



ACHIEVING INCLUSION IN
TRANSPORT

BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS TO INCLUSIVE TRANSPORT

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 4 |
| METHODOLOGY..... | 5 |
| CURRENT STATE OF TRANSPORTATION | 6 |
| Public Transport..... | 6 |
| Specialised Transport..... | 9 |
| BARRIERS IN TRANSPORTATION..... | 10 |
| Attitudinal Barriers | 10 |
| Information and Communication Barriers | 10 |
| Infrastructural Barriers | 11 |
| Technological Barriers | 12 |
| Other Barriers..... | 13 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS | 14 |
| Infrastructure..... | 14 |
| Information..... | 14 |
| Technology | 15 |
| Training..... | 16 |
| Others..... | 17 |
| CONCLUSION | 18 |
| REFERENCES..... | 19 |

INTRODUCTION

Achieving Inclusion in Transport is a publication produced by the Disabled People's Association, Singapore (DPA). The purpose of this publication is to provide a better understanding of the issues faced by persons with disabilities while commuting by buses, Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) trains and taxis in Singapore.

Part One provides a general overview of the current state of transportation for persons with disabilities. Part Two then highlights the barriers in transportation faced by persons with disabilities. The final section builds on what was discussed and provides recommendations for the improvement of Singapore's public transport system.

According to Article Nine of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which Singapore ratified in 2013, state parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to transportation on an equal basis with others. These measures include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility.

This publication encourages Singapore's Land Transport Authority (LTA) and transport operators to do just that – investigate the issues in transportation and search for possible solutions to make transport more accessible to persons with disabilities. This booklet also encourages commuters to practice mindfulness, support and look out for commuters with disabilities. Together, we can take giant strides towards our goal of an inclusive and barrier-free Singapore.

METHODOLOGY

On 14 February 2015, DPA held a focus group discussion at DPA's premises to gather deeper insights into the issues faced by persons with disabilities while travelling by public transport. There were a total of 14 participants with disabilities at this feedback session, and they are all members from DPA. They have physical, hearing or visual disabilities. Their ages range from the late 30s to over 60s.

The questions asked at the feedback session were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Participants were asked a variety of questions pertaining to the accessibility of public transport, public transport customer service satisfaction, and good inclusive practices in their travel experience using a standard questionnaire designed by DPA. DPA then amalgamated all responses into a draft write-up, which was sent to all participants for vetting and endorsement.

DPA also conducted online surveys by sending copies of our feedback session questionnaire to all members who were unable to attend the feedback session, or who attended but had more to share. A total of five DPA members responded to the survey.

DPA also looked at complaints made to the media by commuters with disabilities in publications such as *The Straits Times* and *My Paper*.

All feedback gathered from the 19 participants, as well as information extracted from newspaper articles, are incorporated into this publication.

CURRENT STATE OF TRANSPORTATION

Public Transport

Transportation plays an extremely important role in enabling persons with disabilities to travel and live independently. It brings important opportunities in education, employment, health care, housing, and community life within the reach of every individual with disability. Thus, the Singapore government, together with other disability agencies and transport operators, have launched a number of schemes and initiatives to make public transport accessible to and affordable for persons with disabilities.

Below is a list of the most recent initiatives and schemes aimed at making public transport more affordable for persons with disabilities:

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| Monthly Concession Pass (MCP) | For \$60 each month, persons with disabilities can use MCP for unlimited travel on the train and bus services within the period of validity of the MCP purchased. |
| Off-peak Monthly Travel Pass (OMTP) | For \$40 each month, persons with disabilities can use the OMTP for unlimited travel on the bus and train services anytime outside the weekday morning peak period of 6.30 am to 9 am and evening peak period of 5 pm to 7.30 pm. They can also use it all day on weekends and public holidays. The scheme will start on 5 July 2015 and will end on 4 July 2017. |
| Public Transport Concession Scheme | This scheme gives persons with disabilities, aged less than 60 years, 25 per cent off their adult fares. Their fares will also be capped at the fare payable for 7.2km, including cash fare payments. |
| Taxi Subsidy Scheme (TSS) | Persons with disabilities who need to travel by taxi for school or work purposes can receive up to 50 per cent subsidy for taxi fares. Subsidy amounts vary depending on whether applicants are Singapore citizens or Permanent Residents, per capita monthly household income (PCI) and distance travelled from home to school or work. |
| VWO Transport Subsidies | This scheme offers up to 80 per cent subsidy for persons with disabilities taking specialised transport provided by Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs) to access school and care services. Subsidy amounts vary depending on whether applicants are Singapore citizens or Permanent Residents, per capita monthly household income (PCI), and whether applicants are wheelchair users or ambulant. |

The infrastructure of public transport is also made accessible to persons with disabilities:

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| <p>Sheltered connectivity to transport nodes</p> | <p>Sheltered link ways enable wheelchair users to access transport nodes on rainy days.</p> <p>On 24 January 2013, LTA announced their intention to build more sheltered link ways within a 400 metre radius from all existing transport nodes. LTA also intend to link up developments within a 200 metre radius of all bus interchanges, Light Rail Transit stations and high usage bus shelters. According to LTA, some 200 kilometres of link ways will be added island-wide by 2018.</p> |
| <p>Pedestrian overhead bridges are fitted with lifts</p> | <p>Some pedestrian overhead bridges are fitted with lifts, making it more convenient for wheelchair users and persons with a visual disability to access transport nodes.</p> <p>On 24 January 2013, LTA announced their intention to expand the installation of lifts to another 40 pedestrian overhead bridges. They expect to complete the project by the first half of 2016 and the remaining by 2018.</p> |
| <p>Wheelchair-accessible bus (WAB) services</p> | <p>SBS Transit WAB services are installed with wheelchair-accessible features such as wheelchair ramps to enable easy access for passengers-in-wheelchairs, a specially-designated area with a padded backrest, horizontal handrail, vertical stanchion pole and a bell-push button for signalling the intention to alight. As of 3 December 2015, SBS Transit offers 183 WAB services, making 89% of all SBS Transit buses wheelchair friendly. SBS Transit aims to make the entire fleet wheelchair accessible by 2023.</p> <p>SMRT WAB services are also retrofitted with wheelchair-friendly features such as a manual ramp, a specially-designated area with a backrest and seatbelt to help secure the passenger-in-wheelchair in place. As of 16 March 2015, SMRT Corporation offers 45 WAB services.</p> |
| <p>Electronic bus arrival board</p> | <p>The electronic bus arrival board informs commuters the arrival time of the next and subsequent bus service. It also indicates the wheelchair accessibility of arriving buses with a wheelchair symbol. It is installed at selected bus stops and bus interchanges.</p> |
| <p>Tactile ground surface indicators at transport nodes</p> | <p>Tactile indicators installed at all MRT stations, selected bus stops and bus interchanges help commuters with a visual disability navigate transport nodes independently.</p> |
| <p>Rail Travel Information System (RATIS)</p> | <p>The RATIS on train platforms indicate the arrival time and</p> |

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| | destination of the approaching train - a useful feature for people who are hard of hearing. |
| SMRT Active Route Map Information System (STARiS) | <p>STARiS consists of two parts: a dynamic route-map located above train doors on the North-South and East-West lines and a Vacuum Fluorescent Display (VFD) mounted on the ceiling of the carriage.</p> <p>The dynamic route map provides journey information such as current station, next station, direction of travel, interchange station and the side of doors opening. And the VFD provides multi-language transcripts of audio announcements. These features are very useful for persons who are hard of hearing.</p> |
| Audio announcement of approaching trains and station names | <p>Station names are announced as the train pulls into the station. There are also audio instructions for transfers at Interchange station. As the train departs, the name of the next station is announced. This feature is useful for persons with a visual disability.</p> |
| Flashing red 'Door Closing' lights at MRT train doors | The flashing red lights warn commuters who cannot hear that the train doors are closing. |
| Barrier-free entrance in every MRT station and wider fare gates | The barrier-free entrance enables passengers-in-wheelchairs to access all train stations. |
| Accessible elevator service at MRT stations | <p>The accessible elevator service at all MRT stations allows passengers-in-wheelchairs to access all station levels.</p> <p>Braille plates installed at the MRT station lift buttons also enable commuters with a visual disability to use the lifts to access all stations levels independently.</p> |
| Wheelchair-accessible train carriages | These train carriages feature two wheelchair spaces per train. |
| Wheelchair accessible toilets in all bus interchanges (except Woodlands) | Passengers-in-wheelchairs travelling by bus can access toilets at all bus interchanges, except Woodlands. |

Public transport operators also seek ways to improve the commuting experience of persons with disabilities by adopting the following inclusive practices:

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| Customer care training for bus captains | Both SBS Transit and SMRT bus captains are trained to provide assistance to passengers-in-wheelchairs. They can operate the ramps on the WABs for boarding or alighting. |
| Free bus rides for people with a visual disability | Certified people with a visual disability get free bus rides. |
| Customer care training for MRT staff | MRT station staffs are trained to provide assistance to passengers-in-wheelchairs alighting or boarding train carriages. They can escort passengers-in-wheelchairs to the platform and arrange for assistance at the destination station. |
| Information about disabled-friendly features shared on SBS and SMRT websites | The Rider Accessibility Guide on SMRT website provides information about features that make it easy for commuters with disabilities to travel by bus, train or taxi. SBS Transit has a webpage about their WAB services and has also included a list of all existing WAB services and accessible bus stops. |
| Taxi drivers communicating in sign language | According to DPA members, some taxi drivers from Comfort Transport Pte Ltd could communicate with their passengers who are hard of hearing using sign language. |
| Rapid Transit System Regulations | Bus and train operators, as well as some taxi drivers comply with the act permitting service animals such as guide dogs accompanying commuters with a visual disability to go on board trains, taxis and buses. |

Specialised Transport

Besides public transport, people with disabilities can also choose to take specialised transport. There are a number of organisations that offer such transportation services to people with disabilities:

| Organisation/Company | Website |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Caring Fleet | www.caringfleet.com |
| Handicaps Welfare Association | www.hwa.org.sg |
| Silveray | www.silveray.com.sg |
| Singapore Wheels on Wheels | www.singaporewow.com |

BARRIERS IN TRANSPORTATION

Despite efforts to improve the accessibility and affordability of public transportation, persons with disabilities still face several issues while traveling by public transport. These issues were raised by DPA members via the online survey and feedback session, or were highlighted in newspaper articles.

The following lists the different issues and how they affect persons with disabilities in their daily commuting:

Attitudinal Barriers

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| Bus captains | Some bus captains lack sensitivity towards people with disabilities. Some also drive recklessly and make abrupt stops, causing safety issues for people who are not that mobile and stable standing up in buses. |
| Commuters at MRT stations | Some commuters do not give way to commuters with a visual disability or passengers-in-wheelchairs trying to board the lifts. They also do not give way to wheelchair users trying to board or alight train carriages. Some commuters also stand on the tactile ground surface indicators, obstructing the path of people with a visual disability who rely on the tactile indicators to navigate the MRT station. |
| Taxi drivers | Some taxi drivers refuse service to guide dog owners, wheelchair users and people with a visual disability. Some drivers also do not provide assistance to wheelchair users. |

Information and Communication Barriers

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| Confusing tactile surface ground indicators at MRT stations | There are usually three or four connecting tactile paving, which confuses people with a visual disability because the tactile paving do not inform them of their destination. |
| Under-publicised information on emergency protocol for commuters with disabilities | In the event of an emergency, MRT authorities have come up with an emergency protocol for passengers with disabilities to be informed of the situation and to evacuate the premises safely. The station staff will put up signs to inform passengers of train service disruption. The electronic display system will also inform |

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| | <p>passengers of the disruption and ask them to evacuate the station if necessary.</p> <p>In the event that an evacuation is required, the station staff will patrol the station to ensure that all passengers leave the station. Passengers can also receive the information via SMRT’s twitter messages and corporate website. SMRT will also seek the assistance of other passengers to assist SMRT in evacuating the passenger-in-wheelchair. They are also looking into how they can use the lift for evacuation of passenger-in-wheelchair even in the event of fire.</p> <p>This crucial information is not available on their corporate website and therefore not known to most people with disabilities. DPA only learned about this emergency protocol through an email correspondence with a SMRT customer relations officer.</p> |
| Bus captains’ language of communication | Some bus captains only speak and understand Mandarin, causing a communication barrier between the bus captains and people who are hard of hearing, because the latter may only communicate in other languages such as English. |
| No access to information on bus route diversions and affected bus service numbers | People with a visual disability have no access to information on bus route diversions and affected bus service numbers during events like Thaipusam. |
| Lack of information on accessible bus stops | There is no map of accessible bus stops, except for those posted on SBS Transit website, making it difficult for wheelchair users to plan their journey. |
| Lack of information on type of taxi | Persons with a visual disability experience difficulty differentiating between premium and non-premium cabs. |

Infrastructural Barriers

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| Lack of sheltered link ways connecting transport nodes | Some link ways are not sheltered, causing great inconvenience to wheelchair users who need to access transport nodes during rainy days. |
| Broken tactile surface ground indicators at MRT stations | Some tactile indicators have a few missing raised studs or bars. The tactile indicators also do not lead to the MRT exits. |

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| Frequent breakdown of lifts and escalators at MRT stations | The frequent breakdown of lifts and escalators prevents wheelchair users and some people with a visual disability from accessing train stations. |
| Inaccessible bus stops and bus interchanges | <p>The safety bollards placed in the front of some bus stops block the path of wheelchair users boarding or alighting the bus. Some bus stops also do not have step free access or are too small for wheelchair users.</p> <p>Some bus stops and bus interchanges also do not have tactile surface ground indicators to help persons with a visual disability navigate.</p> |
| Internal design of new buses | <p>The new SMRT and SBS Transit buses have grab poles placed in a manner that tend to cause a person with a visual disability to bump into them.</p> <p>In the new buses, the seats directly behind the bus captain's seat and at the back of the exit door are also positioned in a manner that is too high for people with a visual disability to sit without falling off. SBS Transit buses also do not have seatbelts to help secure the passenger-in-wheelchair in place.</p> |

Technological Barriers

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| Electronic bus arrival board | The electronic bus arrival board often displays inaccurate bus arrival timings. They are also not installed at all locations. |
| SMRT Active Route Map Information System (STARiS) | STARiS often displays incorrect information, causing great inconvenience to persons who cannot hear and are relying on the system. |
| Taxi booking apps | Taxi Booking Apps, GrabTaxi and ComfortDelGro, often do not work properly, causing great inconvenience to people who are hard of hearing or have speech impairment as they may not be able to communicate with their taxi drivers. |

Other Barriers

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| Poor customer complaint procedures | DPA members gave feedback that complaints given to transport operators only received generic responses, and that no action was taken to resolve the issue. |
| MRT wardens | Some wardens do not know how to provide assistance to people with a visual disability. There are also not enough of them stationed at train platforms. |
| No backup plans at MRT stations | <p>In the event of lift breakdowns, MRT authorities have no backup plans to help passengers-in-wheelchairs evacuate the station. They rely on fellow commuters or MRT staff to help carry the wheelchair user and his or her wheelchair down the stairs which could be dangerous.</p> <p>MRT authorities also do not have any contingency plan to evacuate passengers-in-wheelchairs out of the train in the event of fire outbreak or train breakdowns.</p> |
| Newspaper vendors at MRT stations | At some MRT stations, newspaper vendors station themselves on top of the tactile ground surface indicators, obstructing the path of people with a visual disability who rely on the tactile indicators to navigate the MRT station. |

RECOMMENDATIONS

DPA held a focus group discussion and conducted an online survey with our members with disabilities and, after gathering their feedback and suggestions, have come up with a list of recommendations to improve their commuting experience.

The following is the list of suggestions and ideas on how we can further improve the travel experience of persons with disabilities:

Infrastructure

1. LTA and SMRT Corporation could improve the maintenance of MRT infrastructure (i.e. trains, elevators, escalators, and tactile surface ground indicators) and notify their passengers about any maintenance works on their websites.
2. LTA could install tactile ground surface indicators at every bus stop and bus interchange to help people with a visual disability navigate independently.
3. LTA could make all bus stops accessible to persons with disabilities. This involves replacing steps with ramps, removing potential obstacles, creating more space for wheelchair users and adding tactile surface ground indicators for commuters with a visual disability. If LTA is already aiming to make all bus stops accessible, they could make this project a priority and give additional information about the timeline of the project and expected completion date.
4. SBS Transit and SMRT Corporation could make the replacement of their entire fleet to WAB a priority. If it is already a priority, SMRT Corporation could give more information about the timeline of the project and their expected completion date.
5. Taxi operators could provide all taxi drivers with portable ramps to facilitate easy boarding or alighting for wheelchair users. This would motivate taxi drivers to pick up wheelchair users.

Information

1. LTA could provide additional information in braille about the internal layout of MRT stations, specifically the locations of the ticket booths, ticket office, Passenger Service counter, information counter, toilets and MRT exits for people with a visual disability.

2. SMRT Corporation could publicise information about their emergency protocol for evacuating passengers-in-wheelchairs, and how they would inform and evacuate passengers with a visual or hearing disability on their website.
3. SMRT Corporation could provide live updates of lift and escalator breakdowns on their corporate website and at train stations.
4. SBS Transit and SMRT Corporation could publicise their webpages on disabled-friendly features on various social media platforms, and ensure that all of their webpages conform to level Triple-A of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines so that all persons with disabilities can easily access the webpages.
5. LTA, SMRT Corporation and SBS Transit could ensure that commuters with disabilities have access to information about bus diversions during events like Thaipusam by sharing information about bus routes diversions and the affected bus service numbers on their websites.
6. LTA, SMRT Corporation and SBS Transit could create a map of all existing disabled-friendly bus stops, as well as the WAB services available at each bus stop and bus interchange. The information could then be shared in their corporate websites and at all bus stops and bus interchanges. This would make it easier for wheelchair users to plan their journeys.
7. Taxi operators could investigate ways to help people with a visual disability differentiate between premium and non-premium cabs such as training their drivers to identify a person with a visual disability and to announce their type of taxi before starting the taxi meter.

Technology

1. LTA and SMRT Corporation could improve the maintenance of their technology (i.e. ensuring that STARiS is working properly and updating the electronic bus arrival board in real time).
2. LTA could ensure consistency in service by installing the electronic bus arrival board at every bus stop and bus interchange.
3. SBS Transit and SMRT Corporation could develop a similar technology to that of the train system, where there would be an automatic announcement in buses stating the

upcoming bus stop within, say, 500m of the stop itself. This would greatly benefit commuters with a visual disability.

4. LTA could add audio announcements at bus stops and bus interchanges, stating which bus would arrive in one minute and which bus has arrived. This would improve the travel experience of persons with a visual disability.
5. LTA could create a journey or route planner similar to that created by the United Kingdom's Transport for London. The planner could provide commuters with different travel options such as travelling by bus or train, cycling or walking. It could also factor in the commuter's walking speed and mobility requirements – whether he or she can use escalators or stairs, and if he or she need step free access to train, bus etc. The route planner would make it easier for commuters to plan routes, get traffic updates, and work out their travel mileage. It could also help commuters work out how much the journeys cost. (To see Transport for London's journey planner, go here: <https://www.tfl.gov.uk/plan-a-journey/>)

Training

1. Transport operators could provide robust sensitivity training and disability awareness training for bus captains, MRT staffs and taxi drivers. This includes teaching them about the various types of disability, disability etiquette, people-first language, and the Rapid Transit Regulations System Act that permits guide dogs accompanying commuters with a visual disability to go on board trains, taxis and buses.
2. SMRT Corporation could also train MRT wardens to identify a person with a less visible disability such as those with a visual or hearing disability in the crowd so that they may provide assistance when necessary.
3. Bus operators could look into ways to ensure that their drivers abide by Singapore's rules and regulations of road safety. They could ensure that their drivers undergo road safety training courses, and provide these courses for those new to Singapore and unfamiliar with Singapore's road traffic rules and regulations.
4. Bus operators could develop a similar protocol to that of the train system, where a few wardens are stationed outside the train carriages to provide assistance to passengers in need. These trained wardens could be stationed inside every bus to provide assistance and ensure that all commuters with disabilities board or alight the bus safely.

5. SMRT Corporation and SBS Transit could train all bus captains to communicate in the English language because some people who cannot hear may only be able to communicate in English.

Others

1. SMRT authorities could police MRT stations, making sure that newspaper vendors and other commuters are not obstructing the path of people with a visual disability by standing on top of the tactile surface ground indicators.
2. SMRT Corporation could develop a backup plan in case of lift breakdowns for wheelchair users, such as letting wheelchair users use the cargo lifts at MRT stations that have them. They could also investigate and plan an escape route for passengers-in-wheelchairs stuck in train carriages in the event of a train breakdown.
3. SMRT Corporation could station more trained wardens along train platforms to provide assistance to those in need.
4. Transport operators could create a better customer complaint procedure where all complaints are treated seriously, and person(s) affected by the complaint are fully informed of all facts and given the opportunity to put forward their case. A staff member should attempt to resolve the issue and, if the customer is unsatisfied, pass the case to the relevant manager. The manager should then investigate the complaint and, if the complaint is reasonable, make an attempt to resolve the issue. The customer should then be informed of the outcome of their complaint.
5. LTA could organise more public education campaigns to spread awareness about the challenges faced by persons with disabilities while travelling by trains, taxis and buses. This would encourage fellow commuters to be more gracious on public transport.
6. LTA and taxi operators could look into ways to motivate taxi drivers to pick up wheelchair users, guide dog owners and people with a visual disability or penalise picky taxi drivers who refuse service such as giving them demerit points.

It must be noted that most of these suggestions will not just benefit people with disabilities. Other people without disabilities, especially the elderly, pregnant women and families with young children, will stand to gain as well. Indeed, all of these suggestions may, to some extent, benefit all commuters.

CONCLUSION

Singapore has come a long way in making the society barrier-free and inclusive for persons with disabilities. Since Singapore's ratification of the UN CRPD on 18 August 2013, and Singapore's introduction of the Enabling Masterplan (2012-2016) in 2014, efforts have been made to ensure that the disability community have equal access to all spheres of life, one of which is Singapore's public transport system.

Yet, despite the recent initiatives towards making Singapore inclusive and barrier-free, there are still areas in the public transport system which have been overlooked and require further examination and improvement.

DPA hopes that LTA and transport operators will continue to keep up the good work, and look into these areas to improve the travel experience of persons with disabilities. It is important that public transport remain affordable and accessible to persons with disabilities so that they may access all spheres of life independently without restrictions and limitations.

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