

FOCUS

A UITP POSITION PAPER

Access to Public Transport

UITP's vision statement clearly states that UITP works for better mobility worldwide. This means enabling mobility for ALL citizens. This is not only part of the public service role of companies, but also part of the general customer care that should be striven for.

People with special needs or reduced mobility include:

- Members of society whose mobility may be impaired due to health reasons in varying degrees of severity, who need wheelchairs, or are hearing or sight impaired. This impairment may be temporary or definitive.
- Older citizens, pregnant women, those travelling with babies or young children in prams, buggys or with heavy bags or suitcases, whose mobility may also be impeded, either temporarily or definitively.
- In addition there are also people who may have various degree of mental impairment and may face difficulties using the system.

Today, an average of 25% of the population may be said to belong to one of the above categories. Thus no public transport company can ignore this fact. In the future, this trend will be reinforced. Due to the strong correlation between age and mobility impairment, the impact of an ageing demographic structure on transport needs and demand is a vital issue.



With a growing share of elderly people in western countries (a third of the population by 2020) improving accessibility cannot be neglected, and in an increasingly liberalised market, has also to be seen as a commercial opportunity and a potential source of new revenues. If we also take temporary impairment into account, all citizens will be sooner or later in a state of mobility difficulty.

This is an official position of UITP, the International Association of Public Transport. UITP has over 2000 members in 80 countries throughout the world and represents the interests of key players in this sector. Its membership includes transport authorities, operators, both private and public, in all modes of collective passenger transport, and the industry. UITP addresses the economic, technical, organisation and management aspects of passenger transport, as well as, the development of policy for mobility and public transport world-wide.

The undertakings, affiliated to the International Association of Public Transport are aware of their responsibilities towards mobility-impaired people and are anxious to do everything possible to ensure they are able to benefit from the same levels of mobility as any other passenger.

UITP re-affirms that public transport as such is the best way to fight social exclusion, However, this can only be realised in close co-operation with the transport-authorities.

Measures on infrastructure and rolling stock

Full access to vehicles requires stepless and gapless boarding between the boarding point and the vehicle threshold, and therefore closely controlled interfaces between the providers of infrastructure and the vehicle.

Consistent efforts have been made to render vehicles, equipment and facilities more accessible to mobility-impaired passengers. Much has been achieved in the last decade, with the spread of low-floor technology for rail and road-bound rolling stock. New vehicles have broad doors and often accommodate a reserved space for wheelchair, with (in some systems where it is necessary) a specially designed fastening device, as well as stop-request button easy to reach even when sitting. These efforts will be continued and intensified in the future, as provisions for people with reduced mobility can be beneficial to all users.

Moreover, such measures have an impact on the general operation of a line: shorter stops, higher commercial speed, better attractiveness. As part of a win-win action for all parties, UITP encourages its members and local governments as co-responsible:

- to invest in low-floor technology, whenever the local operating environment makes it feasible and appropriate, with measures to ensure safe movement within vehicles.
- to design accessible infrastructure, when refurbishing older facilities or planning new ones, including interchanges (level boarding, signalling, lifts, ramps, passenger information etc.).

UITP fully supports the views of the proposed European Bus Directive that all Class I road

vehicles (urban buses) shall be accessible for people with reduced mobility, including wheelchair users. Efforts should be made to improve accessibility on other types of vehicle (interurban buses, rural buses, coaches etc.).

However, these efforts should be carried out keeping in mind the specific responsibility of public transport companies for the transport of millions of passengers, by the provision of high-density, rapid, frequent, safe and reliable services, without which it would be impossible to maintain the economic life in the cities and regions.

In this sense, UITP supports the view of the European Directive that the principle of subsidiarity shall prevail and that the operational decisions on how to best implement full accessibility should be taken locally, according to the prevailing conditions (kneeling system, ramp, lift).

Not to be ignored is the fact that there are limits on the size of the wheelchairs. One cannot expect that every wheelchair can be handled and safely stored in every vehicle. In this respect it is necessary to set a maximum limit on the dimensions of the wheelchairs that can be accommodated in public transport and (for systems where it is necessary) the elements to fasten the wheelchairs in the vehicles. The European Directive and ECMT Resolutions have established a “reference wheelchair” based on the ISO norm and UITP welcomes this approach. Good co-operation with local and national associations of disabled and elderly people and with associations of wheelchair manufacturers is crucial.

Safety issues

Companies are concerned that their liability in case of unexpected incidents could lead to expensive civil and penal procedures and affect their reputation as safe transport mode.

However, given the importance of opening public transport to as wide a part of the population as possible, UITP encourages its members to review and improve access conditions to underground infrastructure for wheelchair users, both in normal and emergency operating conditions.

The operation of a manual ramp also raises safety issues that have to be answered: either it is operated by the driver, or by a fellow-passenger. In both

cases, legal aspects have to be clarified in order to remove possible residual reluctance and to guarantee the largest possible accessibility.

Information

Having accessible infrastructure and vehicles is not enough. If the aim of generalising accessibility is to be achieved, efforts have to be made in communication and information. Information should be accurate, complete and easy to understand, especially for people not familiar with the system.

- Before the journey, customers have to be aware of the services offered and the accessibility conditions. This can be provided by multimodal information centres (call centres, internet)
- During the trip, clear, understandable and easy information has to be provided. Ideally, information shall be visual (showing next stop, name of stops/stations, connections etc.) and audio (loud speakers). This applies to stations/stops and vehicles.

A comprehensive Core Brief (Fact sheet) on passenger information is available from the UITP General Secretariat.

Special services

At local level, transport authorities and operators should clearly define the desirable optimum level of relevance between rendering basic services accessible and providing special services. For instance, a line serving a hospital should obviously be made fully accessible, while another may not. Where constraints (e.g. safety, operation, outer urban areas) prevent accessibility to be fully achieved, UITP-members should endeavour to provide a well-balanced service which ensures the best possible integration of all categories of mobility-impaired passengers, respects the demand of safety and the basic functioning of a public transport system.

- Public transport companies are ready to adjust



- their production to reach a balanced offer, e.g. by alternating fully and partially accessible vehicles
- Such an objective may also be achieved by the provision of special services, using adequately equipped vehicles and personnel specially trained in the care of the severely mobility-impaired.

Complementary measures

However, the “hard” measures mentioned above are not enough, and UITP members consider that accessibility also requires measures such as:

- Investment in proper staff training to care for the special needs of customers with reduced mobility : smooth acceleration and braking, precise pull-in for easier boarding, service and help orientation etc. Commitment to accessibility should also be shared by company management.
- Co-operating with the authorities to pursue and improve concessionary schemes for certain categories of passengers with lower income.

Financial impact

Where the public transport undertaking is responsible for organising services adapted to mobility-impaired people, or for collaborating with associations for mobility-impaired and other interested bodies in their provision, the financial responsibility for these services and their adequate infrastructure must not rest only with the public transport undertakings. Responsibility should normally be assumed by the public authorities, as part of the social role of providing collective passenger transport available to all citizens.

When an authority wishes to award a concession for a line/system it must clearly stipulate the desired degree of accessibility, for bidders to set their proposed costs accordingly. Special attention has to be given to the relationship between vehicle and infrastructure. Both are part of the total system.

RECOMMENDATIONS :

UITP considers that public transport has a duty to improve mobility for all. Actions to be undertaken are technical, organisational and operational. Consequently, it recommends that :

- In urbanised areas ,gapless and stepless boarding should be generalised. This requires efforts on the part of local authorities and operators.
- Infrastructure modifications should be undertaken to allow such boarding, either by making existing high platforms accessible or by arranging street-level infrastructure to maximise the benefit of low-floor vehicles. These measures are mainly the competence of local authorities, in close co-operation with vehicle manufacturers and local operators.
- Compulsory accessibility to urban vehicles is a common strategic target, while the operational-tactical means should be decided locally, according to conditions prevailing locally: high/low platform, kneeling devices, low-floor, ramp, lift etc.
- Access of wheelchairs to underground infrastructure should be provided, as long as the overall safety of wheelchair users and other passengers can be ensured, even in emergency cases.
- The operation of a manual ramp requires some legal and liability clarification. This affects mostly work regulations and social dialogue at sectorial level.
- In order to make construction provisions more effective, affordable and easier to design, it is desirable for local authorities, operators and vehicle manufacturers to rely on some degree of standardisation in wheelchair dimension and fastening device for transport purposes. Association of wheelchair users and wheelchair manufacturers are invited to adopt existing ISO standards.
- The effective enforcement of parking restriction in the close proximity of bus stops is absolutely necessary to ensure easy boarding. This requires stringent and consistent policy at local authority level.
- Other types of measures are also recommended to improve accessibility: specific staff training, concessionary schemes etc.
- Issues related to accessibility should not be addressed top-down, but in close co-operation with customer associations to make sure the measures and investments proposed meet the sensible requirements and to create a climate of confidence and trust between producers and consumers.
- When issuing call for tenders, authorities should stipulates clearly the accessibility level wished.
- To provide information in all stages of the journey which must be clear and simple to understand for all, and be available audio-visual.

With this new position, UITP members want to demonstrate their true commitment to public service: make sure that everybody enjoys the freedom of movements to the largest extend.