

**Submission  
No. 33**

## **DRIVER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND ROAD SAFETY**

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## Submission to the Inquiry into Driver Education, Training and Road Safety by StaySafe - Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety.



*Submitted by:*

*Kate Galloway on behalf of Diana Palmer – Chief Executive Officer IDEAS Inc., 53 Merivale Street  
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## **IDEAS Inc. appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Inquiry into Driver Education, Training and Road Safety.**

The cost of transport or the lack of availability of transport often means that people with disability cannot access education, employment services or the community. It is a pivotal support service, which is often not available which then excludes the person from many or all aspects of their community. (Deane, 2009)

The Shut Out report (Deane, 2009) identified social isolation as one of the most important issues facing people with disability in Australia. One of the major contributors to social isolation in Australia, particularly in regional areas, is a lack of transport; private transport is expensive to modify for disability and public transport can be difficult to access due to limited accessible vehicles or inadequate driver education.

With this in mind, we would like to address the following areas from the established terms of reference:

**The needs of any particular driver groups**

**The needs of driver trainers, both professional and non-professional**

**Other related matters**

### **The needs of any particular driver groups**

It is estimated there are more than 30,000 people in Australia living with spinal cord injuries and amputations who could potentially drive modified vehicles. (Hermant, 2016)

As the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) rolls out around the state, we are expecting that more people with a physical disability will be seeking out access to vehicle modification equipment or modified vehicles to enable them to drive independently. The ability to transport oneself independently is something that many of us take for granted. Private transport allows non-disabled persons to do many things in their lives more efficiently, it means they can get to and from work or leisure activities, and they can travel to other cities and states for holidays. For a physically disabled person this is not possible without a vehicle modification.

There are approximately 16 million cars and light commercial vehicles registered in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), but finding one that has already been modified or is easily modifiable is not an easy task. As part of the 'Get into Gear' project, completed in 2016 with funding from the Department of Family and Community Services NSW, IDEAS campaigned for online car sales websites to add a checkbox to their listings to make this feature searchable. However finding a modified vehicle is just the first hurdle to being able to drive independently.

With assistance from NDIS funding many people with disability will be learning to drive for the very first time, while others will be re-learning a skill they had thought was lost to them, and there are necessary supports and services required to enable this to happen. Currently IDEAS have the only comprehensive database of information to assist drivers with a disability get behind the wheel. IDEAS has a verified list of Occupational Therapists who conduct driver assessments, services who conduct driver training and assessment for people with disability as well as a list of services who complete vehicle modifications.

IDEAS also runs a classified site called e-Bility ([ebility.com.au](http://ebility.com.au)) which allows customers to buy and sell modified vehicles and vehicle modification parts from a dedicated site. The site allows users to browse vehicles without having to shift through numerous listings that are not relevant to their needs.

Disabled drivers and disabled learner drivers need a central point of information where they can gain access to everything they need in one spot. IDEAS would be more than happy to work with Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) in this regard. An information hub should be established in Service NSW and RMS locations with access to physical and electronic information or clients could be directed to our information service phone line. This information hub would give disabled drivers or disabled learners a quality source of information that outlines the process of either regaining or obtaining a licence. It could also provide information on modified vehicles, equipment suppliers and installation costs and/or grants where available.

Disabled persons in general would also benefit from RMS locations being identified as accessible on the website, if they are in fact accessible for people with mobility issues. This is especially important for disabled drivers as their driving tests are not able to be booked online they must attend a Service Centre in person.

## **The needs of driver trainers, both professional and non-professional**

Getting into a car and driving independently is something that most of us take for granted; we drive to work, to sporting events and to leisure activities. However, for people with physical disabilities this choice is limited by their ability to pay for vehicle modifications, the availability of a suitably qualified driving instructor to teach them how to drive and the limited number of qualified driver assessors at RMS Centres.

Drivers with a physical disability often need to seek out the services of an Occupational Therapist who is able to conduct driver assessments. This assessment determines whether a person with a physical disability can safely drive and whether they can attempt to gain a licence or if they are already licensed whether they can retain it. Not all Occupational Therapists offer this service, which means that getting an assessment can mean travelling long distances. In order to become qualified to provide this service a post-graduate course must be completed. The cost of the course can be prohibitive especially to new graduates or to rural and remote therapists who may not be able to justify the cost based on their client base. A training grant for new graduates and rural/regional occupational therapists may increase the number of driver assessors available to the community.

Likewise, driving instructors may have no experience in dealing with physical disability or modified vehicles. Currently there are additional courses or training for driving instructors wishing to work with heavy vehicles, or older drivers, as well as courses for safer driver and motorcycle training instructors. An initiative to have driving instructors train in instructing disabled drivers would provide a much safer and less costly option for people looking to gain a licence.

Another issue we would like raised is that is not currently possible to tell from the RMS website how many driver assessors there are in each office qualified to assess a driver with a modified vehicle, and a disabled driver has to contact the RMS phone line in order to book a test with an appropriate assessor. Having sufficient driver assessors available at each RMS location would mean that the process would be much more convenient for people with disability. A list of RMS locations with driver assessors who have been trained to assess disabled drivers with modified vehicles would also mean the process could be more streamlined and more user friendly.

## **Other related matters**

Very little progress has been made in challenging prevailing myths and stereotypes about people with disabilities. They still find themselves the subjects of fear and ignorance, regarded as burdens or objects of pity. (Deane, 2009)

Roads and Maritime Services staff should complete disability inclusion training to ensure that people with disability are able to attend any RMS location and receive the same respectful treatment as any other member of the public. This is not to say that RMS staff are not respectful towards people with a disability, it is an acknowledgement of how complex the issue is. Inclusion training unpacks what we think about disability and challenges our beliefs at their very core. Inclusion training is not just about installing ramps and using correct terminology it is about challenging our concepts of what it means to be disabled.

The ability to drive will open up a raft of opportunities for people with a physical disability including for many the opportunity to gain employment for the first time. Employment opportunities that were previously not available will become options. Andrew Meddings is a successful business owner and truck driver who also happens to be a paraplegic. Andrew who is drives semi-trailers, dirt bikes and cars that have been modified to suit his disability. (Lewis, 2013) Increased numbers of disabled drivers means increased interactions with RMS staff. RMS need to ensure that their staff are prepared to deal effectively and sensitively with people with disability.

**IDEAS Inc. agrees for our submission to be made public.**

## References

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# Social Inclusion



Integrating disability access in to mainstream consumer services is good business sense for the 21st century. Creating an inclusive and all-encompassing end user experience on mainstream websites is imperative for the development of an inclusive and accessible society as a whole.

In Australia, the term [social inclusion] has relatively recently come into public focus. Social inclusion agendas have been developed by the South Australian, Victorian and ACT governments. In 2008, the Rudd Government established a Social Inclusion Board and a Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. In 2014 the NSW government passed the NSW Inclusion act.

Social inclusion aims to create an equal opportunity society where people with disability and other marginalised groups can interact and participate in social and economic endeavours freely and without limits. Choosing to accommodate the needs of people with disability and to integrate some simple search fields which would make finding a disability accessible vehicle easier and simpler, would work to empower people with disability, their families and carers.

Let's work together to improve the accessibility of your database by making it simpler and easier for people with disability to locate vehicles relevant and useful to them!

*"If you don't like something, change it.  
If you can't change it, change your attitude."*

– Maya Angelou



# Accessible Vehicles

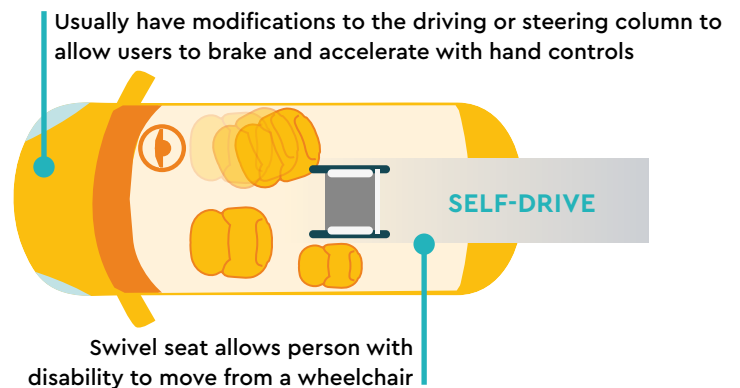


There are three main types of accessible vehicles; self-drive, wheelchair drive and passenger access. It is important to be able to distinguish between these three types of vehicles as they all have very specific purposes. Someone wishing to find a passenger access vehicle will not find self-drive or wheelchair drive vehicles relevant and vice versa. Including these sub-categories of wheelchair accessible vehicles in a search field in the advanced search options on your database may be beneficial to your customers.

## Self-drive

Self-drive accessible vehicles allow a person with disability to move from a wheelchair to a swivel seat in order to drive the vehicle. These vehicles invariably have modifications to the driving or steering column to allow users to brake and accelerate with hand controls.

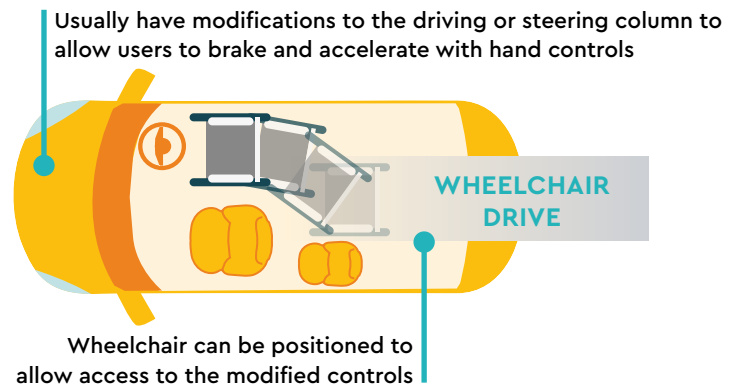
**SUGGESTED KEYWORDS:** wheelchair, self-drive, swivel driver seat, disability access, hand controls



## Wheelchair drive

Wheelchair drive accessible vehicles allow a person with disability to access the controls of a modified vehicle from their wheelchair. These vehicles invariably have modifications to the driving or steering column to allow users to brake and accelerate with hand controls.

**SUGGESTED KEYWORDS:** wheelchair drive, disability access, hand controls, drive from wheelchair



## Passenger access

Passenger accessible vehicles are the most commonly available style of wheelchair accessible vehicles. This type of conversion allows for a passenger to travel in the vehicle in their wheelchair, as a passenger. Vehicles may accommodate multiple wheelchair spaces, or just one, depending on the capacity of the vehicle and style of conversion.

**SUGGESTED KEYWORDS:** wheelchair access, disability access, wheelchair passenger, accessible modified vehicle

