

Inquiry into Integrated Public Transport

Evidence from Disability Wales

The Enterprise and Business Committee is undertaking an inquiry into **Integrated Public Transport**.

Disability Wales recognises that at the heart of full inclusive participation in society is the right to access all public transport. Inaccessible transport remains a significant barrier to independent living for many disabled people. Our members have identified access to public transport as one of the core principles of Independent living. Integrated transport is an integral part of the Framework for Action on Independent Living. The Welsh Government is currently consulting upon the first draft publication of the document.

- **How well is Welsh public transport integrated, particularly in relation to bus, rail and community transport services, and what factors limit integration?**

Integration of bus and train services in particular is of paramount importance because the Welsh Government promotes public transport as a way of cutting down on people's carbon footprint. If public transport is to provide a real alternative to private vehicle ownership services must be reliable, accessible and there must be a smooth transition from bus to train networks.

Many rural trains do not have accessible parking bays in their car parks mainly due to their small size. In train station car parks where there are any accessible parking bays, there are usually only a very limited number of spaces.

At park and ride sites disabled people's access requirements must not be overlooked. There must be dedicated accessible parking spaces available on site, accessible transport (bus & train) to and from shopping centres; drop off points located near to the shop mobility scheme. There should be more information available in accessible formats; this applies to both paper information such as leaflets and online information. Online and paper information should be accessible to all disabled people. Also there should be visual display and audio announcements of trains at railway stations and at bus stops providing real time information. Car park attendants and transport staff should be appropriately trained to

understand disability equality issues and able to provide assistance if required.

Rail replacement coach provision must be accessible for disabled travellers. Information should be made available at the time of booking passenger assistance if a rail journey involves a rail replacement service. Disabled people must be aware of such factors when booking a journey on public transport so that they do not become stranded at a station due to the inaccessibility of the rail replacement coach service.

Generally, access issues concerning train carriages, bus vehicles, train stations and bus stations are common. Taxi accessibility too is something that needs to be improved.

- **How successful are legal, policy and administrative / delivery arrangements in Wales in supporting effective, integrated public transport services that meet the needs of Welsh travellers?**

With regards to disabled access, transport providers are involving disabled people, i.e. actively engaging them more often and considering access issues in the design and implementation stages of decision making processes. Impact assessments and consultations on transport decisions are held more regularly and disabled individuals, access groups and disabled organisations are invited to contribute to the process. It would be good if each of the four transport consortia engaged with disabled people / access groups in their local areas. Local groups / individuals would be the best people to advise the consortia on local transport issues as opposed to national organisations because they would have more local knowledge.

Two good practice examples involving trains:

National Station Improvement Plan Plus. The Welsh Government's and Network Rail's engagement with disabled organisations and groups on the access improvements to Swansea railway station; Network Rail, Arriva Trains Wales and the Welsh Government liaised with Swansea Access for Everyone and Guide Dogs before and during access improvements to Swansea train station. Prior to the opening of the station Disability Wales was also engaged and attended the feedback session – 'lessons learned' workshop. Each organisation's access views / observations were listened to carefully and any concerns raised were noted and discussed with the proviso to amend access issues accordingly if they were able to do so.

A) The 'lessons learned' workshop was particularly useful as it allowed for disabled organisations to have a say regarding highlighting key issues for any planned future access improvements. The workshop was carried out in September 2012. The involvement of disabled people from the planning and design stage to the feedback stage was very pleasing; the way in which the planning information was presented also aided disabled peoples involvement. A 3D model of the newly proposed station plans was produced along with the standard plans which ensured visually impaired people were not excluded from the consultation process. This isn't common place however and it should be.

B) Network Rail's Equality Impact Assessment for the access improvement / revamp of Ystrad Mynach train station. The local access group (Caerphilly Access Group), Disability Wales and Network Rail officials met to discuss proposed accessibility improvements of the station and the path linking the station to Ystrad Mynach town centre. Engagement with disabled groups and organisations at the earliest opportunity is crucial for the success of transport network integration.

- **What steps can be taken to improve public transport integration in Wales?**

The main barriers for train travel include:

- Inadequate provision of disabled bays at many rural train stations. As accessibility of railway stations improves, so too must the number of disabled parking bays available at those station car parks.
- Physical barriers such as train carriage height and the age of the carriage; many routes have old rolling stock which are not wheelchair accessible due to their narrow aisles and the lack of disabled/accessible toilet.
- A lack of lifts at a train stations means that wheelchair users cannot access the stations and even if lifts are present there are often limited hours in which the lifts can be operated. Many lifts do not operate in the evenings due to fears of vandalism.

There is a new system in place when disabled passengers book assistance. The 'Passenger Assist' booking service replaced the Assisted Passenger Reservation Service (APRS) this year, with no change to the customer. How assistance is booked via the telephone remains the same.

. With the new system, however, there is no requirement to book 24 hours in advance which was essential with the old APRS system. However, by providing 24 hours notice it allows the train operator to provide the best possible service. The benefits of the new system are that train operators receive a great deal more information about the customer than before. Information becomes easier to track and there is more accountability on both sides i.e. did the customer turn up and was the appropriate, impairment specific assistance provided etc.

It is worth noting that the Association of Train Operating Companies chose the system run by Northgate Public Services which will be rolled it out one train company at a time. Incidentally this is the same company that is administering the Blue Badge Improvement Service.

For Disability Wales' full response see:

http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-eoc-home/bus-committees-third-eoc-inquiry/eoc3-inq_rail/eoc3-rail_inq-response/eoc3-rail_inq-rs58.htm

Bus transport has very similar issues such as information tables being situated too high for wheelchair users to see, or a lack of audio real-time information at bus stops thus preventing visually impaired and blind travellers knowing which bus is which. This means that people have to depend on the good nature of other passengers to assist them, assuming there is anyone else at the bus stop. The same lack of information on board the bus regarding current route and location is also an issue for visually impaired and blind passengers whilst travelling.

Communication barriers, including staff attitude can have a negative effect on journeys. Access barriers include physical access to buses, lack of low bus vehicles and lack of ramps. Too few wheelchair accessible spaces on busses can be an issue especially if wheelchair users travel together. Bus stops, especially in rural areas, are often on the roadside and frequently without kerbs. Wheelchair users regularly find getting on a bus difficult due to the height discrepancy / gap between the bus itself and the bus stop.

Many disabled people rely on private vehicles or taxis and cannot make use of their free bus pass because public transport is not accessible.

What can be done to remedy integrated transport barriers?

Timings, reliability and accessibility of public transport are essential to ensure an effective transport system.

Timings of public transport must be appropriately matched as to ensure smooth journey transition between all modes of transport. All modes of transport which includes not only bus to train, but taxi, coach, cycle, and private vehicle also. Disabled people require adequate time to change mode of transport. A disabled person's impairment may mean that they are unable to change transport modes in a short time frame (there may be only a matter of minutes between arriving and departing transport mode). Some disabled travellers could miss their transport link altogether. Lack of fluidity of travel means that buses may depart before the connection train arrives at the station or vice versa or that services stop after a certain time in the evening so alternative modes of transport have to be sought therefore making smooth transitions impossible. Timetabling of bus, train and other services are often designed independently by individual companies, very often without taking into account other operators let alone other modes of transport.

Timetabling of busses or trains to allow enough time for disabled people to go about their business i.e. to shop or to attend doctor appointments etc is crucial. There have been cases where public transport users either have a very short time to go shopping or have to wait until the next bus home which could be a further wait of two hours (especially in rural areas) which is too long. Disabled people who use public transport as a means of attending medical appointments also have problems. They often have to start out early in the day to reach their destination on time due to the irregularity of busses or trains. This means that an already stressful journey could leave a passenger exasperated.

Public transport must be reliable: some bus and train journeys are not reliable. E.g. a wheelchair user may be able to access a low level floor bus for on their outward journey but on their return they are met by bus after bus with stepped access. On one occasion a member who is a wheelchair user had to get a taxi home because they were unable to board their bus home as it was not wheelchair accessible.

As previously mentioned accessibility is essential for disabled people with sensory, physical and learning disabilities to use integrated transport networks. Information must be easily available to enable disabled passengers to adequately plan their journey. Access to information while journeying is also important. Pembrokeshire Young Voices for Choices embarked on "All Aboard" Transport Challenge Wales to celebrate Disability Wales 40th Anniversary. The four day

event (17 – 20 April 2012) tested the accessibility and usability of Arriva Trains and Buses for disabled travellers. Two of the four days involved travelling on bus and trains. Observations included: 'Bus timetables are too high and not easy to understand – electrical message board not working (Bangor).' 'The bus driver misunderstood which train station we wanted to get off at so he went past the stop. But he apologised.'

All modes of transport should be accessible for disabled travellers to ensure a smooth transition between different transport types for all journeys. Transfer times between modes of transport has to be considered, very often that the time stated as needed for successful transition from one mode of transport to another assumes that all travellers are ambulant non-disabled people. This is not the case, transition times need to adequately reflect all travellers, especially disabled travellers', many of whom sometimes have slower transition times. This has to be taken into account when timetables are created and transition times are produced.

To conclude integrated, accessible, transport plays an essential part in ensuring disabled people have the opportunity to live independently in the community and play an equal part in society.

