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## **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

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### **THE ALLEN CONSULTING GROUP**

### **REVIEW OF THE DISABILITY STANDARDS FOR ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

**HEARING CONDUCTED AT: BENDIGO**

**DATE: 12 JULY 2007**

MS SKILBECK: Welcome, everyone, and lovely to be able to chat with you beforehand. I wanted to start on time but we have had a slight change in the schedule. James Dunn has very generously agreed to speak first. Just a few preliminaries. You will have met myself; I am Melissa Skilbeck, a director of the  
5 Allen Consulting Group and my colleague, Jessie Goldsmith is here today, who will be directing traffic a little bit more. The Allen Consulting Group has been appointed by DOTARS, by the Department – or by the Minister for Transport and Regional Services technically, to undertake the first five year review of the Transport  
10 Disability Standards. We have been asked to assess progress against implementation plan for the standards, understanding that only partial compliance with the full standards was expected in the first five years. We are not questioning the standards in the form of them themselves necessarily, but looking at compliance as a matter of focus. The review has a website where hopefully all the information you need and the transcripts of these hearings within the next week will appear. It is  
15 ddastandardsreview.com.au.

This hearing is one of a number. We are having one in each capital city and seven in regional centres around the country. The role of the hearing is to provide formal  
20 opportunity for interested parties to talk with us, information in addition to written submissions, which can be as simple or as complex and as long as you like, but this gives us an opportunity to speak with people one on one and provide a little bit of opportunity for some interaction among people. The formality of the hearing is limited to what we need to do to ensure we get a transcript, so hence the two tables here, but we really would like to keep it informal. One request we have though is  
25 because we have the transcript, that if you are over in that back corner anything you say won't be picked up by the microphone, so just keep that in mind. They are here for the transcript purposes so they are not amplifying and if you have got an issue hearing what we are saying, well, we can rearrange the chairs so we can bring it up forward.

30 So this is an opportunity for some stakeholders to tell us what is important about the Transport Disability Standards and their implementation, compliance with them. I would just like to remind you finally that written submissions are being accepted up until 24 August and you can do so through the website or the old-fashioned way. All  
35 the contact details are in our issues paper that is presented on the table next to the coffee and biscuits. We also have issues papers available in Braille and large print upon request. We have coffee and tea out the side. There is an accessible toilet in the back of the building. Both Jessie and the venue staff can direct you to other toilets across behind us past the stairwell. So with all that I think they are all the  
40 preliminaries. The scheduled plan for today is to hear from James Dunn of the Wangaratta Disability Action Group and then we hope to hear from Raelene Dennis. James, over to you.

45 MR DUNN: Jim.

MS SKILBECK: Jim, sorry, Jim.

MR DUNN: If you can't hear me, please speak up and I can stand up if you want. Okay, do you mind if I stand up. Okay, I am not one for using microphones, but that is okay. I am Jim Dunn, I am the Co-ordinator of the Local Client Group Wangaratta, which is for blind, vision impaired, deaf-blind people primarily and also  
5 people who have various other physical disabilities associated with blindness, say they are in a wheelchair or they have some other form of disability. A bit about me. I am trained in disabilities and I am a trained division 2 nurse. I have been legally blind all my life and I am one who actually prefers text to speech actually. In my  
10 group I actually run the group and we actually do a monthly newsletter. I am going to be adding some of my presentation to that and getting onto the form of access. I have trouble reading because of small print. I have just decided to cover a couple of points where we are actually five years down the track. I travel to Melbourne a lot; I have noticed Melbourne is a lot more advanced with their accessibility than what we are here in the country.

15 Wangaratta is 150 miles north-east of Melbourne. Our local bus service is fully accessible with low floor buses, but the buses which you get to go to places like Corryong, Yarrawonga, Mulwala, Bright, Myrtleford, outer lying areas, actually have the old step buses which are not accessible, some of them still have narrow  
20 doors. Even if they book a wheelchair accessible bus they can't get it usually. They actually have to go and have a taxi hired for them by V/Line. Excuse me struggling here.

MS SKILBECK: You're all right.  
25

MR DUNN: Also with the accessibility issue for timetables, the timetables we get still out in the north-east anyway, are still really small pocket ones, they don't have access to large print or adaptive technology and they just say go see Vision Australia or some other organisation that is more than willing to put it into your preferred  
30 format, which does take time, a long time especially, and I am getting hopelessly lost here.

MS SKILBECK: Jim, can I ask a question?

35 MR DUNN: Sure.

MS SKILBECK: The timetables, is that the same case for the in-city bus services as it is for those between-city bus services?

40 MR DUNN: Yes, it is.

MS SKILBECK: The timetable is just as poor?

MR DUNN: Just as poor. I have asked for large print bus timetables to be told,  
45 "We don't print them."

MS SKILBECK: Right.

MR DUNN: Which has its disadvantages. Fortunately I can get online and my computer does talk to me, the timetable, where I want to go.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

5

MR DUNN: Older people or people who are - - -

MS SKILBECK: Are so technology savvy.

10 MR DUNN: Technology savvy, thank you, are not as able to get them. Being able to read a little bit I have put timetables into audio format for people, which is time consuming and also quite difficult trying to get the thing set up right so that they know where they are going. I understand that, but I feel since video has been going since virtually 1992 we should at least be a little bit further along getting this  
15 adaptive technology out to the agents and railway stations and bus depots. People could challenge me on that, but that is fine.

MS GOLDSMITH: Jim, sorry, just another question.

20 MR DUNN: Yes.

MS GOLDSMITH: Do you have the same experience when you catch buses and other forms of transport in Melbourne or is it more of a - - -

25 MR DUNN: It is in Melbourne too, I can't get an accessible format – buses – sorry, I will try and speak up. Also with the local buses for anywhere else our people have to book them at least 24 hours in advance. They prefer a week's warning so that they can roster a driver who is qualified to use the access bus. At times they still don't get the bus, yet I have noticed the community buses that pick up a couple of people from  
30 my – to the disability action group I go to, have already had to be compliant with the standards and have the wheelchair access in them already.

MS SKILBECK: Yes, yes. So there is an opportunity there to improve the access.

35 MR DUNN: There is an opportunity to improve. Okay, they say it is going to all be going by 2022. Okay, and I've heard, what, 30 years by then, but that is okay. These things take time they say. I occasionally go to Adelaide on the speed link from Albury; which starts at Albury and meets the XPT, it goes to Adelaide and that bus is only a non-accessible bus, they claim they don't have an accessible bus to take  
40 you through to Adelaide. If you want to go to Adelaide you virtually have to go to Melbourne, change to the Overland, which runs Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from Melbourne, then go to Adelaide on the Overland.

MS SKILBECK: Train.

45

MR DUNN: Because the speed link doesn't do it, which is operated by Dysons. I don't know when (inaudible) to do that. What else is there? There are times when they don't have a low floor bus because the low floor bus is out of service, but in that

case then if someone in other of the bigger towns have low floor buses they actually supply an access taxi at their expense to take the person where they are going.

5 MS SKILBECK: Jim, what is the supply of access taxis in Wangaratta like?

MR DUNN: We have three access taxis in Wangaratta.

MS SKILBECK: Three, okay.

10 MR DUNN: Two in Wodonga and two in Albury and the cross border ones do share. They are not supposed to but if they need to they – what goes on under the radar doesn't – okay. I also find that the railway stations around the place, that the timetables, okay, they are a large sized timetable but the print is still small for me and they are usually up and wheelchair users have trouble having to sit down and look  
15 up to find the train time at the top. If they have any form of vision impairment (inaudible) primarily from vision impairment because of my vision problems, but  
- - -

20 MS SKILBECK: What is the difference in font, what font size do they have?

MR DUNN: The font size is about four or five on the timetables, standard timetables and about eight or ten or smaller on the bigger timetables, which is still too small.

25 MS SKILBECK: You were saying earlier you use 22 point fonts.

MR DUNN: I use 22. I have actually got 22 on my laptop. I notice that the city stops are, as I said, are a lot better advanced with the push buttons for trams on real time tram times coming at the various tram stops around Melbourne, yet out in the  
30 country some of our stations are unmanned, we don't have any announcers saying that if the train is late what time it is going to be there or with some stops like Chiltern, Springhurst, Avenel and Euroa, which are unmanned, they do have PAs there, but if the bus isn't running, particularly at Chiltern, the V/Line bus stop is half a mile away from the railway station because it doesn't come in due to access issues  
35 and if the people aren't told that there is a bus substitute, they sit there, the bus comes and goes and no bus. You ring V/Line, oh, it was a substitute, we forgot to tell you. Once I actually had to get a taxi from Chiltern to Melbourne.

40 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DUNN: V/Line was not impressed with the bill, but there we go. Also if I can spend a minute on the TGSI, tactile ground service indicators, the direction things that you walk over, they do feel rough, granted, Melbourne has got a lot, but the stations from Broadmeadows onwards don't, except Wangaratta which has recently  
45 had some TGSI placed around where the coaches stop, still non-accessible coaches. It has a direction indicator and the ripple warning.

MS SKILBECK: Right, yes.

MR DUNN: 800 by 400 of direction and an 800 by 800 square of the hazard TGSI, where the actual coach door actually is and that is about it. Some stations actually have bitumen or concrete from one edge to the other with no TSSI zoned. I know I do have, particularly if it is a dark night, I do have trouble finding where that edge is, not being able to see like yellow or at times blue lines where the warning is. I actually know of one person who on a wet rainy night at Chiltern actually went straight off the edge of the platform. Fortunately there was no train. Also there are some stations still which don't have disability toilets in them. On the country lines if the train is late you are busting, you actually have to wait till the train gets there. Wheelchairs are only accepted in car D of the standard seats we get to Wangaratta which I do think is a little bit ordinary, to say the least, a maximum of three wheelchairs; any more you have to wait for the next service or find another way of getting home.

15 MS SKILBECK: Sorry, Jim, the accessible toilets, there are none on the trains themselves either, is there?

MR DUNN: On the trains there is only one in car D which is the economy unreserved, which is an older car which strangely enough has a speaker at either end of the carriage and the speakers usually aren't loud enough for most people, they are not audio enhanced and it does pose problems.

MS SKILBECK: Right. Okay, so it is not - - -

25 MR DUNN: Fortunately, with my training, and I know so many of the crews, I have been known to go from an A class – from a first class seat, which I do get free with my blind pass, into car D and assist disabled people, which the crews love. It actually breaks the journey up and it goes faster than sitting in the first class seat the whole way to Wangaratta or Melbourne, which is about three hours. The city stops, as I said, are compliant, yet the real stops leave a lot to be desired. I was also looking at the access things for V/Line and so many of them are actually non-compliant to where they want to be in 2007, yet they say, “But there is funding committed to the next milestone.” My question is if the funding is already there why hasn't it been done?

35 MS SKILBECK: What sorts of things are included in that?

MR DUNN: Actually, it has got TGSIs. If you want, I have got it in my bag. Also with the TGSIs I find that everything is so far down it does frustrate me a little bit because working with blind, vision-impaired and deaf-blind people and also now the extras of working with the Disability Action Group does pose the occasional problem.

45 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DUNN: It also allows me to see a lot more of what is going on. Excuse the paper rustling here, I am actually getting the standards out, bear with me a second. I also find that there is so much – yes, it is small print, I printed it off in – not looking,

I didn't bother to enlarge the print. Also I have noticed with CountryLink, I don't know whether we are covering them too or not.

5 MS SKILBECK: Well, we will in the review, so, yes.

MR DUNN: Okay. The stations that it stops are Benalla, Wangaratta and Albury.

MS SKILBECK: Right.

10 MR DUNN: Those stations, okay, they have got reasonable lighting on them. The ramp down, because it is down in the gully in Wangaratta the ramp is rather steep and wheelchair users find it difficult to get into.

15 MS SKILBECK: Right.

MR DUNN: Actually the shelter has got two halves, it has only got one orange light in the northern side of it and that is poorly lit. The platforms are 2.1 metres wide.

20 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DUNN: I notice the standard is – the access only has to be 850 mil but it is a solid concrete slab with no warning to go off the edge.

25 MS SKILBECK: Yes. Right.

MR DUNN: By and by. Annunciators; Melbourne has them where you just push a button and get the train information.

30 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DUNN: In Wangaratta, Benalla, Wodonga, Albury, they do announce the train when they are coming, let you know if the train is going to be late and approximate time when the station is manned. Some of our trains, the station is unmanned and  
35 you just have to sit there and wait.

MS SKILBECK: So the train station is without an annunciator or that are not manned are also without annunciator.

40 MR DUNN: Yes.

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

45 MR DUNN: Also, if they are unmanned they may have a timetable there if it hasn't been vandalised or the glass smashed and you can't read it. Most stations still have the PA systems but they never work. You are never told what is going on. And if there is a problem you usually miss out. If I can quickly on car parks, the car parks at Chiltern, at Barnawatha, at Springhurst, you go from coir rubble straight to

bitumen which could actually be upgraded a little bit and there is no TGSIs and I have know people to miss the ramp to go in and actually hit a wall particularly at night. I could go on about frequency of trains if I could.

5 MS SKILBECK: General issue.

MR DUNN: Pardon?

10 MS SKILBECK: More of a general issue around the frequency of trains, isn't it but  
- - -

MR DUNN: Yes, yes. But the staff on them are great. If they know you are going to be getting the train they actually look out for you and help you on and that.

15 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DUNN: The trains are accessible for wheelchairs to get foot but then again it is the issue of having to have to go from car D to car B to get the foot with a wheelchair. Some of the Gophers don't fit down the aisles. The wider Gophers - - -  
20

MS SKILBECK: Yes, the motorised - - -

MR DUNN: The motorised ones, the motorised scooters, if you want to call them that.  
25

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

MR DUNN: Okay. They have an area which is – Australian standard is 800 wide by 1300 mil long for the standard wheelchair bay but there is actually no set  
30 specification for the size of a motorised scooter.

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

MR PASCOE: That has been a problem in most capital cities.  
35

MR DUNN: Okay.

MR PASCOE: Most capital cities. I know in Perth they have got a big move to change the wheelchair accessible taxis, but the designers of these Gophers or  
40 motorised wheelchairs kept changing the width and they had all these taxis ready and then they couldn't get these things in.

MS SKILBECK: Yes. There is no generic standardised spec for the motorised  
45 chairs?

MR PASCOE: No.

MR DUNN: No.

MR PASCOE: So it is a problem in most public transport that doesn't have the rear (inaudible)

5 MS SKILBECK: Okay, so it has not had anything to design around.

MR DUNN: No.

MR PASCOE: No specification.

10 MS SKILBECK: Sorry, Chris - - -

MS WALTERS: I have done a whole report on motorised scooters and buses in (inaudible off mic) local bus company and (inaudible off mic) after meeting with one of the people who needed to get to work.

15 MS SKILBECK: Right.

MS WALTERS: In a scooter. He had a genuine disability. And it actually makes a lot of recommendations so I will pass it on.

20 MS SKILBECK: Okay, Chris, great. Sorry, you weren't picked up on the transcript. Chris has tabled a report into accessibility by motorised chairs into the local bus service. So, thank you very much for that.

25 MR DUNN: Okay. I know it isn't actually part of the transport thing we are reviewing, I was wondering if it could be brought up somewhere along the way that they do design a national standard.

MS SKILBECK: For the motorised.

30 MR DUNN: Say in compliance with the 800 by 1300 thing that the wheelchair – the motorised scooter, I should say - the wheelchair's manufacturers do have something that they can spec work on. I know some people that actually have those wheelchair scooters that can be almost as wide as a rail carriage.

35 MS SKILBECK: Goodness, okay.

MR DUNN: And they are really big. As I said the aged do not and disabled do not like the new savvy technology we have on computers and do not have the access to them and are restricted in their access to the timetables and such and maps. I notice no maps are actually tactiled. They are all flat maps, usually small and very minimal.

45 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DUNN: I have no chance of seeing them unless I blow them up on a close circuit TV or photocopy them.

MS McMAHON: Do you and your kind use the transport information telephone service?

MR DUNN: We do.

5

MS McMAHON: Well, that certainly fills in some of the difficulty with the access that we can (inaudible off mic).

MR DUNN: It does.

10

MS McMAHON: So I would suggest that is probably quite - - -

MR DUNN: Yes, I understand that.

15

MS McMAHON: Good, sir, okay.

MR DUNN: And can I play devil's advocate. From my side people can get a timetable for free. We have to actually ring up and so it and if I can do aside here if I could. With my local client group I run I put out a monthly newsletter that actually goes out fully accessible. It goes out in standard 18 font print. I have clients who have really large print. It goes out on CD, on cassette, audio files; email. It goes out in PDF, Word document, rich text format, a text file fully accessible so that whatever the person's need is I meet it where they are. I am a volunteer. I do not get funded for this. I do it all myself.

20

MS McMAHON: I think the notion of making the transport information service either a 1800 - - -

MR DUNN: Yes, true, 1800.

30

MS McMAHON: Free call.

MR DUNN: It is.

35

MS McMAHON: I think that is probably fairly strong (inaudible off mic).

MR DUNN: Yes, yes, I agree.

MS SKILBECK: Just for my information, is that service run by Viclink or Metlink or is it the Department of Infrastructure?

40

MR DUNN: I think it is DLI or - - -

MS SKILBECK: DLI, okay.

45

MR DUNN: I think it is DLI who runs it and it is linked into Viclink and Metlink.

MS SKILBECK: Okay, thank you.

MR DUNN: Also, just not the issues of vision impairment and wheelchairs, people with ABI neurological disorders, Down Syndrome, dyslexia or any other form of disability who cannot access print itself, does have that disadvantage.

5 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DUNN: Fortunately, I will be 43 at the end of the month and, fortunately, haven't grown up legally blind. I have got all this gear I have actually managed to put on board that I can work round what I am doing. Also I feel that there is a vast  
10 difference in the standard city compared to country of the Disability Act. And if you look at those standards you will find that there is a lot that is not met or where they are. My question is why don't they actually have the funding. Why don't they put the funding into getting the processes going to bring it to where the standards are supposed to be. I have been challenged with my group. I have one deaf/blind person  
15 and I am going to be getting another in my group soon who use a cochlear implant which actually has a hearing loop switch on it.

MS SKILBECK: Right, yes.

20 MR DUNN: I have actually designed and I am making a portable hearing loop that I can actually link into them and standard hearing aids through the audio loop for them to better access my groups.

MS SKILBECK: Something more portable than the standard version of a hearing  
25 loop?

MR DUNN: Yes, because we actually meet in the Sydney Hotel for our meetings in the little dining room there and with the person that I had I could actually seat him next to me and he could hear me.

30 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DUNN: But I have got two. To make my group fully accessible to where it is supposed to be so I don't get my throat cut, I want to get this going so my group can  
35 be as adaptable and user friendly as possible.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DUNN: This person gets my newsletters on CD which he can hear.  
40

MS SKILBECK: Yes, makes sense. I have just one question, Jim, about the accessibility within vehicles.

MR DUNN: Yes.  
45

MS SKILBECK: You mentioned a number of buses in particular are not accessible if you are in a wheelchair and certainly the issue of the motorised scooters having some significant issues. For yourself, once you are on a train or on a bus, moving

around within the vehicle, are there significant differences in how accessible they are?

5 MR DUNN: There is. I know that a lot of the buses have got the yellow markers on them. Actually some trains have actually gone to, like, green there now particularly the Connex ones. I do have some problems with it particularly if people have their feet out, with my cane, but that is okay, it happens. I can fall over my own two feet anyway. I do have accessibility issues with public transport at times but I usually say I will get there. I will bump into someone; it happens. I trip over someone's feet. Could you please put your feet in so I don't fall flat on my face again.

MS SKILBECK: Yes. Do many vehicles have the tactile surfacing on the floor within the vehicle? I have not seen it myself.

15 MR DUNN: I have not seen it myself. A few of the vehicles have got strips down either side of the aisle where you are confined, but not a lot either.

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

20 MR DUNN: I am actually from Adelaide. Some of the newer trains have actually got tactile on them.

MS SKILBECK: They do?

25 MR DUNN: Tactile. It is a type of flooring and it is warning dimples.

MS SKILBECK: Right, yes.

30 MS GOLDSMITH: Jim, what about the bus stops and stuff like that, are they accessible? I mean, for yourself or for someone else, if you don't have a wheelchair – if you don't have a low floor bus? Do you have problems getting on and off the kerb or - - -

35 MR DUNN: At times I do. Some of the speed link, if I can use that as an analogy, or the rural buses, you actually come from the ground up into the bus and up the steps, two or three steps.

MS GOLDSMITH: Yes.

40 MR DUNN: People with mobility problems do have problems.

MS GOLDSMITH: Okay. And has that improved at all in the last five years or - - -

45 MR DUNN: Not that I have noticed. The only improvement we have virtually had is the local floor buses.

MS SKILBECK: Right.

MS GOLDSMITH: And you have already said that they are better in the big cities?

MR DUNN: They are virtually in the big cities and the private contract operators who run out – virtually don't have them.

5

MS SKILBECK: In Wangaratta.

MR DUNN: But they keep getting - - -

10 MS McMAHON: It is probably fair to say that in our regional area – I know recently we had a situation where even a school bus stop was - I think it is difficult for people in metro areas to understand the sort of circumstances we are working in regional areas like we have bus stops that have very, very minimal infrastructure let alone - - -

15

MR DUNN: Yes.

MS WALTERS: I think we are getting sidetracked here.

20 MS SKILBECK: Yes, exactly.

MS McMAHON: Let alone deviate (inaudible off mic). So I think, you know, if anything from visits to the region I think, you know, if we can create a picture that is quite different to the – you know, I would agree with Jim that the DDA compliance in metro areas is certainly being enhanced but, you know, again part of the issue with the regional areas is the paucity of public transport. And I know that is a different issue but it certainly contributes to the DDA compliance because while we don't have a service, there is not a demand for people who live with or without disability because, you know, the services are so infrequent.

30

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS McMAHON: Like someone could only have a service three or four times a day, you know.

35

MS SKILBECK: A day.

MR DUNN: Yes.

40 MS WALTERS: So it is in DDA, you are not talking about the outline - - -

MS McMAHON: So they are, you know, like (inaudible off mic). We almost have to start from the point of looking at public transfer per se.

45 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS McMAHON: You know, and DDA compliance probably hasn't even really hit the radar in any significant respect in regional areas, like Bendigo and (inaudible off mic).

5 MR DUNN: Yes.

MS McMAHON: But you know, as Chris was saying, you get out into the Loddon Shire (inaudible off mic) and all those places.

10 MR DUNN: Yes, I mean, it is not there.

MS WALTERS: It is non existent.

15 MS SKILBECK: Yes. No, that is certainly noted. I think that some of the really minimal bus stops are also an issue in outer suburban areas as well but it is certainly a distinctive difference. Thank you, Jim, thank you very much and thank you especially for changing the order for our convenience. Thank you. The next person we had scheduled to appear was Raelene. One moment, we will just change over the facilities a little. Raelene, we will get you a glass too.

20

#### **DOCUMENTS HANDED UP BY MS RAELENE DENNIS**

25 MS DENNIS: My name is Raelene Dennis.

MS SKILBECK: One moment, Raelene, I think we just had some people arrive. Okay, Raelene, thank you very much for coming. If you could start by giving me a sense of how you use public transport, where you are from; what your trips usually are just so I have a sense of what your direct experience versus observations are.

30

MS DENNIS: Yes.

35 MS SKILBECK: That would be great, thanks.

MS DENNIS: My name is Raelene Dennis. I am from Horsham. I use mainly the trains to get from Horsham to Melbourne. It is a bus service from Melbourne to Ararat and then it is a train service from Ararat to Melbourne.

40 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS DENNIS: And I have difficulty with getting on and off the trains so much so that – well, you will hear about it. Okay, on Wednesday 19 July 2006 which was the last time I travelled on trains I travelled from Horsham to Melbourne on V/Line. This involved travelling by bus from Horsham to Ararat and then swapping to the train at Ararat for Melbourne. Due to my disability I am able unable to step down over the gap between the train and the platform and now I find that I am also unable

45

to step up in various places around the house so I imagine that I would be unable to – have difficulty stepping on to the train from the platform.

5 This gap is approximately 22 centimetres wide though it may vary from station to station. The height difference between the platform and the train is over 12 centimetres and that creates rather a large step to negotiate. On that date, 19 July, I asked the conductor for the ramp. He refused my request stating that that particular train was not accredited to use ramps. I have since learnt that the trains are accredited but rather the problem is with the passenger's needs. He offered to assist me but the only assistance that would have worked was lifting me down off the train because I become a dead weight when somebody tries to lift me or tries to help me going down.

15 And that is not permitted under OH and S rules because I weight 80 kilograms and they are allowed to lift 40 kilograms. As a result I had to sit on the floor of the train which was very hard for me to do and swing my legs out of the door and then the conductor assisted me to stand up and this did nothing to enhance my dignity. This has been the case in about 40 per cent of my trips over the last 10 years between Melbourne and Ararat as well as between Ballarat and Melbourne. The Ararat station has only come on line in about the last 18 months.

MS SKILBECK: In terms of being disability compliant or come on line at all?

MS DENNIS: Come on line at all.  
25

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

MS DENNIS: It is not disability compliant.

30 MS SKILBECK: Okay.

MS DENNIS: Some conductors have allowed me to use a ramp even though they were not supposed to. According to the V/Line website all trains can be accessed by wheelchair. Despite not using a wheelchair, I need the same service as a person in a wheelchair for using a train and the problem is that I am not allowed to do that. I am not allowed to get the ramp.

MS SKILBECK: So you have asked for the ramp from a driver?

40 MS DENNIS: Yes.

MS SKILBECK: They have said that they are not allowed to provide it for you?

MS DENNIS: They are not allowed to. They were given a memorandum. I have got a letter here that I have got to read out some part of and it says that a memorandum was issued to the effect, "To all on-train staff on 20 July 2004". Now, that was because a woman in Morwell fell down between the train and the ramp and she was quite a heavy woman apparently.

MS SKILBECK: The gap, basically. Okay.

MS DENNIS: So that is why nobody is allowed to use the ramp.

5 MS SKILBECK: Okay.

MS DENNIS: So it makes it very difficult.

10 MR DENNIS: Everybody suffers (inaudible off mic).

MS DENNIS: Yes. On 23 August I received a reply to my written complaint and it says:

15 *Conductors have been directed that for health and safety reasons they are not to use the folding wheelchair ramps for passengers to walk upon when boarding or alighting V/Line trains. A memorandum to this effect was issued to all on train staff on 20 July 2004. These ramps are not designed to take the weight of an upright perambulatory passenger on the hinged area of the ramp. Weight placed on the centre hinge will cause the ramp to close like a book and collapse. The ramp is designed specifically for wheelchair use only where the weight of the wheelchair and passenger is distributed evenly on either side of the centre hinge. All trains are accredited for use by passengers with special needs and every train is equipped with an approved wheelchair ramp. Every V/Line conductor has been instructed and is fully trained on how to properly assist disabled passengers who may have difficulty stepping up and down from trains at platforms and are willing to render this assistance if asked to do so.*

20

25

But the problem in my case is that I actually have to be lifted.

30 MS SKILBECK: Yes, it doesn't help, yes.

MS DENNIS: Because I can't help - - -

35 MS SKILBECK: The assistance they are willing to provide isn't sufficient.

MS DENNIS: That is right.

40 MS SKILBECK: Right. And it sounds like from that letter that the issue is with a ramp that has a hinge in the middle?

MS DENNIS: Yes, yes.

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

45 MS DENNIS: So this issue is still unresolved. My father has also measured the distances and written to V/Line regarding this issue. As a result I am unable to travel where and when I choose, I have not been on a train since July last year and I would like to go down to Melbourne or Sale to visit my friends.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS DENNIS: I have been told that I can access Travellers Aid. I have done this in the past when it was the old Spencer Street Station because of having to walk up and  
5 down the ramps and of the distances involved to get out of or into the station. Now because of where the train comes in the distance is not a problem, but if I were to come to Melbourne on a train which arrives outside normal office hours there is no-one there to help me. I am not the only person that encounters such difficulties. All  
10 people with disability have individual needs, there is not a one size fits all solution.

MS SKILBECK: No.

MS DENNIS: As you can see from the letters that I have given - - -

15 MS SKILBECK: Thank you, and you have given to us - - -

MS DENNIS: Sorry?

MS SKILBECK: And you have given to us, thanks.  
20

MS DENNIS: That have been going between myself, my father, Lynne Kosky, who is the state minister for public transport and Hugh Delahunty, who is our local member of parliament. This has been taken up by V/Line but it is being drawn out. Until it is sorted out I cannot travel on the trains when I need to. This means that I  
25 am unable to visit my friends and family in Melbourne or places like Sale without someone driving me, as I am not able to drive in Melbourne. There are other instances where a ramp would have been helpful. A three year old fell in between the train and the platform about four weeks ago. This was reported to me by a fellow  
30 member of the Grampians Disability Advocacy Association whose grandson it was. I am unsure of where it was and I have been unable to ask him because of he is away. This shows the need for something to cover the gap when people are getting on and off the trains and this child does not have a disability.

My mother-in-law requires assistance to get on and off the train and she has told me  
35 many times that she wishes there was a ramp or some such thing that she could use. Various people with sight problems have mentioned to me the problems that they have gauging the distance and the gap between the train and the platform.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.  
40

MS DENNIS: The suggested solutions that I have got: create a ramp that won't collapse regardless of how weight is distributed on it. This is supposedly what the V/Line Engineering Department is working on. Such ramps were available for use by all passengers disembarking from the Sunlander at the Roma Street transit centre  
45 in Brisbane, according to a friend of mine who used to live in Queensland.

MS SKILBECK: Okay. Sorry, which train is that?

MS DENNIS: The Sunlander.

MS SKILBECK: The Sunlander.

5 MS DENNIS: Yes.

MS SKILBECK: That goes between Brisbane and Sydney, doesn't it?

10 MS DENNIS: I don't know where it goes.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS DENNIS: Yes, Cairns.

15 MS SKILBECK: Thank you. Thank you, Jim, between Cairns and Brisbane, thanks.

MS DENNIS: All platforms are flush with the train floor. This is possible because the platforms in Perth are flush with the train floor. What would have to happen at  
20 Southern Cross Station or Spencer Street in Melbourne is that the level of the platform would have to be raised, perhaps with false flooring, which gradually slopes to the level of the platform and I was most disappointed when I went down there in July to find that this new station you still had to step down to get off it.

25 MS SKILBECK: It has got a gap, yes.

MS DENNIS: Another solution which I haven't written down would be the ramp hinge is down that way, but if you stand in the middle of it, it could go up like that, okay.

30

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS DENNIS: It would be easy just to hinge it that way.

35 MS SKILBECK: Turn it over.

MS DENNIS: And then it was resting on the platform and the train.

40 MS SKILBECK: So the weight reinforces it, yes.

MS DENNIS: Yes, your weight won't cause it to collapse. But anyway, V/Line tells us that they are working on it, but I would like it a little bit faster if I could.

45 MS SKILBECK: When did they tell you they were working on it first, would it have been around July last year or the year before last?

MS DENNIS: It was around September/October last year when V/Line said that they were working on the ramps. I have got it in here, it is in the letters anyway.

MS SKILBECK: It is a good year though.

MS DENNIS: Yes, it is a good year.

5 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DUNN: (inaudible off mic) they reckon but I am not too sure about that.

10 MS DENNIS: And, you know, the outcomes of it could be that such problems are addressed properly, promptly and with input from groups such as the Grampians Disability Advocacy Association or other such disability advocacy groups and that I can access public transport like anyone else without a disability, I go when and where I like and such solutions would not only benefit myself or other people with a disability, but would also benefit some others with prams or small children, frail  
15 elderly, people on crutches, people who have difficulty judging distance and gaps and probably many more groups of people who I have not mentioned and that is my finish.

20 MS SKILBECK: Thank you.

MS McMAHON: I think it is really a great point that you raise here and also as country visitors using the country services often we have suitcases, whether they be small or big, so not only do you have the difficulty of getting yourself from the train down to the platform, and as you say, if there is vision impairment you have no  
25 warning, you expect it to be level. And then also for frail elderly people, like I know my in-laws go down to Melbourne quite often on the train. Now, it can be quite a drop to the platform and it is not consistent, depending on where the train comes in and at what platform there is. You can't anticipate that there will be a six inch drop or whatever. So I reckon it is (inaudible off mic).

30 MS SKILBECK: Thank you. Sorry, Jim, you want - - -

MR DUNN: Okay. Can I say a couple of things on that? I am originally from Adelaide and we actually have a four part wheelchair ramp which has actually got  
35 sides on it. It actually folds into four.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

40 MR DUNN: It weighs six and a half kilo, it is fibreglass, actually pull out of the locker, unfold it, wheelchairs and people can go onto it, it doesn't collapse. It folds up again into itself and I have had one incident where - - -

MS SKILBECK: That is right, yes.

45 MR DUNN: Except for a (inaudible off mic). Also V/Line, now that they own the country, the broad gauge network, they say they are going to be progressively lowering the track - - -

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DUNN: For all tracks to be level with the platforms.

5 MS SKILBECK: All right.

MR DUNN: Don't hold your breath on this one.

10 MS DENNIS: No, that is right.

MR DUNN: I am not expecting to see that in my life time.

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

15 MS DENNIS: Okay, no, well, I can't imagine why they would do that because the southern Cross Station is so far below the level of the train and in Ararat there is no-one to, like, there is no Travellers Aid at Ararat or anything like that, it is just a country station.

20 MS SKILBECK: Yes, and these are both the new and the older trains?

MS DENNIS: The newer and the older trains, yes.

25 MS SKILBECK: Okay.

MS DENNIS: Yes, last year it was (inaudible off mic).

MR DUNN: Also, the height of the rail car can vary up to eight inches.

30 MS SKILBECK: Yes. Depending on the actual type of train that it is, isn't it?

MR DUNN: It depends on the type of train (inaudible off mic).

35 MS SKILBECK: Yes, okay. Raelene, then can I ask you, do you use the inter city bus network at all? Is there similar issues there?

40 MS DENNIS: I don't have issues myself because when I get on and off the bus I can stand right next to the bus and I position my foot up that way and the same for getting off.

MS SKILBECK: Right.

45 MS DENNIS: But with the train it is that much gap and I have got to get over the gap.

MS SKILBECK: Yes. So it is stepping over the back, that is the issue for you?

MS DENNIS: Stepping over the gap is more of an issue than actually getting up, you know.

MS SKILBECK: Got you, up the step.

5

MS DENNIS: Getting up.

MS SKILBECK: Yes, okay.

10 MS DENNIS: Of course, I have to use buses from Horsham because the buses go from Horsham to Ararat and then the train.

MS SKILBECK: Yes, okay. Access to and from the actual station themselves, do you ever have an issue there?

15

MS DENNIS: No.

MS SKILBECK: No, because, again, there is no particular gap, per se.

20 MS DENNIS: How do you mean, access from the station?

MS SKILBECK: Like, getting into the station and along - - -

MS DENNIS: Getting into the station, no.

25

MS SKILBECK: Thank you very much, Raelene.

MS DENNIS: Thank you.

30 MS SKILBECK: I would like to open it up if there is anyone else that is with us today, perhaps, Chris and Maureen from the Shire or Amelia from the Department is here. Is there any other comments? Thank you, Maureen and Chris in particular, for your contributions throughout. Is there anything in particular you would like to add while we have the opportunity?

35

MS McMAHON: Yes, I wouldn't mind just to have a table that (inaudible off mic). We are obviously not large in numbers - - -

MS SKILBECK: One moment, Maureen.

40

MS McMAHON: Can you hear me now?

MS SKILBECK: May as well make sure.

45 MS McMAHON: I just think it would be really good to have a table that – like, we are obviously not a large group here today and we did talk about it before the forum. Unfortunately, this event has not been well distributed through our community so I just think it is important to have that formalised in today's proceeding.

MS SKILBECK: Yes. For future reference, because we certainly have attempted to distribute it widely, is there a particular network here that would have been the proper one to access? Is there an information service that would have got the appropriate community fast?

5

MS McMAHON: Well, I suppose if I talked from a personal perspective.

MS SKILBECK: Yes, from personal, please.

10 MS McMAHON: Chris and I are with a program called Rural Access with the City of Greater Bendigo and I believe we had some fairly good networks through the communities. So I suppose, you know, to hit a number of points is obviously the way to go.

15 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS McMAHON: It is better to have cross-postings, but, like, we only found out this morning that this was one. And it is a significant issue of access to transport in our local area so I would hate to think that the numbers here today were somehow interpreted as a lack of interest in the issue.

20

MS SKILBECK: Certainly, no. No, thanks, Maureen, no, it certainly won't be. As I said earlier on, we are accepting written submissions of whatever form and whatever length people care to make and we are doing so until 24 August. If there is any one who requires contact information to make those submissions; any further copies of the issues paper in whatever format would be accessible in order to capture some other people that you may be aware of that would have something to say. And please encourage people if they only have one point to make and that is all they need to make. They don't need to respond to every question in the issues paper. If we can after the hearing I am happy to provide you with any additional information or get some contact details so we can do so later to maximise the input from the area. Jessie?

25

30

MS GOLDSMITH: I have just organised for these guys to come and talk about what they do and what their experiences have been.

35

MS SKILBECK: Wonderful. So Chris and Maureen from the Macedon Ranges Shire Rural Access.

40 MS WALTERS: City of Greater Bendigo.

MS SKILBECK: Sorry, City of Greater Bendigo, that is.

MS WALTERS: Do you want to come up, too, and we can probably tag team on our work on what we know about transport.

45

MS McMAHON: Sure.

MS WALTERS: Well, both Maureen and I work in the Rural Access Project which is a state funded project that goes across the state and there is about 27 of us mainly situated in local Government and our role is very much looking at issues of access inclusion for people with disabilities across the board.

5

MS SKILBECK: Right.

MS WALTERS: And transport has been one of the biggest issues we come across all the time in terms of people needing to get to places. Everything about the disability state plan and the DDA it is the thing that is the crux of the issue that actually stops people doing the things they want to do.

10

MS SKILBECK: Getting to other things.

MS WALTERS: So, hence, we hear a lot of those issues. Last year this report that I developed up was a result of a young man who has to use a motorised wheelchair. He arrived at his destination, a bus stop, to be told by the bus driver, I cannot take motorised wheelchairs. And he was left dumbfounded about how he was going to get to work. And now he is a father of two young boys and thinking if I can't get to work how am I going to support my family. So that is the impact. So, hence, I went to the bus company and listened to their issues about what it was as well because they have a lot of issues as well and also actually we did a lot of training around disability awareness and what people need in terms of assistance.

20

From that report I was able to actually hear the issues about the design of the scooters as we have mentioned before. They are getting bigger and bigger and bigger and there is nobody stopping those manufacturers from actually saying, okay, public infrastructure cannot get bigger to cater for these things. And a lot of people are wanting the best and the biggest one for their elderly parents and just going out and buying them and not realising they won't fit in taxis and they won't fit in buses. But if there was a standardised thing for that to happen, I know it is probably beyond the realms of this thing but it needs to be addressed.

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30

MS SKILBECK: One moment, Chris. Derek?

35

MR TARRY: Can I just say something on that?

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR TARRY: We have been doing work with DOTARS about the scooters. I think there is 56 manufacturers of scooters that make the scooters and they are all overseas. So it is, you know, it is awfully hard to standardise the - - -

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MS WALTERS: What our suggestion was though that we could actually say to the sellers of these – that we could tag them to say a certain size will fit on public transport.

45

MS SKILBECK: So people are informed at the point of purchase, yes.

MS WALTERS: If it fits within a recommended, yes, space. And that way when somebody goes off and buys their elderly mother one, they go, okay, she can do a lot with this big one but she won't be able to get on to a bus or a taxi; they are more likely to buy the smaller one.

5

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS GOLDSMITH: Talking to some people yesterday I understand it is also the weight issue of these things. They can get very heavy very quickly and then the ramps for the buses.

10

MS SKILBECK: Actually can't sustain the weight.

MS GOLDSMITH: And the hydraulic lifts in the taxis get strained so it is better off to buy a – because they have the big heavy batteries and stuff in them and can be quite dangerous.

15

MS WALTERS: Yes, and they are not designed to actually take the big motorised wheelchairs, the actual design of buses now that people in wheelchairs are able to get on. When we looked at actually trying to get on an average size scooter into the buses that were designed for people with wheelchairs to get on it just couldn't be done and it actually shows it in my report here.

20

MS SKILBECK: Great, okay.

25

MS WALTERS: Things like timetabling issues are real difficult for buses when they do have to assist somebody on. They are getting stressed because they have got to get to the city by a certain time and here they are having to unload a ramp and stuff. So we need to address those issues. If we are going to work with the system, with the bus company to allay their fears, we have got to work with them. So issues of occ health and safety things for both drivers and passengers, there is things, like, sometimes drivers have to assist people and those issues need to be taken care of.

30

MS SKILBECK: That is a point that Raelene mentioned earlier about the weight limit that drivers have, yes.

35

MS WALTERS: Yes.

MS SKILBECK: And public infrastructure where things are – positions where the bus stops are; there is a huge issue. And just some policy and procedure issues around how a driver determines what scooter will fit on before they can get on and that sort of stuff because they try and get them on and they get stuck and it is holding the whole bus up. And so there is pressure from the rest of the passengers especially in inner regional areas like here more so than, probably, country areas.

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45

MS WALTERS: And your work covers the Greater Bendigo area?

MS McMAHON: Yes, and I also cover Loddon Shire which is very rural and their issues, again, are different. They don't even have access to bus services. And what our previous speakers were talking about is that, you know, having to book well ahead if they need an accessible bus, is just a huge issue. And there are a limited  
5 amount of services to get them into, say, Bendigo, to actually get their hospital appointments or whatever.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

10 MS McMAHON: It doesn't coincide.

MS SKILBECK: Yes, I think in terms of – and I am not sure whether this fits within the brief of this - but the multi-purpose taxi program, is that relevant to what  
- - -

15 MS WALTERS: Yes, I think it is, yes, yes.

MS McMAHON: I think, you know, we all know that a large number of recipients of that service had been capped at \$500 a year and unfortunately that has had  
20 significant impact upon, particularly our older and frail people who tend to perhaps not use even their \$500 now because just in case something goes wrong. And I think what is not really understood is that, I think we worked it out, that, well it doesn't even provide \$10 a week. So it doesn't even get people a return trip to town once a week to do their shopping, let alone doctor's appointment, let alone sort of to  
25 participate in social activities.

MS SKILBECK: Just to clarify it, the cap is the same in city versus rural, it isn't any different to where you reside?

30 MS McMAHON: Yes. And a number of recipients are exempt, people who are blind or vision impaired, quadriplegics, paraplegics, but there is a range of people, I think people with severe epilepsy, I don't think they got through, but particularly our older and frail people. And it doesn't make sense, because we have all, you know, we have our State Disability Plan, you know, we have programs like ours, Rural  
35 Access, encouraging community to embrace people with disabilities, to include them in all aspects of community life. Yet we had their primary means of access, particularly in regional areas through taxis, we had that service being restricted. As we said before the taxi service is probably the main stay for a lot of older and disabled people in regional and country areas simply because we don't have the  
40 public infrastructure. You know people may not be able to get from their homes to bus stops, the number of buses are severely restricted in terms of metro access. You know, as we said before, we have routes – we don't have public transport services of a Sunday, full stop.

45 MS SKILBECK: Yes. In many of the areas.

MS McMAHON: In many of the areas. So our taxi staff is just so, so important and I think that was a very unfortunate decision that was made to cap the dollar

amounts for people who are legible to the program. And you know you can argue that the people in regional areas, if they are going to cap it, people in regional areas should get a higher subsidy because - - -

5 MS SKILBECK: Public transport.

MS McMAHON: Lack of public transport and the fact that, you know, we are all tax payers but we don't get the same piece of cake that people in metro area get in terms of availability and access to public transport.

10

MS SKILBECK: Thank you. The other element of transport we haven't heard much about is community transport, the buses that aren't scheduled services, they are not plying regular routes, used for various purposes, perhaps to community facilities and so forth. Is there much community transport in the Greater Bendigo area?

15

MS WALTERS: There are numerous buses, community organisational buses. In the City of Greater Bendigo and Loddon Shire recently won contract through the Department of Victorian Communities to run transport connections projects.

20 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS WALTERS: And I think they call it V/Line being the Loddon line sort of thing. And hopefully that will address a lot of those issues to actually use the buses that may be sitting at Bob's organisation on the weekends not being used by youth groups or whoever, to actually utilise them better and actually – for people that need them.

25

MS McMAHON: The other issue though we have with a lot of our community buses is that they are pre-booked months in advance. So you know they may provide a good service for those that are in the system, but in terms of absorbing new recipients - - -

30

MS SKILBECK: Or ad hoc journeys.

MS McMAHON: Yes, yes. And like I know council service has a community bus which is run through the Aged and Disability services, but predominantly that would be used by older and frail people and younger people with disabilities. I mean, it is not really seen as - - -

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40 MS SKILBECK: A generic resource.

MS McMAHON: Yes, that they are entitled to it. Where in actual fact they are, but it is fully booked from week to week anyway. So there are some real systemic issues that need to be dealt with there as well. And again the demand on these services are so great because of the absolute limited public transport.

45

MS SKILBECK: Thank you, very much.

MS McMAHON: Thank you.

MR PASCOE: I don't need to sit there, I don't think.

5 MS SKILBECK: No, no. Your voice is strong, go for your life, Robert.

MR PASCOE: As I said, when I met you I spent three years on the Ministerial Advisory Committee on public transport access in Melbourne. And all of the things that have been raised here today are reasonable well known, although because of the  
10 centricity of Melbourne the unavailability of public transport in regional areas is not well understood. The issues about things like gaps with trains and platforms is understood, it is a monumental engineering exercise to change it. For instance a lot of the gaps that appear are on platforms that have a slight curve in them, and to  
15 straighten the platform up or raise the height of the track takes a lot of budgeting and heaps of time and planning and - - -

MS DUNN: Well, wouldn't it be easy enough just to put a ramp on.

MS SKILBECK: Ramp.  
20

MR PASCOE: We will get to that. But that is the way in which those organisations look at it. And that is because they haven't had to become disability focused. However, if you take the time to have a look at tram route 109 which runs  
25 through Mont Albert to Port Melbourne.

MS SKILBECK: Yes, and it is Melbourne, I know it well.

MR PASCOE: And you've got all the super stops in the city.

30 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR PASCOE: You've got all of the information at eye level for people on wheelchairs.

35 MS SKILBECK: Real time, large font.

MR PASCOE: You will see what has happened through the Public Transport Access Committee in getting through to the planning people that these are the sorts of changes they need to make. Now, that took over three years to implement; just the  
40 one route.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR PASCOE: But it is a clear demonstration. In my time there, I was also the  
45 multi-purpose taxi committee and the tram route 109 committee but we got the low level floors in buses right throughout Melbourne and they are not used.

MS SKILBECK: Not used in what sense?

MR PASCOE: People in wheelchairs would prefer to use a taxi. It has been a major shift trying to make public transport accessible. So, right, all new buses will have low floors; it's great. But people can't get to the bus stop if it's raining. It is more convenient to call a cab. Then when you call a cab, especially if it is a multi-  
5 purpose taxi, half the multi-purpose taxis – if you are ever out at the airport, you will see them just sitting in the rank waiting for a group of people getting off an airplane because they pay now. You don't have to do the paperwork and send it in for the 50 per cent of the fare.

10 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR PASCOE: So, there is a whole lot of things to consider but particularly in rural and regional Australia, or Victoria, we are really the poor people in relation to public transport. As I said to you, I have someone who wants to be at work for me at 8.30,  
15 and they live probably three kilometres from the city centre, and the first bus is not until 8.30 and they only run on the hour for five hours.

MS SKILBECK: Right.

20 MR PASCOE: So, how do they get home? You know, crazy stuff. As Maureen said, they don't run on Sundays. So, there needs to be some form of - in my opinion, some form of look at critical mass and economies of scale; how we are going to blend these things together to make it work.

25 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS WALTERS: How do we make it more attractive to actually also make it a greener place to live in as well, that we get people on public transport?

30 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR PASCOE: Chris Walters talked about organisation to a disability focus; having their own buses that sit idle quite often. They do. the problem is, that if one of those buses is leased out for someone to have a community activity and they blow a  
35 gearbox, or smash it, or whatever, who pays (a) for the repairs, and (b) for the replacement bus while it's being repaired? And the answer is, the charitable organisation that owns the bus. And that is too big a risk to take because we have people who like routine in their lives and they are used to, on Monday I will do this, on Tuesday I will do that. And so there is an overarching this economies of scale  
40 thing where, if they are going to be made available, someone like the State Government has to pick up the cudgels and say, "Yes, we will go back to owning and making these things available".

45 MS SKILBECK: Okay.

MR PASCOE: But, look, there are lots of stories but things like we had from Adelaide, with the fibreglass ramp; why aren't states learning from each other? I raised with you the issue of the taxis in Perth and they spent a lot of time getting a

taxi so they could side load, only to find out that all these new wheelchairs would not fit and a whole fleet of taxis and only half the people in wheelchairs could use them.

5 MR DUNN: Yes, I know.

MR PASCOE: And so on; it goes on and on.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

10 MR PASCOE: We are not learning well from one another.

MS SKILBECK: Right.

15 MR PASCOE: So, I am pleased to see this particular inquiry take place and as Maureen said, I really wish we had had more time, more than a couple of days, to be here and ready to make a submission. We will try and do so between now and closing of submissions electronically.

20 MS SKILBECK: That would be great.

MR PASCOE: But I think it is a pity if we do that and everyone else is not here to hear and then ask questions.

25 MS SKILBECK: Sorry, Maureen?

MS McMAHON: I can't help but thinking that in regional areas and remote areas, because we've got – Bendigo is a regional, Loddon that we know is the remote – that there must be some sort of system. It is interesting Bob saying that, you know, wheelchair users are, you know, their preference for motor travel is back to taxis. you know, because when it is wet and it's 40 degrees, it is a door-to-door service. I can't help but think there must be some way of supporting a local industry that is so customer-focused. You know, like, our cabbies would know most of people with severe disabilities by name.

35 MR DUNN: Yes.

MS McMAHON: They provide an extraordinary level of service. It is safe. It is economic to a point but certainly for people who are only on income support, their number of trips extremely limited whether they're M40 or M50 is capped or not. 40 Because, you know, if they are on income support, that they have limited disposable income.

I mean, there must be some sort of creative system where we can use that local industry without all the, sort of, expensive infrastructure and timetables. I don't 45 know what it looks like but it would be really good to – I know there is one area, and I am not sure where it is, that is through Transport Connections that's actually been a lot more creative about its use of taxis. And for me, that has got to be one of the big solutions for our area.

MS SKILBECK: Right. And Transport Connections, again, was a Department of Victorian Communities program?

MS McMAHON: It is.

5

MS SKILBECK: Yes, okay. Something that we will look into. Okay.

MR PASCOE: If they can run a shuttle bus at the airport from the long-term car park to the terminal and back every 15 minutes, it makes you wonder why they cannot run a shuttle bus around places like this.

10

MS SKILBECK: Around the loop, yes.

MS WALTERS: I think there were plans for the City of Greater Bendigo to actually have a ring bus, a red, sort of, bus to help connect.

15

MS SKILBECK: Yes. Do you know where that went?

MS WALTERS: Around the hospital and into the train station and a few other places; but that was a while off and that may be addressed through the Transport Connections project.

20

MS SKILBECK: Okay. And some of the other work around making the transport services and licences more flexible may support that as well.

25

MS McMAHON: And I think for somewhere like Bendigo, I think we've got to put it in perspective, too. I would have said, within what, a ten k city perimeter, public transport just dissipates.

MS SKILBECK: Outside of ten kilometres?

30

MS McMAHON: Would that be right, Paul?

MR PASCOE: I would have thought it was less.

35

MS McMAHON: Less.

MS WALTERS: Yes.

MR PASCOE: You wouldn't get any further out than Eaglehawk, which is only about eight.

40

MS McMAHON: Yes.

MS WALTERS: Yes.

45

MR PASCOE: Going out towards Epsom, you wouldn't even get five.

MS McMAHON: Yes.

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

5 MS DENNIS: It is the same in Horsham. We live seven kilometres out and the bus stops down the road one kilometre.

MS SKILBECK: Yes. So, it is a six k radius out of Horsham?

10 MS DENNIS: Sorry?

MS SKILBECK: Six kilometres out of Horsham only? Right. Sorry, Jim?

MR DUNN: Wangaratta has - - -

15 MS SKILBECK: Sorry – Wangaratta has?

MR DUNN: It would be five or six k from the GPO for Wangaratta.

20 MS SKILBECK: Yes. Five or six; okay.

MR DENNIS: I would like to get back on the ramps, if I can. Is it all right if I get back on the ramps?

25 MS SKILBECK: Yes, you may.

MR DENNIS: I am Raelene's father, of course, if you can tell by the heads. It amazes me that just because of one accident at Morwell, all the handicapped people of Victoria suffer. It amazes me; I have walked down those ramps, walked down one side, no problem. You know, I've probably followed Raelene - - -

30

MS DENNIS: Hang on, Dad.

MR DENNIS: She's not going to (inaudible of mic) those ramps and I've ridden on the Melbourne trains and I've actually walked down the ramps and I'd say, a wheelchair that I've checked out on the weight of, with a passenger, on is something like 278 kilos. Okay? Admittedly there's four wheels on it spreading the load across, but one person walking on one side of that blasted thing with the conductor helping them down has got no problems whatsoever. So, for one person having a bad accident, the whole system is penalised. And that amazes me because the other thing you have to consider, of course, is that the people who drive the trains, they have to have something they can lift.

35

40

MS SKILBECK: Yes, that is true.

45

MR DENNIS: They jump out and they do it, and everything you add to that platform makes it heavier.

MS SKILBECK: Something else they need to, yes.

MR DENNIS: And they don't want that; nobody wants that but there is no doubt in my mind that it is just an engineering problem that could be solved that easy.

5

MS SKILBECK: What is the weight of the - - -

MR DENNIS: But the Union has jumped on that one bloody accident and they go on the Health and Safety and it all went berserk from there because nobody was prepared to sit down and look into it closely.

10

MS SKILBECK: Yes. How heavy are the existing ramps; the one that did collapse, the one with the hinge in the middle?

15

MR DENNIS: Sorry?

MS SKILBECK: About six kilograms? Is that the weight of the current ramps?

MS DENNIS: How heavy are the ramps?

20

MR DENNIS: I don't know; they are not that heavy because they just pick them up and they just take them and they walk away with them.

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

25

MR DENNIS: I haven't weighed one.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

30

MR DENNIS: I have not weighed a ramp but they are not that heavy.

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

MR DENNIS: But you don't want them any heavier anyway.

35

MS SKILBECK: No.

MR DENNIS: And fibreglass is as heavy as steel. When it all comes down to it, making them out of fibreglass or anything like that is really not a proposition because fibreglass is heavy, you know?

40

MS SKILBECK: I think the point might have been - - -

MR DENNIS: All they've got to do is get their act together and just sit down and say, "Well, there is nothing really wrong with the ramps; they can be used providing they are used correctly".

45

MS SKILBECK: Done safely.

MR DENNIS: You know?

MS SKILBECK: Okay. Thank you, very much. Are there any other comments that we ought to put to transcript this morning? Maureen?

5

MS McMAHON: I have one. I am just thinking also, you know, I know where the Bendigo train comes in to Southern Cross it tends to vary where it pulls in and the distance to wherever you need to go. And, you know, the people carrier service is a great service but I just wonder how readily it is promoted and, you know, whether on our country trains we could, perhaps, have an announcement made that that is a service, you know, given approximate distance from the point of drop off to an access point.

10

MS SKILBECK: Sorry, are you referring to the assistance from the train to outside the station?

15

MS McMAHON: Yes. The little - - -

MS DENNIS: They don't actually go into the trains, though, do they?

20

MS McMAHON: They don't go on to the trains?

MS DENNIS: No?

MS McMAHON: No, but they can come down to the trains.

25

MS DENNIS: They come down to the trains; yes.

MS McMAHON: Yes.

30

MS DENNIS: To where you get off the train, they can come down.

MS SKILBECK: Right.

MS DENNIS: And they are sort of like, a golf cart.

35

MS SKILBECK: Oh, yes. Much like the airports would have.

MS DENNIS: Yes.

40

MS McMAHON: Yes. But the problem with that also is it doesn't operate out of hours.

MS DENNIS: Is that right?

45

MS McMAHON: If you come down on a train that arrives at seven o'clock at night, then you cannot access it.

MS SKILBECK: Right. So, it is literally nine to five.

MR DUNN: You have to give 24 hours notice.

5 MS McMAHON: Or you have to give 24 hours notice.

MR DUNN: It is 9.00 till 6.30.

10 MS SKILBECK: 9.00 to 6.30. Thank you. Okay.

MS McMAHON: Because again, I think just, apart from your disability, I think, for other people, I reckon it is a bit of a hike sometimes from where the train pulls in.

15 MS SKILBECK: Although less than it was with the old station, isn't it?

MS DENNIS: Well, the problem with the old station was you had to go down and up and down and up to get out of the place.

20 MS SKILBECK: That is right.

MR DENNIS: The thing that gets me a little bit is that I have actually travelled on the Melbourne trains and I actually took a tape and a measuring stick and I went into the V/Line trains and I measured them and some of the gaps are that wide, I tell you, that wide and that high. I was on the other train, the Connex train the other day.

25 MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DENNIS: And the train pulled up, you just step straight out on to the platform at Spencer Street, like that, straight out on the platform.

30 MS SKILBECK: Okay.

MR DENNIS: Now, we must admit they're new rolling stock, but obviously for the Connex trains they have actually done something to the stations that has made that happen.

35

MS SKILBECK: They bought the rolling stock so that - - -

40 MR DENNIS: You can't do that to every station in Victoria and that is ridiculous to even suggest it but I've also looked at TV because people have told me that across the world you just step straight out onto the bloody platform and all that, but you don't.

45 MS SKILBECK: No, you don't.

MR DENNIS: You watch TV where there's trains for people to get out and they step down or they do whatever they've got to do, but they don't all come in at the level.

MS SKILBECK: No, they don't.

MR DENNIS: They don't. And the engineering problem is an horrific problem, there is no doubt about it. It is horrific. And I come out of that environment and I  
5 know that those blasted ramps actually are practical. All you've got to do is  
somebody who is 30 stone hopped on it and it folded and maybe they are not meant  
to take 30 stone. But the average person, you make it so that there's got a slide or  
something and they drop across it and a 30 stone person could get hit, well, good on  
10 it. But those ramps, I honestly believe they work and because somebody got hurt,  
they jumped up and down because of the insurers and the compensation and all that  
and the whole thing has just got out of hand. And that is all it boils down to.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

15 MR DENNIS: Out of hand.

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MR DENNIS: You know? But for her to have to sit on a platform with her legs  
20 hanging out the door, on the train step with her legs dangled out the door trying to  
get herself up somewhere is stupid because that's when it happens, another train  
comes at the back or a shunter or something, she's halfway out they can't see her in  
the mirror, down. Too late now; you've got one leg down and no good having  
(inaudible off mic). One arm as well. Too late.

25

MS SKILBECK: Yes.

MS McMAHON: Can I just ask add on a positive note?

30 MS SKILBECK: Yes, thank you.

MS McMAHON: Certainly I think it's around the issue of disciplinary awareness  
and I think in terms of our V/Line staff, or the V/Line from Bendigo to Melbourne, I  
35 mean, the level of customer service I think is great and I think, you know, there is a  
whole myriad of infrastructure issues that there is no quick-fix for and there is, you  
know, it requires millions of dollars but I think to maintain and to encourage that  
understanding amongst public transport staff around the needs of people with  
disability is a really important measure to maintain and sustain. Because it can  
40 cover a myriad of sins and if someone has a barrier to access but is treated  
respectfully by the appropriate staff, I think, you know, that is a long way to solving  
that person's problems.

MS SKILBECK: Yes. No, that is an important point; thank you, very much. And  
45 something that we can forget if we are focusing on infrastructure related standards.  
It is true.

MS McMAHON: Yes.

MS SKILBECK: Are there any other comments to make on transcript before – Jim? Emilio? Is there anything you would like to add?

5 MR SAVLE: I could probably add after you cease them.

MS SKILBECK: Okay.

MR SAVLE: Just for information, say. Yes, I would be happy to.

10 MS SKILBECK: All right. With that, I think we will close the session. Thank you, very much, Jean, for taking the transcript and thank you everyone that has contributed; it has been brilliant. Thank you.

15 **HEARING ADJOURNED**

**[11.28am]**