

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR
EUROPE**

Informal document SC.2 No. 4 (2009)

INLAND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Working Party on Rail Transport

13 November 2009

Sixty-third session

Geneva, 18-20 November 2009

ENGLISH ONLY

Item 11 of the provisional agenda

**WORKSHOP ON PASSENGER ACCESSIBILITY
OF HEAVY RAIL SYSTEMS**

Rail Travel for Passengers with reduced mobility – User Views



The European Older People's Platform
La Plate-forme européenne des Personnes âgées

UNECE WORKING PARTY ON RAIL TRANSPORT

WORKSHOP: Passenger Accessibility of Heavy Rail Systems

GENEVA

19 November 2009

Rail Travel for Passengers with reduced mobility – User Views

A Contribution.

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AGE - the European Older People's Platform is a European network of organisations of people aged 50+ directly representing over 25 million older people in Europe. AGE aims to voice and promote the interests of the 150 million inhabitants aged 50+ in the European Union and to raise awareness of the issues that concern them most.

1. Introduction

Firstly as an older person I believe the increased life expectancy and improved health overall of older people is something we should celebrate, but as with all good things it brings with it some problems. There is no doubt we are the fastest growing sector of society and with many aspects of life this causes difficulties.

In many cities getting around is difficult enough for everyone, motorists, cyclists, pedestrians added to which public transport is often not suitable for certain groups of people. The less mobile, by definition some older sections of society, need to be included but need help to gain that inclusion.

Best practise from around the world, and there are many examples, would give us a number of solutions to what in some places are seen as insoluble problems.

Mobility and access to rail systems have an application to all forms of transport if inclusion in society is going to be achieved by older people. It is therefore seamless travel that we seek for seamless public transport systems are a prerequisite for the active participation and independent living of older people.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Accessibility

2.1.1 Accessibility to Stations and Terminals

Accessibility in the long term can only be achieved by sensible design of the infrastructure. So the principles of universal design should be accepted for universal design ensures a solution or group of solutions valid for everybody. The problem exists across all railway systems of how we achieve best results now with infrastructure in many cases over 130 years old. Only through liaison and understanding can the different levels of accessibility both between states and within states be addressed.

Within the terminal there needs to be standardisation of signing and as simple as possible an information display which also should be similar through the system. The number of falls by older people increases at the point where some change of direction is made. The top of an escalator, looking for the next sign to their particular platform or exit are places where this simplicity of design is essential.

Within large terminals the planning sometimes fails to take into account walking distances which may be onerous for the less mobile. This could be remedied by low cost seats, resting places, small mobile people carriers if guidelines and regulations were in force.

Many systems do provide these facilities but it is standards that we seek to ensure universal compliance.

2.1.2 Accessibility of Vehicles

The level of standardisation is important with regard to vehicles. In the long term standards that are simple regarding width, height, gaps between the doors, size of the doors, are all known problems for many years and can only really be addressed at times of change.

There is a need for realism by older people and their advisers for the TGV, ICE or Pendolino and many other trains have a life of 30 years plus. If they are difficult of access now it is not reasonable to expect them to be replaced to make technology look good. Therefore the key area is the adaption of assistive equipment; ramps, lifts, walkways, special toilets, and sensible adaptation of vehicles until life expiry. This again requires the sharing of ideas and the use of best practise.

2.1.3. Accessibility of Information

Access of information is key and critical. Even though "IT" is at the forefront of everybody's thinking many pitfalls exist.

"The internet is becoming the Town Square for the global village of tomorrow" so says Bill Gates founder of Microsoft. That may be true but the global village of tomorrow is a long way from the actual "Homeplace" of to-days' older people. Many older people are disinterested and do not want to know anyway. But how do we persuade persons who are wary, for whatever reason, to accept/embrace modern technology and recognise these benefits?

Technology in ticketing is key and there will be a need to ensure the ticket does allow of universal access for only through such ease of movement can we provide mobility for older people. Ticketing systems need to be accessible both for buying tickets and for use on the network. Ticket machines should be as simple to operate as possible and of a sensible height to allow all persons to use them. Essential back up to systems in times of failure is to have a high percentage of vehicles and stations staffed, or if not staffed have understandable, simple to use, help facilities.

Technology again in the provision of timetabling material and route planning, maps of Terminals and other facilities is also key and more and more will that be available via the inter net

This is important because seven in ten persons over 65 have never used the internet and the lack of access to the web is disadvantaging older people.

One of the difficulties is the lack of standardised equipment so it is more and more difficult for older people to understand the instructions and that is long before they understand the equipment itself. So to get older people into transport systems or indeed into any assistive technology that technology needs to be as "simple" as possible and as "standardised" as possible.

Most importantly change should be kept to the minimum. Let us learn to use to-days technology before inventing tomorrows and it is also important for innovators to remember that the bigger the step forward they make, the bigger the gulf between him/her and the user is created.

2.2 Safety and Security

2.2.1 Feeling Safe

The older one gets the more vulnerable one feels. So one of the biggest deterrents for older people, and their inclusion in use of public transport is the lack of reassurance about their safety.

Large person that I am at age 75 no longer do I walk fearlessly down a lonely, badly lit corridor at night. I need to see staff on duty, closed circuit TV, good lighting, and frequent security/police presence. Importantly a good interchange between modes of travel, Bus to Train, Tram to Bus, Train to Taxi or private car pick up point is needed and are key factors for mobility. These are real issues for the older person.

2.2.2. Security versus Access

The other understandable problem that needs to be faced is that more and more we require ease of access, seamless movement, barrier free to assist older and the less mobile, but at the same time increased security world wide means more barriers, justifiable barriers, both psychological and physical. The answer is: increased staffing to assist the old through systems in areas of security risk.

2.3 Available/Affordable Accessibility

The impossibility of driving a car due to physical related impairments (failing eyesight, hearing, arthritis, etc) is one of the main reasons why older people give up driving which leaves them reliant on public transport. The loss of the freedom to drive makes older people feel dependent on the existing public transport system. This means less flexibility and freedom to travel along with the psychological impact of loss of independence. This is felt to a higher degree in rural areas and small towns. However local rail facilities are frequently rudimentary. Where large city terminals have very desirable facilities for the less mobile it can be extremely difficult to reach those terminals because of the lack of accessibility for those people provided on the local station.

The cost of travel is still a major barrier for many older people, whose limited resources are insufficient to allow them to travel as often as they would like. This is particularly important for older people, who have low incomes and are sometimes unable to reach basic and necessary facilities i.e. hospitals, or visit their relatives in neighbouring towns.

2.4 Value to Society as a Whole

The point that I would like to make is that the total community benefits from the inclusion of older people into the rail system. To allow older people to be part of the community through seamless travel means:

- Firstly older people provide often unpaid well informed persons to contribute to committees and stakeholder groups. So free travel is not a burden on society and an uneconomic alternative but inclusion provides a vast untapped resource if governments recognised the benefits that accrue. Mobility is the key. Enabling older people to continue to lead independent lives.
- Enabling them to participate fully in the local community.
- Decreasing health costs due to better health status.
- Sustaining the environment by reducing car usage and pollution.
- The presence of older people in the precincts boosts economy
- Benefiting all sectors through increasing demand and increased use of services.

In addition large amounts of charity work and volunteer organisations have a high proportion of older people taking part. Work by volunteers saves the economy large sums of money and contributes to the well-being of all age groups

3. Summary.

I have listed some of the problems, but hopefully they point to some of the ways forward. Over the last five or six years I have been privileged to be part of the AGE Expert Group with emphasis on Accessibility. I know through so many initiatives I have seen throughout the community that for most problems someone somewhere has found a solution. The difficulty is ensuring that those solutions are passed between different operators and best practice is shared.

It is the interchange between modes and the through journey experience that is important. I know in times of mishap, derailment or heavy delay operating staff are fully occupied with the task in hand. It is essential that there are back up staff that can make a presence in the confusion for at these times it is the old and the vulnerable that are most at risk. If old people have bad experiences they will not use the services on offer.

However the strength of the argument to make accessibility easier and safer for the less mobile of which a large proportion is within the older generation lies in saying, "Give us social inclusion and involve us and we can contribute.

Far from increased numbers of older people being regarded as a problem, with inclusion we can be part of solving the problem.”

4. The contribution AGE can and does make

Whilst AGE is concerned about the issues within this paper AGE is not unappreciative of the problems.

AGE is willing to be part of Stakeholder Groups or Expert Participation Groups and can call upon a variety of knowledgeable and experienced people. AGE believes also it is important to work alongside younger people to share opinions and views

It is important to be part of schemes that are moving the community forward. I personally favour the smaller groups of experts for analysis and research time frames and action plans can evolve.

Meaningful participation is important and for this reason AGE is involved in a number of projects AALIANCE, Aeneas OASIS, DREAMING and MEDIATE. For more details on these projects please visit the AGE website http://www.age-platform.org/EN/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=75.

Thank you very much for your attention

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