

ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT ACTION PLAN

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1 BACKGROUND

The Disability Discrimination Act was passed in October 1992 to provide comprehensive and uniform protection for people with a disability throughout Australia. To achieve a compliance mechanism, the Act provides for 'Disability Standards' to be adopted.

Within public transport, the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport were promulgated in October 2002. Action Plans are the mechanism by which providers' document policies to ensure their operations become consistent with the DDA and the Standards. The compliance level required under the Standards in the bus industry is gradually introduced by December 2022.

Caringbah Bus Service aim is to continue to manage changes to our services to eliminate discrimination in a positive way so that improved services are delivered to all passengers.

2 IDENTIFYING BARRIERS

Accessible transport services are about being aware of the existence of barriers, which make access difficult or impossible, and being prepared to remedy such barriers.

From surveys that have been conducted, some of the barriers to accessible bus services are boarding buses because of step heights, lack of handrails, narrow doorways and aisles, and the difficulties getting to bus services because of uneven footpaths and crossovers, and poor signs and timetables. In recent years, progress has been made through adopting new processes, and compliant remedial measures which are discussed in following sections.

3 CURRENT PRACTICES

Caringbah began bus operations in Caringbah in 1959. The beginning of 2003 signalled a new approach with changes to improve services and benefit the whole community.

3.1 BUS FLEET

Caringbah continues its investment in the latest buses, which provide:

- Wheelchair access
- Priority seating for the elderly and those with restricted mobility
- Allocated spaces for wheelchair and mobility aid users
- Colour contrasted handrails and grabrails with grab handles on seats
- Comfortable cloth covered seats with more room to sit
- Air conditioning
- Under seat storage for shopping, school bags, etc

3.2 TIMETABLES

Caringbah will introduce an improved timetable network which will include:

- Improved timetables to synchronise with local train services
- Introduce timetables with marked and dedicated Wheelchair accessible services integrated into the new network

3.3 CUSTOMER SERVICE

Caringbah has made customer service a key focus by:

- Rostering drivers on the same shift to not only know the area, but passengers as well
- Creating a new look to identify Caringbah buses
- Ongoing driver training and refresher courses in Customer service

4 STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

This section addresses actions which are being taken, and Caringbah's ongoing commitments to address barriers relating to:

- Bus fleet
- Information
- Infrastructure – bus stops
- Other matters

4.1 BUS FLEET

Caringbah has 2 low floor buses out of a total fleet of 9 buses. Through the 7 year contract period, the compliance timeframe for buses is 25% by 31 Dec 2007. However, the compliance level for several issues within buses is 100% at 31 Dec 2007. These are symbols, signs, information and priority seating. Lighting is also in this category, but the Standard is not considered operationally safe, and will be subject of a submission by the Bus & Coach Association of NSW (BCA NSW) to the five year review of the Standards in 2007.

The low floor buses (39%) are considered compliant with the Disability Standards, so that Caringbah currently exceeds the 2007 five year compliance level. Nevertheless, this will increase over the period of the new contract, as all buses replaced will be with compliant low floor models.

Caringbah is committed to:

- *Ensuring buses entering the fleet are compliant low floor designed buses*
- *Having symbols, signs, information & priority seating on all buses meet the Standards by 31 Dec 2007*

4.2 INFORMATION

In 1999, Transport Infoline was established to provide a consistent one-stop transport information service for the greater Sydney region. Transport Infoline provides:

- Multi-modal trip planning
- Timetable and fare information
- Maps for the greater Sydney area for trains, buses and ferries
- A 'Your Say Line' where all public transport-related complaints can be lodged for referral to relevant agencies for action
- Availability via a call centre, internet and TTY access for people with hearing impairment

The compliance timeframe in the Disability Standards for information is 100% at 31 December 2007, and the centralised Transport Infoline 131 500 service generally complies in its present format. Caringbah currently provide information on services on our own internet site, as well as to the Transport Infoline via BCA NSW to ensure information is presented in a simple and consistent manner.

Caringbah also produce our own timetable pamphlets, and large print versions are available as photocopies on request.

Caringbah is committed to:

- Continue to provide information through the Transport Infoline 131 500
- Have information available on the Caringbah website
- Providing information in standard and alternative formats
- Investigating communication cards and stop reminder slips for passengers

4.3 INFRASTRUCTURE – BUS STOPS

Local government and road authorities have a major role to play in further integrating accessible bus services with the provision of accessible bus stops, footpaths and kerbside infrastructure. Caringbah, through BCA NSW, will continue to work with authorities responsible for roads in developing practical responses to accessibility issues for bus services. The compliance timeframe for bus stop infrastructure is 25% by 31 December 2007.

Caringbah is committed to:

- Work with road authorities through BCA NSW to provide accessible bus stops to comply with timelines in Standards

4.4 OTHER MATTERS

Caringbah Disability Policy

Caringbah will develop a formal Disability Policy, which will provide a public statement of our commitment to implementation of this Action Plan. Caringbah will appoint a DDA Coordinator to oversee this Action Plan.

Caringbah is committed to:

- Develop and promote a Caringbah DDA Accessibility Policy
- Appoint a DDA Coordinator to oversee this Action Plan

Complaints Procedure

The Caringbah DDA Coordinator will enhance our complaints system to include coordination of DDA issues which will establish a grievance procedure prior to any direct approach to HREOC. This will include liaison with BCA NSW and the Transport Infoline 'Your Say Line'.

Caringbah is committed to:

- *Coordination of a DDA grievance procedure with reference to BCA NSW and the Transport Infoline*

Public Transport Disability Forum

Caringbah believes that establishment of a group of representatives from peak disability groups and public transport operators reporting to the State Government would provide an ongoing forum to identify and resolve issues relating to access to public transport. Caringbah and other bus operators would be represented by the Bus & Coach Association of NSW (BCA NSW).

Caringbah is committed to:

- *Supporting establishment of a Public Transport Disability Forum with representatives from Government, peak disability groups and public transport operators*

Consultation with Other Operators

Through BCA NSW, Caringbah will consult and cooperate with other public transport operators to ensure our bus services provide compatible access where connecting with other bus or intermodal transport services. This will contribute to achieving accessible public transport across different bus operators, so that the compliance levels in the Standards are realised.

Caringbah is committed to:

- *Consultation with other public transport operators to achieve accessible public transport services throughout the community*

Training

Since attitude is one of the main barriers to non-discriminatory access, the disability awareness module in the induction training for new staff will be enhanced. It will provide an overview of this Action Plan, outline all staff responsibilities, and explain the current obligations of the DDA. Ongoing training for current staff will also reinforce these points.

The training module for bus drivers and those with customer service responsibilities will be reviewed to provide them with the background and skills to interact proficiently with passengers so discrimination against people with disabilities is avoided.

Caringbah is committed to:

- *Enhance training to include an overview of the DDA and this Action Plan*
- *Review customer service training to provide skills to interact effectively with all passengers*

5 REVIEW & EVALUATION

5.1 REVIEW

Caringbah will prepare an annual review which will audit the progress against the commitments of this Action Plan, and may include reference to any matters that other organisations raise that affect delivery of accessibility outcomes to public transport matters under our contract.

5.2 EVALUATION

This Action Plan will not be a static document, because of the technological changes and other innovations that will occur over the coming years. Changes to the Plan will be able to be made and advised formally to Government and HREOC.

Caringbah will appoint a DDA Coordinator to liaise with representatives throughout the organisation to oversee the implementation, evaluation & review of the accessibility achieved through this Action Plan.