EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS OF TRANSPORT
COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

ACCESS AND INCLUSION

IMPROVING TRANSPORT ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL: POLICY MESSAGES

This document was examined under item 4.2 “Sustainable Transport Policies - Specific topics: Access and Inclusion” of the Agenda for the Dublin Council of Ministers.

Ministers:

-- discussed their countries' achievements and persistent challenges in improving access to transport;
-- confirmed their commitments to implement recent ECMT ministerial decisions on improving transport accessibility;
-- agreed these Policy Messages, in particular, the Priority Areas for Further Government Action in Section 4.
IMPROVING TRANSPORT ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL: POLICY MESSAGES

1. ACCESSIBILITY IN CONTEXT

1.1 A key part of a quality transport system

Accessibility to transport services and infrastructure is an important factor in ensuring a high-quality, efficient, sustainable transport system. Accessible transport has often been characterised as an issue of concern to only a minority of transport system clients; in particular, disabled people whose travel needs have been seen as different from those of the general population.

It is increasingly recognised, however, by transport authorities, service providers and operators, that improvements to the accessibility of the transport system as a whole mean a better quality of transport for all users of the system.

A higher quality transport system (in terms of vehicle design, infrastructure, driver training, information and many other factors), means a more equitable system, and in this way, accessibility is a key element in ensuring the social sustainability of the transport sector.

1.2 The demographic time bomb

Populations across ECMT Member and Associated Member countries are getting older. The proportion of the population over 65 will increase by 40 per cent in the next 30 years and the share of all people over 80 will double. And it is well-acknowledged that there is a strong correlation between age and disability: two-thirds of disabled people are older, and over half of the population of over 75 has some form of disability.

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1. Further references to ECMT countries will include both Member and Associate Members of the ECMT.

Older people are the fastest growing segment of the population in most developed countries.

The growing imbalance between working age and older people will have profound economic and social implications – the former increasingly too small to support an older population that is not self-sufficient. Mobility in general and ability to use the transport system in particular are crucial to maintaining self-sufficiency and independence.

The impact of these demographic trends must be considered alongside the already significant number of individuals with disabilities and/or mobility problems. Recent studies suggest that between 20 and 30 percent of people travelling have a mobility difficulty at any given time. In the European Union, upwards of 45 million people of working age (roughly one in six) have a long-standing health problem or disability.

Against this backdrop, better accessibility is a growing concern to decision-makers at all levels of government.

1.3 The social and economic imperatives

In spite of improvements to the accessibility of transport infrastructure and services, many people across countries still find getting from one place to another difficult or even impossible. Barriers to mobility in the transport system and surrounding environment are numerous, and until they are overcome, a substantial and growing proportion of the population will continue to be at a disadvantage – unable to get around as they need to, and consequently limited in their ability to participate fully in society.

This is not only a significant social issue for Governments; it is also an economic concern. Without independent mobility, people are unable to access education, medical facilities or find employment; likewise, they are not able to be self-sufficient in terms of food shopping and other necessary activities. There is a very substantial cost in most societies for providing the care and support that is needed to compensate for these losses. There is also a correlation between loss of mobility and physical and mental health and well-being. Among older people in particular, loss of even local outdoor mobility can trigger a significant decline in health, leading, again, to heavy costs for Governments as well as a heavy social penalty in terms of quality of life for disabled and older people and their families.

2. WHAT MINISTERS HAVE SAID: THE ECMT POLICY FRAMEWORK

ECMT Ministerial engagements over the last 20 years constitute a sound basis for the development of accessible transport systems as well as for the implementation and exchange of good practice.
Major bodies of work from which Ministerial engagements have emerged over the last six years include the following 3.

- **Consolidated Resolution No 2001/3 on Accessible Transport**

  This Resolution constitutes the basis of ECMT’s policy framework through 2001. Ministerial commitments from 1978 through 1997 were brought together as a single reference in this Resolution, which reiterates and updates recommendations on the full range of accessibility considerations on *inter alia* training, information and communication, research, transport planning, personal vehicles, air travel, rail, light rail and tram systems, as well as buses, coaches, flexible public transport and more specialised transport services, and taxis. It also set forth principles that serve as reference today, specifically that:

  - all policy initiatives or developments in transport and land use planning should include an evaluation of their potential impact on safety and accessibility of older and disabled people;
  
  - all links in the transport chain need to be improved so that an accessible environment is created from door to door. Increased efforts must be made to connect the different means of transport and thereby create an integrated, safe and accessible transport system;
  
  - all new investments in transport must take account of and plan for the needs of older and disabled people in accordance with the Charter adopted by Ministers in Warsaw in 1999; and
  
  - close co-operation between governments, public authorities, manufacturers, operators and the people concerned (disabled and older people) is essential.

- **Transport and the Ageing of the Population**

  Also in 2001, a body of work examining transport issues as they relate to older people was agreed by Ministers, setting out the need for, *among others*, systematic safety and accessibility audits of transport and land use plans – particularly with impacts on older people in mind. A transport chain approach was recommended, including accessibility improvements for all modes and their interchange points; and the need for guidance on a variety of issues important to older people, including neighbourhood-based living for less car dependency, the function and design of the road system; and effective driver evaluation.

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3. The following list is not exhaustive and highlights only major topics. A list of commitments from recent reports, publications and resolutions is also found in annex 1.


Improving Access to Public Transport

In 2003, Ministers agreed a set of joint recommendations with the International Public Transport Association (UITP) on what authorities and public transport operators can do together to promote better access in public transport systems.

Recommendations centred \textit{inter alia} on better co-operation between authorities and operators to cover vehicles, stations and stops; forward planning of 5 and 10 years for accessibility improvements with careful monitoring of progress toward objectives; consultation and collaboration with disability organisations at all stages of the planning and implementation process; consideration of all types of disability (physical, sensory, cognitive); disability awareness training for all public transport personnel; the need for up-to-date information on transport services in appropriate formats for disabled people; and recognition of the financial benefits from increased patronage of the system that accessibility improvements can make.

Implementation of national accessibility policies

And most recently, Ministers at their 2004 Ljubljana Council agreed a number of actions to facilitate implementation at the national level of measures to improve access to transport infrastructure and services, including to:

- consider where legislation is needed (at European, national and/or regional levels) to ensure that the transport needs of disabled people are recognised and delivered as an integral part of transport policy; and
- carry out regular monitoring of progress toward implementation of legislation and policies in this field, and evaluate whether they are making a positive impact on the mobility of disabled people.

3. ACHIEVING ACCESSIBILITY: PROGRESS MADE AND PERSISTENT BARRIERS

3.1 Progress made

With this policy framework as a backdrop, much progress has been made in improving transport accessibility in many countries. Over the past 10-15 years, for example, legislation either to introduce the concept of civil rights for disabled people and/or to set specific technical standards has been introduced in many countries and at the European level.

There are many examples of good practice in the organisation and delivery of accessible transport, as well, including clear demonstrations of:

8. Please see list in Annex 2
• Strong collaboration between authorities and operators to provide a “seamless” transport service;

• Close liaison with organisations representing disabled and older people to ensure that improvements are appropriate to their needs; and

• Attention to the need to create a barrier-free pedestrian environment within which people can move about safely and with confidence and through which they can access transport services.

3.2 Persistent barriers

In spite of this progress in some countries, barriers persist in others to implementing good practice. These problems include:

• **Low government priority**: accessibility remains in many countries in the margins of transport policy -- not yet considered an integral part of a quality transport system and transport decision-making.

• **Inadequate regulatory and legal frameworks and technical standards**, which means that both the incentive and the means for authorities and operators to initiate and sustain progress in improving accessibility is still lacking;

• **Insufficient monitoring and evaluation of implementation**: in some countries that have already enacted national disability legislation in some form, or that have in place a policy framework setting out accessibility requirements, there is sometimes a lack of or insufficient monitoring of implementation of the legal and regulatory requirements. Evaluation is at an early stage -- if practiced at all -- in many countries, and as a result, there is often inadequate understanding of the impacts of policies on improving accessibility.

• **Lack of familiarity with international good practice**. The report *Improving Transport Accessibility for All: Guide to Good Practice*, to be presented to Ministers at their 2006 Council in Dublin, is one initiative to improve access to the latest good practice standards.

**Some economic consequences**

As a result of these barriers, accessibility improvements are often considered too late or not at all in the decision-making process or are regarded as an optional extra, which can be dropped when there is pressure on budgets. Financial and other resources necessary for these improvements are often therefore not committed early enough in the transport planning process.

This can mean high retrofitting and ex-post investment costs in addition to the indirect economic costs described above that can result from a loss of independent mobility. On top of these, can then come more costs engendered by the need to provide separate specialised transport for disabled and older people unable to access public transport.
Including accessibility considerations upstream in the transport planning and decision-making process can allow costs to be spread out over the investment period. In addition, with better accessibility, economic benefits for transport companies can be seen as more people are able to use public transport (including those who need to travel with small children or heavy luggage as well as those who are disabled). And with reduced boarding times due to accessibility improvements can come lower operating costs.

There are also significant cost savings that can accrue outside the transport sector from the provision of accessible transport. These include reducing or postponing the need for domiciliary or residential care for older people who lose their independent mobility, and increasing the opportunity for younger disabled people to return to economic activity through better access to employment. These cross-sector benefits, though difficult to quantify directly, should be taken into account when assessing the economic case for accessibility improvements.

4. **PRIORITY AREAS FOR FURTHER GOVERNMENT ACTION**

From the context set out above, the following issues emerge at this time as needing priority attention from Governments in order to ensure that progress towards better transport accessibility continues across countries.

- Accessibility is no longer an option for Governments. It is a clear economic and social imperative and should be seen as an integral part of a policy framework to promote a high-quality, efficient, and sustainable transport system.

  The *Guide to Good Practice on Transport Accessibility for All*, presented to Ministers in Dublin⁹, is a potentially valuable resource in helping to reach those goals as well as those set out below.

- Whilst many countries have taken strong initiative to improve transport accessibility through legislation, regulation and other types of support and incentive, many others continue to regard accessibility as low priority -- a problem of only a minority of transport system clients, notably those with disabilities.

  This approach demonstrates a lack of recognition of:

  - the importance of accessibility to a sustainable transport system as described above;

  - the growing proportion of older people in the population across countries and the implications of this demographic shift in terms of an increasing need for better transport accessibility; and

  - the potential benefits to be accrued from improved accessibility to all transport system stakeholders and clients – not just those with disabilities.

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• Countries not having yet done so should develop this comprehensive national policy framework with supporting legislation and regulation where deemed necessary to ensure that accessibility is brought out of the margins and into the mainstream of long-term, strategic transport planning. ECMT Resolutions and Reports over the last 20 years set out a comprehensive framework for Government action, which remains valid today.

This will entail, among others, forming partnerships among all those engaged in the planning and delivery of transport services and with the disability community to ensure that full accessibility is achieved.10

• Governments that have already created a sound policy framework for improving accessibility should commit to consistent monitoring of its implementation and evaluation of its impacts. This is essential in order to ensure that priorities for better accessibility are being carried forth at all levels of authority in the transport system. Assessment and evaluation tools need to be further developed and refined for this purpose.

Accessibility issues requiring the particularly close attention of Governments at this time include:

• Training for transport personnel, especially drivers. Driver training and the availability and accessibility of information are fundamental to giving disabled and older people the confidence to travel.

This is particularly important at present in most countries in order to better address sensory and cognitive disabilities as well as mental health problems: these disabilities continue to be under-represented in accessible transport policy. Disability comes in many forms: it is not enough to pay attention only to the needs of those in wheelchairs or with walking difficulty. People with a loss of vision or hearing (both very commonly associated with the ageing process) and those with intellectual disabilities or mental health problems also have particular needs that can be addressed without significant cost.

The ECMT-UITP publication on Improving Access to Public Transport: Guidelines for Transport Personnel11 provides helpful guidance on ways to interact with disabled and older passengers on public transport.

• Separate and specialised door-to-door transport: Whilst the need for these services should diminish if fully accessible transport systems are in place, there will remain some need for such services, for example in isolated rural areas and for those individuals whose disability may always preclude them from using public transport.

10. For example, unless transport infrastructure and the street environment are both free from barriers, and unless traffic management policies are in place to allow buses to closely approach stops, the benefits of accessible buses will be lost.

11. Presented to Ministers in published form as a Reference document
This is an area in which further work is necessary to evaluate the most cost-effective means of meeting these needs.

Taxis remain a particular challenge for transport accessibility, primarily due to the structure and organisation of the taxi sector. Taxis have a key role to play in the provision of door-to-door services for disabled and older people. However the predominant design of vehicles used for this purpose in most countries remains difficult for many people to use.

Joint work currently in progress between ECMT and IRU in collaboration with the major European vehicle manufacturers is helping to address the vehicle design problem.

The objective of this study, which builds on the earlier joint work with IRU on the Economic Aspects of Taxi Accessibility (and responds to a Ministerial mandate emerging from that work) as well as the 1994 ECMT Resolution on Access to Taxis for Persons with Reduced Mobility, is to recommend criteria for vehicles that are able to meet the needs of a wider proportion of the population and which can be further modified as necessary at minimum additional cost.

While the actual design recommendations are at the heart of the study, other important issues are also being considered. These include ways that national and local government might encourage the provision of accessible taxis, the design of infrastructure to make the use of taxis easier, and taxi staff training in disability awareness.

A general two-tiered approach to vehicle design, based on both numerical and performance criteria, has been agreed within the joint ECMT-IRU Task Force and reactions from industry are now being solicited.

It is hoped that for the first time, a broad agreement on recommended parameters for vehicle design among authorities, operators, and the participating automobile manufacturers will be possible.

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13. The basic approach is to have two design levels:
   - Type One: Wheelchair Accessible Taxis: accessible vehicles capable of carrying the majority, but not all, passengers who travel in their wheelchair as well as people with other disabilities.
   - Type Two: Standard Taxis: vehicles with features designed to make use by disabled people easier, but which would only be able to carry a wheelchair user who can transfer to a taxi seat.

   It is recommended that fleets of taxis used for regular services should be composed of a combination of these two types of vehicle. The proportion of each type within the taxi parc is likely to vary from place to place, both within and between countries. This is a matter for decision by central and local governments.
ANNEX 1

LIST OF RECENT KEY MINISTERIAL COMMITMENTS TO IMPROVE TRANSPORT ACCESSIBILITY

Conclusions and Recommendations of the Report on Implementing at the National Level Measures to Improve the Accessibility of Transport (http://www.cemt.org/online/council/2004/CM200427e.pdf)

Conclusions and Recommendations of the joint ECMT-UITP report on Improving Access to Transport (http://www.cemt.org/online/council/2003/CM0306Fe.pdf)


ANNEX 2

EXAMPLES OF RECENT LEGISLATION AT EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL LEVELS

European level

− Directive 2001/85/EC relating to Special provisions for vehicles used for the carriage of passengers comprising more than eight seats in addition to the driver’s seat.

− Regulation [EC] 261/2004 establishing common rules on compensation and assistance to passengers in the event of denied boarding and of cancellation or long delay of flights, and repealing Regulation.

− Draft Regulation on the Rights of Persons With Reduced Mobility when Travelling by Air (COM (2005)47 final).


− Draft Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSI) for Persons With Reduced Mobility related to DIR 2001/16/EC and DIR 1996/48/EC.

Recent COST Action Projects

− COST action 322 Low-Floor Buses related to DIR 2001/85/EC.

− COST ACTION 335 passengers’ Accessibility to Heavy Rail Systems related to DIR 2001/16/EC.

− COST ACTION 349 Accessibility of Coaches and Buses for People with Reduced Mobility.

National level, in particular, disability rights legislation developed over the last 15 years, including in the following countries:

− USA (1990) : Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).


