ECMT-EDF ACCESSIBILITY AWARD

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VAG VERKEHRS-AG NÜRNBERG
30 YEARS OF MOBILITY FOR THE DISABLED PEOPLE

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not represent the views of ECMT or those of its Member Countries
Ladies and Gentleman, distinguished guests,

Let me first say how very pleased I am to be here today to participate in this celebration of Nürnberg’s winning of the ECMT-EDF Access and Inclusion Award. On behalf of the ECMT and the European Disability Forum and as chairman of the jury for the prize, I would like to congratulate Nürnberg for this award.

As many of you know, the ECMT has for many years worked to promote policies and practices designed to break down accessibility barriers to transport for persons with disabilities, the elderly population or for individuals with reduced mobility for other reasons.

This year 2003 is a special year for the ECMT: it is our 50th anniversary. It is also, as you all know, the European Year of People with Disabilities. Given, the significance of this year for these reasons, it was appropriate that we mark this year in a special way. ECMT therefore joined with the European Disability Forum, the umbrella body of the European Disability movement, to launch a competition to promote recognition of examples of good practice in improving accessibility to transport and to reward approaches in the field which are inclusive of all people with disabilities and recognise the importance of consulting with representative disability organisations.

The prize was open to transport operators, transport manufacturers and transport authorities in all ECMT countries. Its objectives were to:

- raise awareness of the importance to disabled people of independent mobility both within their local communities and more widely;
- promote co-operation and partnership involving all stakeholders (disability organisations, the transport sector and local decision makers);
- identify, recognise and disseminate information about examples of good practice, which promote accessible transport within an accessible, barrier free, pedestrian environment.

We were particularly pleased by the number and quality of the candidate dossiers we received. 60 candidacies were received from 16 countries. And of these, three stood out for their overall quality: Nürnberg, Grenoble and Helsinki.

After considerable deliberation, the jury awarded the prize ex-aequo to Nürnberg and Grenoble with Helsinki as runner-up.

Both winning candidacies demonstrated long-term commitment to improving the accessibility of their transport systems, having introduced accessibility initiatives for the first time approximately 30 years ago. Nürnberg clearly showed its long-standing commitment to fully integrating accessibility considerations into the planning and operations of its transport system. The jury particularly liked Nürnberg’s appointing of an Accessibility Commissioner to oversee the accessibility aspects of the transport system, and would welcome a strengthening of this position. And Nürnberg’s outstanding achievements in making the system more accessible to blind and visually impaired travelers on the system in particular brought it to the top of the list of candidates.
Nürnberg and Grenoble both showed commitment to ensuring the seamless, door-to-door nature of travel for disabled persons, providing clear travel information to different user groups using both visual and audible support. Training was also an important feature of each candidacy, with programmes for all transport personnel, and in the case of Nürnberg, for disabled users of the system as well. Both cities had also integrated access to stops and the pedestrian environment into their long-term commitment of resources and planning.

In addition to Nürnberg, a number of other German cities were given high commendation or special mention by the jury. Munich, Hanover and Dresden were all highly commended for the overall quality of their candidacies, while Hamburg and Kaiserslautern were awarded special mention for particular aspects of their systems. This illustrates the commitment both of the Central Government and the länder as well as the cities to improving accessibility.

One interesting observation was that in a number of cities that began accessibility improvements to their transport systems several decades ago – particularly cities in Germany for example -- technology considered innovative at that time has now become quite widely used. This demonstrated for the jury the existence of a certain maturity in long-standing, well-established initiatives for accessibility and evidence that real progress has been made.

Much remains to be done, however. Full integration is not yet achieved in the transport system. Travel by older and disabled people is still much too difficult in many places and we are a long way from our objective of making access to transport for all a reality everywhere. We await the day when there will only be signs for non-access!

ECMT and EDF hope that the winners of the award as well as the runner-up and the other top-ranked candidates will share their good experience and practice with other transport authorities and operators from different cities and countries. Nürnberg has said it will do this.

And for our part, the ECMT and EDF will disseminate this outstanding body of experience and practice gained via this award in our respective publications and web sites. The December 2003 seminar on accessibility to be organised with the French Ministère de l’Equipement and the European Commission will also feature examples of good practice obtained from among the prize candidates.

With this, I would like to once again extend my congratulations to Nürnberg for its achievements and for the winning of the ECMT-EDF prize.

Thank you very much.