

2020

Accessibility Bulletin

PUBLIC
TRANSPORT
OMBUDSMAN



LISTEN · ACT · RESOLVE · IMPROVE





Introduction

Accessibility is about all of us. All Victorians benefit from a public transport system that is easy to use and inclusive, allowing us to be able to travel as freely and as independently as possible.

Public transport is not just a service, but an essential service – for some more than others. For many Victorians, public transport can be a convenient, affordable and faster way to commute to and from work. For others, particularly people with disabilities, people who are vulnerable or people who experience disadvantage, it can mean the difference between accessing employment, education and social opportunities or not. The Victorian Government's *Absolutely Everyone Annual Report 2018* shows that:

- 1 in 10 Victorians have a disability
- 17% of them are not able to use some or any form of public transport
- Less than 33% of people with disability are actively involved in community groups
- Only 50% of people with a disability who graduate University gain employment after graduation (compared with 75% of graduates without disability)

Since 2014, complaints about accessibility of public transport have comprised between two to seven per cent of the total complaints we receive. We believe this figure under-represents the difficulties faced by some people accessing public transport. We know that people with disabilities are more vulnerable when it comes to public transport – they often have limited public transport options and few low-cost alternatives. Our research tells us that people with disabilities are less likely to complain when things go wrong. Because of this, it is important that public transport is accessible and that our office is accessible to people when they want to make a complaint. This Bulletin aims to shine a light on some of the current issues with accessibility and the measures we're taking to make it easier for people to complain to us and how we can help make the system better for everyone.



'Public transport is an essential service for many Victorians, particularly for those who experience disadvantage, are vulnerable or people with disabilities.'

Treasure Jennings

Public Transport Ombudsman



From the Ombudsman

Welcome to my second Accessibility Bulletin, an annual publication reporting on the accessibility challenges facing Victorians using public transport across the state.

We are experiencing an unprecedented time in the world right now with the Coronavirus pandemic fundamentally changing the way we live our lives. This makes it more important than ever to consider those more vulnerable in our community who may need more assistance. Not just the 1 in 10 Victorians who have a disability – both visible and invisible, including those with sensory difficulties – but also those people who may be self-isolating and alone, older people in the community and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Public transport is an essential service for many Victorians, particularly for those who experience disadvantage, are vulnerable or people with disabilities. It's important that we recognise that whilst everybody's day to day lives have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, for those most vulnerable in our community this impact could be significant.

Most of us will need to rely on accessible public transport at some stage in our lives. The accessibility of public transport is a key issue for people with disabilities including invisible disabilities, older people and youth, parents with young children and for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

A recent report from the Commissioner for Senior Victorians showed that for around 10% of the population over 65, social isolation and loneliness can impact significantly on their health and wellbeing and there was a clear link between transport options, social connection and psychological wellbeing. The report found that *"...there are a range of older people who are at risk of social exclusion through lack of transport options, for example, people on low incomes, people with disabilities, older women, those living with dementia or chronic health conditions and people living in rural areas"*.¹

My office doesn't take complaints about the transport options available, but I do take complaints about the quality, reliability and accessibility of the services. The single biggest area of complaints received by my office in the past 12 months was about public transport staff. It is important that public transport operators ensure that all staff understand the role they have in promoting accessibility, and regular training supports inclusive practices and attitudes. This includes accessibility for people with sensory difficulties as well as those with invisible disabilities or people using assistance animals.

This year we implemented our first Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan to ensure that both our services and our workplace align with the work we do. We understand that accessibility of our service is not just about lodging a complaint but about making our process easy to understand and to use.

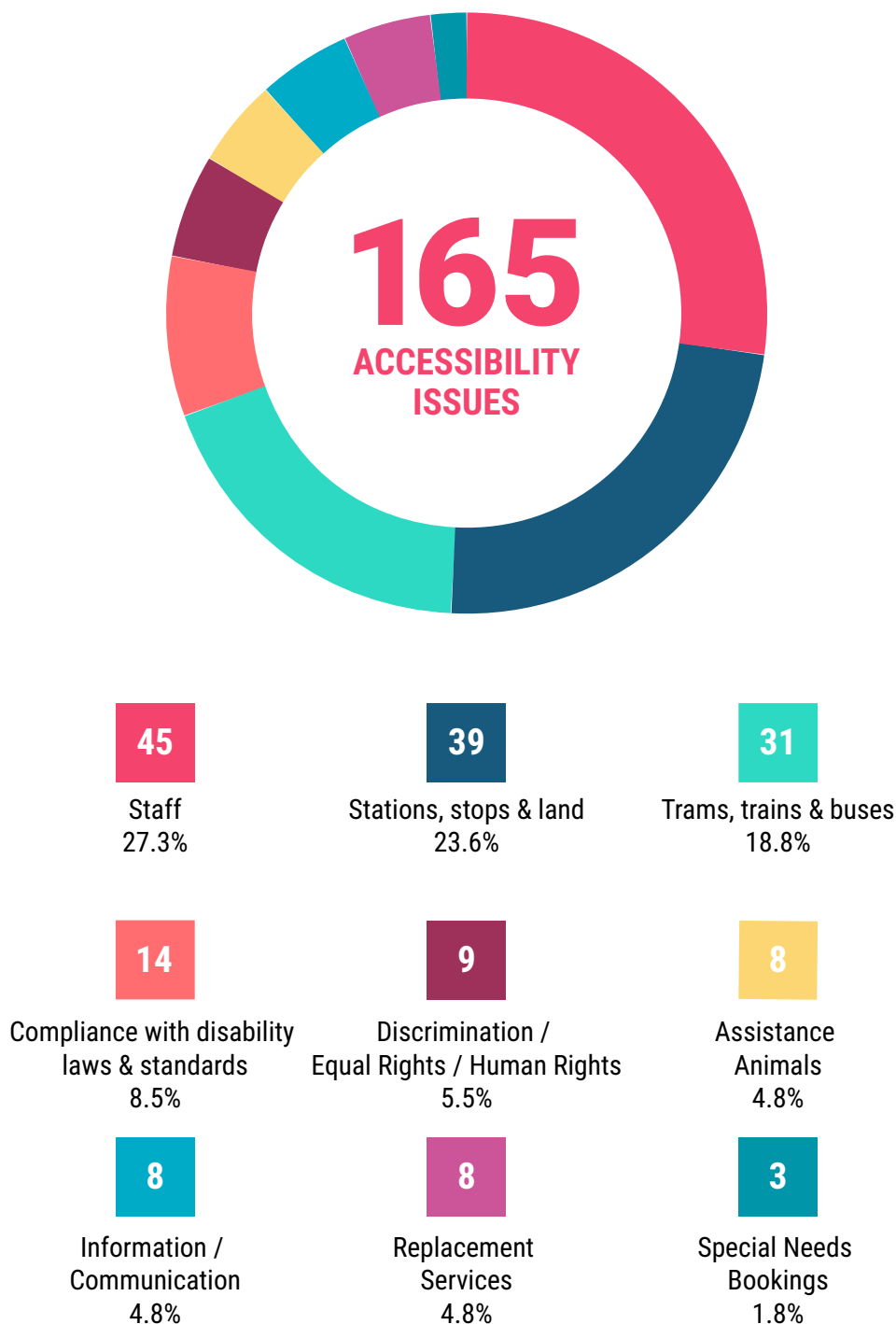
The purpose of the Action Plan is to provide a service that supports diversity and is accessible to everyone in the community, and to build an accessible workplace that promotes increased participation of people with disabilities in employment. See [page 13](#) to read more about our Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan.



Treasure Jennings,
Public Transport Ombudsman

1. *Ageing is everyone's business: a report on isolation and loneliness among senior Victorians*, Commissioner for Senior Victorians, January 2016 page 15.

Accessibility issues from complaints



2019–2020 issues

In the 12 months to 31 March 2020 more than 6,900 issues were included in our complaints to the Public Transport Ombudsman, however only 2.4% of those related to accessibility issues.

While statistically this represents a small portion of overall complaints, anecdotally we know that complaints about accessibility issues are underrepresented.

Overwhelmingly, the largest category of accessibility issues received by the PTO this year was about public transport staff. This indicates that additional training may be needed to assist staff to be more skilled in liaising with people with disabilities, older people or people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

This result is consistent with our overall complaints in the 2019 financial year, as recorded in our annual report, where problems with public transport staff was the number one issue, including poor conduct, customers service failings and lack of responsiveness.

This year we also started to record complaints about assistance animals as a separate issue. By law, a person accompanied by a Guide Dog is permitted to travel on any form of public transport, including buses, trams and trains. However, we get complaints about a range of assistance animals, not just Guide Dogs, including about the process to apply for a PTV Assistance Animal Pass.

We continue to hear from disability advocacy and support organisations that people who rely on public transport were very often reluctant to complain when things went wrong. These organisations, including the Disability Resources Centre (DRC) tell us that this reluctance to make a formal complaint is an ongoing concern.

Because of this, we increased our presence in the community to give us an opportunity to liaise with more organisations and advocacy groups to hear first-hand of their accessibility experiences with public transport.

Having these discussions identifies and highlights the issues that people with disabilities experience with public transport. Identifying not only the 'what' but also the 'why' when it comes to accessibility allows us to have productive discussions with public transport operators and look for improvement opportunities through our systemic issues process.

The Top 5 accessibility issues for 2019-20 were:

1. Staff

2. Stations,
stops and land

3. Trams, trains
and buses

4. Compliance
with disability

laws and
standards

5. Discrimination /
Equal Rights /
Human Rights

Stories from our complaints

The best way to illustrate some of the accessibility issues that are raised with us, is through the stories of people who contacted us to complain about their experiences.

Simone's Story

Simone contacted us regarding an issue with her daughter and the local bus company.

Simone's daughter, Ivy, who has autism, had a bus ticket to travel from Leongatha in East Gippsland to Morwell, 60 kilometres away. Ivy was sent off at Leongatha, with her sister Jo waiting at Morwell to pick her up.

Jo was at the bus stop waiting to meet the bus to pick up Ivy, however the bus didn't show up. Ivy became quite distressed on the bus when it didn't stop in Morwell, knowing that her sister was there to pick her up. Ivy was not able to get off the bus until it stopped at Traralgon, another 13 kilometres away, where she was left stranded with no-one to pick her up. Another family member had to drive to Traralgon to pick Ivy up.

Simone contacted the bus company to make a complaint that afternoon about her daughter's experience. The bus company told her that the bus driver says he did stop, and there was nothing they could do, given the driver's statement. It was his word against hers.

Frustrated by no further action by the bus company, Simone contacted Public Transport Victoria (PTV) on the same day to make a complaint and was told to expect a response within seven business days. Simone asked PTV for reimbursement of the petrol money to go and collect her daughter from Traralgon.

Eight days later, and with no response, Simone contacted PTV again and was told a report had been logged.

Simone then contacted us, and we followed up with the bus company on her behalf. Upon investigation, the bus driver conceded that he did, in fact, bypass Morwell and drive directly to Traralgon, contrary to his earlier statement. Our expectation is that public transport staff provide accurate and truthful information in response to customer complaints and concerns.

The bus company confirmed they addressed the matter with the driver and wrote a letter of apology. They also provided a payment to cover petrol costs as an acknowledgement of the poor experience.

Simone and Ivy were satisfied with the outcome that the PTO had achieved.

Dominic's Story


Dominic has a Disability Support Pension Card and was entitled to travel on a concession myki; however he was issued with a full fare myki by his support organisation. He noticed the error after using the wrong myki for one day and asked the PTV call centre to help him get the myki changed to concession myki.

After waiting a week for a response, Dominic went to the PTV Hub at Southern Cross Station and was given a replacement concession myki. He was told that the money on his full fare myki would be transferred to the replacement myki, as well as the amount he was overcharged. However when Dominic travelled a month later, the balance on his myki showed as \$0.00. He contacted the PTV Call Centre and was assured that his card had a positive balance, but he didn't think their advice was correct.

Dominic contacted our office to find out what happened to the money that should have been transferred to his new myki.

We spoke with PTV about the balance of Dominic's myki and established that there was a positive balance, however the funds had become dormant. Money on a myki becomes dormant if the myki is not used for 90 days. To reactivate the dormant money on his myki, Dominic would need to touch on his myki and then wait for the funds to be returned, which can take up to 24 hours. Dominic was also expecting the balance of a different lost myki to be added to his new concession myki, so we asked PTV to add this amount to the amount he was being reimbursed.

Dominic told us that he would like assistance to reactivate the funds on his myki at his local train station. We liaised with PTV so that the customer service staff at Dominic's station would be available to help him reactivate his myki. We also confirmed with PTV that Dominic was being reimbursed with the correct amount. PTV apologised to Dominic for their initial lack of assistance and told him that feedback had been provided to the call centre about his experience.



**'When the train doesn't stop
for me at my station, I don't
want to push the emergency
button to let the driver know
he's missed my stop, I just
want to be treated like
everybody else.'**

Wheelchair passenger from Geelong

Systemic issues

While we investigate and resolve individual complaints about public transport accessibility, we also investigate broader issues that have the potential to impact more people. We call these systemic issues.

Looking at systemic issues is one way in which we work with public transport operators and the Government to address these broader problems with respect to accessibility and help make improvements to the public transport system.

We find out about systemic issues through the complaints we receive, from talking with people at community events, from advocacy groups or community organisations and sometimes from public transport operators themselves.

Our approach is to:

- Contact the public transport operator and investigate the systemic issue;
- Identify who is affected and the impact of the issue; and
- Find a fair and reasonable resolution to the issue to prevent future complaints.

We monitor systemic issues through the complaints we receive, even after they are resolved, to make sure the problem doesn't happen again.

Here are some of the accessibility systemic issues we have looked at in the past year:

- Train access for special needs passengers at Flinders Street Station when the train changed direction
- Accessibility at railway stations for visually impaired travellers
- Disabled seating on V/Line coaches
- Toilet accessibility on long haul trains
- Disability access to peak hour services
- Accessing trams at superstops
- In-carriage wheelchair and toilet access on V/Line services
- Unplanned service disruption – disruption management

2

Cranbourne

Schedule
2:21

Departure
9 min

Westall
Springvale
Sandown Park
Noble Park
Yarraman

Dandenong
Lynbrook
Melinda Park
Cranbourne

Schedule	Train No	Departure
2:24	Traralgon	12 min
2:31	Palmerston	20 min
Stops All Stations		

14:12:56

**'I've been left on the train
many times and had to
travel to the next town
miles away because
the driver's forgotten me.'**

Wheelchair passenger from Swan Hill



How we make ourselves accessible

This year we created and implemented the PTO Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan to provide a service that supports diversity and is accessible to everyone in the community, and to build an accessible and inclusive workplace that promotes increased participation of people with disabilities in employment.

Our objectives under the Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan are to:

1. Ensure our communication channels are clear and accessible to promote engagement;
2. Ensure PTO staff are disability confident and competent in their dealings with people who access our services;
3. Engage in a recruitment process that is accessible and inclusive; and
4. Provide a positive and inclusive workplace that accommodates and celebrates the strengths and abilities of everyone.

You can see the plan on our website [here](#).

As part of this plan the staff at the PTO undertook disability awareness training which will continue to be delivered on an annual basis. We also developed a comprehensive awareness plan which includes measures for raising awareness of the PTO and engaging with people with disabilities and their advocates.

We have continued to increase participation in events, expos, workshops and contact with community groups and advocacy organisations to provide information to people with disabilities about how we can help them with a public transport complaint. It is also a way for us to research accessibility complaints in the community, hear about issues people have regarding access to public transport and find out first-hand about the challenges of making a complaint.

Hearing people's stories first-hand allows us to improve our communications, ensure our services are accessible and continuously improve the ways in which we capture and resolve people's complaints.

In redeveloping the PTO website, we have made it simpler for people to use the website and make a complaint. The website now meets the accessibility compliance standard of WCAG 2.1. Information in 11 community languages other than English is now available. The website also features a new and updated video in spoken word and Auslan (Australian sign language), which explains what we do and how we help make public transport better for everyone.

This year we also expanded our public communications to include additional social media channels, which allows us to engage with a broader audience and provide people with more ways to contact us and make a complaint.

Out in the community

Increasing awareness of what the PTO does and the services we provide is a priority for us. We are particularly focused on connecting with people in the community we know are less likely to make a formal complaint.

Accessibility is not only about making a complaint, but about making the complaint process easy to understand and use – getting out into the community is a practical and useful way to do this. We aim to reach as many people as we can to make sure they know about our services and how we can help them with a public transport complaint. We also partner with disability advocacy and support groups on opportunities to engage with a broader audience.

Working in partnership with the DRC

We meet regularly with the Disability Resource Centre (DRC) to talk about public transport accessibility and the issues and concerns raised by their members.

In March this year we attended some free regional DRC workshops focussed on the accessibility of public transport in regional Victoria. The purpose of the workshops was to help people tell their stories about public transport and talk to them about how they could bring about change. We attended workshops in Sale and Traralgon and spoke with many people who had experienced inaccessible public transport, their carers and their advocates. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, a number of the scheduled workshops had to be postponed and will now take place online.

It was disappointing to hear about several people at the workshops whose negative experiences with public transport availability and accessibility led to them losing confidence in their ability to travel independently. Often they had no alternative to public transport. This is what some of them told us:

"If the toilet is out of order I cannot travel on the train into Melbourne. This means that I miss out on seeing my children, going to medical appointments and taking up work opportunities. It takes away my independence and my dignity".

"It costs you \$4 to get a coffee. Because the buses don't come out to the new development, it costs me \$24 to have a coffee with my friends - \$4 for the coffee and \$20 for the taxi".

"My teenage son has a disability and is very slow to get on and off buses. He is becoming less independent, because he will only catch a bus if he knows the driver and can be confident that the driver will be empathetic".

"The steps on the V/Line coaches are so high and inaccessible, that sometimes I have to pull myself up with both hands and ask whoever is standing behind me to help push me up the steps".

We talked with participants about our systemic issues process and how we use the information they provide to look at whether and how the services, processes and policies of public transport operators create or exacerbate accessibility challenges.

Connecting with CALD communities in Victoria

In the past year we engaged with ethnic community associations and migrant resource centres to share information about the PTO and how we can work with people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds who may have public transport complaints. This engagement saw a significant increase in people accessing the information on our website in languages other than English. As part of our new website we have expanded the information available in languages other than English to 11 community languages.

In the coming year we plan to provide more information about how we can help with public transport complaints in languages other than English across different communication channels including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We also plan to work with the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria to speak with the CALD advocacy and support organisations who can help us ensure that our services are available to all Victorians who need us.

Young People

We participate in O Week festivities each year at Universities across Melbourne to engage one-on-one with young people. Attending these events gives us access to thousands of students who rely on public transport to attend University from all parts of Victoria.

This year we conducted some market research via a student survey to understand young people's experiences with public transport, find out what issues they faced and get valuable insights as to why they did not complain to the PTO about public transport.

In the survey, almost 80% of students told us they did not know about the Public Transport Ombudsman. Of the small proportion of students that were aware of the PTO, more than 73% did not know we were a free and independent service for resolving public transport complaints.

Of the almost 40% of students that had made a complaint about public transport, almost 18% of those were about accessibility to public transport, which strengthens our view that the broader issue of accessibility is a wide-ranging problem affecting a number of people.

Pleasingly, more than 80% of students told us that now they are aware of the PTO, they are more likely to make a complaint to us if they have a problem with public transport.

VALID Having a Say Conference

VALID (Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability) is an award-winning organisation that has been at the forefront of advocating for people with a disability in Victoria since 1989.

Having a Say is an annual conference we attend to provide information about the PTO, how people with a disability can access our services, how to make a complaint, the type of complaints we can look at, what we are doing about Accessibility to public transport in Victoria.

Most importantly, we get to speak directly with people with a disability, their carers and families about the issues they have with public transport, how they experience public transport – not just trains, buses and trams, but also train stations, bus stops, tram stops, online ticketing services and support when using public transport.

The conference gives us an opportunity to directly hear about accessibility issues from people with disability and how we may be able to help.

Help us to help you

We want to hear from you

It is important to the work we do that we hear from people with a diverse range of experiences in accessing public transport. Since our first Accessibility Bulletin last year we continue to hear from advocacy organisations who tell us that a reluctance to complain about public transport is an ongoing issue for vulnerable people.

We want to hear about your experience with accessing public transport.

What would help you to contact the PTO about your accessibility issue?

- More people at events?
- Questionnaires/surveys at events?
- More information at stations/ on board transport?
- More online information?
- More information via social media?
- Something else?

If you have any suggestions for how we could make it easier for you to contact us, we'd love to hear from you.

How you can contact us

If you or someone you know wants to discuss accessibility problems, or has a complaint about public transport, we would like to hear from you.

This is how you can raise an issue with us:

Phone: 1800 466 865

Email: enquiries@ptovic.com.au

Website: www.ptovic.com.au

Facebook: www.facebook.com/PublicTransportOmbudsman

Twitter: www.twitter.com/ptovic

Mail:

Public Transport Ombudsman
PO Box 538
Collins Street West
Melbourne Vic 8007

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment you can contact us through:

The National Relay Service.
<https://www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/phone/services-people-disability/accesshub>

Speak another language and want to contact us?

Information about the PTO in various languages can be found on our website or you can contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450.

Need help lodging your complaint?

You can nominate a carer or advocate, family member or friend to lodge a complaint on your behalf. You can access all the information on how to nominate an authorised representative on our website.