

# Submission – 2022 Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport

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# QDN

QUEENSLANDERS WITH DISABILITY NETWORK  
*NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US*

Submitted to the Department Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, June  
2023

## About Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) is an organisation of, for, and with people with disability. The organisation's motto is "nothing about us without us". QDN operates a state-wide network of over 2,000 members and supporters and almost 30 peer support groups around the state who provide information, feedback and views from a consumer perspective to inform systemic disability policy and disability advocacy.

## Introduction and acknowledgements

QDN welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the 2022 Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 (DSAPT). QDN is aware that the Australian Government is required to review these Standards every five years for efficiency and effectiveness.

It is broadly acknowledged that people with disability face risks, barriers and impacts in relation to many areas of their lives that people without disability do not. This relates not only to their health and disability needs but is also impacted by individual and contextual factors such as age, gender, LGBTIQ+ status, socio-economic status, family environment, where someone lives, whether they are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and whether they are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. These risks, barriers and impacts are further compounded when systems and structures such as transport, health and housing are designed in ways that exclude people with disability and further isolate them.

QDN also acknowledges Australia's commitments to upholding the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) and Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031. Australia is a party to the CRPD, which recognises the equal right of all persons with disability to live in the community, with choices equal to others, to access all aspects of the physical and social environment on an equal basis with others. In relation to accessibility (Article 9 of the CRPD), people with disability should be enabled to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life. Parties to the Convention are to take appropriate measures to ensure to people with disability are able to access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.<sup>1</sup>

QDN acknowledges the DSAPT has defined a minimum standard of service that people with disability can expect in a public transport system. However, not all parts of the journey are covered by DSAPT. Public transport systems are mobility systems embedded within urban, suburban or rural landscapes and they depend on the accessibility of these landscapes for their efficacy. The precincts in which the public transport systems are located must be accessible. Until this occurs public transport systems will not be fully accessible to people with disability, even though they may be fully compliant with the DSAPT.

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<sup>1</sup> See more information on Article 10 of the CRPD here: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-9-accessibility.html>

Unfortunately, QDN members report that the DSAPT has not been able to deliver an accessible ‘whole of journey’ outcome. Significant parts of the journey fall outside the jurisdiction of operators and providers of public transport services. These will mostly be infrastructure and premises controlled by local authorities and private entities. While the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) covers these locations, its complaints driven application and lack of a Disability Standard for premises that do not have a Building Class makes regulating and upgrading these premises and locations difficult.

In making our submission, QDN acknowledges the expertise of our members across Queensland. This submission involved a state wide, targeted consultation of QDN’s peer leaders to seek member views and lived experience of public transport usage to inform our response.

QDN also acknowledges the tireless work of QDN Life Member John McPherson for his expertise in accessibility standards in general, but particularly the DSAPT Standards and the importance of people with disability having access to reliable, accessible and safe public transport. John’s knowledge and professional work in this space informs this submission and influences the future provision of accessible public transport.

QDN also dedicates this submission to QDN Founding Member and Chairperson, Bill Garsden. Bill died earlier this year and leaves a legacy of being a steadfast advocate for people with disability. Additional to being QDN’s Founding Chairperson, Bill was also passionate about accessible Public Transport, leading the Transport Lobby Group. In John McPherson’s words:

*The Transport Lobby Group (TLG) - -a nebulous collection of likeminded rogues of who Bill was among the ‘rogueyest’- coalesced in the early 1990s around the matter of inaccessible public transport. They were of course part of a greater national movement. The TLG used the newly minted Qld Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 to enter into negotiations with Brisbane City Council regarding accessibility of buses and ferries. Bill began the negotiations with a very emphatic nod and shrewd good humour. The negotiation went the TLG's way. The first City Cat ferry (Kurilpa featured an accessible toilet and plenty of circulation space. Low floor buses entered service well before required. This resulted in Brisbane buses being 100% low floor by 2015--seven years before the deadline. Council acknowledged the TLG's contribution in a rather generous chat with Cr Hayes.*

## **What do QDN members think about the Transport Standards?**

- **Are you familiar with the Transport Standards and what they are designed to do? If so, where did you find out about the Transport Standards? Do we need to increase awareness of the Transport Standards? If so, how?**

QDN is aware that the DSAPT is well known to most disability advocates and access consultants. Jurisdictions are also well aware of them, and Industry is largely aware of them. People with disability, their families and supporters may be aware Standards exist, but little has occurred in terms of peer led, public education to ensure people with disability are informed of the Standards and know how to use the Standards to ensure their rights are met in terms of safe, accessible public transport. Peer led and co-designed educational programs will benefit the public and better equip them for participating in ongoing reforms of the DSAPT.

The purpose of the DSAPT is to meet the objects of the DDA and to enable public transport operators and providers to remove all forms of discrimination from public transport services.

While the DSAPT has focused on minimum Standards, some projects have opted to exceed minimum compliance and have achieved commendable results. This has often involved consultation and co-design with the disability sector. While currently not required by the DDA in the case of prescriptive solutions this engagement is good practice that inevitably leads to improved outcomes that benefit the wider public.

Currently, consultation only applies to Equivalent Access and Unjustifiable Hardship solutions, however, it would be useful if the reformed DSAPT required consultation on prescriptive solutions. Following the Commission of inquiry into New Generation Rollingstock Trains this approach has been adopted by the Queensland government.<sup>2</sup> The Cross River Rail<sup>3</sup> project and the Queensland Train Manufacturing Program<sup>4</sup> are good examples of projects exceeding base compliance via Equivalent Access solutions that are developed through co-design.

Many QDN members have been actively engaged in several current co-design processes through QDeNgage.<sup>5</sup> The sector and its representatives see the benefit of involvement that allows them to convey user experience and needs directly to the tender proponents and infrastructure/ premises designers. It is therefore important that transport operators and providers see people with disability and the broader disability sector as partners in solution development via meaningful consultation and co-design processes.

An ongoing promotion and education program for the DSAPT would be useful. Ongoing education of the procurers, designers and builders of public transport assets is also essential. This should include a compulsory module focussed on community engagement during project evaluation and implementation. Other education programs tailored to suit the audience could be developed through a co-design process and delivered in various formats by the Australian Human Rights Commission industry and disability sector to their respective constituencies. Educating the general public is always a valuable exercise. A multimedia approach would no doubt assist members of the public to better understand the needs of people with disability in public transport. Contracts that require service providers to fully comply with DSAPT, and report against their efforts to reach compliance with legacy assets, should be standard in all jurisdictions.

- **To what extent do you think the Transport Standards have removed discrimination from public transport services?**

Despite the existence of the DSAPT, many people with disability still report experiencing discrimination while using public transport. The Australian Institute of Health and welfare (AIHW) shows a realistic account of the situation still facing some people with disability in relation to use of public transport despite the DDA and DSAPT. According to the report, about 1 in 6 (16% or 326,000) people aged 15–64 with disability, living in households who leave home, have difficulty using some or all forms of public transport.

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<sup>2</sup> For further information see: 4 <https://www.traininquiryng.qld.gov.au/assets/custom/docs/government-response-tofinal-report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> For further information see: 8 <https://crossriverrail.qld.gov.au/about/accessibility/>

<sup>4</sup> For further information see: <https://crossriverrail.qld.gov.au/about/accessibility/>

<sup>5</sup> QDeNgage connects organisations with specialist consultants who bring professional expertise and lived experience of disability to provide practical business solutions. For more information, see: <https://qdn.org.au/our-work/qdengage/>

About 1 in 9 (11% or 221,000) people aged 15–64 with disability, living in households who leave home, are unable to use public transport at all. About 1% (21,000) of people aged 15–64 with disability living in households do not leave home.<sup>6</sup>

A DSAPT requirement for targeted consultation and co-design for all solutions will go a long way to rectifying discrimination that has occurred in the past in relation to public transport. The CRPD and Australia's Disability Strategy (2021-2031) also have requirements regarding consultation that needs to be met. Having no voice, or only a limited voice, in the delivery of new or refurbished assets has disadvantaged passengers with disability. This is particularly the case when solutions are implemented in the absence of co-designing solutions that offer 'function and accessibility'. Co-design has achieved outstanding results at new underground stations<sup>7</sup>, new above ground stations<sup>8</sup> and refurbished legacy stations<sup>9</sup> that in many cases were constructed over 100 years ago.

Aligning with the practice of the Cross River Rail Delivery Authority, the CRPD makes it clear that people with disability shall be closely consulted on matters that concern them via their representative organisations. Article 4, under General obligations 3, states, “In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present Convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.”<sup>10</sup>

Co-design during procurement and design would have saved Queensland's NGR trains from the conflict and contention that followed their acquisition as the Commission of inquiry into New Generation Rollingstock Trains noted under section 6.9 of the Inquiry report, “Findings and conclusions... Inadequate consultation during procurement process In the Commissions’ view, consultation during the procurement phase of the NGR project was inadequate... While there are strict confidentiality and probity requirements in procurement processes, in the Commission’s view, this did not preclude consultation with key stakeholders to inform performance specifications. Undertaking genuine, consultation about NGR train design from an accessibility perspective prior to or early in the procurement process, without disclosing confidential information, would have facilitated a greater understanding of accessibility considerations and preferences...This could then have informed performance specifications, requests for changes and negotiations about proponents’ proposals, and highlighted key accessibility requirements for consideration through the procurement and design approval process.”<sup>11</sup>

In 2022 QDN launched its QDN Leadership Framework and Co-Design Principles. The purpose of this framework is to make visible and accessible, the focus and pathways for leadership by and for Queenslanders with disability. QDN’s principles of co-design guide and inform effective quality and authentic engagement of people with disability. As end users of services, products, policy and laws in their design, it is important that leaders with disability are involved from the beginning, by leading and influencing innovation,

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<sup>6</sup> For further information see: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-inaustralia/contents/justice-and-safety/disabilitydiscrimination#Access%20to%20facilities%20and%20services>

<sup>7</sup> For further information see: <https://crossriverrail.qld.gov.au/stations-routes/>

<sup>8</sup> For further information see: <https://crossriverrail.qld.gov.au/stations-routes/gold-coast-line/>

<sup>9</sup> For further information see: <https://crossriverrail.qld.gov.au/stations-routes/salisbury-to-fairfield-line>

<sup>10</sup> For further information see <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-ofpersons-with-disabilities.html> and 14 <https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/ads/strategy>

<sup>11</sup> For further information see: <https://www.traininginquiryng.rail.gov.au/assets/custom/docs/coi-final-report-2018.pdf>

improvements and impact. With a motto of ‘nothing about us without us’, we hold this central to the way we work and co-design. We believe that people with disability need to be included from the beginning in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of services, policy, and products. Co-design is a key process, which when done well means that people with disability are meaningfully, equally, and authentically collaborating to create solutions that deliver quality outcomes, and lead and influence inclusive positive change.<sup>12</sup>

The DSAPT has not seen any significant update to the referenced Australian Standards since its publication. By using outdated technical standards operators and providers are able to claim full compliance with DSAPT. New technologies such as smartphones, electronic ticketing, digital screens have emerged and been missed by DSAPT. QDN supports the call for reform of the DSAPT standards to be inclusive of this technology so that access standards can be updated.

Regarding the provision of accessible information in alternative formats, the DSAPT says this should be “timely”. Failure to provide accessible information in a timely manner falls short of international good practice. Network Rail, a UK government body, produced a Policy document Accessible Travel Policy; Making Rail Accessible—Helping Older and Disabled Passengers<sup>13</sup> commits to a timeframe for supply of this accessible information, stating “We will action this within seven working days.”<sup>14</sup> The report recognised the need for level entry in all stops, though QDN acknowledges this is difficult to regulate for all circumstances due to topography. DSAPT should require that information in preferred formats be provided in a timely manner as per CRPD Article 21. 'Timely' will understandably vary with requested format and whether the operator or provider is based regionally or in a metropolitan area.

QDN strongly holds the view that information on Standards or the DSAPT should be freely available to members of the public and not hidden behind a paywall or be difficult or arduous to access. Making this hard to access or incurring a cost to access this information is in contradiction to Article 9 of the CRPD; Accessibility.

A nationally consistent, easily accessed and comprehensive database that provides accurate and current accessibility information on all assets covered by DSAPT is needed. Over its 20-year life the DSAPT-2002 has not required nationally consistent compliance data to be periodically supplied by operators and providers. The DSAPT provides no framework for nationally consistent data gathering and reporting on the 'efficiency and effectiveness of these Standards.'

The DSAPT allows for Temporary Exemptions. In most instances these have been for legitimate reasons, for a fixed time and were supported by the disability sector. A small minority of operators and providers seem to have taken a different approach and have had numerous extensions to their exemptions. QDN and our members believe the granting of these extensions requires more monitoring.

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<sup>12</sup> Read more about QDN; s principles of co-design here: <https://qdn.org.au/qdn-launches-leadership-framework-and-co-design-principles/>

<sup>13</sup> For more information on this policy see: <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Making-rail-accessible-helping-older-and-disabled-passengers.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> For more information see: <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Accessible-TravelPolicy.pdf>

- **In the past five years, have you seen improvements in accessibility and safety for people with disability on public transport services? What improvements have you seen?**

*Frequency of services has improved in the last five years.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area.

*I've not noticed any great improvements in the last five years, my vision impairment is invisible until I am moving around. I've had people approach me when sitting in disability seating, because people don't understand invisible disability. They have asked me to move or ask me why I am sitting there.*

- QDN Member, metropolitan area.

*There have been some improvements in getting on and off buses.*

- QDN member, Far North Queensland.

*QR staff attitudes to people with disability have improved. Auchenflower signage is excellent – good location, good contrast.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

*During Covid, everything in the trains was very clean. This means it was easier/nicer to use. Accessible toilets were in good order during this time.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

*Station upgrades, for example, Yeerongpilly has been a great improvement.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

QDN notes that there have been some improvements in the past five years. Some improvements have been driven by DSAPT while others have been driven by the DDA as the items are not covered by DSAPT. Improvements have included operators and providers implementing contemporary practices or procuring contemporary products that have improved the accessibility of the public transport system for all users. QDN believes it is fair to assert that the quality of all assets improves as the level of consultation and co-design undertaken in their design increases.

A summary of improvements is as follows:

- **New infrastructure and premises:** Newly built transport infrastructure and premises are often of high quality. New rail stations, tram stations and stops and new bus stops, stations and interchanges are usually in full compliance with DSAPT.
- **Next stop announcements:** A number of route buses have now entered service or will soon enter service that feature audio-visual next stop announcements as standard.

- **Rail station accessibility upgrades:** Complimentary to the Cross River Rail upgrades to legacy stations are the Station Accessibility Upgrade Program<sup>15</sup>, Logan and Gold Coast Faster Rail<sup>16</sup> project and other projects still developing business cases. The target date of December 31, 2022, for 100% compliance has not been met—it has at least been steady and has involved credible consultation processes.
- **On-demand transport:** On-demand transport is an emerging means of moving people within local areas. Its door to door capability is seen as one way to overcome precinct difficulties<sup>17</sup> and media reports tend to indicate a degree of success in this area.
- **School buses:** Transport and Main Roads (TMR, Queensland) has a funding program to assist eligible school bus operators purchase roll-over compliant buses.<sup>18</sup> TMR also subsidises wheelchair lifts on eligible school buses.<sup>19</sup> QDN believes school buses should not be DSAPT exempt.
- **Hailing:** People with vision or cognitive impairment often have difficulty in identifying and hailing their service. On bus station platforms, people with a vision impairment can use the platform help phone to inform the Translink Busway Operations Centre (BOC) that they are at a particular platform and require a particular service. Brisbane City Council provides a Visually Impaired Passenger Telephone Service<sup>20</sup> that covers the 6,000 plus bus stops in its network.
- **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 (WCAG):** QDN is pleased that many projects are voluntarily implementing WCAG 2.1 AA when developing new online resources and apps. WCAG 2.1 has success criteria for mobile devices that are missing from WCAG 2.0. Mobile devices are increasingly important means of obtaining services and information, so this development is welcome. It would be preferred though if WCAG 2.1 AAA was implemented wherever practicable as this includes success criteria for audio description, Auslan interpretation and other success criteria that better include people with sensory disabilities.
- **Bus stop tactile signs, Quick Response (QR) Codes and Near Field Communication (NFC) tags:** Braille and tactile inserts with QR codes have been installed in Brisbane CBD bus stop blades (signposts at a bus stop). These allow people with vision impairment to identify the stop by touch and via the QR code access the timetable information printed on the blade. NFC tags are being installed at Queensland bus stops after a successful trial.<sup>21</sup> The tags provide easy smartphone access to stop related information and timetables.

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<sup>15</sup> For further information see: <https://www.queenslandrail.com.au/inthecommunity/projects/station-accessibilityupgrade-program>

<sup>16</sup> For further information see: <https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/projects/logan-and-gold-coast-faster-rail>

<sup>17</sup> For further information see: <https://theconversation.com/how-on-demand-buses-can-transform-travel-and-dailylife-for-people-with-disabilities-199988>

<sup>18</sup> For further information see: <https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/travel-and-transport/school-transport/assistanceschemes/school-bus-upgrade-scheme>

<sup>19</sup> For further information see: 80 [https://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/forms/QF4763/\\$file/F4763\\_C FD.pdf](https://www.support.transport.qld.gov.au/qt/formsdat.nsf/forms/QF4763/$file/F4763_C FD.pdf) & [https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/\\_media/travelandtransport/school-transport/assistanceschemes/for-school-bus-operators-schoolbus/information-statements/schoolbusguidelines-and-conditions-16a2022.pdf?sc\\_lang=en&hash=CFA29B64FFE8FC7939ED8A7CCF6B7DB7](https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/_media/travelandtransport/school-transport/assistanceschemes/for-school-bus-operators-schoolbus/information-statements/schoolbusguidelines-and-conditions-16a2022.pdf?sc_lang=en&hash=CFA29B64FFE8FC7939ED8A7CCF6B7DB7) & [https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/\\_media/travelandtransport/school-transport/assistanceschemes/for-school-bus-operators-schoolbus/information-statements/schoolbusguidelines-and-conditions-16b2022.pdf?sc\\_lang=en&hash=6DA56E2CC67A08BE5FA676B3739EAAA8](https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/_media/travelandtransport/school-transport/assistanceschemes/for-school-bus-operators-schoolbus/information-statements/schoolbusguidelines-and-conditions-16b2022.pdf?sc_lang=en&hash=6DA56E2CC67A08BE5FA676B3739EAAA8)

<sup>20</sup> For further information see: <https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/traffic-and-transport/public-transport/buses/busaccessibility>

<sup>21</sup> For further information see: <https://translink.com.au/news-and-media/articles/196076>



- **Public Transport Infrastructure Manual:** TMR updated its Public Transport Infrastructure Manual (PTIM) in 2020.<sup>22</sup> This publication is welcome as it seeks best practice outcomes rather than minimum compliance.
- **Assistance dog toilets:** People who rely on assistance and guide dogs will be limited by the degree of accessibility that the transport systems offer the dogs. Assistance dog toilets have been installed at Brisbane airports terminals.<sup>23</sup> QDN supports the call that these should be available at all major public transport nodes.
- **Lifts:** Due to advances in lift technology and the adoption of various standards, lifts are now far more accessible than is required by DSAPT, Lift cars complying with AS 1735.12- 2020 have audio announcements at all landings and these announcements are also carried over a hearing loop. In addition, the help phone is also linked to the hearing loop.
- **Do barriers still exist for people with disability using or wanting to use public transport? If so, how do you think the Transport Standards could be used to address those barriers?**

*I don't catch public transport at all – I've never found a sense of safety on public transport, even taxis – I've resorted to relying on support workers to drive me because I feel unsafe in many modes of public transport – sensory, emotionally wise and navigating systems and how they work.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area.

*E-scooters are often left abandoned at points of public transport, for example, North Quay ferry has lots of scooters parked there and this blocks access.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area.

*I am using far too much of my funding on a support worker to assist me with transport. I have very small transport funding [through the NDIS] – \$68.00 a fortnight – ... paying for their time as well as kilometres – I need to think about my support hours.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

*NDIS travel allowance is not enough to meet the increased cost of public transport.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

Unfortunately many QDN members tell us that there are numerous barriers that still exist to a fully inclusive public transport system. Some are topographic, spatial or structural in nature. Others represent a lack of funding or planning to meet the Schedule for Compliance. Some others unfortunately result from poor procurement practices that see new services and products falling short of compliance. Barriers to accessing public transport include inaccessible travel information, inadequate disability car parking, inaccessible stops and stations, as well as discriminatory or abusive behaviour.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> For further information see: <https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/public-transport-infrastructure-manual>

<sup>23</sup> For further information see: <https://www.bne.com.au/passenger/passenger-information/specialassistance/assistance-dogs>

<sup>24</sup> For further information see: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-disability-strategy/australias-disabilitystrategy-outcomes-framework/contents/inclusive-homes-and-communities/transportssystem-accessibility>

Some barriers are beyond the jurisdiction of DSAPT. Namely, our public transport journeys begin before we board the service and continue after we've left it. Therefore it is important to develop a Disability Standard that deals with public spaces and infrastructure that are not regulated by either the DSAPT or Premises Standards and which sets out clear expectations for asset owners.

To date, advocates argue that reporting on progress in implementing the DSAPT has been average at best. Australia's Disability Strategy 2021 – 2031 has reporting and data collection as central components. Ideally, reporting on public transport accessibility under the Disability Strategy would present identical data to that gathered for DSAPT reporting. This could be streamlined and cross-referenced with data that Australia is required to produce to the United Nations on our national progress in implementing the CRPD.

Decisions on what, where and when to construct or upgrade are most effective when based on accurate data. Governments and service providers do not always adequately measure and report on access, quality and costs for users. Limited reliable data exists to allow government, regulators and users to understand the total costs of infrastructure.<sup>25</sup> DSAPT has a requirement for five year reviews. Advocates argue that these reviews have been hampered by the lack of reliable and nationally consistent data.

The quality of telecommunications services varies for different groups across Australia, with digital inclusion lagging for low-income households, people who did not complete secondary school, those aged over 65 and people with disability. Without action, these people will be increasingly excluded from an increasingly digital world, exacerbating disadvantage. Improvements in technology also increase barriers to entry, in terms of skill and knowledge, for those who have not accessed services in the past. Some users do not own a smartphone or have insufficient digital literacy to access services such as ridesharing applications. Many infrastructure operators lack meaningful targets for improving access and quality for all users, or publicly available plans and strategies for achieving improvements.<sup>26</sup> Accessible IT is vital, but accessible IT as the sole source of service is discriminatory. Accessible information and services must be available in multiple formats. Some IT is based on a user pays system and that is discriminatory for people with disability as it is a barrier of affordability and costs.

Only a small proportion of Australia's route buses provide automated next stop announcements. Some smaller operators and providers have 100% of their fleet with next stop announcements. Passengers must rely on apps, which have a data cost impost, or on direct assistance from the driver. Some newer buses in Queensland do provide a next stop audio and visual announcement, which has been welcomed by people who have a vision impairment in particular. Transport for Brisbane's Yutong E12 buses are equipped with a next stop<sup>27</sup> announcement function and the 65 Metro buses currently in production will also have this function<sup>28</sup>.

*There is not enough training for staff across all areas. There is not understanding of disability and diversity, and how best to support people.* QDN member, metropolitan area

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<sup>25</sup> For further information see: <https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Australian%20Infrastructure%20Audit%202019.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> For further information see: <https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Australian%20Infrastructure%20Audit%202019.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> For further information see: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-disability-strategy/australias-disabilitystrategy-outcomes-framework/contents/inclusive-homes-and-communities/informationand-communication-systems-accessibility>

<sup>28</sup> For further information see: <https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/traffic-and-transport/public-transport/brisbanemetro/metros>

In the experience of QDN members, staff vary in their ability to offer service to passengers with a disability. In some instances this is attitudinal—for example taxi and rideshare drivers who refuse service to passengers with guide dogs<sup>29</sup>—but mostly it is a lack of disability awareness training. Participants from a recent study believed that people with disability should conduct this training<sup>30</sup>. The recommendations from this study can be broadly applied to staff throughout the public transport industry. These recommendations acknowledge the importance of staff training, particularly training co-delivered by people with a disability. Techniques for communicating with passengers who are Deaf, lip-reading, have intellectual or cognitive impairments, vision impairments and so on should be part of induction and on-going training as is the case with occupational health and safety training.

New websites, web pages and apps are not always accessible to people who rely on assistive software, such as screen readers or voice to text programs, to access the digital information or service provided. Appropriate training of contractors and clear evidence of their professional development is required.

Finding a 'a means to signal hidden disability' is well intended but should be discussed nationally among people who have hidden disabilities. A QDN member was recently given the option to wear a lanyard while travelling with Qantas as a means of identifying them as a person requiring assistance. While the lanyard is welcome, if it is the single 'proof' of hidden disability it risks excluding support for people who, while eligible for it, will not wear it. DSAPT should never force a single means of obtaining assistance on people but rather should require multiple ways of seeking support or assistance.

DSAPT should require that surfaces in public transport facilities and conveyances be non-reflective. Glare from reflective surfaces is disconcerting for many people and very poor design practice. Lighting required by DSAPT should allow a transition between the public transport facility and the surrounding precinct. Measuring the luminance contrast of objects abutting access paths, TGSIs and other features presents quite a technical challenge. A possible Equivalent Access solution that would greatly simplify luminance contrast measurement is the Get Luminance smartphone app<sup>31</sup>. Get Luminance is free to download, operates on Android and Apple systems and is simple to use. It would be extremely helpful if Get Luminance and similar rigorously test products could be highlighted in DSAPT guidance material as potential Equivalent Access solutions. Assistance and guide dogs are given rights of free passage in conveyances by Section 28.3 Location of carers, assistants and service animals. This right should extend to infrastructure and premises. If the dog cannot pass due to a design flaw, then in most instances neither will its handler.

For people with low vision digital displays must provide optimum contrast. Field trials conducted by Transport for Brisbane and Vision Australia clients confirmed the superiority of the white on black signs for contrast and legibility.

Active restraints in wheelchair accessible taxis (WATS) and accessible coaches are effective and compliant with AS/NZS 10542.1-2015 Wheelchair tiedown and occupant restraint systems Part 1 Requirements and

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<sup>29</sup> For further information see: <https://vic.guidedogs.com.au/news/guide-dogs-handlers-refused-entry-or-servicebecause-of-their-guide-dog/> & <https://vic.guidedogs.com.au/news/one-in-three-guide-dog-handlers-put-in-dangerwhen-refused-access-or-service-because-of-their-guide-dog/> & <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2022.2126794>

<sup>30</sup> For further information see: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2022.2126794>

<sup>31</sup> For further information see: <https://www.box50.com.au/home>

test methods for all systems. Unfortunately, the passive restraints in route buses fall short of good practice and are almost universally absent on the aisle side of the allocated spaces.

Public address system announcements are often not audible to people who are hard of hearing. Behind the ear hearing aids have a telecoil that allows the wearer to pick up PA messages broadcast over a magnetic induction loop. These hearing loops, when installed, are only required to cover 10% of the waiting area. Limitations on spatial coverage and time of use discriminate against people who rely on telecoils and hearing loops. The issue of hearing loops being turned off or malfunctioning without staff knowledge has been regularly reported. Without regular maintenance and checks hearing loops may simply be left off for no good reason or malfunction without the knowledge of staff. A regular testing schedule that conforms to Australian Standard is required. Users of hearing aids that are telecoil equipped rely on hearing loops to hear messages broadcasted in areas with high levels of ambient noise. These messages include communication via platform help and assistance phones.

*Hearing loops are affected by rain. Some of the new trains don't seem to have hearing loops. I've seen station masters blowing the air out of the hearing loops with leaf blowers.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

Translink have recognised this and equipped a new model platform help phone with a hearing loop. Hopefully this new help phone will be rolled out across the busway network. Unfortunately the equivalent new unit installed on rail platforms by Queensland Rail lack this essential feature. Conveyances often also have help phones, but it seems that not even the latest generation of conveyance help phones have hearing loops. The barrier to installation seems to be that DSAPT-2002 confines hearing augmentation to public address systems. The lack of hearing loops in help phones is discriminatory and may be in breach of DDA. The reformed DSAPT should require that all verbal communication systems be equipped with hearing loops.

Accessible Adult Change Facilities (AACF) are mostly not within the scope of the DSAPT as infrastructure and premises outside the Premises Standards seldom provide toilets. That said, the Premises Standards in Section F2 now require that they be installed in airports that 'that accepts domestic and/or international flights that are public transport services as defined in the Transport Standards. We are now in a situation where a new or refurbished regional airport serving hundreds of people per week must provide an AACF but a rail station or ferry terminal serving thousands per hour is excluded. The DSAPT should require AACFs for infrastructure or premises not covered by the premises Standards, wherever patronage is heavy and other toilets are provided. This would only cover a handful of large bus interchanges nationally but would certainly increase the accessibility of bus travel for people with high support needs.

Rideshare services have been a mixed experience for people with disability. While many have benefitted from the at-times, inexpensive fares and ease of an app booking system, others have been excluded from receiving services. It is unclear if any rideshare platform has the equivalent of a wheelchair accessible taxi (WAT) in service—and the DSAPT-2002 does not require that they do. People who depend on WATs or equivalent vehicles must rely on the dwindling number of WATs in the taxi fleets. Assistance animals are on occasion refused entry into rideshare vehicles. A similar situation exists with taxis. This breaches the various States and Territories' Assistance Animal Acts and the DDA. There has been some call by QDN members to make usage of the Taxi Subsidy Scheme (TSS) applicable across rideshare services.

The number of WATs on the road appears to be in decline—particularly at off peak times. Competition with rideshare services has made taxis in general far less viable economically. WATs are particularly

impacted as these are the least financially viable taxis. Even prior to rideshare, lift fees and other subsidies were required to maintain the viability of many WAT operators and drivers. The importance of lift fees to WAT viability cannot be underestimated. Without intervention of some kind the availability and reliability of WATs is sure to continue to decline.

Taxi zones (ranks) are referred to as infrastructure in DSAPT section 1.18, but DSAPT has no prescriptive requirements for their accessibility. They should have technical standards in the reformed DSAPT. On-street and off-street taxi zones are often not accessible to wheelchair users who must board or alight from WATS via the rear door. This is due to an unbroken kerb running the length of the zone. Off-street taxi zones are often far more accessible due to kerb ramps in the kerb face or same grade boarding. A consistent regulation for taxi zone accessibility regardless of location on-street or off-street is required in DSAPT. Accessible taxi zones at public transport nodes, whether on-street or off-street are an international good practice.

Passenger loading zones are public infrastructure covered by the DDA1992. For reasons unknown they are not included in the DSAPT. Their inclusion in the reformed DSAPT is vital, as they are boarding points for WATs. Inclusion of passenger loading zones in the reformed DSAPT is essential. Guidance for accessible passenger loading zones exists but is not enforceable and can be ignored. Specifications for accessible on-street passenger loading zones are available from Brisbane City Council<sup>32</sup>.

Lift cars in service prior to 2002 will be costly to retrofit because of their dimension, their appearance in legacy infrastructure, and further, the older lift cars referred to above usually have little or no capacity to upgrade their communication features. Landing audio announcements, help phones and visual displays are unable to be installed or cannot be upgraded to contemporary standards. The reformed DSAPT should require retrospective upgrades of audio messaging in all lift cars compliant with AS1735.12-1999.

For people who depend on Auslan as their first language, audio messages are incomprehensible. Service relate public address system announcements are not understood, leaving people unaware of service disruptions or upcoming works. Digital signs that can deliver service announcements in audio, caption and Auslan do exist but are rarely installed. While closed captions are good, they are not a complete solution due to the differences in spoken English and Auslan.

While the DSAPT has requirements for information, it is not specific on the accessibility of communication devices or their accessible alternatives. Most devices provided rely on the passenger's ability to hear, speak and operate the controls. The majority of, but not all, passengers can do this. A requirement for accessible alternatives to speech and hearing based communication devices is needed.

*The QR lift near Anzac Square is often not working. This makes it difficult to access the train.*

- QDN Member, metropolitan area

*Lifts at Petrie are often not operational.*

- QDN Member, metropolitan area

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<sup>32</sup> For further information see: [http://docs.brisbane.qld.gov.au/standard-drawings/201609-bsd3162\\_b\\_loading\\_zone.pdf](http://docs.brisbane.qld.gov.au/standard-drawings/201609-bsd3162_b_loading_zone.pdf)

Queensland Rail have an SMS messaging service advertised in their lifts and on their help and assistance phones for people with disability. While not stated, the same SMS service could be used in the event of difficulties while aboard a train. This SMS service is a lifeline for people who require non-verbal communication. Unfortunately, Queensland bus and ferry services do not have equivalent SMS services either on platforms/pontoons or aboard buses or ferries. It should be a DSAPT requirement to have SMS as an alternative for all phone or intercom based customer communication systems. As a minimum, operators and providers should promote the National Relay Service SMS relay.<sup>33</sup>

When rail platform changes, service failure, conveyance malfunction and similar are announced it is usually in audio format and over PA systems. Missing these messages places deaf or hard of hearing passengers under considerable stress and confusion around what is occurring and what is expected of them. Digital screens are increasingly common and are able to deliver pre-recorded messages in audio, caption and Auslan formats simultaneously. These screens can be mounted in premises, infrastructure and conveyances that have PA systems and would inform people who were Deaf or hard of hearing of service disruptions and changes.

Air travel continues to present major hurdles and challenges to passengers who have a disability. In recent times many people, including QDN members have been exposed to poor customer service experiences and communication errors which has led to a breakdown in service quality resulting in direct or indirect discrimination. Some regional Queensland airports still have no Disabled Passenger Lifter (DPL). The lack of DPL at Boulia is particularly disappointing as the Shire Council has recently upgraded the airport terminal to full compliance.

### • **Do the Transport Standards need changing?**

Many advocates argue that the DSAPT is outdated. This is mainly due to the advancements in technology that have been made to make environments more accessible. A reform process of the DSAPT is currently underway. It has been argued that without regular future reform, the DSAPT will continue to be outdated. The Guiding Principles<sup>34</sup> for the reform process are well crafted and if the reformed DSAPT conforms to them it should be well received by the disability sector.

The four guiding principles for the reforms are:

1. People with disability have a right to access public transport.
2. Accessibility is a service, not an exercise in compliance.
3. Solutions should meet the service needs of all stakeholders and be developed through co design.
4. Reforms should strive for certainty.

Five-year reviews are an obligatory component of the DSAPT. Regular mandatory reform projects should be incorporated into the DSAPT's administration. The current National Accessible Transport Taskforce

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<sup>33</sup> For further information see: 159 <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-communications-arts/phone/servicespeople-disability/accesshub/national-relay-service/service-features#smsrelay>

<sup>34</sup> For more information, see: 174 <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/infrastructure-transport-vehicles/transportaccessibility/reform-disability-standards-accessible-public-transport-2002-transportstandards>

process, which takes a human rights based approach, offers a workable vehicle for reform that could be a blue print to drive this in the future.

- **Are you aware of the guidelines supporting passengers, operators and providers when interoperating the Transport Standards?**

Generally, awareness of the guidelines is mixed among the various stakeholders. The Guidelines are useful in the areas they cover however, are in need of an update. For example, thinking on what constitutes a waiting area has changed since 2004. The Guidelines only describe large premises as having waiting areas, but the AHRC extended this in 2010 to any area that provides seating<sup>35</sup> Technologies such as SMS, smartphone apps, digital screens and other information technology may be broadly captured but no specific mention or guidance as to how they may be used in a non-discriminatory manner is available. Finding information in the Guidelines can be a challenge. Sections in the Guidelines do not match sections in the DSAPT. If Sections in the Guidelines were numbered, as per the DSAPT Sections they explained, it would be easier to find information and be more accessible.

## **Tell us about QDN members' experience of using public transport.**

- **Planning your journey**

Effort mapping<sup>36</sup> is a new technology that determines the amount of effort required to pass along an access path. This is valuable data when planning a journey as it describes the pedestrian environment in the vicinity of a public transport node. While useful data in itself, its value would greatly increase if it could be incorporated into any journey. The TransLink Journey Planner<sup>37</sup> has no information on the accessibility of boarding or alighting points. A bus journey to Annerley Library locates the Waldheim Street stop. Unfortunately, the stop is inaccessible due to a raised kerb separating road and footpath preventing a bus's boarding ramp from being deployed. A first-time traveller would discover this on arrival, as no public database of bus stop accessibility exists for Queensland.

Passenger loading zones are an essential feature of busy commercial areas. Many, if not most, are in accessible to people in wheelchairs or scooters who are travelling in rear loading wheelchair accessible taxis (WATs). This is due to a continuous kerb face separating footpath and carriageway. A passenger loading zone on Turbot St in Brisbane directly adjacent to the Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) offices and meeting rooms is fully accessible via kerb ramps. In order to plan WAT journeys to busy commercial areas a database of accessible loading zones is required.

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<sup>35</sup> For more information, see: <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/australian-human-rightscommission-accessible-bus-stops-guidelines>

<sup>36</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Travel-and-transport/Disability-access-and-mobility/Inclusive-mapping-pilot-project>

<sup>37</sup> For more information, see: <https://jp.translink.com.au/plan-your-journey/journey-planner>

A pedestrian route derived from the TransLink Journey Planner will not always deliver an accessible route. The Journey Planner has no function to allow selections of accessible pedestrian routes. Rather, it will default to the most direct route regardless of that route's accessibility.

People are often required to use several databases and apps to successfully plan their journey. This puts some people at a disadvantage, for instance, those who find planning difficult or unable to navigate the internet or download apps.

- **Public transport stops, stations or terminal lifts**

QDN members tell us that many accessible public transport facilities are located in precincts that are not accessible to some people with disability—particularly those with mobility or vision impairments. Bus stops can be isolated in grassy road verges and inappropriately parked vehicles and other objects or overgrown plants can block paths, among many other issues. A significant number of Australia's bus and tram stops are located on topography that makes compliance difficult or impossible. While these sites are entirely defensible under Unjustifiable Hardship they nevertheless remain partly or completely inaccessible for many people who have mobility impairments. Similarly, some narrow road reserves do not sufficiently permit wide footpaths to enable manoeuvring of mobility aids.

Boarding points may at times be far away from waiting areas—usually on legacy rail infrastructure. For people who require boarding assistance this means either waiting in the open away from communication and surveillance or moving quickly to the boarding point as the train arrives.

- **Information**

*I have a station access guide which outlines train services. I am able to have hard copy and online copy of information. This is sufficient for me.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area.

*Information is generally not accessible. There is too much reliance on the app. There needs to be multiple points of access for people with disability, access to money, information on screens, boarding locations, where to get assistance.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

Public address system announcements are often not audible to people who are hard of hearing. Hearing loops, when installed, are only required to cover 10% of the waiting area. People relying on them are likely to be in the other 90% of the waiting area and therefore miss the announcement. In some locations the loops are only activated during emergencies or activated on request, meaning that general service announcements go unheard. The information needs of the Deaf community are often not satisfactorily met. Deaf people who communicate solely in Auslan cannot hear any announcements and so depend on visual alternatives to announcements. These alternatives are seldom provided. Digital signs that feature audio, text and Auslan interpreters have been trialled and when this technology matures the signs should be required by DSAPT.



Simple text communication is within scope for most Deaf people. Queensland Rail have a text messaging communication service for people with disability, which is appreciated by the Deaf community. Unfortunately, Queensland bus and ferry services do not have equivalent services either on platforms/pontoons or aboard buses or ferries. This excludes Deaf passengers from using the communication tools provided for other passengers such as help and emergency phones.

- **On board the public transport service**

Some issues relating to bus travel can make travel difficult or impossible for people with disability.

*Getting on and off buses, can be challenging, the buses move really quickly, it's really stressful trying to keep up.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

*School children, don't move or get off seats for people with disability with ramps etc. Including in the wheelchair accessible seats.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

*The onus is on people with disability to get people to move out of the seats, not the bus driver, or the other passengers. People get angry about having to move, especially when the buses are crowded. It is really hard to get on buses in busy times in a chair, and sometimes the buses don't stop.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

*Options to enter/ exit the bus at both doors for people in wheelchairs, and adequate circulation space. Near the designated seating space with seatbelts and assistance.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area.

*Buses remain a real challenge. It is too difficult to catch a bus with no vision.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area.

*Buses are difficult to travel on with a mobility scooter – the bus doesn't have a good way of fastening the scooter to the floor, meaning it often damages the brakes of the scooter and/or you feel unsafe.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

Other issues include:

- Bus stops with boarding points that are inaccessible.
- High floor buses with stair access only
- Insufficient manoeuvring space for larger mobility aids in the aisle
- Mobility aid instability in the allocated space while in transit
- Refusal by other passengers to vacate the allocated space or priority seat.
- Next stop announcements not provided in audio and visual format by the bus.
- Drivers often forget to inform passengers of their stop.

- Drivers often will not raise fold down seats in allocated spaces (driver attitude overall can be problematic)
- Over reliance on smartphone apps for locational and service related information
- No audio or visual indication that a request for ramp deployment has been received by the driver when wishing to get on or off the bus.
- Grabrails that lack luminance/colour contrast.

Coach travel can be difficult for people who have mobility impairments. When inaccessible coaches are used as rail replacement buses this non-compliance impacts rail travel. Some issues relating to coach travel can make travel difficult or impossible for people with disability, such as:

- No lift access to high floor coaches
- Active restraints in allocated spaces not to Australian Standard
- Accessible seats not appropriately located for passengers' individual needs.
- Inappropriate locations are chosen for rail bus temporary stops.

Some issues relating to train travel can make travel difficult or impossible for people with disability,

*Auchenflower station has an example of where the audible beeper on the station help buttons have been deactivated since late 2022. This means people with low, or no vision can't travel independently any more.*

- QDN Member, Metropolitan area

Other examples include:

- Boarding assistance may not be readily available at all times.
- Staff may forget that a passenger requiring off-boarding assistance is aboard.
- Next stop announcements may not always be functioning.
- Refusal by other passengers to vacate the allocated space or priority seat.
- Allocated spaces located mid car are not accessible when services are crowded.
- Deaf passengers unable to use help phones.
- Accessible toilets on trains can be difficult to navigate and use.

Newer ferries appear to be mostly accessible though issues with the fleet include:

- Allocated spaces are not delineated on the deck making them hard to identify and claim—unlike train, bus and tram which delineate allocated spaces on the floor.
- Allocated spaces may not be provided on older ferries.
- Boarding gangways too steep when deployed at some pontoons.
- Next stop announcements inconsistently provided.
- Hearing loops not provided or not switched on.
- Ferry allocated spaces are not required to be delineated in DSAPT. It would be useful if they were delineated.

One QDN member states

*Since the Brisbane floods in 2022, many ferries are not accessible, for example, the main lift at North Quay is often not working. This means I often get on a ferry, but can't get off where I want to, meaning I have to stay on the ferry for it to go to another station.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

Newer trams and light rail vehicles are often accessible. Older vehicles are less so, resulting in the following issues:

- Older trams are not always accessible for mobility aid users.
- Older trams may not have audio visual next stop announcements.
- Tram stops may be located on steep inclines.

The taxi industry is struggling financially due to competition with Rideshare, yet still remain the main public transport option for many people requiring WATs. This is impacting services significantly.

*It's near impossible to get a taxi, especially an accessible one – can wait 2+ hrs and booking ahead doesn't improve that. You can wait 2-3 hours for a taxi and that's fairly normal occurrence.*

- QDN member, North Queensland

*I think there might only be one [WAT] taxi for Rockhampton.*

- QDN member, Central Queensland

*Make taxis universally accessible, so that there is equity, similar to in the UK.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

*[Your experience is] so dependent on the driver – if you get a good driver – they understand. Other drivers whinge and complain about how long it takes to get you secured and then drive unsafely. Not only does that contribute to injuries – it contributes quite significantly to anxiety around can I actually safely do this without a support worker with me which impacts upon independence.*

- QDN member, North Queensland.

*There needs to be a task force from government to fix the issues with taxis in Queensland.*

- QDN member, Central Queensland.

Issues include:

- WATs may be unavailable at certain times of the day.
- Drivers may refuse service to passengers who have assistance animals.
- Drivers may only take passengers with a Taxi Subsidy Card, so they are entitled to claim the loading fee.
- Taxi loading zones and passenger loading zones on public streets may not be accessible.
- Fares are often prohibitively expensive, and subsidy is limited.
- Passengers experience issues with calling for a cab, long waits for an operator and long waits for a WAT to be dispatched.

Rideshare business models do not accommodate people with significant mobility impairments.

*Rideshare companies won't service job requests for people with disability.*

- QDN member, North Queensland

Issues include:

- No equivalent vehicles to WATs are available in the rideshare fleet.
- Not able to use TSS in Rideshare services.
- App based booking and payment systems are not accessible to all passengers.
- Drivers may refuse service to passengers who have assistance animals.
- Passenger loading zones on public streets may not be accessible.
- 

Air travel is a challenge for many people who have a disability.

*Long wait times for a hoist [also known as disabled persons lifts, or Eagle Lift], then they publicly humiliated me because the plane was late. They announced it over the loudspeaker!*

- QDN member, metropolitan area.

*Recently customs told me to get out of my wheelchair but wouldn't let me get out with my support person. They wanted me to do it unassisted and I couldn't. They wanted to pat me down in my chair and they wouldn't let my Mum come and assist. They then patted me on the head and told me I was a good girl! I need to travel with a support person. I travelled with my Mum. They sat me up the front and Mum down the back. They would not seat us together.*

- QDN member, metropolitan area

Issues include:

- Disabled persons lifts are not available at all regional airports<sup>38</sup>
- Carrying only two wheelchairs per flight discriminates against people who use wheelchairs<sup>39</sup>
- Passengers risk having their mobility aids damaged by mishandling of baggage handling staff.
- Passengers risk refusal of service on arrival at destination<sup>40</sup>.

- **Arrival at destination**

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<sup>38</sup> For further information, see: <https://www.rex.com.au/FlightInfo/SRC.aspx>

<sup>39</sup> For further information, see: <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/infrastructure-transport-vehicles/aviation/aviationaccess-forum-aaf/two-wheelchair-policies> & <https://www.jetstar.com/au/en/help/articles/limits-on-assistance-and-mobility-aids>

<sup>40</sup> For further information, see: <https://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/disability-advocate-karin-swift-stuck-on-plane-at-hobart-airport/news-story/1a28d79f8c2388a3a66ac04daf88e7e9>

In all cases the accessibility of the precinct surrounding the arrival infrastructure will determine if the passengers are able to continue their journeys. Rail passengers who need assistance to disembark will on occasion be forgotten when arriving at their destination station<sup>41</sup>. At best this is inconvenient, at worst traumatic. Platform lifts may be out of service on occasion. Passengers may be informed of this at boarding or on arrival but often they find out after their service has departed, leaving them stranded and waiting for the next service.

Bus drivers may forget to inform vision impaired passengers that they have reached their destination stop. Signal devices in allocated spaces may not be functioning, meaning that drivers are unaware that a person in the allocated space wishes to leave the bus at the next stop. Little or no information is publicly available on the accessibility of the destination bus stop. The destination bus stop may not be connected to access paths that allow continuation of the journey.

There may not be a suitable location near the destination where a passenger using a mobility aid can get out of a WAT. Few on-street taxi zones or passenger loading zones are accessible. WATS must sometimes block driveways, or the passenger must travel along the carriageway until they find a driveway or kerb ramp that enables them to access the public footpath from the carriageway. Where accessible taxi zones and passenger loading zones do exist there are no publicly available databases detailing their location.

As stated above, passengers experience numerous issues when arriving at their destination by aircraft, including:

- Problems with disembarkation, usually due to communication difficulties with airline staff and on the ground staff.
- Disabled persons lifts are not available at all regional airports<sup>42</sup>.
- Passengers risk having their mobility aids damaged by mishandling of baggage handling staff.
- Passengers risk refusal of service on arrival at destination<sup>43</sup>.

- **Disruption to your journey**

Issues are experienced for people with all types of disability during service disruption. Specific issues include:

- Deaf or hard of hearing passengers cannot hear instructions given as audio announcements over PA systems.
- Users of telecoil equipped hearing aids cannot hear instructions given as audio announcements if vehicles or vessels have no hearing loop or the hearing loop is not activated.

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<sup>41</sup> For further information, see: 193 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-28/woman-karin-swift-wheelchair-strandedbrisbane-train-apology/8566628>

<sup>42</sup> For further information, see: <https://www.rex.com.au/FlightInfo/SRC.aspx>

<sup>43</sup> For further information, see: <https://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/disability-advocate-karin-swift-stuck-on-plane-at-hobart-airport/news-story/1a28d79f8c2388a3a66ac04daf88e7e9>

- People with intellectual or cognitive disabilities may not understand audio instructions broadcast over a PA system.
- Some passengers with disability may experience barriers to effectively communicating with staff. This can prevent the exchange of information that staff should understand in order to assist the passenger during the disruption.
- People with vision impairments can end up lost if in a location not familiar to them, and/or if they are expected to find their way to alternative transport. This is particularly an issue when passengers are not advised of their desired stop. Catching a bus, train or tram back to the desired stop is almost impossible without assistance in finding the required boarding point. This assistance is only available at staffed locations.
- People with mobility impairments may not easily egress from trains, trams, buses or ferries during emergencies. Buses may have the single accessible door blocked or damaged. Ferries may need to transfer passengers while midstream or mid-harbour. Rail buses are often inaccessible coaches leaving scarcely available WATs as the only alternative. WATs called as emergency paratransit are sometimes commandeered by other passengers or simply unavailable.

The reformed DSAPT should commit to a firm, nationally consistent policy for informing passengers of public transport systems of delays and alternative means of continuing the journey that covers the spectrum of people's communication needs.

The provision of information on planned or unplanned disruptions, maintenance or breakdowns is mixed. An ongoing program where information and options regarding temporary impediments, planned and unplanned, are made available through multiple channels is needed and is considered an International good practice<sup>44</sup>. The DSAPT should require a similar process.

- **Complaints**

QDN members tell us that making complaints about operators and providers not meeting obligations is at times challenging and at other times daunting. Finding the correct complaints channel can be difficult and confusing. Queensland has two examples where contacting the operator can be a confusing process. Translink acts as the first port of call for complaints about the Brisbane bus service and Queensland Rail and some members have described the process at gatekeeping. This can be confusing for passengers who are attempting to follow the complaints process and told to contact the operator in the first instance (Brisbane City Council for buses and Queensland Rail for trains).

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) asserts the costs that may be incurred in unlawful discrimination proceedings in the Federal courts have been identified as a significant deterrent to bringing such proceedings. Discrimination complainants are often vulnerable or disadvantaged, and will not necessarily have legal representation, so there is greater need for a decision maker familiar with the law, how it operates, and how best to communicate with vulnerable individuals<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> For further information, see: <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/who-we-are/>

<sup>45</sup> For further information, see: [https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc\\_free\\_equal\\_de\\_c\\_2021.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_free_equal_de_c_2021.pdf)

According to the Parliamentary Health Services Ombudsman (NSW)<sup>46</sup>, good complaints handling involves:

- **Getting it right:** All public bodies must comply with the law and have regard for the rights of those concerned. They should act according to their statutory powers and duties, and any other rules governing the service they provide. They should follow their own policy and procedural guidance on complaint handling, whether published or internal.
- **Being customer focused:** Ensure their complaints procedure is simple and clear, involving as few steps as possible. Ensure that their complaint handling arrangements are easily accessible to their customers. Let their customers know about any help or advice that may be available to them if they are considering making a complaint. Deal with complaints promptly, avoiding unnecessary delay, and in line with published service standards where appropriate. Acknowledge the complaint and tell the complainant how long they can expect to wait to receive a reply. Use language that is easy to understand and communicate with the complainant in a way that is appropriate to them and their circumstances. Listen to and consider the complainant's views, asking them to clarify where necessary, to make sure the public body understands clearly what the complaint is about and the outcome the complainant wants. Respond flexibly to the circumstances of the case. This means considering how the public body may need to adjust its normal approach to handling a complaint in the particular circumstances. Ensure, where complaints raise issues about services provided by more than one public body, that the complaint is dealt with in a co-ordinated way with other providers.
- **Being open and accountable:** Ensure that information about how to complain is easily available. Be open and honest when accounting for their decisions and actions. Create and maintain reliable and usable records as evidence of their activities. Handle and process information properly and appropriately, in line with the law and relevant guidance. Take responsibility for the actions of their staff and those acting on behalf of the public body.
- **Acting fairly and proportionately:** Understand and respect the diversity of their customers and ensure fair access to services regardless of background or circumstances. Investigate complaints thoroughly and fairly, basing their decisions on the available facts and evidence, and avoiding undue delay. Seek to ensure, where a complaint relates to an ongoing relationship between the public body and complainant, that staff do not treat the complainant any differently during or after the complaint. Avoid taking a rigid, process-driven, 'one-size-fits-all' approach to complaint handling and ensure the response to an individual complaint is proportionate to the circumstances. Ask a member of staff who was not involved in the events leading to the complaint to review the case. Act fairly towards staff as well as customers.
- **Putting things right:** Providing fair and proportionate remedies is an integral part of good complaint handling. Where a public body has failed to get it right and this has led to injustice or hardship, it should take steps to put things right. That means, if possible, returning complainants and, where appropriate, others who have suffered the same injustice or hardship as a result of the same maladministration or poor service, to the position they were in before this took place. If that is not possible, it means compensating complainants and such others appropriately.; and

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<sup>46</sup> For further information, see: <https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/about-us/our-principles/principles-good-complaint-handling>

- **Seeking continuous improvement:** good complaint handling is not limited to providing an individual remedy to the complainant: public bodies should ensure that all feedback and lessons learnt from complaints contribute to service improvement.

## Conclusion

QDN is pleased to present our response to the 2020 DSAPT Review to the Department Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts. Our submission is a culmination of members' technical expertise and lived experience of accessing public transport. QDN supports the DSAPT modernisation process and holds steadfast to the principles of co-design by people with disability of all public transport, from design and project commencement right through to evaluation of all public transport. This will avoid costly retrofit processes down the track.

QDN supports the call for long term program and state commitment to retrofitting existing infrastructure to achieve DSAPT standards – including a funding commitment. Above all QDN supports the need to ensure there is access to public transport for those who are reliant on public transport for mobility due to their disability, including in regional areas. QDN looks forward to further opportunities to contribute to the DSAPT Review, including the outcomes.