



**Free To Move:
VCOSS Accessible Transport Forum**

Summary Report

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The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak organisation of the non-government social and community services sector. VCOSS raises awareness of the existence, causes and effects of poverty and inequality, and contributes to initiatives seeking to create a more just society.

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Introduction

In 2008, the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) published the report of the Accessible Transport Watch Project. The report published 27 recommendations to improve the accessibility of public transport for members of the travelling public, and particularly for passengers with disabilities. Almost 3 years later, in light of continuing concern with the progress of accessibility improvements in the public transport network, VCOSS convened a forum in December 2010 to prompt discussion on the continuing problems and how communities might respond. This report presents a summary of those discussions.

The Forum was advertised through VCOSS electronic notification services, VCOSS members, and through e-mail to targeted stakeholders, especially organisations involved with advocacy for and providing services to people with disabilities. Approximately 80 people attended the Forum, comprising a mix of accessibility advocates, transport users with disabilities, community service organisations, local government representatives, operator representatives and government staff. To inform deliberations, VCOSS produced an information paper, the content of which is included in this report at Appendix II, which documented some major concerns with transport accessibility, summarised from the earlier report.

VCOSS was very pleased to welcome the Minister for Public Transport, representing the recently elected Baillieu Government, to address the forum. The Minister gave participants some personal insights, and outlined the new government's initial responses in the area of transport. A transcript of the Minister's address is included at Appendix I, and a video of the address is available on the VCOSS YouTube Channel.

VCOSS wishes to thank all the speakers, attendees and staff who participated in the forum, and we hope to ensure these issues are documented and acted upon in the future.

Key Messages – Summary

1. Accessibility Planning Processes

- 1.1 The Disability Standards for Access to Public Transport should be one mechanism among many to improve the useability of the transport system, and should not be the only consideration in achieving greater accessibility
- 1.2 Accessibility should be incorporated into planning processes systematically, with a long-term vision for the future accessibility of the system
- 1.3 Transport infrastructure planning requires a conceptually coherent framework for understanding and integrating the needs of transport users

2. Accessibility Improvements in Public Transport

- 2.1 There are continuing barriers to using wheelchairs and scooters on public transport vehicles, including ensuring stability, ensuring access to designated spaces, provision of information on the use of mobility aids and issues regarding the use of aids that do not meet current public transport standards
- 2.2 Providing level access boarding on public transport vehicles remains a key challenge for the system
- 2.3 There continue to be concerns about the accessibility of public transport passenger infrastructure, including ramps and lifts, toilets, TGSIs , and connecting pedestrian pathways
- 2.4 There are suggestions for improvements in interactions between staff and transport users with disabilities, and problems with vehicle queuing, late services and managing cancellations.
- 2.5 There remains additional work to ensure everyone can navigate the transport system
- 2.6 Timetables and scheduling should indicate the availability of accessible services, and be provided in useable formats

3. Governance and Community Engagement

- 3.1 The proposed Public Transport Development Authority (PTDA) needs an appropriate level of commitment, political support and funding in order to prioritise accessibility improvements and co-ordinate accessible services across the transport system
- 3.2 The PTDA needs to be accountable, and transparency would be improved by a regular program of accessibility audits whose findings are made public
- 3.3 Transport Agencies require improved communication, consultation and complaints handling procedures to improve their knowledge of accessibility concerns

4. Community Capacity and Advocacy Strategies

- 4.1 There is fragmented capacity among accessibility advocacy communities, and addressing this lack of communication should be a priority in the community response to accessibility issues
- 4.2 There is a role for VCOSS in facilitating advocacy co-ordination for accessible transport
- 4.3 Public advocacy should be included as a mechanism to ensure accessibility issues are prioritised

Forum Discussions – Detailed Summary

The structure of the forum included 2 group discussion sessions, where groups were invited to consider the information presented by speakers and answer broad focus questions, in order to elicit information on the concerns, suggestions and directions people wished to contribute. The four focus questions were:

1. What are the main accessibility issues that need to be addressed?
2. What is stopping progress being made?
3. How might the new transport authority better manage the system?
4. What methods can we use to draw attention to the issues?

Forum Attendees were invited to record their responses using the writing materials provided. These responses were collated using thematic analysis to provide a summary of the major concerns and suggestions. Overall, the discussions addressed improvements in following areas:

1. Accessibility Planning Processes
2. Accessibility Improvements to Vehicles, Infrastructure and Services
3. Providing Information to Transport Users
4. Governance and Community Engagement
5. Community Capacity and Advocacy Strategies

A summary of the commentary on each theme is provided. Please note that this summary is a consolidation and synthesis of information received from the groups. It does not imply that every group discussed a particular issue, or that every person agrees with every statement or opinion expressed. It does not include every item recorded, and occasionally includes additional comments reported verbally or received in response to the forum which do not appear in the material collected on the day, where these were deemed relevant. It does, however, seek to provide a general perspective of participants views from the comments received.

1. Accessibility Planning Processes

Key messages:

- 1.1 The Disability Standards for Access to Public Transport should be one mechanism among many to improve the useability of the transport system, and should not be the only consideration in achieving greater accessibility
- 1.2 Accessibility should be incorporated into planning processes systematically, with a long-term vision for the future accessibility of the system
- 1.3 Transport planning requires a conceptually coherent framework for understanding and integrating the needs of transport users

1.1 The Disability Standards for Access to Public Transport (DSAPT) should be one mechanism among many to improve the useability of the transport system, and should not be the only consideration in achieving greater accessibility.

Participants noted that focusing solely on percentage compliance compared with DSAPT progress targets may not produce optimal outcomes for accessibility. While DSAPT are important, they should be supplemented by other information, planning and research as part of an effort to achieve best practice for accessibility across the transport network. The importance of the Standards should, however, be recognised by both Executive Government and the responsible authority by a public commitment to ensuring the progress targets are met.

Participants wished to reinforce the points that many DSAPT elements already require 100% compliance across the transport network (with only specific elements subject to progress targets), that a DDA complaint may be lodged by an organisation as well as by an individual, and that there is continued frustration that the final report of the review of DSAPT commissioned by the Federal Government has still not been released several years after it was finalised.

1.2 Accessibility should be incorporated into planning processes systematically, with a long-term vision for the future accessibility of the system

Participants felt that accessibility planning and design was ad hoc and inconsistent, without any long-term strategy to produce a transport system with 21st century standards of useability. While recognising there are significant legacy issues in the transport system due to its age and the impact of past decisions, participants argued these facts should not be used to excuse inaccessibility problems – rather, it should mean greater effort is expended on determining how to retro-fit the system to meet contemporary standards and expectations. On a similar note, it was proposed that a system of consistent design standards, codes and co-ordination be implemented to ensure a pattern of upgrades are pursued that combine to produce a more accessible system.

1.3 Transport infrastructure planning requires a conceptually coherent framework for understanding and integrating the needs of transport users

Repeatedly, participants stressed the need for transport infrastructure planning to occur within a conceptually consistent framework. People noted that while there were numerous examples of improvements, that these were perceived as isolated and disconnected pieces of work than any coherent strategy. Numerous groups suggested approaches that would aid in producing a more internally coherent perspective on transport infrastructure improvements, including:

- *Future-proofing*: ensuring planning and design produced long-term benefits, considers alternative possibilities for use over the life of the infrastructure, and incorporates redundancy that makes facilities resilient to failures and emergencies
- *Place-making*: incorporating ‘whole-of-place’ approaches to considering the context and needs of local communities and integrating infrastructure improvements between multiple agencies, including accessibility and transport infrastructure.
- *Destination-based approaches*: Consider the range of transport alternatives and transport interactions to access key destinations, such as hospitals or shopping centres, allowing identification of gaps and needs.
- *User-centred perspectives*: Ensuring transport planners understand their decisions from the perspective of user groups.

2. Accessibility Improvements in Public Transport

Key messages:

- 2.1 There are continuing barriers to using wheelchairs and scooters on public transport vehicles, including ensuring stability, ensuring access to designated spaces, provision of information on the use of mobility aids and issues regarding the use of aids that do not meet current public transport standards
- 2.2 Providing level access boarding on public transport vehicles remains a key challenge for the system
- 2.3 There continue to be concerns about the accessibility of public transport passenger infrastructure, including ramps and lifts, toilets, TGSIs , and connecting pedestrian pathways
- 2.4 There are suggestions for improvements in interactions between staff and transport users with disabilities, and problems with vehicle queuing, late services and managing cancellations.
- 2.5 There remains additional work to ensure that information is presented so that everyone can navigate the transport system
- 2.6 Timetables and scheduling should indicate the availability of accessible services, and be provided in useable formats

2.1 There are continuing barriers to using wheelchairs and scooters on public transport, including ensuring stability, ensuring access to designated spaces, provision of information on the use of mobility aids and issues regarding the use of aids that do not meet current public transport standards

Participants discussed at some length the problems facing people using wheelchairs and scooters on public transport vehicles. Generally, people perceived no consistent approach to the use of these mobility aids, including the perception that standards for on-board use of mobility aids did not exist or were inadequate.

Specific issues included problems with ensuring the stability of wheelchairs and scooters on the vehicle during the journey, particularly when exposed to sudden braking or sharp turning. One group suggested the installation of restraints, which are understood to be available in other countries.

Ensuring that sufficient space on vehicles was available when travelling with mobility aids also posed a problem, with people reporting difficulty manoeuvring, finding the space occupied by other passengers, particularly on crowded vehicles, or being unable to operate 'flip-seats' which are ostensibly able to be folded away provide a space for mobility aids.

There was extensive discussion about how to address the increasing availability and purchase of non-standard mobility aids. Some users, having often spent large amounts of money purchasing equipment, find that their mobility aid does not fit the standards for use on public transport vehicles, and thus are prevented from using some or all public transport services. It was noted that this may also be a concern for parents who purchase push-chairs or prams that are unable to be used on public transport. Options suggested were to develop a 'public transport approved' sticker for equipment, and for greater public education and information about the use of mobility aids on public transport, including at the point-of-sale.

2.2 Providing level access boarding on public transport vehicles remains a key challenge for the system

There remain concerns about level access boarding to public transport vehicles across all modes – train, tram and buses. Firstly, it remains the case that many vehicles and stops are not capable of providing level-access, and while there is an understanding that these are being progressively upgraded over time, there are concerns about the pace, pattern and standard of upgrades.

On trains, participants continue to experience concerns about the size and inconsistency of the vertical and horizontal gap between the train and platforms, and the reliance on ramps as the main means of providing level-access. Numerous suggestions were made to provide for alternatives to manual ramp deployment, including designing platforms and trains that eliminated the gap, installing on-board lifts for trains ("floor-lowering devices") that were capable of providing level access, and ceasing construction of curved railway platforms that produced larger gaps.

On buses, it was noted that even low-floor buses have a significant vertical gap, which poses problems for people with ambulatory impairments. It was noted that drivers do not universally use 'kneeling' capabilities on buses equipped with this feature, and may not consistently offer or agree to deploy ramps for people with ambulatory impairments. It was also mentioned that some bus ramps were too narrow or too steep for some mobility aids. There were also concerns that equity

geographic fairness was not incorporated into the deployment of accessible buses, with some routes and regions experiencing lower (or no) availability of these vehicles.

DSAPT progress targets have not been met for the tram system, and participants were generally critical of this failure and required an acceleration of accessibility improvements for this mode. In addition, participants were concerned at the location of new platform tram stops, noting that platform stops were being constructed on routes that were not serviced by low-floor trams, while large sections of routes that were serviced by low-floor trams had no level-access stops. Participants also had concerns with the size of the 'gap' on between trams and some platform stops, and also raised the concern that trams with spring suspension changed height depending on their load, meaning that the size of the gap was not uniform.

2.3 There continue to be concerns about the accessibility of public transport passenger infrastructure, including ramps and lifts, toilets, TGSIs, and connecting pedestrian pathways.

The issue of access to train platforms was heavily discussed. Of particular note was general criticism of the decision to provide lift-only access to platforms in some new station designs, only for the lifts to malfunction, to be subjected to vandalism or were extremely unclean, resulting in passengers being unable to board trains, unable to exit the platform after disembarking, or finding using lifts unpleasant or unsafe. Generally, it was felt these experiences were unacceptable given the reported expenditure on these facilities.

Other specific issues included the practice of locking accessible toilets at train stations, unlike other toilet facilities. This means that people with disabilities have to ask to go to the toilet unlike other transport users, a situation that people consider discriminatory and disrespectful of their dignity. People also noted that the use of TGSIs was inconsistent and sometimes confusing, and that signage at stations was inadequate for people to determine which way a train would be approaching (for instance, to know which end to board at), or which platform to change to when changing services.

A number of groups commented that there were problems with the accessibility of pedestrian infrastructure that connected to transport facilities, including connecting infrastructure approaching train stations, concerns about the safety at level crossings, and the creation of bus stops with no access paths. A further concern was the lack of designated drop-off points at some train stations for passengers with disabilities.

2.4 There are suggestions for improvements in interactions between staff and transport users with disabilities, and problems with vehicle queuing, late services and managing cancellations.

Participants made a number of comments and suggestions about the interaction between people with disabilities and transport staff. A number of reports expressed frustration at inconsistencies in the level of assistance provided by transport staff, whereby assistance happily rendered by one staff member would be refused when requested from another, citing that it was against policy. Another common problem was differences in driver behaviour in allowing time for people to be seated before accelerating the vehicle, and in allowing time for people with mobility aids to disembark. Numerous groups suggested that improvements in staff and driver training might improve service quality, as well as providing greater clarity and dissemination of the rights and responsibilities of staff and passengers. The comment was received that there is little transparency from operators

about the type and content of training they provide to staff, including drivers and authorised officers, especially about engaging people with disabilities. Similarly, it was reported that there are low levels of awareness about transport disadvantage more generally, and the mean of addressing these issues and relevant referral opportunities.

There was some commentary about practices when vehicles were running late, such as accessible vehicles by-passing stops, when subsequent services may not be accessible. The practice of bus and tram queuing at stops, whereby vehicles may allow boarding when queued behind another vehicle at the designated stop, creates a problem for people with vision impairments in identifying that their service has arrived, or for people who may not be able to quickly change locations to access the correct vehicle. There was also a report that some passengers has trouble discerning the correct bus service as no route number was visible from side of the vehicle, or was obscured by advertising materials.

People also noted accessibility problems in the practices of managing delayed, cancelled and replacement services. For instance, there were reports of accessible services being replaced by inaccessible buses when cancelled due to maintenance work. There were also concerns that changes or cancellations to train services are announced audibly but not by using visual displays, meaning hearing impaired people are not informed of changes.

2.5 There remains additional work to ensure everyone can navigate the transport system

A number of participants raised the issues of providing complete coverage of automated visual displays and audible announcements. It was noted that many vehicles do not have these installed, or they do not function correctly. Similarly, they are not universal at stations and stops – and where present, they malfunction with notable frequency, are hard to hear, or do not work for all services. Participants noted that this was not consistent with DSAPT section 27.4, which states that passengers should have the same information regarding their whereabouts during a journey.

More generally, it was noted that transport user's lifecycle affects their requirements for information to navigate the transport system, including parents with children, young people, frail aged/older people, people with disability, people with mental health issues, people transitioning from driver to non-driver, regional transport users using metropolitan services and the converse. The provision of information needs to take into account the multiplicity of users, be available in appropriate formats, multi-modal, current, consistent and relevant.

Further, it was report that there are existing sources of information about transport options, including community transport services, which are under-promoted. In addition, many community organisations and transport operators provide education programs which could be more collaboratively developed, especially to improve the consistency of information.

2.6 Timetables and scheduling should indicate the availability of accessible services, and be provided in useable formats

Some participants reported that timetabling information may not allow passengers to identify when an accessible service will be available, with some operators asking people to ring ahead, and tram timetables not identifying which scheduled services will be low-floor vehicles. It is difficult to

determine which model of train will be running, which poses problem for people who have difficulties using older models (such as opening manual doors, or requiring audible announcements).

One suggestion was to provide an integrated, multi-modal accessibility map so that passengers could plan journeys with knowledge of all locations where level-access boarding was possible. Participants reported that some timetables and signage used very small print, which could not be read by people with vision impairments.

3. Governance and Community Engagement

Key messages:

- 3.1 The proposed Public Transport Development Authority (PTDA) needs an appropriate level of commitment, political support and funding in order to prioritise accessibility improvements and co-ordinate accessible services across the transport system
- 3.2 The PTDA needs to be accountable, and transparency would be improved by a regular program of accessibility audits whose findings are made public
- 3.3 Transport Agencies require improved communication, consultation and complaints handling procedures to improve their knowledge of accessibility concerns

3.1 The proposed Public Transport Development Authority (PTDA) needs an appropriate level of commitment, political support and funding in order to prioritise accessibility improvements and co-ordinate accessible services across the transport system

Participants noted that the Government had made an election commitment to instituting a new Public Transport Development Authority. Generally, participants noted that greater co-ordination of the transport system between modes and across transport agencies may improve the user experience, particularly by ensuring a co-ordinated approach to accessibility improvements.

However, participants were unsure whether the Authority would have the mandate, commitment, funding and political support to ensure there is sufficient priority given to accessibility. A number of groups noted that the lack of funding for accessibility improvements was a significant barrier to progress.

3.2 The PTDA needs to be transparent and accountable, and this would be improved by a regular program of accessibility audits whose findings are made public

Participants expressed a desire for the PTDA to be accountable for its decision-making, and “not insulated by being at one remove from government”. In particular, participants indicated their current concern about the lack of consequences when timelines, targets or budgets are not met, and expressed the desire that these issues be addressed in the composition of the new Authority.

A number of discussion groups expressed the desire to see regular accessibility audits of transport infrastructure and a clear reporting process for communicating progress and improvements in transport access (or lack thereof), to improve transparency and community understanding of the process.

3.3 Transport Agencies require improved communication, consultation and complaints handling procedures to improve their knowledge of accessibility concerns

Participants noted that the means by which the PTDA and other transport agencies communicate with transport users, including users with disabilities, affects their ability to understand user perspectives and educate the public on the status, improvements, and demands upon the public transport system.

Participants expressed the view that there was insufficient consultation before the design of new transport facilities, leading to sub-optimal accessibility outcomes. They also noted difficulties in complaint-handling capabilities of public transport – for instance, one group noted suggested that there be a dedicated means (such as a phone/text number) for notification in case of a lift failure.

More generally, participants perceived that complaints did not ‘flow on’ to produce beneficial changes in the system. It was noted that the Public Transport Ombudsman collected data on complaints, and the question posed as to whether complaints data could be better utilised and shared across government, operators and community agencies. However, others also cautioned against too heavy reliance on complaints as a feedback mechanism, as vulnerable people may be reluctant to formally complain.

There was discussion about whether the PTDA should have a specific reference group on accessibility, for which there was some support, but also caution as there was also a concern that there were already a number of accessibility advisory groups.

4. Community Capacity and Advocacy Strategies

Key messages:

- 4.1 There is fragmented capacity among accessibility advocacy communities, and addressing this lack of communication should be a priority in the community response to accessibility issues
- 4.2 There is a role for VCOSS in facilitating advocacy co-ordination for accessible transport
- 4.3 Public advocacy should be included as a mechanism to ensure accessibility issues are prioritised

4.1 There is fragmented capacity among accessibility advocacy communities, and addressing this lack of communication should be a priority in the community response to accessibility issues

Participants noted the large number of groups and committees that had an interest in accessible transport issues and noted that they have few mechanisms to share information or deliberate on appropriate policy responses. Respondents suggested that methods of ‘working together’ should be explored, including mapping existing consultation mechanisms and adapting successful models of collaboration.

There was also general support for examining broader partnerships with other stakeholder communities who support better transport options, such as health, ageing, environment, cycling or family groups.

4.2 There is a role for VCOSS in facilitating advocacy co-ordination for accessible transport

In the presentation before the second discussion session, the presenter outlined a role for VCOSS in facilitating an advocacy working group, where a range of stakeholder could meet regular to exchange information, discuss policy responses, and plan shared campaigns. Participants were generally support of this idea. Additional suggestions included disseminating information through the Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (DARU), and including a relationship with larger stakeholders and regional groups.

4.3 Public advocacy should be included as a mechanism to ensure accessibility issues are prioritised

A number of groups highlighted the role of public advocacy in achieving improvements in accessibility. This included highlighting issues in the media, using direct action campaign models, and involving the public in demanding accessibility improvements. Different strategies were discussed, such as creating empathy by conveying the human impact of lack of access, as well as gathering evidence to support policy change – for instance, by monitoring progress and collecting statistics.

Appendix I: Minister's Address - Transcript of Proceedings

Cath Smith, VCOSS CEO:

Welcome to all of you, thank you very much for coming to our forum on accessible transport and a discussion around *Free to Move* on accessible transport in Victoria. My name is Cath Smith, I'm the CEO of VCOSS, and a number of VCOSS team members are here for the session today, as well as Board Members.

We've changed the programme slightly, early in the piece, because we were all excited because this is our new Minister for Transport's first public engagement.

When he became available, we were pretty pleased, given that public transport and transport generally was such a huge election issue. The fact that this forum is the first forum that our new Minister chooses to come to, to us is very positive and hopefully a fantastic symbol of things to come.

So I'll just get us started. Welcome to all of you. Before I go on, I'd just like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we're meeting on today, the Kulin nation, and pay our respects to elders past and present, and to any elders who are with us in the room today.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to introduce our interpreters, Mark and Megan, thank you very much. Also, as you can see from the camera, we are recording this morning's proceedings, and there will be hopefully be a few minutes for questions and answers. Please be aware that we will be filming you and filming the proceedings today, so do let our team know afterwards if you have any concerns about that.

The reason why we're running this forum - Free to Move: Planning for Action on Accessible Transport – is due to VCOSS and the sector's very long interest in transport issues, and the importance of transport in people's lives, whether its to get to work or the shops, or the doctor, or education or friends and family. Without the transport services people can have trouble just getting out of their homes, and are at risk of isolation, poverty and sickness. So we've been advocating for many years, as have many of you in the room today - there's some familiar faces - for people who have been advocating to improve the accessibility of our transport system, so that more people can use it, building independence and transport choice.

So, we are pleased to extend a warm welcome to the speaker who is kicking off this morning's proceedings. The Honourable Terry Mulder is with us only probably for about ten minutes, so I'm going to leave the stage on now and I'm going to hand over, because he's got another meeting he's got to be at. So, I'm going to hand over now, and if then if there's not time to get through all the questions, there'll be an opportunity to have a discussion and follow up later.

So, thank you very much and please welcome Terry Mulder.

<applause>

The Honourable Terry Mulder MLA, Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Roads:

Thank you Cath for the invitation to come along this morning. Before I came this morning I got a text message from a nun who used to teach me at St. Mary's School in Colac. When I first went to school – I was 5 years old – I couldn't talk: I had a bad stutter. She had polio and had callipers on. She looked at me and I looked at her and she said: "I think I can do something for you." So morning, lunch and afternoon she used to take me aside and read with me and within 3 months the stutter was gone. I sent back a message to her saying thankyou for her congratulations and I'm about to attend my first formal function – minus the stutter.

My department prepared an actual speech for me, but I'm not going to go through that speech, as I indicated to Cath. When I come along in future, the way that I like to conduct my addresses or my information sessions is to sit around in a circle where people can actually talk to me and throw questions at me, feed information to me, I'll have a couple of advisers who'll take on board all the information. I don't want to be a Minister who makes a speech and bolts out the door. Because that way I don't get the feedback I want, I won't get the information that I want from you.

Cath indicated I come from the country – she said I hope that means we'll get some practical solutions to the problems that we have and that people with disabilities and people with a lack of access to public transport face. I've addressed a couple of those matters already in some of our policy announcements and some direction I've given to the Department in relation to how we actually build public transport infrastructure. I don't believe there is enough input from people who actually use that infrastructure. If things are built, and then they're asked to come and comment on it, and then find out what is wrong with it. A simple example is Laverton, a \$92 million railway station that has a lift that continually breaks down. All that's left for people at that particular location is a steep staircase, and a taxi around the other side. I want to make sure that people who work in those facilities, people who use those facilities, people with disabilities, people who have difficulty because of their age in being able to use public transport or other means of transport actually have input into what we build. That we address those needs in the very early design stages, and don't find ourselves with a \$92 million project that doesn't actually work for the people.

My mum went through a stage of dementia; there are some real issues I think within the medical professional in terms of how people who have loss of independence that that message is conveyed to different agencies to realise that there is a person within the community who does need some form of assistance. There are a lot of agencies out there, there is a medical profession here, but there seems to be a breakdown in communication in connecting a lot of people to those types of services.

We have also got a situation with older drivers, and I have made some pretty strong policy commitments in relation to that. I had situations in regional Victoria, whereby older drivers, on a number of occasions, get a letter from VicRoads reading "You've got to be re-tested, someone's reported you. Turn up for a test." They turn up, they're put into a car they've never driven before, with 5 or 6 minutes to familiarise themselves with it. Away they go: fail the test - "You've lost your licence." Sit another test - once again, an unfamiliar vehicle - try the test: fail. Third time around, they might get through it. But if someone in that sort of circumstance actually loses their licence?

I've had a situation: elderly people living out on a farm, an invalid husband, totally, completely isolated at the minute that decision has been made. No referral, no connection in relation to other types of transport for them. So, one of the policy positions that I'm taking to VicRoads is that older drivers should be able to take a test in their own car. That brings about issues in relation to occupational health and safety for the licence testers, but what I'm asking to look at is an observation test. Quite often people have been reported, because it's been seen to be something that's not right on the road. Because they're older they're pushed into a test situation. With a younger driver that doesn't happen, but with an older driver it does happen. I want to make sure there is a sense of fairness and a sense of balance in the way that those sort of decisions are made as we go forward.

So, I'll be asking VicRoads to develop a test for older drivers: that, if they wish to, that they can take a test in their own car. That may be at a driving range, that may well be that a licensed tester follows them to see how they actually carry out their driving. It may well be an inboard video to see how they're performing behind the wheel. But it is a distinct disadvantage for someone who has been driving a certain type of vehicle for ten years or so, to be all of a sudden put into a brand new vehicle – different clutch pressure, different brake pressure, accelerator pressure – everything is different about the vehicle, and then asked to familiarise themselves in a short period of time and pass a driving test. I believe that's extremely important and would make a lot of difference to a lot of older drivers. As I've said, a lot of them fail on a number of occasions and pass on the third occasion, but it's very, very expensive. So, it's a matter of being fair. It's a matter of making sure that: number one, we don't want to keep people on the road who are dangerous, I think everyone realises and understands that, but it's a matter of being fair. And I don't think the current system, as it stands, is fair to older drivers.

We've given a commitment to a series of new rolling stock – new trains, new trams. Naturally the needs of people in this room will be taken into consideration. As I say, my role is to make sure that when we go through designing – whether it is rolling stock or whether it is designing trams - we don't get to the end of cutting the ribbon on a project and everyone says this doesn't work for us. It is very important that we get that grass-roots and ground-level support from people who are involved.

You've got a new government. You've got a new premier. Early announcements include an extension of energy concessions and cutting ambulance subscriptions in half. We are very much aware of the pressure that's currently being applied to, not only families, but people who are on single incomes and people who are in receipt of pensions. They're going to feel an enormous amount of pressure because of decisions that have been made in the past. It's our intention as a government to take as much pressure as we possibly can off vulnerable people within the community and off families within the community. As I say, some of those decisions have already been announced by Ted Baillieu, and as we go forward I think you'll find that there will be further decisions and further announcements that will be made taking into consideration people on single incomes, people on pensions and certainly families who are under an enormous amount of pressure at this point in time.

I don't have a long period of time, as you said Cath, so I'm more than happy to take some questions, understanding that I've had a series of very small briefings from my Department. I don't have staff in

place at this point in time. But I will come back, and when I do come back it will be in a forum, if we can, as you can, and it won't be in the form of a stand up speech and bolt to the door.

This is my first official function, and I'm very happy and pleased that it is VCOSS, because I do understand the needs of people in our community and I do understand the role that VCOSS plays and it does great advocacy for those different groups and organisations. I'm more than happy to take any questions.

<questions and answers not transcribed>

Appendix II: Content of Fact Sheet Distributed at Forum

Free To Move: Accessible Transport in Victoria

Everyone should be able to get to where they need to be, whether it's to work, shop, attend doctors or other services, visit friends or enjoy a day out. Being able to 'get there' is a basic requirement for a good life. We all need good transport choices so we can participate in and contribute to our communities.

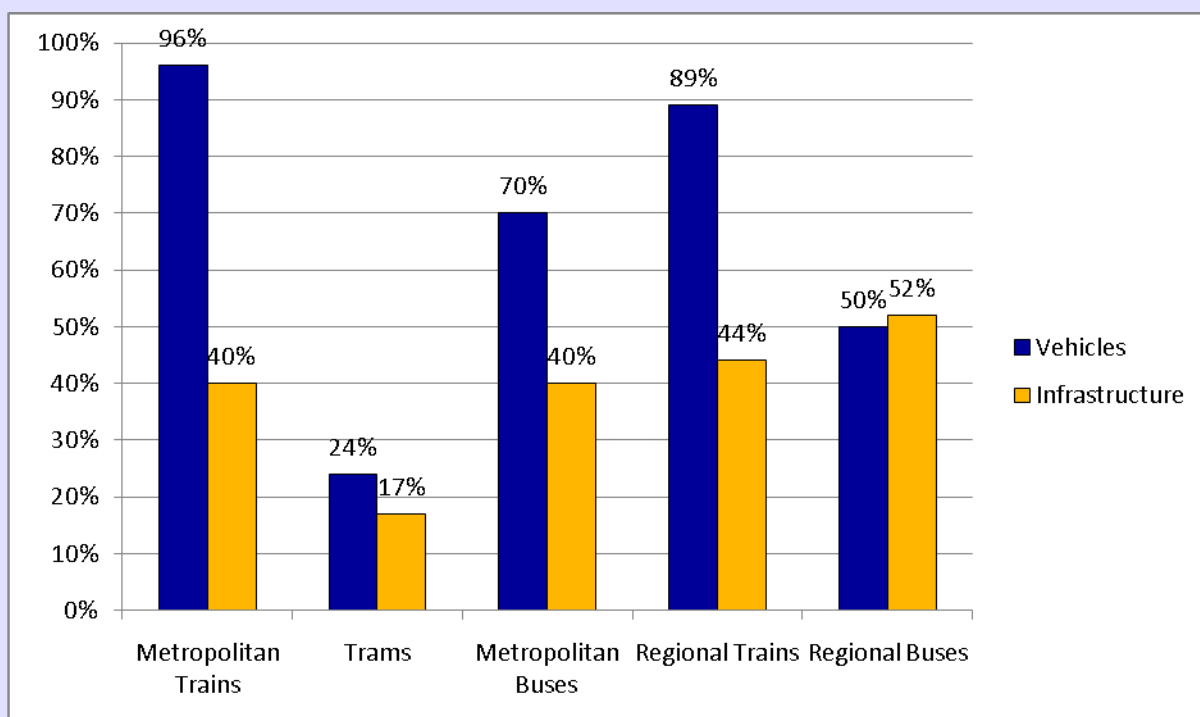
But these choices aren't available to many people in Victoria today. Not everyone can drive a car, or afford to have one. Not everyone can rely on family and friends for lifts, or afford to pay for taxis when they need them – even if they get subsidised fares. And many are unable to use public transport, which should be accessible to all who live in the community.

Accessible transport options are needed for people as they get older and become frail, if they have impaired mobility, use a trolley to get their shopping home, or use pushers and prams for their children. With an ageing population and a rising rate of disability, these options are becoming increasingly important.

Public transport was at the forefront of debate during the recent Victorian election campaign and was seen to be a key reason for the election of the new Coalition Government. A key failure of the previous Government was in not meeting the minimum standards for accessible public transport, required by law.

The new Government's promise to 'fix' public transport problems in Victoria has raised hopes that seniors, people with mobility and sensory impairments, and young families will see significant improvements. It is vital that action is aimed not just at reducing peak hour congestion and reliability but at wider accessibility issues for so many Victorians who cannot have the lives they want because they can't get around.

Figure 1: Progress towards the requirements under the *Disability Discrimination Act 2002* as at March 2010; the 2012 target for compliance is 55 per cent



Source: DoT Annual Report 2009-10, p.173

Top Ten Problems with Transport Access in Victoria

1. Funding improvements

The previous Government promised \$150 million for accessible public transport, but didn't allocate funds in the State Budget. The new Government has not yet committed funding for upgrades.

2. Meeting the access standard

The previous Government failed to reach the legal targets for accessible transport in 2007, and would not commit to meeting them in 2012. The Coalition Government should make this a priority.

3. Knowing when and where to travel

It is often hard to find out when and where accessible services are available. The Metlink website is difficult to navigate, and it can be difficult to track where level-access tram stops are, or when low-floor trams will be scheduled. It is even harder for people who don't use the internet. Timetables at bus and tram stops can be too small to read, and don't indicate accessible services. Many people struggle to find out if they will be able to move between the train station and the bus stop they need.

4. Finding services

Knowing where to go to catch a train, particularly at multi-platform stations, can be difficult because signs are often not available or are unclear. Small writing, lack of tactile signage and misleading Tactile Surface Indicators, and lack of audible announcements all cause problems at stations and stops for people with visual impairments.

5. Getting on and off

The gap between trains, trams and buses and the platform or stop is a major concern for many travellers. On trains, it is a major safety risk, including for people who are frail or ambulatory or visually impaired, and for small children. Some train stations have narrow platforms at the wheelchair boarding point. Even where low-floor trams meet a platform stop, the gap can still be too large for some mobility aids. Staff may not realise that a person needs assistance, or passengers do not know to make space. Boarding with or storing prams, trolleys, scooters and luggage can also be issues.

6. Knowing when to get off

Some transport services, including SmartBuses and main train services, have good automatic displays and audible announcements. All too often, however, these services are not fitted, functioning, or clear.

7. Using important facilities

Access to facilities in and around public transport hubs can be major issues for people with disabilities or impaired mobility. Some ramps do not meet standards, and lifts are subject to vandalism, have very limited space, or may be broken down. Ticketing machines may be inaccessible or hard to navigate. Some rural and regional services require 24 hours notice for people with mobility impairments to use them. There are sometimes concerns about adequate seating. Many Victorians also continue to be frustrated that they must ask permission to use accessible train station toilets.

8. Improving areas around stations and stops

Lack of pedestrian, interchange and parking infrastructure is preventing people from using public transport. While stations or stops might be accessible, the paths to get to them aren't, or it is not easy to change between transport modes. Some stations have poor parking options for people with disabilities, or no place to drop off people with impairments to catch the train.

9. Feeling safe and accessing help

The ability to attract the attention of public transport staff to ensure people can board, disembark or if they require assistance can be difficult on some vehicles, particularly when stop buttons malfunction. Poor lighting, safety concerns at isolated locations and vehicle instability can make passengers fearful of injury and personal safety.

10. Improving vehicle design

To ensure public transport is safe for all, attention needs to be paid to the configuration of passenger vehicles, so that there is adequate space for mobility aids, prams and luggage; clear understanding of priority seating allocation; sufficient grab-rails for stability; and ensuring that design takes into account that passengers move differently where there are people with mobility aids.

Some recent transport changes in Victoria

- In the 3 years to June 2010, 84 level-access tram stops were constructed.
- Bombardier Transportation, a Melbourne-based firm, has been contracted to build 50 new low-floor trams to be delivered between 2012 and 2017.
- Around 90 accessible buses are being added to the bus fleet each year the Bus Replacement program
- The Myki ticketing system has begun operations, with the Metcard system to be phased out in 2011. A new Access Travel Pass has been introduced to provide free public transport for people who can't use the Myki system, supplementing other concession programs
- Metro Trains and KDR Melbourne became the new private operators for the train and tram networks, respectively, on 30 November 2009.

Recent transport reports and consultations

- In 2007, the Federal Government instigated a review of the Disability Standards for Access to Public Transport. A draft report was released in 2008, but the final report is yet to be released.
- Also in 2007, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission released a report on access to taxi services for people with a disability, noting continued problems in the industry. A follow-up report in 2010 noted continuing concerns about waiting times and reliability.
- VCOSS published the report of its Accessible Public Transport Watch Project in 2008, describing the continuing accessibility problems of the Victorian public transport system.
- In 2009, the Victorian Auditor-General released an audit report on public transport accessibility. The report concluded that the Department of Transport focussed on compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act without sufficient regard to real

improvements in accessibility. It recommended that accessibility be built into transport planning at an earlier stage, and that there be greater focus on real access rather than simply DDA compliance.

- In 2010, a tram accessibility consultation exercise was undertaken by the Department of Transport, utilising focus groups and a forum. The report found that there was high levels of concern about using trams, and recorded their suggestions for improvement.

Appendix III: Order of Proceedings

Free to Move: Planning for Action on Accessible Transport in Victoria

Thursday, 9 December 2010

Jasper Hotel, 489 Elizabeth St, Melbourne

9:30	Arrival and Seating
10:00	Welcome Cath Smith, VCOSS CEO
10:02	Keynote Speaker The Hon. Terry Mulder MLA, Minister for Public Transport
10:20	Thankyou Cath Smith, VCOSS CEO
10:30	Accessible Transport – The Story So Far Kate Colvin, Manager Policy and Public Affairs
10:45	Group Discussion Issues and Barriers to Access
11:30	MORNING TEA
12:00	Future Directions in Accessible Transport Llewellyn Reynders, VCOSS Transport Policy Analyst
12:15	Group Discussion Strategic Advocacy and Systemic Change
12:50	Summary
13:00	CLOSE