

TRANSPORT TECHNOLOGY SECTOR

Organisation: Guide Dogs NSW & ACT

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Submission: Inquiry into the transport technology sector

Email transportinfrastructure@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the transport technology sector

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT is part of Guide Dogs Australia, the peak body for a group of organisations in ACT, NSW, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Northern Territory that provide services to support people with low vision and blindness to achieve their goals in life. Working with all ages, from infants to adults, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, offers a broad range of services, alongside their Guide Dogs, to people who are blind or have low vision.

In addition to providing individual support, equipment and training, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has significant access advisory and advocacy experience. Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has particular interest in accessible and inclusive design for people who are blind or have low vision, and the implementation of these practices in public services and facilities. Facilitating independent travel for people with vision impairment includes not only navigating transport journeys and precincts themselves, but also infrastructure elements and the non-tangible service elements such as interactions with customer service staff.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has provided comments in relation to the following 5 areas outlined in the terms of reference.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Parliament of New South Wales

Inquiry into the transport technology sector.

Terms of reference: The Committee will inquire into how local research and development in the transport technology sector can deliver transport service innovations, including:

1. Mobility as a Service (MaaS)
2. real time public transport journey management
3. first and last mile transport services
4. how data might be used to improve access and safety for travellers, including for women
5. the ethical considerations and regulations in the development of connected and automated vehicles (CAVs).

People who are blind or have low vision rely on public transport to access their communities. Guide Dogs NSW/ACT is very much aware that public transport has very significant infrastructure issues that makes achieving and improving access difficult. In our experience, it is the improved interaction with transport staff (via disability awareness training opportunities) and the use of emerging technologies that has helped fill in some significant gaps in achieving upgraded accessibility.

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1. Mobility as a Service (MaaS)

People who are blind or have low vision (legally blind) are eligible for a Travel Pass. Therefore, at this moment in time, Mobility as a Service (MaaS) is not necessarily relevant for our stakeholders.

2. Real time public transport journey management

Clients with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT regularly report that their interactions with public transport staff has improved significantly over the years. This has resulted in increased confidence for people who are blind or have low vision to independently travel using public transport in NSW.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has been conducting regular face to face training with TfNSW frontline staff which we believe has improved the interaction with both frontline staff and people who are blind or have low vision. As a result of this work TfNSW staff now:

- Are proactive and help when required
- Frontline staff now create 'access linkages' between routes
- Frontline staff are improving how they make announcements – essential for people who are blind or have low vision
- People who are blind or have low vision can ask TfNSW frontline staff to 'call ahead' (with improved technology) to next/desired station to be greeted & assisted on arrival.
- Technology improvements on both the vehicles and platforms have assisted with stopping patterns, disruptions and seeking assistance.

These interactions have positively affected the sense of safety and confidence of people with disability to use public transport.

Wayfinding:

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT would like to see greater emphasis and resources in the area of Wayfinding technologies. Technologies such as 'beacon technology' to help people who are blind or have low vision navigate the 'open' and increasingly complex busy transport precincts would be greatly welcomed.

Trials conducted in the past (Town Hall and Chatswood stations) were well received by clients using the wayfinding technologies. As transport precincts become more 'open' and complex, people who are blind or have low vision are finding it more and more difficult to travel with confidence and independence.

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Apps:

A recent trial of a bus hailing App, 'Hailo' has proven great potential to assist people who are blind or have low vision. The Hailo App is designed to assist both passengers with vision impairment as well as bus drivers. The passenger selects their pick-up location and the driver becomes immediately aware of the request - the same thing occurs for selecting a bus destination. Common complaints from people who are blind or have low vision include; not knowing what bus it is (i.e. information is displayed on the front of the bus) the driver did not stop and the determining their destination (no announcements on the bus – except the BLine bus). This App will address these frequent issues.

Digital displays:

Technology surrounding digital displays requires more attention as there is still ambiguity and uncertainty on what is required to meet the needs of people who are blind or have low vision. No accessible version of information digital displays, especially information kiosks, are currently functioning in NSW.

3. First and last mile transport services

Often it is the 'first and last mile' that creates problems for people who are blind or have low vision to access transport. This is often due to issues around streetscape connectivity - from their homes to the transport precinct or transport stop, or the connectivity from one particular transport mode interconnecting with another transport mode. This repeats from the transport precinct or stop to their destination, i.e. work, leisure.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT definitely supports the 'Whole of journey' approach, that is, thinking beyond compliance and facilitating best practices based on innovation and continuous improvement, human-centred design, understanding, consultation and collaboration.

The first and last mile transport options are often taxi or rideshare. The de-regulation of the taxi industry has brought both improvement as well as continued discrimination. The improvement of technology to help book and track a driver has helped those people who are blind or have low vision who have a smart phone. However, many clients have expressed frustration with Point to Point services promoting inaccessible Apps or websites.

Unfortunately, our clients with Guide Dogs are still refused entry to both taxis and rideshares.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT also welcomed the 'On demand' trial for flexible public transport service designed to improve connections to transport hubs and popular destinations like shopping centres or hospitals.

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4. How data might be used to improve access and safety for travellers, including for women

Unfortunately, many people who are blind or have low vision feel vulnerable accessing their communities independently. Women, travelling at night often feel even more vulnerable.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT applauds the Greater Sydney Women's Safety Charter to ensure that women should feel and be safer when travelling at night. We agree that more needs to be done to ensure everyone feels safe, confident and included so everyone can fully participate in their communities.

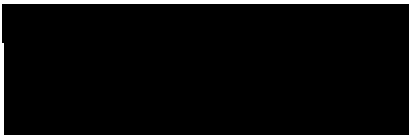
5. Ethical considerations and regulations in the development of connected and automated vehicles (CAVs).

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT recommends that the Connected and Automated Vehicle industry works collaboratively with key stakeholders and government towards amendments and improvements to the DSAPT, as well as the Whole Journey Guidelines.

Connected and Automated Vehicles should be expressly included in the Disability Standards for accessible public transport (DSAPT) in order to provide for their unique features relating to the needs people who are blind or have low vision. As mentioned previously, having frontline staff to provide direct assistance is an important safeguard for people who are blind or have low vision when using public transport. Resolving the problem of having 'no driver' will be a key issue that will need addressing.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the transport technology sector. Guide Dogs NSW/ACT looks forward to working with the committee and is available to provide further information should it be required.

Kind regards,



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