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27 June 2023

Dear Director,

Please find attached Western Sydney Community Forum's submission to the Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make this submission.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact Anita Hanna, Director Policy and Programs, on 9687 9669 or [anita.hanna@wscf.org.au](mailto:anita.hanna@wscf.org.au).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Billie Sankovic", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Billie Sankovic**  
Chief Executive Officer

# Submission to the Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002

June 2023



## Acknowledgement of Country

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We acknowledge First Nations peoples as the sovereign Traditional Owners and Custodians of the unceded lands and waters on which we work and live. We pay respect to Elders past and present. We respectfully recognise all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their cultures and their heritage. We acknowledge past and present injustices and commit to standing in solidarity with First Nations people.

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## Background

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Safe and dignified access to public transport is a significant contributor to accessing employment, contributing to economic growth and ensuring community health and wellbeing across the greater Western Sydney region.

It also contributes to the wellbeing of the state and the nation as the ability to use public transport enables individuals and communities to live actively and independently. It is every individual's right, irrespective of their needs, to be able to travel safely and be involved in all types of social and economic activities as stated in Article 9 in the United Nations Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The Australian Government has both signed and ratified UNCRPD, so it is bound by the obligations set out in UNCRPD.

Easy and safe access to public transport for people with disability is a fundamental issue in Australia based on the available data and statistics. In addition, Australia's Disability Strategy (2021-2031) identifies transport as a fundamental enabler to economic and social participation for people with disability.

The Australian Standards for Accessible Public Transport are key to ensuring that people with disability can travel independently and thrive in Australian society.

Western Sydney Community Forum commends the Australian Government on its commitment to improving the easy and safe access to public transport and presents this submission with recommendations on opportunities to improve outcomes for people with disability across Western Sydney.

## Western Sydney Community Forum

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Western Sydney Community Forum as the region's social development council, has led and shaped social policy and service delivery across greater Western Sydney for decades. As a regional peak, it champions solutions that sustain community resilience, health and wellbeing, and works with community organisations, business and government across all levels and services.

The region represents a population of over 2.5 million people and a community services industry that annually invests \$2.7 billion into the Western Sydney economy. Western Sydney Community Forum has a member and subscriber base of more than 2,500, with an annual reach of approximately 450,000 with over 100,000 activities participation.

The recommendations contained in this submission are based on collaborative work with providers who support people with disability and older people through service delivery across the region.

## Greater Western Sydney

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Western Sydney incorporates the local government areas of Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Parramatta, Penrith, The Hills and Wollondilly. The region is rich with significant cultural, social and economic diversity.

Western Sydney has diverse demographics, therefore the needs of people requiring assistance is diverse. In the 2021 Census, 5.8 percent of the population identified as needing assistance with core activities. This increased from 5.4 percent in 2016. This is proportionately higher than other areas. The need for assistance with core activities has grown in all areas from the 2016 to 2021 Census period, with the highest growth of close to 70 percent being in Camden local government area. The top three age groups that had the highest need for assistance with core activities in the region were people aged over 65 years.

This data demonstrates the importance of the Standards for Accessible Public Transport for older people, particularly those who have mobility issues as well as people with disability.

Though Western Sydney's population is young, it also comprises of an ageing population, with a significant number of older people across the region. This population of older people, particularly those with mobility issues and people who are frail due to ageing, also benefit from accessible public transport. This population group relies on effective Transport Standards to actively participate in society and for quality of life. The evidence is clear that what benefits people with disability and with special needs also benefits the whole society.

## Recommendations

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### Recommendation 1: Make fundamental information about public transport usage and timetabling accessible via unmetered connection

Transport is instrumental to enable people to feel connected and to get to where they need to be, be it to access work, education, social participation or to the health and community services they need. For people with disability, accessible public transport is key to living active and independent lives.

In recent years, the use of technology has made the use of public transport far more convenient and quicker for the general population. However, digital accessibility is not equitable. Digital exclusion is experienced at higher proportions across greater Western Sydney due to matters relating to accessibility, affordability and ability.

Older people and people with disability are one of the key groups who experience digital exclusion. This impacts access to transport as well as access to employment and services.

It is recommended that real time information about accessing public transport is made accessible via unmetered data usage. This will assist to address the issue of affordability providing access to information regardless of ability to pay to receive transport related information.

## Recommendation 2: Deliver mandatory training for public transport operators about the specific needs of people with disability and older people

People with disability and with special needs have shared that many public transport operators are not well educated about the diverse needs of people with different kinds of abilities.

Poor driver training has been identified as one of the key reasons why people with disability are prevented from accessing public transport conveniently and safely. It is even more crucial for people with invisible disabilities such as intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.

Therefore, investing in training drivers and operators about specific needs of people with disability and equipping them with resources to learn about these will enhance the experiences of using public transport for people with disability and special needs.

Incorporating this in the Transport Standards will ensure that people with disability and special needs are treated with dignity while they are using public transport. This training should also include a focus on cultural safety and the unique experiences of First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse communities with special needs.

### Recommendation 3: Strengthen engagement with First Nations and culturally diverse people with disability for future reviews of the Transport Standards

First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse communities with special needs are more likely to experience transport disadvantage.

Western Sydney has a diverse demography. Seven of the 13 local government areas across the region have a higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples than greater Sydney. Further in some communities, over 70 percent of the population speak a language other than English at home.

It has been identified that First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse communities encounter additional barriers when it comes to accessing transport facilities. When these intersect with disability, accessibility becomes even more complex.

Therefore, Western Sydney Community Forum recommends that future consultations on the Transport Standards consider these factors and incorporate strategies for broader engagement with people with disability from these groups. This should be through in-language information and resources and working with the organisations and peak agencies that support people with disability from First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to broaden reach and meaningful engagement.

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