

Transport for London

Safety and Sustainability Panel

**Subject: Transport Select Committee Report on Access to
Transport for Disabled People**

Date: 9 October 2013

1 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to inform panel members of Transport for London's (TfL's) submission to the recent House of Commons Select Committee hearing into access to transport for people with disabilities and to note the key points of the Select Committee report.
- 1.2 The Panel is asked to note this paper

2 Background

- 2.1 In December 2012, TfL was invited by the House of Commons Transport Select Committee (TSC) to provide written evidence on the effectiveness of legislation relating to transport for disabled people. The TSC were particularly interested in how the legislation works in terms of staff assistance, and the provision of information.
- 2.2 The memorandum of evidence was submitted in January 2013 and answered specific questions. These questions were;
 - (i) Is the legislation working?
 - (ii) How effectively is the legislation enforced?
- 2.3 A further question was asked about what could be learned from the success of the London 2012 Paralympic Games and what could be done to build on their success.
- 2.4 TfL submitted that it believed that legislation aimed at improving the rights of disabled people had been broadly successful insofar as it set out the minimum which disabled people expected. The legislation developed over time into the Disability Duty, which added the additional requirement to involve disabled people in the decision making process for services that are being designed for them.
- 2.5 TfL set out what it had done to meet the requirements of the Disability Duty and other legislation relating to transport, such as the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations. Key points included the development of the TfL Independent Disability Advisory Group (IDAG), the development and publication of a long term accessibility implementation plan (AIP) as part of the Mayor's Transport Strategy and the publication of Disability Equality Schemes and the recent Single Equality Scheme (SES).
- 2.6 In December 2012, TfL also published "Your Accessible Transport Network", this document sets out the access improvements TfL will deliver over the next 2 to 3 years. The action plan was submitted as part of TfL's written evidence to the TSC.

3 Oral Evidence Given to the TSC - 13 May 2013

3.1 TfL was called to present oral evidence to the TSC along with representatives from Devon County Council and Merseytravel.

3.2 The TSC members asked a range of questions including:

- (i) What are the major challenges to achieving equal access to transport for disabled people
- (ii) Has the Equality Act made any difference to what you have done?
- (iii) Is there anything you would do differently in planning for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games?
- (iv) Are there any initiatives (that TfL put in place for the Games) that TfL would share with other areas?
- (v) Is there potential to extend the concept of volunteers at major interchanges providing assistance to passengers?
- (vi) How do you ensure that disabled people can plan their journeys with confidence?
- (vii) How do you communicate with disabled people and how organised do you find their voice, and whether you have introduced formal structures to communicate with disabled people?
- (viii) Do you have complaints about taxis and private hire vehicles and if so what are they and how many complaints do you have?
- (ix) Are there less wheelchair spaces available on buses in London since the “bendy bus” has been removed from service
- (x) Is there anything you would like the Government to do to assist you or the operators to help disabled people access the public transport system more easily?

3.3 In its responses to these questions, TfL demonstrated the considerable focus it had placed on improving accessibility for disabled people; the accessible bus fleet, investment in station and train infrastructure, the variety of ways in which it makes information available to customers and its ongoing involvement of disabled people in its decision making process.

3.4 The success of accessible transport for the London 2012 Games was acknowledged and particularly the use of volunteers in providing assistance and the involvement of disabled peoples’ organisations in the development of the access training given to these volunteers.

3.5 The TSC asked a supplementary question about the impact of reliability on a disabled persons’ perception on journey accessibility. TfL stated that it continues to invest significant resources in improving journey reliability and was well aware that predictability is an access issue, and that when things do go wrong it is vital that staff and customers have access to information to get people to their destination with the minimum of inconvenience.

- 3.6 TfL's response to the final question pointed out that the Department for Transport (DfT) had recently published its own accessibility action plan and that disabled people as well as transport operators would benefit from this action plan being carried out.

4 Recommendations of the TSC Report

- 4.1 The TSC published its report: "Access to Transport for Disabled People" on 9 September 2013. The majority of recommendations within the report are directed at the DfT, particularly in relation to delivering its own accessibility action plan. The full list of recommendations is attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.2 Other recommendations include a call for the DfT to involve disabled people's organisations and "charities" in the decision making process for deciding which stations should receive funding under the "Access for All" programme. Bids for the next round of funding are being sought over the next couple of months. TfL's submission is based largely on the list identified in the AIP, which was scrutinised by a Citizens' Jury of disabled people in 2009/10 and had detailed involvement of its own IDAG.
- 4.3 The TSC report also urged the DfT to complete its review of the Inclusive Mobility (recommendation 2) Guidance early in 2014. The current guidance was issued in 2005. TfL has been involved in the development of both the DfT's action plan and this guidance and will continue to be an active stakeholder. TfL is already reviewing its own "streetscape" guidance including specific reviews around tactile paving and accessible pedestrian crossings. Members of TfL's Independent Disability Advisory Group (IDAG) are involved in completing these reviews which are an important part of inclusive mobility..
- 4.4 A further recommendation (number 8) suggests that the DfT introduce a "mystery shopper" campaign for those using the National Rail Passenger Assist (NRPA) programme. London Overground customers are recommended to use NRPA service to book assistance, however in reality London Overground generally operates a "turn up and go service". However a pilot mystery traveller survey has been agreed with London Rail and London Overground Rail Operations Limited (LOROL), using the same format for other accessibility mystery traveller surveys carried out across the rest of the TfL network.
- 4.5 It is noted that TfL is further ahead than the rest of the UK in terms of transport accessibility for disabled people and as such the recommendations of the TSC report are not applicable as they are already in place in London.

5 Recommendation

- 4.6 The Panel is asked to NOTE this report.

6 Contact

- 6.1 Contact: Stephen Golden – Head of Equality and Corporate Sustainability
Number: 020 3054 7160
Email: stephengolden@tfl.gov.uk

Conclusions and recommendations of the Transport Select Committee report into the accessibility of transport for disabled people.

Monitoring of the DfT's Accessibility Action Plan

1. We have concerns about the lack of information available on how the Action Plan will be monitored. We recommend that the Department for Transport publish annual updates on the implementation of the measures in the Action Plan, which should include data on changes in the number and types of journeys made by disabled people. (Paragraph 18)

A review of the Inclusive Mobility guidance

2. We urge the DfT to complete its review of the Inclusive Mobility guidance in the first half of 2014. The review should take account of new practice such as the growth of shared space infrastructure. It should also engage with disability charities and organisations to develop new ideas for providing accessible pedestrian infrastructure in the different physical environments around the UK. (Paragraph 20)

Improvements to the UK bus and coach fleet

3. We believe that improvements to the bus network for disabled people are improvements for everyone. As part of the Accessibility Action Plan, the DfT should:

a) introduce financial incentives for bus and coach companies to bring forward capital investment in new PSVAR-compliant vehicles ahead of the deadline for compliance;

b) introduce a system of penalties for operators who fail to operate low-floor buses on routes advertised as such;

c) work with bus operators to implement a nationwide campaign asking people to make space for wheelchairs in wheelchair areas of the buses, similar to that undertaken by Transport for London; and

d) introduce the kite-mark system for mobility scooters by the end of 2013. (Paragraph 25.d)

4. We accept that retro-fitting and operating audio-visual equipment on an existing bus is expensive and difficult to justify on routes with a more marginal business case. A UK bus fleet fully equipped with audio-visual equipment is therefore unlikely in the short-term. We note various smartphone applications are being developed to assist people with visual or hearing impairments to complete their journey. However, due to the cost of technology and poor 3G mobile phone coverage in rural areas, these are unlikely to replace audio-visual passenger information in the foreseeable future. The DfT and transport authorities should review their position on audio-visual systems on buses. The Accessibility Action Plan should require a phased introduction of buses with audio-visual information systems over the next ten years. The DfT should therefore require new buses to have audio-visual systems in place. (Paragraph 29)

Accessible transport for isolated communities

5. We believe that such shared taxis and other demand-responsive services could provide a wider-ranging, more accessible form of public transport than infrequent buses on fixed routes through inaccessible areas and so deserve further investigation. (Paragraph 31)

6. We recommend that the DfT enable local authorities to pilot a scheme whereby accessible private hire vehicle consortia or community transport organisations can tender for local bus services which are eligible for Bus Service Operator's Grant. We shall be looking in greater detail at this in our forthcoming inquiry into passenger transport in isolated communities. (Paragraph 33)

Access to the rail network and station staffing

7. The Office of Rail Regulation should work with the train operating companies and launch a widespread campaign to ensure that disabled people are aware of their rights regarding accessibility to the rail network, including receiving a taxi to the nearest available accessible station if necessary. (Paragraph 35)

8. The DfT should commission Passenger Focus to undertake a "mystery shopper" survey of users of Passenger Assist, to monitor the quality of the service. This should be repeated regularly. Train operators must work to reduce the booking time required for organised assistance on a journey, so that advance booking for assistance is phased out. (Paragraph 47)

9. We welcome the DfT's funding for accessibility improvements to stations. The DfT should involve disability organisations and charities in prioritising stations for improvements in the future Access for All programme and in identifying effective improvements at each station. Station upgrades do not detract from the importance of staffed stations to ensure a safe and secure journey for disabled people and any changes in ticket offices should not reduce the level of staff on stations. (Paragraph 38)

10. The DfT must include a requirement in future rail franchise agreements for train operators to brief their station staff on the interchange beyond the station forecourt. (Paragraph 39)

Taxis and private hire vehicles

11. The DfT should introduce financial incentives for taxi and private hire operators to choose fully accessible vehicles when they invest in new fleets, with a target of a fully accessible taxi and private hire fleet within ten years. (Paragraph 40)

12. Building on the success in Merseyside, the DfT should bring forward a programme of disability awareness training for drivers of taxis and private hire vehicles without delay, working with licensing authorities and the taxi trade on implementation. (Paragraph 58)

Journey planning and Transport Direct

13. There is a risk that the investment to enable the planning of an accessible journey via Transport Direct will not reap its full benefit due to a lack of awareness of the site. As part of the Accessibility Action Plan, the DfT should develop and implement a

targeted marketing strategy to raise awareness of the new features of Transport Direct among disabled people. (Paragraph 43)

14. We recommend that the DfT reviews the Transport Direct website to increase its Web Content Accessibility Guidelines standard to AAA. The DfT should ensure those who are unable or unwilling to use the Internet have an alternative means of planning an accessible journey. (Paragraph 45)

Travel training schemes

15. The DfT should encourage local authorities to include travel training schemes in bids for funding in the next round of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. (Paragraph 49)

Staff training and awareness

16. We are disappointed that the DfT exercised its exemption to the requirement to provide disability awareness training to staff in the bus and coach industry. The needs of disabled users with all impairments should be taken into account. The DfT should end the exemption and work with the bus and coach industry and disability charities to develop a basic disability awareness training package for drivers for implementation by 2014, including investigating "e-learning" as a means of providing this training at a minimal cost. This should be included in the Accessibility Action Plan. (Paragraph 56)

Air travel

17. The DfT should seek to amend the air travel equality regulations (EC 1107/2006) to require airlines to allow carers to travel free of charge on an aircraft, where an airline judges a disabled person to be incapable of travelling independently contrary to the individual's self-assessment. (Paragraph 60)

18. The DfT should urge the European Commission to bring forward proposals on adequate compensation by airlines for damaged mobility equipment. (Paragraph 61)

The Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee

19. We are pleased at the Government's decision to retain the Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee. Where the DfT requires guidance documents, disabled people's charities and organisations will be able to commission and produce such documents, possibly with private sector sponsorship. A smaller, more efficient DPTAC should have a role in the quality assurance of such documents, but not in their production. DPTAC's key role should be to help the DfT develop and monitor the delivery of the Accessibility Action Plan. We recommend that future role of DPTAC be one of providing informal and practical advice to the DfT during policy development, the specification of research, and the analysis of policy impact. We therefore recommend that representatives from mainstream transport operators be included in the reformatted committee, to enable it to better advise the DfT on what is feasible. (Paragraph 63)

Qualitative assessment of accessible transport funding

20. In many areas of transport expenditure, the DfT undertakes an economic cost-benefit analysis, which it uses to justify changes in expenditure. A methodology for quantitative assessment of accessible transport is not available and so spending

decisions on it are not available for scrutiny. We recommend that the DfT develops and publishes a methodology for quantitative assessment of benefits from improving accessibility to disabled people. (Paragraph 66)

Concluding remarks

21. Enabling and encouraging access to transport for disabled people will have widespread benefits. For example:

i) Disabled people would be able to access more employment opportunities. This would improve the standard of living for disabled people. For government, improving the accessibility of transport might therefore reduce the out of work benefit payments made by the Department for Work and Pensions and increase tax income to the Treasury.

ii) Disabled people would be able to travel to healthcare centres, reducing the requirement for home visits.

iii) Disabled people would have easier access to a wider range of education and training opportunities.

iv) Disabled people would be able to travel to shops and to meet friends in cafes and bars, increasing the spending by consumers. (Paragraph 64)

22. Given the potential benefit across government from promoting transport for disabled people, we are surprised at the lack of such co-ordination and engagement currently between departments, as seen with the lack of co-ordination between the DfT and Department for Work & Pensions over changes to Motability. The Environmental Audit Committee recommended in its recent report "Transport and accessibility to public services" that the Cabinet Office convene a working group of ministers and officials to improve cross-government working on accessibility. We agree with this recommendation. (Paragraph 65)

23. Local government and the strategic transport authorities have the closest involvement with transport operators and passengers. It is essential that disabled people can work at a strategic-level with local decision-makers at the planning stage of transport services and infrastructure in a local area. When there is a local scheme that is very successful, there should be a means of promoted nationwide so that its full potential is harnessed. The DfT must work with the Disability Action Alliance to identify successful local authority and/or operator schemes and promote their development at a national level. Details of schemes being progressed should be published on an annual basis alongside the annual update of the implementation of the Accessibility Action Plan.