator and it works very well.

### **Robert**

- Robert noted he is independent if conditions are right – for example, if there is adequate lighting and if he has familiarity with his route. However, he experiences issues if conditions are not right. For example, at his local train station, the underpass is only adequately lit at one end. The light has not been fixed at the other end for several years. Robert also noted there are issues with consistency. For example, some buses have bright signs which show the route number, whereas on others this sign is too dim, making it difficult to travel. Similarly, at some train stations the signs are black with white text, which is good. But at other stations, the sign is white with black text, which is difficult to read.

### **Rodney**

- Rodney often catches the train and bus.
- Rodney has trouble reading the bus route number – and in the past has accidentally boarded the wrong service.
- Rodney finds it difficult to catch trains independently due to communications barriers. This is frustrating.

### **Gil**

- Gil said that when he travels to the city, it is very difficult to catch the train with his walking frame due to the step. He often has to lift the walking frame up a steep step.
- Gil said it is also difficult to walk down ramps at train stations because it's hard to use the breaks if it is too steep. This makes him feel nervous. He is scared of falling over – so he needs a support worker

to help him. This means he cannot travel independently. However, he only has a support worker three days a week. This is not enough, and means he cannot always travel using public transport.

#### **Andrew**

- Andrew shared an experience when he was travelling on a V/Line train using his trolley. He received assistance to board, but the trolley tipped over inside the train due to a tripping hazard. Passengers had to assist him to pick it up. Andrew said that tripping hazards are an impediment to safe travel on trains and at train stations.

#### **Kathy**

- Kathy said that sometimes at Flinders Street Station it is hard to read signage because of the colour and glare. The font size and colour can be an issue. This is a barrier to identifying the correct train.

#### **Deb**

- Deb said there are issues with both trains and trams, but boarding with support workers or family makes it accessible. This made her feel safe and she was very grateful.

#### **Chris (interpreter)**

- Chris noted that stations with no staff have a booth with a button that delivers an audio announcement with service information. This is not accessible for people with hearing impairment.
- Chris shared an experience about how he only realised the train drivers deliver updates about the service via audio announcement along a journey. He only realised this because he was traveling with a colleague who was not hearing impaired. If you cannot hear this information, you may miss out on important updates.
- Chris noted the DDA aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and seeks to remove discrimination. However, he does not believe he has seen enough progress, and feels this is discriminatory.

#### **Andrew**

- Andrew said on trains, he cannot read the display board, but the app is helpful and easy to use. He said that it is frustrating when there are inconsistencies across stations.