



House of Commons
Transport Committee

**Access to transport for
disabled people:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Fifth Report of Session
2013–14**

**Tenth Special Report of Session
2013–14**

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The Transport Committee

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The current staff of the Committee are Mark Egan (Clerk), Farrah Bhatti (Second Clerk), Richard Jeremy (Committee Specialist), Adrian Hitchins (Senior Committee Assistant), Stewart McIlvenna (Committee Assistant) and Hannah Pearce (Media Officer)

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Tenth Special Report

On 18 November 2013 we received a response from the Government to the Transport Committee's Fifth Report of 2013–14, Access to transport for disabled people.¹

Government response

Introduction

This paper sets out the Government's response to the fifth report of session 2013-14 (HC 116), on Access to Transport for Disabled People.

The Government welcomes the Committee's report on the important issue of making transport as accessible for disabled people as it is for the rest of the population. The Department for Transport is committed to ensuring that disabled people have equal access to transport services and opportunities to travel. We are pleased that the Committee has recognised the value of the commitments contained in the Accessibility Action Plan and note the recommendations that the Committee has made.

Response to the Committee's Recommendations

Monitoring of the DfT's Accessibility Action Plan

Recommendation 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).

The Department for Transport (DfT) will publish an annual update on implementation of the commitments in the Accessibility Action Plan. In order to monitor the specific measures, the Department will produce a new chapter on 'Transport and Disability' in its annual *Transport Statistics Great Britain* publication. *Transport Statistics Great Britain* is released every December via the GOV.UK website. The Transport and Disability chapter will be updated each year and include a summary of relevant data, including those mentioned in the Action Plan, along with an accompanying set of tables. It will include National Travel Survey data on the personal travel patterns of people with mobility difficulties, the number of holders of disabled parking badges, the number of disabled concessionary travel passholders, and the proportion of buses, taxis and trains that are accessible for disabled people.

A review of the Inclusive Mobility guidance

Recommendation 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).

The Department remains committed to review and update ‘Inclusive Mobility – a Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure’ by 2014, as set out in its Accessibility Action Plan. However, work on this has been halted for the time being, as a consequence of corporate planning and resource constraints.

Improvements to the UK bus and coach fleet

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

DfT welcomes efforts by bus operators to run fully accessible bus services before the PSVAR compliance deadlines.

However, offering anything that constitutes a form of financial assistance to commercial bus and coach companies, in order to encourage them to comply with legal requirements ahead of the deadline for PSVAR compliance is likely to constitute unlawful State Aid under EU law.

On the subject of mis-advertising ‘low-floor’ bus services, DfT looks to all bus and coach operators to ensure that information about their services is as accurate as possible and that no passengers are deliberately misled on the accessibility of certain services. If an operator does not use a ‘low-floor’ bus on a service that is advertised as a ‘low-floor’ or accessible route, the Traffic Commissioners are able to call that operator to attend a Public Inquiry to consider taking action against their licence on repute grounds if they have failed to supply a vehicle as advertised.

It should also be noted that there may be exceptional circumstances when the operator is unable to provide an accessible vehicle and needs to use a temporary replacement vehicle. In these circumstances, we are of the view that it would be preferable to allow a replacement to be used for a short period of time, so that the service can continue to run, rather than have the operator withdraw the service all together because the usual vehicle is unavailable.

With regards to wheelchair space priority on buses, the Public Service Vehicles (Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors, Conductors and Passengers) (Amendment) Regulations 2002 are clear that drivers must allow a wheelchair user to board the bus when the wheelchair space is unoccupied and ask any other passengers occupying the wheelchair space to move. However, the passengers are under no legal compulsion to move if they do not wish to do so.

It should be noted that individual transport authorities are able to take action concerning wheelchair priority on their buses. For instance, in November 2012, Transport for London launched a new campaign outlining the rules around the use of the wheelchair space on buses and stating that buggy users and other passengers may use the space if it is not otherwise in use.

In addition, on 29 August 2013, to coincide with the first anniversary of the Paralympic Games, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) launched their pilot Shared Space Campaign, funded by the Department. Working with bus operators they have designed a poster asking people to make space for wheelchairs in the wheelchair priority areas on buses. The artwork was distributed via Metro News, TfGM owned transport infrastructure, a range of press releases, and on the TfGM website. They are currently exploring options for further roll out of the campaign on the Greater Manchester Metrolink light rail network and to train operating companies who operate within the Greater Manchester area, to help promote respect for shared space areas on light and heavy rail.

Earlier this year the Department commissioned a research project to look at the policies and concerns relating to the carriage of mobility scooters on public transport. The study included research to identify individual models of mobility scooters currently on the market that meet the specifications of individual operators for carriage. It also investigated the feasibility and practical steps needed to introduce labelling or kitemarking, taking account of the views of scooter suppliers, retailers and consumers, and the British Standards Institute (BSI).

Any such development would need to be industry led, requiring a substantial commitment and investment from manufacturers, retailers and trade bodies. There is no evidence that the mobility scooter industry see this as a priority at this time. The Department is following up this study with a market research survey to obtain information on the range of vehicles on the market and who is using them, with a view to considering whether there are alternative options for labelling or kitemarking scooters for carriage on public transport.

Recommendation 4: 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).

DfT recognises that disabled passengers and many other people find audio and visual announcements useful when travelling and we understand the social benefits of having such systems on buses. In support of this, the previous Minister with responsibility for

buses, Norman Baker MP, wrote to bus operators to encourage them to work in partnership with their local authorities, to see if the uptake of these systems could be increased on a voluntary basis.

There is also a commitment in the Department's Accessibility Action Plan to develop costings on Audio Visual (AV) technical options for buses and we will publish this data as part of the upcoming Accessibility Action Plan progress report.

However, we do not at this point intend to legislate to make audio visual systems on buses mandatory. This is because the business case for operators cannot be demonstrated and, particularly in the current economic climate, the Department is loath to impose financial burdens of this kind on the industry.

Accessible transport for isolated communities

Recommendation 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).

The Department agrees with the Committee that shared taxis and private hire vehicles (PHVs), and local bus services using taxis and PHVs, can provide a valuable service. The legislation already allows for both taxis and PHVs to carry passengers at separate fares. Under section 10 of the Transport Act 1985, local authorities can establish taxi sharing schemes whereby taxis at identified ranks take multiple passengers to similar destinations at separate fares. We encourage local authorities, through our Best Practice Guidance, to set up formal taxi sharing schemes.

PHV operators are permitted, under section 11 of the Act, to "marry-up" separate hirings where the passengers are travelling to similar destinations and charge the passengers separate fares, while section 12 allows taxi owners to run local bus services using taxis.

A relatively new power has been available to PHV owners to use their vehicles to provide local bus services. Under section 53 of the Local Transport Act 2008, PHV owners outside London can apply to the Traffic Commissioner for a special PSV operator licence and then register a route with them. These services, whether commercial or tendered, would be eligible for Bus Service Operators Grant (assuming they met the wider eligibility criteria). It is, however, apparent that despite the powers being available, the taxi and PHV trades are not providing these services on any significant scale. The Department is keen to understand why this might be and will be asking the trade for feedback about the lack of interest and what changes might encourage greater take up of the opportunity to provide local bus services.

Recommendation 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).

The Department agrees that demand responsive community transport operators provide a crucial facility, with over 15 million passenger trips provided by at least 2000 community transport organisations in England last year. Where commercial services are not viable, community transport services can often play a vital role in preventing isolation and supporting growth by linking individuals and communities to existing transport networks, work, education, shops and services.

In support of this sector, over the last two financial years we have allocated £20 million in funding to Local Authorities to help support community transport in linking rural and isolated communities to jobs and services. This funding has seen some very creative solutions being developed to tackle local problems, with community transport groups working together and with Local Authorities to put in place plans that will support the sector.

Recent legislation has also increased the options available to community transport operators. The Local Transport Act 2008 includes provisions which allow community transport operators with a Section 19 permit to use smaller vehicles (less than 9 seats) to deliver services, particularly dial-a-ride and services in rural areas. In addition, Section 59 of the Act enables large buses (defined as those capable of carrying in excess of 16 passengers) to be used to provide community bus services under Section 22 permits and removed a prohibition on the drivers of such services from being paid. This has seen a rapid rise in the number of new community bus services registered each year (from 1 in 2007/8 to 174 in 2011/12).

On the subject of tendering for local bus services, in July 2013 the Government published details of its reforms to bus subsidy which included the devolution to local authorities (including TfL) of the Bus Service Operators Grant funding that relates to the tendered bus services they support. Therefore, it is for local authorities, working in partnership with their communities, to identify the right transport solutions that meet the economic and environmental challenges faced in their areas and deliver the greatest benefits for those communities. However, the Department for Transport remains supportive of the role that can be played by Community Transport operators in the running of local bus services and will write to the Community Transport Association (CTA) to explore how this can be further encouraged.

Access to the rail network and station staffing

Recommendation 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).

The Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) assumed responsibility from DfT for the train operating companies' Disabled People's Protection Policies (DPPPs) on 10 October 2013 and the Department welcomes this recommendation as it provides ORR with the support to deliver on their aims.

Key elements of their approach to monitoring and enforcement will be to raise awareness of the protections and services that are already available to disabled people and to increase

transparency of the results of the TOCs' self assessments. Initial indications are that the TOCs are keen to work with ORR. A workshop later in the year will explore what the current levels of awareness are, and what train operators can do to address any gaps.

ORR are engaging with disability groups as they take this work forward.

Recommendation 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).

The Department has commissioned Passenger Focus to carry out research into the efficacy of Passenger Assist (PA), measuring the quality of facilities and services provided to disabled passengers who use the system to book assistance for rail journeys. Passenger Focus's methodology includes a mystery shopping element which will be carried out by disabled people. Amongst other things, the research will audit passengers' experience of booking assistance with PA and the effectiveness of the level of service offered by rail companies to disabled passengers on journeys for which assistance has been booked through PA.

Passenger Focus will report back to DfT in spring 2014 and we will share the findings with the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC), who have responsibility for managing the Passenger Assist system.

It is important to recognise that advance booking does have a number of benefits. For instance, as there are a limited number of wheelchair priority spaces on trains, advance reservation helps train companies to guarantee that space is available for wheelchair users on particular services. Advance booking also allows the train company to check that all points on a planned route are accessible, to plan for staff to be available at stations to assist disabled passengers, and to ensure that an accessible taxi is available for the onward journey, if required by the passenger.

ATOC are considering options for reducing the booking horizon in light of the Passenger Assist continuous updates, compared with the former assistance reservation system that updated once every 24 hours at 18.00 each day.

Recommendation 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).

Access for All stations are chosen based on their annual footfall weighted by the incidence of disability in the area, but with around a third chosen to ensure a fair geographical spread across the country. This approach ensures the best possible value for money and that the highest number of disabled people will benefit, and was supported by responses to a 2005 public consultation.

For the next rail Control Period (2014-19) the Department has £100m to add to the Access for All programme. We have asked the industry National Stations Improvement Programme Local Delivery Groups (LDGs) to nominate stations based on the criteria above, but also to take account of other factors such as proximity to a hospital or the availability of third party funding.

We believe that if we were to seek the views of charities and disability groups at a national level this would add little value to the process, as most groups would simply recommend their local station. However, we have asked the LDGs to seek the views of local authorities and disability groups in deciding on their priority stations for this funding. Nominations are due to be sent to the Department by 15 November and we will be seeking the views of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) before publishing the list of successful stations.

Once a station is selected for the programme Network Rail will set up a Local Project Group to help formulate the design. This will include Network Rail and train operating companies, but we also expect representatives from the local authority and disability groups to be invited to ensure that disabled passengers can help ensure the final design is fit for purpose.

Changes to ticket offices

In the recently published *Rail Fares and Ticketing: Next Steps* report published in October 2013 the Department set out plans to improve the way changes to ticket offices are managed. We want to make it easier for the rail industry to propose innovative changes that harness new technologies for the overall benefit of passengers and taxpayers, but we also want to ensure that all passengers continue to enjoy a high level of service, including for disabled people.

Future changes to ticket office opening hours should mean no reduction overall, and in some cases an improvement, to the services provided to disabled passengers. Where station staff can be brought out from behind the ticket office window and on to the concourse, this will also mean that fewer disabled people will need to telephone ahead to ask for assistance or use other nearby stations, while greater visibility of station staff should also provide better assurance to passengers about safety and security at stations.

Where train operators propose a planned reduction in ticket office staffing, careful consideration should be given, before any changes, to adaptations which could be made to enable disabled people to continue to use their preferred station. If the reduction in ticket office hours will affect an operator's ability to comply with its DPPP or with any obligations on it as a service provider under the Equality Act 2010, this will need to be addressed separately. Depending on the nature of the change, the DfT may require the operator to produce evidence that it has assessed the impact of the change in light of their obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

We are also strengthening the role of passenger bodies as part of this change, giving them a broader role in shaping change proposals and the ability to raise objections on a wider range of grounds than previously. For example, passenger bodies will now be able to raise

objections to any aspects of the proposals including those that previously could not be given adequate weight, such as the impact of any proposals on disabled passengers.

We also know that many passengers value the ability to talk to a human being for help and advice when buying a ticket. We are therefore strengthening our policy on changes to ticket office opening hours so that where passengers currently have access to a trained representative, all of those passengers will continue to do so.

Recommendation 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).

The Department agrees with the Committee's view that good information about the onward journey and interchange to other modes is an important element of rail accessibility. However, we do not consider that the contractual action proposed by the Committee is practical in light of the structure of Franchise Agreements and the Department's approach to contract management.

Franchise Agreements aim to set a small number of high-level outcomes, and contracts are managed by relatively small teams within DfT. Franchisees are responsible for training and informing their staff on a large number of safety, operational and customer service issues. The Department does not include standard requirements in franchise agreements setting out which topics must be covered by staff training and/or briefing in any of these important areas. Such an approach would risk introducing a tick-box compliance approach, with potentially little impact on quality of training or the quality of staff interaction with customers.

Rather than setting individual provisions for training or briefing, the Department requires train operators to develop their own training policies as part of their Disabled People's Protection Policy (DPPP). The Department considers that information about interchange needs to be considered as part of broader awareness raising on accessibility.

As referred to above, the ORR assumed responsibility from DfT for the train operating companies' DPPPs in October 2013. DfT will be meeting with ORR later this month and will raise this issue with them.

Taxis and private hire vehicles

Recommendation 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).

The Department understands that taxis and PHVs are a particularly useful form of transport for people with disabilities; they can provide door-to-door transport and they can be a vital cog in a journey of multiple stages.

However, it is important to be clear what is meant by the term "fully accessible" in relation to taxis and PHVs. This term is generally held to mean a vehicle which is capable of accommodating a passenger who is seated in a wheelchair. Whilst such vehicles clearly

have a useful role to play in taxi provision, the Department does not consider that establishing a fully wheelchair accessible taxi and PHV fleet over the next ten years would be a desirable aspiration.

It should be borne in mind that there are people with disabilities for whom the existing models of wheelchair accessible taxi are not suitable and who prefer to use saloon cars. We see merit in allowing licensing authorities to determine whether all the taxis they license should be wheelchair accessible or whether to allow individual taxi owners to decide, on a commercial basis, the type of vehicle they use.

That is why we made a decision not to use the power in section 160 of the Equality Act 2010 which would enable the Secretary of State to make regulations requiring all taxis to be accessible to people with disabilities.

As regards the PHV trade, the Department's view is that individual vehicle owners should be permitted to decide on a commercial basis what sort of service they want to provide and it is the role of the licensing authority to ensure that the vehicle, operator and driver providing that service are safe and suitable. There are PHV owners who choose to acquire wheelchair accessible vehicles because they want to secure certain types of work which necessitate carrying passengers who use wheelchairs. But a crucial point is that the PHV definition covers a wide range of vehicles such as chauffeur vehicles, smaller limousines and some novelty vehicles and it would not be sensible to adopt a policy of requiring them all to be wheelchair accessible.

Accordingly, the Department is not proposing to introduce financial incentives for taxi and PHV operators to choose wheelchair accessible vehicles. At the moment it is up to local licensing authorities to decide whether to require all their taxis to be wheelchair accessible. We have used the Best Practice Guidance to urge licensing authorities to allow a range of vehicles to be licensed as taxis and PHVs and, in particular, to avoid an overly stringent policy which would allow just one make of vehicle to be licensed as a taxi.

Recommendation 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).

The entry in the Accessibility Action Plan relating to disability awareness training for taxi and PHV drivers was included against the background of section 165 of the Equality Act 2010. We were at that time, and still are, considering our commencement strategy for this section which places duties on drivers of designated taxis and PHVs to assist passengers who use wheelchairs. If we do commence section 165, we shall need to consider how best to ensure that drivers are fully aware of the nature and extent of their duties. More generally, we welcome local initiatives to enhance taxi driver training and our Best Practice Guidance highlights to local authorities the importance of training. Whilst the Department provides dedicated guidance as the need arises, we are not proposing to establish or fund a comprehensive training programme for taxi and PHV drivers.

Journey planning and Transport Direct

Recommendation 13: 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).

The Transport Direct accessible journey planner was launched in March 2013 with data that covered a limited number of areas. Data for further areas has been added steadily since then and is now sufficient to support more widespread use. DfT will raise awareness of Transport Direct's new features through targeted engagement with stakeholder organisations and their members, and in consultation with DPTAC and the Disability Action Alliance.

Recommendation 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).

DfT has reviewed the Transport Direct website against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) level AAA. Some features of the website, such as the interactive 'Find a Map' are fundamentally incompatible with level AAA. Other features are capable of upgrading to level AAA but the extent of change is such that this is only possible with fundamental change to the underlying technical platform, much of which dates from 2002. DfT will include WCAG compliance as part of the current wider review of Transport Direct.

Transport Direct is only available through digital channels. DfT will however publish the underlying data on accessibility, in line with Government policy to release as open data a wide range of material under its control. This will enable third party firms or individuals who wish to develop a similar service for an alternative interface or channel (e.g. a downloadable software application for a mobile device) to do so, and to include equivalent functionality.

Travel training schemes

Recommendation 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).

The Spending Round announcements in June confirmed that the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) will continue into 2015/16. £100m capital funding is to be administered via the Local Growth Fund on a competitive basis. A separate revenue funding stream of £78.5m will be retained by DfT. We will be launching a competition for this revenue funding stream in December this year.

While the Department will not be providing specific examples of schemes within the revenue funding guidance, we have sent a letter to Chairs of Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Authority Chief Executives confirming that bids should be ambitious, should engage local businesses, and should be focussed on improving quality of life for the local community. Bids should also seek to achieve the principles laid out in the Door to Door

Strategy published in March 2013 which include providing accurate, accessible and reliable information about the different sustainable transport options; convenient and affordable tickets for an entire journey; regular and straightforward connections at all stages of the journey and between different transport modes; and safe, comfortable transport facilities. Travel training would be covered within the Door to Door strategy's objectives.

Staff training and awareness

Recommendation 16: 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).

On 7 February 2013, the Department announced its intention to make use of a number of exemptions within EU Regulation 181/2011 concerning the right of passengers in Bus and Coach Transport. The decision to apply all of these exemptions was taken to ensure that we met our EU obligations whilst delaying the costs to industry and giving them more time to prepare, which is likely to be of particular benefit to small and medium size operators.

In order to mitigate the impact of applying the disability awareness training exemption, Norman Baker MP wrote to industry representatives to encourage the completion of such training at the earliest opportunity and DfT remains committed to review the use of exemption in a year's time (March 2014).

The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) have estimated that across the whole bus and coach industry, approx 75% of drivers would have completed some form of disability awareness training by March 2013 as part of the ongoing training required under the EU Directive on the Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) and this figure continues to rise.

Disability Awareness Training is available as part of the periodic Certificate of Professional Competence training syllabus and training materials can be obtained free of charge from the 'People1st' training website. These training materials have been developed to reflect the content and best practice set out in the Disability Equality and Awareness Training Framework for Transport Staff developed by the DPTAC.

Air Travel

Recommendation 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).

Article 4 (2) of EC Regulation 1107/2006 provides that "an air carrier or its agent or a tour operator may require that a disabled person or person with reduced mobility be accompanied by another person capable of providing assistance required by that person." DfT guidance in the code of practice makes clear that this requirement should only be exercised in cases where the person who is not self reliant could pose a risk to safety. In

practice this means anyone who is unable to unfasten their seat belt, leave their seat, reach an emergency exit unaided, retrieve and fit a lifejacket, don an oxygen mask without assistance or is unable to understand advice and instructions given by crew in an emergency.

Although airlines may wish to consider offering a discounted rate for carers, this arrangement is unlikely to be viable or practical in many circumstances, such as where the airline seat is sold as part of a package holiday.

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

Under the 1999 Montreal Convention, legislation already exists that offers protection for disabled passengers in event that any mobility equipment is damaged during transit. Whilst in the care of an airline, the liability for delay, loss or damage for any luggage, including mobility equipment rests with the airline. Under the Convention, the liability for delay, loss or damage is limited to 1,131 Special Drawing Rights (approximately £1,129). However, it is the Department's understanding that a number of carriers will voluntarily compensate passengers to the full value of the equipment if damaged beyond repair, or if not, for costs to repair any damage. In addition, passengers with more valuable items (such as mobility scooters) can make a special declaration to the airline and for a fee their baggage will be covered for the full value of the declared amount.

The actual number of incidents when mobility equipment is damaged in transit is very low. However, the Department recognises the consequences for any individual who is affected. This is why DfT guidance in the code of practice states that it is essential that staff involved in the loading of wheelchairs or mobility scooters receive specific training for this process.

Additionally, airport managing bodies should also be prepared to provide temporary replacement of damaged or lost mobility equipment under EU rules, albeit not necessarily on a like for like basis. This only applies to airports in the EU.

The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee

Recommendation 19: 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).

Following the announcement in a Written Ministerial Statement on 12 June 2013 that DPTAC would be retained, subject to a refocusing of its core aims, the Department began a programme of work to redefine the scope and structure of the Committee to make it more effective. We have taken account of the views of many different stakeholders including representatives from the transport industry and from organisations representing disabled people.

Going forwards DPTAC will provide independent advice to the Department on matters relating to transport for disabled people, during policy development, research specifications, evaluation of policy and relevant consultation exercises.

The Department will shortly commence a recruitment campaign to enable new members to start office in April 2014. We plan to advertise the posts through links with stakeholder organisations and we will direct these to those representing disabled people and to the transport industry.

Qualitative assessment of accessible transport funding

Recommendation 20: We recommend that the DfT develops and publishes a methodology for quantitative assessment of benefits from improving accessibility to disabled people (Paragraph 66).

DfT currently publishes detailed guidance on the qualitative assessment of social and distributional impacts of transport interventions, including improved accessibility to disabled people. These assessments are taken into account in determining the overall value for money of schemes. However, we recognise that existing guidance is limited to qualitative assessments.

We have recently published three research reports related to the social impacts of buses². Whilst established methodologies exist to monetise the impacts of bus policy on the economy and the environment, relatively little is known about the value of social benefits, such as increased accessibility. The output of these new research reports has been the development of a quantitative methodology and set of values to estimate the social impacts of local public transport access. We are currently in the process of in-house consultation on how these values and methodology can be integrated into our appraisal framework.

Whilst this research was not commissioned to develop a methodology for specifically assessing the benefits for improving accessibility to disabled people, the methodology could still be used as a proxy of these impacts in future scheme appraisals which relate to buses. It is important to note that social benefits quantified in this way are not additional to any economic benefits calculated using existing WebTAG methods and therefore do not affect the overall net benefits of interventions. For this reason, the Department expects this value to be quoted in Appraisal Summary Tables under the 'key impacts' column rather than the 'quantitative' column.

The DfT will continue to aspire towards improving methodologies for the quantitative assessments of benefits from improving accessibility to disabled people specifically on all modes.

Concluding remarks

Recommendation 21: 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

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-benefits-of-buses-valuing-the-social-impacts>

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).

In the Government’s response to the Environmental Audit Committee report “Transport and accessibility to public services” we noted that DfT does work closely with a number of other Departments, including the Departments of Health, Work and Pensions, and Communities and Local Government to deliver its remit, including improving accessibility for disabled people.

However, in recognition that transport accessibility is primarily a local issue, with people wanting to be able to access work and services close to their homes, we believe that local communities, local government and transport operators are best placed to identify practical solutions. The Cabinet Office does not think that an inter-Ministerial Group would add value to this local agenda.

Recommendation 22: 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 (Paragraph 67).

DfT has begun to engage with the Disability Action Alliance on its transport project. We are interested in working with the Alliance to promote good practice amongst transport operators, to help make transport as accessible for disabled people as it is for the rest of the population. We will also be giving further consideration to how we can work with the Alliance on delivering some of the commitments in the Accessibility Action Plan.

Letter from David Mapp, Commercial Director, ATOC , to Louise Ellman MP dated 9 September 2013

Having provided written and oral evidence to this inquiry earlier this year, I thought it would be helpful to let the Committee know that the inquiry has prompted us to consider further improvements in the area of passenger assistance and, in particular, providing greater clarity around the circumstances when we would generally advise disabled passengers to book assistance. Looking back over our evidence, we concluded that our current guidance was less clear than it might be.

To this end, we are developing more specific guidance so that passengers are clearer about when and why assistance needs to be booked. This will help passengers to decide whether they need to book and address the perception that all disabled passengers need to pre-book assistance. Some passengers will continue to need to book assistance (where a boarding ramp needs to be deployed for instance), but many people with disabilities (such as those with hearing impairments) are able to travel by rail successfully without assistance.

In addition, we have begun evaluating a second initiative to identify point-to-point routes in London where staff are available from first train to last to provide assistance. The intention is to produce passenger guidance about the journeys that can be made with assistance on a 'turn-up and go' basis. We hope to pilot this initiative in 2014.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to clarify one sentence from my oral evidence. I said that "We are to a large extent now a turn-up-and-go railway as far as disabled people are concerned". This was in the context of there being around one million assistance bookings a year but over seventy million journeys a year made by disabled people according to the National Passenger Survey. However, I did not mean to give the impression that this is the case for all passengers. As our written evidence makes clear and I have repeated above, some disabled passengers will continue to need to pre-plan journeys and pre-book assistance. I hope this clarification is helpful.

ATOC is looking forward to receiving the Committee's final report and to working with you in the future to make further improvements to rail accessibility.