

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) welcomes the Public Transport Ombudsman's report, *Closing the accessibility gap*, which is an important step in addressing the gaps in accessible transport. Access to public transport is essential to ensure that Victorians are able to participate in and be included in our community. For many people with disabilities, public transport services are the only means for accessing employment opportunities, goods and services, education, healthcare, social and cultural life. Access to public transport is therefore central to a person's quality of life and upholding their right to equality.

The Equal Opportunity Act makes it unlawful in Victoria to discriminate on the basis of disability when providing public transport services. The positive duty in the Equal Opportunity Act also requires public transport providers in Victoria to be proactive in taking reasonable and proportionate measures to prevent discrimination as far as possible.

*Closing the accessibility gap* identifies a number of important issues that people with disabilities face when using public transport, including customer service, the ability to embark and disembark operators' services, information provision, the myki ticketing system and non-compliance with the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport.

Many of the recommendations in *Closing the accessibility gap* intersect with those found in the Commission's recent report, *Who's on board? Public transport for people with disabilities in Victoria*. These include ensuring that public transport operators provide an effective and proactive service that enable people to access their services, ensuring that public transport operator staff undertake disability awareness training and undertake consultation with key stakeholders to ensure that accessibility is built into the design. Both reports also highlight the importance of improving the soft infrastructure of the public transport system as a way to provide a truly accessible service for people with a disability.

The findings of these reports also present an opportunity for the Commission and the Public Transport Ombudsman to work together into the future.

We look forward to establishing networks that will allow us to share information and expertise in relation to managing and addressing complaints, and provide advice on the Equal Opportunity Act and the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

The benefits of this cooperation will not only be felt by both organisations, but by the people who face public transport accessibility issues everyday.