

Transport Accessibility Summit

Report by Christine McGiveron, Scottish Pensioners Forum and Pensioners Alliance

On Tuesday 24th March, 2015 I attended a Transport Accessibility Summit at the John McIntyre Centre, Holyrood Park Road, Edinburgh with my carer, John McGiveron. The event was chaired by Jill Mulholland from Transport Scotland – Blue Badge Policy, and this was the first ever Transport Accessibility Summit. Jill said that the day was the end of a long process that would be ongoing.

Sally Witcher, Co-Chair, and CEO of Inclusion Scotland said that the ambition of the Summit was to get the voice of disabled people into legislative policy. Inaccessible transport is a major barrier to inclusion and it's really important we talk. At the moment the Scottish Government in creating a Disability Delivery Plan, to be put forward in June. We needed to have a conversation about the difficulties faced by disabled people.

At the Summit there was representation from First Bus Group Scotland, Stagecoach Buses Scotland, Transport Scotland, Abellio Scotrail, The Community Transport Association, Visit Scotland and Sustrans. The Scottish Transport Minister arrived in the afternoon and addressed the assembly.

Altogether about fifteen different issues were raised around the various groups from which Transport Scotland will produce a detailed report. The main topics raised over the day were: **Connectivity, Accessibility; Unplanned Change and/or Breakdown to a Journey; Attitudes and Culture (Human Rights) and Toilet Accessibility.** Disabled people will be included in discussions on these issues.

Abellio Scotrail

The Abellio Franchise is about to start in the forthcoming week. They will introduce new trains from Edinburgh – Glasgow, and will transform the Scottish intercity network with refurbished High Speed Trains which will be compliant with accessibility requirements. There will be the introduction of a multi modal smartcard for use on airlines, trains and buses, and they will also introduce an Assisted Travel System. There are still about 250 stations around Scotland which are not fully disability compliant and these are on the cards for refurbishment. Many of the trains in service today are not fully compliant with accessibility standards and these will be upgraded. Abellio have based their proposals on a fairer and more inclusive Scotland, especially regarding disability and accessibility.

All trains will be compliant by 2020. There will be new customer information desks at key stations; new ticket vending machines; passenger assistance will be available at one hours notice. All customer-facing staff will have disability awareness training. Abellio will also look at providing alternative transport.

First Bus.

They said they are concentrating on **visual impairment**. The issue about transport and disability is about having empathy. First Bus said that they hold seminars inviting members of the public from relevant disability groups, including Guide Dogs, and have 'Swop with me' sessions. The most important people are both the visual impaired and the bus drivers. Drivers need to understand what it is like to be visual impaired. All of the First Bus drivers are trained in disability awareness, but nothing can be better than personal experience. So they hold a well publicised event where drivers board a bus wearing a blindfold. Most of the drivers haven't got any idea what it is like to be visual impaired. First Bus has 'Safe Journey' and 'Empathy Cards'. It is trying out a system of audio visual on board announcements in West Yorkshire, and are hopeful that it will be rolled out in the not too distant future. John pointed out that all the buses on the island of Malta have had this system since 2014.

Sustrans

They spoke about their **Thistle Assistance Card**, which was originally introduced in 2002 by the Scottish Government. However, because of the high cost, the scheme was withdrawn in 2009. In 2011 Sustrans decided to reintroduce it, and it can be easily recognised. It is only used by the people who need it. All the information required is on the front of the card. There has been a large uptake on this card, which is

Transport Accessibility Summit

Report by Christine McGiveron, Scottish Pensioners Forum and Pensioners Alliance

distributed through bus companies and disability groups. The bus drivers are an important factor in the scheme, as a result some of the bus companies have incorporated the card into their training schemes.

Community Transport Association.

The CTA provides transport through the **Voluntary Sector**. These are not public bodies nor commercial companies, and are focused on local transport includes door to door dial-a-ride services, group transport and community car scheme. The CTA provide a Community Bus Service where there is no bus service. The range of services is quite wide, somewhere between what looks like a bus service or a taxi service. But you do need to plan your journey in advance. It's aimed at older and disabled people who can't get to a bus stop. All vehicles are accessible, and some can carry five or six wheelchairs when the configuration is altered to suit. The vehicles usually have a driver and or assistant, and the drivers will help people on and off . Drivers and assistants are trained how to work with disabled people, making sure that the transport is safe and the drivers are trained in various scenarios (MIDAS Training). Training is common place for Community Transport. Not everywhere has a community transport scheme, the geographical area is patchy. Local people are needed to be committed to community transport. www.cta.uk.org

Visit Scotland.

A lot of disabled and elderly people think that it's easier to stay at home, rather than go on holiday in Scotland. Making Scotland more accessible to the elderly and disabled is a massive task.

There are three main barriers – **Accessibility; Information and Attitude** (How I'm treated when I get there). **Attitude** – Visit Scotland have an on-line training course which highlights business case, moral argument and social responsibility, and how they interact with each other. Tourism in Scotland is a growing market and we need to put in more effort. The Royal Yacht Britannia, for example, is fully accessible to the disabled. In Glasgow Visit Scotland are working with businesses creating a picture of accessibility. They say that they are dealing with attitude, information and access. www.visitscotland.org

Scottish Minister for Transport and the Islands – Keith Brown

He said this was the first gathering to bring together local authorities, providers etc. The vision that the Scottish Government has is that journeys should be as seamless as possible. Weather, congestion, accessibility are all barriers. We have to make sure that rights are upheld. People complain about overcrowding, complete absence of transport, lateness. More effort is required. The feedback from this event will definitely be considered. The Government is recognising barriers and taking action where it can.

Transport isn't just about connectivity it's also about **personal wellbeing**.

There will be good and bad experiences. There are many disabled people who are reticent about travelling. A non disabled adult is 50% more likely to make a journey than a disabled person. 80% of transport journeys are taken by bus. 147 million journeys are taken on the bus pass. But buses can be overcrowded. There is, however, an opportunity for rail improvements with Abellio, and there is still more to be done about taxi provision. We will work closely with the Accessibility Committee. Today is the beginning of that new journey for people who depend on public transport.

Overall it was a very interesting and informative day. Hopefully, the issues raised will be discussed by the Scottish Government, with a positive outcome. As I write this report Stagecoach West of Scotland will remove a bus service, on May 11th that runs between Crosshouse Hospital, Kilmarnock and Ayr Hospital, Ayr. It states that the service is unsustainable, though it does leave an area of Prestwick with a high population of elderly, without any public transport whatsoever.