

VICTORIA

Victorian
Auditor-General

Audit summary
of
Making Public Transport
More Accessible for
People Who Face
Mobility Challenges

Tabled in Parliament
9 December 2009

Audit summary

Background

In 1992 the Commonwealth passed the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (the Act) requiring states to upgrade their public transport systems to eliminate discrimination.

The Act defined a disability as the total or partial loss of a person's bodily or mental functions or having a disease, illness or condition that affects a person's ability to learn or affects their mental or physical state. This includes the effects of ageing. It defined discrimination as treating a person with a disability less favourably than others.

The Commonwealth's Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (the disability standards) require states to progressively upgrade public transport to fully comply with the standards by 2032 and meet intermediate milestones in 2007, 2012, 2017 and 2022. The standards set minimum design requirements for public transport vehicles, stations, stops, interchanges and customer information.

About 20 per cent of Victorians have some type of disability and about one third of these people, or 6 per cent, report that this affects their access to public transport. Other people, for example, parents with young children, also need public transport that is easy to use. The demand for accessible public transport will rise as the population ages: one in four people will be over the age of 60 by 2021, compared with one in six in 2001.

In September 2006 the government published *Accessible Public Transport in Victoria—Action Plan 2006–2012* (the Action Plan). According to the business case underpinning the Action Plan, its objectives were to apply the disability standards and to enable people with a disability to use public transport safely, effectively and with dignity.

The Department of Transport (the department) is the main agency responsible for carrying out the Action Plan. The department set up the Public Transport Access Committee (PTAC), which included representatives from peak disability organisations, as a forum to advise the Minister for Public Transport.

This audit examined whether the department has been effective in making existing public transport services more accessible for people with a disability.

Conclusions

The department has succeeded in complying with the disability standards for most parts of the public transport system but it has not adequately measured how these changes have affected people with a disability. The department needs to now focus on these outcomes and the realisation of the Action Plan benefits.

Compliance with the disability standards

The department has been largely successful in meeting or exceeding the compliance targets set out in the disability standards.

The critical shortfall relates to standards covering trams and tram stops that help people with a disability to board and alight from trams, because:

- government policy is to replace older trams when they have reached the end of their design lives. However, this is not quick enough to achieve the milestones
- it has proved both difficult and expensive to upgrade the required number of tram stops and this is now conflicting with other uses of the road space.

The 2012 targets for these standards are unlikely to be met; however, the department is developing a plan to achieve full compliance by 2032. This plan needs to be finalised and the department is working to achieve this by the end of 2009.

Overall, the management of the Action Plan and reporting on compliance targets were adequate although there is room for the department to improve by:

- strengthening its processes for monitoring bus stop upgrades
- validating the accuracy of its compliance reporting for regional stations
- improving its management of the disability access components of projects.

Accessibility outcomes

The department has not adequately measured the outcomes from applying the disability standards for people with a disability. It needs to do this now.

The department needs to improve its understanding of how people with a disability use and want to use public transport, their level of satisfaction with the changes made to the system and their priorities for future change. The department should:

- commission an evaluation so that it can better manage PTAC
- complete research to better understand the travel behaviour of people with a disability.

The Action Plan and the detailed plans used to deliver its components included reasonable prioritisation principles but lacked detail on how these had been applied to determine priorities. Future plans should explain how priorities have been determined.

While the department understands how well it has complied with the disability standards, it has not measured its performance against the objective of enabling people with a disability to use public transport safely, effectively and with dignity.

The department now needs to apply the performance measures described in the Action Plan business case to understand the outcomes and respond to this information.

Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Page
	The Department of Transport should:	
1.	Strengthen its processes for monitoring the multiple agents responsible for bus stop upgrades, which will include creating a bus stop asset database.	12
2.	Address the compliance accuracy issues regarding the department's reporting on regional station upgrades, metropolitan bus stops and audible train announcements.	12
3.	Improve its management, review and oversight so that the disability components of projects are adequately incorporated into project designs and delivered as intended.	12
4.	Commission an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Public Transport Access Committee and as part of this address the issues raised in this audit.	22
5.	Undertake research to better understand the travel behaviour of people with a disability.	22
6.	Require disability access plans to include information showing how prioritisation principles have been applied to select and order works.	22
7.	Develop and apply an evaluation framework to understand how well disability access works have achieved their intended outcomes of increasing the travel and level of satisfaction of people with a disability.	22