Background

On 8-9 February 1995 the ECMT organised a 10th Anniversary seminar on Achievements and Challenges in connection with its work on Transport for People with Mobility Handicaps. Representatives from twenty-three ECMT Member countries and one Associated country attended. Papers were presented on a full range of transport topics by speakers from fifteen countries. For the first time, representatives from Central and Eastern European countries attended meetings on this topic and papers were presented by several of them. These papers are to be published and are available on request.

Conclusions

Substantial progress

Significant progress has been made in increasing awareness of the nature and size of the population of people with mobility handicaps (including those with physical, sensory and cognitive impairments as well as elderly people and those encumbered with baggage, small children etc.), in improving understanding of the issues affecting them and in developing more integrated approaches to improving accessibility.

There have been many improvements. Low floor buses and trams, significant advances in airports and air services, better trains and stations, more possibilities to drive, better pedestrian environments, improved information provision and more open consultation procedures are among the numerous examples of the achievements made.

But

Despite the efforts, progress remains uneven between modes and countries. Coordination between operators and different modes of transport remains weak. As a result, truly accessible transport chains from door-to-door do not yet exist.

Data on the topic (including on the population concerned and on access improvements) are still poor at both national and international levels.
**Challenges for the future**

For the future, a great deal remains to be done. The outstanding challenges can be grouped under five broad headings.

**Striking the Right Balance between Legislative, Technical and Advisory Actions**

-- To achieve practical and sustainable progress towards more accessible transport, a combination of approaches is needed. It is important to strike the right balance between general legislation, for example, on civil rights or anti-discrimination, detailed regulations on technical standards and non-legally binding guidelines or codes of practice. All these approaches need to be combined for maximum effect at both national and international levels.

**Using the Market and Resources Efficiently**

-- Both governments and operators must meet the challenge of how best to exploit the growing commercial opportunities to provide transport services for people with reduced mobility;

-- Governments at all levels need to find ways to improve co-ordination in the allocation of resources. Limited resources make it difficult to meet every need and it is increasingly important to find cost-effective solutions;

-- Governments and operators must co-operate in maximising the potential for accessible mainstream public transport services which improve levels of service to all passengers and can reduce the need for special services;

-- Governments, operators and specialist transport providers must work together to develop common organisational and funding structures so that specialised services, which will continue to have a role for severely disabled people, are seen as a complement to accessible public transport and not as a substitute for it.

**Respecting Fundamental Principles**

-- Effective progress depends on maximising the "design for all" principle in combination, where necessary, with the introduction of assistive technology;

-- New legislation needs to take account of accessibility as a matter of course. Where markets are deregulated or companies privatised, the goal of achieving autonomous mobility must be built in to new frameworks;

-- New technology, wherever it is introduced, must be accessible to all people with mobility handicaps, including elderly people or those suffering from intellectual deficiencies;

-- There must be full recognition of the importance of these issues at political and technical levels. In particular, education of town planners, architects and engineers needs systematically to include consideration of the needs of people with mobility handicaps;

-- There must not be disproportionate safety, financial or other requirements imposed on disabled people in the course of providing independent mobility.
Improving and Sharing Information

-- Research to identify problems and find solutions to them must continue at national and international levels. In particular, the EU Fourth Framework Programme should focus on this area;

-- Sharing information and experiences is vital in order to use resources efficiently and to avoid mistakes. This applies also to international organisations which must work closely together and avoid duplication.

In particular, for countries in Central and Eastern Europe

-- ECMT’s new Member countries have, in general, begun later than other Members to take action in this area and face severe resource constraints;

-- There are measures that can be taken and low-cost improvements are available that can improve the situation for many people (for example, staff training and personal assistance, signing, parking provision, colour contrasts);

-- Consultation is a valuable starting point and structures should be put in place involving the main interests concerned, governments, operators, people with disabilities. These structures are most effective if they are given a statutory base;

-- The needs of disabled people must be taken into account when new investments or improvements are made or where new laws and regulations (including technical standards) are being introduced. On this basis, the extra costs are insignificant;

-- Consultation processes should ensure that all new investments and laws are subject to an "accessibility" check;

-- Countries with more experience can help by providing information on innovative solutions and research and by providing technical expertise through the dissemination of guidelines and other publications on good practice. Participation in the ECMT Working Group would provide one useful forum for information exchange.