

What has already been achieved

The Human Rights Commission report “The Accessible Journey” defines all the steps needed for a person to get from their home to their destination and back. All steps are interlinked and if one step is not accessible, the whole journey will not be accessible. The steps defined are:

- Step 1: Information about services
- Step 2: Booking the service
- Step 3: Safety issues
- Step 4: Paying for the service
- Step 5: Getting to the service pick-up point
- Step 6: Getting on board
- Step 7: Training
- Step 7: Getting to your destination

1. Step 1: Information about services

1.1 What has been achieved

The Metlink Service Centre is a 24 hour, seven days a week, toll free service for all questions regarding public transport within the Greater Wellington region. As users speak to a person rather than having to deal with an automated system, individual questions can be answered. The Metlink Service Centre has been considered as part of the recent Ministry of Transport “snapshot”. The researchers concluded that *“calls are answered promptly by a “human” or pre recorded message about Metlink if you are on a brief hold”*. Service Centre staff offered to mail the timetable early in the enquiry, *“the service was efficient and the staff member was very happy to oblige.”*

The printed Metlink timetables and network map were assessed overall as very good by the Ministry of Transport researchers. Positively marked by the researchers were the maps, which are used in all timetables, the clear and consistent layouts and the colour coding. Although the research found that the replenishment of the Metlink timetable racks could be done more frequently and timetables were often not available on buses or trains, the positive aspect from the perspective of people with disabilities is that *“every location the researchers visited where timetables and tickets could be obtained could be accessed without using stairs”*.

The Metlink and the Tranz Metro homepage were also assessed. The overall result was that *“these appear to comply with NZ Government Web standards. Both sites are user friendly and have sufficient information to enable seamless travel solutions.”* The Metlink homepage *“is easy to navigate”* and has a good colour contrast. It contains specific information regarding wheelchair accessible services. Other information available for people with disabilities on

the website is regarding the Total Mobility scheme and a Tranz Metro guide on accessibility.

The txtBUS service is another way to receive timetable information, at any place and at any time. The user needs to know the bus stop number and the route number, available on the Metlink website or at the bus stop. The Metlink team has made a list with all bus stop numbers available to the Foundation of the Blind (for further distribution in a suitable way).

1.2 Opportunities for further improvements

An opportunity for future improvement of the Metlink Service Centre based on the snapshot is the fact that the *“call centre had no resources or information to assist people with hearing or sight impairment”* and that *“no information was available on the availability of super-low-floor buses.”*

Regarding the printed Metlink timetables and the network map an important aspect which needs attention is the small font size used and in some cases the (lack of) colour contrast. There are no timetables available in larger font size, neither as hardcopy nor on the internet. The Metlink Marketing and Information team has scheduled a review of the timetables for the financial year 2008/09. This is a great opportunity to consult with representatives of visually impaired people in order to improve the timetable readability. Contact between the Metlink team, the Foundation of the Blind and the Wellington City Council Community Advisor for seniors has been made to ensure their input. As well, there are a couple of best practices and guidelines from other regions available. The snapshot found the availability of the printed information to be *“incomplete and inconsistent”*. As the quality of the information is generally regarded as very good, it is a pity that *“the value to users of printed information is diminished if it is not readily and conveniently available to them”*.

Also for the Metlink homepage the font size *“could present problems for visually impaired users”*. A search of different terms related to accessibility and users with disabilities does not produce matches. The Metlink team will work on the layout of the homepage in 2008/09. Again, Metlink will ensure that stakeholders like the Foundation of the Blind can deliver input to this process.

2. Step 2: Booking the service

2.1 What has been achieved

The only system that can be booked in advance is the Total Mobility Scheme. And wheelchair riders can contact Tranz Metro if they plan a train journey, especially if they want to use the train for the first time.

2.2 Opportunities for further improvements

At the moment there are no obvious opportunities for improvement identified.

3. Step 3: Safety issues

3.1 What has been achieved

The safety standards on buses and trains at the moment mainly depend on the type and age of the vehicle. In general, the newer a vehicle the higher the chance that it is wheelchair accessible and provides other measures such as grab rails etc. which provide safe options to hold during the ride.

The new Wairarapa trains have a wheelchair hoist on the Servery Car with two wheelchair parking spaces on that car, where wheelchairs can be parked safely. There are also Braille door open labels on each Wairarapa carriage, and a hearing loop in the Servery Car.

The new trains for the other lines that will come into service from 2010 onward will have multifunctional areas where wheelchair can be parked safely.

At the moment almost 40% of the diesel buses in Wellington are super low floor buses which are wheelchair accessible and provide space for wheelchairs.

Of the trolley-buses only the new ones (about 10% at the moment) are wheelchair accessible, but this will improve rapidly with the roll-out of new trolley-buses. Once all new trolley-buses are delivered the whole trolley-bus fleet will be wheelchair accessible. This means at the same time that almost 50% of the whole bus fleet will be accessible. NZ Bus has also purchased new low floor diesel buses for Wellington and the Hutt Valley. They will be rolled out in 2008 and 2009. According to NZ Bus the NZ Bus fleet in Wellington and the Hutt Valley will be approximately 95% low floor by the end of 2009.

3.2 Opportunities for further improvements

Currently Greater Wellington staff are involved in a Land Transport NZ project that defines new Vehicle Quality Standards. Accessibility is one of the subjects that is covered. The draft of the new Vehicle Quality Standards has been discussed with disability groups. Greater Wellington plan to make the new standards part of the procurement of public transport contracts.

4. Step 4: Paying for the service

4.1 What has been achieved

Single trip and daily travel tickets are available on every bus and train, which means that every user can buy a ticket for a trip without having to go to a ticket office. Ten-trip tickets for NZ Bus can be bought at several agencies, whereas Mana/Newlands services can be paid with a pre-loaded smart card on the bus. Concession fares are available for Blind Permit Holders.

People who are unable to use public transport can apply for membership for the Total Mobility Scheme. At this stage this is a paperbased voucher system.

Greater Wellington officers are currently investigating options for replacing this system with an electronic card system.

Recent developments such as the Snapper Card introduced by NZ Bus have the potential to make paying for public transport services easier. Consultation with the disabled community has recently taken place.

4.2 Opportunities for further improvements

A further integration of tickets and fares would allow a more seamless travel in general for all public transport users and it would also help people with disabilities. Greater Wellington officers are working on the next steps, e.g. an Electronic Ticketing system for the Wellington rail system.

5. Step 5: Getting to the service pick-up point

5.1 What has been achieved

Currently, about 90% of the people within the Greater Wellington region live within 400 m of a bus stop.

Infrastructure to and at bus stops is usually the responsibility of local Territorial Authorities, as they are responsible for example, the quality of pavements and urban space furniture. One example for a route based approach is Wainuiomata, where bus stop accessibility has been improved based on a Stagecoach report.

The accessibility of platforms at stations is an important issue Greater Wellington works on step-by-step basis. Along the Wairarapa line all stations have been made wheelchair accessible during the upgrade that was necessary for the new rolling stock. All platforms are now equipped with a ramp. The accessibility of station platforms along the other lines is on the Greater Wellington agenda for the coming years, as part of the upgrade required when the new trains are coming from 2010 onwards.

Whenever Greater Wellington upgrades park and ride facilities, at least two parking spaces are planned as disability parking spaces. This can be more, depending on the size of the whole parking area and the expected demand.

5.2 Opportunities for further improvements

Feedback received from NZ Bus shows that there are a number of issues for buses in Wellington being able to access bus stops without other obstacles in their way, such as parked cars. Besides, a number of bus stops are not accessible for users with disabilities. NZ Bus has indicated that they will be working with the Wellington Disability Reference Group this year to identify these stops and approach Wellington City Council and Greater Wellington on how to fix the problems.

6. Step 6: Training

6.1 What has been achieved

In new contracts Greater Wellington requires operators to have a customer service training program, which they report on against their annual training plan.

NZ Bus started a programme of driver training in customer service. Initially this training was for new drivers but it has since been rolled out to other drivers. In Wellington a member of the Disability Reference Group attends the training and discusses with the drivers difficulties people with disabilities have when using public transport. They also demonstrate how best to approach customers with disabilities. The response has been excellent; drivers now better understand the issues and are more willing to help.

NZ Bus also receives very positive feedback from public transport users on the way the drivers are treating them. In one example a wheelchair rider reported that the ramp of the bus was not working and the driver took a lot of effort to get the bus close enough to the kerb to ensure that the wheelchair rider could get on the bus.

But training is not only about staff. Also people with disability can be trained to help them to feel more comfortable regarding using public transport. After the introduction of the new Wairarapa trains training sessions have been organised for people with disabilities to get used to the new trains. There was the opportunity to test the new wheelchair hoist and to become familiar with the train itself.

6.2 Opportunities for further improvements

Upper Hutt City Council has expressed a wish to organise a “train training” session for the elderly and disabled inhabitants as well. They are already planning a training with Valley Flyer buses, an idea which has to be further investigated is whether this could be combined with the trains.

7. Step 7: Getting on board

7.1 What has been achieved

During the last years improvements have been made regarding the information provided to passengers on stations. A couple of the improvements have been made by Toll, as e.g. better platform indicators at Wellington station, improved announcements, PA systems on trains and training to use them.

The Ministry of Transport snapshot was positive about different aspects regarding bus stop signs. The uniformity and recognition of the signs, their size and surface, the amount of text on the signs and the timetable information given were rated excellent.

For buses, Greater Wellington improved the destination display standards, and in the trolley contract Greater Wellington have asked for electronic LED destination screens but we have not stipulated the standard at this stage.

Greater Wellington is working on a Real Time Information system, which will be implemented from the end of 2009 onwards. This system will include on-street displays and audio information at major bus stops and other options for the public transport user to access the information, like a web-application and a cell phone application.

7.2 Opportunities for further improvements

Although improvements have been made regarding the signage at stations, and Wellington station in particular, the snapshot indicated a couple of omissions. For example, there was no central location showing departure information for all trains at Wellington station, which means that *“the departure platform for a particular service could only be identified by observing the signs at each of the nine individual platforms, or by listening to the public announcements. This is an extreme inconvenience for mobility-impaired travellers.”* Also, *“there were no particular facilities available to assist people with hearing and vision impairment”*.

Although a couple of aspects regarding the bus stop displays scored very well during the snapshot, there are still some opportunities for improvements. One important area is the text size on the signs, which was regarded as too small. The researchers also commented on the fact that they did not observe tactile or audio signs during their investigation. The Greater Wellington Real Time Information system will solve some of these issues.

8. Step 8: Getting to the destination

8.1 What has been achieved

Greater Wellington has vehicle quality standards for buses. At the moment Greater Wellington assigns one to 11 points out of 110 for “wheelchair/pram facilities”. A standard condition of the Wellington contract is the requirement that where routes have been operated by super low floor buses, any subsequent contracts must continue to provide them. Higher accessibility standards are introduced step-by-step, mainly when contracts come up for renewal.

In the new trolley bus contract Greater Wellington have stipulated the following details that will benefit all public transport users, and in particular people with disabilities:

- LED destination blinds
- Large wheelchair symbol on the front of the bus
- 2 wheelchair locations, one on each side of the vehicle at the front using the front door and ramp for entry and exit

- Bell push buttons compliant with expert advice from the Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee ('Diptac')
- Stanchions in bright contrasting colours, floor markings including wheelchair locations to be identified by contrasting colour on the floor.

The vehicles have been future proofed so they can have extra equipment fitted at a later date: interior passenger display information, audible announcements, and video surveillance cameras.

Currently almost 40% of the diesel buses and 10% of the trolley buses are super low floor and wheelchair accessible. The percentage of accessible trolley buses will be 100%, after all new trolley buses have been delivered. NZ Bus has also purchased new accessible diesel buses for Wellington and the Hutt Valley.

Bus operators have already put a lot of effort in the accessibility of new buses. The new trolley buses have a multifunctional area where wheelchairs can be parked. The lay-out has been discussed with NZ Bus and disability groups. Some wheelchair riders commented that the new trolley buses and the newest generation of diesel buses have "excellent" accessibility from their point of view. They are especially satisfied with the fact that a lot of new buses have a 2 by 1 configuration, which gives them much more space to get to the wheelchair space. NZ Bus is also replacing badly performing ramps on buses bit by bit.

At the moment the following routes are wheelchair accessible:

- Routes 21, 24, 43 and 44 operated by Go Wellington
- Routes 81, 83, 84, 85, 80, 90 and 110 operated by Valley Flyer
- Services operated by Mana Coach Services and Newlands Coach Services as specified on their timetable
- Most Kapiti Coast bus routes use super low floor wheelchair accessible buses

The new Wairarapa trains have a wheelchair hoist on the Servery Car with two wheelchair parking spaces on that car, where wheelchairs can be parked safely. There are also Braille door open labels on each Wairarapa carriage, and hearing loop on the Servery Car.

The existing Ganz Mavag Units (owned by Toll) carry a portable wheelchair ramp inside the motor car of each unit. On board they have foldable chairs where two wheelchairs can be parked. Due to their age, there is no provision for wheelchair riders on the English Electric Units.

All new trains for the other lines will have wheelchair accessible parts and next stop audio and visual information.

8.2 Opportunities for further improvements

Super low floor buses are a real improvement as part of the accessible journey. One problem that still has to be solved is the fact that these buses are in most cases not dedicated to certain routes (with the exemptions mentioned above). At the same time the information whether a certain scheduled service is accessible or not is almost impossible to get for a public transport user, which means that users with disabilities have no certainty that they will be able to use a service. This makes a whole route inaccessible for them. Better information or more dedicated buses and wheelchair accessible routes would be a huge improvement which requires mainly operational effort rather than huge expenditure.

The new trolley buses will also have the option to give next stop information on on-bus displays. As these are owned by NZ Bus it is at their discretion how to use these displays. Also the Real Time Information system will have the option to add on-bus displays. This is also regarded as a measure under the responsibility of operators.

The Matangi trains that will be rolled out within the region in 2010 are in the design phase at the moment. To avoid disappointment amongst the disabled community, consultation should take place as soon as the process allows this. Asking people with disabilities about their experience with the new Wairarapa trains can potentially deliver lessons which can be learned for the current process.