

19 June 2023

Phone submission to the 2022 Review of the Transport Standards

Georgie, Tasmania

- Neurodivergent and chronic illness.
- On low tier NDIS access funding. Lives at home with her parents and relies on public transport to access the community.
 - o Relies on Ubers and her dad. Very expensive, not sustainable in the long run.
- Trying to move out. When she moves out, living close to public transport will be a priority.
- Georgie enjoys going out to local cafes, the botanical gardens and other “third spaces”. This allows her to get out of the house and interact with the community independently.
 - o When public transport is inaccessible, people who rely on public transport have a lot of their autonomy taken away. This impacts their dignity and mental health.
 - o “When we can’t use public transport a lot of our autonomy is taken away”
- Doesn’t live on a bus route
 - o Buses are the main form of public transport in Tasmania.
 - o Has lived in multiple places in the area, none of which has been on a bus route able to walk to a bus.
- Tasmania is a car-dominated state.
 - o If you do catch public transport, you have to walk to the bus stop or find a place to park your car.
 - o Certain times of the day the bus gets very crowded (peak hour).
 - o Tasmania is very behind when it comes to public transport compared to other states.
 - o Can’t rely on public transport. If you do, you have to walk long distances. If you’re a person with a disability that presents a barrier.
- Georgie shared some concerns about safety, cost and accessibility, and some suggestions to improve.
 - o Georgie also felt that Covid-conscious people are underrepresented in consultations about accessibility.
- Georgie explained that you “hear people say you should just use public transport [buses], not Uber. But the people who say this don’t use public transport themselves”.
 - o People planning public transport need to be users of public transport and local to the area.
- A lot of benefits for people with disability are skewed towards people with physical disability.
- “People assume public transport must be okay because I’m 15 mins from the cbd, but it’s not.”

Safety

- Sometimes people make her feel uncomfortable – won’t stop talking, infringing on personal space or acting aggressive.
 - o “I pick up tension, if there’s a situation where there’s something going wrong, it makes me feel uncomfortable”.
- People with Autism and other disabilities are often more vulnerable to harassment on public transport.
 - o Georgie explained that neurodivergent people often have intersecting marginalized identities (e.g. statistically more likely to be LGBTQ) and are especially vulnerable to harassment on public transport.
- Georgie explained that she feels unsafe catching the bus at night and sometimes during the day.

- Ubers feel like the safest option; however, they are also the most expensive.
 - o Georgie explains that riding alone in a taxi as a woman with a male driver feels unsafe. Uber (and other rideshare) allow more choice in drivers, drivers are reviewed and the app shows you where you are on the journey.
- Buses also feel unsafe, especially at night. Walking to and from, and waiting for the bus also can be unsafe.
- Don't feel comfortable using public transport after dark. Always makes sure to sit up front near driver, even then on high alert. Must rely on someone picking her up from the bus stop.
 - o Vulnerable female in the dark by myself
 - o Certain places I avoid once it's past a certain time. Streets quiet no one around.

Cost

- "I shouldn't have to pay \$50 to leave my house, go to the city, and come back to my house"
- Many people with disability are low-income and may rely on the Disability Support Pension and the NDIS.
 - o Ubers are not covered in the taxi subsidy scheme. Taxis feel less safe than Ubers and are more likely not to show up, so Georgie much prefers Ubers.
 - o "The amount of funding I receive for transport shouldn't be dependent on me going to activities put on by other people. I should have autonomy picking where I want to go."
- The cost of public transport is often too much for people with disability, especially those who cannot use buses/ trains/ trams. This means a lot of people with disability are not able to leave their homes and access the community.
 - o Georgie likes to visit places in the community such as cafes and the botanical gardens. It costs \$25 each way to access these places. Because of the cost, she can't do this as much as she would like.
 - o Services are available for transport to and from some medical appointments, organized social events and by appointment. However, this takes away a person's autonomy, as they cannot decide when they want to go out, they have to wait for a support worker or volunteer.
 - o Being able to leave the house safely and comfortably when you would like to is important for independence and mental health. Georgie explained that "if I wake up and the weather is nice, I would like to be able to go out and visit the botanical gardens", but the cost of Uber to get there means she often is not able to do this. There is also no bus that easily takes you from Georgie's area to the gardens.
- Neurodivergent people may feel overwhelmed on the bus, especially during peak hour. Buses also do not service all parts of Hobart. As such, they must take rideshare and taxis. However, rideshare and taxis are substantially more expensive than local buses. If a person cannot afford this extra expense, they aren't able to leave their house to engage with the community, go to medical appointments and run errands.
- Can get discounted bus trips. Can't access taxi subsidies. Concessions can be available to you, but you have to be using that specific form of public transport.
 - o Would be nice to have another option available, give more autonomy to users.
 - o Open taxi subsidy to Ubers. Uber more accessible – pet friendly and accessible app.
- Not allowing passengers to pay with cash presents a barrier. There aren't always places nearby/ open to buy a metro card.
- Concession public transport card can be hard to get. Immediate access important. People who use concession cards deserve the same ease of access as people who don't use concession cards.

- Some states allow you to get a concession card immediately, some require you to apply in advance.

Accessibility

- Bus stops aren't accessible. They are too small, don't have enough seating and often the shelter is too far from the road to allow you to see/ line up for the bus.
- Buses are loud, have lots of smells and other things going on. This can be very overwhelming for people with autism and may prevent them from being able to use public transport.
 - Georgie explains that the "dinging" noise the bus makes when requesting stops, loud school children and the different smells encountered on the bus all add up to be very overwhelming.
- Buses take a long time to get anywhere, especially on the weekend when less buses run. This makes the experience more unpleasant and less accessible.
- Payment systems can be difficult to work out. Georgie explained that having the system available on your phone may be easier to work.
- Bus stops aren't always close to your home or the place you want to go. Lots of people with disability might not be able to walk that far and thus can't access the bus.
 - Hobart doesn't have many buses and so this is a big problem there.
- In Hobart, bus drivers sometimes miss stops and get "grumpy" when this is pointed out. Georgie explained that neurodiverse people using public transport, and others, are not always comfortable asking for what they need or confrontation, and bus drivers not being kind makes public transport more inaccessible.

Covid conscious people

- Georgie explained that Covid conscious people often aren't heard when talking about accessibility.
- Many people are Covid conscious due to chronic health conditions (including disabilities).
- Explained that it is important for there to be options like rideshare and taxis for people who cannot go on crowded buses due to Covid risks.
- Georgie also explained that with people getting long Covid and the accompanying Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, the number of people with a disability is increasing.

Improvements

- Georgie explained that "most of the people making these decisions about public transport are people who can drive, have money and live in cities".
 - Suggested paying people with disability (or giving them free public transport access) to provide advice on how to improve public transport networks.
- A "quiet bus", much like the quiet carriages on trains for people who are overwhelmed on busy crowded buses.
- A seat that has space around it (e.g. a seat kept free next to it) for use by neurodiverse people who are uncomfortable with the smells, sounds etc. of crowded spaces.
- The burden of reliving traumatic events during consultation should be paid.
- Some consultations need broader advertisement to reach more groups.
 - A blanket approach doesn't work in consultation
- Public transport is expensive and the current NDIS model and disability support pension are not enough.
 - Georgie understands this is not our area, but pointed out that it is important context for why public transport accessibility is so important.

- Georgie explained that many neurodiverse people may not have a diagnosis as wait times are long and diagnosis can be expensive, and it is important to support these people too.
- Cost of insurance, cost of car, petrol high cost, license, possible subsidy for car ownership
- Modified vehicles, discount if you have a disability card, not everyone has a card.