
FACT SHEET

Elderly-friendly design for public buses

1. Introduction

1.1 This fact sheet aims to provide information on elderly-friendly design for public buses to members of the Panel on Transport to facilitate their deliberation on the issue. It covers the report published by the World Health Organization ("WHO") in 2007 which encourage cities to become more age-friendly through the development of a set of age-friendly city checklist from the experience in 33 cities, including the availability and accessibility of transportation and age-friendly vehicles. The city of London in the United Kingdom is also studied to provide background information on elderly-friendly bus design.

2 The World Health Organization

2.1 In view that population ageing is one of the global trends shaping the 21st century with increasing number of residents aged 60 and above in every city, WHO has conducted a research project on age-friendly cities. WHO subsequently published a report in 2007 entitled "*Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*" with a view to engaging cities to become more age-friendly by encouraging active ageing through optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security, thereby enhancing quality of life as people age. In particular, WHO recommended that age-friendly vehicles should be designed to:

- (a) be accessible, with lower floors, low steps, and wide and high seats;
- (b) be clean and well-maintained;
- (c) have clear signage indicating the vehicle number and destination;
and
- (d) have priority seating for older people.

2.2 WHO is of the view that transportation services and infrastructures, including the provision of elderly-friendly public buses, must always be linked to opportunities for social, civic and economic participation, as well as to access to essential health service. Going forward, participants in the WHO research project undertake to translate the research into local action, and to expand the scope beyond cities and into more communities.

3. London of the United Kingdom

3.1 In 1985, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee was established under the *Transport Act 1985* to advise the government on the transport needs of disabled people. In the same year, the first low-floor bus specification was drafted by the Committee. In 1995, the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995* provided for the implementation of *the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000*, which specified that all new public service vehicles over 22 seats should be low floor from 31 December 2000, with smaller vehicles mandated from 1 January 2005.

3.2 In addition to the legislative requirement for providing accessible transport to the disabled, the increase of the London's ageing population is also a concern for the city to cater for an ever increasing proportion of mobility impaired. The Transport for London¹ projected that the total London population was to increase by around 13% from 2011 to 2031, whereas the number of Londoners aged over 65 would increase by around 34% over the same period.² As such, the Mayor of London published the Mayor's Transport Strategy ("MTS") in May 2010 to set out improvements to London's transport system over the next 20 years. In particular, the Accessibility Implementation Plan under MTS includes buses and bus transit as its main area of coverage:

- (a) bus network development – regular review of the development of bus network, including reviews of the strategic priorities underlying the process approximately every five years, to ensure it caters for population and employment growth, while maintaining ease of use, attractive frequencies and adequate capacity, reliable services, good coverage and good interchange with other modes;

¹ The Transport for London is a statutory body established under the *Greater London Authority Act 1999* responsible for overseeing the transport system in London.

² Transport for London (2011b).

- (b) bus stop accessibility – improved accessibility of bus stops, for example, through removal of street clutter; and
- (c) development of a new bus for London – the new bus will include enhanced accessibility design features.

Bus design

3.3 At present, except for the heritage buses, all buses in London are low-floor wheelchair-accessible vehicles which can be lowered to street level when the bus stops and doors open. Furthermore, these buses are equipped with audio-visual real-time information to inform passengers of the ensuing stop, route and final destination.

3.4 While the design of low-floor buses is generally seen as a means of improving accessibility for passengers with disabilities, including wheelchair users, all passengers benefit from low-floor bus services, such as the elderly, young children, and passengers with luggage. Specifically, these buses are fitted with powered ramps at the centre door where wheelchair users may board and alight. Push buttons are provided for wheelchair users to alert the driver when the ramp needs to be deployed. Additionally, low-floor buses are provided with the means of lowering the bus suspension to reduce the step height at stops.

Figure 1: A London bus fitted with low floor and powered ramp.



Source: Transport for London (2006).

New bus for London

3.5 The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, unveiled a new bus for London in November 2011. The prototype of the new bus is due to arrive in London in December 2011, and these new buses are expected to be deployed for passenger service in early 2012.

3.6 The new bus has a step-free gangway on the lower deck from the front to the back, allowing ease of access for people with mobility impairments and passengers with baby strollers. Ten easy access seats are provided on the low flat floor area for passengers with reduced mobility, of which four are specifically designated as "priority" seats with space underneath for assistance dogs. The bus also includes a wheelchair bay, which is significantly larger than the minimum standard.

3.7 The new bus will also have three doors and two staircases, and incorporate a number of accessibility improvements including additional rail handles, a T-loop system for hearing impaired passengers³ and additional iBus, a state of the art automatic vehicle location system, for passengers facing backwards and in the wheelchair bay.

Figure 2: A new bus for London.



Source: Transport for London (2011a).

³ A T-loop system is an audio transmission system used to help mild to severely deaf people hear specific communications such as a telephone call or audio messages transmitted from the bus.

References

London

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Others

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