Transport Provision for Disabled People in Scotland
Progress since 1998
TRANSPORT PROVISION FOR DISABLED PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND

PROGRESS SINCE 1998

Reid Howie Associates Ltd

Scottish Executive Social Research
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- The Scottish Disability Equality Forum
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- Aberdeen Action on Disability
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- Dumfries and Galloway Elderly Forum
- Disability Resource Centre, Paisley
- Glasgow & West of Scotland Society for the Blind
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- Fife Independent Disability Network
- Handicabs Lothian

As this research was being completed, we learned of the death of Elma Mitchell MBE, latterly convenor of the Scottish Disability Equality Forum. Elma was a member of the steering group for the original research commissioned by the Scottish Office in 1998, and, as a member of Dunfermline Forum on DisAbility, had been responsible for commissioning one of the first pieces of research on transport issues facing disabled people in 1995. Elma made an enormous contribution to this area of work and will be sadly missed.
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SECTION ONE INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In 1998, Reid Howie Associates was commissioned by the then Scottish Office to undertake research into the transport needs of disabled people in Scotland. This report sets out the findings of work commissioned by the Scottish Executive in 2003 to identify and assess progress made by policy makers and transport operators since 1998 in providing accessible transport for disabled people in Scotland.

INTRODUCTION

The report is in 5 sections. The first section sets out the introduction to the research. The second section summarises policy and practical developments implemented since the first report in 1998. The third section draws together evidence from published reports and from the findings of the current research to identify current issues facing disabled people in using public transport. The fourth section summarises the issues identified in relation to each of the main modes of transport which were studied as part of this research. The final section sets out a series of conclusions and recommendations.

Objectives of the research

A series of objectives were set for this research:

- To compare transport provision in 2003 to provision in 1998 and establish where progress has been made
- To identify where gaps in accessible transport provision remain and continuing barriers to improving provision
- To assess whether improvements have increased the use of the service by disabled and elderly people and thus their mobility
- To ascertain ‘what works’ in initiatives to improve transport accessibility
- To identify any common reasons why certain initiatives have worked well or failed
- To identify cases of good practice from which transport operators and facilitators can learn
- To identify priorities for further research in this area

Section 5 summarises conclusions of the research in terms of each of these objectives.

Methodology

The research involved a range of interlinked methods.

Literature review

A review of literature was carried out, focusing on policy and other developments since 1998. This included reports published by the Scottish Executive and Department for Transport, as well as the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) and the Disabled Persons
Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) and a range of voluntary organisations. A small number of reports were provided by local authorities, and these were included where relevant.

A review was also undertaken of 33 local transport strategies developed and published in 1999/2000 (provided by the Scottish Executive). Over the period of the research, local authorities and Strathclyde Passenger Transport (SPT) were in the process of preparing updated strategies. These were not available at the time of completion of this report.

**Surveys**

A number of surveys were undertaken as part of the research. Firstly, a survey was undertaken of 31 local authorities\(^1\) to identify policy and practice in relation to taxi licensing and concessionary fare schemes. Surveys were undertaken of a range of transport operators in order to identify current accessibility issues, developments since 1998 and future plans. To supplement this, a wide range of contacts were made with transport operators, both to clarify details and to ensure that all major operators were included. Similarly, information published by public transport operators was examined relating to both travel and access issues.

**Postal survey**

With the assistance of the Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA), the Scottish Disability Equality Forum and Inclusion Scotland, a postal survey (with a version capable of being e-mailed) was circulated to both individuals and organisations representing disabled people across Scotland. The questionnaire was also transcribed into Braille and a tape copy was prepared, although not requested. Around 150 responses were received. Over two thirds of these were from individuals, with the remainder being from organisations. Among the types of organisations represented were national and local disability organisations, disability forums, older people’s forums, housing associations, access panels and day centres.

The survey asked 5 questions:

- What are the key barriers you (or disabled people more generally) face in using public transport?
- How do these impact on your life (or the lives of disabled people more generally)?
- Can you identify any examples of good practice in terms of accessible transport provision?
- What has changed (either for better or worse) in the last five years?
- What still needs to change?

The responses varied from a few sentences to several hundred words, and represented a valuable insight into the lives and public transport experiences of disabled people across Scotland.

**Focus groups and individual interviews**

With the assistance of a range of local organisations, focus groups were held in Aberdeen, Shetland, Dumfries and Paisley. Individual interviews were undertaken in each of these areas.

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\(^1\) Despite a large number of efforts, one local authority did not provide information.
and additionally in Fife, Edinburgh and Highland. In total, 91 disabled people either attended a focus group or were interviewed. Both the interviews and focus groups concentrated on similar areas including:

- Participants’ experiences of modes of transport
- Local public transport issues
- Developments over the last 5 years
- Necessary changes

The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to more than 1 hour. The focus groups ranged from 90 minutes to more than 2 hours.

In addition, both Fife Council and Edinburgh City Council made available reports of focus groups undertaken in their areas. Findings from these sessions have also been included where relevant (and have been identified as such).

**THE FINDINGS OF THE 1998 REPORT**

In 1998, the then Scottish Office commissioned Reid - Howie Associates to carry out a piece of research to examine transport provision for disabled people in Scotland\(^2\). That work had five main purposes:

- to attempt to estimate the prevalence of disability in Scotland;
- to identify the needs of disabled people in relation to public transport;
- to identify the provision of public transport for disabled people;
- to compare the provision to the needs identified and,
- to identify the gaps in services which emerge from this.

The main findings of that research included that:

- disabled people need to be able to board vehicles easily, and in a manner which does not compromise their safety, to maintain this level of comfort and safety while travelling, and to be able to use appropriate facilities independently and privately.
- there was a need to ensure that the built environment allows access to transport, and that the facilities and waiting areas are accessible to all disabled people.
- disabled people need clear information in a range of appropriate formats.
- there were found to be significant variations across the country in terms of the availability, and particularly the accessibility of services.
- barriers were found, in terms of access to services and facilities, relating to all modes of transport studied.
- staff within the public transport system need to have an understanding of disability issues.
- consultation between disabled people and transport and infrastructure providers and policy makers was identified as being critical.

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A fuller summary of the findings is set out at Appendix 1.

THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT 1995

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 ("The DDA") is central to policy issues relating to transport provision for disabled people. Although aspects of the impact of the DDA will be identified throughout this report, it is worthwhile, at this point, summarising the main issues in order to set later discussion in context.

The DDA places a range of duties on service providers in relation to physical and other access issues. The main provisions are being implemented progressively over an extended period, and cover virtually all aspects of public policy (as well as most forms of transport and transport-related infrastructure).

Part III of the DDA, relating to the delivery of access to services is being progressively implemented, with a major new set of provisions taking effect from October 2004. Although this Part of the Act relates to virtually all public service provision, transport vehicles are exempt, although as will be set out later, some transport-related infrastructure is covered. Transport vehicles are covered by Part V of the Act, which gives the UK government powers to introduce regulations defining both the extent and nature of accessibly required, and the timescale for its implementation. Since 1995, a range of regulations have been implemented, and these are detailed in the individual sections relating to both bus and rail travel. In most cases, the final date for compliance with these regulations for existing vehicles is beyond 2010. In some policy areas, for example taxis, limited regulations have been implemented, and specific action in relation to, for example, physical access, is expected in the near future.

Although air and sea travel are excluded from Part V, as will be set out later, the government has, instead, chosen to develop advisory, or voluntary standards, either at its own hand, or through the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC).

Transport provision, as this impacts particularly on disabled people is, in general terms, a reserved matter, although the Scottish Executive has powers in relation to a number of policy areas which impact on this, including the planning system (which impacts on physical infrastructure), powers to provide grant assistance (directly to operators and through local authorities) as well as specific powers in relation to some modes of transport, for example the licensing of taxis.

The next section will set out the findings of this and other research about the travel patterns, and travel-related difficulties faced by disabled people. The section will conclude with a summary of the impact of a lack of accessible transport on the lives of disabled people.
SECTION TWO  DISABLED PEOPLE AND TRANSPORT

This section provides an overview of the transport issues facing disabled people in Scotland. The material for this section is drawn from recently published reports and from the findings of this research.

CONCEPTS OF DISABILITY

Although there is a legal definition of disability set out in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, in reality the issue of who is, and who is not “disabled” in relation to public transport is much less clear cut. The definition in the Act is set out as:

“A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

This research adopted a wider definition of disability to that set out in the DDA, encompassing people who, in their own opinion, have some level of difficulty in using public transport, or ancillary services such as information systems. The key difference is self definition. Many people who would be considered disabled under the terms of the Act have no particular difficulty in using public transport, but conversely, many who are not may face insurmountable barriers. An example of this would be an individual who endures a periodic illness or impairment which significantly impairs his or her ability to use public transport (for example a respiratory illness). A more intangible issue is where an individual may face a complete loss of confidence either in their own abilities, or in a mode of transport, for example following a fall on a bus. In no sense is this individual “disabled” under the terms of the Act, but they are prevented from using public transport by a range of factors which can, generally, be overcome. It is also worth bearing in mind that many people who might otherwise be classified as “disabled” under the terms of the legislation would not classify themselves as such.

A further issue is that, to some extent, the legal definition treats disability as a constant factor, whereas, in reality, the impact of an individual’s impairment or impairments may vary considerably on a day to day basis. An obvious example of this is an individual with a mobility impairment who, on some days can manage to walk with sticks, while on other days may require to use a wheelchair. The impacts of these variations on individuals’ ability to use public transport are obvious.

The final issue in this context is that the extent to which transport providers address the needs of disabled people varies considerably. An individual living in an area where transport services are largely accessible may face far fewer barriers to travel than an individual in another area, even though, all other things being equal, the nature of their impairment is similar. This is at the heart of the social model of disability.

For these reasons, the research has not set any “tests” for contributors. Around 90 people took part in focus groups or individual interviews, and more than 150 paper-based contributions

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were made, some from individuals, but many from organisations representing in some cases hundreds of disabled people. The basic approach adopted was that, if a contributor believed that some aspect of the accessibility of public transport impacted on their lives, then their views should be considered for this research.

Similarly, the research did not attempt to classify respondents, except where the nature of their impairment had a direct bearing on the issue raised. Among the participants in focus groups and individual interviews were wheelchair users, people with limited mobility (for example in terms of walking, reach or grip), people with a visual impairment (some of whom used assistance dogs), as well as people with a range of both mental health issues and learning-related impairments.

**ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT**

The term accessible transport is now in common usage. For the most part, it is taken to mean *physically* accessible, however, this is clearly only part of the issue. A recent Department for Transport Environment and the Regions (DETR) report\(^4\) notes:

> "Accessibility ... is more complex. The dictionary definition is 'the ability to be reached or entered'. In a transport context, as well as physical considerations, for something to be 'accessible' requires knowledge, ability and financial means. Thus factors that might inhibit access include lack of information on availability, lack of money, lack of confidence, inappropriate operating practices, or rules, lack of help from staff or lack of security, as well as physical aspects such as the design of vehicles and infrastructure. All of these can therefore be barriers to access."

There are a range of factors which contribute to making transport accessible to disabled people. Help the Aged\(^5\) identified, in a review, four factor conditions which impact on this; safety, physical accessibility; reliability and affordability. These are conditions which recur throughout the current research. It is important also to recognise that these issues do not exist in isolation of each other, and, for many disabled people (and older people generally), if any one is not satisfied, they are unlikely to travel (even where it would be possible to do so). As one interviewee noted:

> "I've never been on a trip that has been all good."

The main conditions which all impact on the ability of disabled people to travel were summarised usefully by one interviewee as:

- you have to know about it
- you have to have the confidence to try it
- you have to be able to get to it
- you have to be able to get on it
- you have to be able to afford it

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• it has to go where you want it to
• it has to go when you want

The argument advanced by the interviewee (and echoed by a number of others) was that mainstream public transport currently does not, and may not ever be able to, satisfy these conditions for a substantial number of older and disabled people.

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) has set out three principles it suggests should be adopted in relation to transport and travel:

“The DRC believes that disabled people should:

2.1 enjoy the same rights, choice and opportunities to use the whole transport and travel environment as non-disabled people;

2.2 not encounter discrimination or disadvantage when making journeys;

2.3 be able to travel and to use transport services with as much confidence as non-disabled people.”

It is clear, from the analysis provided by DRC to support these statements, that it does not believe that sufficient progress has been made to allow the achievement of these principles.

At the heart of the achievement of the principles is “accessible” public transport (although a number of terms are used, including inclusive and barrier free transport). DPTAC provides the following definition of accessible transport:

“An accessible transport system is one that recognises the need for every stage in the journey to be accessible to disabled people. It sets out to include as many people as possible. It does not attempt to meet every single need. Rather, by considering people’s diversity, accessible transport systems try to break down unnecessary barriers and exclusion. In doing so it will often achieve superior solutions that benefit everyone.”

The key within this definition is, perhaps, in the first sentence. Much of the work undertaken following the implementation of the DDA in 1995 has been directed towards transport vehicles, particularly buses and trains, and more recently to ferries and some forms of air travel. The DPTAC definition recognises that for disabled people, it is the totality of the journey which is important.

As the Disability Rights Task Force noted:

“For disabled people to be able to travel, and to travel with confidence, all aspects of the ‘transport chain’ must be accessible. The benefits of new vehicles and systems will be minimised, or lost altogether, if disabled people find that they cannot move easily and safely between transport modes”

6 http://www.drc.gov.uk/campaigns/campaigndetails.asp?id=112
There is little point, for example, in operating a low floor bus to a terminus where the only exit requires the negotiation of steps. This is an issue which is also particularly problematic for the rail industry. Succeeding generations of carriage design have allowed these to be accessible to more and more disabled people (although there remain some significant problems, as will be set out later), and ramps now carried on trains make access to the vehicles much easier than before. However, many of Scotland’s stations are either inaccessible, or require either problematic or additional cost solutions to permit safe exit.

A particular example of this is Edinburgh Waverley railway station, probably the single most mentioned location throughout this research. The station is functionally inaccessible to all but the most mobile, and is problematic even for those using powered wheelchairs due to the gradients involved. The only practical exit route for many disabled people is via a black cab (assuming that this is accessible), even if their destination is as close as Waverley Bridge. This is clearly an additional cost for disabled people, and, as has been identified in this research, is a far from comfortable, and potentially unsafe option for some due to the height of speed humps and the driving style of some taxi drivers. Many respondents recognised the considerable difficulties facing Network Rail in trying to make Waverley accessible (due to its particularly difficult location) but this does little to help make multi-modal and long distance travel easier for them. The situation is compounded in Edinburgh as the other mainline station, Haymarket, is currently accessible to only one of its four platforms.

Much of the current thinking in relation to accessible transport relates to “whole journey” or “chain” solutions. These require disabled people to be able to access vehicles within a viable distance from their homes (or to be transferred to a vehicle safely), to be transported safely to a destination which is barrier free (and being able to switch modes if necessary), and be returned in a similar way. A common analogy used relates to the movement of parcels. In this sense, a disabled person is a “parcel”, which requires to be collected from an “origin” and delivered to a “destination”. The parcel industry does this in a seamless network of operatives, vans, trains, aeroplanes and depots.

As will be set out later, it is clear that few disabled people can rely on such a service, with, in many cases, individual parts of the journey being either inaccessible, or in some cases, being unreliable or inconsistent. A good example of this (provided by a number of respondents) is that passengers do not know which sorts of trains will be used on a specific service. Similarly, bus operators cannot guarantee that a low floor bus will be used on a route at all times. A further example is that, in many locations, although disabled people can book an accessible taxi for an outward journey, they are unable to do so for the return journey. For most disabled people, however, “taking their chances” simply is not an option.
The built environment also has a considerable role to play in relation to whole journey solutions. There have been considerable improvements both to buildings and to open spaces in the last 10 years, with dropped kerbs now very common, as well as ramps and powered doors. Design solutions, such as cobbles are now much less likely to be acceptable to planners. DPTAC produced a comprehensive guide to inclusive design in 2002, and in 2003, both the Disability Rights Commission and DPTAC launched initiatives targeted at students and professionals promoting this approach. This said, it is clear from talking to disabled people throughout this research that new facilities are not always ideally accessible. Examples provided to the research include poor (very small and very high) signage at Edinburgh Bus Station, very long walkways at Lerwick Ferry Terminal and remarkably heavy, manual doors which give access to the otherwise excellent lift area at the brand new Edinburgh Park railway station.

The net effect of these issues is that there are a substantial number of disabled people who are effectively excluded from public transport. There is no reliable estimate for the size of this group. Recent research by Fife Council argues that many men and women over 75 are effectively excluded from many aspects of social and economic life, and may suffer a range of health and other consequences from this.

TRAVEL PATTERNS OF DISABLED PEOPLE

It is clear from this research, as well as from other sources, that there are substantial variations in the extent to which disabled people travel, and the modes of transport which they use. The most obvious finding is that there is no such thing as a “typical” disabled person, a factor which clearly has considerable significance in transport planning. It is worth bearing in mind that this research did not set out to develop an accurate picture of disabled people’s travel patterns, and the sampling approach used cannot be taken to be directly representative of all disabled people. This is a general area where, in fact, relatively little is known, and a view expressed by a number of respondents was that there would be some value in developing further research to gather together current knowledge on travel patterns, assess this, and, if necessary, to recommend further specific research.

Recent research for the DRC suggested that:

“There are no absolutely reliable estimates of the overall level of impairment in Scotland. The only primary data which are available are drawn from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) studies which estimated in 1988 that there were 612,000 disabled adults in Scotland and 33,800 children.”

9 DRC website
10 Internal working document provided to this research
The wide ranging survey carried out by then OPCS in the mid 1980s to assess the extent and nature of impairments which exist within the UK population, is still the benchmark for much of the understanding in relation to disabled people and their use of transport. This research identified around 6 million “disabled” people in the UK, although there is now a recognition that this was an underestimate. A figure of 8 million is now used by DPTAC and the DRC, and has widespread currency. Research funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), using data derived from the Labour Force Survey, suggest that the true figure may be around 11 million. DRC now estimates that the number of disabled people in Scotland is around 830,000, or around 1 in 7 of the population.

The overall figure is, however, of largely academic interest in this context. In transport terms, of more importance are assessments of the practical impacts of impairments, for example on the extent to which people may be able to walk without stopping.

- About 70% of disabled people have some form of locomotion difficulties.
- Contrary to widespread belief, wheelchair users (both constant and irregular) represent only about one tenth of all those with locomotion problems.
- Most disabled people cannot travel far without pausing for a rest. For wheelchair users, this is, on average, about 150 yards. For people with a mobility impairment, this is generally less than 150 yards, and for many, is more likely to be around 30 – 50 yards. (It is worth bearing in mind that many people with mobility impairments effectively half the effective distance they are able to travel in case they feel unwell or for some other reason have to return to their home or other starting point.)
- The London Travel Survey identified that around a third of disabled people could only stand for less than 5 minutes, with about one in ten able to stand for a minute or less.
- Many disabled people find it very difficult to reach or grip effectively, an issue of particular significance for example in boarding a bus and finding a seat.
- About 700,000 people in the UK are severely or profoundly deaf.
- About 2 million people in the UK have severe sight loss, although it is worth bearing in mind that the range of this varies widely. Many older people, for example, have much reduced sight in poor lighting or at night. There are around 40,000 registered blind or visually impaired people in Scotland, but this may be less than a third of those who would be eligible to register.

Many of these factors are age related, and the overall prevalence of impairments is substantially higher in older people. There are also other age-related impacts. A Department for Transport report recently concluded that the main factor influencing the travel patterns of older people was their access to a car. As many as 90% of single pensioners, and 53% of couples do not have access to their own car. Even thought the number of older people holding licenses has increased sharply, many older people still cannot drive. The report estimates that

14 DPTAC (2002) op cit
16 Oxley, P. and Alexander, J. (1994) “Disability and Mobility in London - A Follow Up to the London Area Travel Survey” Project Report No. 34, Department of Transport
17 Scottish Office (1999) op cit
18 DRC (2002a, op cit)
of those who have given up driving, more than three quarters of men and half of women had done so due to their experience of one or more impairments.\footnote{DFT (2001) “Older people: Their transport needs and requirements” Department for Transport, London}

It is also worth bearing in mind that many disabled people experience multiple impairments, for example combining mobility and reach/grip difficulties. Research undertaken for the DWP (DWP, 2002 op cit) suggests that as many as a third of people who would be regarded as “disabled” using the DDA definition have four or more separate and limiting impairments. The DWP research also provided further evidence that the impacts of impairments vary over time. Only around two thirds of those surveyed suggested that their impairment was “constant”, with a further third experiencing variable impacts over time. Clearly, as noted earlier, this has significant impacts on the approach which should be taken to the delivery of appropriate services.

The number of people who are “transport disabled” is hard to estimate, as this is, in effect, a construction based on the social model – not everyone experiencing a specific impairment will be “transport disabled” due to, for example, the presence of local initiatives such as easy access transport or helpers.

The population of disabled people is changing over time. Generally, people are living longer, and there is a reasonable expectation that, as a consequence, more people will experience a period of limited mobility at some point in their lives. Care in the community policies ensure that far fewer people are detained in long-stay hospitals, and there have been significant investments in occupational therapy and homecare services to allow people to remain in their own homes. The net effect of this is that the demand for accessible transport services is likely to rise over time.

It is also important to recognise that approaches to mobility change over time. In the last 10 years, for example, the design of wheelchairs has changed radically, and now many more people use powered scooter type mobility aids on a “when needed” basis. Most transport vehicles cannot readily accept such scooters. Current low floor buses are, in most cases, too small to accommodate powered scooters. Although some commuter trains and the new Class 170s can accommodate them, the vestibule areas of many other trains are simply too small to allow any manoeuvring.

There are a wide range of potential implications of these issues in achieving inclusive mobility. A range of these will be set out throughout the report, but it is worth summarising some here:

- Access to stepped buses is severely constrained for many disabled people, with a requirement not only for a low floor in many cases, but also specifically constructed boarding points or the use of ramps.
- The need for substantial numbers of appropriate grip points within transport vehicles to allow disabled people to move relatively freely.
- The use of visual and audible announcements.
- The nature of signage is important in terms both of size and location.
- The need for seating at least every 50 yards within public areas to accommodate the substantial number of disabled people who are unable to walk without resting.
• The need for ticket windows and other information points to be accessible to a wide range of people, accommodating, for example, loop system, low level counters and visual displays.
• The need for corridors to be wide enough and barrier free to accommodate both people with a visual impairment, and people who use a wheelchair or sticks.
• The need for transport vehicles, including taxis, to be able to accommodate the wide range of wheelchairs currently in use.

Clearly, this is a very small selection of the design issues which will impact on the extent to which public transport can become inclusive.20

Research for DETR21 set out the broad travel patterns of disabled people (in England and Wales), but these are worth summarising here:

• Disabled people travel one third less often than all transport users
• Disabled people drive cars 47% less often than the general public and 79% never drive. 60% of disabled people have no car in the household
• Disabled people use taxis 67% more often than the general public and buses 20% more often
• Almost half of disabled people use some form of travel scheme for disabled people (generally, community transport has not been considered in the study)
• Only 10% of disabled people hold a disabled person’s railcard, and 48% a local authority bus concession
• Roughly equal percentages use public transport alone or with a companion, but wheelchair users are much less likely to travel alone
• 23% of working disabled people find travelling to and from their place of work difficult
• 41% of disabled people experience difficulty with at least one of the types of journey asked about (travel to: work; place of study; hospital/doctor; recreational facilities; visit friends/relatives)

It is also worth bearing in mind that mobility exists in a wider social and economic context. Research, for example, for the DWP (DWP, 2002) and for the DRC in Scotland (DRC, 2002) both set out clearly that disabled people:

• are less likely to be in work, and face significant additional barriers to accessible work;
• are more likely to be claiming benefit;
• be in low paid, or insecure jobs;
• have lower overall levels of income;
• are more likely to live in unsuitable housing conditions.

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20 The guide “Inclusive Mobility” prepared by Philip Oxley for DPTAC provides a comprehensive range of suggested improvements
21 DETR (2002) op cit
Clearly, any or all of these factors also impact on the extent to which disabled people can travel independently. The specific issue of the cost of travel, and the impact of subsidy schemes will be discussed later in this report.

**Disabled people who do not travel**

As noted earlier, there are a substantial number of older and disabled people who do not travel, or who do so under very controlled conditions, for example in an ambulance, or to and from social work day centres. In some cases, the reasons for this may relate to a specific illness or impairment, while in others, it is likely to relate more to a perception that there are no options available to them, or that they lack the confidence to attempt to travel independently. One interviewee noted:

“The problem with transport statistics is that they measure those who travel, not those that don’t.”

At a wider level, the government has a series of wide ranging commitments to social inclusion, and it is clear that a lack of transport, or a lack of confidence in transport, is a limiting factor in achieving this.

As will be set out throughout this report, there have been a wide range of direct and indirect accessibility improvements over the last 5 years, and, as will be set out towards the end of Section 3, there have also been a number of projects designed to open up access for people who currently do not travel. Many initiatives, however, have had little or no impact on this group. An example of this provided by a number of interviewees is concessionary fares, which are seen to impact only on those who already travel, or those whose primary reason for not travelling is *economic*. It is fair to suggest that too little is currently known about the factors which prevent many people from travelling, or the measures which would be required. As one interviewee noted:

“Making something accessible isn’t enough, you have to solve people’s access problems.”

Accordingly, picking up on the views of a number of respondents to this research, it is suggested that further specific research is required on these issues, focusing on bringing about the transition from “no mobility” to “mobility” for excluded older and disabled people.

**Use of private cars**

It is worth bearing in mind that many disabled people rely on the use of a private car, often in conjunction with other modes of travel. For many disabled people either driving, or being driven, remains the most commonly used form of transport, and for some the only viable form.

Although this research focused on public transport, a number of respondents identified issues relating to the use of private cars and, as these impact on the extent to which many disabled people are able to actually reach public transport, these are worth outlining briefly here.
The main issues raised by those respondents who travel by private car were, firstly, the costs involved, and secondly, the lack of parking, and more particularly the lack of enforcement measures in relation to parking. In relation to the costs, a number of respondents noted that they were generally able to use a car, but for some journeys had to rely on other means. Among the reasons for this included cyclical health problems and the lack of parking close enough to the destination (or that the disabled driver could have confidence that spaces would be available). In these cases, most of those who raised this issue suggested that taxis were the most likely option. Particularly in areas with no taxi card concessions, this was seen as problematic for some disabled people. This was summarised by one respondent:

“I just can’t afford to run a car and pay for taxis as well when I need them”.

More numerous, however, were those respondents who raised issues about car parking. A small number of respondents did suggest that one of the most significant improvements in recent years has been the increase in numbers of marked spaces, particularly at railway stations and airports, but it is fair to suggest that many disabled people, whether in the postal survey or during interviews, were very negative about car parking. The impact of the availability of parking can be considerable. One respondent noted that:

“As I can still drive, I design my activities around availability of parking even asking for late afternoon appointments with the doctor because parking is slightly easier then. I cannot walk far enough to make much use of (low-floor) buses and cannot park close to the local shops except Sat pm & Sun, which is not when I wish to go! Balance & carrying both problematic.”

Several respondents identified that they only go out at times, and to places, where they have confidence that parking will be available.

As suggested earlier, the other main issue identified was the lack of enforcement of parking spaces. One respondent (typical of a number) noted:

“There appears to be more abuse of disabled parking badges, disabled parking spaces, especially where general public parking is scarce.”

One point made by a small number of respondents was that, in effect, using a car is their only practical option, either because they cannot reach or use mainstream transport, or because there are limitations on the use of other modes. This was illustrated by one respondent:

 “[I am] isolated - if I had no car available I’d have to use taxis. In some areas of West Dunbartonshire there are no accessible taxis. [I can use] Dial a bus for local journeys if I’m registered with them, however I’m only allowed to use this for max of 2 journeys per day.”
Other examples provided related to the limitations on the restricted availability of dial-a-ride type services to specific days, or limitations on the number of journeys which can be undertaken using a taxi card.

GENERAL TRANSPORT ISSUES FACING DISABLED PEOPLE

The remainder of this section will summarise some of the general transport issues facing disabled people consulted as part of this research. Comments are also drawn from a small number of reports provided to the research.

The lack of accessible transport

Although it seems obvious, the main barrier facing many disabled people is the simple lack of transport vehicles capable of meeting their needs. This will not be discussed in any detail here (as much of the remainder of the report relates directly to this issue). As one respondent noted:

“There will be many people who will never be able to leave their homes, except in an ambulance, and with a lot of help.”

The comment of one respondent made in relation to becoming eligible for concessionary bus travel and finding that she was unable to actually board any buses in her area summarises the views of a large number of people who took part in this research:

“It makes a joke of my free bus pass!!! My hopes of freedom have been dashed.”

The limited availability of transport services

As will be set out in more detail in Section 4, particularly in rural areas, but also to some extent in larger towns and cities, public transport may only be available at limited times. For example, in Shetland, the last bus services leave at around 5pm. In many rural areas, buses may run as infrequently as every second or third day. In many areas, only limited destinations are actually served by public transport. Most town and city bus services (and most Scotrail services) operate on a hub and spoke model, making travel around the periphery of towns and cities more difficult. (An attendant issue is that transferring between modes often requires a substantial wait. A point made by a number of respondents, and often overlooked, is that many disabled people, as well as older people, cannot stand for more than a few minutes at a time, and many bus stops, for example, do not have seating at all, or seating which is suitable for all passengers. An associated point is that connections do not always allow enough time for disabled people.) One respondent (to the postal survey) noted:

“If you want to go more than one place on the same day, generally, you can forget it”.

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As noted earlier, the more complex a journey, the more likely, firstly, that a disabled person will consider the risks too great, and, secondly, the more likely that one or more stage will be inaccessible.

The impact of this is clearly felt by all transport users, but arguably more acutely by disabled people, in large part due to the lack of viable alternatives. The most common points made were in relation to bus services and dial-a-ride and similar services. Points were also made about the limited availability of taxis and some accessible buses in some areas as these are often contracted to local authorities’ education services for as much as 4 hours per day. Finally, perhaps as a consequence of the timing of the research, a number of respondents suggested that, in some areas at least, in the period approaching, and over Christmas, it appeared to be more difficult to book taxis, as overall demand was much higher. These issues will be discussed in more detail in the relevant parts of Section 4.

One respondent to the postal survey noted:

“Transport will need to be more inclusive and accessible, and there would need to be more continuity between different modes to encourage me out of my car.”

A parallel point which emerged from a wide-ranging consultation undertaken by Fife Council with older people (in conjunction with Age Concern) was that many public transport users are unaware of the options open to them. Participants in the panels were largely unaware of mainstreams options, or of improvements to accessibility, and were also unaware of the options through community or council-based transport. There was also a lack of awareness of eligibility for concessions. These points were also supported in the group discussions undertaken as part of this research, in which a number of participants were clearly unaware of many of the services and support apparently open to them.

The impact of geography

Again, it is an obvious point, but one worthwhile making that disabled people’s experiences are often shaped largely by where they live. Although this is perhaps most obvious in rural areas, there are also large parts of urban central Scotland where disabled people face very considerable, and often insurmountable difficulties, in travelling.

As one participant in a group discussion in a rural area noted:

“If you can’t drive, there are no bus services. You strive all the time to be independent, but there’s no way”.

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The impact of living in a rural or island area was identified as an issue by many respondents to each of the strands of this research. (It is also worth noting that the problems of serving rural areas were also raised by public transport providers.) A comment typical of many was:

“If people can't drive or do not have access to a car then their life will be very restricted especially in rural areas which are unlikely to have low access buses and a very restricted timetable.”

There was a strong view among many of those who contributed to the research that the model of public transport operating in rural areas was inherently flawed. This was summarised by one group discussion participant:

“Public transport in rural areas is a waste of time. It’s very expensive and doesn’t meet needs. There needs to be investment in alternatives, such as taxis, car share, CT etc – subsidies are a complete waste of money”.

A number of such approaches were identified in rural areas (described in more detail in Section 4), including examples of car sharing, community use buses, and demand-responsive subsidised public buses.

The problems in urban areas are no less serious on an individual level. One interviewee noted, for example, that the only way to complete a round trip by public transport was to:

“get off at the next station and travel down the pavement for a couple of miles in my motorised scooter. Can you imagine that in all weathers?”

**The built environment**

Many respondents to this research raised the issue of the impact of the built environment on the use of transport by disabled people. This was identified earlier in terms of the difficulties faced by those with limited mobility and those who cannot, for example, stand for long periods. Research for DETR suggests that disabled people generally are dissatisfied with the condition of roads and pavements, with visually impaired people rather more likely to be dissatisfied. In a survey, 60% felt that roads and pavements were not well designed for disabled people.22

It was suggested that, in some places, matters have improved over the last 5 years:

“Town and city centre environments are improving, generally providing a much safer environment for disabled people - pedestrianisation, street lighting, smooth footway surfaces, control of clutter ...”

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These views were not shared by all respondents. It was suggested that there were still many inaccessible public buildings (in most areas) although this was acknowledged to be improving. Similarly, a wide range of problems with pavements, crossings and signage were also noted. A point noted by a number of respondents was that, even with the general increase in awareness among planners of issues facing disabled people, not all new developments are accessible to all disabled people. A small number of potential safety issues were also identified, some related to conflicting needs of road users, and in one case to the removal of a tactile surface separating a pedestrianised area from a roadway used by taxis.

Pedestrianisation schemes were not viewed as always being beneficial to disabled people, with a range of issues identified, including the removal of bus and taxi drop off points, the restriction of access times for disabled drivers and conflict with other users, particularly service vehicles. Capability Scotland, in comments provided to the research suggested that many of these shortcomings may be due, in part at least, to a lack of effective consultation.

Many areas operate Shopmobility – type schemes, often in conjunction with pedestrianisation. These were identified in the 1998 report and remain popular with many disabled people. The basis of such schemes is that powered (and manual) wheelchairs are made available to registered users for any purpose related to town centre visits. In most cases, schemes are run by a mixture of volunteers and paid staff, and in some areas, volunteers are also available to provide assistance to clients.

A number of respondents also identified that, in the last 5 years, there appears to have been a significant increase in the number of people using town centres, shopping centres and other public places. The consequences of this for many disabled people are both direct (in terms of the practical problems caused in moving around) but also indirect, in terms of increased levels of worry and uncertainty (with a consequent disincentive effect). This point was also raised in relation to both transport vehicles and bus and rail stations.

It is also worth noting that many of the problems are avoidable. One respondent (in Aberdeen, but typical of a number) noted that:

“[I] have lots of problems with wheelybins”.

Others identified difficulties with, for example, temporary road works (in terms of the warning boards used and their suitability for visually impaired people who use tapping canes) and the difficulties posed to many disabled people by, for example, doors which revolve at a set speed.

The need to plan ahead

A consistent point made by participants in this research was the need to plan journeys in advance. One respondent to the postal survey noted:
“[The key barrier] for wheelchair users is having to plan in advance access to train travel – not having the opportunity to do something on the spur of the moment.”

Many disabled people were critical of the need to provide generally 24 hours’ notice of travel. This is an issue for rail, ferry, air and, in some cases, taxi travel, although not generally for bus travel. In relation to railway travel, one respondent to the postal survey noted:

“If you want to catch the train from Inverurie you have to phone the train company at least a week in advance so they can arrange for the train to come in on the right side of the platform and for someone to get you on and off the train if you are a wheelchair user.”

A number of respondents were also critical of dial-a-ride type services because these can only be booked a few days ahead. One client, echoing a range of comments, noted:

“If not travelling with Dial-a-Journey, going out alone is almost impossible. However, Dial-a-Journey can only be booked 3 days in advance and due to the demand of the services in this area, getting the desired times or days can be difficult, which leads to cancellations, loss of money if tickets have been purchased for a special event which in turn leads to disappointment.”

As will be set out in Section 4, the experience of disabled people is often that planning ahead is no guarantee that services will be available. This point was made in relation to air, ferry and rail travel.

The final point worth making in this context is that planning ahead is not always straightforward. As will be set out later, most travel planning services (including Traveline) have no, or very limited information about accessibility. There were also a range of issues raised throughout the report about the difficulties presented to disabled people when transport operators cannot guarantee the type of vehicle which will be used on a specific service. Examples of this include both low floor and stepped buses and different types of train (with differing levels of accessibility) being used on the same routes. Specific examples are provided in the relevant parts of Section 4.

Uncertainty

There is a clear relationship for many disabled people between levels of uncertainty and the likelihood that they will use public transport services. Perceptions of uncertainty are tied very closely to perceptions of risk, and, understandably, very few disabled people are likely to run the risk of finding themselves, for example, stranded. As one respondent noted (echoing the views of many):

“If you can't guarantee that you have suitable transport for the journey - then you will not go.”

This issue was raised in relation to most modes of transport, with the exception of air and ferry, where the likelihood of experiencing unexpected difficulties is arguably lower.
Although these issues will be discussed in more detail below, and in Section 4, it is worth summarising some of these here:

- Uncertainty over the nature of the vehicle used (mentioned earlier);
- Uncertainty over the accuracy of accessibility information (mentioned specifically in relation to information provided by Scotrail, although it should be acknowledged that the company’s new standards have addressed many of the problems);
- Uncertainty as to whether a return journey will be possible (raised largely in relation to the availability of accessible taxis where these cannot be guaranteed by the company);
- Uncertainty over whether transfer between modes will be possible (raised, for example in relation to changing trains at major stations);
- Uncertainty about whether assistance will be available (raised in relation to most modes of transport);
- Uncertainty about the attitudes of transport staff (often where a disabled person has had a negative experience in the past);
- Uncertainty about the attitudes of other transport users (raised particularly by wheelchair users in relation to being able to access designated spaces on low-floor buses);
- Uncertainty that the built environment at their destination will be accessible.

The net effect of any or all of these issues is that many disabled people for whom it may be physically possible to, for example, board a bus, do not travel.

**Attitudes**

One of the key issues raised in many contexts throughout this research was the attitude and approach of transport staff. Although this is raised within the mode-specific sections later, it is worth noting here that there is a wide disparity of views, and a range of experiences among disabled people. One postal respondent noted that one of the most positive changes of the last five years was that there was:

> “More of an acceptance of disabled people travelling in the community by public transport”,

but this view was not shared by many disabled people. Some also identified that specific assistance (for example, provided by train operating companies or airlines) had improved, but again, there were many examples provided of this assistance either not being available when requested, or being inappropriate.

In some cases, company policies were identified as being the source of unnecessary difficulties for disabled people. Some issues were be identified in Section 3 in relation to concessionary fares. Another issue mentioned in at least two areas (Edinburgh and Aberdeen) was that passengers had been told by drivers that they were not permitted to deploy the on-bus ramp because they were not permitted to leave their cab for safety reasons. As one respondent (in Aberdeen) noted:
“In shops, staff can’t just refuse to give you any help – why should transport be different?”

It is interesting to note that research among disabled people commissioned by DETR suggested that transport services generally were thought to compare poorly with the service received from, for example, supermarkets and banks.\(^\text{23}\)

Many respondents across the stands of this research identified problems they had faced with public transport staff. To some extent, these covered all modes of transport, although, as might be expected, bus and taxi drivers were most commonly mentioned. As one respondent noted:

“I feel that I am a burden to the driver and an inconvenience.”

As noted earlier, the attitudes of public transport staff, and disabled people’s experiences of this can be a significant contributory factor in whether they are likely to attempt to travel at all. As one respondent noted:

“I can’t go out on my own in case I get a taxi driver on the way back who won’t help me.”

Research by DETR\(^\text{24}\) suggests that, among disabled people the following was identified:

- Taxi drivers were rated as the most helpful staff, by three quarters of respondents, with a similar rating for airline cabin crew, but only 44% for bus drivers and 34% for on train staff. Taxi drivers were also rated most patient, friendly, polite and cheerful
- Bus drivers were rated as most unhelpful (by 20%) and as most impatient, rude, miserable and unfriendly.

**Interaction with other transport users**

A further point made by respondents was that, in their view, public transport appears to be busier than five years ago. This point was raised frequently in relation to off-peak bus use, but also in terms of trains and, in some cases, more generally to town centres. A number of respondents identified that this has a significant disincentive effect on older people, people with limited mobility and those who cannot, for example, readily grip, or stand for long periods. As one worker interviewed as part of this research noted:

“Many of the people I work with are reluctant to use bus services because they are worried about long waits, overcrowded buses and not knowing the street routes, people who could travel the route independently are forced to rely on staff support.”

One respondent to the postal survey (a wheelchair user) noted that there often appears to be conflict between disabled people and parents with buggies:

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\(^{23}\) DETR (2002) op cit
\(^{24}\) DETR (2002) op cit
“It doesn't seem fair that during busy times of the day I can wait for up to 5 buses before there is space or someone folds up their pram to allow me their space. Children are able to sit on their support workers/carers/parents lap. I am not!!! This is especially difficult during the winter as some disabled people are more prone to colds and chest infections.”

This point was echoed by other respondents.

The cost of transport

A wide range of points were made by respondents in relation to the costs of public transport for disabled people. This issue will be noted in Section 3 (in relation to concessionary fares) and earlier in this section (in relation to the use of private cars). Cost issues appear to fall into two main groups. The first is a wider point in relation to the fact that many disabled people live on low incomes, and transport costs can represent a relatively high percentage of that income. The second relates to the additional costs which disabled people face, either through lack of choice, or the need to use specific modes of transport. This was raised most frequently in relation to taxis. One respondent noted that:

“Everything is more expensive i.e. taking taxis locally and further field. I go usually twice a year to a nursing home in Largs (Ayrshire) and it costs by taxi £50.00 each way, which is quite a consideration on a limited budget.”

Taxi card schemes, where these are available, offset this cost to some extent, but, as will be described in more detail in Section 4, taxi fares can still be very expensive. A point of contention for some respondents to this research was that these fares may be incurred for “official” trips, such as visits to medical appointments.

THE IMPACT OF TRANSPORT LIMITATIONS

Evidence from the research suggests that, as might be expected, disabled people use public transport for a huge variety of purposes, including work, leisure, education and health. It is worth noting at the outset that many disabled people are not specifically limited by public transport, but it is also fair to say that many are. As one respondent noted:

“People with disabilities may be excluded from accessing employment, education and leisure. It becomes tiresome always having to plan even simple journeys e.g. going shopping. People with disabilities are often forced to make use of segregated resources rather than be included within society.”

One respondent, who undertakes voluntary work, suggested that this has to be organised entirely around the availability of suitable transport. In this example (which is typical of many), the dial-a-ride service is only available one morning and one afternoon each week, and the return journey requires a wait of one and a half hours for a train, as the afternoon dial-a-ride service returns too early to complete a full shift.

Among the examples of ways in which disabled people might be limited by public transport (provided by participants in this research) were:
• Social events, for example visiting friends, theatre trips, sports events
• Work (either in terms of limitations of time, or in being able to work at all)
• Ability to reach medical and dental appointments
• Shopping trips
• Collection of pensions, payment of bills etc
• Holidays

One respondent to the postal survey noted:

“You become frustrated. If you do not miss meetings, it puts hours on your travelling time. The result if that you become exhausted and frazzled by the time you get to your destination, only to face it all on your return.”

A report summarising the views of Age Concern User Panels consulted by Fife Council staff (provided by the Council to the research) make clear that many older people (many of whom have one or more significant impairments) are frustrated by their inability to carry out basic tasks or undertake apparently simple journeys. Among those journeys mentioned most often by participants in the User Panels were collecting prescriptions and shopping. A number also identified that their friends were in nursing homes, destinations not typically well served by current forms of public transport suitable for older or disabled people. A number of the participants in the User Panels stressed the social benefits of shopping, particularly for people living alone. One other main cause of frustration mentioned by a number of participants was the lack of flexibility of current transport, including dial-a-ride, particularly in terms of destinations and available times.

A number of respondents also identified wider health and psychological impacts of these limitations, for example, the consequences of a lack of social contact, a lack of exercise, and feelings of isolation (as well as, in some cases, the need to rely on state benefits). The cumulative effects of this were summarised by one respondent:

“In winter I am reduced to eating tinned food and to not getting out. I cannot go to social activities or hospital /doctor/dentist appointments. I cannot get a hair cut, or pay bills. I cannot attend meetings. As a carer for my father who has cancer, I cannot even get down to see him a mile away. This means he too will have problems getting shopping, as home helps do not so this. I cannot get to the bank or building society, I cannot get to the library.”

Among the wider impacts of public transport limitations noted by respondents were:

• Undermining of confidence
• Promoting feelings of insecurity
• Causing social isolation
• Stopping disabled people leaving their homes altogether

A point made by some respondents was that their lives are to a variable extent guided by whether or not they can afford to make a journey. The following example relates to limitations to taxi card use:
“In Aberdeen, you get a six month book which works out at 4 per week or 2 return journeys ... you’re watching how many vouchers you have and to pay full fare is quite high. You say to yourself, can you go out? You’re not expecting a whole lot of free travel but you could have some more.”

It is clear, therefore, that the impact of a lack of transport which meets the needs of disabled people is considerable. The DPTAC survey of disabled people’s attitudes to transport (DPTAC, 2002) found that more than 50% of respondents suggested that better access to transport would have a major beneficial effect on their lives.

The next section will set out a range of policy and other initiatives undertaken since the original research in 1998.
SECTION THREE POLICY INITIATIVES SINCE 1998

There have been a range of policy initiatives in the last 5 years which have impacted on disabled people. Among these have been:

- the development of local transport strategies;
- the implementation of a national concessionary fare scheme, and
- the publication of a range of standards, including new standards for low floor buses, railway vehicles and training for transport staff.

Within this context, it is also worth noting that, in May 2001, the Scottish Executive established the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS), with a remit to provide advice to Scottish Ministers on transportation issues affecting disabled people.

As set out in Section 1, a key area of change has been the progressive implementation of provisions within the DDA. Central to this has been the publication of accessibility regulations, including those for buses and trains which are of central importance to how access improvements will be delivered in the next 10 years. There have also been a range of voluntary, or advisory standards published, for example relating to ferries. Although these regulations and standards have been published since 1998, they are best understood in the wider context of the mode of transport to which they apply, and are, therefore, discussed in detail in Section 4.

The Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS)

Although DPTAC has provided advice to ministers at a UK level for many years, there was no body within Scotland which provided advice either to Scottish Office ministers, or more recently to the Scottish Executive. The Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) was established in May 2002 to provide this advice, although on a different legal basis to DPTAC. At least 50% of the committee must be comprised of disabled people. Its aims are described as being:

1. To give Scottish Ministers advice on aspects of policy affecting the travel needs of disabled people.
2. To take account of the broad views and experiences of disabled people when giving advice.
3. To ensure that disabled people throughout Scotland are aware of travel developments which affect their mobility, choices and opportunities.
4. To work closely with the Scottish Executive and ensure our work programme complements the work being undertaken by the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), the Scottish Office of the Disability Rights Commission and other organisations, voluntary and statutory agencies.
5. To promote the travel needs of disabled people with transport planners and operators so that these are fully taken into account in the delivery of services.
6. To monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our work against the above aims and objectives in improving travel opportunities for disabled people in Scotland.
MACS, as noted, provides advice to Scottish Ministers on transport issues as these affect disabled people. It does so in a range of ways, including close working with ministers and officials on the development of policy, by commenting on policy made available for consultation, and, as with DPTAC, the committee also carries out its own investigations. One investigation, for example, resulted in the development of a specification for a set of training standards for transport staff\(^{25}\) (described in more detail later), while another sought to establish a standard for the provision of accessible transport information\(^{26}\). On a day to day basis, MACS has (following the practice adopted by DPTAC) established a series of mode and issue specific sub groups. It also maintains an on-going programme of consultation with both national and local disability organisations.

Local Transport Strategies

As noted in Section 1, local authorities and SPT were required to prepare Local Transport Strategies. As part of this research, an assessment was undertaken of these to identify any strands relating to accessibility for disabled people. The strategies covered timescales of 3-10 years (although, at the time of this research, local authorities and SPT were in the process of revising these).

All contained at least some specific reference to disabled people, recognising them as a group with specific needs, and some included a discreet section setting out, for example, guiding principles and initiatives to address barriers. In terms of general content, all the strategies included measures related to bus services and pedestrians, and all but island authorities included rail services. Almost all covered taxis and private car use. Ferry services were only included by those authorities with a port or ports in their area, and air services received similar coverage (with the addition of a small number of central belt authorities proposing better links to major airports). All, as might be expected, addressed strategic issues common to all modes of transport.

A majority of authorities highlighted the provision of low floor buses. In most of the strategies which discussed accessible buses, the main policy objective concerned either the introduction of, or increasing the number of such vehicles. A range of approaches were set out in relation to this. Edinburgh, for example, set out a priority to achieve a fully accessible bus fleet in advance of the requirements of the DDA (reflecting the already comparatively advanced state of provision in the capital). Shetland Islands Council identified having accessible vehicles on all main bus routes as a priority (identified later in this report).

Some authorities which acknowledged the importance of accessible buses were, however, less confident about the likelihood that, post deregulation, operators would invest in significant numbers of accessible vehicles in advance of the DDA requirement. Highland Council’s strategy, for example, was explicit about the limitations on major improvements to bus fleet accessibility in the short-term. The main constraints identified in a number of strategies were that, firstly, improvements would only come as old vehicles were replaced by new (rather than used) vehicles. Secondly, cost was seen as a major constraint. A useful point made in the Highland strategy was that, if it were to prioritise low floor buses on all routes in

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\(^{25}\) “Recommended minimum training standard for staff assisting disabled people”, MACS 2003, Rosyth

\(^{26}\) “Valuable for anyone, valuable for everyone - providing accessible information about travel”, MACS 2003, Rosyth
the short term, there would be a danger that some lesser-used routes would have to lose their service completely to afford it.

Infrastructure measures, particularly raised kerbs to allow wheelchair users to board low floor buses, was also frequently mentioned. Relatively few local authorities had, however, identified enforcement of these in terms of poor practice by other road users. Some authorities identified the introduction of bus boarders which project into the road as a preferred means of address this.

Some authorities identified improvements to bus stations and bus stops as a priority. Angus Council specified providing wheelchair access to Arbroath bus station, and Shetland Islands Council noted that it had, in advance of the introduction of low floor buses, installed loading points in the council-owned Viking bus station. Shetland also identified the implementation of a programme of accessibility improvements at rural bus stops. Perth and Kinross identified an intention to ensure that all new or replaced bus stops would comply with the DDA. In other strategies, unspecified or more general improvements to bus stops, such as the provision of seating bars in shelters, were identified.

Finally, in terms of scheduled bus services, a small number of authorities prioritised awareness training for staff in terms of the needs of disabled people.

A majority of authorities identified the provision of dial-a-ride or similar ‘on demand’ bus services as a priority. The means of undertaking this varied across authorities, requiring, in one area, the initial introduction of a service, while in other areas, there was a stated intention to expand or increase an existing service, or to offer greater flexibility. West Lothian and Stirling, for example, both identified the introduction of a dedicated “on demand” service to major shopping centres in their areas in addition to the more general service. For a number of authorities, support to community transport or community minibuses was also an element in the strategy.

Almost all authorities included concessionary fares for disabled and elderly bus travellers in their priorities, increasing access to travel for the many people in these groups on low incomes. As will be set out later, local schemes were, to some extent superseded by a national scheme relating to firstly visually impaired people, and later all older people.

Almost half of authorities prioritised improvements to accessibility of railway stations in their strategies. Generally specific projects at individual stations were identified, including the installation of lifts to platforms, ramped access to platforms, and in one case, an accessible overbridge. Nearly half of all authorities prioritised building new stations or halts. In advance of the DDA, Aberdeen City, for example, specified step-free access to ticket offices at Aberdeen and Dyce. Two authorities prioritised having wheelchair access ramps available on all trains (although this issue is more properly one for train operating companies). Over half of authorities prioritised new or extended Park and Ride facilities at stations.
In relation to taxis, a number of authorities gave priority to increasing the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles licensed in their area. A similar number either referred to accessible taxis in their strategy or expressed a priority in less concrete terms such as ‘encouragement’ of their use. Exceptionally, the City of Edinburgh reported that its taxi fleet was already fully accessible. East Ayrshire noted that this would be achieved by the end of 2004. West Dunbartonshire identified a priority of working towards a wholly accessible fleet by adopting a policy of only renewing licences for accessible vehicles. Stirling Council noted that it would ensure that new vehicles coming into service meet accessibility standards. A number of authorities prioritised disability awareness training for taxi drivers, including some which did not otherwise specify a priority relating to vehicle accessibility. Slightly more than half of authorities prioritised a ‘taxi card’ or similar taxi fare discount scheme.

Around a third of strategies prioritised providing more taxi ranks or improving the location of ranks to make them closer to other transport and community facilities. Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority additionally prioritised improving the location of ‘drop-off’ points for taxis at bus and rail stations.

A number of priorities were identified relating to pedestrian use, for example in relation to road crossings. Of these, over half of the local authorities included providing dropped kerbs, while a small number prioritised tactile paving and/or audible and tactile crossing signals. Aberdeen City Council, for example identified the need for rephrasing pedestrian crossing lights, while around one third of authorities identified the need to provide additional crossings. One third of strategies prioritised better maintenance or upgrading (including resurfacing) of pavements, and six the provision of wider footways. Five authorities include the location of street furniture or removal of footpath obstructions as a priority. Highland Council, for example, prioritised providing wheelchair access to bus stops on routes where accessible buses are in use. Only four authorities specifically included support for, or partnership working with, local Shopmobility schemes.

There were very few specific initiatives to meet needs of disabled ferry passengers outlined in strategies. North Ayrshire noted a commitment to improving passenger facilities at ferry ports generally, and Orkney noted plans for a new terminal at Stromness. Argyll and Bute noted a priority for the provision of Park and Ride facilities at ports, and Shetland the introduction of integrated ticketing for ferries and other modes of transport.

Similarly, few specific initiatives relating to the needs of disabled air passengers were included in the strategies. The City of Edinburgh Council noted that it intended to work with Scottish Airports Ltd to introduce a surface access strategy for the airport along the lines of that already in place at major English airports. Most measures identified, were more general, relating to easier access to major airports for all passengers.
Almost all authorities gave priority to the integration of public transport, which includes a range of initiatives; the physical integration of networks, timetable co-ordination for better connections between different modes of transport, integrated ticketing arrangements and the provision of joint timetable information for different modes. Most frequently these referred to bus and train services, though in one case bus and taxi was specified, and some authorities with ferry ports included surface public transport to ferries. Over one third of strategies included improvements to existing or the development of new interchange facilities.

A relatively small number of strategies specifically identified the planning process as a means of securing improvements for disabled travellers. The City of Edinburgh Council stated that “all new and upgraded transport projects will have accessibility built in”, while Aberdeen noted that it aimed to ensure that the needs of disabled people are “integral to technical thinking and planning of any part of the city”.

Over half of the strategies addressed issues of public transport information provision, although in the majority of cases the specific needs of disabled travellers were not explicitly considered. Six authorities include a telephone information service, with one providing this through a freephone number. In the Western Isles, it was noted that local area bus timetables were delivered to all households. Among those strategies which specifically prioritised information provision for disabled people, for example, Aberdeen City Council identified the development of audible information facilities at bus stops, while Aberdeenshire Council noted the production of a comprehensive guide for people with mobility problems, containing information on accessible public transport.

A relatively small number of authorities highlighted specific consultation with disabled people in implementing strategies or preparing future strategy.

Concessionary fares

Prior to 2003, concessionary fares were generally a matter for local authorities and PTEs, although a small number of private operators (principally ferry companies and all rail operators) also operated their own schemes. The 1998 report noted a good deal of dissatisfaction with the concessionary fares policies in place within various areas of Scotland, most notably general inconsistencies in eligibility and benefits, and the existence of a variety of exclusions (for example in terms of cross – boundary travel).

Since the previous research, the Scottish Executive has introduced a national free travel concession for all visually impaired people. This covers all modes of transport, and has been widely welcomed (and was identified by a number of respondents to this research as the most positive change in the intervening period). That said, it is also fair to say that a number of respondents were unclear as to why such a concession should be available to one group of disabled people, but not others.
The Scottish Executive is in the process of standardising bus-based concessionary fares for older people across Scotland, following from an election commitment. The basis of this is to move to a position where similar minimum eligibility criteria apply for all areas within Scotland, and a common fares structure is adopted. In the first instance, eligibility will continue to be on an authority by authority basis, but this could be extended at a later stage to provide for a Scotland-wide scheme. The scheme as introduced in September 2002 allows for men and women to become eligible for concessions at the same age, and allows free off-peak travel in all areas. It is still open to local authorities to extent the range of eligibilities (in terms of groups and times). This has led, in some areas, to a perpetuation of the sorts of inconsistencies which were identified in the 1998 research. For example, in Aberdeen, local residents pay a flat fare before 9.30am, while residents of Moray and Aberdeenshire councils travel free. Cross-border travel, particularly at peak time, but often at other times, remains problematic. Members attending a group discussion in Dumfries noted that they have to buy fares in two stages, for example to reach Edinburgh, with the first stage to Biggar being free, the second stage to Edinburgh costing around £5.

There remain inconsistencies in rail – based concessions. In the SPT area, a number of groups can travel free, but elsewhere, eligibility is patchy with, for example, Fife allowing free travel on trains, but some local authorities exclude this. The issue identified earlier in relation to cross – border travel also applies to rail travel, with, in the case of longer distance journeys, only a part being eligible. The national railcard-based concession scheme remains available, but was not seen as particularly popular among respondents to this research.

Taxi-based concessions are covered in more detail in the relevant section of Chapter 3, however, it is reasonable to characterise the current situation as one of inconsistency and some disenchantment. Less than half of all local authorities operate taxi card schemes, allowing subsidised travel for disabled people on the basis of a quota number of journeys. The level of subsidy varies between area, and the number of eligible journeys also varies widely. In some areas, disabled people have to choose between a taxi card or a bus pass, and this was seen by many as being unduly restrictive, and counter-productive in terms of supporting independent travel. As one participant in a group discussion in a rural area noted:

“How can you have integrated transport when you can have either a taxi card or a bus pass. In rural areas, using a taxi to get to the bus for longer distances is a good option – that way you can have the bulk of the journey free.”

The main concern remains, however, the very large number of disabled people living in areas of Scotland where no concessions exist, and where, due to the lack of accessible alternatives, the taxi remains the only form of public transport which is viable.

Each of the ferry companies offers some form of concession, although these are not necessarily offered on a consistent basis. Where wider local authority – based schemes exist, some ferry companies (for example CalMac and Shetland Ferries) participate in these. It is interesting to note that all internal ferry journeys in Shetland are free to those eligible for concessionary travel.

As far as can be ascertained, no airlines offer general concessionary fares (a point raised by those who participated in a group in Shetland), although some offer specific concessions, such as to visually impaired passengers (and companions). A recent English case highlighted the imposition of additional charges by one airline on passengers wishing to use a wheelchair.
transfer. In Scotland, wheelchairs are provided as required at all airports, and no direct charge is made to the disabled person concerned.

At a practical level, there is still evidence of a great deal of misunderstanding on the part of transport companies. One ferry company, for example, offers concessions to “registered disabled people” and requires proof of status before offering a reduced fare. This is clearly an outdated approach with no basis in current legislation. It was also noted that Scotrail staff working in travel centres will only provide concessionary fares when they are presented with proof of eligibility. The impact of this is that disabled people travelling together must all attend the station in order to purchase tickets. It was noted by one participant in a group discussion that they had had no difficulty in obtaining reduced fares for children, even though the children were not present. The view of the group was that Scotrail should be more flexible, relying (as with other tickets) on the at-station and on-train checking processes to ensure eligibility.

There was also criticism of local authority staff providing information about concessionary fares. Respondents in some areas noted that this was often inconsistent and inaccurate.

It is interesting to note that MACS, in considering its position on concessionary fares has echoed the views of a number of disabled people who participated in this research. Its approach is to recognise that while there is a role for concessionary fares, this should not be the main priority for government support. In the view of MACS:

“MACS vision is of a Scotland where anyone with a mobility problem due to physical, mental or sensory impairment can go when and where everyone else can and have the information and opportunities to do so.

This means that we are seeking an improvement in transport services to make them available and accessible for everyone.

MACS considers that the Scottish Executive’s Partnership Agreement is deficient in that it only proposes examining and extending concession schemes. At no point does it suggest that making transport accessible is a priority. There is no point in a concession if you cannot use the transport.

MACS recommends that the policy goal should be to achieve Inclusive Transport.”

A small number of disabled people expressed the view that concessionary fares were wrong in principle, for example that they were “demeaning”. As one noted:

“Concessions make you feel small, like somehow you should be grateful”.  

Another identified that concessionary fares may have the effect of reinforcing, rather than ameliorating the poverty faced by many older or disabled people. This view was not shared by all respondents, with some citing the introduction of wider concessions as an aspect of good practice. The new concessions regime for bus travel was, however, identified as being unpopular among many disabled people, as the net effect has been to increase off-peak ridership in many areas, with the consequence that many people with limited mobility have been discouraged from using public transport at all.
There are also concerns that the regime is not progressive, and does not target assistance on those who actually require it. As will be noted in Section 2, there is also a concern among some respondents to this research that extending concessionary fares impacts more on those who already do travel, and does little for the extensive group of excluded older and disabled people who currently cannot travel at all. It is suggested that the Scottish Executive undertake specific research to examine the impact of concessionary fares on specific groups of older and disabled people.

**Thistle Card**

The Thistle Card was introduced in September 2002 following work by a group of voluntary and statutory organisations as a way of ensuring that people requiring additional assistance to use public transport independently are able to receive this. The scheme is open to anyone who believes that they require additional assistance.

The basis of the scheme is a standardised card, available throughout Scotland, which identifies the user and provides a summary of the ways in which the public transport staff member can provide assistance. The rear of card consists of a wallet which allows, for example, the intended destination of the user, or any contact details to be entered.

Training has been provided to transport staff and the initiative has the support of the Scottish Executive and transport companies.

**Transport – related information**

Perhaps more than any other aspect of transport provision, there has been a substantial change in both the extent and nature of transport information. At the time of the original research in 1998, the internet was still relatively under-developed in terms of the delivery of transport information. The report noted that this was likely to be an area of some expansion in the future, and this has proved to be the case. A vast array of information is now available via the internet. All of the major transport companies have websites, and many of these deliver both service and fare information, with some also offering booking services.

Relatively few, thus far, offer much information of specific relevance to disabled people. The main exceptions to this are train operating companies and airlines. In the case of train operating companies, there is, in most cases, detailed information about stations (although some disabled people lack confidence in this) and in some cases, information about facilities on trains (including layouts). All provide information about the national booking system for disabled people (which was referred to in the original research, and which is currently being redeveloped). In the case of airlines, most websites have detailed information about access issues. All, for example, set out clear policies on issues such as the carriage of guide dogs and wheelchair users. Most have detailed information about how to ensure that assistance is made available.

There has also been a considerable expansion in telephone-based helpline services. The 1998 report identified a small number of initiatives, for example the journey planning system operated by SPT, and those operated by a small number of local authorities. Outline proposals for a national approach were also identified.
The current situation is that there is, in effect, a two tier approach to the delivery of information of this kind. At a national level, Traveline has been established as a partnership between central government, local government and major transport operators. This provides multi-modal trip-based information using sophisticated journey planning software and uses information supplied by local authorities and transport operators. The main drawback for disabled people is that Traveline does not currently offer specific information on the accessibility of either services or transport infrastructure, although this is being considered for future enhancements of the system. Where callers raise access-related issues (for example about the type of bus used, or whether a station has ramped access), these are referred to the transport operator. At a local level, local authorities across Scotland, as well as SPT, offer transport information relating to their own area (and usually trips to adjacent areas).

There are also a wide range of commercial services which provide public transport information, and can providing multi-modal, or single mode journey information.

There are a small number of services geared specifically to the needs of older or disabled people. Many of these have been established, or significantly expanded, in the last 5 years. Perhaps the best known service is Tripscope. It provides telephone based information (with a range of accessibility enhancements) on all modes of transport, both in terms of journey planning and accessibility, working alongside mainstream information providers.

It is also worth mentioning that more traditional information is still, in most cases, made available. For example, most transport companies still produce printed timetables, some of which are also available in large print and other formats. A small number of transport companies, for example, CalMac, identified that, following consultations with disabled people, they had either changed the way that the information was presented, or made it available in alternative formats. Most local authorities also produce printed information about local services, often on a multi-modal basis.

In some areas, traditional travel centres still operate, for example throughout the SPT area. Most of these offer multi-modal transport information to callers (as well as, in some cases, other information, such as tourist information). Some transport companies also operate traditional travel centres, often in conjunction with interchange facilities. It is worth noting that the First Group closed a number of travel centres towards the end of 2003.

A point raised by a number of respondents to this research is that many older and disabled people are being excluded by the progressive introduction of new technology. At a practical level, many older and disabled people have no access to the internet, or are discouraged from its use by, for example, concerns about security and cost. Despite improvements to accessibility standards and speech synthesis technology over the last 5 years, there remain many sites which are effectively unusable by, for example, visually impaired people. In terms of telephone helplines, many of the same issues apply. It is likely that many older and disabled people are concerned about the cost of using telephone services. An issue raised by a number of respondents (in a range of contexts) is that older and disabled people are often discouraged from using services, or seeking assistance due to feeling that they are a nuisance, or will be made to feel stupid. MACS has recently published a set of standards designed to improve the delivery of transport related information to disabled people.

Finally, in this context, it is worth noting that many older and disabled people are unlikely to be aware of the existence of public transport information services. During group discussions
held as part of this research, it became clear that virtually no-one knew about Traveline, and assumed that either transport operators or perhaps local authorities would be able to provide information.

**Training**

One of the key areas of weakness identified in the 1998 research was staff training. It was identified that relatively few public transport organisations were undertaking training, and there was an overall lack of both coordination and standards. In some areas, disabled people were involved in the provision of training, but this was patchy.

In early 2004, MACS published the “Recommended Minimum Training Standard For Staff Assisting Disabled People” following a period of research both into current training and the methods used. The standard is aimed at all public transport operators, and is designed to address the same weaknesses identified in the 1998 report. MACS has set out a clear and unequivocal recommendation:

\[
\text{MACS recommends that every transport operator should ensure that, consistent with their type of operation, all employees providing transportation related services, who may be required to interact with the public and assist disabled people, receive a level of training appropriate to the requirements of their function in the following areas...}
\]

\[(a)\] the policies and procedures of the transport operator with respect to disabled people, including relevant regulatory requirements;

\[(b)\] the needs of those disabled people most likely to require additional services, recognition of those needs, and the responsibilities of the transport operator in relation to those persons, including the level of assistance, methods of communication and aids or devices generally required by disabled people; and

\[(c)\] The necessary skills for providing assistance to disabled people and their travelling companions, and the needs of disabled people travelling with a service animal (for example a guide, hearing and other assistance dogs) including the role and needs of that animal.

The standard also sets out a clear requirement for public transport operators to monitor and evaluate the impact of this training.

The findings of this report suggest that the publication of this standard is timely and, arguably, much needed. This said, there is evidence of substantial progress in some areas. Train operating companies, for example, have either introduced, or are introducing, disability equality training for all employees. There are also local examples of initiatives. GNER, for example, in association with Scotrail and Network Rail, has introduced British Sign Language training for staff in areas such as Edinburgh where demand is highest. Airport

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28 A subsection relating to the duties of contractors has been edited out.
operators and airlines were also found to have relatively high levels of staff provided with some training. Bus companies, however, appear generally to have undertaken less training. The situation with taxi operators is more complex, as in some areas, disability equality training is compulsory on receiving a license. That said, the Scottish Taxi Federation strongly supports training for all drivers, and examples were provided to the research of local initiatives. Ferry companies, generally, were found to have undertaken relatively little training.

Overall, therefore, this remains an area where little progress has been made, and where further work by the Scottish Executive and MACS may be required.

This section has provided an overview of some of the main transport-related policy and practical issues which have been addressed since the publication of the original report in 1998.

The next section will address the findings of the research in relation to each of the main modes of public transport.
SECTION FOUR PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES

This section will deal in some detail with public transport services. In each case, an overview of the policy framework relating to the mode will be explored, followed by a summary of the issues identified in relation to vehicles, services and infrastructure.

BUS AND COACH TRAVEL

This section will set out the findings of the research in relation to bus and coach services.

Organisations involved

Bus services in the UK were deregulated following the Transport Act 1984. The practical effect of this was to introduce competition into bus services in most areas for the first time. Following a period of some uncertainty, where many bus companies either merged, were taken over or went out of business, the last few years have been marked by increased stability in services. Since the mid-1990s, a small number of companies have dominated Scottish bus services. In some areas, such as Edinburgh, there are two large companies in direct competition with each other, operating similar routes, but in most areas, including the other 3 large cities, single companies have by far the largest share of the market. Thus, in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, while one company has an overwhelming market share of in-city services, another company operates most of the rural routes. A similar situation applies in Dundee and Angus. There are also a very large number of small operators, generally in rural areas, but also in urban areas, where many operate as few as one or two timetabled routes. Many also provide school or social work transport services to local authorities under contract (which often has the practical effect of limiting the times of the day when scheduled service can be offered).

Routes have to be registered with the Office of the Traffic Commissioner, and a range of duties apply to this in terms of the provision of timetables and other information. Currently, there is no requirement to specify that a service will be operated by a specific type of vehicle (for example, a low floor bus).

In many parts of Scotland, most, and in some cases, all services are provided under contract to the local authority. Local authorities have the power to subsidise services they deem to be necessary, and where commercial operators would be unable to operate profitably. In some cases, services are subsidised for their entire duration, in other cases, only at weekends or in the evenings. In a small number of cases (for example in Shetland) the local authority has used this contracting approach to specify that low-floor buses should be used on all main route services.

Coach travel takes two main forms. There are a large number of coaches available for hire, some of which also undertake contract work for local authorities. There are also scheduled coach services operated by a smaller number of operators, particularly Citylink, Rapsons and Stagecoach. Many of the scheduled coach services are over quite long distances, and there are services linking to both airports and ferry terminals (such as those at Uig, Ullapool and Scrabster).
The implications of the DDA for bus and coach services

Bus and coach services (although not bus stations) are exempt from Part III of the DDA. Since 1995, a series of changes have been introduced under the provisions of Part V of the Act, designed to make buses more accessible in advance of the final deadlines set in the Act of 2016 for single deck and 2018 for double deck buses. New buses are now governed by the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000, which were developed from advisory standards proposed by DPTAC and published in 1997. These set out the minimum standards which all buses carrying more than 22 passengers have to comply with, including having a low floor and easy access (with standards set for the operation and nature of ramps), and at least one wheelchair space (with standards governing the size and location of this). The specification also covers issues such as the width of passageways, the location bell pushes and the nature of the seats provided. DPTAC has published a standard for small buses in advance of the implementation of regulations in 2005.

Coaches will not be fully compliant until 2020, partly in recognition of the particular technical difficulties posed by the steep entry steps. New regulations will come into place from 2005, which will be similar to those for buses. The Department for Transport has supported a trial of wheelchair accessible coaches on a small number of long distance routes in England in advance of the commencement of the regulations.

It is fair to suggest that there was some level of incredulity among disabled people interviewed as part of this research, and who responded to the postal survey, that changes to the accessibility of bus and coach services should be so protracted. A number noted that Part III comes into force fully in 2004, yet buses would not be fully accessible until 2018 (although there were also many disabled people who do not perceive that current low floor buses actually are accessible) and coaches until 2020. As one respondent, typical of a range, noted:

“I was told by the First Bus Glasgow Depot, that although I had been under the impression that all buses would be low floor and available by 2004, they have a special dispensation to extend to 2012, which I think is a disgrace by that time I would be 81 years old and perhaps not so able to travel anywhere by bus.”

It is also clear from a small number of respondents that there is some level of misunderstanding about the provisions of the DDA both among passengers and service providers. One noted that a bus operator had claimed to them that the DDA did not apply to buses, while others noted being quoted a range of dates by which buses should be fully compliant with the PSVAR. There is also, as suggested by the previous quote, some level of

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29 Two respondents made specific and unfavourable comparisons with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the provisions of which were introduced fully within a matter of months of the legislation being enacted.
misapprehension that, from October 2004, the full implementation of Part III will apply to buses.

**Bus services**

As noted earlier, most bus services in urban areas are provided by commercial operators and are geared to make a profit. In peripheral areas, and in rural areas, most are provided by commercial operators under subsidy-based contracts to local authorities.

One area of consistent criticism of bus operators was routing. This issue was raised in relation to most areas of Scotland, and was also a key feature of a joint consultation undertaken by Edinburgh City Council and a range of equality forums. Although local bus services have to be registered with the Traffic Commissioner, and any amendments notified in advance, there is no stipulation that any consultation should take place with either local interest groups or with disabled people specifically (although the Traffic Commissioner does suggest consulting with local authorities and the police). Typically, companies will provide advance notification of any changes, but, unless the service is subsidised, any alterations are a commercial matter, and, unless there are overriding issues (for example, relating to road safety or congestion) are likely to be agreed. This is a matter of concern for some disabled people who participated in this research. An example (from the Edinburgh Joint Consultation) was the re-routing of service 26 by Lothian Buses, which previously served the City Council offices Waterloo Place.

Allied to this, respondents particularly in Edinburgh but also in parts of Fife, identified some measure of frustration that low floor buses were deployed by two companies competing on a route, while other routes served by the companies remained inaccessible. It was acknowledged that this may be, in part, due to the investments made in road infrastructure to support the introduction of the services.

A further area of concern in relation to changes in timetables was identified by one respondent, who suggested that:

> “Most of the adults I work with have few physical barriers preventing them from using public transport but other factors can make it difficult. There have been several major reorganisations of bus routes and timetables in Edinburgh over the past 3 years. The work that people with learning disabilities have put into learning routes is lost each time this happens and it has proved very confusing for them.”

New buses with more than 22 seats have to conform to access specifications developed under Part V of the DDA in relation to a wide range of aspects such as door widths, ramps, passageways, floor coverings, seats and wheelchair spaces. As noted earlier, small buses and coaches will have to comply from 2005. As will be set out later, by no means all of those with experience of low floor buses are content that the access standards are acceptable, and provide barrier free access. Many wheelchair users remain unable to use buses due to the relatively confined turning area both at the entrance door and in the area of the designated space. In this regard, Fife Council and Fife Independent Disability Network conducted an access trial using a standard low floor bus. Out of ten wheelchair users, half were unable to board the bus or gain access to the designated space. Wheelchair users in two areas expressed
concerns about their safety due to the fact that, if the space is rearward facing, there is no requirement for the wheelchair to be anchored in any way, although a notice in most buses states that brakes should be applied. One interviewee stated clearly that:

“[I] won’t ever use buses until they start clamping. This should be a condition of carriage – people have to be safe.”

Another noted their concern at not being anchored when, for example, a bus goes round a roundabout at speed. One respondent questioned whether the wheelchair user or the bus company would be liable if brakes were not applied and the passenger concerned was injured as a direct result. Related to this, neither wheelchair users nor bus companies identified that drivers routinely ensure that a passenger is settled before moving off.

A number of interviewees in Aberdeen identified that they were unable to use First Aberdeen low floor services due to the positioning of handrails. The layout of low floor buses was also raised as a concern by older people. The provision of at least one space for wheelchair users means that, in most cases, there is now a considerable gap without either handrails or seat backs which, in older buses, can be used to help steady a passenger moving down the bus. As one participant in a group discussion noted:

“All they’ve done is converted the buses and made it much more difficult for elderly and visually impaired people”

The view of many disabled people and older people was that low floor buses are only a partial improvement at best, and in some ways, and for some users, actually offer poorer access.

The rate of purchase of low floor buses appears to have slowed down since 1998. Large parts of the fleets of major companies, such as Arriva, First Group, Travel Dundee, Stagecoach and Lothian Buses had been updated prior to 1998. Most change in the last 5 years has been in the fleets of smaller companies, which are progressively replacing older buses with newer, low floor buses. This process has been greatly assisted by the fact that second hand low floor buses are now coming onto the market (although these still command a premium over other vehicles).

One very small operator (with 4 buses, all low floor and all bought in the last 5 years) identified that their approach had been to identify niche markets not currently served either by larger companies for profit, or under local authority contracts. Much of their current timetable is dedicated to transporting elderly and disabled people from housing areas to shopping malls (with Shopmobility-type provision available), using a virtual door to door service where required.

Operators were virtually unanimous that cost was the main determining factor preventing all fleets from becoming low floor. This represents a slight change since 1998, when there were more concerns both about the technology embedded in the buses and the capacity of the roads infrastructure to cope. This still remains an issue in some areas as one smaller operator noted:

“In many rural areas low floor vehicles would ground regularly and therefore cannot be used without major works being carried out on the roads. (e.g.
Two operators in rural areas questioned the introduction of low floor buses on routes where suitable pavements do not currently exist. A further point identified in Shetland (Shetland Times 26.12.03) is that low floor vehicles are lighter than coach style buses, and there is a concern that these are more susceptible to being blown off the road in severe cross winds. This said, costs are the primary concern for most operators, even those which expressed support for the principle of easy-access vehicles. As one operator noted:

“It's a catch 22, we haven't got the suitable vehicles to do the job, but to buy them on spec doesn't justify the outlay. If we got a help from the government like a grant or subsidy. I remember 25 years ago my dad got a grant for a service bus, the condition was he had to do so many service miles and keep it for a certain time, this was when I was at school. Nothing has been offered since then. If something like this could happen then I am sure not only I would like to upgrade, other operators would as well.”

A large operator identified that a problem for them was the potential cost of replacing older vehicles before they had fully depreciated, hence low-floor buses had to be phased in at a slower rate.

A number also identified that, in their area, most services were provided under contract to the local authority. Two points were made in regard to this. The first was that bus companies were unlikely to invest until the local authorities concerned specify low floor buses in their contract conditions, and secondly, the marginal rates offered by local authorities are perceived to be too low to allow for early replacement of older vehicles. One operator noted:

“All our routes are contracted from Angus Council. If, in future, they require low floor or kneeling vehicles we would tender for, and supply if successful, vehicles of that specification.”

One company, having replaced its fleet with new low floor buses identified that, over the period of operation, very few wheelchair users had used the services, although it acknowledged that access had been greatly improved for other groups of passengers.

For many disabled people, however, the main issue remains that there are large parts of Scotland where there are no low floor buses. As one member of an elderly forum in a rural area noted:

“Is it right that people are still being lifted on and off buses in the 21st century?”
Most rural areas are served by buses with steps, as well as many urban areas, for example in Fife. Very few areas are served by an entirely low-floor fleet. In Shetland, where all main services are low floor, linking routes are provided by stepped mini-buses. In some areas, for example, Aberdeen and Dundee, the fleets of one operator are largely low floor, but some routes remain served by older stepped vehicles. This was a cause of considerable frustration to interviewees and respondents. The Aberdeen group discussion identified that, although most services in the city are served by low floor buses, one is served by a mix of low floor and stepped double deckers. One respondent to the postal survey noted succinctly:

“In Aberdeen City most of the buses are accessible for all disabled people including wheelchair users. Transport in Aberdeenshire does not cater for disabled passengers.”

In most areas with high concentrations of newer buses, a range of services have been designated by their operators as being low floor. This approach has been adopted by, for example, Lothian Buses and Travel Dundee. First Group has further branded a number of these services, for example in the Glasgow, Falkirk and Aberdeen areas, and will wherever possible, use low floor buses on these routes. In some cases, for example in the cities, the introduction of these routes has been accompanied by investment in infrastructure – for example the provision of raised kerbs and boarding points, as well as new bus shelters (see below).

High floor and stepped buses present a wide range of access difficulties for disabled people. Clearly the steps themselves are an insurmountable barrier for many travellers, but there are other issues evident. Most older buses have a central pole in the doorway (which is now no longer standard, with poles at the sides to allow easier, unrestricted access). Several visually impaired travellers identified that such poles can present problems to them as these are not readily identified by guide dogs. As one noted:

“I’ve had situations where the dog has gone one way and I’ve gone the other. It’s a comedy of errors, but I could have fallen back onto the pavement.”

Most older buses do not have either high contrast surfaces, or slip resistant floors, again leading to substantial difficulties for visually impaired travellers. One respondent identified that their dog became distressed on being unable to grip the floor during a longer journey.

One of the main criticisms offered by disabled people was of bus drivers who either do not lower their bus at a stop, or who do not deploy the ramp. Interviewees in Aberdeen and Edinburgh provided examples of drivers refusing to deploy manual ramps. One interviewee suggested that their companion was asked by the driver to deploy the ramp. Another reported that the driver suggested to them that he had been ordered not to leave his cab at any time (even to deploy the ramp) and another refused to touch the ramp because it was “too dirty”. Conversely, a number of interviewees appear never to have had a problem with the deployment of ramps, suggesting that there is some measure of inconsistency.

The deployment of ramps is covered in detail by the Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors, Conductors and Passengers Regulations. These state that:

- You must make a boarding device available when a disabled person wants to get on or off. If you're using a portable ramp, make sure it's positioned
correctly and any safety locks are in place. If you're using a lift, you'll need to check handrails and ensure that other safety devices such as lift roll-off stops are put in place.

- You must also get as close to the kerb as you can and deploy the lift or ramp onto the pavement. If that isn't possible, you should ensure that you have stopped the bus in a position that is safe for the wheelchair user to get off.

Lothian Buses, for example, made it clear that its drivers are instructed to abide by these regulations.

None of the bus companies identified that drivers should lower the bus at every stop, although most suggested that drivers should do so either if asked, or if they believed that a passenger required this. Lothian Buses, for example, noted:

“Drivers are instructed to lower the bus as required for elderly, infirm or parents with small children”.

One company also identified that their drivers will only lower the bus (or deploy the ramp) if the bus stop is suitable for this. The Conduct Regulations (op cit) suggest that:

“You must kneel your bus or get out the folding (or retractable) step if someone asks you to, or if you think they may need it. It may be difficult to tell who might need such assistance to board, so it's much better if you can kneel the bus at each stop. Doing this will help not only disabled people, but also other passengers to get on and off more easily. Remember, if it's quicker for them then it will also help you.”

While the level of discretion afforded the drivers is understandable, a point made by a number of people as part of this research is that many older people and many disabled people are highly unlikely to ask for assistance (for a range of reasons, including fear of becoming enmeshed in an argument if the driver refuses, so as not to draw attention to themselves, or from a perception that this will either inconvenience the passengers or the driver). It was also noted that drivers’ perception of who may or may not require this assistance may be based only on visual perceptions, and are unlikely to take any account of hidden impairments.

A further area of concern for a number of disabled people was the perceived conflict of interest between various categories of bus user. Most bus operators market low floor buses as being accessible to a wide range of people, not only disabled people, including those usually described as “encumbered”. A number of disabled people identified issues which had arisen for them where the designated space was already occupied by passengers with buggies. In one case, the respondent described feeling humiliated when the driver ordered a parent to either dismantle their buggy or get off the bus, while others described discomfort at the way in which drivers handled these types of situations. A small number of respondents also described conflict with other passengers. One wheelchair user suggested that they would rather wait for the next bus than risk a confrontation with other passengers.

Visually impaired travellers raised a number of concerns about current bus services. It was suggested that many buses have small direction indicators, which may be difficult to read. The main concern, however, was that drivers still rely on intending passengers to signal their
intention to board the bus. Some respondents indicate that they routinely try to stop all bus services to ask the driver their destination, but it was suggested that some drivers appear to be antagonised by this. One respondent to the postal survey noted:

“My sight is very poor and I have to ask the driver where the bus is going. This has been met with a sarcastic reply on several occasions.”

Other respondents cited examples of buses simply passing them at bus stops. Another area of concern for visually impaired travellers is that they generally have no way of knowing when they are reaching their stop. A number indicated that they routinely ask the driver to indicate this, but this is generally unreliable. A number suggested that on-bus announcements (similar to those made on some SPT trains – see below – would be more reliable).

Bus stops and shelters

The issue of bus shelters was raised in a number of contexts during this research. Most new bus shelters are provided by specialist advertising companies, which, in effect, rent the space from a local authority in return for the advertising revenue generated by the shelter. There was some criticism of this approach which, in the view of some disabled people means that the needs of advertisers appear to take precedence over travellers’ needs, particularly in terms of providing unhindered sight lines.

Transform Scotland has published a series of pictorial reports about bus stops and shelters (and other issues) in Edinburgh, for example “Life in the Bus Lane” (Transform Scotland, 2001)* which are very critical of, among other things, bus shelter design and maintenance. This issue was also raised by both postal survey respondents, and disabled people interviewed in Paisley, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. Among the criticisms made (echoing those made by Transform Scotland) were that vandalism (particularly scratches in the Perspex) make seeing a bus very difficult, that advertising hoardings can obscure buses until the last minute and that new designs can be very draughty (as there is often a substantial space between the shelter and the pavement to allow for drainage and to prevent litter gathering). There were a number of specific criticisms made by interviewees in Aberdeen about the siting of bus shelters. Example were provided of bus shelters on hill but with no kerb (at the St Nicolas Centre) and of shelters set back from the boarding point, but close to the kerb, meaning that a wheelchair user faces the choice of either reversing out of the shelter as a bus approaches or getting wet (for example in Broad Street and Lang Stracht).
A criticism also voiced by disabled people in a number of areas concerned the fact that, in towns, there are a range of bus stops which buses use. Two particular examples provided to the research were Union Street in Aberdeen, and Burns Square in Dumfries, although other examples were noted, for example in Perth, Falkirk, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Taking the eastern end of Union Street in Aberdeen as an example, buses can arrive at up to four separate stops over a 150 yard span of roadway. Although virtually all the buses using these stops are low floor, some disabled people reported facing particular difficulties with changing buses. The area around the bus stops is part of the main shopping street in the city and is busy at virtually all times of the day. The stops in the area around and opposite St Nicolas Kirk are particularly problematic as these are on a hill. The pavements in this area are wider than average, but still make unhindered movement difficult for those with mobility difficulties or who are wheelchair users. In similar areas of Princes Street, the pavements are much wider following the renovations undertaken in the mid 1990s. The issue in Dumfries is, to an extent similar, in that buses stop in various locations around Burns Square and the general area is quite busy. There is a further complication here (as in other towns) in that some buses stop at alternative locations (including Whitesands), necessitating a journey of around a quarter of a mile (which is slightly uphill).

It was also noted that, in many areas (even within cities), bus stops do not generally have seats. Although newer bus shelters generally do have seats, these are of a tip up design, and are not always easy for older people or people with mobility impairments to use. In peripheral and rural areas, most bus stops consist simply of a signpost and potentially a boarding point. It was noted by one respondent:

“The main problem with buses is standing waiting for them! More seriously, it is more difficult for some people to stand than it is to walk.”

There were also criticism of bus drivers who do not stop at the boarding point (and who may not either deploy the bus ramp or even lower the step), necessitating a higher than necessary step for less mobile passengers. The more general issue of failing to lower the bus or deploy the ramp was identified earlier. There was also criticism of a perceived failure by the police to enforce parking restrictions around bus stops. The Transform Scotland research (identified earlier) demonstrated clearly that many motorists appear to have no regard for the needs of bus drivers in terms of being able to stop adjacent to boarding points. It was suggested by one respondent that, as a matter of course, double yellow lines should be placed in the approach to, and exit from all bus stops on routes served by low floor buses (in order to ensure that buses can access the kerb).
More positively, many disabled people were very positive about the provision of information on bus shelters. This is now common in virtually all areas in Scotland, with timetable information displayed about all services. In some city locations, the number of services means that the display area is quite crowded (and may be difficult to access when the shelter is busy), but despite this, there was virtual unanimity that this was a positive development.

In a small number of locations (for example on some routes in Aberdeen and Glasgow), real time information is provided at bus stops giving the time and number of the next services to arrive.

A system is currently being piloted by Arriva in Yorkshire which offers enhanced information about services using a loudspeaker attached to the bus. There are no pilot sites for this service in Scotland.

**Bus stations**

The number of bus stations in Scotland has declined markedly in the last 20 years. Paralleling this, among the relatively small number which remain, most have been extensively re-built, usually including features which enhance accessibility.

In most rural and smaller urban areas, bus stations per se have been replaced by designated stopping places within town centres. Often these are served by both local and long distance services. In some locations, for example Portree, these are organised broadly into stances, and, although there are no dedicated waiting areas, the general area (in the main square of the town) looks broadly like a small bus station. In other towns, for example Montrose, buses stop at designated locations on a main thoroughfare, with bus shelters and public transport information. In some areas, for example in Dumfries, although there is no bus station per se, there is a small group of stances (at Whitesands, although with no waiting rooms) supported by stopping places (at Burns Square). A variant on this exists in Falkirk, where there is both a bus station and a group of linked stances (in Newmarket Street) serving other destinations. In smaller areas, most buses (both local and longer distance) are served by a single bus stop.

The 1998 report set out a range of bus station related developments, including those at Buchanan Bus Station in Glasgow and at Stirling. Since 1998, the only significant redevelopment undertaken has been at Edinburgh (although the development of McArthur Glen at Livingston also included what is, to all practical purposes, a bus station in all but name).
Edinburgh Bus Station was opened in 2003 following an extended period of redevelopment adjacent to the existing site at St Andrews Square. The bus station has a wide range of accessibility improvements, including lift access from the city centre, easy-access counters, induction loops, designated toilets and a range of public transport information (updated in real time). That said, there has also been criticism of some aspects of the development, for example in terms of the size and location of the signage but in general terms, the bus station represents a good example of accessible modern design. The main difficulty facing disabled people is not the bus station itself, but the fact that most of the buses using the station have high steps.

The “bus station” at Livingston differs from the now common town centre stopping areas in having a dedicated travel centre, and real time vehicle information (although the travel centre was reported to have been closed by First Edinburgh in late 2003).

The 1998 report identified a proposal to redevelop the bus and railway stations at Guild Street in Aberdeen. Although the overall development commenced in 2003, the redevelopment of the bus and rail stations has yet to commence, although it is interesting to note that local disability organisations in the North East are being consulted about the detail of the development.

In terms of existing bus stations, a range of incremental improvement since 1998 were identified, including, for example:

- The installation of ramps
- Improvements to public transport information
- The development of information about surrounding areas and through routes
- The installation of tactile information
- The installation of induction loops

Overall, however, the main difficulty for many disabled people at most bus stations remains the buses rather the bus station per se. Bus station are included within the scope of facilities which will be required to be accessible from October 2004.

### Overview of bus and coach issues

There has been further progress in the introduction of low floor buses, with larger companies progressively implementing new vehicles, although at a slower rate than in the late 1990s, and many smaller companies investing in accessible vehicles for the first time. There remains, however, a substantial area of Scotland in which there are no such buses. Among older and disabled people, there are concerns about the accessibility of low floor buses in terms of both access for wheelchair users, and the difficulties faced by those with mobility impairments or who have problems with grip. Progress in terms of bus-related infrastructure appears to have been steady, with a large number of new bus stops introduced, although there
remain concerns about compromises in terms of accessibility and visibility. With the exception of the new bus station in Edinburgh (which has a wide range of accessibility related features), improvements in bus stations have been incremental.

**RAIL TRAVEL**

This section will set out a range of issues in relation to rail travel.

Prior to the mid 1990s, all services were provided by British Rail, but following deregulation, services have been provided by a range of companies, including Scotrail, which provides all internal services within Scotland.

There is, however, an extensive regulatory framework, part of which encompasses access issues. Section 71b of the Railways Act, as amended by the 2000 Transport Act, places a duty on the Strategic Rail Authority to publish a code of practice which is binding on all train operating companies and Network Rail. This was published, following a period of consultation, in February 2002. All train operating companies, as well as Network Rail, are required to maintain a “Disabled People’s Protection Policy” (DPPP).

“As a condition of their licence, each passenger train operator and station operator, including Railtrack [now Network Rail] in respect of the stations it operates, must establish and comply with a Disabled People’s Protection Policy (DPPP), stating how they will protect the interests of disabled users of their trains and stations. The DPPP must be established within six months of the grant of the licence and must be approved by the Authority. Under the terms of the licence condition, the Authority can also instruct the licence holder to carry out a review of their DPPP.”

This sets out policy and practice on a range of issues, including safety, access arrangements and consultation. The original DPPPs were prepared in the period following deregulation, but are currently in the process of being updated. The Strategic Rail Authority called for draft policies in 2002, and published a review of these in 2003. It is expected that new DPPPs will be published covering all operators within Scotland in the first half of 2004. One of the main problems with the original DPPPs was that these were not reviewed and were not, in effect, “live” documents. The SRA has now made it clear that DPPPs will be subject to annual review and agreement.

DPPPs for Scotrail, both Virgin-owned Companies and Network Rail were provided to the research. The main drawback with each of the DPPPs was that they were not current, and much of the content was either irrelevant, or had been superseded. For example, the Scotrail DPPP supplied in December 2003 is dated June 1996, and contains a considerable number of “planned” improvements, timed for 1996 and 1997. As noted earlier, revised DPPPs are expected to published in the first half of 2004, with annual updates thereafter.

Each is, as might be expected, broadly similar in its coverage and objectives. The objectives for Virgin West Coast are:

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30 “Train and Station Services for Disabled Passengers: A Code of Practice” Strategic Rail Authority
31 Edited from the original
• To undertake a comprehensive review of facilities
• To develop a chain of care
• To continue development and use the disabled persons reporting system to allow greater flexibility and choice
• To improve staff awareness of disability, and develop staff abilities
• To develop improved contacts with disability organisations
• To develop a customer satisfaction survey
• To consult on the policy with relevant organisations

Although structured differently, the objectives within the Scotrail DPPP are very similar in content. Those for Network Rail are, as might be expected, more specifically geared towards station facilities, but the basic principles are, again, quite similar. It is interesting to note that Network Rail has taken a mainstreaming approach, suggesting that its intention is to ensure that work to meet the needs of disabled travellers is embedded in all the work of the company, and integrated into the company’s overall vision.

It is also worth noting that each of the DPPPs makes explicit reference to working in partnership with either Network Rail, or with other train operating companies, in order to ensure that services are transparent and seamless. A commitment within the Virgin West Coast DPPP is interesting in that regard. It states that:

"Where there is a shared financial responsibility, Inter-City West Coast Limited will act in the interests of customers with disability, as if it were the facility owner”.

The implications of the DDA for rail services

The DDA has placed a range of responsibilities on both train and station operators. Since 1996, station operators have been covered by the general provisions of Part III of the act, which placed an obligation on operators not to discriminate in terms of the provision of a service to disabled people. Since 1999, again in common with other service providers, station operators have had to make “reasonable adjustments” to overcome lack of access. The final implementation of Part III will take place in October 2004, by which time station operators will have an obligation to provide alternative means of access. This obligation applies even where the operator of the station is not the owner, and the onus is on the operator to reach an agreement with the owner on, for example, a schedule of works and payment arrangements.

Transport vehicles, including trains, are exempt from Part III of the DDA, but fall within Part V, specifically that new trains brought into service after 31st December 1998 have to comply with the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (first promulgated in 1998, and variously amended since). As will be noted in more detail later, the SRA has, within the context of its 2002 Code Of Practice, implemented a regime whereby any refurbishment of pre-1999 stock should also be undertaken to comply, wherever possible, with the Regulations.

Organisations involved

Services in Scotland are provided by four companies. The vast majority of services are provided by Scotrail, part of the National Express Group. Long-distance services are
provided by GNER (on the east coast line to and from both Edinburgh and Glasgow, as well as to Inverness and Aberdeen), Virgin West Coast (on the west coast main line from Glasgow) and Virgin Cross Country (from Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow on east and west coast main lines to Birmingham and south west England).

Services in the former Strathclyde are provided by Scotrail under contract to Strathclyde Passenger Transport, although this is currently the subject of a review established by the Scottish Executive. SPT also operates the Glasgow underground system.

**Assistance to disabled people**

A national agreement exists which binds all train operating companies and Network Rail to providing a seamless and transparent service to disabled people. There is a national booking service for disabled people (with a range of accessibility enhancements). Any needs notified to this service are distributed to all of the operators likely to have contact with the disabled person over their journey (including any train operating companies and station staff). In the view of contributors to this research, this approach tends to work patchily. Most disabled people have experience of some aspect of assistance not being delivered either on time or at all, but, against this, it is clear that many journeys proceed with no difficulties at all.

**Rail vehicles**

As noted earlier, rail vehicles brought into service since 1999 are covered by a detailed series of design-based regulations. The SRA has made it clear that its objective is that all vehicles should, in time, comply with best practice standards and has made it clear in its code of practice that any replacement or refurbishment of pre-1999 stock should be undertaken with a view to ensuring compliance with the Rail Vehicle Access Regulations, or to seek a dispensation where this is not possible. The SRA has set out a wide range of types of refurbishment it believes should be covered, many of which are of key relevance to disabled people, including doors, floors, contrasting surfaces, audio and visual display systems, spaces for wheelchair users and toilets. By this means, the SRA hopes to ensure that all stock meets or surpasses the 1998 Regulations (as amended) even where operators do not purchase or lease new stock.

Scotrail, SPT and Virgin have made considerable investments in their fleets over the last 5 years, and GNER is in the process of so doing, with the cumulative effect that access has been improved in a number of key respects. As noted in the 1998 report, slam door trains are no longer used on any Scottish service and the majority of vehicles are now relatively new.
Scotrail diesel services outside Strathclyde rely on four main types of vehicle. Short haul commuter services are operated largely using Class 150 sets (comprising two or four carriages). These have centrally located electric doors controlled by the passenger, but centrally locked. There are no visual announcements, although services do have public address systems (although a common complaint from visually impaired travellers is that they are seldom actually used). Toilets have manual locking doors and are relatively small. There are no dedicated spaces for wheelchair users per se, although on all vehicles there is a vacant area where a wheelchair can be placed, and prominently displayed signs suggesting that travellers give up seats to elderly or disabled people.

There are a relatively small number of Class 156 vehicles in use. These are designed for longer distance commuting (for example to and from Dumfries), although they are also used in other areas. Class 156 vehicles have end-carriage located electric doors. The bulk of seats are in sets of four around tables. There is a single space in each carriage identified as for wheelchair users, although there are no restraints provided. As with Class 150 vehicles, toilets are small. There are no visual announcements, and each has a public address system. Longer distance services are provided either by Class 158 or Class 170 services. Scotrail intends that longer distance express services will be entirely based around Class 170 vehicles from late 2004. In the meantime, on all routes, services may be operated by either type. This is an issue for some disabled people, as there is generally no way of telling which type of vehicle will operate on any service. Class 158 vehicles have end-located electrically controlled doors, with seating in a mixture of two abreast and table configurations. Express Class 158 services retain a small first class section. There is a single space reserved for wheelchair users in each vehicle. There was a measure of criticism of this from wheelchair users, due to the fact that luggage space on these services is generally very small, and passengers joining at an intermediate station may find the allocated space “piled high” with luggage. This was identified as a particular issue on Perth-Inverness and Inverness-Aberdeen services. These vehicles do not have visual announcements, although each has a public address system.

Class 170 services generally comprise sets of 3 or 6 vehicles. Unusually, these are self contained, and movement is not possible between the front and rear sets. This is an issue identified by a small number of disabled people in terms of being able to seek assistance, for example with alighting. Each Class 170 set has a single large toilet, which is generally accessible for wheelchair users, and which has electronically operated doors. There was a small amount of criticism of the button system, which, it was suggested could be more effectively spaced, but generally, disabled people interviewed were positive about the toilet provision.

Wheelchair users were generally less positive about the location of the space allocated (although in more general terms, the size of the space was viewed positively. Visually impaired travellers also use this area (as it provides a good amount of space for a guide dog to rest with less danger of being stood on). As one noted, however:
“It is wrong to have to share space with bicycles and luggage just because you’re visually impaired”.

All Class 170 services have a visual display system and a public address system.

Electric services in the SPT area follow a similar pattern, with all stock having electrically operated doors which are accessible by wheelchair users with the assistance of a ramp. Generally, there is one “wheelchair” space in each unit (generally made up of three carriages, rather than 2 with local diesel operation). Again, as with diesel services, all have public address systems. It is interesting to note that some services, for example those to Gourock, have an automatic public address system, which play a recorded announcement as the train is approaching a station. These were viewed as being particularly helpful to visually impaired passengers. One visually impaired respondent (who travels by rail a great deal) identified that this has been the single most important development in rail travel in meeting their needs as it removes the uncertainty of whether or not an announcement will be made, and similarly, does not require them to seek out a member of the train crew to specify that they may require assistance. One visually impaired passenger identified that, in their view, while the on-train announcements (on the Class 334 services) were a very positive development, the door closing signal was too quiet, and could be missed.

GNER long distance services are operated either by “HST” or “225” sets. The former serve Aberdeen, Dundee and Inverness, and were particularly strongly criticised by Aberdeen-based passengers due to difficulties in general access and considerable problems faced by people with mobility difficulties and wheelchair users in accessing the toilets. Two interviewees based in Aberdeen described having to travel to London on “HST” services without being able to access the toilet for more than 8 hours. This issue is currently being addressed by GNER which has purchased carriages previously used by Virgin and, as part of a refurbishment, has redesigned the interior to allow for a fully accessible toilet and provision for two wheelchair users to travel together. These carriages are being introduced into all HST sets, and will be located in the centre of the train to allow for easy access to catering (with previously designated spaces being close to the guard’s office at the end of the train) and to ensure ease of exit at stations with short platforms (such as Stonehaven and stations on the Perth-Inverness section).

GNER is embarking on a process of refurbishing all of its existing carriages on “225” services to a new standard “Mallard”. This incorporates much better access arrangements, with, for example, accessible toilets and improved spaces for wheelchair users and visually impaired passengers. As of January 2004, a small number of Mallard carriages were entering service between Edinburgh and London, and it is expected that these will be progressively rolled out to all services in due course.

Virgin cross country services are now largely operated by Voyager trains, comprising 5 coaches. These were viewed positively by most disabled people interviewed, with easier access than the previous “125” services, and more accessible toilet provision.
Disabled people interviewed made a range of general criticisms about aspects of railway carriage design, which apply to most, and in some cases all of the types of vehicles set out above. Wheelchair users were consistently critical of the size and location of the space allocated, as noted, even in newer vehicles. The lack of enforcement by train staff of maintaining these are clear areas was also criticised. In a small number of vehicles, call buttons are available to summon assistance, but this is not yet universal and, although identified as an aspect of good practice, there was some criticism that this had not been more widely adopted, with older carriages being retro-fitted with such systems. In virtually all services, only one space is allocated for wheelchair users, and there was criticism (as there was in the original research) of this, with a number of interviewees (both wheelchair users and visually impaired people using guide dogs) identifying that they had to sit separately from others in their party.

Visually impaired interviewees were generally critical of train staff for failing to use public address systems, and for the generally poor quality of these on some services (although Scotrail’s DPPP notes that all staff “have been reminded of the need to make clear, consistent announcements”). Automatic announcements on SPT services, for example to Gourock were identified as generally very clear, but those on, for example, suburban services around Edinburgh were described as often difficult to hear. Although more modern toilets in Class 170 and Voyager vehicles were generally well received, most disabled people identified that they were reluctant to use the toilets at all on other services, due to poor design features. Even on newer services, some disabled people identified that they found the possibility of falling due to the movement of the train to be “too much of a risk” and hence precluded their using the toilets at all.

**Railway stations**

There are a total of 340 railway stations in Scotland. Of these, 337 are managed by Scotrail, with, of the remainder, two, Edinburgh Waverley and Glasgow Central, being managed at strategic level by Network Rail, and Prestwick Airport being managed by the airport’s operator.

The number of stations is slowly growing, following a sharp decline up to the 1960s. A new station was opened at Edinburgh Park in late 2003, following the opening of a new line to Newcraighall in 2002. New rail links are proposed for Edinburgh and Glasgow airports, and a feasibility study is currently underway to re-open the Stirling – Alloa railway line, with the possibility of a further extension to Dunfermline. Consideration is also being given to the reopening of part of the rail link between Edinburgh and the Borders.
New stations in the last 10-15 years have followed a largely similar pattern. Typically, new stations are unstaffed, in out of town (or peripheral) locations, have CCTV and telephones, with access to opposite platforms being via an overbridge with generally long access ramps. The main exception to this is Edinburgh Park which has an overbridge reached via a lift. Both Scotrail and Network Rail have also made substantial investments in existing stations, including the refurbishment of both Edinburgh Waverley and Glasgow Central stations (with a further major refurbishment proposed for the former) by Network Rail, and a series of investments by Scotrail.

A total of 194 stations are entirely unstaffed (57%). With the exception of larger stations, and some stations within the SPT area, many of the others are staffed only on a part time basis (usually from the first service until around 10am, or in some areas until early afternoon). Scotrail now publishes information on the number of stations with a telephone, and where there is no telephone, the location of the closest. Surprisingly few stations actually have a telephone at the station (and even where there is a telephone, there is no guarantee that this will be in an accessible location). SPT has taken a more proactive approach in some locations, with signs making it clear that, where no telephone exists, and where a traveller requires to contact a relative or a taxi firm, this can be done via SPT controllers.

Among those stations with a ticket office, 122 have some form of level access from the street, or from one platform (although this does not necessarily mean that a disabled person travelling independently would be able to gain access). Only 24 booking offices currently are reached via steps. In all cases, Scotrail is clear that, where an individual cannot gain access to a ticket office, they would be able to purchase a ticket on the train, or at their destination, on the same terms as would apply if they had purchased the ticket at their point of origin.
There are, however, a range of issues which can be identified with these basic statistics. For example, in a small number of cases, even though the booking office is accessible, the platforms may not be accessible to all disabled people. A good example of this is Partick, where the booking office is on ground level, but the platforms are reached via two escalators. Similarly, among the stations with ramped access to the booking office, these ramps may be too steep for users of non-powered wheelchairs. An example of this identified by an interviewee is Burntisland, where the ramp access to the booking office (and southbound platform) is very steep. One respondent raised the issue of Markinch station, which has stepped access to both platforms. There, tracks exist to both platforms which would allow level access, but these are not maintained by Scotrail, and passengers can no longer use these. Passengers with limited mobility are now required to use either Kirkcaldy or Thornton stations, both of which also have accessibility issues.

Respondents to the previous research criticised the standards used by Scotrail to assess whether or not a station was accessible to wheelchair users. The new standard applied has reduced the number of apparently accessible stations considerably. Data provided by Scotrail suggests that only 69 stations are accessible to wheelchair users without assistance (from a companion / member of staff, or by using a powered wheelchair). In some cases, stations now described as “inaccessible” are largely accessible. A good example of this is Aberdeen, where only one platform is entirely inaccessible (being reached by a footbridge), with the remaining 6 having entirely level access. In some cases, although both platforms are themselves accessible, there is no viable route between them. A good example of this (identified by interviewees) is Dumfries, where both platforms (and the ticket office) are entirely level, but the route between the platforms requires a walk of around 250m or crossing a steep-stepped overbridge. A similar example is provided at Linlithgow (where there is an underpass with steps). The view of some interviewees was that such stations should not be described as accessible.

There are a range of examples of stations where one or other platform is accessible, and where alternative arrangements have to be made for outward or return travel. Examples provided by interviewees included Montrose (where northbound travellers are required to travel south to Arbroath to be able to cross the line) and the well-publicised case of Lockerbie, where travellers have to cross the line at Carlisle. A point made in both cases, is that schedules are rarely designed to meet the needs of travellers in these situations, and that, in some cases, even relatively short journeys may require a substantial wait. One respondent to the postal survey noted:

“Dalmeny station is not accessible south bound, so the advice given is to travel to Inverkeithing then come back towards Edinburgh, or to go in to Edinburgh and come out again if returning from Fife. It’s frustrating having a station so close and not being able to use it.”

In rural areas, Scotrail and GNER generally use the same platform for outward and return services. Examples of this include most stations on the Perth – Inverness and on the Inverness – Aberdeen line. At Aviemore, for example, both south and northbound services typically use the same platform (which is accessible and adjacent both to the toilets and booking office, as
well as the car park). A point made by several disabled people interviewed in Badenoch and Strathspey, however, is that there is no guarantee that services will use the same platform, and each described situations where they had been forced to alight on the opposite, inaccessible platform. If the disabled person is travelling independently, this was identified as a particular problem, as there is no viable route to return to the car park without assistance. (A further issue identified here is that, although Aviemore station is staffed, staff shortages mean that, often at short notice, there may be no assistance available. One disabled person reported being told, in such a situation, to stay on the train to Inverness and return via another service.)

A number of interviewees identified that these uncertainties contribute to a general anxiety about travelling by train, which, in their view, could be readily addressed were a consistent and guaranteed service to be provided. It is worth noting that this was also identified as a cause of frustration to train operating companies, as they have no direct control over the platform a train is allocated to, and that, to accommodate late running or engineering works, changes to “normal” allocations can be made by Network Rail at very short notice.

An issue was raised by one respondent who noted that they had travelled to Stirling using a GNER service, and were unable to get assistance from Scotrail staff. Both companies, however, make it clear that this should not happen, and that any disabled passenger should receive assistance in these circumstances. GNER also noted that it was in the process of specifying on-train ramps (similar to those carried by Scotrail) for HST – based services to ensure that passengers would be able to receive appropriate levels of assistance at both staffed and unstaffed stations. It is worth noting that a small number of respondents with reduced mobility and wheelchair users identified the carrying of ramps on Scotrail trains as an aspect of good practice, or, in some cases, as the most positive change to take place in the last five years. Only one respondent provided an example where a ramp was found to be missing, but in this instance, the train remained in the station until a ramp was sourced from a train stopping at another platform.

A number of respondents noted that, where ramps are not used, access to the train is in some cases via two steps, one of which is quite narrow. A further issue identified by some respondents was that some stations are sited on a curve. This is particularly an issue for commuter-type trains, which have doors in the middle of carriages (for example, Class 150s). In this case, the gap between the platform and the train may be large. One example was provided of an older person who had fallen between a train and the platform at Burntisland station, having missed their footing on the train step.

As noted in the introduction, Edinburgh Waverley was, throughout the research, subject to the most sustained criticism perhaps of any aspect of Scotland’s transport infrastructure.
Although each of the station’s platforms have either flat or lift-based access, a range of issues were identified which preclude many disabled people from using services within the station. Among the points identified were:

- Access is via either of two steep ramps, identified by Network Rail with a “wheelchair” symbol as being an exit route, but, in the view of several disabled people interviewed, the ramps are too steep even for users of powered wheelchairs to use safely.
- For many disabled people, the only effective means of exit is by using a taxi (at extra cost) but this was also the subject of much criticism (from interviewees in a wide range of locations) due to the presence of large speed-reducing humps, which, even when driven over slowly, were a cause of considerable concern due to the possibility of injury.
- The counters are all at a high level.
- The alternative station (Haymarket) is accessible to only one platform.

One wheelchair user described using the ramp access at Waverley station in these terms:

“Try pushing your own weight in a wheelbarrow up an 11% slope. Then see whether you can get back down again without it all tipping out”.

A small number of general criticisms were made by visually impaired and other travellers. It was identified that Network Rail no longer use “front” and “rear” train designations on destination boards. Previously, where two services shared a platform, each would be shown with that platform number, but now, the “rear” service is shown without a platform number until the “front” service leaves. This means that travellers may have as little as 4 minutes to find and reach the platform. This was identified as a particular difficulty for people with limited mobility (although it is recognised that station staff can provide assistance, in the concourse of either Waverley or Glasgow Central, staff may be difficult to find, and many less mobile travellers would be reluctant to venture into such a busy area).

**Glasgow Underground**

Glasgow Underground is, as noted earlier, operated by SPT. The service consists of one line (and inner and outer circle) serving the city centre, west end and immediate southside. At a small number of locations (for example, Buchanan Street, St Enoch and Partick), the service links with either Scotrail or bus services. The system was built more than 100 years ago, and faces very considerable constraints in terms of sites, station layouts and vehicle sizes. As noted in the 1998 report, SPT has instituted a range of initiatives designed to make the system accessible to as wide a range of disabled people as possible, but there remains no prospect of developing access for wheelchair users (as now exists on the Jubilee line in London).

**Overview of rail issues**

It is clear from the research that considerable improvements have been made in the accessibility of trains since the previous report in 1998. The development of the RVAR, and their introduction has led to considerable improvements in, for example, toilet provision, signage, announcement and tactile surfaces, and recent refurbishments mean that, for the first
time, two wheelchair users can travel together on a service. The SRA has also made it clear that pre-1999 rolling stock, when being refurbished, should be brought to full compliance with the RVAR, ensuring that progress in achieving an accessible fleet will be faster than might otherwise be the case. The carrying of on train ramps, common since 1998, was identified as an example of good practice. There still remain some areas of concern for disabled people, for example relating to the lack of announcements and the lack of call buttons, the fact that spaces reserved for wheelchair users are often filled with luggage and the fact that, in rural areas, trains can be diverted at short notice to inaccessible platforms for operational reasons. The main areas of concern, however, remain with the accessibility of Scotland’s stations. Although much of the criticism in this research was of Edinburgh Waverley, a huge number of stations remain inaccessible and train operating companies are clear that a significant proportion of these could never be made accessible for practical reasons.

AIR TRAVEL

Air travel in the UK is entirely operated by private sector companies. With the exception of air ambulance services and some services within Shetland, none within Scotland are contracted to, or operated on behalf of public sector organisations. Air services are operated on the basis either that they are scheduled, or chartered. Within Scotland, it is unlikely that many chartered services would operate, although there are, clearly, a substantial number from Scotland to holiday destinations.

The implications of the DDA for air travel

Aircraft and airline operators are not covered by the DDA. The reason for this (provided by DPTAC) was that the industry operates on an international basis, and it was considered more effective to agree standards on this basis, rather than seek to develop standards for the UK only, which would have little effect on the vast number of foreign-based carriers operating here. A code of practice at an EU level has recently been introduced, and it is expected that there may be legislation to support this in the future. In the UK, the Department for Transport published a voluntary code of practice in 2003, and DPTAC has published guidance for disabled people intending to travel by air. It is interesting to note that, although the DDA does not apply to aircraft, DPTAC completed a consultation on aircraft toilets in October 2003 and hopes to publish guidance in 2004.

Airports, and booking and other services are covered by the DDA, and will be required to conform to Part III from October 2004 in common with other infrastructure facilities.

Organisations involved

Scheduled services within Scotland are now largely operated by Loganair (a franchise partner of British Airways), with a small number of services operated by other carriers such as BMI.

Services from Scotland are operated by a wide range of carriers, including British Airways, BMI and a range of national airlines, such as Air France and Lufthansa. Increasingly, many services to UK and international destinations are being operated by budget airlines such as Ryanair and Easyjet.

Within Scotland, airports are largely operated by two companies. Scottish Airports Ltd owns and operates Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen airports. Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd (a state owned company) operates most (although not all) airports in the north of Scotland. A small number are operated by local authorities directly (such as in Orkney and Shetland) or by a company associated with a local authority (as at Dundee). Prestwick airport (and associated railway station) are operated by a private company.

Ground services (including check in, baggage handling and passenger loading) are provided either by the airline itself (as in the case of British Airways and Loganair), or by a ground handling agent, of which Servisair is perhaps the best known. This situation is complicated further by the fact that many airport based services are subcontracted at larger airports, including the provision of assistance to disabled people. At various points in their journey, disabled people may be reliant on services provided by the airline, ground handling agent and the airport operator, or a subcontractor of any or all of these. In reality, in most cases, the airline (with whom the disabled person has a contract) will be responsible for ensuring that ancillary services are provided as required. British Airways will, for example, with at least one day’s notice, ensure that a wheelchair can be made available at any airport it serves.

In all cases, airlines require that disabled people intending to travel provide them with prior warning in relation to their needs. Some, including British Airways, make it clear that, where needs are not notified in advance, and they cannot be met satisfactorily, carriage will be refused. In the view of some respondents, this approach has improved over the last five years, with a view that there is a greater level of understanding of key issues among booking staff. It was noted that larger airlines (and Loganair, through its franchise with British Airways) have access to specialist staff who can both provide advice and ensure that appropriate arrangements are made. Although these arrangements were generally in place at the time of the previous research, it is likely that, with the growth of online information, that passengers are more aware of their availability. One respondent to the postal survey noted, however:

"Airports offer assistance if arranged in advance of travel, but this is difficult to arrange if the ticket has been booked on the internet by a relative or friend or on the behalf of a partially sighted traveller."

With notice, assistance is, generally speaking, available to anyone who requires it. Most airlines will provide a “meet and greet” type service for disabled people, with assistance geared towards specific needs. As with other modes of transport, the need to arrange assistance was criticised by a small number of respondents, for example:
“[We should be able to travel] without having to arrange access to buses, trains and aeroplanes. A disabled person should have the ability to travel independently without restrictions. Disabled people do not want a special kind of service.”

An area of concern raised by a small number of respondents was the approach taken by airport or airline staff to seeking assistance when disabled people travel independently, but with friends. One visually impaired traveller was refused assistance at a London airport because they were travelling with friends, the member of staff suggesting that they were “accompanied” and were not, therefore, eligible for assistance.

**Aeroplanes**

Traditionally, air travel has been the most problematic for many groups of disabled people. This is both in the context of access difficulties, and the fact that many disabled people (reiterated by this research) would not countenance flying due to a lack of confidence that their needs might be met. This includes disabled people who would otherwise be able to access the aircraft, for example visually impaired people. That said, a substantial number of disabled people do fly, and a number of those involved in this research travel by air on a regular basis.

There are a number of inherent access difficulties involved in aircraft design which, even with specialised assistance, make travel impossible for some groups of disabled people. The main difficulties are the width of the gangways, toilets and the basic seating arrangements. On wide-bodied long-haul jets, such as the Boeing 747 and 777, it is possible to offer disabled people access to a small wheelchair to reach their seat, and to move around within the aircraft. Similarly, toilets are, although still very small by, for example, modern railway standards, more accessible, with handrails being provided\(^{34}\). The situation within Scotland is, however, much more problematic.

Longer distance services offered by Loganair are provided by Saab 340 aircraft. These aircraft seat 34 passengers in a 2+1 configuration. Although the gangway is narrow, and the cabin has a relatively low ceiling, the front seats offer a reasonable amount of room, and passengers who regularly fly from Shetland identified that Loganair staff are typically very flexible in their approach to carrying people with limited mobility. The toilet compartment is very small, although the flight time (assuming no diversions) is unlikely to exceed 1 hr 30 minutes. The other aircraft operated by Loganair (Twin Otters and Islanders) are much smaller still, and offer limited access. Orkney Islands Council noted:

“*A step is provided to assist elderly people to board the plane. It would be almost impossible for a severely disabled person to board an Islander plane.*”

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\(^{34}\) As noted earlier, DPTAC intends to consult during 2004 on the development of a standard for aircraft toilets.
The other main difficulty with access to aircraft operating from Scottish airports is in terms of boarding and disembarking. Some flights at major airports embark via a walkway which stretches from the departure lounge to the aircraft itself (an airbridge). Internal Scottish flights, however, which use small aircraft, tend not to embark in this way. Passengers generally embark using a set of steps which are integral to the aircraft. This is also the means used at smaller airports, including all of those in the Highlands and Islands. These present a number of difficulties for people with reduced mobility. The steps generally are quite narrow, and steep. One difficulty, noted by a small number of respondents is that some Scottish airports are quite exposed (for example Sumburgh and Stornoway), and passengers can, therefore, be exposed to quite strong winds while disembarking. It is also worth noting that this is also the means of embarkation typically used by low-cost airlines at all times, even though the aircraft used (for example, Boeing 737s) can be accommodated at an airbridge.

In virtually all except the very smallest airports, passengers have the option of being transferred to the aircraft using a mechanical lift. The experiences of disabled people, as reflected in this research, are somewhat mixed. In some cases, respondents viewed this as a very straightforward procedure, others, however, were concerned about their own safety. One also described the “indignity” of being transferred into the aeroplane. Another noted that:

“It would be much better if I could remain in my own wheelchair and clamp down, rather than being man-handled and uncomfortable in another seat.”

This was reiterated by another respondent who suggested that:

“In today's world you should be able to access the plane, be able to be clamped in place in your wheelchair, and be able to exit in the same manner.”

Only one airport operator (Dundee Airport) suggested that people with mobility impairments would be unable to board the services currently offered:

“Due to the rules laid down by the present airline they currently only accept passengers who are able to negotiate the aircraft steps unaided.”

This is re-iterated by the airline concerned (Scot Airways) which states the following:

“Wheelchair assistance will be available to and from the aircraft. Assistance will also be provided to climb the stairs on the aircraft, but on all flights the passenger can not be carried or lifted on board, due to the width of the stairs, and must be able to 'walk on' to the aircraft with assistance.”  

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35 From the Scot Airways website, current January 2004.
One of the key determining factors in the experiences of disabled people appears to be the approach and understanding of the staff providing the assistance.

A long-standing issue for wheelchair users is the difficulties many seem to face in airlines refusing to transport powered wheelchairs. A number of respondents identified inconsistencies, where, in their view, their wheelchair had conformed to current acceptable standards, but where the airline seemed unaware of this, or unwilling to investigate the matter further. Both British Airways and Loganair, for example, make it clear that wet cell batteries are restricted and will not be carried, but respondents provided examples of cases where airlines (via telesales operators) had claimed that all powered wheelchairs would not be carried. As Loganair makes clear, however:

"Battery (non-spill) operated wheelchairs can be accepted and will be carried as checked baggage."

Visually impaired passengers can travel with their guide dog in the cabin, and the experiences of respondents to this research appear to have been generally positive. A number noted that the dog may not have been entirely happy or comfortable, either throughout or at specific times in the flight due to a variety of factors which included changes in cabin pressure, the steeply inclining floor and the relatively cramped space. Overall however, assistance from airline staff was viewed very positively by visually impaired passengers. A small number identified that they had been reassured by cabin crew providing them with a personal briefing about safety procedures. It is also worth noting that some airlines have also introduced a signed version of their in-flight safety video.

A point made by a small number of respondents related to the fact that disabled people cannot, in many cases, use those seats with the most leg room, in which they might be more comfortable. This is generally because such seats are adjacent to emergency exits. It is worth noting, however, that some respondents suggested that they had been accommodated in seats with extra legroom in areas away from emergency exits, for example on Saab 340 and Boeing 737 aircraft.

**Airports**

There have been very significant improvements at a number of airports since 1998. The original report identified improvements at Glasgow, and then forthcoming improvements at Edinburgh, which have since been completed. The changes at Edinburgh have increased the number of gates where airbridges can be used, as well as developing both new check-in and arrival and departure facilities. Since 1998, there have been additional improvements undertaken at Glasgow, including the development of a new car park with direct level access to the terminal building. Work is also underway to develop new car parking at Edinburgh.

Since 1998, new airport buildings have been completed by Highlands and Islands Airport Ltd at Stornoway and Kirkwall. These have been built to a similar design, which offers flat access to check-in, departure and boarding gates, as well as flat access at arrival. At both airports, access to aircraft is available using mechanical lifts.

A range of other improvements have been carried out by operators over the last 5 years, including the installation of new toilets at Wick and Islay, and improved signage at Inverness.
Access issues remain at very small airports in Orkney and Shetland, largely in boarding aircraft. In both locations, facilities are described as rudimentary, although it is worth noting that accessible toilets have been installed at all airports in Orkney, and all buildings are accessible at least via a ramp. There are no ticket issues facilities, and check in may be undertaken by aircrew rather than ground staff (although there are always ground staff available for safety reasons).

As with ferry terminals (see below), there remain a range of issues with access to airports using public transport. In many areas, there are no low floor buses (or limited services) and few accessible taxis. Only Prestwick Airport is directly accessible by rail, although proposals exist for direct links to both Edinburgh and Glasgow, and for a transfer system between Dyce station and Aberdeen Airport. It is interesting to note that, following the opening of the Edinburgh Park railway station, Lothian Buses now operates a direct service from Edinburgh Airport to the station (although as at January 2004, most of the buses used on the route were older high floor double deckers).

**Overview of issues for air travel**

Although air travel remains arguably to the most problematic of all forms of public transport in terms of access, there have been a range of improvements in the last 5 years. Although there have been few improvements to aircraft per se, it appears that the overall package of assistance provided by airlines is now meeting the needs of a very large number of disabled people. That said, it is clear that many disabled people would not countenance flying, even though their needs would be likely to be met satisfactorily. It is interesting to note that, even though aircraft are exempt from the DDA, the Department for Transport and DPTAC have developed policies designed to improve access for disabled people. There have been considerable access improvements at a number of Scotland’s airports, including new terminal buildings at two airports in the islands, and a range of incremental improvements elsewhere. With the exception of small airports in Orkney and Shetland, there appear to be few outstanding accessibility issues at Scottish airports.

**SEA TRAVEL**

Ferries operate both within Scotland and on routes to Ireland, Belgium and to Scandinavia and the Faroe Islands. The main routes within Scotland are those on the Clyde coast, to the inner and outer Hebrides and to Orkney and Shetland. The range of ships involved is quite considerable. The length of crossing varies from a few minutes to around 14 hours (in the case of Aberdeen to Lerwick) and 17½ from Rosyth to Zeebrugge. In some cases, there are alternatives to ferry crossings (for example by air from the Western Isles, Islay, Tiree and both to and from, and within both the Orkney and Shetland Islands, and in some cases, by road in Western Scotland), but in many cases, there are no alternatives (for example to Arran or Jura).

**The implications of the DDA for sea travel**

The position of ferry services in relation to the DDA is similar to that of air services. From October 2004, passenger terminals and other facilities have to be accessible, however, the
situation with ferries is less clear. At present, ferries are not within the scope of the Act, although in November 2000 DPTAC, following a period of consultation, published a good practice guide in relation to the accessibility of larger ships and infrastructure. DPTAC is understood to be currently reviewing the implementation of this guidance in order to advise the Department of Transport whether further measures are necessary. In the event, as will be noted later, a significant number of new ships have been ordered for use within and from Scotland in the period since 2000, each of which (as reported by the companies concerned) includes significant access improvements for disabled people.

Organisations involved

Ferry services within Scotland are provided by a mix of private companies, public companies and companies controlled by local authorities. CalMac, which operates the largest number of services is currently wholly owned by the Scottish Executive, and is a partner in Northlink Ferries, a new company established to operate routes to Orkney and Shetland. A small number of local authorities (including Orkney, Shetland and Highland) operate ferry services, either directly or through associated companies. There are also a small number of private companies operating services, including Western Ferries. Services from Scotland are provided by large UK or foreign owned companies. Services from Rosyth, for example, are operated by Superfast Ltd, a Greek Company. Services to Scandinavia and the Faroe Isles are operated by the Smyril Line.

Assistance to disabled people

In general terms, ferry companies ask passenger to make them aware of any particular needs in relation to access, although this is not a condition of carriage (as with some airlines). The extent to which prior notification is required varies depending on the way in which the vessel is boarded. For example, Western Ferries vessels can only be boarded via the car deck, and, in this case, the company does not see notification as necessary (although, as with other companies, assistance will be made available if required).

Two companies identified that they had made specific improvements to the provision of information to disabled people. Both Calmac and Western Ferries identified signage specifically as an area which had been improved. In the former case, the company reported that it has installed electronic signage in unstaffed locations. CalMac also noted that it had improved the readability of its printed information to address the needs of disabled people.

Ferries

Broadly, ferries (for the purposes of this report) can be broken into three main groups. The first is passenger only ferries. There are relatively few of these operating in Scotland. The second is vehicle ferries where passengers can travel in their vehicle. These represent the largest number of ferries operating within Scotland. The third is vehicle ferries where passengers must leave their vehicles for the crossing. These include the longer crossings to the Western Isles and to Orkney and Shetland. There are also a small number of overnight crossings where cabins are available.
In terms of securing access for disabled people, ferries present a number of key difficulties, some of which are now being overcome very successfully. Much of Scotland’s ferry fleet dates from the 1960s and 1970s, when, in common with other forms of transport, accessibility was rarely considered. The consequence of this was that, at the time of the 1998 research, it was largely only those ferries where passengers could remain in their cars which were reasonably accessible. The main areas of difficulty identified include accessing the ship other than via the car deck (including difficulties caused by rising and falling tides), the steepness of gangways, the access problems caused by the need for watertight doors (which require passengers to be able to negotiate a step of around 10-12 inches) and, in many cases, the fact that there was no effective means of getting from the car to passenger decks, other than by steep stairs. In some cases, for example the former P&O service from Aberdeen to Lerwick, a goods lift was available, but this was disliked by passengers. One respondent also noted:

“There was no space between the cars on the deck, so I couldn’t actually reach the lift at all”.

The issue of the state of the tides was identified by all ferry companies as a particular problem where passengers have to board the vessel directly. As will be noted later, Northlink has addressed this through the use of long ramps starting from a mid point in the high and low points of the tide. As one respondent from Shetland (a wheelchair user) noted:

“I used to be dragged backwards up open gangway – this is a great improvement.”

CalMac and other companies have ramps which can be extended to minimise the gradient experienced. All companies also identified that staff are available to provide assistance. Orkney Ferries identified that, in some cases, it may not be possible to safely overcome the steepness of the access ramp. The height and steepness of some ramps was a cause of concern to some of those who took part in this research. Among the issues identified were that some ramps are not smooth (ridges are built in for safety reasons) leading to difficulties for those with limited mobility, some may be exposed to side winds (a point also raised earlier in relation to aircraft steps) and that some may be slippery when wet.

Since 2000, however, there have been a number of significant improvements. Guidance on the development of accessible ferries was published in 2000, which set out a wide range of ways in which traditional problems could be overcome. Modern ferries now incorporate lifts, and a range of other significant improvements, such as contrasting surfaces, improved handrails and accessible toilets. Western Ferries (which operate short run car ferries) has also introduced wheelchair accessible passenger lounges on its new ships, even though passengers can also remain in their vehicles. Modern ferries also have designated spaces for passengers who require extra space, for example to transfer to a wheelchair, which will, in time remove the difficulty identified in the quote above. CalMac, the Smyril Line, Superfast, Western Ferries and Northlink Ferries have introduced new vessels which comply with the improved specification. CalMac noted, however, that little can be done with older vessels, although Orkney Ferries reported that accessible toilets had been added to some vessels since 1998.

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Northlink Ferries introduced four new ferries on routes to Orkney and Shetland. These vessels were built to meet or exceed the specification set out by DPTAC. Thus, passenger areas are reached by lifts, and movement within these areas is virtually step free. High contrast surfaces have been provided, although a visually impaired respondent noted that the passenger access area (which is, in part, mirrored) can be disorienting. Vessels serving Shetland have four designated cabins, two of which are fitted with hoists to allow transfer from a wheelchair to a bed. A small number of issues with the layout of the cabins were identified and it is understood that these were the subject of discussions between the company and local groups of disabled people. These included the fact that some passengers found the hoists not to have been fully charged, there were no instructions for use provided and access to the shower and toilet area required negotiation of a small lip. Overall, however, the views of those disabled people who had used the cabins was positive.

CalMac (which operates Scotland’s largest fleet), through the provision of lifts and ramps (as well as alternative means of boarding) can now make at least some passenger areas available on all vessels where disabled people would not be permitted to remain in their cars. Lifts are also used by the Smyril line and by Orkney Ferries. The latter company did note, however, that some vessels are effectively inaccessible beyond the car deck due to the need to negotiate steep stairways. Most companies may allow disabled people to remain in their cars where the crossing is short. In these cases, a member of staff remains on the car deck at all times for safety reasons. Orkney Ferries noted:

“Where travelling by car and remaining in car we need to know in advance to enable the loading plan to take into account clearance required around car, and allocation of crew person to car deck whilst sailing.”

It is interesting to note that a number of companies are, or have undertaken consultation with disabled people. Detailed work done by Orkney Ferries was noted in the 1998 report, and since then, for example, CalMac has created a specific steering group to advise the company on access issues (including the design of a new vessel) and has entered discussions with MACS. As noted earlier, Northlink has worked with disabled passengers to improve the quality of its service.

In terms of future developments, it is clear that companies see the introduction of new vessels as the key to further access improvements. Funding, not surprisingly, was identified as the main constraint to this.

Ferry Terminals

There is a recognition among ferry operators that there remain a range of access difficulties at ferry terminals. These access difficulties can fall into two main groups, those relating to the terminal buildings, and those relating to boarding the ship.

It is worth setting out at the outset that, in some locations, there are no terminal buildings as such (as is the case with smaller airports). Some of the smallest terminals (particularly those operated by CalMac) are unstaffed, although in these cases, assistance is provided by ferry crew.
Access difficulties in relation to terminal buildings are those which are common to most other modes of transport, including steps and inaccessible areas, the lack of accessible toilets, high counters, the lack of contrasting surfaces and the lack of provision for passengers with a range of sensory impairments. There appears to be limited progress being made towards addressing these issues, a point noted by Calmac in a presentation to MACS in June 2003. The main developments in relation to ferry terminals relate to the provision of new facilities. New terminal facilities have been, or are being built at Scrabster, Stromness and at Lerwick, in conjunction with the introduction of new services by Northlink Ferries (although the facilities are not owned or operated by the company). New facilities were also built at Rosyth to coincide with the introduction of the service to Zeebrugge.

The new terminal at Lerwick, for example, provides much improved access for disabled people. The terminal building has a lift and accessible toilets. The counters are relatively low and attention has been paid to the need for visual contrast. Access to ships is via a covered walkway at first floor level. This is designed to overcome the potential 7m rise and fall of the tide - an issue which affects passenger access to ferries throughout Scotland. A small number of points were noted by disabled people in Shetland about the accessibility of the building which are consistent with those made in relation to, for example, railway stations. Key amongst these is that the need for the operating gradient of the covered ramp to be reasonable has meant that its length is significant. Although local disability groups suggested to Lerwick Harbour Board that it should provide seating to allow passengers with limited mobility to rest, this was refused, citing both fire regulations and the potential obstruction danger to visually impaired passengers in the event of an evacuation. This was described by one participant in a group discussion as “ ironic”.

The other main points made were that there was insufficient visual contrast between doors and walls, and that the signage was generally too small and too high. This illustrates once again a general point made throughout this report that standards evolve, and even new buildings (or vehicles) built to current standards are not necessarily accessible for all disabled people. A secondary point, made above by disabled people in Shetland, is that addressing the needs of one group of disabled people may impact negatively on another group.

A further set of access issues exist in terms of the integration of ferry and other services. By definition, most ferry terminals are in rural, and often remote areas, and these areas are not generally well served by accessible public transport of any kind. This may make it difficult for disabled people to travel independently, other than by car. Examples of this are the ferry terminals at Scrabster, Uig and Ullapool, which are served by long-distance coach services operated by Citylink and Rapsons. In most other locations, linking services are provided by local bus companies, many of whose services will also be coach-based. In a small number of cases, linking services are also provided by Scotrail (for example at Ardrossan, Wemyss Bay, Gourock and Oban, not all of which are capable of being accessed by wheelchair users travelling independently). As noted elsewhere, there are few accessible taxis in rural areas. The overall impact of this in many areas is likely to be relatively slight, as most passengers
will travel by car. The main impacts are likely to be in terms of services to the Western Isles and Orkney.

One issue raised in Shetland is that, although bus services are provided by low floor buses, in a small number of cases, passengers have to disembark and board ferries as foot passengers, before boarding another (accessible) bus following the crossing, which is potentially problematic for some disabled people. Shetland Islands Council noted that it is considering addressing this by the apparently simple expedient of using one bus for the length of the route, and permitting passengers to remain in the vehicle.

Overview of issues for sea travel

Perhaps more than any other mode of public transport, the accessibility of ferries has improved in the last 5 years. New vessels introduced by a variety of companies have taken the standards proposed by DPTAC and translated these into a much more accessible (and correspondingly less stressful) experience for disabled passengers. There remain some access issues with smaller ferries which will only be addressed as these are replaced. There have also been access improvements in ferry terminals. New terminals at Scrabster, Stromness and Lerwick are much more accessible than those in place previously. The innovative solution employed to address the rise and fall of the tides at Lerwick, involving an extended ramp, was viewed very positively by some disabled people, while others had concerns that no seating could be provided (although passengers can be transferred by using a wheelchair if they wish).

TAXI TRAVEL

Taxis are available in virtually every part of Scotland, and provide both door to door and linking service (for example between other modes of transport).

Organisations involved

In Scotland, taxis are generally either owned and operated by individuals, are owned by companies and rented to drivers, or are owned by companies and driven by employees. The consequence of this is that virtually all taxis are owned and operated within the private sector. Taxis are, however, licensed by local authorities on the basis either of a hackney carriage license or a private hire license, with various restrictions on how each can operate. The overall number of taxis in an area is regulated by the local authority, which also set fares and may (or may not) operate a concessionary fares scheme for some groups.

Implications of the DDA for taxi travel

In 1997, the government undertook a consultation on how the provisions of the DDA would be implemented in relation to taxis. It proposed that, by 2002, all new taxis should be accessible and that all licensed taxis should be accessible by 2012. However, following the consultation, the government decided not to implement the proposals as set out, and currently, new proposals are awaited from the Department for Transport. The impact of this
has been felt in two ways. Firstly, it is clear that, in most areas of Scotland outside the cities, there are still very large numbers of inaccessible taxis, and secondly, as will be set out in more detail later, a number of local authorities have deferred consideration of their own policy on access while a national policy is agreed. In some areas, however, individual local authorities have chosen to either set quotas for accessible taxis, or to enforce a policy of only granting hackney licenses to operators of accessible taxis. This is set out in more detail below.

In 2001, the UK Government implemented Section 37 of the DDA, making it mandatory for taxi drivers to accept guide dogs at no extra charge, although most visually impaired respondents suggested that they had had few problems before this time. The only exemptions relate to drivers who can demonstrate an allergy to dogs. It is worth noting that this does not apply to private hire vehicles.

**Taxi services**

Respondents to this research were clear that there was a need for more accessible vehicles. For some, there was a need for all vehicles to be accessible, while for others, the issue was about matching needs, for example through more sophisticated booking systems. It is also worth noting that, even in areas such as Edinburgh, where all licensed taxis are “accessible”, this does not necessarily mean that any disabled person would be able to use the vehicle. There was, for example, a good deal of criticism (across areas) of the traditional black cab design. The main issue for many was that the seats are low and slope backwards, making it relatively difficult for a passenger with limited mobility to lever themselves to a standing position. It was also identified that some wheelchair users would prefer to transfer to a saloon car (using a swivel seat) rather than be carried in their own wheelchair. This is not possible in a black cab. From this, and other points raised, it was clear that there is no consensus on what constitutes an “accessible” taxi, and a number of respondents made it clear that the need was for a variety of solutions.

**Local authority policies on taxi licensing**

All Scottish Local Authorities, as the licensing bodies for taxis, were contacted by telephone as part of this research. Thirty one authorities responded. “Taxi” in this context means a public licensed hackney carriage; private hire vehicles were not included in the study.

Respondents were asked whether or not they currently had a policy on taxi accessibility. Sixteen local authorities, or just over half of the total, identified that a policy (however described) existed. Fifteen local authorities had no specific policy. Among the authorities which had a policy, the most common approach was found to be the requirement that all new

37 The exception was Argyll and Bute
vehicles licensed as taxis must be accessible, adopted by eight local authorities. In the case of Midlothian, for example, this policy had been operational for long enough to ensure that the entire taxi fleet was considered accessible by the time of the survey. In Renfrewshire, on the other hand, the policy was due to come in to force in January 2004 and would also apply to licence renewals as well as new licences. The authority identified that this would have the effect of increasing the number of accessible vehicles more quickly than if the policy had been applied solely to vehicles being licensed for the first time. West Dunbartonshire is an unusual case, with different arrangements applying in the Clydebank and Dumbarton zones, as these fall within different District Court jurisdictions for licensing purposes. Stirling Council added the caveat that, as there is currently a full quota of taxi licences in the area, it was unlikely that any new licences would be granted in the near future.

Four authorities, a quarter of those with policies, simply specify that all taxis must be accessible. This is the position in the Clydebank zone of West Dunbartonshire (and will be introduced in the remainder of the area from 2006). In East Lothian, this policy was introduced for new vehicles in 2000, then applied later to renewals, and has therefore, brought about a 100% accessible taxi fleet within three years. South Ayrshire’s policy specifies the types of vehicle it considers to be accessible as custom-built and capable of carrying at least one wheelchair loaded through a side door from the pavement.

Two authorities have chosen to encourage accessible taxis either by providing grants to operators towards the cost of suitable vehicles, or by adding new plates to their quota of licences and reserving these for accessible vehicles. In one of these cases, this was identified as an interim policy which will be reviewed when the Scottish Executive publishes the Disability Discrimination Act Implementation Guidelines for Taxis.

A number of other policies were found to be operated by one authority only. These include: all new operators must have accessible vehicles, adopted by Aberdeen City Council, (who are facing a legal challenge to the policy from the trade, and feel that the publication of the Implementation Guidelines is necessary for the policy to have legal backing); all vehicles must be purpose-built and accessible by the end of 2005, adopted by North Lanarkshire, (who also face strong opposition from the trade locally, with representations being made through the consultation process); all vehicles must be accessible by May 2005; vehicles with more than five passenger seats must be accessible (being applied in Falkirk alongside the policy of new vehicles being accessible), and allowing accessible vehicles a longer service life than non-accessible ones (in Stirling, purpose built accessible taxis are allowed to be up to ten years old and adapted ones up to eight years old, while non-accessible taxis are only allowed to be up to five years old, again to provide an incentive to operators to purchase accessible vehicles).

Of the authorities which reported that they did not currently have a policy, one third said that they planned to introduce one in the future. Four of these five authorities suggested the main reason they have not already implemented a policy was a decision to wait for the publication of the DDA Implementation Guidelines. Just over half the authorities without a current policy...
said that they did not have plans to introduce one, but it should be noted that of these, two respondents also indicated that this was due to awaiting the Implementation Guidelines before formulating a policy, while a third indicated an awareness that the DDA would make a policy necessary, but had not yet begun the process of developing it. The fourth indicated that it was likely to introduce a policy once the DDA is fully implemented.

It would appear, therefore, that respondents interpreted ‘planning’ a policy differently, but that over half of local authorities with no current policy on taxi accessibility see the publication of the Implementation Guidelines as the key trigger for the introduction of such a policy. One authority reported that this had been the advice of the Scottish Executive, while another indicated that, in their view, the only way a policy would be enforceable would be if legislation was in place. Three local authorities indicated that their decision to wait was driven by a concern that the Implementation Guidelines may then make it necessary to change policy soon after implementation, involving duplication of work and extra inconvenience for the trade.

Highland Council reported that it had been considering the options for the most appropriate policy for a rural area and noted that it intended to present recommendations to members before Christmas 2003. A consultation exercise had shown a demand for saloon taxis among some sections of the public, including elderly people who felt more secure in them and valued being able to sit in the front of the taxi next to the driver. For the same reason, East Ayrshire reported that it was consulting with disabled people about its 100% accessibility policy at the time of the survey, and suggested that some compromise may be necessary. In this consultation, visually and hearing impaired respondents, as well as frail elderly people had indicated that they would prefer not to have black cabs as the only option.

Of the remaining authorities which stated that they had no plans to introduce a policy, one questioned the viability of such a policy in their area, while another indicated that they were likely to seek exemption from the Implementation Guidelines on the basis that it may be able to prove that there is no demand for accessible taxis over and above that which can be met by existing provision. Another was about to enter consultation with operators as part of a review of all licensing conditions for taxis so that demands could be identified and conditions amended accordingly; it was planned to advertise the consultation so that other stakeholders could become involved, and it was acknowledged that this may provide a means to address issues of accessibility.

Authorities were also asked to provide details of any incentives or support offered to operators to use accessible vehicles. Four authorities were found to offer grants for this purpose, ranging from one-off grants of £1,000 - £2,000 to £5,000 over five years (offered by Clackmannanshire). In one of these cases, the grant was only available to operators participating in a Taxi Card scheme. In Orkney, while there is no formal, publicised grant scheme, in practice the operator of the Islands’ sole accessible taxi was given financial support. A further two authorities have used licence quotas as a means of encouraging accessibility by restricting the granting of extra licences to those operators proposing to use accessible vehicles, and Dumfries and Galloway is considering offering operators the chance to by pass the current three year waiting list for licences in Dumfries itself for accessible

38 Taxi card schemes provide disabled people with a fixed number of subsidised journeys, and are described on more detail later in this section.
vehicles. In total, slightly more than a quarter of authorities are currently offering some kind of encouragement to the trade to increase provision.

The general view of the taxi trade is strongly supportive of the need for accessible taxis. The Scottish Taxi Federation, reflecting the views of member associations is clear, however that it does not support a “100% accessible” policy. At the time of the research, the Federation was involved in various forms of action in both West Dunbartonshire and Dundee, in relation the planned imposition of “100% accessible” policy. The Federation’s approach is to ensure that adequate numbers of accessible taxis are available in each area, with booking and guarantee systems in place to ensure that any passenger requiring such a vehicle is provided with one.

The other main concern among the trade is partly financial and partly technical. Until very recently, a fully accessible vehicle acceptable to licensing authorities could cost around £30,000. As noted earlier, only a very small number of local authorities offer incentives to purchase accessible vehicles, and there is a strong view among some operators that the premium over a saloon vehicle is unlikely ever to be recouped. In the last year, a small number of converted car or van bodies have been marketed. In the case of a Fiat vehicle, the purchase cost is less than £14,000. While, on the surface, these vehicles may represent a cheaper alternative, there is concern among operators about high depreciation and potential reliability (and hence possible re-sale values of these vehicles). The Scottish Taxi Federation also expressed reservations about the safety of such rear-loading vehicles in the event of an accident.

Licensing conditions

Less than one sixth of authorities were found to impose any conditions on the granting of licences to drivers in terms of completing disability awareness training. Among those which do, Aberdeen City Council offers non-compulsory training, including disability awareness, to drivers, and Scottish Borders was piloting courses including disability awareness at the time of the survey, aiming for full introduction at the start of the 2004-05 financial year. In the latter case, training would be compulsory for new drivers, while existing drivers would be encouraged to participate.

A further three authorities have more or less advanced plans to introduce training, although this would not be compulsory in all cases, and in West Lothian, plans include a test for drivers in relation to carrying disabled passengers. Two more authorities are considering the introduction of training in the future. In one authority, training had been provided by the council in the past but was withdrawn due to the low number of accessible vehicles and the high turnover of drivers (caused by the lack of a quota on licences). In this area, training is now arranged for drivers by a private sector operator. One other authority reported that, although it does not provide disability awareness training directly, some drivers had undertaken it.

It is worth noting that the Scottish Taxi Federation is supportive of training, and encourages members to undertake this as part of being able to provide a properly professional service to all users.

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39 Although it is recognised that “disability equality training” is now the preferred approach, this section reflects the conditions set out by local authorities.
Available information on accessible taxis

Only three local authorities (just under 10%) identified that they maintained a list of accessible taxis, and in two of these, the list is limited to those operators participating in the Taxi Card discount scheme. In West Lothian, this information is published in a Concessionary Travel information booklet available to members of the public, and in Angus a list of operators in the scheme, including accessibility information, is provided to applicants for the card. Of the twenty eight authorities which reported that they do not maintain a list, one quarter said that this information is kept on the licence register and could be extracted and provided to members of the public on request, with two authorities citing Data Protection issues as a reason for not publishing the information.

Authorities were asked to state the total number of taxis in their area and the number that are accessible. Two authorities were unable to provide a figure for accessible taxis and one for the total number, although in this latter case the number of accessible vehicles was known. Percentages of accessible vehicles were found to cover the range from 0% to 100%, with only one authority having no accessible taxis and four (plus the Clydebank zone of West Dunbartonshire) having an entirely accessible fleet. It is worth noting that, of these, three are in the Edinburgh and Lothians area. Over one third of the sample currently have fewer than 5% of taxis accessible, and with the exception of Glasgow, where around 90% are accessible, no authority has a proportion of accessible vehicles between one third and 100%. Three authorities have proportions in the 5 to 10% range, three in the 10 to 20% range, two in the 20 to 30% range and one in the 30 to 40% range. Respondents to this research identified large areas where there were known to be no, or very few accessible taxis, including, for example, Shetland, Orkney, much of Highland, parts of Aberdeenshire, most of Angus, parts of Fife, the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway.

As might be expected, there was found to be a strong correlation between a low proportion of accessible taxis and not having a policy on taxi accessibility, with over three quarters of authorities with fewer than 10% of taxis accessible having no stated policy. Of the three authorities in this range who did have a policy, one had an interim policy and another had adopted a policy that all new taxis must be accessible but which had not had time to take effect.

Complaints

Twenty nine authorities operate a complaints system for taxis, while in the remaining two, complaints about taxis have to be made to the police. Additionally, in two of the authorities where complaints can be made to the council, these are then passed to the police for investigation as the authorities concerned have no Taxi Enforcement Officer. Two authorities stated that taxi complaints are dealt with under the council’s standard complaints procedure. More than half of all authorities required complaints to be submitted in writing, with only two providing a form for this purpose, and only six said that they would accept complaints made verbally. Over three quarters of respondents stated that serious complaints would lead to referral to the Licensing Committee, with suspension or loss of the licence as the ultimate sanction.
Taxi concessions

Fourteen authorities, or around half of the sample, were found to operate Taxi Card or similar discount scheme for disabled passengers, with twelve of these being in Eastern Scotland. Of those not currently operating a scheme, two authorities were considering introducing one and a further six had considered introducing one in the past but decided not to go ahead with it. Three of the latter reported that they had been prevented from doing so by budgetary constraints.

Orkney Islands Council identified an additional difficulty in having only one accessible taxi in the Islands, and so had concluded that working with community groups through the Rural Transport Initiative to provide a Dial-a-Bus service was a better way of meeting the needs of disabled passengers. Nine authorities reported that they were unlikely to introduce a scheme in the future, with one acknowledging that there was grassroots demand for one, one again citing prohibitive costs and two suggesting that it would be up to the trade to organise any discount scheme. This may suggest a need for wider dissemination of information about local authority policies and practices across the rest of the country. Three respondents said that they did not know whether or not a scheme may be introduced in the future, one that they ‘may’, and one that they ‘would aspire to’.

Among the schemes currently being operated, there was considerable variation in detail. Eligibility conditions for schemes and definitions of disability used are divided in many cases between those which give automatic qualification and those which require support from an applicant’s GP, or a medical assessment, prior to a decision on whether to grant the discount. In some cases, different authorities take a different approach to the same criterion, e.g. six authorities reported that receipt of War Pensioner’s Mobility Supplement gives automatic entitlement, while another would require an applicant on these grounds to undergo an assessment. The most frequently cited conditions for automatic entitlement were found to be registration as a blind person, used by eleven authorities, and receipt of Disability Living Allowance Mobility Supplement at the Higher Rate, used by eight. Two authorities require all applications to be supported by the applicant’s G.P.

The number of subsidised trips allowed under schemes also varies considerably, from 80 per year to 14 per week (equivalent to 728 per year), with the most common provision being equivalent to one return journey (two trips) per week, found in five authorities. Similarly, there was great variation in the subsidy available. In almost all authorities offering a scheme, there is a percentage discount (varying from 40% to 67%) coupled with a maximum metered fare to give a maximum subsidy per trip varying from £12 to £2, with any metered fare over the maximum paid by the passenger. The most generous subsidies are in the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire areas (67% discount up to £15 total fare, £10 maximum per trip and 50% discount up to £24 total fare, £12 maximum per trip respectively). Generally, however, the maximum subsidy available is at the lower end of the scale, with almost two thirds of schemes providing for £3 or less per trip, while only around one third of schemes cover maximum metered fares of over £5. On the whole, therefore, subsidies only impact significantly on the cost of the shortest, most local journeys.

One of the main concerns of disabled people in areas where a taxi card operated was that journeys were, in some cases, severely limited. Several respondents made the point that they have little choice but to use taxis, and, therefore, can face prohibitively high costs, even in areas with a scheme in place. A number of examples were set out in Section 2 of disabled

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people who felt that either the lack of a scheme, or the limitations of their local scheme constrained their ability to travel. Respondents in rural areas particularly commented on the still high cost of taxi travel, even where a scheme was in place. Capability Scotland identified that some taxi firms appear to impose additional charges on disabled passengers, although this was not specifically identified by this research (and may be a function of the areas in which fieldwork was carried out).

The final point made by respondents in some areas (including Edinburgh and Dumfries) was that some local authorities allow disabled people to have either a taxi card or bus pass (although it is understood that at least some local authorities are reviewing this policy). As noted in Section 2 (in relation to the need for multi-modal journeys in rural areas), this was seen by respondents as being a cause of limitation to their mobility.

**Service issues**

A wide range of points were made by respondents in relation to taxi services (some of which were rehearsed in Section 2). It is important to stress at the outset that many respondents were entirely positive about taxi companies and taxi drivers, and it is fair to stress than some respondents, even heavy users of taxis, had never encountered any problems. Equally, it is also fair to stress that this was not the experience of all respondents, and comments, both positive and negative are summarised in this section.

One of the key difficulties some disabled people face is in actually securing the services of a taxi company. Broadly, taxis can be obtained in three main ways, depending on both the location of the client and the license held by the operator. These are; by telephone, from a rank and in the street. (Private hire vehicles can, generally speaking, only operate by telephone, or under a contract, while hackney licenses allow taxis to stop at ranks and in the street, as well as respond to telephone calls.)

As noted earlier, in most areas there are either central booking services or associations which process telephone bookings. The Scottish Taxi Federation identified that good practice in relation to disabled people would involve the use of a computerised database to store users’ details (within the terms of the Data Protection Act) and confirm that this approach is used by many operators throughout Scotland. Where respondents had registered with such services, there was a clear view that the service obtained generally was good, with little difficulty found in obtaining a taxi except in certain circumstances (such as very late at night, and at peak times, such as Christmas). Respondents in Aberdeen, for example, identified that this database system meant that in virtually all cases, a suitable taxi was despatched and, in many cases, the same taxi driver was used to respond to bookings by each individual. The main benefits of this were seen to be in developing the confidence of the disabled person that their needs would be addressed.

Users’ experiences of firms not operating such a system were less positive, with a number citing poor service in a number of areas. Among the issues raised were inaccessible taxis being despatched, drivers being unwilling to deploy ramps (even where a booking was clearly identified as being for a wheelchair user) and bookings apparently being accepted even where the company was aware that no accessible taxi was available. One interviewee (in an area where virtually all taxis are accessible) noted that:
“Taxis come more quickly if you don’t say you’re disabled”.

Respondents also identified systematic problems with being able to hail a taxi at a rank, or in the street (where this is permitted). Many respondents covering each of the cities suggested that they had had personal experience of drivers either directly or indirectly refusing to accept them as passengers. Indirect examples cited included taxis slowing, but refusing to stop, and taxis pulling away from ranks on identifying a wheelchair user in the queue. Clearly, it would be wrong to conclude that, in all cases, these situations were necessarily due to the intending passenger being disabled, but, in the view of a number of those who participated in this research, this was a likely explanation. The implication of this is that, whether or not, on a case by case basis, this was the correct explanation, many disabled people believe that they will be unable to hail a taxi at a rank or in the street, and this has clear implications for the likelihood that they will travel (a point made in Section 2).

Overall, there were a range of service related issues raised about taxi companies. One interviewee in Edinburgh identified the frustration of this:

“Sometimes they send a non-accessible taxi even though I’ve asked for an accessible one – they don’t always listen.”

Participants in a joint consultation in Edinburgh identified bad practice among taxi drivers in that:

- Some drivers refuse to take wheelchair users
- Some drivers have no ramp, or claim the ramp isn’t working
- Some drivers don’t use the proper ramp

One interviewee, echoing a point made by a number of respondents, reported that:

“A taxi driver refused to load the wheelchair into the boot – I saw that he had golf clubs. It was nothing to do with a bad back at all.”

An Edinburgh – based interviewee identified that:

“I gave up using taxis two years ago because of not being able to rely on getting one, drivers don’t want to stop for you, get ramps out and saying ‘you can’t get that type of chair in’”.

A significant number of respondents suggested that they only ever used one taxi company, in order to minimise the risk of poor service.

One of the key areas of difficulty (as suggested earlier) was in the use of ramps. This issue was raised by most wheelchair users with experience of taxis. Among the concerns were:

- The design of the ramps used, with, in most cases, one design being expected to suit any sort of wheelchair;
- The extent to which ramps protrude into the cab, with a small number of wheelchair users reporting having “see-sawed” on crossing the threshold of the cab;
• Some drivers appearing to be unwilling to deploy the ramp, preferring to use other means;
• The condition of some ramps;
• The observation that some drivers appeared to be unaware of how the ramps should be used safely.

It was also identified that drivers face a range of difficulties, for example in terms of poor parking by other motorists, meaning that ramps had to be used in locations the passenger felt might be unsafe. A number of wheelchair users reported ramps having been deployed in a way which would leave them in the roadway, or off a kerb with no easy means of access to the pavement. One suggested that:

“Sometimes I get a driver who doesn’t want to get the ramp extension out (which helps make the ramp less steep so that you can get out gradually and it’s easier to get in if the vehicle isn’t at the kerb) – they push and shove trying to get you in”.

The final criticism made by a wide range of respondents, and reflected in some of the earlier comments, was about the attitudes of some drivers. As identified at the outset, it is important to stress that many disabled people have little or no difficulty in using taxis, and receive exemplary service. Nonetheless, as with other modes of public transport, it is clear that this is not the case for all disabled people at all times. One respondents summed up the views of a range of disabled people thus:

“The attitudes of taxi drivers can be appalling and it all makes a journey more difficult and less worthwhile”.

Another respondent, from a different area identified the level of inconsistency which is perceived to exist:

“Some [taxi drivers] are very nice and that’s great, but there is variation and inconsistency. I once got told at 10pm that I shouldn’t be out at that time of night.”

The effect of this for some disabled people is that the fear of receiving poor service means that they are less likely to travel, a point also made in relation to other modes of transport.

Overview of issues for taxi travel

There has been progress in relation to the introduction of accessible taxis. Clearly, more are on the road than in 1998, some as a consequence of licensing policies, some as a result of initiatives by the trade. Cost, and perceptions of limited return on investment appear to remain significant disinhibitors to further growth in numbers. The current policies of some local authorities in having all-accessible fleets are not popular with the taxi trade. There were also a number of examples of very good practice identified throughout this research, and one area in which there has been considerable development in the last 5 years has been the use of computer systems to record, and meet the needs of disabled travellers.
PERSONAL, COMMUNITY AND DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT

The final strand of this section will deal with a wide range of types of transport which might be broadly termed “community” or “personal” transport. These are distinguished largely by being non-commercial, or not for profit, and are often operated by voluntary organisations, or directly by local authorities (or by SPT).

Organisations involved

This classification includes traditional community transport, local authority or voluntary sector dial-a-journey type services, car sharing and volunteer driver schemes and a small number of demand-responsive door to door services. There are also a very substantial number of accessible vehicles of all kinds owned and operated by local authorities, generally within the social work service (but also within the education service.) With some exceptions, these vehicles are not available to the public, being used to move clients from, for example, their homes to day centres. In some areas, for example Angus and Shetland, bookings are accepted for these vehicles at off-peak times. In the view of a number of those who participated in the research, the pool of accessible vehicles owned by social work services remains an under-utilised resource.

The other main form of transport not included in this section is patient transport, as this generally exists only to move patients from home to appointments and back, although this distinction appears to be becoming blurred, as, in some areas, patient transport is the only transport, while in other areas, medical appointments are, for many people, services by community transport (or public transport) solutions.

Community Transport

There are a large number of “traditional” community transport schemes across Scotland. Most exist to serve a very local area, and may have very specific aims and objectives, which restrict their service to a small number of clients. The main areas of restriction relate to either geographical areas, for example:

“Members must live within a ten mile radius of Inverurie and have a physical or sensory disability”;

or on the basis of membership or use of a service, for example:

“Not general members of the public. Passengers have to be clients of [a local voluntary organisation].”

In some cases, more general restrictions can apply. Among those identified by respondents were:

- Age
- Income
- Employment status
- Specific impairments
- Inability to access mainstream public transport services
- Lack of public transport services in area

One scheme described its client group as:

“Any member of the community aged 50+ or in need of assistance due to physical, mental or social disabilities.”

It is clear from responses to this research that by no means all community transport providers offer accessible vehicles, although many do, and accessible vehicles represent a high proportion of overall fleets.

The following summary of activities is typical:

“We have 2 wheelchair adapted Peugeot Expert vans to provide affordable and accessible transport to all residents in [area]. We employ 2 paid drivers who work 30 hours each and have 12 volunteer drivers who cover the other hours. We operate 7 days a week.”

The following quote is typical of volunteer driver schemes:

“The scheme was set up to provide a door to door service for people who cannot use other forms of transport. The scheme relies on volunteer drivers using their own vehicles to take people to various appointments, shopping and community activities.”

Most community transport providers are very small, having one or two vehicles, and operating with either a very small number of paid staff, or by using volunteers (or, in some cases, a mixture of both). In many cases, organisations are member-led, and have disabled people represented on management committees or boards (depending on their structure). Most organisations identified that they also consulted widely with disabled people in their community of interest, either on a regular or ad hoc basis. A number of organisations identified that they regularly undertook evaluation surveys or users. One organisation (which is fairly typical) described its approach as:

“We consult with all our client group regularly through face to face chats, questionnaires etc. I also attend meetings regularly with local disability groups across the spectrum.”

The funding for community transport provision is often complex. Many providers have been gifted vehicles, either by larger charities or by private sector companies, and in some cases, this is accompanied by revenue support to pay for maintenance. The other main forms of funding are community fund raising, endowments and legacies, and both local authority and Scottish Executive grants. It is reasonable to suggest that relatively few community transport providers are well funded, and many identified costs (particularly maintenance and replacements) as a difficulty. As one respondent noted:

“We are a charity - all our drivers are volunteers. We depend on donations to keep us afloat and to cover the high cost of insurance and regular servicing of vehicles.”
Most community transport providers generate revenue income through fares or bookings, often on a cost per mile basis. In a small number of cases, providers are seeking to cross-subsidise services by, for example, working with childcare and other service providers to maximise utilisation and open up fresh revenue streams.

The range of services offered by community transport providers is extensive. In some cases, services are provided on a group basis (for example shopping trips and summer outings) while some services offer personal use (for example hospital visiting or visiting relatives). In some cases, the service is provided by the transport provider (for example through volunteer or employed drivers), while in other cases, the service is offered on the basis that community groups can hire the vehicle (or a mixture of both). In some ways the key defining factor is that services are provided on a door to door basis. As one provider noted:

“People don’t live on routes”.

Among the range of services offered include:

- Shopping trips
- Trips to community facilities
- Trips to visit friends and relatives
- Hospital and other similar visits
- “Outings”
- Transfers to other services, such as lunch clubs
- Transfers to other modes of transport, for example airport and ferry terminals

Given the relatively small scale of most community-based transport, relatively few of the participants in this research had had direct experience of this form of provision. Of those which had, there was, however, universal praise, both for the organisations and the individuals concerned. The main drawback identified, as might be expected, was the limited availability in terms of both times and coverage, although it is fair to say that some disabled people identified a willingness to structure their lives around the support available to them.

The main constraints experienced by community transport providers include funding issues (including the insecurity of funding, as well as a general shortage of funding), a reliance on grants and, in some cases, local authority and other contracts. The other main issue facing many organisations is a lack of volunteers, and the implications of a range of recent changes, including the need to undertake Disclosure Scotland checks.

There were relatively few significant changes identified by providers over the last five years. Most progress appeared to be in terms of the purchase of new, more accessible vehicles and in terms of training. A number of organisations identified that they had invested in making their premises more accessible, including, in some cases, the purchase of an induction loop. It is interesting to note that a number of local authorities, either directly or through other organisations have employed development officers with a remit to assist in both the creation and sustainability of community transport initiatives.
“Dial-a-ride” and similar provision

The second main form of non-commercial public transport is, broadly, dial-a-ride type schemes. These are branded in a range of different ways across Scotland. Some provision is run by voluntary organisations (such as Handicabs in Lothian and The Order of Malta in central Scotland) or by public authorities (such as Fife Council and SPT). In most areas, both dial-a-ride and community transport operators co-exist, often providing services to the same group of clients, but meeting different needs at different times. It is important to stress that dial-a-ride type schemes are not available in every area.

Dial-a-ride provision works in ways similar to other forms of community-based transport. For example, there may be a mix of timetabled provision (for example to a shopping centre) and demand responsive provision (where an individual can book a door to door journey). Payment is usually on the basis of either of a notional cost per mile, or, in some cases, on a table of standard fares defined by the journey. In some areas, although not all, local authority concessionary passes are valid.

It is important to stress that dial-a-ride type provision can be limited in terms of the destinations it serves. In Glasgow, for example, travel is restricted to specific zones, and is not available for a range of purposes (which are assumed to be served by other means). In most areas, services to and from shopping destinations are timetabled, and the time at destination may be too long or too short to meet the needs of some users. Generally, users must show that they are eligible for the provision. In Fife, this is done through the holding of a Mobility Card, but the general approach varies. In some areas, some groups of users must travel with a companion.

A number of participants in this research (both interviewees and through the postal survey) had considerable experience of dial-a-ride type schemes. For most, the provision was viewed positively, particularly the “door to door” element. This point was stressed by a number of respondents, contrasting this with taxi firms, who generally do not permit drivers to enter clients houses. A number of users also contrasted this with mainstream public transport. One noted:

“I use dial-a-ride where I can. I live 50 yards from the bus stop, and it might be only 50 yards at the other end, but that 100 yards makes a huge difference to how I feel”.

The main difficulty identified by respondents with dial-a-ride type schemes was their limited availability. Most providers will only allow one booking at a time, and may restrict how far in advance bookings can be taken. Although there are good reasons for this, it is also a source of considerable frustration to service users:

“The only problem is not being able to make block bookings. Ideally I would like to go to work and come home with them every day”.

An example was provided in Section 2 of a dial-a-ride scheme user who has had to structure their work around the availability of transport, and this was typical of a number of comments made by disabled people as part of this research. As one disabled person noted:
“The availability of community transport is pot luck – you can only make one advance booking at a time, and since I always seem to have one for weeks away, that means that for any other journeys I have to ring the day before and hope a space is available.”

This was echoed by another respondent, who suggested that:

“I usually book a fortnight in advance, any less and I stand a good chance of not getting booking – I can never be spontaneous”

A point raised by participants at the Scottish Travel Access Review conference (in September 2003), as well as in the postal survey carried out as part of this research, is that dial-a-ride type services tend to be organised by local authorities, and cross-boundary travel is not permitted. This was also identified as an issue with concessionary travel earlier. As one delegate at the conference suggested:

“It is entirely wrong that someone living on the edge of an area can’t use demand responsive services just because they are contracted by another local authority”.

Demand responsive services

Increasingly, the future focus of such services is likely to be on “ring and ride” type services. This option has always been available to a limited extent within some existing schemes, but in some areas, for example, Fife and Angus, pilot projects have been developed to develop this further. The rationale behind the pilots is that there remain many people who may be capable of semi-independent travel, but for whom the existing options, including dial-a-ride, are not suitable. A pilot project has operated in Kirkcaldy and Levenmouth since early 2003, and is being considered for wider implementation. The basis of the approach is that prospective users register their details (with a summary of their transport related needs, as happens currently with some taxi operators, but there are no “eligibility” conditions as apply to, for example, dial-a-ride) and, once registered, individuals can book a trip between 8am and 10pm. Initial feedback from users has been positive, and there appears to have been a stimulation of travel among some users who had been unwilling, or unable to travel on a semi-independent basis.

A slightly different approach is being taken by SPT, which has introduced pilot ring and ride schemes in six rural areas. Although these services are operated by accessible small buses, the scheme is actually open to anyone in the areas who has limited or no access to conventional public transport. The services provide links to town centres, and to transport interchanges, for example main line and other railway stations. The services must be pre-booked.

Issues for personal, community and demand responsive services

Personal, community and demand responsive services provide a wide range of services but with limited scope, in terms of geography and / or eligibility. Some pilots, such as those in Angus, Fife and within a part of SPT are offering a wider door to door service on a demand
responsive basis. These services are beginning to define an alternative model of public transport for disabled people, albeit in currently very limited geographical areas, and there remains the scope in due course for close links between these services and mainstream services (such as rail and air services, as these become more accessible). In terms of more general improvement in the last 5 years, these appear to have been largely incremental, through the purchase of new buses, improved training and access improvements, for example to offices. The main constraints on traditional community transport schemes appears to be, as might be expected, the availability of funding, as well as, in some areas, a shortage of volunteers.
This section will draw together the findings set out in the first four sections and offer a series of conclusions, and a number of recommendations. The conclusions will be structured in terms of the objectives of the research, as set out in Section 1.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Before addressing the conclusions and recommendations as these relate to the specific objectives of the research, a few general conclusions will be offered.

The 1998 Transport White Paper was the first to tackle the accessibility of public transport in a structured way. Since then, however, there has been relatively little focus on this in terms of national transport policy (with the exception of the UK government 10 Year Plan, which made links between funding for wider transport improvements to access improvements). The recent transport indicators, for example, do not identify accessibility as a priority. The guidance to local authorities and SPT on the development of local transport strategies also suggested that the accessibility of public transport should be a key consideration. Despite this, it is clear from an assessment of the original round of strategies that the approach to this was patchy, with some areas clearly viewing this as a higher priority than others.

The 1998 research identified the development of a national strategy on accessible travel, supported by local strategies as one means by which a consistent national approach might be adopted, and this would also provide a means by which disabled people could channel their views into the planning and other processes. The findings of this research support the view that a national strategy could still be a useful mechanism to identify priorities and guide the development of policy at both a national and local level.

It is clear that the timetable for implementing the transport-related provisions of the DDA is a matter of much frustration to many disabled people. Although progress is being made in many areas, much of Scotland remains without low floor buses, fully accessible trains and stations or, in many cases, any wheelchair accessible taxis at all. Considerable progress has been made in some areas, most notably, perhaps, in relation to ferries (which are, paradoxically, outwith the scope of the DDA), with the purchase of new vessels transforming what was for many disabled people something of an ordeal into a much more pleasurable and safe experience.

One of the key remaining areas of difficulty is in adequately defining what constitutes “accessible” in terms of public transport vehicles. Low floor buses are more accessible than high floor, and have no steps, but they still cannot be used by many disabled people, and are disliked by many older people. Black cabs are more accessible than saloons, but are not universally liked by disabled people, for example due to the use of poorly designed ramps and the low, raked nature of the seats. Some improvements, for example the ramp at Lerwick, have made matters better for some disabled people, but, arguably, worse for others (who do not wish to transfer in a wheelchair). What is clear is that standards will continue to evolve, and there is a clear need for changing standards to be discussed with disabled people, and communicated clearly to operators involved.
Overall, it is reasonable to conclude that there has been progress in a wide range of areas since 1998, but, as will be set out in more detail in the remainder of this section, this has been patchy and inconsistent, and there remain some significant gaps which prevent many disabled people from travelling at all, or make their experience stressful and difficult.

CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO EACH OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The remainder of the conclusions will be presented in bullet point format.

To compare transport provision in 2003 to provision in 1998 and establish where progress has been made

It is clear, as identified earlier, that there has been considerable progress made in some areas, but that this has been patchy and inconsistent. This section will deal with improvements, while the next will deal with remaining gaps.

- One of the key developments since 1998 has been the establishment of MACS. It is clear that MACS is now being consulted by public transport operators and disability organisations, and represents a means by which good practice can be disseminated and wider changes actioned.
- The first wave of local transport strategies, as might be expected, were somewhat variable in terms of their coverage of issues facing disabled people. It is recognised that updated strategies will published in 2004, and it is expected that these might better reflect these issues. It will be recommended later that the Scottish Executive carry out an assessment (perhaps with the assistance of MACS) in order to assess the extent to which strategies cover issues and with a view to disseminating potential areas of good practice.
- The national concession for visually impaired travellers was identified by many people throughout this research as an aspect of good practice, although a number raised the perhaps obvious point that there appeared to be no specific reason why this should be restricted to one group of disabled people.
- There have been increases in the number and quality of marked parking spaces at transport interchanges (and in town centres). These appear to have had an impact on the likelihood that disabled people will consider travelling, and to have made longer distance travel (and multi-modal travel) somewhat easier.

Bus

- There has been a progressive increase in the number of low floor buses in service, although there are few areas where all buses are low floor.
- There is now more information available about bus services, although, as will be noted later, much of this does not address access directly.
- There has been substantial investment in some areas in the infrastructure necessary to support the use of low floor buses.
- The new bus station at Edinburgh appears to be highly accessible (following from the examples of Buchannan and Stirling bus stations mentioned in the 1998 report) although some users have reservations about signage. The main difficulty is the fact that most services operate with coach and other high floor buses.
Rail

- The DPPP process, started in 1995/6, has brought about a substantial increase in the amount of information available on the accessibility of rail services. Although there were initial concerns about the accuracy of this information, this appears to have been addressed by the train operating companies.
- The DPPP has, perhaps less directly, brought about a significant rise in the amount of training undertaken by train operating companies.
- There have been key advances in the accessibility of trains since 1998. New trains, such as the Scotrail Class 170 and Virgin’s Voyager are much more accessible than previous trains, and the refurbishment of much of GNER rolling stock will also deliver improvements in relation to, for example, toilet provision. The carrying of ramps on services also appears to have had a positive effect.
- The introduction of automatic announcements on some SPT services has had a positive impact on the extent to which the travel-related needs of visually impaired people are addressed.
- The initiative by SPT to permit travellers to contact relatives or service providers through network control staff appears to be an excellent approach.

Air

- The main access improvements are largely within airports, rather than aircraft, with new airport terminals at Stornoway and Kirkwall, and incremental improvements elsewhere.
- The assistance provided to air passengers appears to working effectively and to be seamless in operation.
- The development by DPTAC of a standard for accessible toilets on aircraft represents a first step towards making aircraft more accessible for a large number of disabled people.

Ferry

- Ferries represent one of the main areas of improvement since 1998, with a range of new vessels with much improved access.
- The value of the development of an accessible standard for large passenger ships is clear, and has clearly brought about a substantial increase in accessibility.
- There have also been improvements to terminal facilities in the north of Scotland, and some incremental improvements elsewhere.
- The innovative solution to tidal flows at Lerwick Harbour has eased what was previously an unpleasant experience for many disabled people.
- The willingness of ferry companies to engage with disabled people and to address their concerns is noted.

Taxis

- There has been a progressive increase in the number of accessible taxis since 1998.
- A number of local authorities have implemented “100%” accessible taxi policies, although these are not popular with the trade.
• A number of operators have introduced computerised booking systems which record the needs of disabled people.
• Some areas have introduced mandatory training for drivers.

Personal, community and demand responsive transport

• There has been incremental improvement in most areas, with new buses and improvements to the accessibility of existing fleets.
• The pilot demand responsive services in some areas represent a new model of local transport for disabled people, and should be carefully evaluated with a view to disseminating good practice lessons.

To identify where gaps in accessible transport provision remain and continuing barriers to improving provision

Although there have been a wide range of improvements, there remain significant gaps in services.

• Although it is, perhaps, stating the obvious, the main problem facing many disabled people in many parts of Scotland is the simple lack of transport capable of meeting their needs.
• One of the key concerns among disabled people is that travelling is uncertain and stressful. Many passengers have had poor experiences with, for example, the failure to deliver assistance which has undermined their confidence. Many visually impaired people have little confidence that, for example, audible announcements will be made on trains, or that bus drivers will remember to let them know when their stop is approaching. Rail passengers in rural areas have little confidence that their train will return to an accessible platform. Many disabled people will not travel by taxis as they are unable to be guaranteed that an accessible vehicle will be available for the return journey. These are only some of the issues addressed throughout this report which have the cumulative effect of discouraging many disabled people from travelling, or of making travelling stressful.
• Concessionary fares remain a clear and outstanding issue. As in 1998, there are a range of inconsistencies in terms of eligibility, coverage and the extent to which travel is either free or subsidised. Cross-boundary travel remains surprisingly problematic. Perhaps the issue which impacts most clearly on less mobile disabled people is that a clear majority of local authorities do not have a taxi card concession scheme. Even where taxi cards exist, the level of benefit is very variable, both in terms of the number of journeys supported and the level of subsidy offered. The recent introduction of a free local off-peak bus travel appears to have had little or no impact on the very large number of disabled people who live in areas where there is little accessible public transport, who cannot use public transport, or who live some distance from services, and who are, therefore, reliant on personal transport. It is clear that the availability of dial-a-ride schemes is patchy, and even where these exist, availability is quite limited. In the absence of alternative, a large number of disabled people rely on taxis which are, in all areas, proportionately very expensive. Disabled people also tend to have lower household incomes, which compounds the problem.
• Consultation with disabled people remains patchy among local authorities and particularly public transport providers, although there is evidence that MACS is being consulted by larger operators.

• There is now substantially more public transport information from a huge range of sources, either internet or telephone based. It is clear that, for most providers, the delivery of service and fare information has been a priority, with access – related issues rarely covered, except where these form part of the conditions of carriage. It would be wrong to suggest that disabled people have not benefited from this, as clearly many will have, but, as yet, the full benefits have not been realised. It is suggested, therefore, that, taking the MACS guidelines as a starting point, the Scottish Executive should encourage all public transport information providers to address the gaps which exist currently in relation to accessibility information.

• The findings of this research, and that conducted by Fife Council, suggest that many older (and by extension, many disabled) people are unaware of the public transport options open to them. Take up of a variety of services is lower than might be expected, and it is likely that many who are able to travel, are unaware that they can, due to improvements in accessibility and services.

• Training for public transport staff remains an issue (as it was in 1998). It is clear that many companies do not provide training to staff in the needs of disabled people, and it is reasonable to conclude that at least some of the negative experiences identified in this research may be due to this. There are some good practice examples, which are worth making more widely known. Overall, it is suggested that MACS and the Scottish Executive, working with trade associations may have to do more to promote the need for training, using the MACS guidance as a starting point.

Bus

• Progress in the introduction of low floor buses remains patchy. While some areas (such as, for example, the four main cities and the Falkirk and Stirling areas) are well served, many other areas remain very poorly served indeed. It is clear that the market is not an effective driver for the introduction of accessible buses in these areas, and with the ready availability of second hand high floor stepped buses, it must be assumed that it will be at least another 10 years before the DDA deadlines bring about accessible networks in some areas.

• The accessibility of current low floor buses is a matter of concern to many disabled people. A large number of wheelchair users cannot use current low floor buses, and it is clear that the layout represents a disincentive to a significant number of older and disabled people.

• The issue of lowering buses remains a point of contention between disabled people and bus drivers. The current conduct regulations offer a measure of discretion to drivers, but there is ample evidence that many disabled people, and many older people, will not ask for the bus to be lowered for a range of reasons. Many people who would benefit from a bus being lowered do not have impairments which drivers are likely to be able to recognise from their cab. Modern buses can be lowered and raised with virtually no additional time delay, and there may be merit in considering whether the conduct regulations should be revised to require lowering at every stop. It is acknowledged that this is a reserved matter.
• One of the key difficulties in the operation of low floor buses (and buses generally) is poor parking. There are a range of consequences of this, including rendering the bus effectively inaccessible to any intending passenger with a mobility impairment, and necessitating a potentially dangerous access route for visually impaired people.

• Cost appears to be the main remaining barrier. There are relatively few (although some) second hand low floor buses, and new buses are very expensive, especially for small operators. Larger operators who wish to convert their fleet more quickly than the DDA timetable also face cost issues with having to write off vehicles well before the end of their useful life. In some areas, there are technical problems due to the lack of suitable pavements and the condition of the roads.

**Rail**

• One of the key frustrations for disabled people is the fact that accessibility improvements are not always used by staff. Many visually impaired people identified the failure of Scotrail staff to use the public address system as a matter of concern to them.

• A very large number of Scotland’s stations are inaccessible and some hold no prospect of ever being made accessible. The lack of accessible stations clearly has an impact on the extent to which people with mobility impairments can travel independently. There are also a large number of stations where one platform is accessible, making return journeys very difficult for many disabled people.

• One of the key frustrations for users of rural stations is that trains can be diverted without warning to inaccessible platforms. This is an issue which also concerns train operating companies, who are often faced with both unhappy customers and difficult and potentially expensive solutions to this. It is suggested that there should be greater levels of cooperation between train operating companies and Network Rail to ensure that trains carrying passengers with mobility needs are given priority when any platform alterations are necessary.

• As with other modes, the main constraint is cost. Although progress is being made with trains, the cost of making all Scotland’s 340 stations accessible would be very considerable, and would have to include re-siting a large number of stations where no obvious (or cost effective) engineering solution exists.

**Air**

• Most aircraft are functionally inaccessible to significant numbers of disabled people, and to change this would require radical remodelling of aircraft interiors.

• Many disabled people remain concerned about the boarding process, with worries about the safety of mechanical lifts, and about the degree of manual handling required (although staff are generally very highly regarded).

• The cost of air travel within Scotland, and the fact that there are few concessions, is a particular concern to many disabled people.

• There appear to remain issues about the understanding of some airline staff about which wheelchairs can, and cannot be carried.

• Although Scotland’s airports appear to be largely accessible, there remain issue with access to airports, in terms of the provision of accessible buses and taxis to permit independent travel by disabled people.
Ferry

- Although there have been considerable advances in ferry design in the last 5 years, there remain a large number of ferries where access is difficult. These issues are only likely to be addressed by the purchase of new vessels.
- Some ferry terminal buildings are not currently accessible (and may lack facilities suitable for disabled customers), although the DDA will require that improvements are made before October 2004.
- As with airports, there are a range of issues with the interchange with other modes of transport, particularly buses and taxis, but also coaches at, for example, Scrabster, Uig and Ullapool.

Taxis

- Again, as with other modes, although there has been some increase in the number of accessible vehicles, this remains patchy, and there are large areas of Scotland where only saloon cars operate.
- In some areas, the service received by disabled people appears to be of concern, with suggestions that some drivers refuse to accept disabled passengers, and some companies not properly addressing needs, even where these are identified in advance.
- Cost is clearly the primary barrier in areas where local authorities have not imposed a “100%” accessible policy. In areas with such a policy, operators have had to invest or leave the industry, but this is very unlikely to happen in other areas simply due to market forces.
- Some local authorities are delaying the development of policies on accessible taxis, preferring to wait for guidance from central government.
- The net effect of all of these issues is that current practice in relation to taxi licensing is inconsistent and confusing, with hardly any two local authorities having in place the same set of policies and criteria.

Personal, community and demand responsive transport

- The main issue for this mode of transport is that availability is, inevitably, limited, either in terms of geography or eligibility.
- Many operators face considerable cost pressures, and are reliant on insecure funding streams.

To assess whether improvements have increased the use of the service by disabled and elderly people and thus their mobility

- There is some debate as to whether the free local off-peak travel initiative (Sept 2002) is having the intended effect. It is argued by some that the concessions benefit “younger” retired people, and do little to benefit wider groups of disabled people. It is also argued that the steep increase in ridership has also had a significant disincentive effect particularly on those with limited mobility.
- There is some measure of ambivalence about the need to book trips in advance. A significant number of respondents, particularly, but not exclusively wheelchair
users, identified this as a cause of unhappiness, many citing the loss of any spontaneity. Set against that, a large number of respondents also cited difficulties when assistance was not made available to them when required. Clearly, the long term objective should be full mainstreaming of assistance. In the short term, however, it is clear that public transport operators (for the most part) will continue to require notice to provide assistance.

- There is a lack of statistics on the use of public transport by older and disabled people which make an answer to this question quite difficult. Overall, the access improvements *appear* to have made an impact on the extent to which disabled people travel (on the basis of a wide range of comments made), but this cannot be definitively assessed. It is will also be important to assess the disincentive effect of the remaining uncertainties about travel, and the congestion caused by extension to concessionary fares. Primary research is suggested within the recommendations.
- There is no doubt that the lack of accessible transport in many areas *constrains* travel, and that the lack of a taxi card scheme in about half of Scotland’s local authority areas imposes significant additional costs on disabled people, inevitably limiting their mobility.

**To ascertain ‘what works’ in initiatives to improve transport accessibility**

- It is clear that the use of standards is proving to be effective in bringing about improved accessibility in terms of public transport vehicles. As noted in the report, modern ferries present relatively few barriers to disabled people, whereas older ferries were, to all intents and purposes, inaccessible. Trains which meet the current RVAR specification represent a considerable advance on those constructed even in the early 1990s. The issue with buses is less clear-cut. Many disabled people remain unconvinced by low floor buses, and it is clear that many people with mobility, reach and grip impairments are uncomfortable with aspects of their design, suggesting that revision of the standards is perhaps required.
- There seems little doubt that the DPPP process has been an effective focus for the rail industry on the needs of disabled people. This said, the fact that “current” DPPPs were prepared in the mid 1990s, undermines this to some extent, and it is interesting to note that the SRA has introduced a requirement for annual updates.
- The initiative by the SRA to extend the effective coverage of the RVAR to any pre-1999 carriages refurbished since 2000 will have the effect of speeding up the introduction of accessible rolling stock.
- The imposition by some local authorities of policies on accessible taxis has considerably increased the number of accessible vehicles.

**To identify any common reasons why certain initiatives have worked well or failed**

A number of factors appear to be evident in successful initiatives:

- The availability of clear access standards supported by government and industry;
- The participation of disabled people in the development of these standards;
- Consultation with disabled people over the implementation of these standards, and the development of a review process;
• The existence of a monitoring regime (such as the DPPP process) appears to concentrate activity and provide a focus for, for example, action planning and priority setting;

• There also appears to be some merit in tackling a range of issues across modes in one location, rather than on a single mode basis.

To identify cases of good practice from which transport operators and facilitators can learn

Throughout this research, a number of examples of good practice have been identified. These are summarised here. It is also worth noting at this point that many disabled people provided examples of good practice, or excellent service, by individual public transport staff covering all modes of transport.

• The access audits undertaken by train operating companies as part of the development of their DPPPs, and recently revised, represent good practice in two ways. Firstly, this remains the only systematic access audit carried out by a transport provider, and secondly, each of the operators has responded positively to criticism of the standards used, and sought to develop updated information which is more relevant and hence valuable for disabled people generally.

• The approach taken by train operating companies to the training of their staff appears positive (although no comment can be made about the nature of the training). The fact that all staff are to receive specific disability equality training is positive, as is the commitment to revisit this after a reasonable period. It is also positive that all staff, including managers are expected to undertake this training. Also in this area, the local initiative of train operating companies in supporting staff to undertake BSL training is positive.

• The provision of increased numbers of marked parking spaces appears to have encouraged more disabled people to consider transferring to public transport for at least part of their journey.

• Shetland Islands Council, which provides all services in the islands, has specified in its contracts that all main route services are to be provided by low floor buses. Local transport operators have made substantial investments to purchase low floor buses. Linking services (from the most outlying areas) are, at this time, however, provided by inaccessible vehicles.

• The commitment shown by a number of operators (both large and small) to the early introduction of low floor buses. It is also worth noting that some small companies are creating niche markets through operating outside normal routes, in a manner more akin to community transport provision.

• A number of disabled people based in Aberdeen were highly critical of the HST services provided by GNER to Edinburgh and London. The approach of the company has been, recognising that it would not be possible to replace the carriages in the short term, to lease additional rolling stock which has been refurbished to current RVAR standards, and which will be inserted into existing sets, providing a much improved level of access, better toilets, and, for the first time, will allow two wheelchair users to travel together.

• The provision of bus information on stops and shelters was viewed by virtually all of those who mentioned this as an example of best practice.
• The provision of automatic audible destination information on some SPT services.
• The initiative by SPT to permit travellers to contact relatives or service providers through network control staff appears to be an excellent approach.
• The approach of the airline industry to providing transparent assistance to passengers appears to be working effectively in the view of many disabled people, although there remain issues with access to aircraft.

To identify priorities for further research in this area

This is addressed in the recommendations below.

KEY PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED BY RESPONDENTS

It is worth summarising the key priorities identified by those who took part in this research. As the responses were both from individuals and from organisations and within different contexts, it is impossible to identify any meaningful ranking, however, the following issues were those which were raised most commonly during the fieldwork and through the postal survey.

• The need for public transport to be consistent and dependable, with reasonable guarantees that services described as accessible will be so, and that assistance offered will be provided.
• The need for more accessible transport vehicles, particularly buses and taxis.
• The need for transport facilities to be more accessible.
• The need for the attitudes and approach of transport staff to be appropriate and positive.
• The need for the attitudes and approach of other passengers to be appropriate and positive.
• The need for the wider built environment to be accessible. Among the issues raised were shops, offices and other places of work, health centres, leisure centres and public buildings.
• The need for public transport to be affordable, particularly taxis in most areas, but also flights and ferries in island areas.
• The need for better enforcement of a wide range of issues, such as poor parking, designated spaces, as well as maintaining spaces on buses and trains.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A series of recommendation are set out below. These arise directly from the findings of the research set out in the early part of this section.

• It is clear that there is, at present, a lack of clarity as to what is meant by “accessible” transport, and there is a clear tendency for public transport operators, inevitably, to think only in terms of their own services. What appears to be required is, in reality, a much wider view, recognising the benefits of needs being addressed on a “whole journey” basis. The 1998 report recommended the
development of a national accessible transport strategy, supported by local strategies. It is suggest that the findings of this research underline the need for work of this kind to be undertaken, and to feed through to wider transport policy (for example the national indicators, which do not refer to access at all).

- It is suggested that the Scottish Executive considers commissioning exploratory research to assess current information on the travel patterns of disabled people with a view to recommending whether primary research may be required.
- It is suggested that the Scottish Executive, working with MACS and the main disability and older persons’ organisations, undertakes further systematic research into the factors which prevent many older and disabled people from travelling, and to explore the measures which may be required to enable this.
- It is suggested that the Scottish Executive reviews the impact of concessionary fares, specifically the national concession on bus travel, local concessions on rail, sea and air travel and the operation of taxi card schemes, in order to identify their impact (both positive and negative) on various groups of older and disabled people, and to identify those initiatives which can be demonstrated to have most impact on the social and economic inclusion of these groups.
- It is suggested that the Scottish Executive, working with RNIB assesses the impact of the national concessionary fare scheme for visually impaired people, with a view to identifying whether similar provision for other groups of disabled people would lead to positive social and economic benefits.
- It is suggested that the Scottish Executive carry out a review of the extent to which Local Transport Strategies address accessible transport issues with a view both to highlighting gaps and disseminating potential good practice.
- It is suggested that MACS, working with the Scottish Executive and major transport federations (such as CPT and ATCO), as well as with local authorities, develop a good practice guide in consulting with disabled people about transport provision, and particularly about changes or improvements to services. It is recognised that there is already good practice in some areas, and this should be built on in the guidance.
- It is suggested that the Scottish Executive, working with MACS, should seek to encourage public transport operators to include access information on their websites, and make this available to telephone helpline staff.
- Although accessibility audits were recommended in the 1998 report, with the notable exception of rail, these remain patchy and lack a systematic basis. Recent work done on behalf of DPTAC presents the opportunity for the Scottish Executive (with MACS and professional associations in transport, planning and architecture) to develop a set of good practice guidance on the undertaking of accessibility audits, and the development of action plans to address any shortcomings identified. The timing of this is opportune, as many operators may be struggling to understand clearly what may be expected of them following the implementation of further DDA requirements from October 2004.
- Training remains an area where relatively little progress has been made, and it is suggested that MACS and the Scottish Executive could undertake wider promotion of the need for, and benefits of, undertaking disability equality training on the basis set out in the MACS guidance.
- The lack of knowledge of accessible services among many older and disabled people is an issue which could be addressed by MACS working with local authorities, major national voluntary organisations and transport operators,
perhaps through a campaign stressing the opportunities for travel which now exist. This would, of course, have to be targeted carefully, perhaps to coincide with the development of more accessible services in an area.

- It is clear from the findings of this research that disabled people face unnecessary problems through the attitudes of transport staff and other passengers. Examples of this include reluctance to give assistance, failure to enforce accessibility measures and failure to, for example, vacate seats to allow a disabled person access to the most suitable seating. It is suggested that the Scottish Executive, working with local authorities, major voluntary organisations and transport providers put in place a campaign to address these attitudes and behaviours, and hence improve the travel experiences of many disabled people.

- It is suggested that the Department for Transport consider whether, in the light of advances in technology, it would be possible to require the lowering of suitably equipped buses at every stop, recognising the issues set out in this report of hidden impairments and the reluctance of many people to ask for assistance.

- The apparent failure of some bus drivers to deploy the ramp on their vehicle is contrary to the Conduct Regulations, and it should be made clear to bus operators, and to drivers, that ramps must be deployed where these are required by a passenger.

- It is suggested that DPTAC, MACS and the Department for Transport review the current Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations to identify whether changes in the specification may make buses easier to use for some groups of older and disabled people.

- It is suggested that the Scottish Executive discusses with ACPOS whether the enforcement of parking measures at bus stops can be improved. One suggestion made by a respondent, which appears worthy of consideration, is the use of double yellow lines in the entry to, and exit from bus stops.

- It is suggested that train operating companies and Network Rail put in place a system which gives priority to trains carrying disabled people with mobility needs when trains have to be re-routed to inaccessible platforms for operational reasons.

- The Scottish Executive should consider commissioning an evaluation of various pilot ring and ride schemes (for example those in Angus, Fife and the SPT area) in order to establish whether these do make a significant impact in allowing the older and disabled people who currently do not travel to do so on a more regular basis. One outcome of this could be good practice guidance for other operators considering schemes of this type.

- The Scottish Executive should consider research to review the current funding and other issues facing community transport providers given the expected increase in use due to improvements in community care.

- The Scottish Executive, working with CoSLA and the CPT should consider reviewing the actual and potential impact of the specification of low floor buses on subsidised routes, with a view to establishing whether this approach might firstly, be viable, and secondly, lead to wider access benefits for older and disabled people.

- Similarly, it is clear from this research (and research conducted by SATA in the past) that the adoption of accessible taxi policies can be introduced successfully. It is recognised, however, that these are not popular with the trade (although overall, the trade is in favour of improving access) and with some disabled people. The current situation across Scotland is inconsistent and confusing, and the Scottish
Executive should consider whether bringing forward its proposed guidelines might help improve access in the many areas with few, or no accessible taxis.
APPENDIX ONE  FINDINGS OF 1998 RESEARCH

The main findings of the 1998 research were:

In relation to the **prevalence of disability**, whilst the report shows that it is difficult to measure this accurately for a number of reasons including the definitions used and incompatible data (see Section 3 of the 1998 report), a number of key conclusions can be drawn, as follows:

- the OPCS survey of 1985/6 (the central study in this area) estimated that there were 612,000 people with impairments in Scotland, and changes in the population base suggest that this would, in the absence of any other factors, have increased by up to 30,000 since then, representing at least 12% of the population;
- nearly all of the people classed by OPCS as having an impairment of any kind, could be seen to be likely to have some difficulty, in some circumstances, in using some forms of public transport (640,000+ in Scotland). Approximately 260,000 people may have considerable difficulty in using public transport;
- up to 450,000 people in Scotland may have some form of mobility impairment, and as many as 135,000 may have difficulty in walking as much as 50 yards or standing for five minutes;
- around 15,000 people in Scotland are likely to require a wheelchair for their mobility, with considerably more relying on wheelchairs for part of the time;
- RNID estimates that 730,000 people in Scotland overall experience some level of hearing impairment, and that approximately 55,000 people are severely or profoundly deaf;
- RNIB estimates that approximately 67,000 people (approximately double the number of those registered) have some form of visual impairment;
- although the quality of the data available is inadequate to produce reliable estimates below a Scottish level in relation to the prevalence of disability, these national figures indicate that provision to meet these needs is a major issue.

The **needs of disabled people in terms of public transport** were found to fall into five broad categories.

- there is a need for public transport policy and co-ordination at national and local levels to reflect the needs of disabled people not only in relation to physical access to vehicles and facilities, but also to include issues such as the built environment, the co-ordination and scheduling of different modes of transport, the availability of transport information on a multi-modal basis (relating both to services and accessibility) and the provision of assistance in an appropriate manner;
- disabled people need to be able to board vehicles easily, and in a manner which does not compromise their safety, to maintain this level of comfort and safety while travelling, and to be able to use appropriate facilities independently and privately. There is also a need to ensure that the built environment allows access to transport, and that the facilities and waiting areas are accessible to all disabled people;
• staff within the public transport system need to have an understanding of disability issues, as the influence of staff attitudes and actions on the experiences of disabled people can be considerable;
• disabled people need clear information in a range of appropriate formats both in relation to services themselves and to their accessibility. This must be accurate, up to date and must reflect the needs of the widest possible range of disabled people;
• disabled people have identified consultation with transport and infrastructure providers and policy makers as the main means by which accessible public transport can be developed and provided.

In terms of identifying **the accessibility of current public transport**, information was gathered from service providers and operators of individual facilities. This covered all of the major modes of transport including bus, coach, rail, air, ferry, taxi, underground and specialist / community transport. In addition, information was collected from local authorities and SPT on their existing policies relating to accessible public transport and to the support which they provide to transport operators.

The main findings in relation to public transport in Scotland (set out in detail in Section 4 of the 1998 report) are as follows :

• there are significant variations across the country in terms of the availability, and particularly the accessibility of services;
• significant progress has been made in a number of areas in terms both of the availability of accessible transport vehicles and supporting infrastructure, but, in other areas, progress has been found to be slower;
• operators in some sectors identified a range of perceived constraints which, in their view, may be likely to impede the development of a fully integrated, accessible public transport system in Scotland;
• there is no consistent picture across Scotland in terms either of the existence of strategies to promote accessible public transport, nor of policies to support its implementation;
• even where operators considered that they had an understanding or awareness of the needs of disabled people, in many cases this had not yet been translated into the development of systematic awareness training (and, for some modes of transport, working practices) to reinforce this;
• barriers were found, in terms of access to services and facilities, relating to all modes of transport studied.

The main **gaps in services** identified by the research in terms of the five areas of need which were outlined previously were found to be as follows :

• there was found to be a lack of strategic approach, objectives and priorities at a Scottish and local level to provide guidance to authorities and transport providers on the development of accessible public transport. There were found to be few mechanisms to provide local direction or co-ordination and little co-ordination of individual services at a local or national level;
• there were found to be considerable variations in the accessibility of public transport both by area and by mode of transport;
significant gaps were found in terms of staff training, with an overall lack of this in relation to disability issues. In a few cases, the policies of transport providers were found to militate against the use of their services by disabled people;

although the availability of information was found to be increasing, there is still a lack of information relating to physical access and facilities, and to multi-modal journey planning;

few transport providers were found to undertake extensive or proactive consultation with disabled people.

Following the identification of these issues, a wide range of recommendations are made, and it is recommended that:

- a national partnership should be developed to consider access to public transport, comprising transport industry interests, disability groups and policy makers;
- a national strategy for accessible public transport in Scotland should be developed;
- awareness-raising and information provision should be undertaken at a national and local levels with transport providers (particularly smaller, but also some larger providers) in relation to the implications of the DDA and the requirements of this;
- local partnerships should be established comprising transport industry interests, disability groups and policy makers (including a range of separate interests, such as physical planning, public transport, roads / infrastructure and corporate policy functions from all relevant authorities);
- local accessible transport strategies should be developed, within the framework of the national strategy;
- local transport and infrastructure providers should be encouraged to audit their services and facilities in terms of their accessibility and to prepare an action plan to address the problems which have been identified, taking into account the range of needs of disabled people in the planning and provision of their services and facilities;
- The Scottish Executive and local authorities should consider the best means of channelling funding into accessible transport;
- transport and infrastructure providers should assess the training needs of all staff within their organisations in terms of disability awareness and implement a systematic programme of disability awareness training for staff at all levels;
- multi-modal information systems should be developed at a national and local level taking into account the needs of a range of groups in the ways in which information is presented;
- information should be routinely updated and a means developed to allow feedback from disabled people on its accuracy;
- consultation with disabled people should be undertaken as a matter of course in the development of all aspects of national and local transport policy;
- mechanisms to highlight access problems should be identified by providers;
- a passenger watchdog body should be developed to address key issues which emerge for users.
APPENDIX TWO  BIBLIOGRAPHY


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