



Democracy Disability and Society Group
Report on a Transport Event
at
The Thistle Foundation
27th November 2001



*"I'm not in control.
It's a bit of a lottery.
Will I have to wait ages for a wheelchair
accessible bus?
I started out with plenty of time.
Now I'm panicking."
(DDS Group member)*

*"It's all a bit dodgy. I'm hoping the taxi
driver will get out the ramp. He tilts me
back and tells me he has never dropped
a wheelchair before. It's a bit scary. He
doesn't want to get the ramp out. In the
taxi I slide from side to side. He doesn't
seem to want to use the seatbelt either.
He puts his foot down.
I will phone and complain later.
I feel out of control now. Terrible."
(DDS Group member)*



*The Democracy Disability and Society Group
is supported by
The Thistle Foundation and The Learning Centre.*



Craigmillar's Democracy Disability and Society Group held a Transport Event which was very successful in raising awareness of the barriers faced by disabled people when using public transport. This report highlights some of the ideas emerging from the day's discussions.

The event was attended by decision makers including City of Edinburgh Councillors and Council Officials, representatives from bus and taxi companies and local community leaders. The event aimed to let people know of some of the difficulties in communication and access to travel faced by disabled people.



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SOLUTIONS AND ACTION PLAN

1 Training and awareness raising

The key challenge is to change the culture and attitude of many taxi and bus drivers towards disability

Edinburgh Council, bus and taxi companies should ensure:

- Compulsory disability awareness training courses for all bus and taxi operators as part of driver and manager induction
- Refresher training courses
- Extended training for all drivers in the use of ramps.

2 Dialogue and information

All present agreed that the Event provided a great opportunity to learn from each other in an informal, problem-solving way.

Edinburgh Council should:

- Create more opportunities for positive dialogue between companies and disabled people, such as this Event.
- Create opportunities for dialogue between vehicle manufacturers, designers and disabled people.
- Produce guidelines on rights and responsibilities, with advice on complaints procedures, etc.

Edinburgh Council, bus and taxi companies should:

- Consult local groups about local route planning
- Provide an accessible transport phone line to give information on when wheelchair buses are running

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Guest speaker, Bill Fisher, Disability Rights Consultant, told the meeting that Edinburgh had some way to go to catch up with Europe and America when it came to accessible public transport.

Guests were invited to look at the Group's photo display on bus and taxi journeys, with quotes from members. In discussions that followed everyone got a chance to make their points. In this way, the group hoped the Event would help guests discover how to relate to the problems and share solutions.

A DDS Group member commented "People were most interested, and the problems were taken on board by providers and decision makers with promises to ease the situation".

"A new Parliament is being built. Will I get there?"

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- Encourage input from the DDS Group and other disability organisations into companies' internal news letters.

3 On the Buses

Accessible, cheap and reliable public transport is the best option for many disabled people, yet most cannot use buses at present.

Edinburgh Council and bus companies should:

- Ensure that buses have at least two accessible spaces for wheelchair users as a standard
- Provide more low-floor buses
- Lobby for legal requirement for seatbelts and clamps on buses for wheelchair users
- Ensure that drivers ask anyone taking up wheelchair space to give it up if needed.

4 Bus stops and kerbs

Edinburgh Council and bus companies should:

- Tighten up the siting of bus stops, ensuring there is no car parking, that sites are not near corners and traffic lights, and that kerbs are suitable for wheelchair users
- Display wheelchair access signs on bus stops
- Site bollards carefully.
- Increase the use of automated, built-in ramps, which have a better grip
- Build kerbs for low-platform buses on greenways
- Lobby manufacturers for audible/visual safety signal on ramps

5 Taxis

Edinburgh Council and taxi companies should:

- Ensure that all exemption certificates are displayed
- Ensure that drivers always display I.D.

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"It was a brilliant meeting as long as what was said was listened to and will be acted upon," said Josie Timms, Thistle tenant.

Quote from Steve O Donnell Photographer: "What could be easier than getting on and off a bus? The people I photographed for this report showed me that when the system works, it works well. However our Public Transport system still has a long way to go. I can only hope that those involved in the Public Transport decision making process will continue to build on creating a transport system for all people"

Everyone's suggested solutions have gone into the Action Plan below.

The Democracy Disability and Society Group is a group of disabled and non-disabled people who meet at The Thistle Foundation to campaign for a fully inclusive society. We are currently campaigning to improve bus and taxi services so that everyone can use them.

6 Taxi card scheme

Edinburgh Council should:

- Ensure more funds to extend the number of fares in the taxi card scheme **but** not neglect the need to build confidence in buses.

7 Complaints procedures

Edinburgh Council, bus and taxi companies should:

- Provide a freephone number for complainants.
- Publicise formal complaints procedures in accessible formats.

8 The DDS Group will:

- Tour our photo display and raise awareness of transport issues for people with disabilities.
- Use this Action Plan to continue to lobby decision makers.
- Continue to build our own capacity to be an effective voice for inclusion.
- Continue to complain if necessary to bus and taxi companies.
- The DDS Group is considering working with professional trainers to offer disability awareness training for bus and taxi companies.

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