



Physical Disability Council of NSW
Ordinary People Ordinary Lives

Submission for the Transport for NSW
Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017 – 2021 Consultation Draft

28th September 2017

Ellen Small

Physical Disability Council of NSW
3/184 Glebe Point Road, Glebe NSW 2037

02 9552 1606
www.pdcnsw.org.au
ellen.small@pdcnsw.org.au

Who is the Physical Disability Council of NSW?

The Physical Disability Council of NSW (PDCN) is the peak body representing people with physical disabilities across New South Wales. This includes people with a range of physical disability issues, from young children and their representatives to aged people, who are from a wide range of socio-economic circumstances and live in metropolitan, rural and regional areas of NSW.

Our core function is to influence and advocate for the achievement of systemic change to ensure the rights of all people with a physical disability are improved and upheld.

The objectives of PDCN are:

- To educate, inform and assist people with physical disabilities in NSW about the range of services, structure and programs available that enable their full participation, equality of opportunity and equality of citizenship.
- To develop the capacity of people with physical disability in NSW to identify their own goals, and the confidence to develop a pathway to achieving their goals (ie: self-advocate).
- To educate and inform stakeholders (ie: about the needs of people with a physical disability) so they are able to achieve and maintain full participation, equality of opportunity and equality of citizenship.

Introduction

PDCN appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on Transport for NSW's Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) Consultation draft 2017 – 2021.

The Transport for NSW's DIAP contains strategic objectives and actions organised under five outcome areas. PDCN will make comments on the actions outlined in the consultation draft where we feel we can contribute to the conversation.

PDCN would like to commend Transport for NSW on the progress made through the Disability Action Plan 2012-2017 and improvements made to infrastructure, information provision and customer service across the NSW transport system.

PDCN would like to reinforce that it is vital that transport services are available across NSW to facilitate greater access, inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in the community.

PDCN would also like to accentuate the importance of affordable, accessible transport with good connectivity as without access to transport there are barriers present in the community that prevent people with disabilities from accessing employment, education, medical appointments, social opportunities, community resources or from visiting friends and family.

The NSW public transport network continues to be upgraded through the Transport Access Program and other infrastructure programs. PDCN believes a short timeframe for Transport for NSW to achieve whole of journey accessibility has greater pertinence given the roll out of the National Disability Insurance scheme (NDIS), statewide from July 2017. The NDIS will give eligible participants an opportunity to have more choice and control over their support services and will enable greater participation in education, employment and the community. As stated in Transport for NSW's DIAP as the NDIS rolls out "transport services in NSW, along with other services, will need to adapt to meet the unique needs and life goals of people with disability"¹. Whole of journey accessibility and upgrades of the entire transport network are crucial to facilitate the community participation that is a cornerstone of the NDIS.

PDCN commend Transport for NSW for the extended timeframe provided for submissions in response to their draft DIAP 2017-2020, allowing those wishing to respond adequate time to prepare a well-researched and considered response.

Actions Items

Liveable communities: To provide barrier free end to end journeys for all customers

Accessible transport is a key issue for people with disabilities, especially individuals who are wheelchair and motorised scooter users. The right to equal and active participation in the community is clearly mandated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which was ratified by Australia in July 2008. Article 9 provides for accessibility, including access on an equal basis to transport², Article 19 provides for living independently and being included in the community³, Article 24 provides for the right to education⁴, and Article 27 provides for work and employment⁵.

Furthermore, access and inclusion is key in the National Disability Strategy (NDS). Policy direction four states 'a public, private and community transport system that is accessible for the whole community' is vital for people with disabilities to have mobility in the community and 'underpins all aspects of life for people with a disability'⁶.

¹ NSW Government, Transport for NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) 2017-2021 Consultation Draft, page 6

² United Nations, Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRDP), page 9

³ Ibid, CRDP, page 14

⁴ Ibid, CRDP, page 17

⁵ Ibid, CRDP, page 19

⁶ Commonwealth of Australia, National Disability Strategy (NDS) 2010- 2020, page 32

To achieve the objective of barrier free end to end journeys for all customers PDCN believes the Transport for NSW DAIP requires concrete and detailed strategies demonstrating how each of the five actions steps will be implemented and how progress will be empirically measured.

1.1 Progressively improve accessibility of train stations

PDCN believes it is vital that there is greater clarity around the schedule of the Transport Access Program currently underway to upgrade the transport network, including rail infrastructure such as train stations. The primary compliance target of 2025 for the Commonwealth's Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport⁷ does not include the train network which has been given an extension to be compliant by 2032.

PDCN would like to see compliance targets brought forward wherever possible, and steps taken to maximise the practical accessibility of stations during the upgrade period. The DIAP should provide greater detail on the inclusive design principles that will be applied to achieve greater train station accessibility.

PDCN would also like to highlight the importance of providing the public with a clear and definitive timeline for the infrastructure work taking place through the Transport Access Program ensuring it is simpler to track the progress being made and to ascertain the degree to which train stations are accessible - thus improving customer experience during the implementation of the program. Transport for NSW should also provide transparency around the process for "improving access to stations on the basis of prioritised need" so the public is aware of the timeline for stations receiving accessibility upgrades and are able to provide consultation during this process.

PDCN believes that increasing the level of accessibility across the rail system, specifically physical access to train stations will result in an increase in patronage by people with disabilities. The DIAP states 49.5% of train stations that are accessible account for 83.6% of patronage, however if more stations were accessible PDCN believes this number may vary considerably. As stated in the DIAP, accessibility of Newtown station increased usage by 12% after the completion of the accessibility project⁸.

1.2 Progressively improve the accessibility of the train fleet

The DIAP requires specific criteria around the upgrades that are possible for the present train fleet and should detail how these physical upgrades will take place in conjunction with considerations, such as direct assistance that will guarantee the usability of trains during the upgrade period.

1.3 Progressively improve the accessibility of bus stops

⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002, Part 33 Compliance, Part 5

⁸ Op cit., Transport for NSW, DIAP, page 11

PDCN feels that this action item is noncommittal and the DIAP must identify and set strategies to ensure upgrades of existing bus stops occur in a swift manner that will maximise both accessibility and customer experience. When Transport for NSW 'issues guidelines on bus stop design standards for accessibility and the reduction of barriers' it is vital that specific means for following up on the implementation of these guidelines are identified.

Furthermore, as the accessibility of bus stops is primarily the responsibility of councils, PDCN urges Transport for NSW not only to investigate but to set a specific timeline for developing a feasible program to accelerate upgrades to bus stops by NSW councils. Transport for NSW should state how they will work more comprehensively with local government to accelerate upgrades to existing bus stop infrastructure as along with the increased accessibility of the bus fleet this is vital to facilitate access for people with disabilities.

1.4 Progressively improve the accessibility of Bus fleet

PDCN suggests that the termination 'progressively' be replaced by a scheduled timeline with set goals against which progress can be monitored for achieving full compliance against the Commonwealth's Disability Standards for Accessible Public transport.

Currently Transport for NSW reports that "seventy-eight per cent of all contracted buses in the Sydney metropolitan and outer-metropolitan areas are now wheelchair accessible⁹. This highlights the importance of service planning to ensure priority routes have accessible services. Whilst awaiting full accessibility being achieved across the bus fleet, practical accessibility measures will be of great significance to ensure equitable access for people with disabilities. For example, ensuring that wheelchair accessible buses are utilised over as many bus services as possible.

PDCN recommends concentrating accessible services on routes in locations with a demographically ageing population as it has been identified that "older Australians can face a range of challenges when using public transport and around half of Australia's older population (aged 65 and older) have a disability"¹⁰

During the process of replacing non-compliant buses with accessible buses built to design specifications that comply with disability standards PDCN recommends design specifications be informed by consultation and usability testing with individuals with disabilities who access transport services. This would ensure practical accessibility issues consistently raised with PDCN, such as the placement of opal card terminals and stop request buttons in accessible seating areas can be addressed. At present stop request buttons are often at a height and angle that is difficult to access for travellers who are wheelchair users.

1.8 Implement measures to increase access to taxi services by people with disability

Increasing access to taxi services is imperative as many individuals with disability, particularly wheelchair users and those in geographically isolated locations rely on point to point transport to

⁹ Op cit., Transport for NSW, DIAP, page 10

¹⁰ Op cit., Transport for NSW, DIAP, page 8

meet their transport needs as they do not have access to a private vehicle or other forms of transport. The objectives and actions listed in the DIAP should be aligned with the Point to Point Transport (taxis and hire vehicles) Bill 2016 and it would be valuable to highlight the strategies Transport for NSW will utilise to better target subsidies and incentives for improved point to point services for customers with disability.

PDCN believes that Transport for NSW must go beyond 'exploring options for disability awareness training for all point to point drivers' and recommends that disability awareness training is mandatory to achieve full inclusion for people with disabilities and ensure people with disabilities do not encounter discrimination accessing taxi services.

The implementation of an electronic payment system for customers using the Taxi Transport Subsidy scheme (TTSS) has the potential to provide easier access to some individuals with disabilities. However, any changes to the payment system must ensure access is still available via other methods, including vouchers in hard copy to ensure equal access for individuals who do not have the necessary technological literacy for electronic payments or access to smartphones, computers or the internet.

1.93 Improve access to transport for people with disability in rural communities.

PDCN seeks further information in the DIAP on how projects in the Country Passenger Infrastructure Grants Program (CPIGS) will be prioritised. Due to the large amount of bus stops in rural and regional locations that do not comply with the DSAPT standards or are still needing bus stop improvements, PDCN recommends that Transport for NSW increase the availability of funds through the Country Passenger Transport Infrastructure Grants Scheme so that the scheme is available on a yearly basis rather than only available biannually.

Furthermore, access to transport for people with disabilities in rural communities would be improved by Transport for NSW guaranteeing staff will be available at train stations in rural and regional locations that do not provide full accessibility to provide direct assistance to people with disabilities.

Accessible systems and processes: To build accessibility into our business systems and processes.

2.1 Accessibility as a performance criteria for public transport products and projects

PDCN supports the proposed update of business requirements for infrastructure projects to ensure that accessibility goals are included in the project scope for all future plans. However, the project scope must contain how these considerations will be addressed and applied in practice. In addition, all Transport for NSW programs should include accessibility as a performance indicator to ensure tangible progress is made against the action items within the DIAP.

2.3 Ensure that contracted public transport services provide accessible services

PDCN believes that Transport for NSW has the responsibility to implement a uniform standard of training about accessibility issues for both staff of contracted public transport services and Transport for NSW employees. This training should be included in contracts with transport service providers to ensure a consistent standard in the level of staff training and disability awareness across the entire transport network. It is vital that all contracted public transport services are aware of their obligations to meet the standards in the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

2.4 Provide contracted alternative transport services for people with disability who are unable to access public transport.

It has been consistently identified that many individuals with disabilities have no access to public transport and this is a substantial barrier to their full economic and social participation in the community. Research carried out by PDCN to identify barriers in accessing transport has indicated this is a substantial issue, particularly for individuals living in rural and regional areas. In many parts of NSW accessible transport options available for people with disabilities are limited to modified private vehicles, community transport services and taxis.

The implementation of the NDIS across NSW, particularly in areas where transport infrastructure is non-existent or services are infrequent has resulted in people with disabilities being further disadvantaged by inadequate access to public transport services.

The transition to individualised funding within NDIS plans and the removal of subsidisations for community transport, previously through Government funded programs (such as the Community Transport Program and Community Care Support Program through Transport for NSW) has increased Community transport organisation trip prices considerably (to market price). In conjunction with the introduction of new forms of transport charged at market rates, PDCN is concerned that funding for transport in NDIS plans at the current set levels will be insufficient to cover these increases and this will severely limit the ability of NDIS participants to participate in the community and access essential services.

Due to these changes it is essential that the implementation of service contracts for specialised community transport services takes into account the new funding landscape to assess community transport requirements. In addition, the transport needs of individuals who will not be eligible for the NDIS must be considered.

PDCN recommends the DIAP includes strategies for ongoing collaboration between the NDIS and Transport for NSW to ensure these systems run efficiently and people with disabilities are not left without essential services.

2.5 Ensure systems and processes are accessible

Transport for NSW must ensure that information for both the process of applying for passes and concessions and the complaints and feedback process is accessible. Information must be easy to understand, written in plain English and available in hard copy upon request. Furthermore, to ensure accessibility information should be obtainable in a variety of formats including AUSLAN, large print, easy English, audio, braille, rich text format and captioning.

In addition, the design and content on the Transport for NSW website must be easy to navigate to ensure individuals, regardless of computer literacy, are able to successfully access information about these processes.

2.7 Governance and reporting

PDCN is pleased to see Transport for NSW's commitment to using reporting mechanisms to update ATAC members and the public on the progress of actions in the DIAP. PDCN suggests reporting on the progress of actions should employ set metrics, such as timelines for compliance with accessible design standards to demonstrate the concrete improvements that have been made in increasing accessibility across the transport network. In addition, reporting on the progress of actions and their implementation should make specific reference to how the actions are reflected in Transport for NSW projects, policies and service contracts.

The proposed action by Transport for NSW to conduct forums to inform people with disability about the implementation of the Action plan must be inclusive of all people with disability. PDCN recommends forums be held via multiple mediums including online and in person, advertised broadly, physically accessible and present information in a range of accessible formats.

Accessible customer information technology and research: To provide accessible planning and cutting edge assistive technology

3.1 Provide information about transport services that is accessible to all customers

PDCN is concerned that there is an over-reliance on the use of technology for accessing information on accessibility and this may disadvantage individuals with disabilities who do not have adequate computer literacy or access to the internet or smartphone technology. Hardcopy information sources should be maintained as an alternative to ensure people with disabilities do not experience discrimination based on access to technology.

In addition, information on the accessibility of transport services and facilities should be easily obtainable on all mainstream information services that the general public utilise to find transport information. PDCN believes it is important that the onus is not placed solely on the individual with disability to seek out accessibility information that may be held in a different source, for example a website, phone application or booklet.

Having accessibility information easily available from all transport network information sources has the benefit of better enabling people with disabilities to find accessibility information during their journey, reducing their reliance on planning ahead, in turn making the transport system more flexible and able to meet their needs.

3.6 Increase our insight into the travel needs of customers with disability and older people through qualitative research

PDCN feels increasing the qualitative research undertaken with customers with disabilities is an essential step for Transport for NSW to gain an insight into the travel needs of people with disabilities and their interactions with the transport network. PDCN supports the DIAP action step of analysing the unmet travel needs of people with disability through the household travel survey and other relevant data sources. PDCN recommends that Transport for NSW seek the input of individuals who do not utilise public transport in their own research projects to provide a more comprehensive view of the barriers people with disabilities encounter accessing public transport. This qualitative data will be invaluable in informing future strategies and policies that will foster inclusion.

3.7 Monitor emerging technologies and opportunities

PDCN has concerns over the accessibility of opal cards and thus would like to commend Transport for NSW for seeking to conduct ongoing monitoring of the performance of the opal card and ways accessibility could be improved. PDCN seeks further information on how accessibility issues with opal are currently identified and will be monitored and addressed.

It is acknowledged that as outlined in the DIAP¹¹ improvements in accessibility have been made across the transport system with the introduction of Opal. However, PDCN has received consistent feedback from individuals who are unable to use opal cards and require direct assistance from transport staff, disability support workers or a friend to access opal card readers on light rail, trains, buses and ferries.

PDCN conducted a survey on the use of opal cards and found half of participants experienced difficulties tapping on and off as they have limited mobility in their upper body or require the use of their arms or hands to operate their wheelchair or mobility device or for stability when entering or exiting the mode of transport. This was particularly identified as an issue on buses as passengers are required to tap on and off inside the vehicle. Other respondents reported the height of opal card readers also being a barrier for independent access to transport for people with disabilities.

Due to these identified issues PDCN feels the introduction of the opal electronic ticketing system does not negate the need for staff to be present across the transport system to provide direct assistance, as may be required by individuals with disabilities. This assistance is still essential to facilitate independent travel and should be recognised in the DIAP.

Inclusive customer service and feedback: To ensure people with disability influence the future of transport in NSW

4.1 Develop and promote a culture of inclusion and customer service among Transport for NSW staff and our transport delivery partners.

¹¹ Op cit., Transport for NSW, DIAP, page 14

PDCN is pleased that Transport for NSW is committed to fostering a culture of inclusion through the actions steps detailing disability awareness training for customer service staff and call centre operators. Under the Disability Discrimination Act public transport operators and providers, such as Transport for NSW must ensure that their services do not discriminate against people with disabilities¹².

PDCN recommends disability awareness training be provided to all employees to ensure people with disabilities have an equitable experience when accessing transport services. This disability awareness training should be comprehensive and go beyond simply delivering instructions on providing direct assistance to people with disabilities. Additionally, the impact of disability awareness training on staff performance should be monitored through customer feedback and the complaints processes.

The need for disability awareness training is highlighted in the negative experience of a PDCN stakeholder who found herself unable to access a Sydney bus service due to prams commandeering all available space in the accessible seating area. The individual felt unsupported by the bus driver who did not have the appropriate skills to handle the situation and was not aware of his responsibilities regarding customers who are wheelchair users. In this situation more extensive driver training, public awareness campaigns and clear guidelines for staff and customers regarding the use of the priority seating area would have facilitated access for all commuters.

4.2- Increase opportunities for feedback from, and ongoing engagement with, people with disability, their carers, and disability peak bodies.

PDCN commends Transport for NSW on including peak disability representative organisations on their Accessible Transport Advisory Committee (ATAC). The National Disability Strategy (NDS) recognises the role of systemic advocacy in representing the interests of people with disability in their second policy outcome area, ensuring that people with disability have their rights promoted, upheld and protected¹³.

The inclusion of disability advocacy services in consultations with Transport for NSW enables and supports people with disabilities to safeguard their rights and overcome barriers to participation in the community, such as inadequate or inaccessible transport services.

Transport for NSW's commitment to ensuring all public consultations are accessible by people with disability is imperative for increasing opportunities for feedback and engagement with people with disabilities. PDCN concurs that public consultations should be offered by alternative methods such as phone, online and video. In addition, we recommend that public consultations should not solely rely on technology to recruit participants and input should also be able to be made through the post, alongside online submissions. Information on the process for participating in public consultations should be easy to understand, written in plain English and

¹² Commonwealth of Australia, Disability Discrimination Act 1992

¹³ Op cit., NDS, page 40

available in hard copy upon request. The information should also be provided in various formats including easy English, AUSLAN, large print, braille and audio to guarantee accessibility.

PDCN believes appropriate financial compensation, for time and travel costs should be provided to participants of public consultations, to reduce the economic barriers that may discourage involvement and ensure the diversity that is present amongst people with disabilities is represented in these forums.

In addition, the outcomes of public consultations must be transparent with Transport for NSW demonstrating where feedback provided by people with disabilities has informed the implementation of infrastructure projects. Where input from public consultations has been considered but not implemented or issues remain unaddressed it is important the reasons are shared with participants and clearly documented.

Inclusive employment: To become an employer of choice for people with disabilities

5.2- Representation levels and the recruitment process

PDCN feels the strategies outlined in the action items for inclusive employment will facilitate Transport for NSW achieving the objective of being an employer of choice for people with disabilities. However currently only 2% of staff employed by Transport for NSW has a disability. This figure is unreasonably low given their objectives, and in light of statistics that identify that 18.3 % of the Australian population has a disability¹⁴.

PDCN would like to see the representation levels increase to ensure the Transport for NSW workforce better reflects wider society and to ensure as a NSW state government organisation Transport for NSW supports workplace diversity¹⁵. PDCN recommends set targets for inclusive employment including figures which can be used to monitor progress.

Indicators

Overall recommendations

PDCN would like Transport for NSW to bring forward compliance deadlines for meeting accessibility standards wherever possible. PDCN believes it is essential that all Transport for NSW access and infrastructure projects have set public timeframes and dates for compliance. PDCN recommends timeframes are added to each of the outcome area indicators.

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Disability, ageing and carers Australia: Summary of findings, 2015

¹⁵ NSW Government, Government Sector Employment Act 2013, page 34

Appendix 3- Compliance requirements for disability standards for accessible public transport.

The DIAP should include more explicit reference to the extended compliance targets allocated for the rail network in the Commonwealth's Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport. The train network has been given an extension to be compliant with the standards by 2032.

Appendix 4- Status Report, Disability Action Plan 2012-2017

PDCN believes the report must provide more substantial details on the status of the actions detailed in Transport for NSW's previous Disability Action Plan.

A majority of the actions marked as implemented provide no indication or tangible evidence of progress made against Transport for NSW Disability Action Plan 2012-2017. PDCN is aware of the ongoing nature of many of the actions outlined in the previous DIAP however the status of each action as implemented is meaningless without concrete information demonstrating how action steps have been executed.